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by

'Atu Emberson-Bain



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 the accuracy of such information thereafter.

## Foreword

I have a high regard for Dr 'Atu Emberson-Bain personally and intellectually, and for her work on labour relations in the Fijian gold-mines. Her background and intellectual formation give her unusual advantages for the analysis of such an 'intermediate' and transitional society as that of the Vatukoula miners, and she has used her opportunities well. Her book is of wide interest to those concerned with the economic and social problems of Third World countries.

It will be obvious to any reader that there can be no question as to Dr Emberson-Bain's thorough and meticulous scholarship. The book is a very substantial contribution, indeed probably definitive for its theme. It is well organised and clearly written, the great mass of empirical data is ably marshalled. Dr Emberson-Bain shows herself well aware of the current comparative literature, e.g. on African mining communities, and handles it well; her theory is not obtrusive, but relevant.

For the Pacific region, socioeconomic studies seem to have concentrated mainly on the problems of primary producers, farmers or fishermen, in their relations to the intrusive market economy; on petty entrepreneurs; and on the drift from the land to such quasi-metropolitan centres as Suva or Port Moresby or Noumea. I think Dr Emberson-Bain's book is a pioneer study of a discrete community living and working in a relatively isolated company town. As such it should be of much interest to readers in a number of related disciplines concerned with the changing social structures of Pacific Islanders, and beyond that to those interested in the Third World generally.

Oskar Spate  
Australian National University

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### Dedication

For my mother, Betty Emberson-Bain, and in loving memory of my grandmother Matilda Emberson: two women who, in different ways, continue to be an inspiration to me.

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## Acknowledgements

The genesis of this book was a doctoral thesis in history at the Australian National University in Canberra, and it was through that university's generous four-year scholarship that I was able to begin my voyage of discovery into the mine labour market of Fiji. In some respects this voyage began even before the shaky beginnings of the thesis, when in the seminar room of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, I was captivated by the stimulating debates of a group of UK-based South African historians, including Shula Marks, Charles van Onselen, Harold Wolpe and Stanley Trapido. This experience as a young postgraduate in the late 1970s is one that undoubtedly fuelled my interest in labour history and influenced my decision to research the history of Fiji's goldmining industry.

Research for this book in its earlier thesis form was undertaken in Fiji and Australia, where I was assisted by many institutions and individuals, particularly staff of the Melbourne University Archives of Business and Labour; the Australian National University Archives of Business and Labour; the National Library of Australia, Canberra; the Mitchell Library, Sydney; and the Research Library of the Sydney Stock Exchange. I would like to make special mention of the Fiji Government, which in the early 1980s granted me unrestricted access to the records of the Colonial Secretary's Office accommodated at the National Archives, including open files inside the thirty-year period and confidential files. My thanks go to the archivist, Setareki Tuinaceva, and staff, especially Margaret Patel, whose support has remained solid throughout the ten years spanning both thesis and book endeavours.

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xvi Acknowledgements

The post-thesis phase of writing this book was undertaken while I was employed as a lecturer in the School of Social and Economic Development of the University of the South Pacific, and involved several months of new research in Fiji and at the Public Record Office, London. Aside from fairly substantial revision to the original text, three entirely new chapters were written, subsequently cut back to one, to address developments in the post-colonial period. I am grateful to Wadan Narsey of the University of the South Pacific, who generously read and commented on the post-colonial economic sections, and also to Barbara Hau'ofa, who painstakingly read through two entire drafts to give me the benefit of her incisive editing skills. I am also grateful to my family in the UK for making possible my research at the Public Record Office and to the University of the South Pacific for financing a number of additional visits to Vatukoula. Research and library staff at the Reserve Bank of Fiji and the Bureau of Statistics obligingly assisted me on numerous occasions, as did Josephine Deo, Koresi Tabete, Sashi Prasad, Urmila Prakash and Mohini Singh by typing an assortment of drafts.

Space does not permit me to name the many company staff, union and government officers and others who kindly agreed to be interviewed or gave me valuable assistance. I derived much benefit from discussions with Ruskin Ward and Bill Cornwall (Emperor staff), Sakiasi Waqanivalagi, Navitalai Raqona, Sairusi Waininima, Mesake Cirimaiwasa, Kavekini Navuso and Alifereti Waqa (FMWU), the late Dr Timoci Bavadra (deposed Labour-NFP Coalition Prime Minister), Tevita Fa (legal counsel to the Nasomo people), Mahendra Chaudhry (FTUC), the late Sir Robert Taylor (Economic Adviser and Financial Secretary, Government of Fiji 1947–52), R. D. Patel (former Member of Legislative Council), Karl Fleischman (former Inspector of Mines), Father Richard Keelan (Xavier College, Ba), and the late Herbert Murray (former member of the Mining Board). I am grateful to Peter Walker (Acting Principal Engineer, Mines) for sharing his technical knowledge of the mining industry and for answering endless questions, to David Greenbaum (former government Economic Geologist), Alfred Simpson (Assistant Director of Mineral Development), Nevil Ebsworth (former Principal Engineer, Mines), Peter Rodda (Principal Geologist, Information), and Raja Ram (former Chief Labour Officer), who helped me in various ways. The Ministry of Information, Department of Mineral Resources and the *Fiji Times* kindly made available most of the photographs that are included in this book, and Asaeli Lave and Sylvia Low laboured to produce quality products. Paul Geraghty (Fijian Dictionary Project), Amelia Rokotuivuna, Viniana Buitora and Ann Nacola generously assisted with Fijian translations.

I would like to express special thanks to Emperor Gold Mining Co. Ltd and in particular, its Managing Director, Jeffrey Reid, for granting me access to the enormous volume of correspondence files and other private records of the Emperor, Loloma and Dolphin mining companies of Vatukoula. The company facilitated my research by providing office space and also made accommodation available during the field trips I undertook between 1982 and 1983 with a young baby in tow. In the Blatchfords I had a special Sydney 'family', who gave me a wonderful home away from home, shared their rich memories of life at Vatukoula in the 1940s and 1950s, and facilitated contact with other retired company staff living in Australia. I am well aware, and can only regret, that company staff who helped make this book possible may not agree with my conclusions.



Notwithstanding the company's generosity, I should mention that the wide-ranging discussions and (informal) interviews I had with miners and their families at Vatukoula were generally constrained by the realities of life in a company-run town. Given these circumstances, I am enormously indebted to the many workers who succumbed to my persistent proddings and agreed to share their experiences and views, which often included vivid recollections of the early days of labour recruitment, mine work and life in the mining town. I am especially grateful to the Vatukoula relations I discovered I had and came to know, the Corrie family, who provided me with boundless hospitality, humour and information. To the elders and people of Nasomo, may I also express my appreciation.

Without doubt, however, my greatest debt is to my family for whom this journey of mine has almost certainly been a joyless trial. Sitiveni's support and love have been far more than I ever deserved, and three little people, Siale, Anga'ae fonu and Melino, who have popped up at odd intervals along the way, have in different ways, and to different degrees, endured more dislocation (as well as the sharp edge of a deranged mother) than is probably healthy for them. My brother, Ashley, and mother were at different stages of the project persuaded into the unenviable roles of research assistant and companion to me. My parents, Kenneth Bain and Betty Emberson Bain, have contributed critical comments, proofing assistance and crucial moral support. Last, but perhaps most important of all, have been the very special support of two surrogate mothers for my children, Rosa Mavoli Lewalewa, who accompanied me on my thesis fieldwork in Fiji and endured long cold months in Australia away from her family, and Viniana Buitora, who loyally bore the brunt of the second, post-thesis phase of my obsession with Vatukoula. Without them, this book would not have materialised.

'Atu Emberson-Bain  
Suva

# List of Abbreviations

ADB	<i>Australian Dictionary of Biography</i>
BHP	Broken Hill Proprietary Co. Ltd
C/L	Commissioner of Labour
CO	Colonial Office
CP	Council Paper
CS	Colonial Secretary
CSO	Colonial Secretary's Office
CSR	Colonial Sugar Refining Co. Ltd
cwt	hundredweight
DC	District Commissioner
DMS	Director of Medical Services
DO	District Officer
dwt	pennyweight, unit corresponding to one-twentieth of a troy ounce
EGM	Emperor Gold Mining Co. Ltd
EML	Emperor Mines Ltd
ETI	Emperor Timber Industries Ltd
FAB	Fijian Affairs Board
FECA	Fiji Employers' Consultative Association
FMD	Fiji Mines Development Ltd
FMWU	Fiji Mineworkers' Union
FS	<i>Fiji Sun</i>
FT	<i>Fiji Times</i>
FT & H	<i>Fiji Times &amp; Herald</i>

GM	General Manager
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	Inspector of Mines
IOM & ME	Inspector of Mines & Mining Engineer
JCC	Joint Consultative Council
Leg Co	Legislative Council, Fiji
LGMNL	Loloma (Fiji) Gold Mines No Liability
MB	Mining Board
ML	mining lease
MMSA	Methodist Mission Collection, Fiji National Archives
MP	Medical Practitioner
MR	Mineral Resources Division Library, Fiji Government
MSE	Melbourne Stock Exchange Mining Collection
NFP	National Federation Party
NLTB	Native Land Trust Board
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
OAGF	Officer Administering the Government of Fiji
PC	Provincial Commissioner
PIM	<i>Pacific Islands Monthly</i>
PP	Parliamentary Paper
PRO	Public Record Office
RCAF	Roman Catholic Archives of Fiji
SFA	Secretary for Fijian Affairs
SMH	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
SML	special mining lease
SNA	Secretariat for Native Affairs
TNC	transnational corporation
TPP	Tavua Power Proprietary Co. Ltd
Vat.	Vatukoula
WMC	Western Mining Corporation

A NOTE ON CURRENCY

Fiji currency is used in the text unless indicated otherwise. Pounds, shillings and pence were replaced by dollars and cents on 13 January 1969.

EQUIVALENTS

1 ounce	=	approx. 30 grams
1 acre	=	approx. 0.4 hectare
1 ton	=	approx. 1 tonne
1 lb. (pound)	=	approx. 500 grams
1 pint	=	approx. 600 millilitres
1 foot	=	approx. 30 centimetres
1 dwt	=	approx. 1.555 grams

ORTHOGRAPHY

In Fijian b is pronounced mb, as in number; c is pronounced th as in that; d is pronounced nd as in find; g is pronounced ng as in singer; q is pronounced ng as in finger.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In line with company practice after the Second World War the term ‘Part-European’ has been used in this book to describe persons of mixed (commonly Fijian and European) descent. The terms ‘half-caste’ (typical of the pre-war years) and ‘Euronesian’, both of which are frequently found in company correspondence (and which are retained here when they appear in quotations) were used interchangeably with ‘Part-European’. The term ‘Indian’ does not refer to workers recruited from India. It was used by the mining companies (in accordance with colonial convention) to describe Indo-Fijians. ‘Indian’ remains the official classification today. While the term is problematic, it is used in the text to avoid confusion.

# Glossary

buli	government-appointed district chief
dalo	taro, a staple root crop
Degei	chiefly ancestral god in the form of a snake, believed to live in the Nakauvadra mountain range
galala	literally meaning free, but generally used to refer to the independent or 'free' farmer usually living outside the village and exempt from communal obligations
kumala	sweet potato
lālā	the conscription of goods and services (tribute) by a chief
leqa	trouble(s)
loloma	gift, offering, greetings, love
luveniwai vaka viti	traditional healer or medicine
mana	special powers, believed to be divinely ordained, held by chiefs or others in authority
masi	beaten bark cloth made from the paper mulberry tree
Matanagata	face of the snake, traditional Fijian name for Vatukoula
matanivanua	spokesperson or herald (traditionally male) for a chief
mataqali	the primary, patrilineal social division of a village
ratu	man of chiefly rank
roko tui	head of provincial administration; sometimes also a title given to persons of rank
rourou	green leafy vegetable (from the <i>dalo</i> plant)
soqosoqo	association or group
tabu	sacred or sacred thing, taboo
tabua	sperm whale's tooth used in ceremonial presentations or exchanges
taralala	popular Fijian dance in pairs

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taukei	indigenous Fijian landowners
teitei	food garden
tui	chief
turaga ni koro	government appointed village headman, not necessarily a chief
turaga	chief, man of rank or status
vale ni mate	house of death, hospital
vanua	land; political grouping or association of villages under one chief
Vatukoula	rock of gold
vulagi	visitor, outsider, alien, foreigner

# In the Beginning

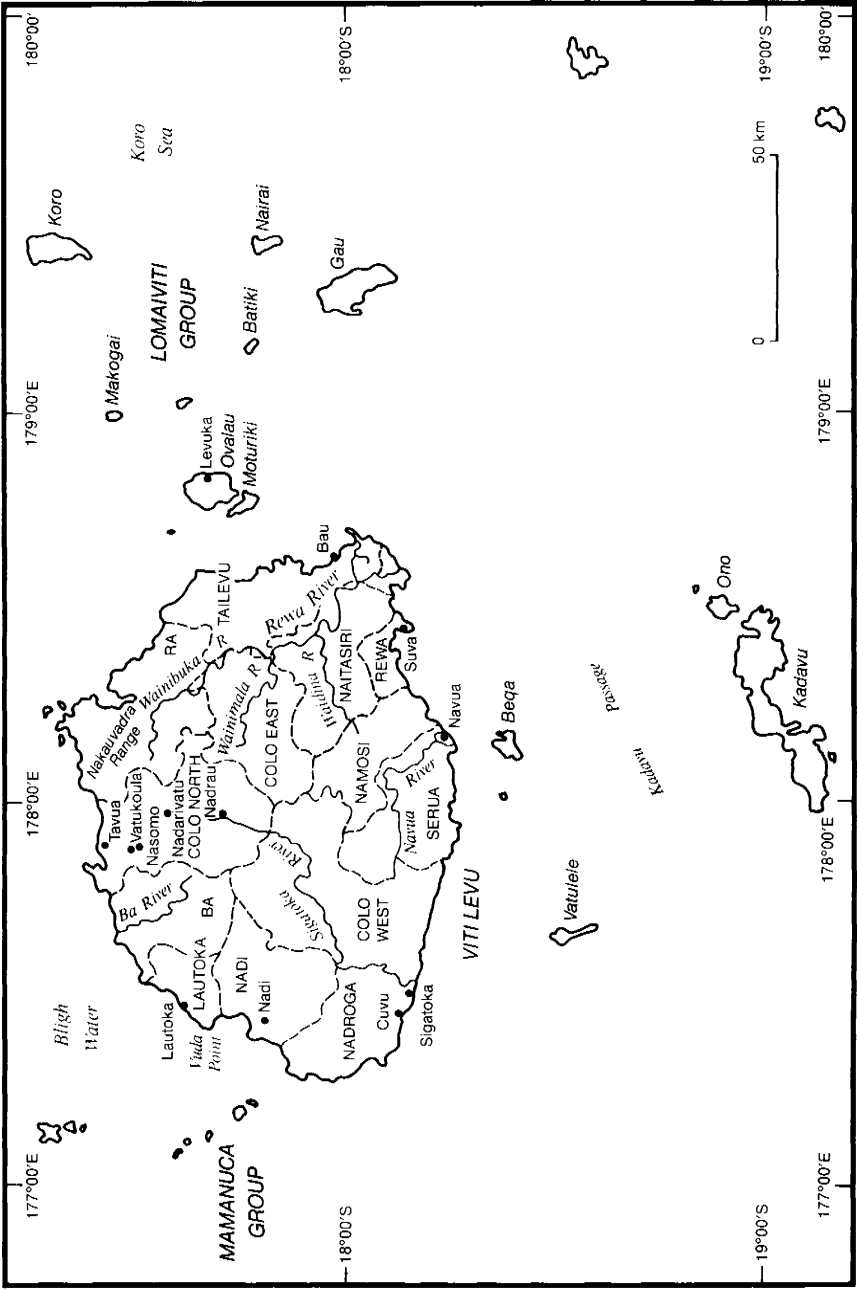
(A legend from Saivou, Ra)

*During the late nineteenth century, some time after the fortified village of Nakorowaiwai had been under gun attack, the ancestral god Navosavakadua spoke to two elderly brothers, one of whom was called Taivesi, whose great grandfather was the Tui Naliwane of Nacareva, Nasova, in Navuni. Navosavakadua instructed the brothers to undertake a journey to Matanagata. They were to carry a sack of putrid soil that contained the remains of those who had been killed at Nakorowaiwai and to bury them in a hilly place called Tolevu, not far from Matanagata. Under no circumstances were they to look around or behind them.*

*The two men went on their way and eventually arrived close to the designated area. However, the younger brother was unfortunately suffering from yaws of the foot, and when he trod on some thorny grass he collapsed in pain. He cried out to his brother, who was walking ahead of him, 'Alas, I am finished. My legs are giving way. I feel weak. Something is happening here. Turn around. There is an old man (spirit) who has fallen out of the ivi tree, and he is staring at me from behind. Turn around, I can't walk. Let's pour the soil out here.' The older brother turned back and they both set to work to bury the soil.*

*On their return journey, as they reached Drauniivi, the brothers met Navosavakadua. They were severely reprimanded for their disobedience. 'You two have not returned from Tolevu as you were told,' he chided. 'You have buried the soil in the wrong place. Why did you stamp on it? You have both been foolish. Because of what you have done, the soil will be dug up before the time is right. The soil was to have brought great wealth to our government and people. It was to have provided for our people.'*

And so it came to pass: the riches of the soil at Matanagata were discovered and enjoyed by others.



Pre-1945 provincial boundaries, Viti Levu