‘Emphatically Not a White Man’s Colony’:
Settler Colonialism and the Construction of Colonial Fiji
LORENZO VERACINI

ROBERT BICKERS, HISTORIAN OF MORE THAN A CENTURY OF SETTLER SHANGHAI, convincingly noted ‘the necessity of ignoring the geographical and disciplinary restrictions we impose on ourselves when looking at settler societies’. Responding to this call, and consistent with an interpretive tradition identifying Fiji as a constitutent site in the evolution of colonial forms, this paper argues that Fiji’s colonial history provides a privileged point from which to explore the divide separating colonial and settler colonial phenomena. While suggestive more than conclusive, it has two reciprocally supporting aims: first, it argues that colonial development in Fiji should be contextualised within transcolonial debates regarding Indigenous-settler relations, and that the construction of Fiji’s colonial landscape resulted from a decisively anti-settler determination; and, second, that a reframed understanding of Fiji’s colonial history can contribute to a reappraisal of the evolution of wider traditions of colonial governance.

Trajectories of Anti-Settler Discourse: Fiji as an Exemplary Colonial Polity

Colonial studies have recurrently needed to confront colonialism’s simultaneously localised and transnational nature, and to discuss whether colonial phenomena are intractably specific, or whether they constitute a body of systemic relations. In an attempt to emphasise shared traditions of colonial ideology and practice — and in order to explain an extraordinary resonance ultimately unaffected by rivalries generating from a diversity of centres, each characterised by a distinctive colonial and imperial tradition — Edward Said, for example, referred to what he defined as colonialism’s ‘structures of attitudes

1 Bickers was presenting a compelling outline of the history of a settler community located right in the centre of an Asian metropolis, hardly a locale normally associated with settler colonial endeavours. Robert Bickers, ‘Shanghailanders: the formation and identity of the British settler community in Shanghai, 1843–1937’, Past and Present, 159 (1998), 209. I am grateful to Professor Roger Louis who first suggested I read Bickers’s work and start looking for settlers where they were and not only where they have stayed.

2 See Nicholas Thomas, Colonialism’s Culture: anthropology, travel and government (Melbourne 1994); John D. Kelly, Martha Kaplan, Represented Communities: Fiji and world decolonization (Chicago 2001); and Stuart Banner, Possessing the Pacific: land, settlers and indigenous people from Australia to Alaska (Cambridge MA 2007), esp. 260–280.
there was virtual unanimity that subject races should be ruled, that they are subject races, that one race deserves and has consistently earned the right to be considered the race whose main mission is to expand beyond its own domain... It is perhaps embarrassing that sectors of the metropolitan cultures that have since become vanguards in the social contests of our time were uncomplaining members of this imperial consensus. With few exceptions, the women’s as well as the working-class movement was pro-empire.3

Domestic consistency notwithstanding, by foregrounding nationally centred histories of colonialism, the traditional narratives of empire that Said was attacking have also, as Nicholas Thomas noted, generally underrated sometimes clamorous contradictions of colonial imaginings and practices: not only empires competed with each other, colonial forms also had to contend with alternative projections of colonial rule within each specific imperial context.4

Separating distinctive colonial domains and different colonial traditions became a longstanding feature of colonialism’s imagined geographies.5 The reciprocally exclusive character of each colonial form with regard to the others should be emphasised, as different colonial projects were often imagined and practised in direct and urgent competition: the long-lasting tradition of the trading companies and their commercial and administrative legacies, colonies run according to the principles of various humanitarian lobbies, the array of settler ‘Neo-Europes’, and so forth.6 Careers in the colonial service, for example, reflected these classifications.7 A multiplicity of interacting and intersecting colonial traditions contributed to what could be described as a loosely organised and yet competitive division of colonial labour whereby certain colonial imaginings in tension against others were allowed specific areas of intervention.8

Alan Lester has convincingly described a web of post-emancipation imperial communication in which humanitarian discourse had become explicitly opposed

---

4 See Nicholas Thomas, Colonialism’s Culture, especially 21–7. Significantly, Thomas’s engagement with Said was also based on Thomas’s appraisal of Fiji’s history.
5 On the geographies of colonisation, see, for example, Felix Driver, Geographies Militant: cultures of exploration and empire (Oxford 2001), and Alan Lester, ‘Historical geographies of imperialism’, in Brian Graham, Catherine Nash (eds), Modern Historical Geographies (Harlow 2000), 100–17.
7 See, for example, David Lambert, Alan Lester (eds), Imperial Careering: colonial lives across the British Empire (Cambridge 2006), and Catherine Hall, Civilising Subjects: metropole and colony in the English imagination, 1830–1867 (Cambridge 2002), especially 23–66.
8 Analytical distinction did not imply rigorous separation: colonial and settler colonial forms, for example, combined on the ground. As Penny Edwards convincingly demonstrates, a clear ‘bifurcation between settler colonialism and its hypothetical antithesis — the presumed conundrum of a colonialism without settlers’ must be qualified with an appraisal of a complicated pattern of overlapping practices involving ‘settler’ and ‘non-settler’ locales and practices. Penny Edwards, ‘On home ground: settling land and domesticating difference in the “non-settler” colonies of Burma and Cambodia’, Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History, 4:3 (2003). Available at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v004/4.3edwards.html
to a settler one.\textsuperscript{9} Catherine Hall has also authoritatively explored an ongoing and intense ‘war of representation’ between colonial philanthropists and settlers over colonial oppression and, previously, between abolitionists and planters.\textsuperscript{10} In contrast, John and Jean Comaroff have emphasised an intractable opposition between missionary and settler projects in early-19th century South Africa.\textsuperscript{11} Missionaries and their metropolitan supporters had developed a powerful anti-settler rhetoric, insisting on settlers’ unwarranted destruction of Indigenous life, their indolence, isolation, deculturation, atomisation, and even a lack of orderly cleanliness: these stereotypical constructions saw settlers leading unsettled and unsettling lives.\textsuperscript{12} A long-lasting tradition represented settlers as ‘unsavoury’ characters: David Cannadine has referred to the perception of settlers as the ‘white trash of their time’.\textsuperscript{13}

British evangelical and humanitarian initiatives in colonial scenarios are normally construed as peaking sometime during the 1830s and experiencing a subsequent decline. According to these narratives, by the 1860s the climate of opinion had dramatically shifted and evangelical efforts were no longer capable of shaping imperial policy. Lester, for example, concluded his analysis of evangelically informed networks by pointing out that in the mid-19th century settlers in each colony were assisted tremendously in their struggles against humanitarianism by the progressive disillusionment of humanitarians themselves after the apparent failure of emancipation in the West Indies, and by their own ability to interpret indigenous resistance as specific evidence of irremediability. Subtle forms of resistance to the missionaries’ cultural colonization took their toll on the confidence with which humanitarians upheld their transformative visions in each colony.\textsuperscript{14}

These trajectories and the imaginative geographies that they sustained are relevant to an analysis of Fiji’s colonial history. At the same time, an appraisal of the modalities of Fiji’s incorporation within the British colonial sphere may integrate established narratives by highlighting how evangelically informed colonial projections were displaced but never discontinued. If South Africa had been a crucial laboratory for the development of anti-settler discourse and rhetoric, developments in Fiji demonstrate that anti-settler advocacy had not been silenced through the ultimate assertion of settler sovereignties in a


\textsuperscript{10} Hall, Civilising Subjects, 107.


\textsuperscript{12} See, for example, Elizabeth Elbourne, ‘The sin of the settler: the 1835–36 Select Committee on Aborigines and debates over virtue and conquest in the early nineteenth-century British white settler empire’, Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History, 4:3 (2003). Available at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v004/4.3elbourne.html

\textsuperscript{13} David Cannadine, Ornamentalism: how the British saw their empire (London 2001), 125.

\textsuperscript{14} Lester, ‘Colonial settlers and the metropole’, 45.
multiplicity of consolidating settler polities (particularly South Africa, Australia and New Zealand). That Fiji should be a small consolation for the loss of other domains matters less in the context of a colonial imagination that thought in 'typological' terms and was interested in the establishment of exemplary experiences of Indigenous 'protection'.

Thanks to a decisive and coordinated initiative of humanitarian opinion (the Aborigines Protection Society and the Anti-Slavery Society had been involved for some time in attempts to control labour trafficking in the Western Pacific), the Imperial government had reluctantly extended colonial sovereignty to Fiji in 1874, where another ongoing concern was the prospect of conflict between Fijians, many of whom had converted to the Wesleyan mission, and European settlers from Australia and New Zealand. The establishment of Fiji as a formal colony is a notable case of intra-colonial contradictions: through continuous reference to a negative stereotype of settler colonialism, an initial conjunction of missionary and settler interests in favour of annexation was eventually undone by a particular colonial regime engaged in ultimately contrasting both.

Humanitarian lobbying had influenced the Colonial Office in envisaging Fiji as a crown colony of a 'very severe type', where administrative control over Europeans would be at its strictest and where authority to implement native policy would rest exclusively with the governor and not with a legislative council representing European residents. While missionaries would remain suspicious of a policy supporting chiefly rule, colonial authorities systematically whittled down settler pre-cession land claims in Viti Levu, which had been staked in the context of a rapidly expanding Australasian settler frontier, propelled partly by the hefty premium paid by cotton during the American War of Secession. Settler interests were especially frustrated by British Governor of Fiji Sir Arthur Gordon (1874–1880), who was willing and able to establish an unprecedented example of cooperation between a selection of officially endorsed Indigenous interests and colonial and bureaucratic interests. Gordon told the settlers, and he meant it: 'it should always be remembered that this is emphatically not a white man's colony'.

15 See, for example, Andrew Thornley, Exodus of the I Taukei: the Wesleyan Church in Fiji, 1848–74 (Suva 2002).
18 See John Young, Adventurous Spirits: Australian migrant society in pre-cession Fiji (St Lucia 1984). On the importance of 'Australasia' and its subsequent demise as a geopolitical notion, see Donald Denoon, 'Remembering Australasia: a repressed memory', Australian Historical Studies, 122 (2003), 290–304.
19 See, for example, Kelly and Kaplan, Represented Communities, especially 161–7.
20 Quoted in Stewart Firth and Daryl Tarte (eds), 20th Century Fiji: people who shaped the nation (Suva 2001), 20. However, as Claudia Knapman has argued, Fiji would not be a white woman's country either. As the possibility of reproducing familial relations is one crucial prerequisite for the establishment of a viable settler community, anxieties regarding white women are not surprising in the context of Fiji's anti-settler colonialism. See Claudia Knapman, White women in Fiji 1835–1930: the ruin of empire? (Sydney 1986).
Gordon was an extraordinary empire builder, and his activity expressed a cluster of anti-settler feelings common to a particular kind of colonial policy-maker. He served both in colonies that enjoyed ‘responsible’ government and in crown colonies, but believed he had been successful only in the latter. He consistently resented settlers and their demotic ways: he had represented the New Brunswick legislature as ‘cobblers, tinkers, tailors, and thieves’, and much later would describe New Zealand parliamentarians as a group of ‘drunken, ignorant, corrupt boors’. While his support for the establishment of a Canadian confederation, for example, had only been obtained in the (anti-settler) hope that a central government would fall into the hands of gentlemen, he became embattled in a drawn-out confrontation with the New Zealand government over the Parihaka crisis (1881), when he stubbornly contested settler authority to repress Maori autonomy and a prophetic Indigenous movement. He was ultimately aware of an intrinsic divide separating settlers and mother country: ‘colonists are after all essentially foreigners’, he had concluded.

On the other side of the colonial/settler colonial divide, he operated with much more success, including historiographical success (indeed, Gordon’s anti-settler rhetoric would survive intact to the 1960s). Possibly reproducing his source, his biographer concluded that he had ‘solved the problems which a generation of near-anarchy and the impact of a semi-civilized purse-poor white population upon the half-barbaric and half-Christianized intelligent native inhabitants had generated’. Two complementary and reciprocally self-supporting dynamics should be noticed here: on the one hand, fear of settler degeneracy, including recurring anxieties about Europeans ‘going native’ in particular colonial locales; on the other, their dialectical counterpoint, represented by the possibility of civilising Indigenous people. Shielded from the need to deal with unpalatable settlers, he was in Trinidad and Mauritius before being promoted to Fiji, where he could finally perform as a proconsular law-giver. As Gordon appreciated the ‘prospect of founding a colony’, the Colonial Office valued Gordon’s ‘administrative experience in Colonies in which the coloured inhabitants form a large majority of the population’. While Fiji’s colonial regime was born in the
perception of a settler population deficit, Gordon was ultimately able to counter powerful prophecies of settler ascendancy (associated with representations of an Indigenous ‘dying race’) that had become self-fulfilling elsewhere.

The Colonial Office was aware that Gordon’s policy of Indigenous ‘protection’ would slow down the rate of capital investment and Fiji’s economic growth; however, even if not unanimously, it supported an experiment that, besides appeasing humanitarian opinion, would test ways of delivering cheap colonial governance. Gordon knew of this resolve and, while he remained suspicious of ‘the old regular habitués of office, who won’t or can’t see the difference between a long settled colony, and a new field’, he had concluded: ‘If I am to work cheaply I shall have in many ways to run counter to routine’.27

At the same time, he approached Fiji with a specific sense of the comparative history of Indigenous peoples:

At best the natives, bewildered and depressed, deprived of all interest and object in life, sink into indolence, apathy and vice, and, exposed almost without any safeguards to snares and temptations innumerable, they lose position, property, self-respect, and health, and perish from off the face of the earth.28

Checking abuse, however, was not enough; ongoing protection had to be ensured:

If the Fijian population is ever permitted to sink from its present condition into that of a collection of migratory bands of hired labourers, all hope, not only of the improvement, but the preservation of the race, need inevitably be abandoned.29

An aristocratic repugnance for hired labour practices was associated in Gordon’s rhetoric with abhorrence for the possibility of Indigenous mobility.30 In settler demands for accessing Fijian labour and controlling its flows, he detected an intention to establish a type of ‘agricultural servitude’, and he was determined to save Indigenous Fijians from serfdom.31 He insisted that Fijian labourers not leave their districts and that they be allowed only to work outside their villages for short periods. However, ultimately expecting increased pressure ‘upon the Government to consent to measures intended to coerce the native population of this Colony into an involuntary servitude’, and to keep the whole enterprise viable, the importation of Indian indentured workers had to be organised.32

---

27 Ibid., 160.
28 Ibid., 192.
29 Ibid., 182.
30 It is interesting to note that Gordon had had a career as an ‘immobiliser’ of colonial subjects. In Trinidad, he had introduced a scheme that would grant ex-slaves and former indentured workers title to surveyed agricultural land in newly established townships. See John Kelly, ‘Gordon was no amateur: imperial legal strategies in the colonisation of Fiji’, in Sally Engle Merry and Donald Brenneis (eds), Law & Empire in the Pacific: Fiji and Hawai‘i (Santa Fe 2004), 63.
Gordon immediately promoted this policy while addressing an assembly of some 200 settlers only two days after taking up his governorship. Not only were native policy and importation of Indian labour intimately linked (J.D. Legge noted that importing Indians amounted to a ‘human subsidy’ to his ‘experiment in native rule’), they were both determined upon before initiating his governorship on the basis of a specifically anti-settler interpretation of colonial history. ‘Protection’ and the need to support it are categories that precede their implementation in a Fiji context.

Gordon imagined a comprehensive system of colonial administration — where Indigenous Fijians would reside in villages under the authority of chiefs he would coopt in the machinery of government as district officials and stipendiary magistrates — not a body of piecemeal measures aimed at managing established colonial contexts and their conflicting interests. While his perception of the European settlers of Fiji, of Fijian life and chiefly organisation was obviously shaped by his aristocratic background, his experiment in indirect rule, however, was also based on previous British colonial experiences in subsuming princely states and on his knowledge of colonial governance as exercised by the Dutch in Java. He demanded that the Colonial Office give him carte blanche: he required a high salary and the authority to personally select personnel who would accompany him, and obtained both. He was still undecided for weeks; eventually, he opted for his Fiji enterprise on the understanding that his mission would possibly provide an unprecedented opportunity of ‘reconciling the claims of European settlers and of the natives’. It was this crucial aim that would inform his demiurgic activity in a ‘new’ colonial scenario.

Aware of the competing demands of his system and of the Colonial Office, which was expecting a rapid end to Fiji’s dependence on financial aid, Gordon made efforts to appease the requirements of a developing colonial economy. He encouraged the production of copra, coffee, fruit and sugar, and ensured, as mentioned, adequate importation of cheap labour. This importation was crucially related to his ‘native’ policy, in which his dominant motive was to ‘protect’ Fijian society by ‘disturbing’ it as little as possible. While he feared the ‘disruption’ that would follow Indigenous Fijian employment in European plantations, he hoped that an entirely separate sector could be promoted, where Fijian production could expand without upsetting what he understood as Fijian ‘primitive’ communalism. Ongoing settler opposition against these provisions focused on measures aimed at making Fijian labour unavailable and on demands

34 Legge, Britain in Fiji, 1858–1880, 268.
that Indian labour would be independently supervised. Protecting Indigenous ‘paramountcy’ demanded a partial appeasement of settler demands as a means to an end (although the Crown enforced a strict interpretation of the Deed of Cession and retained an absolute right to dismiss European land claims, for example, settlers were treated generously): in this sense, the viability of European-owned plantations, the establishment of viable crops, and Fiji’s integration in international trade flows were essential to his experiment.

Indigenous taxation by levying Fijian communities a produce tax (as opposed to a cash one) was also devised as a means to ensure economic separation between Indigenous and European sectors and, in a subordinate fashion, to make the system sustainable. A chain of Fijian councils would determine the share needed to be produced by each district and village. Gordon’s objective was a non-transformative type of colonial regime: keeping most Fijians working communally in their areas, encouraging increased production while avoiding money payments, and using expected surpluses to sustain both the colonial administration and the system of chiefly councils. While a determination to prevent Indigenous Fijian mobility would be long lasting (the Native Regulations, restricting movement to and from urban areas, were only abolished in 1967), enforcing this taxation scheme would not be easy: some Indigenous communities were already using cash, for example, and preferred being taxed normally (and ended up purchasing copra from European plantations in order to meet their tax requirement).

The cornerstone of Gordon’s policy, however, was an attempt to rule through what he perceived to be an existing political structure by delegating responsibility to Fijian chiefs according to a selective interpretation of what became codified as Fijian ‘custom’. Gordon’s ‘non-transformative’ colonialism was of course transformative: despite theoretical endorsement, a number of customary practices were outlawed, limited or manipulated in the process of inventing a (colonially acceptable) tradition. The very authority of chiefs had to be established, located and tested before it could become an effective instrument of indirect rule and control, while in some areas there were no suitable Indigenous political structures and white commissioners had to be appointed. Three levels of chiefly councils were eventually instituted: a supreme council, 12 provincial, and 80 more, each representing a district. These became the structure of colonial governance, the

---

38 A determination to access all subjects within the colonial domain does not necessarily require a sympathetic approach to Indian labourers. In his farewell speech, MacGregor mentioned the Fijians (‘no other race on the face of the earth so interesting’), the ‘Polynesians’ (who ‘commanded admiration’), and the Indians. The best thing he could say about them was that ‘they are necessary evils’. Press reports recorded applause and laughter at this point. Quoted in Joyce, Sir William MacGregor, 71–2.

39 Quoted in ibid., 60.


41 One related transformative dimension of Gordon’s ‘non-transformative’ system was the (re)construction of the ‘village’. See Nicholas Thomas, ‘Sanitation and seeing: the creation of state power in early colonial Fiji’, Comparative Studies in Society and History, 32:1 (1990), 149–70.
medium through which Gordon and subsequent governors would pass policy decisions and receive suggestions. Official preference for chiefly prerogatives meant repression of individual rights; the Bose vaka Turaga (the supreme council, one of Gordon’s newly established institutions) was to check chiefly abuses.

This framework of colonial governance would face ongoing crises and recurring opposition. Never self-supporting, the economy did not take off. The produce tax was never successful, and the Fijian sector of the economy was never really separate or viable. Settler dissatisfaction with ‘protection’ was always forthcoming (settlers demanded land and labour, and agitated for a colonial system that would displace Indigenous people rather than immobilise them). Missionary unease with the absolute power exercised by Fijian chiefs and with policies aimed at replacing their influence with that of the government never disappeared, and ‘commoner’ Fijians became increasingly opposed to aristocratic rule. Finally, contradictions between Indians, ‘Polynesians’, Fijians and Europeans would also recurrently mark the political life of the colony. Yet Gordon’s system was considered an extraordinary achievement, demonstrating that well-placed connections and an ongoing capacity for shaping debate in metropolitan circles (both attributes that Gordon possessed) were essential features of his endeavour.

**Trajectories of Anti-Settler Discourse: Fiji as a Laboratory of Colonial Governance**

Opposing suggested reforms, in an 1884 letter to Gordon, William MacGregor (later Governor of British New Guinea, Lagos, Newfoundland and Queensland), who had gone to Fiji at Gordon’s request and had remained in the colony to supervise the maintenance of his system, confirmed his commitment to a specific system of colonial administration:

> I see nothing very difficult in carrying on native government here on its present lines for at least a generation. I see a multitude of evils in the establishment of government by white commissioners, the first of which is the degradation of the race as such; the second the breaking up of towns and the scattering of the people; the third the alienation of their land; the last the disappearance of all trace of your hard work here.

42 In order to address chronic instability in the Fiji economy, suggestions were made in 1885 that a closer relationship with New Zealand should be established, either by a reciprocity treaty or by annexation. This call was renewed in 1887, but this would require abandoning Gordon’s system of native government (New Zealand’s capacity to effectively protect native peoples was questionable). The Colonial Office considered this possibility, but, as one bureaucrat commented, opposition from ‘Sir A. Gordon and the Aborigines Protection Society’ was expected. Joyce, *Sir William MacGregor*, 50.

43 As Receiver General of the colony of Fiji, William MacGregor had even unorthodoxly proposed to establish a government guaranteed savings bank for Indigenous Fijians. This suggestion was not received — there was a limit to Treasury willingness to bend the rules for Fiji. Ibid., xiv.

44 Writing in the *Fiji Times*, a prominent local settler had concluded: ‘It seems to be his [Gordon’s] determination to ruin the country... Everything he has done and is doing is contrary to the wishes of every planter’. Quoted in Chapman, *The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon*, 195.

45 Ibid., 84.
All these elements — that the Fijian ‘race’ would not degenerate (as Indigenous people had elsewhere), that they would not move (as they had done elsewhere), that their land would remain inalienable (unlike elsewhere), and that this system would fulfil a long-lasting exemplary role — confirm the transcolonial nature of Gordon’s vision.

Transcolonial debates, however, did not involve only disputations regarding the rights of settlers in specific colonial locales; what was at stake was also who could claim to be ‘a settler’. Secretary of State for India Lord Salisbury, for example, had proclaimed in 1875 that Indian indentured labourers who had completed their terms and decided to settle in the colonies would access ‘privileges no whit inferior to any other class of Her Majesty’s subjects residents in the Colonies’. While Indo-Fijian opinion had identified the Salisbury Despatch as a constituent charter for the grounding of their civil and political rights, British colonial administrations in Fiji never recognised this commitment. Despite settling on the land, and despite an explicit promise of franchise supported by the British administration of India, Indo-Fijians could never access on the whole the basic entitlements of settlerhood: in Fiji, Gordon’s anti-settler compact was maintained. In settler colonial contexts, a possible recognition of an Indigenous sovereignty is intrinsically provisional, and Indigenous ‘others’ and their sovereignties are typically understood as transient (settlers, on the contrary, are seen as exercising a sovereign right to self-governance). In Fiji, as Indigenous paramountcy is projected indefinitely into the future, and as newcomers articulate their political consciousness in terms of reciprocal obligations (rather than sovereign entitlements), things are turned upside down: it is not an accident that ‘Indigenous’ and ‘settler’ are categories charged with a distinctly unique meaning in a Fiji context.

‘Protection’ is born in a long tradition of anti-settler discourse and is contrapuntally connected to Indigenous ‘destruction’. In this dialectical relation, protection and destruction define each other even if they are accorded locally selective areas of exclusive operation in different colonial domains. Fiji was to constitute an exemplary counterpoint to the formation of national polities founded on settler colonialism: unlike settler colonial replacement, Fiji’s colonial regime was geared towards immobilisation. Allowed to exercise free of settler interference in a specific locale, protection would provide atonement for destruction elsewhere. In this dialectical relationship, settler fantasies of total

46 Quoted in Kelly and Kaplan, Represented Communities, 161.
47 Foundational experiences are often crucial: as settlers are founders of political orders, Indo-Fijians arrived as ‘Girmit’ (literally: people who have contracted an agreement). While a contractual relationship is conceptually distinct from a settler understanding of an inherent sovereignty, the importance of foundational experiences in shaping political consciousness is also confirmed by the separate experience of Gujarati migrants to Fiji.
Indigenous destruction were associated with parallel and corresponding fantasies of total Indigenous protection. Fiji is especially significant to the history of administrative attitudes regarding settlers and their prerogatives because it was designed as a 'remarkable' exception. Fiji’s uniqueness, however, should not suggest that Gordon was isolated, as he could not have been successful without access to a solid and strategically located support network, or without ultimate support from the colonial establishment. Indeed, while it is within a British transcolonial system of Indigenous/settler relations that one needs to contextualise this experience, one could argue that Fiji was constructed in one specific way exactly because the attempt to build a settler colonial establishment respectful of Indigenous prerogatives in New Zealand had failed after settler takeovers of the 1860s (the approach tried in this latter colony had also been initially devised as a counterpoint to the atrocities on Australian frontiers — another recurring reference of developing anti-settler rhetoric). Indeed a transcolonial system of reference had informed most policy developments in Fiji. Gordon’s decision to avoid a scorched earth policy in dealing with the insurrection of Fijian highlanders in 1876, for example, was based on an appreciation of New Zealand history and on a determination not to repeat it. The very institution of the Great Council of Chiefs was also devised in order not to reproduce a New Zealand example, where a number of Maori members sitting in the (otherwise entirely European) legislative council had proved ineffectual in preventing settler abuse. Moreover, even if the native land ordinance of 1880 had envisaged the possibility of eventually individualising communal holdings, Gordon, fearing a repetition of the New Zealand precedent, had limited it. Although elsewhere, again and again, settlers and their ideas about colonial settlement prevailed, in Fiji white residents were denied ultimate self-government while Indo-Fijian ‘settlers’ — who were residing in their farms, opening up an agricultural frontier, and integrating Fiji in the world markets — were denied franchise.

An attempt to break Gordon’s anti-settler compact in Fiji (the ‘Gordon–Thurston system’, as it was called from the early-20th century) was made during Governor Everard im Thurn’s tenure, when expropriations of Indigenous land were resumed with the aim of appeasing Fiji’s white settlers and creating conditions for their ascendancy. In a lecture delivered in 1913, im Thurn later defined Fiji as ‘one case — fairly typical of many others — in which certain tropical land formerly exclusively occupied by natives...has now been invaded

52 Colonial authorities were aware of Fiji’s nature as a test case in colonial governance. During a 1909 visit to Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies Charles Lucas noted that as Fiji’s dealings were principally with self-governing Dominions: ‘the Crown Colony system, therefore, is here, so to speak, constantly being put on its trial, and tested by contrast’ (my emphasis). Charles Lucas, ‘Notes on a visit to Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji in 1909’, Colonial Office Series — Dominions No.1 (1910), 8. I am grateful to Frances Steel for this quote.
and more or less absorbed by white-skinned men originally of European race'. According to this solipsistic rendition, settler colonialism becomes a normative colonial experience, even in Fiji: Fiji's colonial circumstances had been exceptional (and this exceptionalism was by then extinguished) not because a large section of the population had to be imported so that the remaining part could be kept secluded from a developing market economy, but because of the temporary absence of an entrenched settler regime.

Despite im Thurn's wishful thinking, however, both the white planters who had established themselves in earlier decades and those who had arrived after the enactment of his pro-settler measures would face very difficult conditions. In colonial Fiji, the viability of their plantations had been premised on both the availability of cheap labour and on the tolerance and outlays of the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR). In the early 1920s, both these conditions would disappear. Discontinuing the importation of indentured workers was paralleled by a decision to organise production by establishing Indian farmers 'constituting their own labour force' on leased farms. As the land was then imagined as ultimately settled by another people, this spelled the end of a white settler community in one specific colonial landscape. While this decision was ultimately CSR's, it should be emphasised that it was based on a long-lasting local tradition of anti-settler feelings. The Pacific Age, for example, had lamented CSR's lack of racial solidarity and had concluded: 'to the board of directors what is it if a man is white, black, or brindle, so long as the dividend is wrested from the far-off soil of Fiji ...?' Most white planters in Fiji, no longer able to rely on the credit hitherto provided by CSR, abandoned their enterprises. Noticing 'a retreat of the white settler frontier in Fiji', Bruce Knapman remarked that, by the early 1920s, Fiji's monopsonist controller of sugar production 'saw itself relying on the small-scale Indian cane grower in the future', a situation where 'the white capitalist grip on the colonial economy was emphatically a corporate one'. Gordon's prophecy had been fulfilled: while certainly colonial, this order was certainly not settler colonial.

---

53 E. im Thurn, 'Native land and labour in the South Seas', in F.J.C. Hearnshaw (ed.), King's College Lectures on Colonial Problems (London 1913), 35. His lecture defended his policy by referring to Indigenous reluctance to work (a circumstance typically requiring labour importation) and to Indigenous claims to obviously 'unused' lands (a situation classically justifying Indigenous dispossession).


55 Quoted in ibid., 74.

56 Ibid., 77, 78.

57 Fiji would not be a unique example of an anti-settler determination. In Struggle for Kenya, Robert Maxon concludes that it was the Colonial Office that ultimately prevented the colony from becoming a white settler state. However, this was a much protracted confrontation throughout five decades of mounting divergences between declared official policy and settler assertion. Robert M. Maxon, Struggle for Kenya: the loss and reassertion of imperial initiative, 1912–1923 [Rutherford, NJ 1993], especially 280–5, and Ronald Hyam, 'Bureaucracy and “trusteeship” in the colonial empire', in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis (eds), The Oxford History of the British Empire: the twentieth century (Oxford 1999), especially 270–2.
Fiji can then be seen as a laboratory for the development of non-settler, ‘non-transformative’ colonial practices and as a crucial precedent for indirect rule.\textsuperscript{58} It would represent a template for colonial articulations both within the context of British imperial and colonial policy, and in transcolonial terms. The military administration of American Samoa, for example, was explicitly established on the Fiji model. Julian Go has noted its difference from other contemporaneous US colonial endeavours in Hawaii, the Philippines and Puerto Rico: an American regime in Samoa was not to be a transformative one. Tilley, the first US governor of the newly acquired colony, had noted:

\begin{quote}
My aim was to modify this system so as to adapt it to requirements of civilized government, without at the same time interfering with the deeply rooted customs of the people or wounding their susceptibilities in any way. To achieve this I followed the plan which has proved so successful in Fiji of appointing native chiefs as local magistrates or governors in each district.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

Fantasies for German Papua New Guinea also used Fiji as a reference; and colonial officials there toyed with the idea of importing Indian labourers in order to replicate Fiji’s circumstances.\textsuperscript{60}

In a British imperial context, MacGregor’s contribution, crucial in Fiji’s formative years, was also essential in a successive transfer of colonial governance. In Lagos, he applied a number of principles and practices tried in Fiji, including an ostensible ‘intimacy’ with Indigenous and officially recognised ‘traditional’ leaders aimed at sustaining a ‘protective’ type of colonial governance. In his new posting he encountered a mosaic of conflicting interests: merchants interested in opening trade links with the interior, missionaries wanting to hold onto their converts and lands, and ‘educated’ Africans who equally distrusted colonial powers and the authority of traditional and less traditional chiefs. The Colonial Office was sending to Lagos someone who had a positive track record in managing non-transformative colonial relations. Four months into his Lagos posting MacGregor concluded:

\begin{quote}
This government is not sufficiently in touch with the native part of the population of the Colony and Protectorate, and that certain means are wanting to establish the organic connection between the government and natives that is absolutely necessary in matters of native administration if this is to be conducted intelligently and on
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{58} Contrasting settler colonialism’s easy fit with the deterriorialisation/territorialisation paradigm against indirect rule’s immobilisation of Indigenous structures can help making sense of two structurally different (and dialectically constructed) colonial regimes. Robert Young’s criticism of Deleuze and Guattari’s influential notion of capitalism as implying ongoing processes of deterriorialization and reterritorialisation, for example, is crucially based on an understanding of indirect rule as a type of non-transformative colonialism: ‘contrary to the implication of deterriorialization and reterritorialization, it was often the case that colonial powers such as Britain did not erase or destroy a culture, but rather attempted to graft onto it a colonial superstructure that would allow the convenience of indirect rule, freezing the original indigenous culture by turning it into an object of academic analysis, while imposing the mould of a new imperial culture’. Robert Young, Colonial Desire: hybridity in theory, culture and race (London 1995), 173–4. See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia (New York 1977).


\textsuperscript{60} I am grateful to Professor Stewart Firth for alerting me to this connection.
sound principles... This can never become a white man's colony. It is and must remain as regards industrial development almost exclusively in the hands of the natives.61

In this context, MacGregor's allusion to an 'organic connection between the government and the natives' is an explicit reference to indirect rule as practised in Fiji; his conscious or unconscious repetition in Lagos of Gordon's anti-settler resolve confirms a direct link between Fiji and what would become Nigeria under Frederick Lugard.62

MacGregor's advocacy for indirect administration as a tested approach to colonial rule was consistent with a Fiji precedent, and the core feature of his approach was a hierarchical structure of native councils. The Native Council Ordinance established a series of councils exercising some delegated powers. As well as demanding that their position in the hierarchy of colonial governance be recognised, MacGregor tried to prop the authority of the chiefs, whose standing was continually challenged by younger and literate Africans, and by those who had served as soldiers or labourers elsewhere. He hoped that the Ordinance would restore and consolidate the authority of the chiefs and approved, for example (against colonial precedent and against the wishes of merchants), that the nominally independent polities of the Lagos hinterland could exact tolls. This authorised officially recognised native institutions to tax Europeans, while also providing a means of funding a system of indirect colonial administration. Europeans objected. Similar contestations flared when MacGregor suggested that local courts could try Europeans.63 Regarding land administration — in a language reminiscent of that used earlier in Fiji and later in the Nigerian Native Rights Proclamation of 1910 — MacGregor reiterated that 'native lands cannot, and will not, be alienated to Europeans', as this would be 'contrary to present native uses and customs'. Land, he concluded, 'could, probably, be leased for a long term'.64

MacGregor's policies unsurprisingly won the support of chiefs installed in the protectorate areas of the Lagos hinterland and prompted the vocal opposition of the 'educated' Africans (often 'returned' slaves from Brazil). The Colonial Office — wary of fostering the impression of substantive chiefly autonomy — increasingly opposed a policy of genuine recognition of chiefly authority. Nonetheless, it should be noted that Lugard's subsequent systematisation, institutionalisation and internationalisation of indirect rule were premised on a

61 Quoted in Joyce, Sir William MacGregor, 243.
62 See, for example, Michael Crowder, The Story of Nigeria (London 1978), and Toyin Falola, The History of Nigeria (Westport, Conn. 1999).
63 Notice a conceptual shift from protecting chiefly authority to restoring it. Another remarkable difference in MacGregor's activity between Fiji and Lagos was a decreasing emphasis on education: perhaps his experience with 'educated' Africans challenging both his government and the chiefs he supported may have had a role in defining his changing priorities.
64 Quoted in ibid., 290, 292.
Indeed, Lugard's administration of Nigeria could rely on an established legacy of indirect Indigenous governance.

John W. Cell's authoritative reconstruction of different traditions of 'native administration' does refer to indirect rule developing in locales where settlers had not become established. Exploring the intellectual background of indirect rule, Cell refers to Henry Maine's work on the 'primordial' Indian village community and to the later influence of the functional school of anthropology as an academic underpinning of Lugard's concept of a 'dual mandate' and system of 'native administration'. While Maine had also been relevant in shaping Gordon's approach, Cell neglects Fiji as a testing ground for the development of anti-settler colonial practices. Nor does he indicate that an intractable opposition between settler colonialism and 'indirect rule' is a structural element of a long-lasting colonial divide. Introducing Fiji's experience into this trajectory would highlight an ongoing anti-settler determination: the British colonial debates about Africa in the 1930s, in which settler-sponsored notions of segregation bitterly opposed those of indirect rule, were indeed grounded on more than a century-long tradition of anti-settler feelings.

These sentiments were never entirely silenced between the 1860s and the 1900s, when 'trusteeship' emerged (again) as a crucial determinant in the formulation of colonial policy. Ronald Hyam's outline of 20th-century notions of 'trusteeship' and their anti-settler character emphasises discontinuity with previous practice; his narrative detects trusteeship in West Africa after 1905 and covers its implementation in a number of colonies throughout the 1920s and later decades. However, an appraisal of Fiji's anti-settler compact and its reproduction in a number of sites of colonial expansion allows a bridging between 19th-century rhetoric of humanitarian colonial practice and 20th-century discourse involving notions of non-racial partnership. Crucial elements of developing 'trusteeship' policies in Africa had Fijian precedents: the groundbreaking Nigerian Land and Native Rights Proclamation of 1910 imposed non-alienation of African land and leasehold in preference to freehold 25 years after Gordon had already sanctioned it in Fiji; the Devonshire Declaration of

---

65 This suggestion is not new. J.D. Legge argued that Gordon initiated what 'came to be called' indirect rule, and J.K. Chapman concluded that Gordon has a 'major claim to be judged the father of twentieth-century British policy in colonies with large indigenous populations'. See Ian Heath, 'Toward a reassessment of Gordon in Fiji', 88, 91. While otherwise reframing the nature of Gordon's activity, Heath agrees on this point, noting that Gordon and Lugard met, entertained a correspondence, and that, subsequently, Lugard's articulation of indirect rule more closely resembled Gordon's. On the other hand, Gordon's Fiji policy as a precedent for indirect rule in Africa is also mentioned, for example, in Bernard Porter, The Lion's Share: a short history of British imperialism, 1850-2004 (London 2004), 190. Porter indicates that Sir George Goldie's ideas on ruling through native chiefs had a more direct relevance for Lugard. MacGregor's direct linking of Fiji and Nigeria is not mentioned. Finally, a genealogy of 'native administration' linking Fiji and later, Nigeria and Tanganyika is suggested in Thomas, 'Sanitation and Seeing', 156.


67 See Kelly, 'Gordon was no amateur', 77–85.


69 See Hyam, 'Bureaucracy and "trusteeship" in the colonial empire', 265–78.
1923 had proclaimed Indigenous paramountcy and prophesied settler demise in terms strikingly resonant with Gordon's 1870s rhetoric. \(^{70}\)

**Indirect rule** was in due course transferred to other non-settler locales in Africa. Mandatory Tanganyika was managed as a country that ‘will always remain a predominantly native country’, and ‘primarily a Black man’s country’ (note that these references pertain to both the present and the future), and this was hailed by the post-World War I Permanent Mandates Commission as a standard in the application of indirect rule and trusteeship. \(^{71}\) If British African policy could be praised for being sufficiently anti-settler, logically, South Africa’s *de facto* annexation of South West Africa was criticised: Mandatory provisions had a specific anti-settler determination. \(^{72}\) At the same time, indirect rule carried inherent expectations of eventual Indigenous sovereignty: influential colonial advocate Margery Perham commented that ‘it was like scaffolding around a building ... the impermanent external planks European, the permanent structure African. One day, the core having proved capable of standing on its own, the scaffolding would be removed’. \(^{73}\) As the possibility of ultimate decolonisation always remained within colonialism’s cultural horizon, Fiji’s colonial construction was crucial in the original establishment of a colonially acceptable form of native administration, an outline that could be reproduced successively in Mandatory and even in neo-colonial/postcolonial examples.

Anti-settler discourse eventually contributed to shaping extremely powerful imaginative geographies. Inheriting a tradition of Mandatory colonialism, after World War II, the United Nations compiled a list of non-self-governing territories presumably scheduled for ultimate decolonisation. Hawaii was initially included, and this prompted US federal authorities to remove barriers preventing its formal accession to the Union (Hawaii’s Organic Act had been *organically* different; inclusion demanded a significant departure from normal constitutional practice). \(^{74}\) New Caledonia was also occupying an ambiguous position in this context, prompting French authorities eventually to accede to negotiations that would ultimately lead to the Matignon Accords of 1988, which were crucial in envisaging for the first time the possibility of negotiating a French indivisible sovereignty. \(^{75}\)

---

\(^{70}\) Primarily Kenya is an African Territory, and His Majesty’s Government think it necessary definitely to record their considered opinion that the interests of the African natives must be paramount, and that if, and when, those interests and the interests of the immigrant races should conflict, the former should prevail’. Quoted in ibid., 269.


\(^{72}\) There was, however, a universally accepted exception. Palestine, also a mandate, was never to be treated like the others: as far as the Commission was concerned, Palestine was a white man’s country. See ibid., 124–9.

\(^{73}\) Quoted in Cell, ‘Colonial rule’, 249.

\(^{74}\) See, for example, J.D. Bowers, ‘Hawaii’, in Benjamin F. Shearer (ed.), *The Uniting States: the story of statehood for the fifty United States* (Westport, Conn. 2004), 295–324.

If an appraisal of Fiji’s history can contribute to an understanding of the evolution of transnational colonial technologies of governance, however, the reverse is also possible, and an analysis of the legacies of indirect rule elsewhere can contribute to the interpretation of Fiji. Mahmood Mamdani’s insightful analysis of the outcomes of indirect rule in tropical Africa is crucially aware of the need to distinguish between settler and non-settler colonial practices. His intuition that indirect rule establishes ‘a racialized regime of rights’ for some and ‘an ethnicized regime of custom’ for others has arresting implications as regards Fiji, where an asymmetric contradiction between ‘ethnic’ Fijians and racialised Indo-Fijians is all too apparent.  

There is a scholarly tradition in Pacific studies that emphasises exceptionalism and the notion that the Pacific subverts global practices; the conception that global phenomena arrive later and in a distorted form to the Pacific is also widely held. On the contrary, there is still a need to explore the Pacific’s constituent character in terms of its strategic location and contribution to global developments. While the contemporary Pacific is often represented under the rubric of ‘Africanisation’, the history of Fiji’s anti-settler colonisation suggests that it was Africa that was ‘Pacificised’ at a crucial junction of its history.

**ABSTRACT**

Consistent with an interpretive tradition identifying Fiji as a constituent site in the evolution of colonial forms, this paper argues that Fiji’s colonial history provides a privileged point from which to explore the divide separating colonial and settler colonial phenomena. While suggestive more than conclusive, it has two reciprocally supporting aims: first, it argues that colonial development in Fiji should be contextualised within transcolonial debates regarding Indigenous-settler relations, and that the construction of Fiji’s colonial landscape resulted from a decisively anti-settler determination; and, second, that a reframed understanding of Fiji’s colonial history can contribute to a reappraisal of the evolution of wider traditions of colonial governance.
