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**Master Thesis**

**MA in Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe**

**ETHNIC CONFLICTS AND CULTURAL EXCLUSION  
IN THE FIJI MUSEUM**

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# Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i> .....	<i>1</i>
<i>Chapter 1: Ideas of Race and Relationships between Colonialism and Nationalism</i> .....	<i>4</i>
1.1 Race and Its Connection with Colonialism .....	4
1.2 The Emergence of Nationalism and Its Relationship with Race .....	8
<i>Chapter 2: Historicizing Ethnic Conflicts in Fiji</i> .....	<i>15</i>
2.1 Before 1874: Precolonial Fiji .....	15
2.2 A Turning Point: The Deed of Cession and the Beginning of Indenture .....	16
2.3 After Independence: Military Coups and Clashes of Ethnicity .....	18
2.4 <i>Vulagi</i> : From King to Outsider .....	19
<i>Chapter 3: The Fiji Museum: The Intersection of Colonial Enterprise and Nation-building</i> .....	<i>24</i>
3.1 The Birth of the Fiji Museum .....	24
3.2 Exhibition and Exclusion .....	27
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	<i>33</i>
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	<i>34</i>

## Introduction

This research delves into the ethnic conflicts in contemporary Fiji with a focus on the national Fiji Museum. It examines tensions between Fiji's two primary ethnic communities and the connection between such tensions and British colonialism. To achieve this end, the thesis will examine the presentation of the country's history in the Fiji Museum as a case study. The findings of this research will uncover the implicit exclusion of one specific ethnic culture within the exhibitions of Fiji's national heritage in the Fiji Museum.

At the heart of the South Pacific, Fiji holds a significant social, economic, and cultural position within the region. The population of Fiji primarily consists of two different ethnic groups: the *iTaukei* (the indigenous people of Fiji), and the Indo-Fijians (or simply Indians).<sup>1</sup> Originally, the Indo-Fijians were introduced as indentured labor into the islands by the British colonial administration in the late 19th century. Instead of returning to India, most of the indentured laborers chose to stay in Fiji after the completion of their contracts. Under the colonial regulations, the indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians experienced economic and residential segregation. Such race-based division of colonial Fijian society has left a long legacy with conflict between these two ethnic groups enduring to the present day. Therefore, this thesis will examine the historical development of this race-based division in Fijian society in an attempt to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Fiji's ethnic conflicts.

On the 28th of June, 2019, Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama openly stated that: "No Fijian is *vulagi* [meaning a visitor in Fijian] in our country."<sup>2</sup> This speech aimed to refute the statement made by the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) former president, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, who labeled the National Federation Party and the Fiji Labour Party as the '*vulagi*' parties. Both of these two parties are supported mainly by Indo-Fijians. This controversy was not only reminiscent of Fijians' harrowing experiences and their memories of suffering during several political coups that were principally associated with ethnic issues in Fiji's history but this controversy has also contributed to the long-lasting tensions between *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijians. This thesis argues that these tensions were formulated under the racial categories in Fijian society that had been constructed since the

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<sup>1</sup> According to a population census conducted by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FBoS) in 2007, there were at least seven different ethnic groups in Fiji, namely, *iTaukei*, Indian, European and part European, Rotuman, Chinese, other Pacific Islanders, and all others. One noteworthy is that after this, the category of ethnicity in the census had been eliminated from the next population census that was taken in 2017.

<sup>2</sup> As reported by Ronald Gatty, the term *vulagi* is a noun referring to visitors or guests. However, as Gatty notices, "modernly, in political parlance of Fijian extremists, *vulagi* also refers to people in Fiji who do not qualify legally as indigenous Fijians (*iTaukei*), though they may have been born in Fiji and lived all their lives there for several generations" (Gatty 2009: 311).

beginning of the British colonization and reinforced during Fiji's nation-building process after declaiming its independence.

This thesis takes this ethnic tension further and connects it with a concrete case study field—the Fiji Museum—to see how this ethnic tension in Fiji has become an ideology of exclusion through processes of nation-building that has come to permeate every aspect of Fijian society. Established in 1908, the Fiji Museum holds a tremendous collection, including archaeological materials that date back 3,700 years and cultural artifacts representing Fiji's indigenous people and the other communities that have settled on the island. To date, the Fiji Museum has been carrying out its core mission of displaying and preserving the traditional Fijian culture through its collections. The central issue is: what does the traditional Fijian culture stand for? More straightforwardly, the question could be: Can Indo-Fijians' culture be seen as part of the traditional Fijian culture? This research will answer this question by examining the exhibitions of the museum. It argues that the museum diminishes the existence of Indo-Fijians' culture and their contribution to Fijian society and history. This finding generally corresponds with the comparative underprivileged of Indo-Fijians today.

At present the Fijian government strives to create so-called "One Fijian" imagery, trying to resolve this issue by dissolving the boundary between these two ethnic groups. However, this imagery is constructed by emphasizing indigenous culture and its keen connection to the Pacific region with little recognition of the existence of Indo-Fijians. This constructing process and lack of acknowledgment is widely reflected in the Fiji Museum. This research explores these two trends by closely examining how Fijian national imagery is constructed and represented in the Fiji Museum. With this case study, a more nuanced and vivid picture of the ethnic issue in Fiji's society becomes apparent.

## **Methodology**

This research primarily employed three research methods—participant observation, in-depth interviews, and exhibit analysis of the Fiji Museum.

I conducted my fieldwork mainly in Suva, Fiji, for three weeks separately in July 2016 and August 2019. As one of the fundamental research methods of anthropology, participant observation enables researchers to switch their perspectives between emic and etic, forming a comprehensive understanding of the sociocultural situation of a specific group of people. Thus, this research uses participant observation in an attempt to obtain an insightful perspective of how Fijians think of their daily life and how they react to their present-day



issues. When I stayed in Suva city, I interviewed three interlocutors to gain their opinions of being a Fijian in contemporary Fiji. During these in-depth interviews, I mainly asked my interlocutors how their ethnic backgrounds affect their daily lives and for their comments on the ongoing disputes between the *iTaukei* and the Indo-Fijians. The firsthand data of the interviews will help understand their everyday lives and the struggling sceneries of ethnic conflicts.

I visited Fiji Museum twice during my fieldwork. This research, thus, combines my visiting experience and the exhibit analysis in order to form a critical perspective of how the Fiji museum represents Fiji's national images through its material culture. In respect of exhibit analysis, I focus on identifying the "official stories" narrated in the museum through its representations and arrangements of collections. I further examine these official stories to discover the unspoken stories that seem to be ignored or simply silenced by the dominant narratives supported by Fijian nationalism. These unspoken stories are the key to understanding how Indo-Fijians and their culture and history have been implicitly excluded from the exhibitions of the museum.

### **Chapter Arrangement**

This thesis will be divided into three chapters. As a beginning, Chapter 1 will explore the connections between the idea of race and colonialism and nationalism. It starts by reviewing conceptions of race and then briefly discusses the historical articulation between the idea of race itself and colonialism and nationalism respectively. In general, Chapter 1 is intended to present the overall theoretical framework of this research. Next, Chapter 2 will focus on the genealogy of the ethnic conflicts in Fiji, forming a general picture of how and when it emerged. The ethnographic data will also be described in this chapter in order to show the native's point of view. Chapter 3 will zoom in on the role of the Fiji Museum in ethnic disputes. It will specifically concentrate on the exhibit analysis of the museum and thus reveal the counterstories against the official ones.

## Chapter 1: Ideas of Race and Relationships between Colonialism and Nationalism

In this chapter, I focus on constructing the theoretical framework of this thesis. This is because the scholarly works on these subjects I intend to discuss here, namely, race, colonialism, and nationalism, are greatly bewildering. It is of necessity, thus, to draw a coherent structure. Hence, this chapter first analyzes the origins of the idea of race and under what circumstances it emerged. Secondly, it explores the relationship between race and colonialism, especially in the context of the post-colonial approach. Finally, it examines the emergence of nationalism and the linkage between nationalism and the notion of race.

I argue that all three conceptions listed above are utterly important to understand the ethnic conflicts in Fijian society. Throughout this chapter, we can understand the influences — both from Fiji's colonial past and its pursuit of becoming a modern nation — that profoundly shaped the current configuration of the ethnic issues in contemporary Fiji.

### 1.1 Race and Its Connection with Colonialism

Needless to say, the ideas and the categories of race are convoluted and thus are extremely difficult to grasp.<sup>3</sup> Yet the articulation between race and colonialism has relatively clear history to track back. According to *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (2021), the concept of race as a 'categorization system' for human beings did not officially exist until the late eighteenth century. Before then, human beings were "recognizing differences between themselves as they crossed national and continental borders in exploration and trade." These differences were mixed with negative and positive imageries, and most importantly "prior to the idea of race, no discussion of an altogether inferior or superior species attached to physical differences yet existed." As colonization and enslavement expanded between the fifteenth and seventeenth century, the idea of race itself gradually became a 'pseudoscientific claim' that articulates the biological distinctions of races with social and cultural behaviors and performances. This claim serves as a justification and rationalization of what Western colonization has done to those who have been colonized (*ibid.*: BEFORE RACE section). The founder of Northern American anthropology, Franz Boas, challenged this claim. In his prominent work *Anthropology and Modern Life* (1962), Boas deals with several social prejudices firmly rooted in the disguise of science in the late

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<sup>3</sup> I find Joshua Glasgow, Sally Haslanger, Chike Jeffers, and Quayshawn Spencer's book *What Is Race? Four Philosophical Views* (2019) quite helpful in further exploring the issues of race. However, the theories and the core concerns in their book exceed this thesis's scale and seem to decontextualize my discussions of ethnic conflicts in Fiji. Still, the intellectual journey presented in their book provides a chance for the reader to ponder their positions on racial matters.

ninetieth and the early twentieth century. On the matter of the issues of race, Boas states that:

In the study of material culture we are constantly compelled to compare similar inventions used by people of the most diverse descent. Devices for throwing spears from Australia and America; [...] the use of bronze, of methods of firemaking in many parts of the world cannot be studied on the basis of their distribution by races, but only by their geographical and historical distribution, or as independent achievements, without any reference to the bodily forms of the races using these inventions. [...] It does not matter how the similar traits in diverse races may have originated, by diffusion or independent origin. They convince us of the independence of race and culture because their distribution does not follow racial lines.

*(ibid.: 61-2)*

Boas has dedicated himself to fighting against the race-based science and eugenics movement. His legacy in academics, as known as the Boasian approach to anthropology, inspired many scholars. Following the same vein, anthropologist Robert W. Sussman also points out that “race is not a biological reality among humans; there are no human biological races. What humans have designated as races are based on nonexistent differences among peoples” (2014: 305). For Sussman, the idea of race is a social construct within a particular historical context. Helping people understand this history — a history about how they were raised to believe that biological races actually exist — is the most important thing in our contemporary world. As Sussman puts it: “This is a history that we must all be aware of in our political, economic, and cultural interactions in the future. Biologically valid races are not real, but cultural racism is, and we must understand how this cultural reality affects our everyday interactions” (*ibid.*). I agree with Boas and Sussman and their arguments. Their viewpoints of seeing the idea of race as a social construct are undoubtedly crucial stepping stones for scholars who devoted their energies to this area. I also concur with Sussman's argument that we need to investigate the history of racism and how the cultural reality constructed under this circumstance affects our daily lives. A similar investigation in this kind of history, I argue, needs to be carried out for Fiji's ethnic conflicts as well. Hence, this thesis makes its effort to historicize those conflicts in an attempt to form a comprehensive understanding. This understanding, I would like to argue further, would not only be able to be applied to Fiji but could be applied everywhere worldwide.

In their book *Racial Theories in Social Science* (2016), Sean Elias and Joe Feagin examine these racial matters through the development in social sciences. The authors point out that the mainstream social sciences were born around the same time that “European and US imperialism and slavery systems were dramatically expanding throughout the nineteenth century” (*ibid.*: 19). During that time, European analysts helped to create systems of thought and knowledge that “justified the human actions and social praxis of racial oppression necessary for colonization and enslavement across the globe” (*ibid.*). This justification secured the definition and usage of race in European’s interests and strengthened the relationship between the idea of race and colonialism. Here I should make it clear how I approach the term colonialism throughout the thesis. I examine the term colonialism within the post-colonial theoretical framework that primarily focuses on the Western’s various forms of the representations of the “others” and the implicit inequality of the power/knowledge relations within these representations. In his pivotal work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said employed Foucault’s technique of discourse analysis to the production and the reproduction of knowledge about the Middle East. Moreover, Said also applied the concept of the cultural hegemony from Gramsci in an attempt to capture the actual pattern of how the *Occident* fabricates all the images of the *Orient*. As Said explained:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point, Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.

*(ibid.: 3)*

From this viewpoint, scholars are allowed to deconstruct the literary and historical writings and thus uncover how these pieces of literature refracted and intensified the imageries of the other that had been constructed in colonial projects. Although this literature-based theoretical framework brought several critiques from different scholars (see James Carrier 1995), there is no doubt that Said’s work has enormously affected the later scholars in this area. I discuss colonialism primarily within this post-colonial perspective, influenced by Said’s *Orientalism*. This reveals that all the images of others are socially constructed and are constructed under the power inequality. The idea of race is, obviously, included in this imagery. I argue that acknowledging this characteristic of power/knowledge of colonialism also helps understand the close relationship between the idea of race and colonialism.

In *Race and the Education of Desire* (1995), Ann Laura Stoler draws on Foucault and extends his analysis in his book *The History of Sexuality*. Stoler stated her usage of Foucault's theory:

I thus approach *The History of Sexuality* through several venues by comparing its chronologies and strategic ruptures to those in the colonies and by looking at these inflections on a racially charged ground. But, as importantly, I argue that a "comparison" between these two seemingly dispersed technologies of sex in colony and in metropole may miss the extent to which these technologies were bound.

My second contention is that the racial obsessions and refractions of imperial discourses on sexuality have not been restricted to bourgeois culture in the colonies alone. By bringing the discursive anxieties and practical struggles over citizenship and national identities in the nineteenth century back more squarely within Foucault's frame, bourgeois identities in both metropole and colony emerge tacitly and emphatically coded by race.

(*ibid.*: 7)

From this passage, it can be seen that Stoler intentionally placed Foucault's theory in the framework of colonialism for the purpose of emphasizing that race, as a social construction, was not limited to have an effect on the people in the colony but also helped the metropole to understand and define themselves. Stoler also argues that the very ideas of race used by the colonizers are not directly derived from the western scientific concept, but from the colonial frontier, and thus, are an experimental product of the encounter between the colonizers and the colonized. From this research, one can learn that the concept of race has been constructed and modified by the colonizers to justify the colonial practices. That is to say, the idea of race is essentially bound up with colonialism.

One notable thing is that, in a second book *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (2002), Stoler investigates the *métissage* [or the mixed blood] problems both in French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies that threaten European superiority. Stoler argues that "colonial projects and the European populations to which they gave rise were based on new constructions of what it meant to be European. These communities were artificial groupings—demographically, occupationally, and politically distinct" (*ibid.*: 24). Stoler challenges the colonial/colonized dichotomy, reminding us to be aware of the fluidity of racial categories created in colonial encounters. Although it does not perfectly apply to Fiji's case, I still find this reminder useful because it highlights the importance of recognizing an alternative perspective towards the racial categories and the idea of race itself.

Nevertheless, one thing that still needs to be discussed: Why does this connection between the idea of race and colonialism matter? What is the importance of these particular histories that need to be discussed in the contemporary world? In her new book *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Time* (2016), Ann Stoler argues that the present-day issues of former imperial polities are rooted in their colonial past and are “intimately tied to imperial effects and shaped by the distribution of demands, priorities, containments, and coercions of imperial formations (*ibid.*: 1).” That is, understanding the connections between the colonial past and our modern world is vital for addressing the issues, in former imperial polities, of environmental degradation, social dispossession, and inequalities.

The insights taken from the research mentioned above underscore the importance of recognizing the entanglement between the idea of race and colonialism. Moreover, this continues to influence a large number of social issues within numerous former imperial polities. This thesis puts itself in the same theoretical position and further discusses how this entanglement affects contemporary Fiji in the postcolonial context. I will discuss more details about this matter in Chapter 2. Here I want to reiterate that, especially in this case, it is crucial to understand and recognize the historical and sociocultural articulation between the concept of race and colonialism.

## **1.2 The Emergence of Nationalism and Its Relationship with Race**

This section focuses on the origins of nationalism and explores the correlation between nationalism and the idea of race.

To begin with, Liah Greenfeld’s new book *Nationalism: A Short Story* (2019) is a vantage point to examine the origins of the concept of nation itself and the evolution of national consciousness. Greenfeld starts with exploring the semantic history of the word “nation.” According to Greenfeld, the Latin word *natio* was a term of contempt describing “the communities of foreigners,” that is to say, not Roman citizens in Rome. After Rome fell, “far into the Middle Ages, universities, which essentially were Christian institutions, were formed in Western Europe. Wherever they were located, their students were foreigners in the university cities” (*ibid.*: 15). At that time, the negative meaning of the word *natio* had become a neutral one that applied to a community of foreigners. The students in those university cities thus gathered together in groups called “nation,” which refers to the geographic origins of the students. Greenfeld goes on that “such university nations became bands of friends and developed common opinions, which they defended in scholastic disputations. Thus, the word ‘*nation*’ acquired an additional meaning — that of a community of opinion — which gradually eclipsed that of a community of foreigners” (*ibid.*: 16). In 1274,

the Church Council of Lyon used this new concept of nation — a community of opinion — to describe the parties at the Church Councils that were in charge of dealing questions of grave ecclesiastical import. With this sense, the meaning of nation changed again, “becoming the term for the *decision-making elite*” (*ibid.*). However, as Greenfeld has noted, it applied only to the nobility. In the contrary, the term *people* referred to the “lower social strata.” In England, specifically because of the new aristocracy in England, the combination of the nation with the people in the sense of sharing equal identity and national consciousness took place (*ibid.*: 17). For it helped rationalize and justify their upward mobility. Hence, Greenfeld further argues:

The English aristocracy chose to forge the two separate communities, each with its own exclusive identity, into one inclusive community of identity, and made members of the people and of the noble “nation” interchangeable, and thus fundamentally equal. Once the people and the elite shared a common identity, families were no longer bound to their current place in the social hierarchy, which appeared temporary and accidental. Social stratification became fluid: depending on will, ability, and chance, individuals could move up and down society as if on a ladder. [...] Such a society, whose institutions were organized on the basis of the equation of people and nation, on fundamental equality combined with popular sovereignty and reverence for the people as a whole, was by definition a democratic society, even if it was not described in those exact words. A democracy stressing individual freedom is liberal democracy. In sixteenth-century England, it was simply called “nation.”

(*ibid.*: 17-8)

From this passage, one can certainly notice that Greenfeld conceives sixteenth-century England as where the idea of nation and the national consciousness was born. Furthermore, Greenfeld clarifies that it was because of the shared identity and the dignified national membership that catalyzed the formation of nationalism.

In his seminal book *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson argues that the emergence of nationalism was historically possible due to the ‘three fundamental cultural conceptions’ losing their axiomatic grip on men’s minds. These three cultural conceptions are the following: the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth; the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centers; and finally, the conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable (*ibid.*: 36). Anderson sees the nation as essentially an “imagined political community” that is inherently limited in scope and sovereign. This community is a group of

people who share the same language, history, traditions, and culture. The emergence of nationalism or the national consciousness, as Anderson argues, is because of the rise of the print-capitalism: “What, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but, explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity” (*ibid.*: 42).

Ernest Gellner, on the other hand, holds a different opinion from Anderson. Published in the same year, Gellner’s book *Nation and Nationalism* (1983) depicts his theory of the emergence and the typology of nationalism. Gellner believes that nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which “requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state — a contingency already formally excluded by the principle in its general formulation - should not separate the power-holders from the rest” (*ibid.*: 1). The critical factor of the emergence of nationalism, according to Gellner, is the age of transition from agrarian society to industrial one. Gellner applies the concept of culture to elaborate his argument:

Cultures, like plants, can be divided into savage and cultivated varieties. The savage kinds are produced and reproduce themselves spontaneously, as parts of the life of men. No community is without some shared system of communication and norms, and the wild systems of this kind (in other words, cultures) reproduce themselves from generation to generation without conscious design, supervision, surveillance or special nutrition.

(*ibid.*: 50)

The cultivated/wild culture is a metaphor for the industrial/agrarian society. Because of the urgent need to unify the villagers who came to cities from their hometown, most industrial societies educated, or in Gellner’s analogy, cultivated the people for the convenience of governance. This process of education, thus, is where the nationalism grew and consolidated the unity of the people (*ibid.*: 51-2).

Both Anderson and Gellner are identified as modernists (Liah Greenfeld too, is conceived as a modernist, see Greenfeld 1992) who claim that nationalism is a sociopolitical phenomenon that is occurred in accordance with the formation of modern states. Primordialism, in the contrary, represents another view of nationalism. In his introductory book *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (2000), Umut Özkirimli indicates that the term primordialism is “an ‘umbrella’ term used to describe scholars who hold that nationality is a ‘natural’ part of human beings, as natural as speech, sight or smell, and that



nations have existed since time immemorial” (*ibid.*: 64). In this thesis, I put Fiji’s case in modernism’s theoretical framework. After becoming independent from the British Crown colony (1874-1970), Fiji eagerly sought its national identity. To gain international recognition, Fiji made much effort transitioning itself to a modern state. The Fiji Museum, I argue, is included in this effort. As one of the crucial cultural institutions in Fiji, the Fiji Museum serves Fiji’s national vision, demonstrating its cultural diversity and material cultures. Hence, it is one of my central arguments in this thesis that it is vital to contextualize the Fiji Museum and its exhibitions in the process of Fiji’s nation-building and its pursuit of modernism. For it admonishes us to scrutinize all the ideologies hidden behind the material cultures that seemingly neutral.

I am certainly aware that all the literature of nationalism that have been selected to present in this thesis so far are generally derived from the Western theoretical frameworks. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz has already reminded scholars to be aware of the importance of the local knowledge. For Geertz, things such as sailing, gardening, politics, and poetry, are “crafts of place,” meaning “they work by the light of local knowledge” (1983: 167). That is to say, these crafts of place are constructive of social realities rather than merely reflective of them. With this sense, it might seem that applying the theories and explanations of nationalism that were generated within the Western contexts to approach Fiji’s case is of questionable effectiveness. As preliminary research, this thesis finds it difficult to form a comparative perspective of nationalism between the Western countries and the Non-Western ones. Nonetheless, as I mentioned before, this thesis aims to explore what had happened in Fiji’s aspiration to become a modern state. Thereby I believe this research can bring a different way of approaching nationalism in current scholarly discussion.

So far, I have discussed the emergence of nationalism in a manner of modernist approach. It is time to let us look at the relationship between nationalism and the idea of race. In examining that, I find primordialism and its assumptions about the nation a helpful starting point. Özkirimli states that: “we cannot consider primordialist accounts of nationalism independently from debate on ethnicity. Primordialist arguments are first formulated to explain the origins and strength of ethnic identities” (2000: 65). For most primordialists,<sup>4</sup> it is their belief that there is an intrinsic bond between the nation and the specific ethnic group. It is something, in their words, of “givenness” that has been passed down from one generation to the next. Hence, what we perceive today is surely a

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<sup>4</sup> According to Özkirimli (2000), there are, in fact, three different approaches concerning primordialism, namely: the naturalist approach, the sociobiological approach, and the culturalist approach. Similar classifications of primordialism and more details about these approaches can be seen in Tilley (1997).

“reassertion” of the national essence. Moreover, they tend to believe that ethnic and national attachments are “underived” pre-date all other social ties. This claim, as Özkirimli indicates, “automatically creates a mystical aura around them: primordial sentiments are ineffable, that is ‘incapable of being expressed in words’, thus unanalysable” (*ibid.*: 77). Undoubtedly, primordialist approach has received several criticisms particularly from modernists (see Smith 1995). Even so, I would suggest that primordialism can help understand the essence of Fiji’s ethnic conflicts. It provides a useful angle that helps reveal where the sense of superiority owned by the *iTaukei* stemmed from. Unlike *iTaukei*, the Indo-Fijians do not share a similar language and cultural background with them. Most importantly, as the term *vulagi* in Fijians refers to, the Indo-Fijians are perceived as “outsiders” or “strangers” in Fiji’s mainstream society. On the other hand, the *iTaukei* and their ethnic ties to Fiji — as they are the “first” people living on this land — accorded them a national membership at the very beginning when the country becoming independent. I will elaborate on this issue in more detail in Chapter 2. The intriguing thing I would like to propose here is that Fiji’s nation-building process is, in and of itself, twofold. One lies in Fiji’s pursuit of becoming a modern state; the other one, as primordialist approach has suggested, lies in Fiji’s construction of ethnic identity. I thereby argue that Fiji’s nationalism cannot be understood without taking both of what modernists and primordialists have suggested into consideration.<sup>5</sup>

I put Fiji’s ethnic conflicts in nationalism’s framework because these disputes are largely, but not entirely, derived from Fiji’s nation-building process. Perhaps the next task needs to be dealt with to make my arguments clearer is: How did that happen? Victor Roudometof’s work *Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy* (2001) would help answer this question. Roudometof examines the sociological history of Southeastern Europe, particularly the Balkans since the early 1990s. He focuses on the rise of nationalism in this area associating with the issues of ethnic conflicts. Roudometof states that:

[The] completion of the nation-building process entailed centralization and homogenization. Both projects were an extension of state-sponsored strategies of modernization (cf. Giddens 1985) aiming to Europeanize the Balkans. The issue of ethnic heterogeneity in the Balkans became a problem for state administrators and international

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<sup>5</sup> In this discussion, I consider the term race as a nearly synonym to ethnicity. I am borrowing this viewpoint from Richard Jenkins. In his work *Rethinking Ethnicity* (2008), Jenkins has pointed out that “ethnicity is a more general social phenomenon than racism or ‘racial’ categorization. It is equally clear that ethnicity, although its emphasis may conventionally be thought to fall upon group identification, is routinely implicated, through the signification of cultural or ethnic markers, in processes of categorization” (*ibid.*: 23). With that sense, one can certainly see the term ethnicity and race similarly when referring to social categorization.

committees, whose goal was to construct nationally homogeneous imagined communities. [...] Therefore, the pursuit of centralization and homogenization entailed a clash with the local cultures of various minority groups. Rival nation-states did not hesitate to lay claims to such minorities, thereby adding oil to the fire.

*(ibid.: 182)*

With this perception, Roudometof specifies the consequences of nation-building in the Balkans: the oppression of minority groups caused by centralization and homogenization. Similarly, in his article Takashi Fujitani (2007) examines the ways that both the Japanese and American regimes treated their ‘outcasts,’ namely the Korean Japanese in Japan and the Japanese Americans in the United States during the Second World War, revealing the political violence and social sufferings within these two groups of peoples. By comparing these two nation-state-based empires, Fujitani argues that the phenomenon of racism within these two empires had shown a transformation from the so-called ‘vulgar racism’ to ‘polite racism’ (*ibid.*: 24). Fujitani emphasizes that:

In the case of Japan’s and America’s minorities and colonial subjects during the war years, even as they entered the mainstream populations in some important respects, they continued to be marked as somehow different, usually characterized within the discourse of cultural difference. This inclusionary racism made it possible for these regimes, and in general for modern regimes premised upon bio-power, to separate out subpopulations as a whole or segments of them, especially by class, and then to constitute them permanently or in moments of crisis into states or zones of exception — exceptional for the ways in which they operated to deprive life through a sheer negativity.

*(ibid.: 34)*

Fujitani’s research describes that, even after being “accepted” by the mainstream society, the minorities still suffered from severe but somehow implicit social discrimination and stigmas, or, in Fujitani’s own word, the “inclusionary racism.”

From these two scholars mentioned above, the correlation between ethnic conflicts and nationalism becomes clear. A similar situation, as I noticed, can be seen in Fijian society as well. This thesis will argue later in the text that the Indo-Fijians seemed to be left behind by the Fijian government both political-wise and cultural-wise during this process.

To end this chapter, it is worth restating the main argument I have proposed based on these discussions: it is nearly impossible to examine the ethnic conflicts in contemporary

Fiji without considering its colonial past and its nation-building process. Bearing this in mind, in the next chapter I will focus on the historicization of Fiji's ethnic conflicts.

## Chapter 2: Historicizing Ethnic Conflicts in Fiji

This chapter reflects on Fiji's colonial past and examines its modern history. It aims to answer the historical origins of the ethnic conflicts occurring in contemporary Fiji. It follows a chronological framework that first looks into Fiji's pre-colonial history; second, it turns into the examination of Fiji's colonial period; finally, it delves into the history of the post-colonial Fiji. Throughout this chronological exploration, the historical explanation of the origins and consequences of ethnic conflicts in Fijian society will be made.

### 2.1 Before 1874: Precolonial Fiji

Fiji consists of 850 islands, of which only about 100 are inhabited. The island of Rotuma, which was added to Fiji in 1881, is geographically separate from the main archipelago. Most islands in Fiji are volcanic, with rugged hills and flat plains where rivers have built deltas. In terms of climate, average temperatures range from 20 to 29 degrees Celsius. From November to April is the cyclone season bringing storms that frequently cause extensive property damage, loss of crops, and casualties (Encyclopedia.com 2021).

About 3,500 years ago, the Fiji Islands first became inhabited. Archaeological evidence has shown that the earliest inhabitants came from the area around Vanuatu and New Caledonia. At that time, the seafaring migrants would migrate eastward to Tonga and Samoa. Fiji also continues to encounter immigrants from West Melanesia. Tonga and Samoa are still relatively isolated and have developed a unique social, political and cultural grouping called Polynesia. Characteristics of Polynesia can be observed in the coastal provinces of Fiji. These areas maintained strong trade and social ties with Tonga and Samoa. But, the physical characteristics and social institutions of the indigenous Fijians indicate Melanesian characteristics. The characteristics of Melanesia are mainly distributed in the inland areas of the main islands (Lal 1992: 4).

According to Brij V. Lal — one of the most important and prestigious historians in Fiji — the social and political organization of the early indigenous Fijians was diverse. Every indigenous Fijian belonged to a specific clan (or *yavusa* in Fijian) that claimed descent from a legendary founding ancestor. The *yavusa* consisted of several *mataqali* (or family groups). In this *mataqali*, an individual's rank and power were determined by lineal proximity to the founding ancestor. Persons who were in charge of *mataqali* were called *turaga* (or chiefs of the leading *mataqali*). They were direct descents through the male line from the founding ancestor. Those below *turaga* in rank were the *sauturaga* [or executive *mataqali*], whose job was carrying out the commands of chiefs and supporting their authority. What remains in

rank were the *matanivanua* (or speakers and masters of ceremony for the *yavusa*), the *bete* (or priests), and the *bati* (or warriors) (*ibid.*: 4-5). Lal points out this pattern of traditional Fijian society was “vulnerable to pressures generated by voluntary or enforced migration within the islands and by internal conflicts and the vagaries of war” (*ibid.*: 5). Thus, considering social and economic factors along with the reason of protecting from being attacked from hostile chiefs, several *yavusa* would become allied, forming a confederation called a *vanua* [or state]. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, many *vanua* united, into larger polities called the *matanitu* [or confederation]. These *matanitu*, according to Lal, varied among the Fijian islands in terms of power and population. In the early nineteenth century, there were twelve or so *matanitu*. The most significant ones were “Bau, Rewa, and Verata in Southeastern Viti Levu; Lakeba in the Lau group; and Cakaudrove, Bua, and Maccuata on Vanua Levu” (*ibid.*). However, as Lal has noticed, “as the nineteenth century opened, these leading *matanitu* were engaged in a byzantine struggle for political supremacy that was soon complicated by outside forces just then beginning to encroach on Fiji” (*ibid.*). This will be discussed below.

## 2.2 A Turning Point: The Deed of Cession and the Beginning of Indenture

In his book *A Vision for Change*, Lal comments on the modern history of Fiji that roughly starting in the 1870s:

The modern history of Fiji begins on 10 October 1874 when Fiji became a British Crown colony. This historic event itself was the culmination of a series of developments going back to the early years of the 19th century, when sustained contact with the European world first began. The first Europeans arrived in Fiji in 1800, sailors from the wrecked schooner, *Argo*. Shortly afterwards, they were followed by beachcombers and itinerant fortune seekers, traders in sandalwood and beche-de-mer, and missionaries, the first of whom, David Cross and William Cargill, arrived in the islands in 1835. By the 1860s, some 2,000 Europeans, mostly from Australia and New Zealand were living in various parts of the islands. Their presence and actions created tensions of their own.

(Lal 2011: 1-2)

From this comment, we can see that in the late nineteenth century, several important historical encounters, mostly with Europeans, took place in Fiji.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the most critical

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<sup>6</sup> Studies on Overseas Chinese in Fiji can be represented by *The Overseas Chinese in Fiji* by Stuart W. Greif (1977). On the one hand, the book provides a clear historical picture of how overseas Chinese entered Oceania and even Fiji. On the other hand, it also provides contemporary researchers with first-hand experience of the early days when the first overseas Chinese settled and took root in Fiji.

development in this history, as Lal argues, is when Fiji became a British Crown colony. In 1874, Seru Cakobau, who was called *Tui Viti*, or “King of Fiji” for he unified the Fiji Islands and established a constitutional monarchy, approached Great Britain with the offer of cession (*ibid.*: 2). This decision was made under a twin pressure of domestic turmoil and foreign invasions. Lal points out that it was because the “[continued] insistent demands by an intransigent European settler community for more land, a stable government and compensation for damages to settler property apparently caused by Fijians resenting their presence and demands, increased his [Cakobau’s] vulnerability” (*ibid.*). It was at that moment that Fiji began a colonial history of nine decades long.

What needs to be emphasized is that the Deed of Cession signed by Cakobau had several profound impacts on Fijian society. In his book *Thinking about Political Things* (2016), Andrew Murray SM states that there were at least three major influences. First, one of the clauses in the Deed of Cession guaranteed the practices of preserving traditional Fijian life, which left most Fijians excluded from a developing national economy (mainly tropical plantation), remaining living their lives in villages. After Fiji became independent, this clause was invoked by the Fijian leadership to reinforce the claim of “Fijian paramountcy,” meaning the (indigenous) Fijians should be always predominant in its country. Second, the policies derived from the Deed of Cession assured the land ownership to native Fijians. Thirdly, at that time, British colonial policy emphasized that 1) the colony should be financially self-sustaining and 2) the Fijians’ traditional forms of life should remain. Thus, the colonial administration of Fiji decided to “import” more than sixty thousand Indians into Fiji between 1879 and 1916 to work as indentured laborers for the development of the sugar industry (*ibid.*: 56-7).

From 1879 to 1916, the British colonial government introduced indentures (or *girmitiyas*) to facilitate the development of the tropical plantation. Most of these indentures chose to stay in Fiji after their contracts ended, and their descendants were the Indo-Fijians (Lal 2011: 7). Not only did this transform the demographic structure of modern Fiji, it was the first time that two groups of people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds came into contact, and it was also a moment in history when Fiji's ethnic divisions, or the racial categories, emerged. During this period, the indigenous Fijians and the Indian-Fijians experienced very different political and economic conditions, even though they shared the same geographical environment. As a result of the colonial policy, the indigenous Fijians, as mentioned earlier, did not enter the labor market in the sugar industry, but maintained their original self-sufficient rural life. In contrast, the Indian Fijians were integrated into the

colonial economy, from the beginning of the tropical cultivation labor, to the owners of small agriculture and commerce. Indigenous Fijians and Indian-Fijians were also deliberately separated from each other by the colonial government, so that the two groups had little opportunity to live together or interact socially (Trnka 2008: 32). A similar perspective can be seen in Naidu et al. 's (2013) work. They point out that Fiji's history of separate development of its people has greatly shown that indigenous Fijians and other ethnicities, especially Indo-Fijians, had little chance to interact socially, economically and politically.

To conclude what has been discussed above, Kelly and Kaplan (2001) analyze the historical process of the British colonization, providing a nuanced understanding of how Fiji's colonial past is still playing a crucial part in the daily interactions between different ethnic groups in Fiji.

### **2.3 After Independence: Military Coups and Clashes of Ethnicity**

According to Guan (2016), Fiji declared its independence on October 10, 1970 and joined the Commonwealth of Nations. Fiji seceded from the Commonwealth of Nations in 1987 after changing its name to the Republic of Fiji. In the same year, there were two military coups. The first coup was caused by indigenous Fijians' dissatisfaction with the majority of Fijians of Indian origin in the cabinet of a government formed by parties supported by Fijians of Indian origin. The second called for the abolition of the constitutional monarchy, the establishment of a republic, and the replacement of the governor general with a president; A third coup took place in 2000, which demanded that Fiji's government should belong to the "Great Council of Chiefs" established during the British colonial period. Although the coup failed, it indirectly influenced subsequent governments to put the protection of indigenous Fijians' rights at the heart of their policies. In 2006, Frank Bainimarama, commander of Fiji's armed forces, staged Fiji's fourth coup d'état since 1987. Guan further pointed out that the three coups from the 1980s to 2000 reflected the power rivalry between indigenous Fijians and Fijians of Indian origin, and that the 2006 coup involved a conflict of class interests within indigenous Fijians (ibid: 12-3).

Dominik Schieder's research (2012) gives more details about these military coups. In May 1987, Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, who staged the first two military coups, led his soldiers into Parliament to depose a coalition government that was newly elected. This coalition government was led by the multi-ethnic Fijian Labour Party. Rabuka's actions were meant to reinstate the indigenous Fijians' political supremacy. On 19 May 2000, George Speight, a Fijian businessman of European descent, entered the Parliament building,



overthrowing Mahendra Chaudhry, Fiji's first prime minister of Indo-Fijian background. For Speight, this civilian coup was to restore the indigenous Fijians' political rights that were endangered by an "Indian" government rather than indigenous Fijian. Speight held the prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry, most of the members of Chaudhry's cabinet, and other Parliamentarians as hostages for 56 days in order to negotiate with Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Fiji's then president. This chaos was ended under the Bainimarama's leadership (*ibid.*: 47-8). Trnka (2008), based on the social trauma Fiji experienced after the coup in 2000, on the one hand, explores how the local people *return* to the daily life from the violence and pain, and on the other hand, it also makes a profound inquiry into Fiji's ethnic identity and national imagination. For example, Trnka notes that during the coup unrest, Fiji's capital, Suva City, experienced numerous attacks by indigenous Fijians on Indian-Fijians and their businesses and vendors, resulting in many incidents of bloodshed and death. As mentioned above, most of the four coups in Fiji were related to ethnic power antagonism, which further strengthened the antagonism and conflict between indigenous Fijians and Indian-Fijians. At the same time Trnka's study also illustrates how the several political coups and its violence have shaped and influenced the collective memory and daily life of Fijians (*ibid.*: 45-6).

In fact, Schieder's research has shown that Fiji's political instability is caused by multiple social divisions that were historically constructed. One possible way to approach these political contradictions within Fijian society, as Schieder argues, "is to focus on political actors, most importantly the coup protagonists and their political rhetoric" (*ibid.*: 59). In other words, Schieder's analysis focuses mainly on the role of political elite in Fijian society. This thesis, however, puts its emphasis on social division, that is, racial difference. Instead of treating Rabuka and Speight's claims in their military coups as political rhetoric, I consider these claims the reflections of indigenous Fijians' superiority that was reified by British colonial policies largely in favour of indigenous Fijians (Murray 2016: 59-61). This superiority, I believe, has been reinforced since the beginning of the Fijian nation-building process.

#### **2.4 *Vulagi*: From King to Outsider**

"My ancestors were buried here, my dad is buried here and my mother will be buried here, I will be buried here and my children will be buried here so definitely don't call me a *vulagi*"  
(Cited from Rosy Akbar, The Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts; a public speech at *the International Conference on Forced Labour and Migration*, 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2019).

Being born and raised in Fiji, Akbar, who is of Indian descent, made her statement that she is Fijian, not a *vulagi*. Similar circumstance can be seen in my fieldwork. Jessica, an Indo-Fijian who is in her fifties, is one of the interlocutors of this research.<sup>7</sup> She is a taxi driver mainly based in Suva city. She showed me around Suva city and shared her experience as a female taxi driver in Fiji. After realizing I was doing research on ethnic conflicts in Fiji, she invited me to have dinner with her family. During the dinner, Jessica and her husband, an interior designer, shared their struggles as Indo-Fijians in Fijian society. “We are not allowed to have our own land, that means we can’t have our own house even we were all born in this land,” said Jessica. Jessica’s comment reflects the fact that nearly 90 per cent of the land in Fiji is inalienably owned by indigenous Fijian landowning units (Reddy and Lal 2002). This restriction, as Trnka depicts, “[makes] the Indo-Fijian population reliant on renting land for their homes and for the maintenance of their livelihoods” (Trnka 2008: 7). To put it together, Akbar’s speech and Jessica’s experience greatly indicate that the *iTaukei-vulagi* contradiction still occupies an important position within Fijian society. To understand this contradiction comprehensively, it is necessary to examine the term *vulagi* in Fiji’s socio-cultural context.

To begin with, I consider Marshall Sahlins’s book *Islands of History* (1985) a useful starting point. In his research, Sahlins uses the concept of “the stranger-kings” to describe the dynamic political structure of Fiji’s indigenous culture:

It is a remarkably common fact that the great chiefs and kings of political society are not of the people they rule. By the local theories of origin they are strangers, just as the draconic feats by which they come to power are foreign to the conduct of “real people” of true “sons of the land,” as various Polynesians express it. The stranger-kings, we shall see, are eventually encompassed by the indigenous people, to the extent that their sovereignty is always problematical and their lives are often at risk. [...] Typically, then, these rulers do not even spring from the same clay as the aboriginal people: they are from the heavens or — in the very common case — they are of distinct ethnic stock. In either event, royalty is the foreigner.

(*ibid.*: 78)

According to Sahlins, “Fijians often complain that their ruling chief is a *kai tai*, a ‘different person’ or ‘stranger’ in the land; or else, he is a *vulagi*” (*ibid.*). From this, one can certainly argue that Fijians are indeed aware of this character within their political structure, which

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<sup>7</sup> In this thesis, all the names of the interlocutors have been changed to ensure anonymity.

means it is recognized and practiced in Fijians' cultural logic. In the same vein, Fox (2008) conducts his research in Fiji, indicating the actions of installing the so-called "others" into their local community are prevalent within Fiji's indigenous traditions and the Austronesian societies. Both studies indicate the important role *vulagi* actually plays within the traditional political structure in Fiji. It is worthy to note that the insight delivered by the two authors seems to be in conflict with the context in which Fijians, especially indigenous Fijians, use the term presently.

Asesela Ravuvu, a Fijian anthropologist and politician, describes the relationship between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians as that of the host and guest. In his book *The Façade of Democracy*, Ravuvu wrote that:

The best analogy to this *taukei* and *vulagi* relationship is that of the host and guest. The host is the *taukei* and the guest is the *vulagi*. Each must play fair and be honest with each other and understand well each other's obligations to the other. The host is generally in command, and the guest must comply with the host's requirements if he is to be accepted and accommodated. If the guest does not comply to the host's expectations then he may very well leave before he is thrown out of the house.

(Ravuvu 1991: 60)

In Ravuvu's description, the relationship between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians is similar to that of the host and guest. For Ravuvu, the *iTaukei* is the owner of Fiji and thereby has ultimate rights to the land and to formulate particular requirements from the guest, that is, the *vulagi*. Ravuvu's perspective is not a special case. In fact, most indigenous Fijians still hold this viewpoint when it comes to the *iTaukei-vulagi* relation.

"We are the owner of our land," said Layla, one of my interlocutors who is in her fifties. Layla and I met in a hotel dining room in Suva. She was there for a local workshop aimed at promoting women's rights in Fijian society. "In here, women are not allowed to have their lands or participate in public affairs, and all of these things were set up by those missionaries and colonizers." "That is not in our culture," emphasized Layla. She also shared her experience of participating in international women's rights protest in Jeju Island, South Korea.<sup>8</sup> During our conversation, Layla showed her enthusiasm for the promotion of human rights and showed that she is well-educated. When I asked Layla about her opinion on the

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<sup>8</sup> Karen J. Bison (2007), from the perspective of gender and women studies, explores how indigenous Fijians have handled themselves in the face of multiple values colliding with local cultural and traditional values under the tide of globalization.

tension between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, she made it clear that “We, the *iTaukei* people, are the real owner of the land.” “Indians are very good at work; they are great farmers. And they really know how to make money.” “But,” she changed her tone, “nobody likes someone who steals their stuff.” Layla’s comment implies that it was Indo-Fijians that appropriated indigenous Fijians’ lands. I then asked Layla to elaborate more about that, “I mean we [indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians] still could be friends, but the problem is the distance by heart, not by physical.” We ended our conversation after I sensed Layla’s uncomfortableness while talking on this topic. I came to realize shortly that her discomfort was because two Indo-Fijian workers were in the same room. I kept ruminating about Layla’s words after I went back to my room. What Layla said seemed arcane and thus hard to comprehend. However, it would become clearer and more relatable if we situate Layla’s expressions both in the context of Fiji’s colonial past and the nation-building process. I argue that the ethnic difference between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians is only ostensibly a reason for Fiji’s ethnic conflicts. The intrinsic cause of the conflicts, from my perspective, lies in indigenous Fijians’ superiority. This superiority, as I have mentioned earlier, was first constructed under British colonial rules and then reinforced during the nation-building process of Fiji.

It should be accentuated that I have no intentions of undervaluing the influence of ethnic difference *per se*. In fact, the ethnic difference or the racial category still serves as an effective identification method ingrained in Fijian society. In what follows, I will explain this based on my fieldwork. Sarah is one of my interlocutors who is in her forties. She is running an Airbnb in Lami town which is close to Suva city. I stayed at her Airbnb for 4 days (September 3rd to 6th, 2019). Sarah is a Rotuman. She moved to Viti Levu to find a job. One night during my stay, I asked Sarah a similar question: What is your opinion on the ethnic difference? She replied: “[Indigenous] Fijians don’t have the same ambition and business acumen as Indians and Asians have. They just want to earn some ‘easy money.’” “In Fiji,” Sarah continued, “families are usually dominated by men, with either a wife or a daughter who needs to go out and earns money to support the whole family. [Indigenous] Fijian men usually just stay at home, eat and then sleep.” Sarah told me that she has been married twice but has never considered marrying a Fijian man because of they are lazy but still want to be the head of the family. “But if I am looking for some business partner,” said Sarah, “I would never find an Indian to be my business partner because they are often the ‘back-stabbing’ people. If you find an Indian as a partner, they will learn your business skills and then break up with you, opening their own shop and steal your customers.” Sarah also shared her

inconvenience while living in Viti Levu: “I am Rotuman, but for some reason, I have to be called Fijian. And even for these Fijians, we are still and always the *vulagi*.” In Sarah’s statements, indigenous Fijians were described as lazy and lacking motivation, while Indo-Fijians were depicted as canny and tended to “backstabbing.” Not only for Sarah, but these temperament labels attached to specific racial categories also play an important role in indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians. However, what essentially matters is to understand how and when these racial categories were constructed. That is why in this thesis I argue for a historicizing perspective to examine ethnic conflicts in Fiji.

In this chapter, I have proposed a historical exploration of ethnic conflicts in Fijian society. I discussed the several historical encounters in Fiji, such as becoming a British Crown colony and the arrival of indentured laborers. As I presented earlier, these historic moments helped establish indigenous Fijians’ paramountcy and led the everyday struggles of Indo-Fijians. This chapter also examined the term *vulagi* constantly mentioned in the context of anti-Indo-Fijians, arguing that the meaning of *vulagi* has changed and been reshaped in Fiji’s nation-building process.

## Chapter 3: The Fiji Museum: The Intersection of Colonial Enterprise and Nation-building

This chapter focuses on the Fiji Museum. It argues that the museum is an intersection of Fiji's colonial past and its nation-building process. It examines the history and the exhibition of the Fiji Museum. Moreover, it explores the implicit cultural exclusion in the museum exhibition, arguing that it is the indigenous Fijians' paramountcy that predominated the exhibiting logic of the museum.

### 3.1 The Birth of the Fiji Museum

As a museum at a national level, the Fiji Museum is designated as the most important cultural institution representing Fijian's cultural heritage by Fijian government. The history of the museum itself, as mentioned before, is intrinsically bounded up with the colonial enterprise since the early eighteenth century. The general intention of building a museum to display and preserve Fiji's material culture was first discussed in 1904. In that year, Sir William Allardyce, the governor of Fiji (1901-1902), presented his collection to the Suva Town Board. Allardyce's collection, which was largely gathered during his term of service in Fiji was displayed at the Town Hall. In 1908, the Fijian Society, an organization that aims at researching and preserving the country's history and culture, was established. The creation of a museum was included in this organization's aim as well. In the following years, the local people donated their collections. The collections were all exhibited in the Town Hall until 1919. In that year, a fire broke out, and the majority of the Town Hall was burned. Since then, the collection was moved to different places. During the Second World War, the collection was stored on various islands, and some of the collection was damaged due to humidity. After World War II, the museum was completed in 1954 at its present location, the Thurston Gardens in the city of Suva. In recent years, the focus of the Fiji Museum has changed from a museum that only refers to an item display to a research and educational institution. The staff in the museum are dedicated to archeological research, collecting and presenting Fiji's oral traditions, and emphasizing the language it displays. Through various projects and cooperation, Fijians are attracted to understand their own cultural background and are encouraged to learn and understand their culture. However, due to funding issues, the museum has no longer engaged in the operation of research units (Fiji Museum, n.d.).

The Fiji Museum has five galleries: The Maritime Gallery, History Gallery, Girit Gallery, *Masi* Gallery, and the Natural Gallery. The Maritime Gallery demonstrates the strong connections indigenous Fijians have developed with the ocean in their everyday life

practices; the collection in this gallery includes canoes (see Figure 1, 2), bamboo rafts, fishing tools, and wood-carved weapons. The History Gallery explores the evidence of human habitation through the material culture; this gallery provides a wide range of collection that helps the audience understand Fiji's history; it also features the *Lapita* culture (see Figure 3), an ancient Pacific culture that colonized much of the Pacific over 3000 years ago. The Girit Gallery shows the history of the Indian laborers on the island, their daily life, and cultural practices; most of the collection in this gallery is the farming and daily living equipment of the Indian laborers in the early life when they arrived.



Figure 1. The *Ratu Finau Tui Nayau*, a Fijian canoe, is one of the most important and representative objects in the Fiji Museum (photo by author 2019).

The *Masi* Gallery focuses on the distinctive material culture of Fiji — Tapa cloth, a piece of bark cloth that is prevalent among the Pacific Islanders' cultures; this gallery displays different usages of *Masi*, such as the installations of chiefs, the costumes of dance ceremonies, and house decorations. Needless to say, *Masi* has its own crucial position in Fijian culture. Finally, the Natural Gallery presents Fiji's natural history through a variety of collections; this gallery provides the chance for the audience to learn about Fiji's ecological environment and its development throughout time.





Figure 2. Different types of fishing canoes (photo by author 2019).

**Excavation of the Bourewa Site by University of South Pacific and Fiji Museum researchers 2006.**

**THE LAPITA PEOPLE - FIJI'S EARLIEST SETTLERS**

LAPITA is the name given to a type of decorated pottery found in early archaeological sites in Oceania. It is a marker for the first colonists who sailed across island Melanesia beginning 3200 years ago. The Lapita peoples reached Fiji by 3050 years ago, becoming the founding ancestors for Fijian peoples today. The earliest Lapita sites in Fiji occur at Bourewa on Viti Levu and on Vorovoro Island off the northeast coast of Vanua Levu. Pottery from these sites closely resembles pots found in Vanuatu, New Caledonia and the Reef Santa Cruz Islands, illustrating shared ancestry. Lapita peoples relied heavily on reef foods, fishing and turtle capture for their subsistence, leaving behind thick garbage heaps of shell, bone, ceramic fragments and other artifacts related to daily activities.

**Paths of Lapita expansion across Melanesia based on archaeological data**

**Fijian language family tree supports interpretations of Lapita expansion**

Bismarck Archipelago obsidian (volcanic glass) excavated from the Lapita settlement at Bourewa

Figure 3. This display panel gives an introductory explanation of the *Lapita* culture (photo by author 2019).



### 3.2 Exhibition and Exclusion

In his book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, James Clifford describes the museum as a “contact zone,” which he borrowed from Mary Louise Pratt. In her book *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt defines the term “contact zone” as “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Pratt 1992: 6). Extending Pratt’s usage of the term, Clifford applies it in the context of emphasizing ongoing process of negotiation between different cultures, knowledge systems, and practices (1997: 192). Clifford further argues that:

With different political valences, museums express the interests of nation-states, of local and tribal communities, of transnational capital. Wherever local custom, tradition, art (elite or popular), history, science, and technology are collected and displayed—for purposes of prestige, political mobilization, commemoration, tourism, or education—museums and museum-like institutions can be expected to emerge.

*(ibid.: 216)*

As mentioned earlier, the Fiji Museum was established during British ruling time. Based on this history, the Fiji Museum itself is no doubt a contact zone of the colonial encounter. At that time, the museum served as an exhibiting space for collections representing the triumphant story of colonial enterprise. Prior to 1994, the exhibition of the museum principally relied on modules inherited from the colonial period and therefore presented the Western imagination towards Fiji. After 1994, the museum resituated its position in light of the urgent need for decolonization, making several attempts to outstretch its engagement in Fijian society. Hence, the Fiji Museum transitioned itself from a museum that was a pure reflection of colonial gaze to a more community-oriented organization (Ramsay 2014: 189-91).

The museum’s attempt to decolonize is the construction of Fijian national identity. In its efforts to establish the national identity, the museum highlighted its collections of *Lapita* culture. In the History Gallery, the audiences can see a great amount of *Lapita* pottery (see Figure 4, 5). Besides the pottery, several pictures of local Fijians using similar pottery at present are included on the display panel (see Figure 6).



Figure 4. The *Lapita* pottery bowl (photo by author 2019).



Figure 5. Different parts of *Lapita* pottery (photo by author 2019).



Figure 6. This display panel provides a brief introduction of *Lapita* pottery and its decoration (photo by author 2019).

The first sentence on the display panel, as shown in Figure 6, emphasizes that indigenous Fijians are still using the same methods to make the pottery. This implies the strong correlation between *Lapita* culture — the first people who inhabited in this island — and indigenous Fijians — the successors of the Lapita people. By doing so, Fiji's national identity has been created under this narrative, which combines archaeological evidence with Fijian's traditional culture. In her book *Artifacts and Allegiances*, Peggy Levitt tackles the question of how museums put the nation and the world on display. Based on firsthand interviewing with museum directors, curators, and policymakers, Levitt's book provides an intellectual journey throughout the globe on museum studies. Her main argument is that what museums put on display is "where a country is in the arc of its nation-building and global claims-staking projects, and the kinds of citizens it believes it needs in order to reach its goals" (Levitt 2015: 3-4). For Levitt, the cosmopolitan values and the national consciousness are intertwined and contested in the making process of museums. Levitt's perspective, I argue, can be applied to the Fiji Museum. As stated earlier, the Fiji Museum created a narrative that emphasizing the historical continuity between *Lapita* culture and traditional Fijian culture. This narrative helped establish Fiji's national identity in the sense that (indigenous) Fijians are the heirs of the *Lapita* people and thereby justified their claims to the land. Apart from that, the History Gallery also displays Fiji's historical connections with neighboring



countries, such as Tonga, Solomon Islands, and Kiribati (see Figure 7). These connections underscored in the museum's exhibition helped raise Fiji's international recognition in a global society, especially in the South Pacific region. In short, the exhibition in the Fiji Museum, particularly in the History Gallery, has created a national narrative that built up Fiji's national identity and bolstered its position in the network of the global society.



Figure 7. The collection of Kiribati in the History Gallery (photo by author 2019).

Indeed, this national narrative formulated by the Fiji Museum effectively helped Fijians to envision their national identity. However, it also excluded a group of people who do not correspond to its narrative framework — Indo-Fijians. This cultural exclusion can be seen in the museum's exhibition as well (see Figure 8). John Kelly wrote that:

The Indo-Fijians are represented in the Fiji Museum, but only in three among the dozens of permanent displays in the main museum spaces, and in an 'Indo-Fijian gallery,' one among three small galleries upstairs. Similarly, the distinguished history of Fiji Museum scholarly publications, largely devoted to reprinting ship's journals, travelers' accounts and other monographs of historical and ethnographic interest, is focused overwhelmingly on ethnic Fijian history and culture. Through 1997, only two monographs concerning the Indo-Fijians had ever been published by the Fiji Museum.

*(Kelly 2000: 201)*

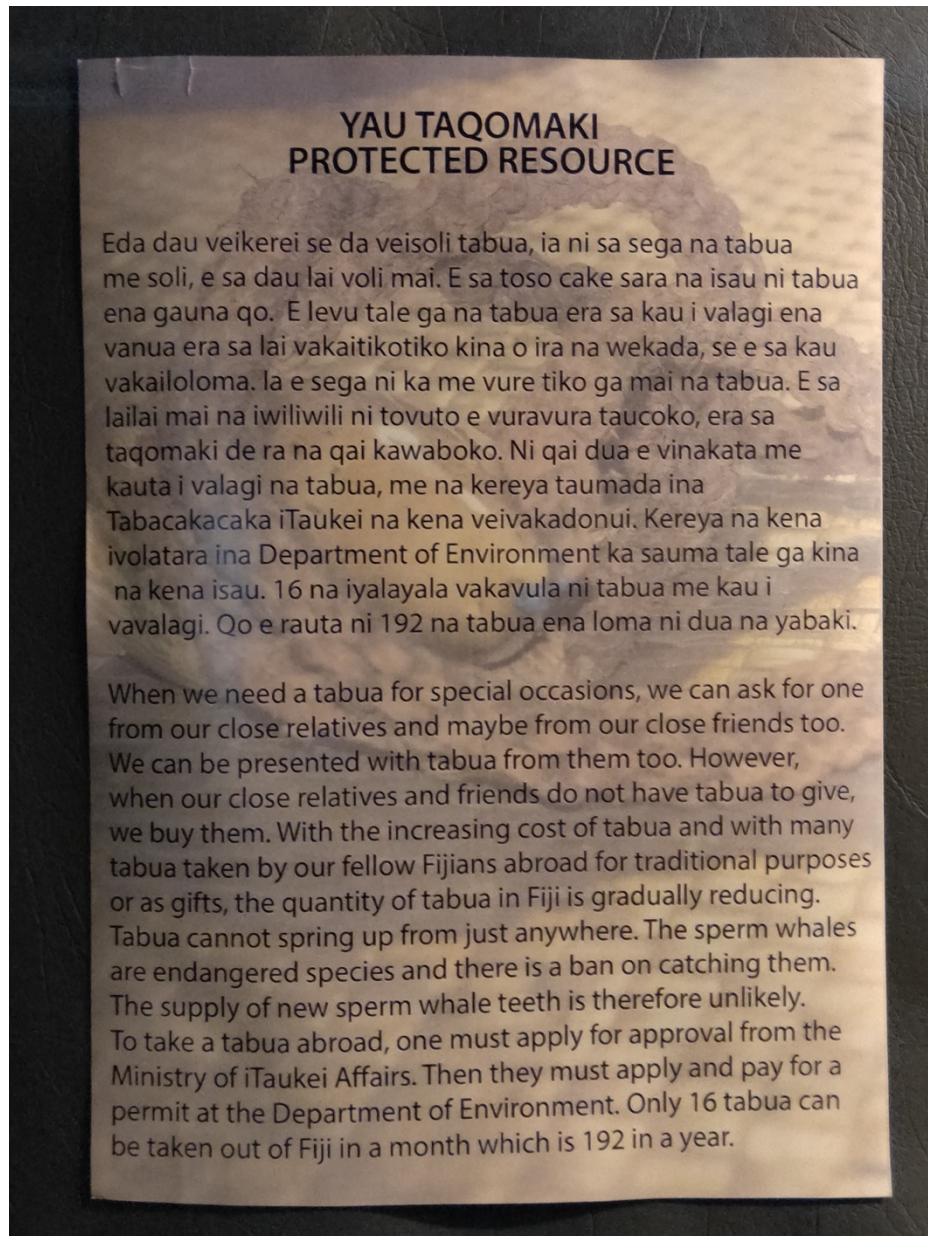


Figure 8. An explanatory text of tabua, an important cultural item in Fijian traditions. As shown in this figure, the text is written in Fijian and English. Fiji Hindi, one of the official languages, is excluded (photo by author 2019).

This asymmetry of the exhibition in the Fiji Museum can be viewed as the cultural exclusion that ostracizes the history and the collective memories of Indo-Fijians. Kevin Coffee argues that “inclusivity and exclusivity are neither abstract nor absolute qualities; they can only be measured according to specific socio-cultural relationships” (2008: 271). Coffee thus urges scholars to examine the “ideological performance” of the museum that “exemplified in its collections and programming activities, and by the specific narratives privileged by the museum and shared with specific sub-groups, classes or strata within the population as a whole” (*ibid.*). The ideological performance in the Fiji Museum, I further argue, is the indigenous Fijians’ paramountcy. As I have argued in Chapter 2, this paramountcy

emanated from the colonial legacy of the British ruling time and amplified during Fiji's nation-building process.

So far, this chapter has discussed the history of the Fiji Museum, from which we can see the entanglement between the museum and Fiji's colonial past. After independence, the museum started seeking to reposit its social role in the society and therefore committed to community services and multicultural programming (Kelly 2000: 202). As a result, the museum created a national narrative that fostered the formulation of Fiji's national identity. This narrative, nevertheless, predominantly excluded the Indo-Fijians' history and culture. In light of the insights obtained from Coffee's research, I thus argue that this cultural exclusion in the Fiji Museum was derived from indigenous Fijians' paramountcy.

Here I would like to clarify that I have no intentions to condemn the Fiji Museum for this exclusion of the exhibition. My ultimate concern here is to provide a historical explanation of this phenomenon. I believe this could, at least, help the reconciliation between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians to dawn.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I examined ethnic conflicts in contemporary Fiji through historicizing this social phenomenon. Taking Fiji's colonial past and its post-colonial time into consideration, I investigated the idea of race and its relationships between colonialism and nationalism, arguing that the racial categories used in Fiji's ethnic conflicts were first created under several colonial practices and were strengthened during the nation-building process of Fiji. Apart from that, based on firsthand interviews with locals, I proposed that the racial rhetoric mainly around indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians reflects the *iTaukei-vulagi* contradictions in their everyday life. This thesis also took this ethnic tension further and connects it with a concrete case study field—the Fiji Museum—to see how this ethnic tension in Fiji has become an ideology of exclusion through nation-building processes that have come to permeate every aspect of Fijian society. As I have discussed earlier, the ideological performance, namely, the cultural exclusion of Indo-Fijians' history and culture in the Fiji Museum exhibition, reflects indigenous Fijians' paramountcy. This paramountcy, similar to racial categories, was first shaped during British colonial time and then was fostered in Fiji's nation-building process. To put it together, this thesis utilized the method of historicization in order to obtain a comprehensive explanation of Fiji's ethnic conflicts.

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