

CHAPTER I

## Situating Kadavu

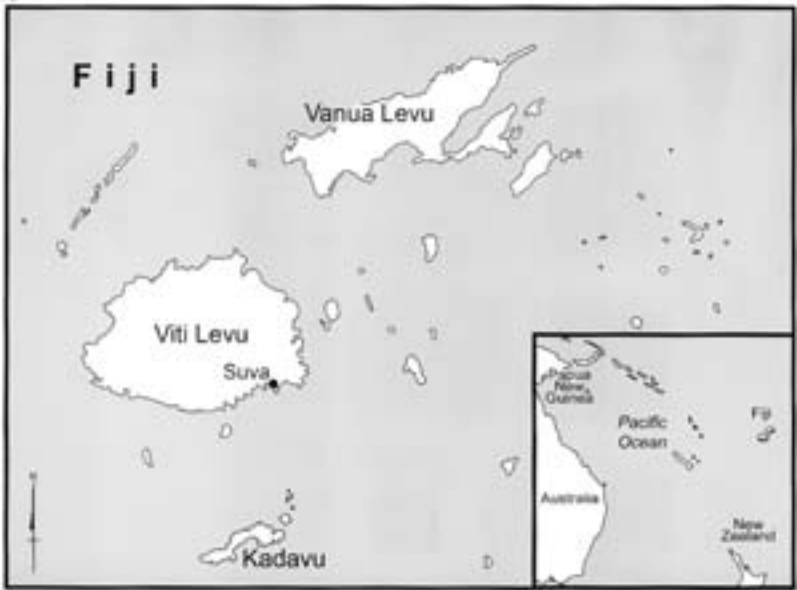
*Church, Chiefs, and the Creation of a Sense of Loss*

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Kadavu is Fiji's fourth largest island, at 408 square kilometers (Nunn 1999: 36). Seen from offshore, it is a vivid tableau of green forest, gardens, grassland, palms, and planted pine. Although there are no major rivers, many streams and creeks flow down from the hilly interior. Derrick (1957: 267) compared the shape of the island to "the body of a wasp, whose head, thorax, and abdomen are linked by narrow waists," with much of the coast notched by deep-cut bays of iridescent blues and greens. A standard geographic distinction that Kadavians make is north shore (*baba tokalau*) versus south shore (*baba ceva*).

The island is a six-hour ferry ride from Suva, Fiji's capital city, or a short airplane flight from Suva or Nadi. Its main jetty and only airport stand near each other in the town of Vunisea and the neighboring village of Namalata. In western Kadavu, a northern road reaches Tavuki village and a southern one reaches Nabukelevuira; one can drive from Vunisea to Tavuki in around twenty minutes, about the same length of time as a quick boat trip. In 1998–1999 there were only twenty-six registered road vehicles on the island, and small boats with outboard motors are the standard form of long-distance transportation within Kadavu.

In Tavuki Bay, as in much of Fiji, people distinguish between the area's original inhabitants and later arrivals, also indigenous Fijians, who became the chiefs.<sup>1</sup> The original inhabitants are the vanua proper, who are expected to support their chiefs; the chiefs, in turn, are expected to work for the welfare of the vanua. Many people in Tavuki agree that the Nukunawa clan was the first to arrive. They are said to have come



MAP 1. Fiji

from Verata, on Vitilevu, and passed through other lands on their way to Kadavu.<sup>2</sup> After Nukunawa settled the land as its original inhabitants, another clan, Nacolase, arrived and gained political supremacy.

The story of how Nacolase became chiefs is an elegant expression of Fijian visions of the strong, noble past. The plot hinges on the *vasu* kin relationship, by which a nephew has the right “to take certain liberties against the whole of the mother’s [patri]lineage group” (Nayacakalou 1957: 47). The hero of the story is the Nephew-to-Naceva, a man of great physical prowess who called on his mother’s relatives from the Naceva region of Kadavu.<sup>3</sup> Here is the version that A. M. Hocart (n.d.: chapter 9) recorded a century ago:

When [the Nephew-to-Naceva] grew up Tavuki was at war with Nabukelevu and Yawe. The Nephew-to-Naceva went to bring over the Naceva people without informing his own people. He came to an ascent (Kadavu is all steep hills) and said, “If I run up to the top without a halt I shall certainly be Lord of Tavuki.” He ran up to the top without a halt and came down on the other side, “If I can get to Naceva along this reef before the tide comes in I shall certainly be Lord of Tavuki.” He reached Naceva and sat on the threshold. The Lord of Naceva asked him who he was, and he explained. “You are my grandson,” said the Lord of Naceva, “let us embrace.” They embraced and the Nephew-to-Naceva asked them



MAP 2. Kadavu

to come and help in the war against Nabukelevu and Yawe and added, “If after the war they want to prepare gifts for you tell them to make me Lord of Tavuki, and that you will go home.” He went back to Tavuki but told no one. On the appointed day the men of Naceva came. The people of Tavuki were angry with the Nephew-to-Naceva. “Why did you not tell us? They have come here and are hungry and there is no food for them. If you had told us we might have made a feast to await them with.” . . . The Lord of Tavuki ordered sugar cane and plenty of food. Then they went out to battle and defeated the enemy. When the army returned the people of Tavuki told the men of Naceva, “Wait till we have prepared a small thing for you.” The men of Naceva answered, “All we desire [is that] you should make our nephew Lord of Tavuki. . . .” So the Nephew-to-Naceva was made Lord of Tavuki and from him are descended the present chiefs.

By enlisting the aid of his mother’s patriline, the Nephew-to-Naceva was able to ensure Tavuki’s victory over Yawe and Nabukelevu, making Tavuki the leading power on the island. He also made sure that by putting Tavuki in Naceva’s debt, the latter could insist that Tavuki make him their leader.

I was told that this hero was the first, and only, person to be installed formally as the Tui Tavuki, the paramount chief. However, the

anthropologist Rusiate Nayacakalou (1975: 40) was told, “The last *Tui Tavuki* to be formally installed according to custom was Ratu Naulivesi,” the great-great-grandfather of the man who took Nayacakalou on his tour of Kadavu in 1960. In either case, no *Tui Tavuki* has been installed for many decades. In years of inquiries, I have never received a definitive answer as to why this is the case, although the general theme that has emerged is one of disagreement over who the chief would be and who would have the right to choose him.<sup>4</sup> This ongoing situation is politically consequential, because chiefs depend on installation by the *vanua*—specifically through the subclan of chiefly installers (*sauturaga*)—for formal recognition of their legitimacy. Without a base of support, chiefs cannot claim the right to rule. Rather than attempt a definitive answer of exactly how many *Tui Tavukis* were installed, or who was the last to be installed, I simply wish to point out what most people would agree on: that the last installation was a long time ago, and installation is a ritual performance in which chiefs become effective.<sup>5</sup> Despite this fact, a senior man is generally recognized as the *Tui Tavuki*. During the entire period of my research it was a man of the Naocovonu subclan, Ratu I. W. Narokete. As Nayacakalou observed, men now filling the role of *Tui Tavuki* are in the tricky position of serving as paramount chief but not emphasizing their authority too much; he described the case of one man who “normally acted in the capacity of *Tui Tavuki*, [but] never pressed the point too far, for if he did, the other members of the clan were entitled to refuse to recognize his authority” (63).

*Tavuki* village has a population of approximately 125 people.<sup>6</sup> Besides being the seat of the *Tui Tavuki*, it is also the village of residence for the superintendent minister of the Methodist Church in Kadavu. In addition, it is the location of the Kadavu Provincial Office and its leading official, the *Roko Tui Kadavu*. The provincial office is run by employees of Fijian Affairs, a branch of government for indigenous Fijians that stands alongside the multiracial, democratic national government. Thus *Tavuki* is home to the leaders of the chiefly system (*vanua*), the Methodist Church (*lotu*), and influential government (*matanitu*) authorities. The town of *Vunisea* has the hospital, police station, and main post office, but *Tavuki* has the prestige and traditional power. Nayacakalou (1975: 62) wrote, “These three high-powered orders of authority co-existed in the same village without apparent conflict, partly because their jurisdictions were fairly distinct, and partly because the village was run mostly on the basis of traditional authority.”

Nayacakalou (1975: 61–62) wrote evocatively of Tavuki’s distinctiveness when he visited it in 1960:

Tavuki bore the true marks of a chiefly village. It was the seat of the high chiefs of Nacolase, the traditional leaders of the confederation of twenty-two villages which comprised Tavuki [as a vanua]. The huge native-style houses (and two with iron roofs) reflected, by their size, the height of their earth platforms, and their gables, the rank of their occupants in the traditional hierarchy. These chiefly houses were arranged more or less neatly around the central village green on which ceremonies took place. The first impression I had was of a disturbing silence, but it was a reflection of the awe and respect with which the chiefs were held, not only by lower-ranking men but also by themselves in their relations with one another. There seemed to be a standing rule that children should not cry and cocks should not crow. The babbling of women beside houses working under the shade of trees, the laughter of young men preparing to go to the bush or to the sea, which often characterize village life in Fiji, were not at all common in Tavuki. Here the chiefs’ houses dominated the village scene, and lesser men were bound by rules of respect towards chiefs to maintain silence in their presence. It was, indeed, a strongly tradition-oriented village. (See also Spate 1959: 112)

Tavuki is still an impressive and well-maintained village, with one of the finest churches in Kadavu. The church is located in a section of the village that includes the minister’s and catechist’s houses and the church social hall. Tavuki also has an attractive town hall, Ratu Nacagilevu House, where large meetings are held. Large old earthen house foundations remain, although the “native-style houses” described by Nayacakalou have been replaced by more durable structures of corrugated iron, lumber, and concrete. Water is piped into the village from the hills, although many houses do not have private taps. Electricity is available for a few hours each night from the village generator or private generators. When power is turned off, people drinking kava late into the night will light kerosene or benzene lanterns.

Tavuki village sits on the shore of Tavuki Bay, in the middle of six other villages. In Fijian terms, the villages of Solodamu, Natumua, and Waisomo sit “above” Tavuki. The villages “below” them are Tavuki, Baidamudamu, and, at the far edge of the bay, Nukunuku. Nagonedau village stands adjacent to Tavuki, just “above” it along the shore. In the mid-1990s the total population of the seven villages in the bay was approximately seven hundred, and almost 82 percent were members of the Methodist Church (Government of Fiji 1995; Vale ni Volavola ni Yasana ko Kadavu 1995). The total population of Kadavu was approximately ninety-five hundred, nearly all of whom were indigenous Fijians (Fiji



FIGURE 1. The choir enters the Tavuki Methodist church before a Sunday service.

Islands Bureau of Statistics 1998: 30–31) and over 93 percent of whom were members of the Methodist Church (Government of Fiji 1995). It is a rural island, ranking eleventh out of Fiji's fifteen provinces in population density, at twenty people per square kilometer (Rakaseta 1999: 6).

Many of Tavuki's inhabitants are subsistence farmers who grow taro, cassava, yams, other root crops, and kava; some earn money by selling surplus produce, especially kava. Women weave mats, baskets, and fans and gather fish in the lagoon; in Baidamudamu village, they gather delectable freshwater prawns. Some men go spearfishing at



FIGURE 2. Inside the Tavuki church.

night and take boats out to pursue bigger fish in deeper waters. Kadavu is well known internationally as a dive site because of the Astrolabe Reef, and the eastern half of the island has numerous small scuba-diving resorts, but the impact of these resorts is negligible in Tavuki and tourists are very rarely seen in the village. Many Tavukians spend time on Vitilevu for education or work, but, like many Fijians, at Christmastime they return to their true homes “on the foundation” (*dela ni yavu*), streaming back to the village for weeks of celebration.

Kadavuans have a two-section Dravidian kinship system, as described for Fiji by Groves (1963: 278; see also Cook 1975; Nayacakalou 1955, 1957). Descent is patrilineal; postmarital residence is often patrilocal; and authority is generally patriarchal. Parallel cousins are treated as siblings, whereas cross-cousins are one’s joking companions and, especially in earlier days, were one’s ideal marriage partners. In practical terms, one of the most significant kin groups is one’s *mataqali*, an extended family defined by Nayacakalou (1975: 165) as “a primary division of a village; a sub-clan” (see also Arno 1993: 9 n. 9). It is also “the fundamental landowning group,” and each *mataqali* is associated with a traditional social role, such as chief, priest, or warrior (Nayacakalou 1957: 50–51; cf. Tuwere 2002: 65). *Mataqali* membership is officially supposed to be subsumed within *yavusa* membership. Logically, this would seem to make a *yavusa* a clan, but Fijian anthropologists are reluctant to



FIGURE 3. Sereti Liu weaves a mat.

apply the word too literally: Nayacakalou (1975: 166) defines *yavusa* as “the widest patrilineal kinship unit (real or imputed),” and Asesela Ravuvu (1983: 123) has called it “a social unit of agnatically related members [larger] than the *mataqali* and the members of which claim descendants from a common founding male ancestor.”<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this book, I gloss *yavusa* as “clan” and *mataqali* as “subclan” because, I argue, an analytical focus on *lotu*, *vanua*, and *mana*—the core terms that I prefer not to translate—will illuminate local social dynamics more effectively than a focus on structural debates.

Kadavu is well known in Fiji for its independent chiefdoms.<sup>8</sup> Although the Tui Tavuki drinks the first cup of kava when Kadavuan

chiefs gather, displaying his paramount status, a well-known saying describes the island's politics as "each rooster its own cry" (*manu dui tagi*, meaning the place is balkanized; see Rokowaqa 1926: 59; cf. Kuhlken 1994: 295). Within Fiji's three major indigenous confederacies, Kadavu is affiliated with Burebasaga, whose leading power is Rewa; the others are Kubuna, led by Bau, and Tovata, led by Lau and Cakaudrove.

### Walking in the Mouths of Sharks: Mission History

In October 1839 the Wesleyan missionary Thomas Jaggar wrote in his journal that a teacher at the Rewa mission had described his situation as "walking in the mouths of sharks."<sup>9</sup> The historian Andrew Thornley (2000: 157), who relates this comment, adds, "This apt remark might fittingly be applied to the Wesleyan cause in most parts of Fiji from 1839 to 1842," an early and unstable period for the Methodists. The first British missionaries arrived in Lakeba, eastern Fiji, in 1835.<sup>10</sup> From then the European effort, directed by the London-based Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, would have a seismic effect throughout Fiji, although its beginnings were inauspicious and the early mission workers struggled against warfare, cannibalism, disease, and exhaustion.

To the missionaries, indigenous religion seemed a polyglot affair wherein deified ancestors, gods of war, and fantastical human-animal spirits mixed easily. Some spirits or gods were local figures; others were known in most of Fiji. Methodists offered predictable judgments on Fijian gods—"monster expressions of moral corruption," for example (Williams 1982: 217)—but there were some elements in Fijian religious life that the Christians appreciated. For one thing, "the idea of Deity [was] familiar"; Thomas Williams even suggested that Degei, the snake god known throughout the islands, might "be an impersonation of the abstract idea of eternal existence" (215, 217). For another, Fijians generally did not create iconic figures of gods, although they did perceive spiritual forces within natural vessels. The most practical difficulty facing the missionaries was thus not to build up a belief in deity or to knock down wooden representations of it, but to challenge the authority of hereditary priests (*bete*) who served particular gods on behalf of chiefs.

From the beginning of the missionary encounter, lotu and vanua used each other in ways that both supported and challenged the other's claims. Missionaries and chiefs were locked in a dynamic of mutual dependence and aggression, each side needing and distrusting the other. Methodists

sought chiefs' support for strategic reasons. Once a chief converted, it was assumed that his subjects would follow. Missionaries also turned to chiefs for practical needs of land and gardens and necessary considerations of safety. Chiefs appreciated the material resources and prestige they gained by hosting white foreigners, as they had already benefited by appropriating the services of castaways and beachcombers.

Despite their fundamental dependence on chiefs, missionaries threatened chiefs' authority in four main ways. First, in the years before Wesleyan efforts had become effective and stable, Christianity was spread in Fiji largely through the efforts of Tongans, who also aimed at military conquest (see Derrick 1946; Scarr 1984; Thornley 2000, 2002). Second, missionaries inevitably challenged chiefly *mana* by proposing the existence of a supremely effective deity for whom they alone spoke. The supreme deity was said to dislike cherished practices such as chiefly polygamy, so accepting Jehovah meant that chiefs would be stripped of important components of their temporal power. Third, although Methodists often focused their efforts on converting chiefs so that commoners would follow, commoners sometimes took the initiative in converting. Fourth, despite their self-image as benevolent men working only for godly purposes, missionaries were occasionally guilty of abusing their authority in non-Church affairs. In fact, in the opinion of some indigenous Fijians, missionaries were just as ambitious and avaricious as other settlers were, and accepting Christianity might lead to the ultimate loss of land as well as custom. For example, in September 1838 the Rewa village of Sigatoka was burned down as a protest "against [Chief] Rokotui Dreketi's leadership, including his patronage of the missionary [William Cross]. . . . Shortly after the burning, there were talks between Rokotui Dreketi and his elders on the question of whether to accept Christianity" (Thornley 2000: 69). The ensuing debate revealed the threat that missionaries posed and that chiefs recognized the dangers but also felt they could not fight the Christians: "Some advised the high chief against it, saying that the coming of [William] Cross was the beginning of a flow of outsiders. Soon, they said, many more would come 'to dwell and they will all join together, build themselves a city, take our land from us and rule over us.' Rokotui Dreketi responded with a more pragmatic outlook: 'Christianity has taken hold of the land and we cannot send it away or stop its progress.'" (Thornley 2000: 69; see also Thornley 2002: 77; cf. Keesing-Styles and Keesing-Styles 1988: 88).

The early period of missionary work in Fiji created a situation in which Church authority both depends on and opposes chiefly author-

ity; Christianity in Fiji has created a contest in which lotu and vanua struggle to define their proper places in Fijian society with reference to each other. I will discuss this dynamic at length in succeeding chapters. To set the stage for these later discussions, here I examine four themes that emerge from the early mission encounters. These themes illuminate the origins of lotu-vanua rivalry and suggest ways of thinking productively about its metacultural elaboration. They are (1) difficulties of translation, (2) sin and diminution, (3) disease and paternalism, and (4) the persistence of ancestral spiritual agency.

#### TRANSLATION

Methodist missionaries vigorously translated and published biblical texts and other materials in order to convert Fijians and organize them into religious communities. As table 2 shows, a great deal of effort was expended in translating, and retranslating, certain parts of the Bible, most notably the New Testament (especially Matthew) and Genesis. A great deal of secondary literature was also produced in Fijian during the early years of the Church, including catechisms, hymnals, sermon outlines, paraphrases of Bible stories, biographies of biblical figures, and textbooks for biblical instruction (Clammer 1976: 24; Thornley 2002: 222; Tippett 1974a: 403–408). A particularly influential early text was *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan's seventeenth-century allegory of a man named Christian who journeys from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City (Nettleton 1866a; Tippett 1958a: 141). In 1861, the missionaries Royce and Baird wrote, "The scriptures have now a wide circulation on Kadavu, and are frequently sought by numbers. . . . We have received more than three tons of oil during the past year as proceeds for the sail [*sic*] of books."<sup>11</sup> John Clammer (1976: 25) estimates that "by 1870 the total number of volumes produced [by the Wesleyans] for distribution in Fiji must have [been] 200,000, at a conservative estimate."

The publication of new texts intrigued many Fijians and attracted them to the Church, but not all texts were appreciated for their intelligibility. When John Hunt introduced a revised catechism in 1843, cleaning up an inaccurate earlier version, some members of the Viwa congregation complained that it was now too easy to understand (Thornley 2000: 232; Tomlinson 2006a). Bible translations are not models of clear prose, either, although missionaries spent decades revising and refining their work. In 1843 the Wesleyans chose the dialect of Bau Island in which to produce the scriptures, but they were not fluent in Bauan

TABLE 2. Methodist missionaries' early translation and publication efforts in Fiji

Date	Event
1835	British and Foreign Bible Society gives one hundred reams of paper to the Mission in Tonga, where Fijian material will be printed.
1836	David Cargill's translation of parts of Matthew in the Lakeban dialect are printed in Tonga.
1838	Printing press arrives in Lakeba.
1839	Mark is printed at Lakeba, in the Lakeban dialect.
1841	William Cross's translation of parts of Genesis in the Bauan dialect is printed at Rewa; parts of Matthew, perhaps a new translation by Cross, are printed there in the Rewa dialect.
1843	The missionaries' language committee decides to choose a single dialect for future translations and selects Bauan.
1844	Two thousand copies of John Hunt's sermons and lectures, hymn books in Bauan and Rewan, and a liturgy in Lakeban are printed at Rewa.
1846	John Hunt's translations of Matthew and Acts are printed in Bauan at Viwa; three thousand copies are bound for distribution, but one thousand are held for future binding in a complete New Testament.
1847	One thousand copies of the entire New Testament are printed in Bauan at Viwa, translated by John Hunt with assistance from a Fijian man named Noa Koroinavugona, except for the Gospel of John, which is translated by John Watsford.
1853	Five thousand copies of the "London edition" of Hunt's New Testament are printed, as well as three thousand copies of Watsford's own revision of Hunt's New Testament, which is printed in Viwa; three thousand copies each of Matthew, Romans, and Philippians are individually printed and bound.
1854	Five thousand copies of Hunt's and David Hazlewood's translations of Genesis, Exodus, and Psalms are printed.
1856	The complete Bible is apparently available in Bauan for the first time.
1858	James Calvert's revision of the New Testament is printed.
1864	The complete Bible is printed in London by the British and Foreign Bible Society.
1884	The complete Bible is printed with Calvert's and Richard Lyth's revisions of the Old Testament and Calvert's New Testament.
1885	A new edition of the New Testament, revised by Calvert, is printed.
1890	Another new edition of the New Testament, revised by Calvert, is printed.
1899	A new version of the New Testament, revised by Frederick Langham, is printed in London by the British and Foreign Bible Society.
1902	Langham's complete, revised Bible is printed in London by the British and Foreign Bible Society.

SOURCE: Adapted from Tippett 1947: 67–69; Thornley 2000: 261; Thornley 2002: 192; see also Clammer 1976.

themselves. In the mid-1850s James Calvert decided to revise Hunt's translation of the New Testament, seeking a more strictly literal version. "This revised edition was published in 1858," Thornley (2002: 193) writes, "and greeted with dismay by the senior missionaries." Calvert had worked with an editor at the British and Foreign Bible Society, and together they managed to produce a text that "clearly carried the imprint of a missionary unskilled in translation and an advisor [editor] ignorant of the language. [The missionary] William Moore was blunt about Calvert's efforts: 'We have much that is not Fijian, not the sense of the Holy Spirit, but Fijian [as spoken by white men] . . . and making what was clear into mud'" (193). The Bible translation used most widely in Fiji today was completed in 1902 by Frederick Langham. This version still contains awkward grammar and Eastern dialectal forms.<sup>12</sup>

In their translations, missionaries staked claims to their own authority in their translation of *God* and their use of new terms and concepts. Lamin Sanneh (2003) has argued that local Christianity flourishes when the word used for God comes from the local vernacular. The Wesleyans in Fiji followed this approach, using the common noun *kalou*, which was "a blanket term for the general class of spirit beings" (Clammer 1976: 36; cf. Hocart 1912b). Quite simply and ingeniously, however, they added the definite article *na* in front of *kalou*, referring to the Christian God as "*the* Spirit." This shift toward prototypicality meant that missionaries were the exclusive agents of the most powerful deity. It also meant that the old *kalou* were still alive. These old spirits were displaced into the newly created categories of *tevero* and *timoni* (Kadavian *jimoni*), meaning "devils" and "demons," with results that I describe in later chapters.

The Wesleyans introduced loanwords such as *kameli* (camel), *ose* (horse), *lami* (lamb), *laioni* (lion), *olive* (olive), and *oki* (oak), as well as characters, identities, and places from the Bible, including *Jiu* (Jews), *Parataisi* (Paradise), and *Etesi* (Hades). Invisible beings inhabited new terms, including *Jiova* (Jehovah), *agilose* (angels), and *Setani* (Satan). But perhaps the most profoundly transformative terms were ones like *papitaiso* (baptize), *sakaramede* (sacraments), and the frequently heard *emeni* (amen), words that define ritual practice.<sup>13</sup> By introducing these terms, missionaries were carving out a sphere of authority for themselves, positioning themselves as mediators of new significance.

Methodists believed that once people had converted, their familiarity with holy texts would guard them from other missionaries looking to poach their followers. In the mid-1860s, when two French Catholic priests arrived at Ono Island off northeastern Kadavu, Joseph Nettleton

(1866a: 541) assured readers of the *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, “Popery can only gain ground where there are political disturbances. Where the people are at peace and can read the Sacred Scriptures, popery cannot make headway” (see also Thornley 2002: 192). He was a bit too confident, however, for Ono remains the stronghold of Catholicism in Kadavu to this day.<sup>14</sup>

#### SIN AND DIMINUTION

Methodist missionaries introduced the notion of sin to Fiji. In doing so they gained a potent weapon for their arsenal: a means by which to claim they had more mana than chiefs did.

The translation of *sin* provoked some contention. *Ca* is the Fijian word meaning “bad” (Dixon 1988: 358). In his New Testament of 1848, John Hunt used the phrase *ai valavala ca* for “sin” because “valavala” denotes “an act habitually carried out” (Capell 1991: 254; *ai* is an article plus nominal prefix). This phrase, which might be translated “bad habits,” was considered “an unsatisfactory substitute [by] many missionaries,” too weak to convey the sense of human depravity (Thornley 1979: 105). “When the worst you can tell a man about the most heinous offence he can commit is that it is *ai valavala ca*—the difficulty of bringing him to see the repulsiveness of it can be appreciated,” wrote William Aitken Heighway in 1913 (quoted in Thornley 1979: 105; see also Clammer 1976: 39).

Nonetheless, the effort to teach Fijians about sin and encourage them to feel it in their marrow proceeded through the decades. A. J. Webb (1870: 213) reported on his efforts to convince “a queer-looking old man” in Nakasaleka district, Kadavu, that he was a sinner:

On being asked what is the natural state of our hearts toward God, he replied “Oh! very good.”

“But just think! what was the state of your own soul before you came to God and sought life through the Lotu?”

“Good, very good.”

“What then was your conduct and the state of your heart before the ‘Lotu’ came, and while you were yet a heathen?”

“Well, not bad, very fair.”

“Well, you are the first heathen that I ever heard of as being in such a remarkable state. Do you mean to say that you were good when you were a cannibal, and everything else that was dark and wrong?”

“I did *some* bad things.”

“Yes, I rather think so! Tell me, then, what was the natural state of your heart before you came to Jesus to be saved from your sins?”

“Vinaka, Vinaka ga” [Fine, just fine].

And this was all that I could get from him on the great subject of Original Sin. The old man would have delighted a Socinian, as being an advocate for man’s natural goodness and moral nobility, and a living proof that a savage and a heathen may be a singularly innocent and happy creature. But we were obliged to defer baptising him until he had been instructed more fully in the leading truths of the Gospel. (emphasis in original; cf. Rafael 1988: 100; Robbins 2004, 2005)

This example highlights an aspect of the relationship between recognizing sin and deferring to authority. Teaching Christian converts that humankind was inherently depraved and essentially sinful was only half of the process; the other half was getting converts to say this themselves and for them to acknowledge the right of men such as Rev. Webb to be authorities on whether they had learned the lesson well enough to participate in central rites of passage such as baptism.

In a move paralleling their introduction of sinfulness, missionaries helped introduce a sense of smallness and insignificance to Fijians. In a grave irony, it was not primarily the missionaries’ lessons about heaven that taught people to feel diminished, but their lessons about earth. “We are . . . very much in want of maps,” the Rev. Joseph Nettleton wrote in 1865 to the *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*. “The students are much interested in geography. . . . If any one could send us a map of the World, of Asia, Europe, Africa, America, and of Polynesia, it would do their generous hearts good to receive the warm thanks of these young men.” But then he continued: “A Fijian has strange notions about the world, especially about its magnitude. . . . The world to the Fijian is composed of small Islands and all is sea besides. The Globe confuses all his notions of creation, and enlarges his view wonderfully. But he cannot see how Fiji can be so little comparatively, as it is represented on the Globe” (1866b: 542). Similarly, in 1858 the missionary Thomas Williams (1982: 120–121) wrote, “The Fijian is very proud of his country. Geographical truths are unwelcome alike to his ears and his eyes. He looks with pleasure on a globe, as a representation of the world, until directed to contrast Fiji with Asia or America, when his joy ceases, and he acknowledges, with a forced smile, ‘Our land is not larger than the dung of a fly’; but, on re-joining his comrades, he pronounces the globe a ‘lying ball.’”

In August 1999 I was sitting with a middle-aged man—a man who had traveled more than most of his fellow islanders; he had even been to Japan—when he used the phrase *da ni lago* to describe Fiji. *Da ni lago* means “dung of a fly,” and I was astonished to hear him using the phrase

I remembered reading in Williams's book. But perhaps I should not have been surprised at how effectively that phrase had wended its way through history, for sentiments of Fiji's small stature in the world were evident during my fieldwork. People sometimes said that places like America were big and Fiji was small. A phrase I occasionally heard in Tavuki, *vuravura levu*, literally means "big world" and indexically points to someplace else, that is, not here, not Kadavu.<sup>15</sup> A sense of smallness is thus a product of Fiji's engagement with white foreigners, not of their engagement with other Pacific Islanders. Missionaries' globes and maps helped introduce a discourse of smallness to Fiji, with significant consequences: a sense of weakness, diminution, threat, and loss. Gone was the expansive Oceanic universe in which Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa were large, mighty places in a living sea (cf. Hau'ofa 1993; Kempf 1999).

#### DISEASE AND PATERNALISM

Measles and whooping cough decimated Kadavu and much of Fiji in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1868 William Moore reported about whooping cough at Tavuki, "I may say here that the land is being depopulated fast with this epidemic" (85). In 1875 John Robson counted 1,811 deaths from measles in Kadavu out of a population of approximately 10,000—a staggering amount.<sup>16</sup> Alfred J. Collocott's 1884 report from Kadavu mentions that "scores" of children died that year of whooping cough. Then influenza took a heavy toll in 1918–1919, in Fiji as it did worldwide (Lal 1992: 18, 57–59; see also Colony of Fiji 1896; France 1969: 152, 163).

These terrible epidemics led to salutary campaigns for better hygiene, but those campaigns reinforced missionaries' ethnocentric notions that Fijian society needed to be "civilized" generally. The earliest missionaries had been appalled by cannibalism, widow strangling, and other such practices, but it was not until the later Victorian age that the evangelists' tone of moral superiority became cartoonishly uncompromising. For example, consider the wife of William Aitken Heighway, who served in Kadavu from 1897 to 1901. Mrs. Heighway, seeing an old woman's house that did not meet her domestic standards, ordered the woman's belongings taken out and the mosquito net burned. "Then [I] told a lad to push the hovel over. This I did to prevent the old dame re-occupying it when I had departed" (Heighway family 1932: 95–96). Not content with merely destroying old women's homes, she also sent a report to the colonial government insisting that Fijian houses should henceforth be built with

partitions: “I long to see more privacy secured for the sleeping part of the house and for women, and think it would be very helpful in inculcating a sense of modesty, and also a sense of the value of that virtue which is well known to us all” (96; see also Firth 1997; Jolly 1998; Thomas 1990).

Mrs. Heighway’s program of harassment reflected the Methodist Church’s turn to paternalism in the later nineteenth century. After the pioneers had established Christianity in Fiji, along came “a new kind of missionary—more Victorian in style and message than his predecessors, much more paternal, more disposed to rule over his ‘children’ as a stern ‘father’ ” (Tippett 1985: 22). Surveying the history of the Church in Fiji, Alan Tippett lamented this period but also pointed out that the increasingly rigid and authoritarian Methodists were responding to social upheavals—not only the devastation of disease, but also a flood of land-hungry settlers and the introduction of alcohol. Defensively, Church leaders “met extreme vice with extreme puritanism” (Tippett 1961: 219). As their standards grew more stringent, they naturally grew more disappointed at their own results and more inclined to see the negative side of things. In 1912 C. O. Lelean complained about the contemporary state of Fijian Methodism by listing “dull sermons, poor singing, long prayers, too much public and too little private devotion, late [kava] drinking, stereotyped forms, shortage of hymn books, a lost fear of God, and an absence of power” (quoted in Garrett 1992: 176).

Victorian missionaries’ complaints about sin, vice, and backsliding buttressed their efforts to maintain authority over Fijian ministers. The first Fijian ordained ministers, although given many of the same responsibilities as European and Australian missionaries, could not attend the annual district meeting until 1863, when they were made to meet on their own separately; they were given the subordinate title “native assistant missionaries” until 1869; and “in 1870, a missionary was paid £160 a year while Fijian ministers received £5” (Thornley 2005: 135–137). Dissatisfied with their subordinate status, indigenous Fijian ministers proposed in 1875 that they be allowed to attend the district meeting as equals of the missionaries, to have their supervisory responsibilities increased, and to receive economic assistance (145). The missionaries, in response, asked the Fijian ministers to vote on a new proposal that they be allowed to attend the meeting on a representative basis, whereby one Fijian minister would attend for each ten circuits of the church. Apparently because of coercion and misunderstanding, twelve of twenty-one indigenous Fijian ministers voted for the change; one voted against the representation plan, and the rest abstained (143–145). In 1878 the

Australasian Methodist Church's General Conference approved the representational system for Fijian ministers,<sup>17</sup> and, with the autocratic Frederick Langham running the Fiji District until nearly the end of the century, their subordinate status became entrenched: "The new generation of missionaries, greatly influenced by Langham . . . had the same lack of faith in the abilities of Fijian ministers as had their predecessors. On numerous occasions throughout the later part of the 19th century and into the next, pronouncements were made lamenting the unsuitability of Fijian ministers for senior positions of authority. . . . Missionaries largely trained in Australia maintained effective control of Fijian Methodism until after World War II" (149–150).

In reaction to this haughty approach and its demoralizing consequences, Tippet was part of the progressive post–World War II effort to "indigenize" the Fijian Methodist Church, to weaken Eurocentric paternalism and, ultimately, to have Fijians run the organization. Accordingly, a new constitution was written: "[It] committed us all to terminating the overseas mission in twenty years in favour of an independent Church" (Tippet 1985: 23). In 1964 the Fijian Methodist Church became independent.

#### SPIRITS OLD AND NEW

From the beginning, Fijians blended John Wesley's religion with local concepts and practices to produce new kinds of Methodism. They reshaped the lotu in terms of the vanua, bringing understandings of place, spirit, and spiritual effectiveness into an imported organizational framework. Ancestral phantoms never died in people's thoughts, flickering in ritual life just beyond the gaze of many missionaries.

When they did notice the vanua's imprint on the lotu, missionaries were surprised and offended. Jesse Carey (1867–1874: 119) wrote in 1868, "Even among the coast tribes, almost all of whom now 'profess and call themselves Christians,' there is unquestionably a *hankering* after the old ways." In another letter written less than a year later, he put the matter more forcefully: "When I first thought of coming to Fiji, it was with the hope that I might help with my brethren in works more abundant in *sapping the old foundations*, rather than by attempting to build *Christianity* upon them, which I am afraid we have in some degree—perhaps even to a dangerous one—been doing" (278; emphases in original).

In 1944 Alan Tippet was sent to Kadavu because the missionary there at the time, A. C. Cato, was alarmed by an "outbreak of sorcery"

(Dundon 2000: 49). In Kadavu, Cato (1947: 156) wrote, “Methodist Church members . . . serve the ancestral spirits but attend the Sunday services of their denomination.” This is indeed what Tippet found, observing a wealth of non-Wesleyan practices carried out by Methodists, including malevolent spell casting, invulnerability rituals, and séances in which people used mirrors to contact the recently dead and ask about the causes of their deaths. In a 1945 report on mission education, he complained that Kadavuan Christianity was relatively “primitive” and claimed, “Ancestor worship, totemism and sorcery still exist in most villages. In many cases accepting Christianity has never meant to these people rejecting the earlier forms of belief.” Later he would phrase his observation neutrally: “Possibly the idea that the ghosts of the recently dead impose themselves on the fortunes of the living has been the most tenacious idea coming down from old Fiji” (Tippet 1971: 363; see also Williams 1982: 239–248).

Thus, after an apparently decisive conversion by Kadavians to Methodism in the late 1850s and 1860s, almost a century later islanders were still reshaping their religious practices in novel directions. Some new influences came from other Christian denominations. For example, Tippet (1974a: 426) speculated on the influence of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ publications in spurring a mid-twentieth-century charismatic movement in the village of Nacomoto. The greatest influence in reshaping the lotu, however, was the vanua. Chiefs and commoners remade Fijian Methodism as a new institution that appealed to people more than severe British Victorianism did. The hybrid of lotu and vanua was lush and lively, but its vitality grew from a complicated dynamic: Christian leaders both depended on chiefs and challenged their authority at the same time. This dynamic generates the sense of decline and loss that is the subject of the rest of this book. To begin analyzing how this process works in the present, I now turn to examine lotu and vanua in the 1990s and 2000s.

### Competition between Church and Chiefs: Kadavu in the 1990s and 2000s

The Wesleyan stamp on Fijian Methodism is profound in at least two ways. First, the organizational structure is not much altered from John Wesley’s “hierarchy closely knit and wonderfully efficient” (Edwards 1955: 178; see also Tippet 1976a). The British system remains intact in

Fiji: ministers are responsible for local congregations, but lay preaching is encouraged; superintendents oversee the ministers, and a president stands at the institution's apex; quarterly meetings are held for local circuits, annual synods for districts, and annual conferences for the national organization. Second, Wesley's conservative political stance has endured. Wesley admired the admonition in 1 Peter 2:17 "Fear God. Honour the king," including it in some of his correspondence to political figures, and this dual imperative is emblazoned on Fiji's national coat of arms. British Methodism "was at once the most conservative in the political opinions of its members, and the most hierarchical in its internal organization, of all the Protestant sects" (Halèvy 1971: 76; see also Thompson 1963: 398). This hierarchical conservatism is a defining feature of Fijian Methodism today.

The Fijian Church bears its Wesleyan heritage in other ways as well. For example, Wesleyanism was not noted for giving women many opportunities to preach (Hobsbawm 1964: 26; McLeod 1996: 160), and Fijian Methodism, like Fijian society generally, limits women's public and institutional roles. For example, few women become ministers, those who do are appointed only to special circuits such as schools, and women never become superintendent ministers.<sup>18</sup> Economically, Wesleyans moderated the Protestant ethic by encouraging not just production but also consumption. As Maldwyn Edwards (1955: 183) put it, John Wesley "strongly urged not only that Methodists should gain and save money, but that then they should spend it"; in Fiji, this ethic is displayed in communal contributions to the Church, as I describe below. Discursively, Wesleyan Methodist missionaries energetically constructed demonic cultural "Others," introducing Christian reading publics to a host of wicked characters, such as Fijian cannibals, Chinese foot binders, and Indian widow burners (Birtwhistle 1983: 71). Inheriting this legacy, the Fijian Methodist Church now sets up a new kind of Other: Indo-Fijians who mostly remain Hindu or Muslim despite missionary efforts to bring them into the Christian fold. Some of the British missionaries' distrust of Roman Catholicism lingers too. For example, one Methodist official in Kadavu asked me if it were possible that the pope was the Antichrist. In these various ways, Fijian Methodism is notably Wesleyan.

Kadavu constitutes its own division of the Methodist Church along with Ono and several small islands nearby. At present, the number of divisions in the national organization is forty-seven. That number has grown in recent years, but this has resulted from divisions being splintered rather

TABLE 3. Church denominations in Tavuki Bay villages, 1995

Village	Methodists	Seventh-day Adventists	Assemblies of God	Roman Catholics	Muslims	Others*
Tavuki	161	5	0	0	0	0
Nagonedau	46	0	0	1	0	0
Baidamudamu	53	0	0	0	0	0
Nukunuku	56	29	0	0	0	0
Waisomo	84	20	0	0	1	2
Natumua	80	0	15	0	0	37
Solodamu	105	3	5	0	0	12

\*This category is almost entirely composed of smaller Christian denominations.

SOURCE: Vale ni Volavola ni Yasana ko Kadavu 1995.

than from demographic expansion. In fact, Methodism's numbers have declined nationally from being the denomination of 74.2 percent of indigenous Fijians in 1986 to 66.6 percent in 1996 (Ernst 1994: 206; Ratuva 2002: 19). As Fiji's population increases, Methodism's numbers are being outpaced by the gains of other denominations, most notably Assemblies of God and Seventh-day Adventism (Ernst 1994: 203). In 1995 statistics showed that Methodism was still dominant in Kadavu, where more than 93 percent of the island's population were members of the Methodist Church. Of the 715 villagers living in Tavuki Bay, 585 were Methodist, approximately 82 percent. Methodist church buildings stand in each village of the bay—counting Tavuki and neighboring Nagonedau as one large conjoined village—except for Nukunuku, where the building would more appropriately be called a chapel. Solodamu was building a new Methodist church during my periods of fieldwork, and Baidamudamu opened a new church in April 1999. But several villages in Tavuki Bay had sizable non-Methodist groups, and Seventh-day Adventists had their own church in Nukunuku; in Natumua village, the Methodists let other denominations meet in their church building. Even within Tavuki village, not everyone was under the sway of Methodism. A few villagers had experimented with or joined other religious sects, sometimes going to the town of Vunisea to do so. Such individuals were not barred from attending Methodist services in Tavuki. However, one of Tavuki village's twenty village laws states, "It is forbidden for another lotu to come into the village" (*Sa tabu ni dua tale na mata lotu me curu mai e loma ni koro*); thus, missionaries are legally forbidden from proselytizing locally.

A superintendent minister (*talatala qase*) leads each division of the Methodist Church. Chosen and appointed at the annual Methodist Church conference, superintendents serve five-year terms, then rotate to new divisions when their terms are finished. This policy of mandatory mobility applies to all ministers, not only superintendents, and was designed by the British so that Church leaders would “not . . . be subjected too strictly to the influence of those whose spiritual guidance has been delegated to them” (Halèvy 1971: 51). The policy serves to keep ministers as permanent guests of their congregations—perpetually subordinate to, and dependent on, local chiefs. In other words, the rotational system keeps the lotu perpetually dependent on the vanua, since the lotu is usually represented by an outsider. In 1999, of the twelve Methodist ministers serving in Kadavu only one was originally from Kadavu; in 2003 the number had risen to four, but I believe this increase was not indicative of any trend. Church officials may become affiliated with a particular subclan in the villages where they are stationed. In Tavuki superintendent ministers customarily become affiliated with the Nadurusolo subclan and catechists become affiliated with Naocovonu.

Rev. Isikeli Serewai was Kadavu’s superintendent minister from 1995 through the end of 1999. Born on August 20, 1952, Rev. Serewai was a native of Ra province in northern Vitilevu, meaning he enjoyed a *tauvu* relationship with Kadavians. The *tauvu* relationship is a connection based on ancestral kinship links; interactions between *tauvu* are expected to be mutually beneficial, relaxed, and jocular. It was an ideal position for Rev. Serewai to be in, because he was jovial, funny, and generous but publicly respectful of chiefly authority. His personal good humor and friendliness, his willingness to walk about the village chatting and joking, his enthusiasm for drinking kava, and his respect for Tavuki’s chiefs all combined to make him immensely popular. He was compared favorably with his predecessor and successor, and Church life was noticeably more energetic during my first two field visits (1996, 1998–1999) than it was in 2003, after Rev. Serewai had departed. When he was in charge of the Church, people wanted to work for it. He also established his own local kinship links: one of the reverend’s classificatory daughters married a Tavuki villager, and a man from Baidamudamu village named his son Isikeli Serewai in honor of the minister.

One night at a casual kava-drinking session, I asked two Tavuki men (one middle-aged, one quite elderly) who had been the best superintendent minister in Kadavu. They both named Rev. Serewai and another man, Esaroma Muasobu. Although the mention of Rev. Serewai



FIGURE 4. Rev. Isikeli Serewai.

may have been partly diplomatic—I was living in his house at the time, after all—the elderly man said something else. He explained that Mua-sobu and Serewai were both from places *tauvu* to Kadavu, and that this meant they worked well in “traditional” matters (*vakavanua*), unlike ministers who came to Tavuki and paid attention only to Church matters. In other words, the old man was claiming that a Church leader should not focus on the lotu alone; a minister should pay attention to the vanua as well, and to all the practices that are the lifeblood of a chiefdom. Rev. Serewai was particularly good at this. He was good friends with the Roko Tui Kadavu, and even accompanied him on a trip to Australia, the United States, and Canada to solicit contributions for Kadavu’s ceremonial honor of opening the annual Methodist Conference in 2000.

I asked Rev. Serewai how he knew as a young man that it was right for him to work for the Church. He answered that when he was a

schoolchild he used to get bad headaches, but that when he was a teenager studying to become a catechist his head did not hurt. In 1970, still a young man, he entered the Methodist training institution at Davuilevu to begin studying for the ministry. He finished in three years and received his first ministerial appointment, to Nadrau in the division of Ba, in 1974. After Nadrau his appointments ranged widely over Fiji's largest islands, Vitilevu and Vanualevu: to Wainibuka (Bau division), Nawaka (Vuda), Seaqaqa (Macuata), and then Buretu (Bau). In January 1995, at age forty-two, he became a superintendent minister for the first time when he came to Tavuki.

He did a great deal of organizational work. For example, he often attended quarterly meetings held in the different circuits around Kadavu. He drew up the Tavuki circuit's "preaching plan," the document assigning particular preachers to services in different villages. He frequently delivered sermons, sometimes appointing himself as the preacher for a particular Sunday service and sometimes being asked to fill the role by a member of the group responsible for organizing the day's service (see below). When he was not giving a sermon, Rev. Serewai was often asked to provide the closing prayer at the end of the service. He responded to occasional religious crises, as I describe in chapter 5. In addition, Rev. Serewai performed ceremonial duties at non-Church events, such as giving public prayers. Finally, through many informal day-to-day practices, Rev. Serewai acted in ways that displayed his religious authority, for example, giving advice on preaching and serving as the voice of the lotu at kava-drinking sessions.

Serving under the superintendent are his ministers, either first-time appointments ("training ministers," *talatala vakatovolei*) or full ministers (*talatala yaco*). They have the authority to conduct weddings, funerals, baptisms, and communion. Eleven ministers are stationed in Kadavu under the superintendent: eight are in charge of circuits (*tabacakacaka*); two work at the Methodist high school and catechist training center at Rijimodi; one serves in the town of Vunisea.

Below the ministers are the catechists. Catechists, called *vakatava* in Fijian, might be described as the minister's righthand men.<sup>19</sup> Like ministers, catechists undergo three years of training. They can conduct funerals but not weddings, nor do they baptize or give communion. If they are serving actively, catechists receive a salary. A circuit may have more than one catechist, and if so, his bailiwick is called a "small circuit" (*tabacakacaka lailai*). Three catechists serve the full circuit of Tavuki, which includes ten villages, the town of Vunisea, the school at Rijimodi,

and the settlement of Busa; one of them serves the Tavuki Bay area specifically.

In the late 1990s Rev. Serewai's catechist in Tavuki Bay was Tomasi Laveasiga. Born on April 9, 1960, and hailing from Muani on Kadavu's south coast, he studied at Rijimodi from 1978 to 1980 to become a catechist. Before coming to Tavuki in January 1996, Laveasiga had been assigned to three other villages in Kadavu. He worked energetically, often traveling to other villages to conduct services and occasionally serving as a replacement for preachers or prayer service leaders who neglected their duties. On one Sunday in July 1999, for example, he substituted for the morning prayer service leader in Tavuki who was unable to fulfill her assignment; then he went to Rijimodi, down the coast from Tavuki, to preach the noon service there; and finally he returned to Tavuki to preach at the afternoon service. His sermons were always solid and straightforward, probably closest among local preachers' efforts to the early Wesleyan ideal of plain speaking. Besides his heavy workload on behalf of the Church, Laveasiga was an impressively powerful manual laborer. He cleared gardens, chopped firewood, and gathered coconuts with seemingly inexhaustible vigor.

Besides the catechists, circuits have treasurers, secretaries, and leaders of various social groups, such as the women's group and the youth fellowship. Each village ideally has one pastor (*qase*) or teacher (*vakavumuli*); the roles are interchangeable. Tavuki village, however, neither has nor needs a pastor because both the superintendent minister and the circuit catechist already reside in the village. Pastors and teachers, who need no formal training, are like lower-level catechists; they are executives' executives, local men in charge, carrying out much of the labor the Church requires. Each village also has several lay preachers (*dauvunau*) and prayer service leaders (*daujili lotu masumasi*).<sup>20</sup> These positions are typically gendered, with preachers being male and prayer service leaders being female; I discuss these roles further below.

A key position is the steward (*tuirara*), who represents the Methodist Church to the chiefs and vice versa. When people explained to me the responsibilities of a steward, they sometimes described the position as a "mouth" between lotu and vanua, speaking from one side to the other. Individual villages may have their own steward, and the head steward in charge of a circuit is called the *tuirara levu*. In Tavuki, the position of head steward was one marked by conflict during my early period of fieldwork. The first man holding the position was the descendant of one of Tavuki's greatest chiefs, so I will call him "the high chief" even though

he was not the Tui Tavuki. (In fact, it would be odd for a Tui Tavuki to serve as a steward, because the steward is a go-between, not a paramount leader.)

In November 1998 I learned that the high chief had been replaced as head steward. The switch had happened a week or two earlier, while I was in Suva. When I asked why, I was given several reasons, most focusing on the high chief's lack of attention to his responsibilities. I learned that men of the neighboring village, Nagonedau, had brought kava to a Tavuki village men's meeting one morning and formally requested that the chiefs of Tavuki appoint a new head steward. Their request, called a *kerekere*, is well known in the ethnography of Fiji as the sort of entreaty that cannot respectfully be denied (Nayacakalou 1978; Sahlins 1962, 1993; Thomas 1992). But this request was especially remarkable: the high chief was, after all, a high chief, and the men's meetings were held in the house of one of his subclan members. Moreover, Nagonedau is not a village of chiefs, but the village of *sauturaga*, the installers of chiefs. In the somewhat awkward position of kingmakers who refuse to make kings, the Nagonedau villagers nonetheless had enough influence to successfully request a new head steward.

But why was the vanua orchestrating the affairs of the lotu? At the time, Anaseini Serewai, the wife of Rev. Serewai, explained to me that in Tavuki the vanua, not the lotu, chooses the head steward. In other words, the pivotal position of go-between—the person who will represent the Church to the chiefs and the chiefs to the Church—is chosen by the people and the chiefs, not by the Church. According to Rev. Serewai, this power of the vanua over the lotu was unique to Tavuki; in the other places he had worked as a minister, Church authorities chose the *tuirara levu*. This fact illuminates the vanua's strength in Tavuki, a topic to which I return below.

The new head steward in late 1998 was Ratu Meli Qaravanua ("Ratu Qara"). He was born on December 19, 1953, and was a member of the subclan Touluga, which made his appointment as head steward in Tavuki somewhat surprising. Toulugans are descended from Qaraniqio, a warrior from Rewa who was a fierce enemy of early Christian converts in Kadavu. Not only did Ratu Qara stand in the daunting shadow of his ancestor, but, until his appointment as head steward, he had not served in any Church role. In some ways he was an ideal candidate, however. He was intelligent, hardworking, and committed to doing a good job of representing the lotu to the vanua and vice versa. When I asked him how he felt when the chiefs asked him to take the position, he said he

was “happy” (*marau*). I asked him if it were possible to refuse the chiefs’ summons, and his answer surprised me: not only was it possible, but other men—I am not sure how many—had been approached before him and had declined to take the position.

For several months he worked without any notable disruption. Then, on June 13, 1999, he helped make a decision that would cause strain between lotu and vanua. Church leaders, including Rev. Serewai, decided that at the next Sunday afternoon’s service people would be called on to give financial contributions by village rather than by subclan affiliation, the usual practice. In other words, the ceremonial names of each village (*icavuji*) would be announced and people would contribute accordingly. As it turned out, the plan did not go into effect until the afternoon service of the third Sunday in July. It sounded like a minor change to me, but, as it turned out, its effects metastasized.

The controversy unfolded at the kava session that took place in the church social hall after the service at which the change was initiated. Normally, these sessions after big church services are pleasant affairs where chiefs discuss matters of importance, people chat and enjoy camaraderie, and kava flows in like a tidal river. This time, however, events took an unusual turn when the Tui Tavuki asked why the call to the collection plate had not followed the usual pattern. I was not present at the beginning of the debacle because I was helping to pound kava outside. By the time I entered the church social hall, the paramount chief and the head steward were arguing and the atmosphere was painfully tense. The head steward even interrupted the Tui Tavuki during their dispute, which was a shocking act—people almost always listen to chiefly speech without interruption.

Ratu Qara was asserting that these financial contributions were purely an affair of the lotu. It was a Church collection, he said, so the Church decided how it would be conducted. In short, this was one arena in which the lotu did not need to defer to the vanua, in his opinion. A third party had to step in to calm things down, and the Tui Nukunuku, a diminutive but confident former soldier, did so. When he finished speaking the room fell into a thick silence for a few minutes. At least two rounds of kava were served in the uncomfortable stillness. No one was enjoying the drinking session at this point, suspended in the charged and awkward moment, waiting for resolution.

Then Rev. Serewai spoke. His tone was conciliatory. He requested the forgiveness (*veivosoti*) of the vanua, and the older men of the kava circle uttered a relieved “Good, thanks” (*vinaka*). These men were

sitting at the sides of the room, in the middle of the spatially ordered hierarchy—old enough to be respected elders who could speak at a difficult moment, but not high chiefs themselves. Rev. Serewai also spoke performatively (per Austin 1962), declaring that the matter was “finished” and “clean” (*oti, savasava*). In other words, the matter was now dropped because Rev. Serewai said so; the Tui Tavuki was right, and the Church did not protest. Lotu deferred to vanua after all; the call to the collection plate would revert to the original practice. Rev. Serewai explained that Ratu Qara was still learning in his new position.

After this conciliatory speech the tension began to dissipate, but the affair was not over yet. Ratu Qara, chastened, left the hall. A short while later he came back in, bearing a large bundle of kava. He presented the kava as an *ibulubulu* (“burial,” with a meaning similar to “burying the hatchet” in English) to atone for his transgression. In his speech he was visibly emotional. The Roko Tui Kadavu accepted the kava on behalf of the Tui Tavuki,<sup>21</sup> and then, after an intermediary round or two of kava drinking, the Tui Tavuki gave a final speech. The affair was now truly finished.

This condensed story of a conflict illustrates local power dynamics. In Tavuki, Church and chiefs often work in harmony, just as John Wesley would have wanted them to, but the vanua is the dominant force. A critical fact, however, is that by publicly deferring to chiefly power Rev. Serewai earned the gratitude and respect of villagers who were thus inclined to support the Church. Evidently Rev. Serewai understood what many European and Australian missionaries failed to understand during Methodism’s early years in Fiji. In 1860 an observer “criticized missionaries for not appreciating the basic aristocratic character of the chiefly class and claimed that the demeanour of the missionaries towards the chiefs would not generally encourage great loyalty to the church” (Thornley 2002: 225; see also Carey 1867–1874: 199). Rev. Serewai, in contrast, apparently knew that by supporting the Tavuki chiefs and deferring to them he was fostering people’s loyalty to Methodism as well. He was an effective lotu authority precisely because he recognized the ultimate authority of the vanua in village life.

But the dispute might still seem opaque to the reader. Why did it take the form it did? Why did the Church want people to contribute money by village, after all, and why did the paramount chief object to this plan, preferring that people contribute by subclan affiliation? The answers to these questions will become clear through a consideration of church services.

## CHRISTIAN RITUAL ACTION

Although *ritual* is a problematic term for many contemporary scholars (Scott 1994; cf. Kelly and Kaplan 1990), Methodist services fit most well-known anthropological definitions. They are formalized, repeated events that help foster certain sensibilities and motivations in the participants; they follow a particular order of service and involve communication with invisible powers (Jesus, Jehovah); they are performative, public ceremonies that effect change in the world and creatively index the social order (Tambiah 1985).

Three of the five weekly Methodist services are prayer services (*lotu masumasu*), which take place on Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings. In Tavuki the congregation might be as small as twenty people or as large as forty-five for these events. The service leader chooses several hymns, reads from the Bible, discusses the passage briefly (this is not a full sermon), and asks people to volunteer prayers on several topics. Although service leaders can use the Church calendar's daily Bible verses as a source for their reading, they often take the opportunity to select a passage of their own choosing. What is most notable about prayer services is that these are the only events at which congregation members are asked to pray aloud individually and voluntarily. The prayer topics chosen by service leaders usually include the welfare of the lotu and the vanua, treated as separate topics, and also youth and the provincial government. In other words, the standard metacultural division of Fijian society into three units—Church, chiefs and people, and government—is replicated in prayer service topics, with youth added as a unit of its own. After the service leader announces the topics, there is a pause of several seconds, and then someone begins praying aloud on the first topic. The first prayer giver finishes, another pause of several seconds ensues, then someone else begins praying aloud on the second topic; and so the prayers continue. Rarely do two people begin praying at the same time, and no one ever competes for the floor, trying to pray louder than someone else. This raises the question of how people know who is “supposed” to pray, and part of the answer is simply that a small group of self-selected people dominate the prayer giving. In a sample I took from May to July 1999 thirty-four separate prayers at *lotu masumasu* were given by only twelve people. Significantly, eight of these twelve prayer givers were women. This suggests that prayer giving, unlike preaching, is a genre in which women feel relatively comfortable speaking publicly in a mixed-sex group.<sup>22</sup>

On Sunday two full church services take place, one around 10 o'clock in the morning and the other around 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Religious education (Sunday school, lit. "Sunday book reading," *wili vola Sigatabu*) is held for young children between the two main services. The morning service might draw around one hundred people in Tavuki. The afternoon service is the biggest communal affair of the week, drawing people from the seven villages in Tavuki Bay. It is held at one of the large churches, often the one in Tavuki village, and can draw a crowd in the low hundreds. At these two Sunday services, chiefly speeches are made, money is collected, the choir sings—sometimes different village choirs have a competition—and formal sermons are delivered.

Specially designated services in the Tavuki Bay area include *lotu ni vula vou* (new-month services) on the first Sunday of every month and *lotu ni vanua* (services for the vanua) on the third Sunday of the month. New-month services take place at both 10:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M., whereas *lotu ni vanua* occur only in the afternoon. Each of the full Sunday services is supported (*viqaravi*) by a kin group, meaning that the group is supposed to provide a preacher if one is not already listed on the preaching plan, give the speech of welcome to visitors, give the chiefly speech, and provide the kava for the after-service drinking session.<sup>23</sup> At *lotu ni vanua* responsibilities for support are usually divided three ways, based on the subclans of Tavuki village: Nadurusolo, Naocovonu, and Vunikarawa. Each of the other villages—politically subordinate to Tavuki—are affiliated with one of these three subclans. For example, Baidamudamu village members belong to their own clan, Viniuniu, but at these church services they are affiliated with Tavuki's subclan Naocovonu. Subclans are major segments of the vanua, part of the traditional order, and the fact that they are given responsibility for the organization and performance of these Church services and the subsequent kava drinking shows how the vanua sets the boundaries of discourse and practice within which the Church acts and abides in Tavuki.

Some Sunday afternoon services are special ones in honor of women, men, or children, or special occasions such as the first-fruits (new harvest) service held on the first Sunday in March. The service in honor of women is led by women, but a man usually delivers the sermon. Attendance at these services is not limited to the group responsible for running the service; for example, men can go to the women's and children's services, and vice versa.

The structure of all Sunday services is generally the same. The typical order of service is this:

1. As people arrive, the catechism is read from the hymnbook in a call-and-response pattern; the call (question) is given by an adult woman, and the response (answer) is given by women and children.
2. The entrance song (*sere ni curu*) is sung by the choir as the minister enters.
3. The service leader welcomes everyone and announces the order of service.
4. The first hymn is sung by all.
5. A short prayer is given by the service leader, followed by the congregation's recitation of the Lord's Prayer (a standard formulaic Christian prayer, commonly beginning in English with "Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name").
6. The anthem (*sere ni tacake*) is sung by the choir.
7. The lesson (*lesoni*), a short passage from the Bible on which the sermon is often based, is read; often the reader is neither the service leader nor the day's preacher, but a third person.
8. A speech of welcome (*vosa ni vikiavaki*) is given to visitors and is often responded to with a speech from one of the visitors.
9. A money contribution (*soli*) is taken under the direction of the steward; a short prayer is offered immediately afterward.
10. The song of thanks (*sere ni vakavinavinaka*) is sung by all.
11. The sermon is given.
12. The recessional (*sere ni suka*) is sung by all.
13. The prayer of benediction (*masu ni vivakalougatataki*) is offered, usually by the highest ranking religious authority present, finishing the service.

Within this basic structure, services sometimes have additional features such as short drama performances or choir competitions. Every so often communion is given and baptisms are performed as part of the service, at the minister's discretion.

Two elements within Sunday church services deserve special mention for the ways they highlight the vanua's presence within the lotu's ritual space: speeches of welcome and money collections. Speeches of welcome

(*vosa ni viki davaki*) are notable for the way chiefs' authority is affirmed. Consider the beginning of such a speech from September 1998, when the steward from the Ravitaki circuit formally welcomed Rev. Serewai to the village of Nasegai. Rev. Serewai was traveling around Kadavu at the time, conducting quarterly meetings in different circuits:

Sir, it is I. [Respectful opening.] Here is the gentleman, the leader of the great [Church] district of Kadavu, the appointment of the Conference in Fiji and Rotuma. Also sitting here is the Vunisa Levu, the honorable Tui Tavuki. I am standing on behalf of the gentleman the Tui Ravitaki, on behalf of the leader of the circuit, the gentleman the minister, the gentlemen and ladies, members of the Quarterly Meeting, so I can speak a few words to welcome you gentlemen.

The Tui Tavuki was formally recognized and welcomed in this speech ("Also sitting here is the Vunisa Levu [an honorific title], the honorable Tui Tavuki"), but he was not actually present in the church at the time. Nor was he present in the village. Nor did the orator think he was. It is simply standard politeness to recognize the visiting party by welcoming their chief in this way. Although speeches of welcome often greet particular guests, sometimes they are given to greet the congregation as a whole. A second speaker then usually responds, thanking the hosts for their welcome.

Monetary contributions to the Church are notable for how they display Fijian concerns with the public recognition of social identity. "The idea of an anonymous donation," Christina Toren (1999: 31) points out, "is absurd in Fiji where all instances of giving mark the fulfilment of a recognised obligation to one's kin and incur obligations from the receivers." When contributions are called for during a service, they are solicited according to kin group membership. For example, at a service that only Tavuki and Nagonedau villagers are attending, Tavukians will be asked to contribute money by subclan (Nadurusolo, Naocovonu, Vunikawara), and Nagonedauans will be asked to contribute money as Nukunawa clan. The point is that, in Fijian practice, money must be tied to a social location, and the size of the contribution can indicate a group's cohesion, which is morally valued. Contributions are never anonymous, never private; they are always socially made and recognized. For example, after the collection at the new-month service on June 6, 1999, the catechist announced:

Now that your new-month offering is attended to, gentlemen and ladies, congregants of Nacolase and Nukunawa, the groups give their different offerings this afternoon: Noble group of Nadurusolo, ten dollars, thirty-seven cents.

[Audience: "Good, thanks."] Ten dollars, thirty-seven cents. Noble group of Naocovonu, twenty-two dollars, four cents. [Audience: "Good, thanks."] Twenty-two dollars, four cents. Vunikarawa, seven dollars, eighty-nine. [Audience: "Good, thanks."] Seven dollars, eighty-nine. Noble group of Nukunawa, thirteen dollars, thirty-six cents. [Audience: "Good, thanks."] Thirteen dollars, thirty-six cents. You gentlemen and ladies have given the total amount [at] our new-month service this afternoon, fifty-three dollars, sixty-two cents. [Audience: "Good, thanks."] <sup>24</sup> Fifty-three dollars, sixty-two cents. [I] ask that we serve God [now] in prayer.

Sometimes people choose to contribute on behalf of groups that they are not members of themselves, but with which they have a social connection. As in the example just quoted, collections are always followed with a prayer.

I have described and quoted from these two parts of a typical church service to show how the vanua plays a central role in the lotu's practices. The crux of the dispute at the July 1999 *lotu ni vanua* service should now be slightly clearer. When the Tui Tavuki objected to the call for contributions by village rather than by subclan, he was probably doing so because it was a change in the traditional order that denied the subordination of other groups to Tavuki. The Church leaders had not designed their plan to be politically subversive, however; I believe they had done it simply to make more money. Creating more divisions and emphasizing smaller localities lead to higher expectations for each division. But the Tui Tavuki apparently perceived the realignment of contributing groups as a political challenge. He objected to it, and the Church acquiesced.

Projects of boundary drawing necessarily raise the possibility of transgression, and even invite it; recognition of transgression motivates new attempts at boundary drawing. Competition between lotu and vanua is the main factor, I argue, in generating the Fijian sense of loss. In the next section of the book, I examine the metacultural shaping and expression of this sense of loss in church services, kava sessions, and chain prayers. In the final section I analyze the ways that a sense of loss motivates attempts at recuperation. As Dan Jorgensen (1981: 237) has argued in a different context, ideas of entropy, belief in "the world's tendency towards loss, contingency, dissolution, and chaos," can spur people to regenerate or recapture what they think is disappearing: people embark on new "attempts to order society or their lives [carrying] with them the sense that they are bucking the trend." I argue that Christianity plays a decisive role in both processes, creating entropy and order as weakness becomes strength, loss becomes gain, curse becomes blessing.

PART TWO

# Lamentation

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Early during fieldwork, I noticed that people referred relatively frequently to the Bible verse Genesis 1:26. In the King James Version, it begins, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” The Fijian version is, “A sa kaya na Kalou, Me datou bulia na tamata mei tovo vata kei kedatou, ka me ucuu kedatou.” People do not repeat this verbatim, but paraphrase part of it idiomatically and poetically as “Tou ia tou bulia na tamata” (We are making humanity). It is a moment of creation, a moment when God decides on humanity’s existence and form. Genesis 1:26 “means that God intends that our customs and habits and all our works are holy and correct just like His,” according to the Fijian hymnal’s section on doctrine (Methodist Overseas Missions Trust Association 1981: 247; my translation).

Over the course of fieldwork I heard this verse used in a variety of contexts. For example, a friend of mine from Solodamu village once used the verse to criticize people who got drunk often; clearly, they were not living up to a divine image. Another time, a friend was telling me that he had once belonged to a gang in Lautoka but was now hoping to become a Methodist minister. I asked why he had changed his ways, and he said that he had read Genesis 1:26. Thus, like my friend from Solodamu, he used the verse as a negative example—it depicted a situation contrary to the one he had been in—and he had decided to try to become more godly. Besides these examples from casual conversations, I heard Genesis 1:26 referred to in sermons, a prayer during a church service, and a government minister’s speech, and the theologian Ilaitia Tuwera (2002: 122–123) offers an intriguing interpretation of the verse in his work.

Genesis 1:26 was not the only Bible text I encountered repeatedly. Another prominent verse was Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” It was impossible to miss this verse when watching rugby videos in the late 1990s, for the Fiji national

sevens team had “Phil 4:13” emblazoned on the front of their uniforms at the time. When I was preparing to return home after fieldwork in 2003, the catechist Sevanaia Takotavuki advised me to begin my farewell speech in church with this verse. Several ethnographers of Fiji have noted the popularity of other Bible verses as well, including Psalms 127:1 (Miyazaki 2004: 111) and Ecclesiastes 10:8 (Tippett 1960: 90). Alan Tippett writes, “The whole field of Biblical parable and allegory has been taken over and is in use daily, especially from the Old Testament Book of Proverbs and the sayings of Jesus. However the particular sayings used most frequently by Fijians are not those most frequently used by Westerners” (90). The verses that are heard relatively frequently, and prominently, challenge the old truism that the Bible can be used to prove anything; it can, semantically, but it isn’t, practically. People choose specific passages to focus on and, comparatively speaking, ignore thousands of others. Verses such as Genesis 1:26, Philippians 4:13, Psalms 127:1, and Ecclesiastes 10:8 circulate with notable success in Fiji, suggesting that as texts they are particularly amenable to recontextualization.

Intrigued by the circulation of Genesis 1:26, I asked Rev. Setareki Tuilovoni about its use. He and his wife, Ana, said that people could not be quite like God but should strive to be as good as possible. Such an interpretation shows that Genesis 1:26 offers a model of perfection. Crucially, it offers a model of perfection that is often invoked critically: people in Tavuki use the verse to call attention to people’s failure to conform to it. People are evidently not godly at present. In this regard, Fijian Methodism shares the common religious theme of humanity’s divergence from a powerful spiritual being (or beings) long ago, but it puts Fijian Methodism at odds with some newer forms of Christianity, such as Faith Christianity (Coleman 2000). Faith Christians emphasize the second half of Genesis 1:26: “and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” Humankind’s godly creation, according to Faith Christians and members of similar movements, is a warrant for humanity’s supreme power in the world today, not for the lamentation of lost power.

By referring to divine perfection in human creation, Genesis 1:26 intratextually sets up the story of humanity’s fall; by referring to the verse’s standard of original perfection, Fijian speakers set up the story of contemporary decline and loss. The speakers I heard did not make distinctions between the loss of will and the loss of reason, as some theologians do; instead, their emphasis was on lost power, as I show in chapter 2.

Here I want to pose two pivotal questions: If people are not like God but were supposed to be, what went wrong? And how do they respond?

For indigenous Fijians, ideas of lost power and declining morality are united in the sense that social order is breaking down. Social unity is a sign of good morality and practical strength. Social unity means that everyone knows his or her place: commoners fulfill their traditional obligations in service to chiefs, and chiefs act in appropriate chiefly style, providing “good speech, good water, good cooking pot” (*rosa vinaka, wai vinaka, kuro vinaka*), meaning they speak well and make sure that people have good kava to drink and good food to eat. If chiefs are effective in these ways, people should be able to work well for them, and society will be strong as a result (see Milner 1952). The image that many indigenous Fijians have of present-day society, however, is one in which properly unified relationships are breaking down, or are already broken, and as a result people’s mana is diminished or lost.