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## Leaving their Tradition Behind : Development of the Lami Movement in Fiji from 1949 to the 1990s

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## **Leaving their Tradition Behind: Development of the Lami Movement in Fiji from 1949 to the 1990s**

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This paper aims to shed light on the validity of previous studies by reconstructing in detail the Lami's historical development from its beginning to the 1990s. The Lami is a cooperative group in Fiji whose main characteristic has been radically changing its members' lives. Lami people not only abolish or simplify some parts of Fijian customs such as wedding and funeral ceremonies; they also abstain from luxuries such as kava and tobacco. Previous studies take for granted (1) the relationship between characteristic activities of the Lami and its members' sterile land and unstable land rights, and (2) the Lami's relationship with Melanesian cargo cults such as the Viti Kabani movement in Fiji. In this paper I would like to use archival and ethnographic studies to question these assumed relationships.

*Keywords: custom, modernity, inversion of tradition, cooperative, Bula Tale, Lami, Fiji.*

### **1. Introduction**

In this paper I would like to examine a kind of cooperative group known as the Lami in Fiji (see Figure 1). Early British colonial policy aimed to protect native Fijians (hereafter I use simply "Fijian" to signify "native Fijian") from exploitation by European settlers. This paternalistic idea was contrived by Fiji's first substantial colonial governor, Arthur Hamilton Gordon. From experience governing previous colonies such as New Zealand, he realized the imminent danger faced by native races at that time. Fiji's native population, indeed, was in rapid decline when Gordon first arrived to assume the position (Lal, 1992).

Sensing a crisis, Gordon enacted policies meant to preserve the Fijian way of life and to prevent Fijians from being used as plantation laborers. In order to dodge European complaints and compensate for a labor shortage, Gordon imported a total of about 6,000 coolies from British India between 1894 and 1916. This marked the beginning of Fiji's ethnic division of labor, with Fijians as subsistence villagers and Indians as laborers. Thus Gordon's policies, which were maintained until the 1950s except for a brief period in the 1900s, laid the foundation for a multiethnic Fiji in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lal, 1992).

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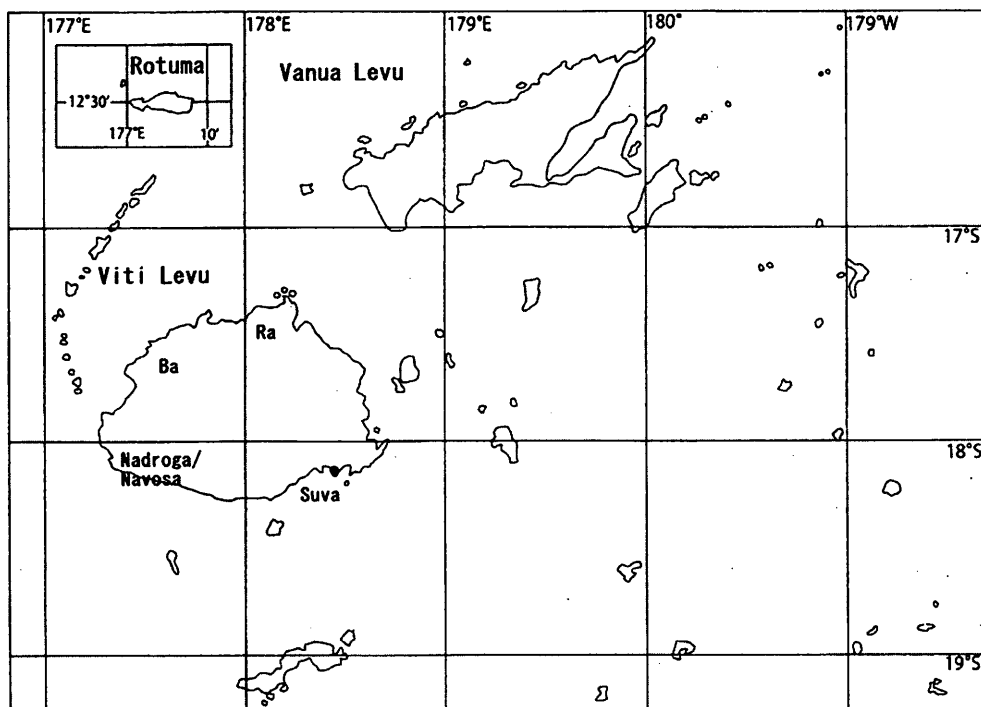


Figure 1. Map of Fiji Islands (based on Thomson, 1999)

Fiji has suffered political instability since its independence in 1970, with coups in 1987, 2000, and 2006. Tension between Fijians and Indian descendants of immigrant laborers has played a role in this ongoing conflict. Many Fijians feel trapped in the subsistence sector of the economy, alienated from the benefits of economic development. Most Indians, on the other hand, enter the economic sector with relative ease because of their background as plantation laborers. This economic disparity does not exactly follow ethnic lines, but it has certainly been seen as an ethnic issue in Fiji. The Lami is one of the groups of Fijians to try to succeed in economic ventures under these circumstances.

The Lami group has drawn attention across the disciplines various reasons. Historians treat the group as a communist party, (e.g. Lal, 1992), anthropologists cite it as an example of “inversion of tradition” (e.g. Thomas, 1997) and theologians treat it as a cult (e.g. Meo, Dale & Dale, 1985). For all this interest, however, there have been no systematic studies of the Lami’s history until now.

Thus this paper will trace the development of the Lami from its beginning to the 1990s. After describing in detail the ups and downs of the group, I will re-examine the validity of two assumptions made by previous studies on the Lami: (1) that the Lami’s activities resulted from the sterile land and unstable land rights of its members’ villages, and (2) that the Lami came from

a line of Melanesian cargo cults such as the Viti Kabani movement.

The Lami's characteristic activities are well known. The members not only distance themselves from Fijian customs such as traditional wedding and funeral ceremonies, but also engage in commercial activities ranging from restaurant management and sugarcane farming to brokerage of vegetables and root crops. The group was registered as a company, the Ilami Fijian Cooperation,<sup>1</sup> around 1990.

The Lami first came together in the latter half of the 1940s in Togovere village of Nadroga/Navosa Province. Three neighboring villages joined the Lami around 1959, establishing the present composition of the group. After 1961, its members began to distance themselves from traditional Fijian ways of life. At this time its enrollment grew to 1,000. But owing to conflict with surrounding societies, the Lami had no choice but to relocate to Ba Province.

There, the group continued its activities. Membership rebounded to more than 200 by the first half of the 1980s, and then to around 300 in the latter half. The Lami is still active today. Although the group's nature has varied with its leadership and membership, its essence remains the same: a cooperative group of people from Togovere and several other villages in Nadroga/Navosa Province.

The group's fame in Fiji seems connected to its de-traditional activities. I say "de-traditional" because the Lami not only abolished or simplified some Fijian customs but also required its members to work hard for better lives. For example, they scaled back ceremonies such as weddings and funerals to avoid extravagance, and they abstained from luxury items such as tobacco, alcohol, and kava. The Lami began living this way in 1961.

The Lami also caught the attention of some scholars when, for a short while, it called itself a communist group. As far as I know, a Methodist preacher named Eparama Naivolasisiga published the first report on this subject in 1970 after a few months of fieldwork. Although the report chronicled many interesting episodes from this period of the Lami's existence, it was not widely cited by later researchers, partly because it was difficult to access (Naivolasisiga, 1970: 1–21).

After this report, more sociologically oriented studies came out. These paid particular attention to (1) how the Lami engendered a way of life and (2) the supposition that the Lami is heir to certain earlier social movements in Fiji.

A typical scholar of (1) is Simone Durutalo (Durutalo, 1985: 406–410). From a socio-economic perspective, he saw the infertility of soil and instability of land rights in Togovere village as explanations for the Lamian way of life. According to his analysis, the Lami valued hard work and de-traditional lifestyles because Togovere villagers not only had sterile land but

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<sup>1</sup> Ilami is made from lami by adding the prefix i.

also lacked the land rights most Fijians had.

I would like to explain this point about unstable land rights in more detail here. As a result of indirect rule, which began in 1874 and aimed to protect Fijians, more than 83% of all Fiji belonged to Fijians. The Native Land Commission classified this “native land”<sup>2</sup> according to *mataqali* (about equal to lineage) by identifying the limits and owners of every property. Native land is inherited patrilineally, and non-*mataqali* (including other ethnic groups) may only lease it.

This very process of identifying these lands and their owners thus divided the population into haves and have-nots (France, 1969: 150). Some *mataqali* were left without land rights, including those who joined the Lami, and Durutalo makes a causal connection here (Durutalo, 1985). John Young, who conducted research in the beginning of the 1980s, does the same (Young, 1992).

All three of these papers—by Naivolaisiga, Durutalo, and Young—are based on their authors’ own field research. Since then, as far as I know, no more such papers have appeared. Among other studies on the Lami, though, Nicholas Thomas’s deserves mention (Thomas, 1997: 186–209). He used archival research to reanalyze the discursive dimension of this movement, focusing on the Lami of 1960 and interpreting its activities as “inversion of tradition,” a counter-discourse against the dominant discourse on tradition in Fiji.

Another popular explanation for the rise of the Lami is the one positing ties between it and previous social movements in Oceania—namely, cargo cults. Many previous studies on the Lami have implied ties to the Viti Kabani, a kind of cargo cult movement in Fiji (e.g. Macnaught, 1979, 1982; Kasuga, 2001). The Viti Kabani movement was initiated by Apolosi Ranawai in the 1910s to establish a company for the Fijian by the Fijian. He was said to be aiming not only to end western control of Fiji but also to bring prosperity to Fijians in the process. Despite opposition from the government and European settlers, his movement attained far-reaching influence over the Fiji islands, especially his home of western Viti Levu. His activities inspired a variety of subsequent social movements in Fiji (cf. Worsley, 1968; Kaplan, 1995; Kasuga, 2001).

Various authors point out the genealogical connection between Viti Kabani and the Lami. Some note the fact that one of the Lami’s leaders also took part in Viti Kabani (e.g. Naivolaisiga, 1970). Some argue that the Lami is heir to the Viti Kabani movement (e.g. Durutalo 1985: 406–407; Young, 1992; Kasuga, 2001). Even studies that mention the Lami only briefly tend to assume more or less implicitly that it is connected to the cargo cult (e.g. Mayer, 1963: 100; Mamak, 1978: 50; Howard, 1991: 88).

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<sup>2</sup> There are three types of land in Fiji, broadly speaking: native land, state land, and freehold land.

## 2. Proposing Questions

After reviewing these previous studies on the Lami, I would like to point out two problems. First, they lacked balance in selecting historical materials. For example, almost all the scholars referred to Apimeleki Ramatau Mataka's remarks in the *Fiji Times*, yet missed equally rich information from the vernacular newspaper *Vakalelewa ni Pasifika*. Although some of them conducted field research in Lami communities, none stayed long, and their research was only marginally concerned with the group (e.g. Durutalo, 1985; Kasuga, 2001). The work of Naivolasisiga is exceptional on these points, but as I explained above, it has not been widely cited.

The studies also neglect the big picture of the Lami's development. They are inclined rather to focus narrowly on one period or aspect of the group's history. Studies that discuss the Bula Tale period rarely mention the group's later steps (e.g. Mayer, 1963; Mamak, 1978; Thomas, 1997; Lal, 1992), while those focusing on the Lami period skip over earlier history (e.g. Young, 1992; Kasuga, 2001). This lack of synthesis may be due to how frequently the Lami changed names and locations. To make our task much more difficult, its members tend to keep to themselves, and some of them prefer not to speak about the past, partly because of their experience of moving away from home around 1962.

In this paper, I would first like to reconstruct the Lami's development, making full use of local media resources. Section 3 describes the pioneering period of the Lami. Sections 4 to 6 cover the period from the beginning of the Lami in 1961 to the 1990s, treating such topics as the group's names, activities, organizational features, and base location in each period.

Section 7 will then reexamine the validity of certain assumptions made by previous studies. These are (1) that a lack of land rights and fertile land led to the founding of the Lami; and (2) that the Lami is a kind of cargo cult. In section 7, I would like to suggest an alternative interpretation of the Lami from the perspective of their historical development.

## 3. Forerunners of the Lami

### 3.1 Tabanivono Cooperative (1949 to 1952)

The Lami started as Tabanivono Cooperative in 1949 (see Table 1). This group was based in Togovere village in Nadroga/Navosa Province and included some members from neighboring villages such as Nadroumai and Vunatovau (Naivolasisiga, 1970: 1). Two years before its establishment, the government had enacted regulations designed to encourage Fijians to engage in cooperative activities. This was therefore a time when many Fijians were founding both registered and unregistered cooperatives (cf. Council Paper No. 22, 1950). The Tabanivono

**Table 1. Chronology of the Lami Movement**

Year	Month/Date	Events
1947	March	Cooperative Societies Ordinance passed
1949		Tabanivono Cooperative established
1952		Tabanivono Cooperative breaks up
1959		Dra or Dra ni Lami established
1961	January 10	Bula Tale established
1961	August 24	Ramatau declares formation of Bula Tale Communist Party in <i>Fiji Times</i>
1961	September 6	Officials of Nadroga/Navosa Province visit main Bula Tale villages
1961	November	Bula Tale gets in trouble with Semo District School over nonattendance of their children
1962	June	Bula Tale changes name to Lami. Leadership passes to Emosi Sove from Ramatau
1962	August 24	Tikina Council resolves to order the Lami to leave Togovere on the pretext of taxes in arrears. The Lami gradually move to Ba Province
1962	September 22	Ramatau helps form Western Democratic Party
1964		The Lami group settles in Yalalevu in Ba Province
1980	The latter half	The Lami group settles in Lami settlement in Ba Province
1992		Kitione Tokula dies
2002		Emosi Sove dies

Cooperative was one of these aspirants to Fijian economic development.

Its leader was Emosi Sove, from Togovere. He supposedly took part in Viti Kabani and was well known around his home village as an entrepreneur in large-scale livestock farming (owning more than 200 cows), rice farming, and more (cf. Naivolasisiga, 1970: 1–3).<sup>3</sup> He built a storage house for rice, maize, and yams and sometimes hired workers on his farm (Young, 1992: 88). The Cooperative dealt in cash crops at the market in Vunahalu (cf. Naivolasisiga, 1970: 1–3),<sup>4</sup> and the business apparently made large profits (Young, 1992: 88).

For all its success, mishandling of money sent the Cooperative into bankruptcy in 1952. According to Naivolasisiga, the Cooperative saved up only 47 pounds at the office of the District Council at Lawaqa during the more than three years from 1949 to 1952 (Naivolasisiga, 1970: 3).

<sup>3</sup> According to Togovere villagers, Emosi and others formed the Tabanivono Cooperative. The leading members, other than Emosi, learned to keep accounts by attending school in town. They dealt wholesale in farm and livestock products such as tapioca, talo, and citrus, a local specialty of Nadroga region. Togovere villagers and a spokesman for the Lami praised Emosi for his pioneering work in the livestock industry there. Some Indians nearby remembered vividly the prosperous livestock business in Togovere and the fence it erected around the village. Emosi also worked actively as a sirdar, a leader of a group for cutting sugarcane. Indians in Raiwaqa and Cuvu asked Emosi to take the role of sirdar to supplement their labor force in the sugarcane field. He did such a tremendous job and so exceeded their expectations that they performed *solu* for him. *Solu* is a Fijian way to appreciate and treat someone with large amounts of foods and gifts. Many Indian elders still bore this episode and Emosi in mind, and they remembered Emosi by his hindunized name, Motish.

<sup>4</sup> Vunahalu is spelled as Vunasalu in standard Fijian (cf. Surridge, 1940: 32). Vunahalu is within the town of Sigatoka.

### 3.2 Dra ni Lami or Dra (1959 to 9 January 1961)

After the Tabanivono Cooperative's bankruptcy, Kitione Tokula took charge of its members in place of his father Emosi Sove (Naivolasisiga, 1970: 4; *The Fiji Times* (FT), 5 March 1996: 15). He worked as a Methodist preacher in Togovere for five years (Naivolasisiga, 1970: 4). According to his relatives, he had not received any formal education beyond Sunday school and primary school (cf. Young, 1992: 100).

Around 1959, Kitione began to take over his father's stock farming business and preach the realization of a happy society through business (Naivolasisiga, 1970: 4; cf. FT, 5 March 1996: 15). In 1960, he established a group named Dra or Dra ni Lami (cf. *Vakalelewa ni Pasifika* (VP), 31 August 1961: 9).<sup>5</sup> "Dra ni Lami" means "blood of the lamb" and carries religious meaning for Fijians (cf. Naivolasisiga, 1970: 5).<sup>6</sup> In the following pages, the name of the group from this period is written Dra ni Lami.

In 1960, the Dra ni Lami consisted of people from major villages of the Bula Tale, which we will see in the next section, such as Togovere, Emuri, Kabisi, and Vagadra (cf. VP, 31 August 1961: 9). Like the present Lami, the group was formed when Togovere villagers joined with people from three nearby villages. Whether they practiced the Lamian way of life is unclear, but the Dra ni Lami had already begun to do business in at least two marketplaces. Reportedly it could open the market with the Roko,<sup>7</sup> official of the Fijian Administration and son to Ka Levu, the highest-ranking chief of that region in attendance (VP, 31 August 1961: 9). However, such was not the case for long.

## 4. The Birth of the Bula Tale and the De-traditional Movement (10 January 1961 to August 1961)

### 4.1 Activities of the Bula Tale

The Bula Tale commenced its activities on 10 January 1961 (VP, 13 July 1961: 12; VP, 31 August 1961: 9). "Bula Tale" means "alive again" or "resurrection" in Fijian. Naivolasisiga also

<sup>5</sup> The document does not say anything about what happened from 1959 to 1960. Although most members and ex-members of the Lami could not give a clear chronology of events in those days, they unanimously affirmed that Kitione Tokula was a leader in this period.

<sup>6</sup> Naivolasisiga related the etymology of Dra ni Lami to Indian custom. But his interpretation was based on the fact that the members of the Lami lived in Ba Province, which was densely populated with Indians. As for my interpretation of the meaning of the Lami, see section 6.

<sup>7</sup> Administrative units in Fiji were stratified from the top as *yasana*, *tikina*, and *koro*. These were administered respectively by a Roko or Roko Tui, Buli, and Turaga ni Koro (Roth, 1973: 140–149). That is, the Roko or Roko Tui Nadroga/Navosa was responsible for the Nadroga/Navosa area where the Bula Tale was located. 'Village headman' is an English term for Turaga ni Koro. I will use the English term in the following pages.



suggested that the group's name reflects its members' wish to revive short-lived groups such as the Tabanivono Cooperative and Dra ni Lami (Naivolasisga, 1970: 5). Bula Tale's headquarters lay at Togovere, like those of the Tabanivono Cooperative.<sup>8</sup> The Bula Tale was led by the four main villages of Dra ni Lami—Togovere, Kabisi, Emuri, and Vagadra—and attracted other villagers, such as those from neighboring Nadroumai and Nabau (VP, 13 July 1961: 12; Naivolasisga, 1970). Although I have been unable to find any relevant written materials, oral testimonies and genealogies of present Lami members suggest that some Semo villagers belonged to this group. At the beginning of the 1960s, Bula Tale members seem to have numbered 1,000 or so (Young, 1992: 90) (see Figure 2).

At this moment, the organization of the group changed. For instance, a division of roles within the group began to develop to some extent. According to one vernacular newspaper, there was a position of the secretary (VP, 13 July 1961: 12). Leadership of the Lami passed to a former clerk in the Medical Department, Apimeleki Ramatau Mataka<sup>9</sup>, and Kitione Tokuka stepped to

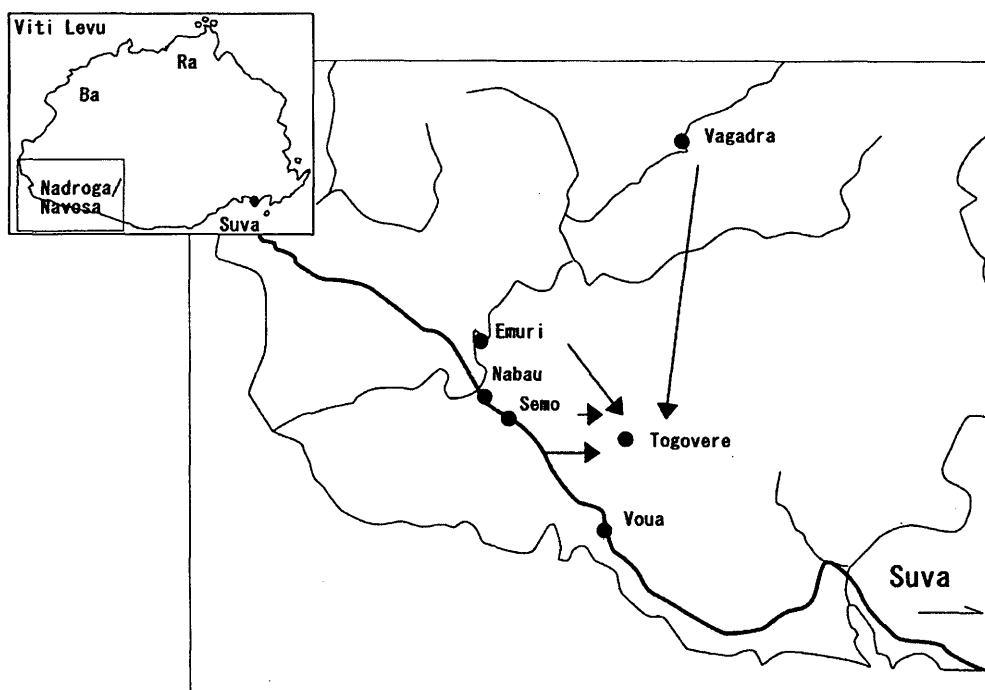


Figure 2. Map of Main Bula Tale Villages

<sup>8</sup> A Fijian monolingual dictionary stated that the headquarters of the Bula Tale were in Emuri (Tabana Ni Vosa Kei Na iTovo Vakaviti, 2005: 152), probably based on contemporary news sources (FT, 12 August 1961; cf. Durutalo, 1985: 406). As I have indicated, the headquarters were much more likely located in Togovere. As a matter of fact, Ramatau himself wrote a letter to the editor making this much clear (FT, 2 September 1961). Oral testimonies of current and former Lami members also support my argument.

the rear.<sup>10</sup> Ramatau consistently appeared for interviews and spoke on behalf of the Bula Tale. Although almost all the group's members came from four villages in Nadroga/Navosa Province, Ramatau was from Sabeto in Ba Province (Lal, 1992; Thomas, 1997). We can assume he rose through the group's ranks thanks to his wife, a woman of chiefly status from Emuri, one of the main villages of the Bula Tale.

Here I would like to shed some light on the activities of the Bula Tale. Its members left their home villages and settled together in Togovere. They followed rules emphasizing communal life; for example, they shared property such as *iyau* (goods) and *vua ni qele* (products of the land), and they used their farm and facilities communally (VP, 13 July 1961: 12). Kitione evidently initiated such practices (Young, 1992: 88–89).

The rules of Bula Tale even governed everyday activities. Alcohol and tobacco were prohibited. Soap and kerosene were bought as a group and then distributed among individuals (VP, 13 July 1961: 12). The daily schedule was as follows: up at 5 a.m. to clean the village green, rest at 7, breakfast at 8, and work again an hour later; preparing lunch at 11 and eating at noon, and work again 1–4 p.m. Evenings were unscheduled. Additional work on the farm occurred at will; dinner was at 6 p.m. and bedtime at 9 (VP, 13 July 1961: 12; cf. FT, 12 August 1961).<sup>11</sup>

Judging from its avoidance of native courts (*Veilewai vakaitaukei*)<sup>12</sup> and provincial taxes (*soli ni yasana*)<sup>13</sup> the Bula Tale favored autonomy (VP, 13 July 1961: 12). There may have been plans to build a school at one time (cf. FT, 12 August 1961), but children of the Bula Tale always attended the same schools as everyone else (VP, 13 July 1961: 12).

Members of the Bula Tale were required to distance themselves from traditional customs (*itovo vakavanua*) such as *sevusevu*,<sup>14</sup> as well as traditional wedding and funeral ceremonies. The group even refused to use *tabua*<sup>15</sup> and prohibited kava (VP, 13 July 1961: 12). These two items are essential components of almost every Fijian ritual activity.

<sup>9</sup> According to his older brother, Ramatau was a very clever child and skilled at English, but he did not receive any advanced education. As described in section 5, he established a Communist party but knew neither Russian nor Chinese.

<sup>10</sup> However, many present and former Lami members suggested that Kitione stayed at the group's helm until his death in 1992. Ramatau and Emosi (of the Lami, and discussed below) were regarded rather as spokespersons inside the Lami community, at least until the death of Kitione (cf. Young, 1992: 103–105).

<sup>11</sup> According to several former members of the Lami who were once staunch supporters of the group, there was a yearly calendar as well as the weekly one. Neither was used after the group moved to Ba Province, however.

<sup>12</sup> The native court was a court system for native Fijian people.

<sup>13</sup> Fijians were obliged to pay a provincial tax (*soli ni yasana*) to the province of their birth (Roth, 1973: 150–163).

<sup>14</sup> *Sevusevu* is a Fijian welcoming ceremony. When someone visits a Fijian village, he or she is supposed to bring a bundle of kava roots to present to the chief.

<sup>15</sup> *Tabua* is an item of exchange made of whale's tooth.

Their attitude toward Christianity was likewise one of detachment.<sup>16</sup> In Togovere a Methodist church building was used for Bula Tale activities (VP, 13 July 1961: 12; Naivolasisiga, 1970: 4). Methodist Christianity, *lotu*, was so deeply rooted in Fijian life that one's level of commitment to it was a sensitive issue. Uneasy about angering Fijians, Ramatau explained that his group was not abandoning the faith (VP, 13 July 1961: 9) but simply refraining from being excessively occupied with the activities of Christianity (VP, 3 August 1961: 9).

The Bula Tale's views on religion caused quite a sensation. One Fijian from nearby Ba Province heard about the group's activities before accounts of them were broadcast in the media; he said he blamed the Bula Tale for denouncing Christianity, not to mention tradition, *itovo vakavanua* (VP, 20 July 1961).<sup>17</sup> In contrast, another Fijian from Ba explained that there were people other than Christians in the world and that the Bula Tale should not be condemned for its views. He also pointed out, referring to the Burns report,<sup>18</sup> that the Bula Tale ethic of *solesolevaki* (working together) would further the *vakatoroicaketaki* (development) of the Fijian people (VP, 20 July 1961). A local journalist who came to Togovere described Bula Tale's activities not so much as a search for *galala* (freedom) but rather as *cakacaka solesolevaki* (working together) (VP, 13 July 1961: 11).

Bula Tale's activities extended beyond Togovere. The group traded retail at Lomawai market near Togovere and at Namaka market in Nadi. It owned its own truck (VP, 13 July 1961: 12). Ramatau also spoke of activities other than trade to the government of the day. He met with Roko Tui Nadroga of Nadroga/Navosa<sup>19</sup> twice, and he even went to Suva to inform the Deputy Secretary for Fijian Affairs, Ratu Mara, of his group's practices (cf. VP, 13 July 1961: 11). According to Ramatau, he invited Ratu Mara to Togovere to observe the group for himself (VP, 17 August 1961: 11).

In this section, I detailed characteristics of the Bula Tale's rules and activities around 1961. The tendency toward simplifying or abolishing Fijian traditional rituals, which I noted earlier was a feature of Lamian life, was already present in this period. We also see that Bula Tale members already valued commercial activity and a diligent work ethic. Most present-day Lami members are descendants of Bula Tale from the period described above.

<sup>16</sup> Kitione reportedly threw the Bible out in the early period of this movement (Young, 1992: 89). I have also heard this narrative from an old man from Togovere who happened to be there when the event took place.

<sup>17</sup> But we should bear in mind that he was simply and calmly expressing his personal views on Bula Tale (VP, 20 June 1961).

<sup>18</sup> The Burns report is a comprehensive report on Fiji's demography, natural resources, political system, and social problems. The commission was led by a former governor of Nigeria, Sir Alan Burns, and the report was published in 1960 (Burns, 1960).

<sup>19</sup> For Roko Tui, see note 7.

#### 4.2 Characteristics of the Bula Tale's Major Participating Villages

Here I would like to describe the major Bula Tale villages. Three of the four (Togovere, Kabisi and Emuri) were in Cuvu district (Seruvakula, 2000: 147).<sup>20</sup> Emuri is within a 15-minute walk from Kabisi. Although Togovere is relatively far from Emuri and Kabisi, it is within an hour on horseback from both villages. Vagadra is located in Sigatoka District<sup>21</sup> (Seruvakula, 2000: 147), far from the other three. Even today transportation to Vagadra is poor, and it takes an hour to get to Vagadra from Nadi. Vagadra is exceptional in the productivity of its land, for most of Togovere is *talasiga*, infertile land covered with shrubs.

In terms of language and regional polities, the four villages of the Bula Tale have little in common. As Kabisi was subdivided from Togovere, they belong to the same dialect area and the same clan, *yavusa*, but the other two villages belong to different *yavusa* and hence have their own chiefs. Moreover, Togovere/Kabisi, Emuri, and Vagadra occupy three distinct dialect areas, though they all use variants of the same Nadroga dialect.

As for land rights, Emuri and Vagadra own native lands divided along *mataqali* lines,<sup>22</sup> as is usually the case with Fijian villages, but Togovere and Kabisi lack such ownership. Togovere's land rights went to Voua village when Togovere villagers failed to negotiate successfully at the Lands' Claims Commission in 1911 (cf. Durutalo, 1985: 407; Young, 1992: 85–86).<sup>23</sup> Kabisi's land too was subject to Voua because Kabisi belongs to the one of the same *mataqali* as Togovere. Kabisi is now located in a 49-acre lot of state land<sup>24</sup> because, according to villagers, Apolosi instructed them to move there when the Viti Kabani movement was active.<sup>25</sup>

In short, these four Bula Tale villages have little in common in terms of language, regional polity, and land rights. People who got to know each other through Dra ni Lami activity used kinship networks rather than other commonalities to form Bula Tale.

<sup>20</sup> The old district name (Tikina Makawa) is Tuva (Seruvakula, 2000: 147). Many people in the area tend to call the district Tuva.

<sup>21</sup> The district name (Tikina Makawa) is Waicoba (Seruvakula, 2000: 147), but many people in the area tend to use its old name, Tuva.

<sup>22</sup> In some cases, *yavusa* or *tokatoka* (approximately equal to extended family) form a part of the land-holding unit.

<sup>23</sup> This was a commission to inquire about land boundaries and ownership. The headman of Togovere explained that their land was returned to them in 2000. Information on the land is highly confidential and difficult to access, and my description here is partly based on oral testimony from the village headman. There is a slightly different explanation for transactions regarding Togovere's land rights in Cuvu village.

<sup>24</sup> For state land, see note 2.

<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately I still cannot find relevant written materials to authenticate this fact. The anecdote has been handed down to most Kabisi villagers, however, and Kabisi is indeed located on state land.

### 4.3 The Objective of the Bula Tale

Some studies on the Bula Tale mention an episode in which the idea of the group occurred to Kitione Tokula in a dream (Naivolasiga, 1970: 4; Young, 1992: 88).<sup>26</sup> This has not been confirmed. What has been clearly stated, though, is the goal of Bula Tale. Eight members of the group issued a short essay titled *Voices of Bula Tale, Domo ni Bula Tale*, lamenting the delay of adaptation to social change and expressing the need for social reform. In it, they called for revival from a death-like state to a new world of freedom without clashing with or being blinded by the customs of the past (VP, 31 August 1961: 9). They also stated their group's objective as being to liberate human beings from the burden of the old world, for which they needed not earthly wealth such as money and goods but only the soul. The essay ended by proclaiming in capital letters, "*ME DA DUAVATA ENA VEILOMANI*, Unite Through Love" (VP, 31 August 1961: 9).

In this essay we can see prototypes for the Lamian ways of life are still practiced today, especially in the criticism of traditional ways of life and the emphasis on *veilomani*, mutual love, which became an especially important keyword in the period of the Lami (see section 6). *Veilomani* is from the word *loloma*, which means 'kindly love' and 'nurturing empathy' in Fijian.

## 5. Activities of the Bula Tale Communist Party<sup>27</sup> (August 1961 to June 1962)

### 5.1 Forming the Bula Tale Communist Party

On 24 August 1961, six months after its birth, the Bula Tale changed its name to the Bula Tale Communist Party. Ramatau defined the Bula Tale's activities as "Communitistic" in public (FT, 25 August 1961). For him, Communism could be defined as "vesting of property in the community, each member working according to his capacity and receiving according to his wants" (FT, 2 September 1961: 5). The Bula Tale Communist Party was meant to be a third government alongside the colonial government and the Fijian Administration, a separate administration for native Fijians (cf. FT, 25 August 1961; cf. Lal, 1992: 188).

After strong reactions from various sectors, including the Fijian Association, the Fijian and Rotuman Ratepayers' Association, the Fijian Teachers' Association, and a variety of media (cf. Niwa, 2005), Ramatau changed the tone of his statement slightly. He explained that the aim of the Bula Tale Communist Party was only "to retrieve the Fijian people from the alien doctrine of private property to the traditional communal ownership" (FT, 2 September 1961) and that

<sup>26</sup> I heard almost the same story about the origins of Lamian practices from core members of the Lami during my research in 2002.

<sup>27</sup> For more detailed description of this period, see Niwa (2005).

Communism was a term adopted for convenience's sake (FT, 2 September 1961; cf. VP, 31 August 1961: 12).

Regarding religion, the Bula Tale, according to Ramatau, never denied it. Explaining that he himself was Christian, he argued that early Christianity had not embraced private property. His point was that no Fijian was Communist and that the Bula Tale was just a "cooperative venture" (FT, 2 September 1961).

Nevertheless, the government began to monitor his group. Officials of Nadroga/Navosa Province visited the main villages of the Bula Tale on 6 September 1961 (FT, 8 September 1961: 5). Ramatau was even arrested at Nadi Airport for allegedly trespassing and loitering there in the middle of September (FT, 19 September 1961: 5; VP, 21 September 1961: 12).

## 5.2 Changing the Activities and Objectives of the Bula Tale

As far as we can tell from Ramatau's remarks, the membership and activities of the Bula Tale might have remained unchanged. At this point, there were approximately 1,000 members (Lal, 1992: 188). Instead of sending their children to school, however, the Bula Tale may have begun to educate their children themselves. We can guess this from a lawsuit over the absence of their children from school in November of 1961 (FT, 18 November 1961; VP, 23 November 1961; cf. Niwa, 2005).<sup>28</sup>

After these incidents with surrounding societies, Ramatau made some slight revisions to the stated purposes of the Bula Tale. He said his group aimed to pursue *Matanitu ni Kalou* (the kingdom of God) and its righteousness and to make earthly happiness more attainable for its members. He regretted that they were bound by *ivakarau vakavanua* (traditional custom) and that Fijians were extravagant and lazy, not exploiting the land as much as other ethnic groups in Fiji. He expressed hope that the activities of the Bula Tale would show that there were some ambitious Fijians who pursued *bula torocake* (a better life) (VP, 25 January 1962: 7). In these ways he subdued his Communist rhetoric and imbued his group's practices with more religious meaning.

It seems clear, however, that Ramatau retained his political convictions. Before the 1963 election he advocated publicly for a common roll<sup>29</sup> as an electoral system (VP, 29 March 1962: 8). He also took part in establishing the Western Democratic Party, which based itself in western Fiji (cf. Niwa, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> According to the one old former Lami member from Vagadra, Kitione explained that this was because children could not study *loloma* in school. Some children of the Lami did not go to school at the time of my research in 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Everyone has a right to cast a vote along his or her ethnic line in the communal roll. On the other hand, in the common roll, everyone can vote regardless of their ethnic category. Fijians historically tended to prefer the communal roll. Ramatau was an exception.

## 6. Development of the Lami

### 6.1 The Early Period of the Lami: In Nadroga/Navosa Province (June 1962 to August 1962)

While Ramatau entered the political sphere, his group changed again. In June of 1962, its name became Lami and its leader Emosi Sove<sup>30</sup> (VP, 7 June 1962: 12; *Volagauna* (VG), 8 June 1962). Lami means “lamb” in Fijian and symbolizes Jesus because it is used in the Bible (cf. The Bible Society, 2004: 779);<sup>31</sup> however, the name represents the ideal of the group: *loloma*, like *lami*<sup>32</sup> (VP, 7 June 1962: 12). According to relatives of Kitione, Emosi is not his direct relation. Like Kitione, Emosi is from Togovere and had no formal educational experience except for primary school. The Lami made Togovere its base just as it had in the period of Bula Tale.

Although the group’s name changed, contemporary resources indicate that its de-traditional activities may have remained much the same (cf. VP, 21 June 1962: 11). As we will see in the following pages, that the Lami began focused not only on mercantile activities but also on the idea of *loloma*. For them, *loloma* implied not only a search for economic profit but also the welfare of the whole human being.

To begin with, the Lami were purchasing certain foods at high prices but were selling foods at bargain prices. A news article based on the author’s two-day stay in Togovere beginning 4 June 1962 reported the following. In Togovere, a bag of oranges worth 15 shilling in the market was sold for 10 shillings.<sup>33</sup> The Lami would purchase a dozen loaves of bread at 12 shillings, which cost normally 9 shillings (VP, 7 June 1962: 12).

They extended these charitable activities beyond Togovere. In Nadi market, they sold five *bibi*<sup>34</sup> of sugar and 3 *bibi* of flour at the discounted price of 1 shilling respectively. They also distributed sugar without charge at Nadi market on 6 September 1962 (VP, 7 June 1962: 12). Some reports said that the Lami supported village development projects at a grassroots level around villages in Nadroga Province from 1962 to 1967. It aided small business projects such as the construction of a village store, and its total amount of aid money reached 100,000 dollars

<sup>30</sup> This Emosi Sove is a different person with the same name who is the leader of the Tabanivono Co-operative. They are in a *vieyacani* relationship, which is the custom of sharing a name.

<sup>31</sup> The source is chapter 53, section 7 of the Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. There is also a passage in chapter 1 section 29 of the Gospel according to St. John saying, “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb (Lami) of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (cf. The Bible Society, 2004: 119).

<sup>32</sup> Some also suggested that the Lami was a name taken from a son of Kitione Tokula. He seemed to occupy a special status among the members. When he died in 1977, some members had his name and year of death tattooed on their bodies. His birthday 16 September is reserved as a day of fundraising.

<sup>33</sup> Fiji used the pound system in those days and adopted the dollar system in 1969. One pound was equivalent to 20 shillings, and one shilling equalled 12 pence (Lal, 1992: 21–22).

<sup>34</sup> *Bibi* is a unit of weight. Exactly what weight corresponds to one *bibi* is not clear from the text.

(Young, 1992: 101).

Such activities were based on the concept that people should not only talk about *loloma* but also act according to the principle. The leader of the Lami, Emosi, expressed his opinion that they were tired of preaching—that it was time to truly practice *loloma*. The article's author closed by saying that he saw the people of the Bula Tale leading peaceful lives and seeking *loloma* like sheep (VP, 7 June 1962: 12).

The Lami embarked on a brokerage business in July of 1962. In Nadi market, they made a deal for certain foods with various villagers from Nadroga Province. For instance, they sold some bags of tapioca every Friday. A contemporary news article provides a vivid example of such activity. According to its author, the Lami collected this tapioca from villages near Togovere such as Naduri (2 bags), Raiwaqa (1 bag), and Nadroumai (3 bags), and from villages near Vagadra such as Vunamoli (1 bag), Yavusania (1 bag), and Waicoba (3 bags). They also brought 3 bags from Vagadra and 4 bags from their members. All this totaled 20 bags of tapioca (VP, 5 July 1962: 11). They even regulated the supply of tapioca. One day when there was a surplus, they stated the exact number of bags they needed from each village; 3 each from Nadroumai and Vunamoli and 2 from Waicoba (VP, 12 July 1962: 8).

Emosi explained that the aim of this brokerage business was not recruitment but rather to organize tapioca's trade route (VP, 12 July 1962: 8; VP, 19 July 1962: 8). The reason these villages were selected is not clear. However, considering the close ties between leading villages of the Lami and hence the possible existence of a kinship network through marriage, we can assume that the Lami could easily form business relationships with these villages.

We should bear in mind that brokering was not just a business transaction to the Lami; it was also related to the group's philosophy. Along with what has just been described, the Lami began something called *solia na loloma* (giving a *loloma*) at Lomaloma market in Nadroga/Navosa Province. The market was open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and throughout the day with a two-hour break the Lami's store sold sugar at 2 shillings per 4 *bibi*, flour at 1 shilling a *bibi*, and tapioca at 1 shilling a heap. Interestingly, customers could receive partial refunds as *loloma* according to the amount they spent. For example, when they had bought 36 *bibi* of sugar, they were refunded 5 shillings and 3 pence if they showed their receipts. Flour and tapioca were discounted in the same way (VP, 14 June 1962: 12).

Two contemporary accounts of the purpose of these activities exist, both from Lami members. One vendor was so eager to *solia na loloma* that he wanted to include articles such as tea, tin fish, soap and more in the deal. He explained that this would be a net advantage because it would accumulate *loloma* despite its unprofitability (VP, 14 June 1962: 12).

The other testimony comes from the manager of the Lami's store at Nadi:



Do not ask me about the *tubu ni ilavo* (profit). It is a work of *cakacaka ni Setani* (Satan). To do damage to one another is prohibited. This is a *situa ni veilomani* (store of mutual love). We are more than happy if people in the world are healthy. ... This is a store for the *vuravura vou* (new world). A store for our *iTaukei* (Fijian people). Our profit is *loloma*. (VP, 21 June 1962: 11)<sup>35</sup>

Here we see the Lami's philosophy that valued *loloma* more highly than economic interests because *loloma* was thought to better everyone's lives, not just those of Lami members.

Emosi suggested that although the Lami paid back portions of money as *loloma*, people should not spend their refunds on things that did not give them the energy of *bula* (life)—things like kava, lavish wedding and funeral ceremonies, and so on—because such activities tended to tie Fijians to the past and *vakabutobutotaka* (darken them). Therefore, his reasoning went, we should do away with old customs deriving from works of the devil (VP, 21 June 1962: 11).

Like Ramatau, Emosi began to express his opinions in print media. Starting in June of 1962, he commented not only on the Lamian way of life but even on the significance of the Apollo lunar landing.<sup>36</sup> But unlike Ramatau, he did not touch on politics (VP, 21 June 1962: 11). Although the Lami and Bula Tale shared a conviction that archaic customs were hindering Fijians from bettering their lives, two things distinguished the groups in this period. First, the Lami came to put much stronger emphasis on the concept of *loloma*.<sup>37</sup> Second, the Lami downplayed the religious and political aspects of their activities more than Ramatau did, at least in the discourse of their leader.

## 6.2 The Middle Period of the Lami: After Resettlement to Ba Province (August 1962 to the Late 1980s)

In spite of the organizational changes from the Bula Tale, the Lami found it difficult to be accepted by neighboring communities and the government of the day (cf. Niwa, 2005). In fact, as I will describe in the following pages, the Lami faced another problem and finally had no choice but to relocate.

According to oral testimony, the Lami divided local communities from the beginning. People's attitudes toward the group ranged from enthusiastic participation to strong opposition. The Lami encountered difficulties when it neglected to pay *solu ni yasana* (provincial tax). On

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<sup>35</sup> Translation is mine.

<sup>36</sup> John Young noted the picture of Apollo 11 on the door of the Lami's car during his research in 1983. He inferred that this picture symbolized the group's identity as progressive Fijians, especially in the field of business (Young, 1992: 91).

<sup>37</sup> Even today, there remain some sympathetic members and former members of the Lami who call their group *Sogosoqo ni Loloma* "a group of kindly love."

22 August 1962, the Tikina Council passed a resolution ordering the Lami to leave Togovere on the pretext of owing taxes in arrears. According to media reports, Buli Cuvu<sup>38</sup> and the constables of that area were dispatched to Togovere for an inspection on 24 August 1962 in order to tell the Lami to leave Togovere within a week (VP, 6 September 1962: 11; VP, 13 September 1962: 11).

The Lami, served with this order and in trouble with neighboring villages (cf. Niwa, 2005), left Togovere and dispersed to towns in western Fiji (Naivolasisiga, 1970; cf. VP, 29 November 1962) before finally settling in rental houses in Ba town (Young, 1992). This was a turning point for the Lami. Many members decided to withdraw from the group. At the period of the Bula Tale Communist Party it was said to have almost 1,000 members; after the relocation to Ba, only 150 or so remained (Naivolasisiga, 1970: 17) (see Figure 3).

In this section we will consider the Lamian way of life after this exodus. According to data provided by Methodist lay preacher Eparama Naivolasisiga, himself a Fijian from Nadroga/Navosa Province who conducted research at the Lami settlements in Togovere, the Lamian way of life remained intact (Naivolasisiga, 1970).<sup>39</sup> Emosi remained the group's leader, issuing papers in print

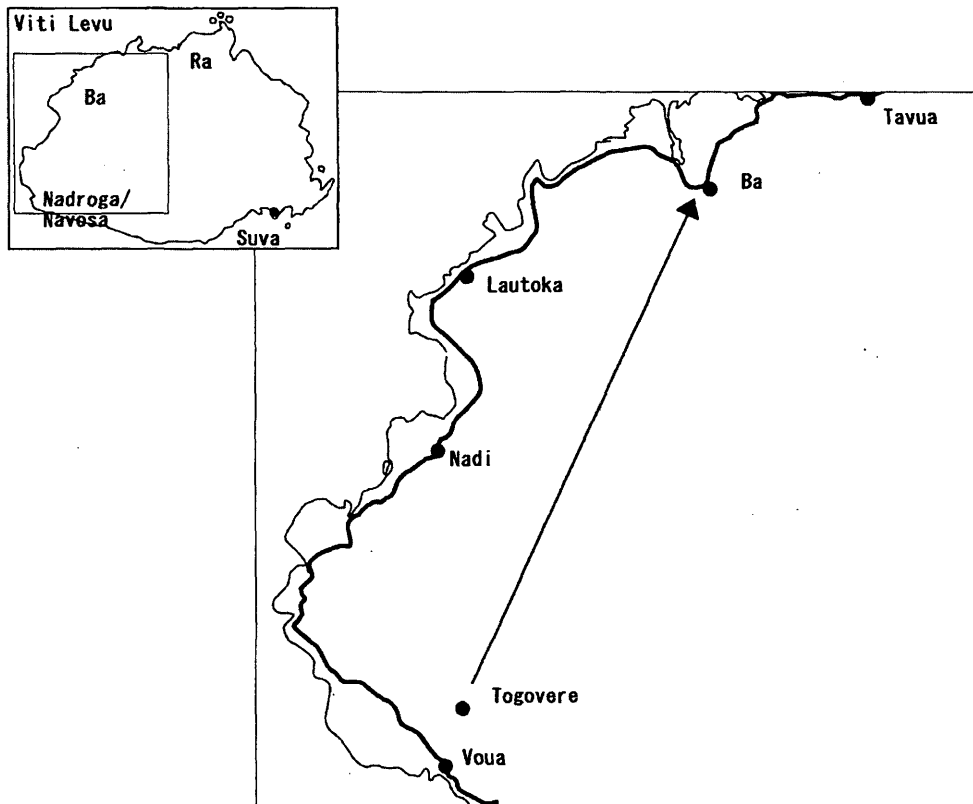


Figure 3. Map of Relocation to Ba

<sup>38</sup> For Buli, see note 7.

media on such topics as the development of interferon and its influence (VP, 23 August 1962: 11) and the significance of insurance companies (VP, 5 April 1963: 2). Again, as we will see below, there was no change in the activities based on *loloma*.

Although the store at Nadi was closed (cf. VP, 29 November 1962), the Lami still engaged in market activities. It established a credit loan business at the market of Ba town on 2 March 1963 and afterward lent money at an interest rate of four pence per shilling every Monday and Thursday. According to Emosi Sove, the purpose of these loans was to provide mutual assistance so that credit was available to anyone who needed it and guaranteed by the District Officer in charge of Ba/Tavua, a member of the Lami (VP, 8 March 1963: 8).

This credit business was unique in a number of ways. Loans could be repaid not only in cash but also by shopping at the Lami's stall in Ba town. The Lami did not always charge interest, and they did not bring matters of non-payment to the court, relying rather on the religious conscience of each person, *nona dina ki nona lotu*. On the grounds that everyone should have *loloma* toward every human being without discriminating, anyone in need could borrow money whether Fijian, Indian, or Rotuman (VP, 8 March 1963: 8).<sup>40</sup>

The Lami's business grew so much that it opened another market at Lautoka on 22 March 1963. The market stayed open every Thursday for a certain time afterwards. At the same time, however, the market at Ba town was open only on Mondays, and the credit loan interest rate went up to six pence per shilling (VP, 22 March 1963: 11).<sup>41</sup>

While maintaining the activities mentioned above, the Lami began to gather from their scattered residences in Ba town. Around 1964, they moved to rented houses at Yalalevu across the Ba river (Naivolasisiga, 1970; cf. Young, 1992). As the Lami stayed out of trouble and calm was restored to their lives, their numbers increased to more than 200.<sup>42</sup> They continued their brokering business even to the extent that they managed the Bula Tale General Merchandise store on the road to Ba town with the help of Burns Philp. This store dealt in daily necessities such as rice, tin fish, sugar, and soap (Young, 1992: 98). Until 1983 the Lami was able to manage 14 stores at six marketplaces in western Viti Levu.<sup>43</sup> Each vendor was supposed to bring receipts to

<sup>39</sup> Yet, according to the several members of the Lami, the Lamian way of life became generally loose after moving to Ba Province.

<sup>40</sup> Rotuman are a Polynesian people who are an ethnic minority in Fiji.

<sup>41</sup> This description of the credit business is based on contemporary writings by Emosi and may therefore glorify the activities somewhat. As the success or failure of this credit business had made vivid impressions on the Lami and former Lami I interviewed, they brought up the topic frequently. Some testified that they collected credit showing the very products they confiscated.

<sup>42</sup> Young estimated that there were more than 271 members (Young, 1992: 90), though Durutalo estimated 217 (Durutalo, 1985: 410).

<sup>43</sup> The exact numbers of stalls in each market are as follows: 3 stalls at Ba, 3 at Lautoka, 4 at Nadi, 1 at Sigatoka, and 1 at Rakiraki (Young, 1992: 93).

the group's headquarters every weekend in order to settle accounts (Young, 1992: 93). Thus the group maintained its communal way of life by controlling the income of each member and taking charge of all accounts (Young, 1992: 98).

Until the 1980s or so the group's main sources of income other than brokering was having its men cut sugarcane<sup>44</sup> and its women do needlework (Young, 1992: 93–94). The former drew no fewer than 400 workers from Nadroga Province with a contract to cut a total of 80,000 tons of sugarcane in 1982. This business enabled them to ask for advance wages, which they then invested in equipment (Young, 1992: 97). Ultimately, the Lami had nine three-ton trucks, one big truck for sugarcane and one small truck (Young, 1992: 99).

The Lamian way of life was still in place. The Lami avoided traditional customs such as weddings and funerals, and they prohibited kava, tea, coffee and alcohol. They had meals together. They liked to play music, and reportedly they were highly praised for their diligence by surrounding societies (Young, 1992: 95). They did not register births of their children<sup>45</sup> and did not even file their marriage notices. Children of the Lami were educated within their own community instead of receiving formal education in school (Young, 1992: 100).

In short, Lamian life changed little, and the group seemed to abstain from high profile activities. Emosi stopped issuing his opinion papers in *Vakalelewa ni Pasifika*. The Lami appears only rarely in print media from this period. Research by Durutalo and Young, who conducted fieldwork and interviews in Togovere and Lami settlements in 1985 and 1983 respectively, confirms these facts (Durutalo, 1985; Young, 1992).

### 6.3 The Later Period: Building the Lami Settlement (Late 1980s to 1990s)

After a period of absence from public attention, the Lami attracted it again in the latter half of the 1980s. As we can see below, the group was still treated as an oddity by Fijian society. At the Ba Town Council elections in April of 1986, the newly established FLP (Fiji Labour Party) won the seat of Yalalevu election district, which the Alliance Party had originally occupied, because the FLP successfully gained the support of the Indian constituency in this district. The Alliance Party ascribed its defeat to the lack of cooperation of Lami members who resided here.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Most members and former Lami members agreed that they began work as sugarcane cutters much earlier, sometime soon after they moved to Ba Province.

<sup>45</sup> Unless a child's birth is registered, he or she will not be registered in *iVola ni Kawa Bula*, a family registration system in which Fijians are registered by *yavusa*, *mataqali*, and *tokatoka*. A person must appear in this document to be eligible for certain vested rights and privileges, such as native land rights. Many younger members of the Lami, especially those born in Ba Province, were not registered.

<sup>46</sup> In media coverage, it was written as "Lami," but Howard called the group "Dra ni Lami" (Howard, 1991: 183). During my research, there were many occasions on which people used the latter term.

According to the Alliance Party, it had guaranteed a \$20,000 loan for the Lami through New Zealand Bank three years before the election, \$11,000 of which had not been repaid. Moreover, despite this financial support, the Lami allegedly did not cast their 93 votes for the Alliance Party. The Alliance Party saw the Lami as betrayers for this reason (FT, 21 April 1986: 2; Howard, 1991: 182–183). For their part, the Lami acknowledged the \$20,000 loan but denied being in so far arrears on repayment. According to a Lami spokesperson, the unpaid amount was closer to \$3,000 or \$4,000 than \$11,000. As for the votes, he said there was no way to know who voted for which party, though he personally thought most Lami members had voted for the Alliance (FT, 25 April 1986: 9). Whether the Lami voted Alliance or not is not the issue.<sup>47</sup> What is remarkable is that the group was still seen as an oddity in Fijian society 20 years after they left their home villages.

After this event, the Lami bought 76 acres<sup>48</sup> near Ba town and began to build another settlement in no later than 1992.<sup>49</sup> I will refer to this as the Lami settlement. The reason for this move was that the group could not afford the high rent in town. They numbered 300 members at this point. Although Emosi continued to lead the group, there was also a committee of four councillors. Their cohesiveness seemed unchanged: all Lami members came together for a meeting every Sunday; children were educated within the community; and the entire membership had a meal together as before. They embraced non-violence and even prohibited competitive sports (FT, 5 March 1996: 15; cf. Robertson, 1998: 116).

They still worked hard at their brokering and marketing businesses, maintaining stalls at marketplaces such as Nadi, Ba, Tavua, and Rakiraki. In Ba town, they managed a restaurant. Every member was supposed to hold a job; for example, male members cut sugarcane in rural areas. Female members sewed diligently. All gave their earnings to a commission of the Lami (FT, 5 March 1996: 15).

At the same time, they did not forget *loloma*. They formed the Cagimaira Development Association<sup>50</sup> to support development in rural areas. Specifically, this association aimed to

<sup>47</sup> Young argued that the Lami first supported the Indian-dominated National Federation Party, then backed the Alliance Party, to which Apisai Tora belonged, in the 1982 general election. For the 1987 general election they redirected their loyalties again, this time to the Fiji Labour Party (Young, 1992: 102). As I have said, however, it is very difficult to know exactly which party the group's members supported.

<sup>48</sup> The spokesman of the Lami told me 75 acres.

<sup>49</sup> As they may have built the settlement gradually and are no relevant records, it is very difficult to identify the year. Kitione Tokula's tombstone at the settlement dates his death to 1992, and so we assume that some sort of community existed there by that year. This does not contradict testimonies from leading members of the Lami.

<sup>50</sup> Cagimaira means "western wind" in Fijian. This association has already broken up at the time of my research.

provide villagers in western Viti Levu from Ra to Ba to Nadroga/Navosa Province with financial support to set up small businesses and build and manage village stores. According to the Lami's accountant, 62 villages had already received aid from the association in some way or another (FT, 5 March 1996: 15).

As we have seen, the Lamian way of life and the commercial activities initiated during the period of the Bula Tale were still generally in place. According to a short article on the Lami of the day (FT, 5 March 1996: 15), however, the meaning of their lifestyle seemed to have changed somewhat. Though they still did not attend church, Emosi explained the Lamian way of life in religious terms: "We lead our life based on our elders' interpretation of the Bible" (FT, 5 March 1996: 15; cf. Robertson, 1998: 166). Even considering that this was said to the mass media, it seems to be a less radical statement than its predecessors, probably because of the group's bitter experience with Communism and the uproar it created.

## 7. Reconsidering the Origin of the Lami

In this paper I describe the history of the Lami from 1949 to the early 1990s. The group emphasized different goals at different times—cooperation, then politics, then *loloma*—as leadership passed from Emosi of Tabanivono Cooperative to Kitione to Ramatau and then to Emosi of the Lami. Accordingly, the group's population changed, along with pressures from neighboring communities. Broadly speaking, however, it was consistent in that it aimed to further the economic development of nearby villages through cooperative activities. It is consistent too in that its leading village was Togovere and most members were from Nadroga/Navosa Province. In sum, we can identify some emphatic changes in the group's principles and activities from period to period, but the Lamian way of life seems to have remained essentially unchanged after 1961. In this section, I would like use the data provided thus far to re-evaluate the two assumptions made by previous studies mentioned above. They touch upon (1) issues of land rights in participant villages, and (2) the relevance of the Lami to cargo cults.

### 7.1 Two Issues Concerning the Land

Here I would like to reconsider previous studies' assumption that the birth of Lami can be attributed to its villages' disadvantages in land ownership. As pointed out in section 4.2, all the Lami's participating villages except for Togovere and Kabisi have stable land rights like any ordinary Fijian village. Even marginal villages with only a few Lami members, such as Nabau, Semo, Nadroumai, and Vunatovau, have no problems with land rights.

Previous studies also argued that the Lami's founding villages were located on infertile

land. This is impossible to prove as there are no survey data indicating soil fertility levels in each village. Only the Togovere and Kabisi village headmen admitted that their land was barren when I inquired, however. The headman of Emuri explained not only that their land had average fertility levels but also that they could easily find other land suitable for gardening within their relatively vast estate. As for Vagadra, its land is actually famous among neighboring villages for its fertility. In sum, contrary to the assumptions of previous studies, only two of the Lami's core villages sit on unproductive land.

Now we would like to examine the remarks of Lami members regarding their group's purpose in each period. It is worth noting that few mention land rights. Though there was a suggestion to make use of land as a group in the Bula Tale period (section 4.3) and Ramatau remarked that Fijians did not make effective use of their land (section 5.2), the issue in both cases was framed only as one of efficiency. No Lami members mentioned further points such as ownership.

After leaving their home villages and relocating to Ba Province, some members, especially younger ones, did not have land rights in their home villages because they were not registered in the *iVola ni Kawa Bula* (section 6.2). Even so, there were no complaints about land rights. In other words, these two assumptions made by previous studies about reasons for the Lami's founding are grounded neither in objective fact nor in the perceptions of Lami members themselves.

As above, we cannot directly relate these villages' economic conditions with the origin of the Lami, as Durutalo and Young tended to do. Of course, we cannot deny the possibility that Togovere's situation, with sterile land and no native land rights, had something to do with establishing the Lami and its guiding principle of hard work. Togovere has in fact been the birthplace of all the Lami's leaders except Ramatau. However, previous studies have overgeneralized from the example of Togovere without giving due consideration to other villages with sizable numbers of Lami members. This lack of attention may result partly from the fact that the main field site of both researchers was Togovere.

## **7.2 The Relation between the Lami and Cargo Cults**

I would also like to shed some light on previous studies' assumptions of a relationship between the Lami and cargo cults. "Cargo cult" is a name for certain social movements that occurred under the colonial situation of South Pacific. This term is said to have first appeared in *Pacific Islands Monthly* in October of 1945; soon thereafter it became established as a technical term in the social sciences, especially in anthropology, through the works of Burridge (1995), Lawrence (1964), and Worsley (1968) (cf. Lindstrom, 1993).

There has been much written about such social movements since the 1980s, mostly interpreting them in the historical context of colonization, in terms of the cultural logic of Oceanic societies, or both (cf. Lindstrom, 1993; Kaplan, 1995). Because of these deconstructive studies of cargo cults, their meaning has become obscure. In general, however, they can be described as “millenarian movements of Melanesia, which centre on a belief that specified ritual manipulations and observances will soon bring to the people involved material rewards, notably manufactured goods, and a better, more emancipated life” (cf. Sillitoe, 2004: 88–90).

Viewing the development of the Lami with this definition in mind, we can see that the Lami and cargo cults overlap in some respects: both were led by a charismatic leader, at least early on and both engaged in commercial activities, though not necessarily to seek the wealth of western societies. But there the similarities end. There is no millenarianistic theme among the Lami, aside from occasional justifications of their activities in religious terms. Rather, their activities were secular in that they took on realistic tasks such as reducing customary obligations and encouraging diligence. To make a long story short, the Lami’s activities lie beyond the scope of the conventional definition of a cargo cult.

Moreover, previous studies’ tacit assumptions of connections between the Lami and Viti Kabani are based on ambiguous evidence. Durutalo’s rationale for associating the two movements was based on their antiestablishment characteristics. He did not in fact point out any way in which Viti Kabani directly influenced the Lami. He mentioned only the kinship between the leader of the Bula Tale Communist Party, Ramatau, and the unionist, self-proclaimed successor of Apolosi Ranawai, Apisai Tora (cf. Lal, 1992: 190). As is evident from my description of the Lami in sections 5 and 6, Ramatau was only a temporary leader, and his Communism-influenced activities were an ephemeral phenomenon in the overall development of the Lami.

Mayer and Mamak associated the Lami with Viti Kabani based on evidence from contemporary newspapers (e.g. Mayer, 1963: 100; Mamak, 1978). As detailed above, there are no substantial discourses or activities to suggest such an association. These researchers’ conclusions seemed to derive more from their interpretations of comparative analyses of two movements than from historical evidence. As for Howard, he related the movements on the basis of the geographical proximity and performed no more concrete investigation into the matter (Howard, 1991: 88).

I would also like to examine the validity of previous studies on oral histories. There is a document recording oral testimony to the effect that the leader of Tabanivono Cooperative, Emosi, took part in the Viti Kabani movement (Naivolaisiga, 1970: 182–183), and I heard the same kind of statement from current and former Lami and Togovere villagers during my interviews. As we saw in previous pages, Tabanivono Cooperative was only a forerunner to the Lami; it did not



practice the Lamian way of life to which most previous studies on the Lami paid attention. The person who initiated the Lamian way of life, though it was in the period of Dra ni Lami or Bula Tale, was the son of Emosi, Kitone Tokula. He did not join the Viti Kabani movement.<sup>51</sup>

Kabisi villagers, in fact, moved to their present site because of their participation in Viti Kabani. According to them and their village headman, this historical episode has nothing to do with the origin and activities of the Lami movement. Likewise, according to the elders of Vagadra, a portion of Vagadra villagers took part in Apolosi's movement, but this fact had no relation to the activities of the Lami. To support this line of argument, leading Lami members' testimonies regarding the origins of their group mention nothing about the Viti Kabani movement. There exists only a newspaper article from 1961 describing similarities between the Lami and the Daku movement, a village-based development project in Tailevu Province (VP, 7 September 1961: 7). The idea of their way of life is believed by Lami members to have come to Kitone in a dream (cf. Young, 1992: 86).

As a matter of course, deliberate consideration has to be given to the validity of these oral testimonies. However, the fact that many villages with large numbers of Lami members frankly admitted their past participation in Viti Kabani suggests that they feel no need to conceal their relationships with either movement. In other words, if the two had been connected, they would have had no reason to deny it.

In sum, it is possible that the supposed relationship between the Lami and the Viti Kabani was assumed by outsiders rather than proven by historical evidence (e.g. Mayer, 1963; Mamak, 1978; Kasuga, 2001). There is no denying the possibility of Viti Kabani's indirect influence on the Lami, but there seems to have been no direct relationship between the two movements.

## 8. Conclusion

### 8.1 Parallels with Colonial Policy

To review, it has become clear that previous studies failed to see the big picture of the Lami's development. They focused mostly on possible causes of the group's establishment. They defined the Lami narrowly as a Communist group owing to its members' poverty, or they saw it as something like a cargo cult for its anti-establishment tendencies, partly because these interpretations were easy to understand. We should bear in mind, however, the changes in the group's name and activities over more than 40 years of existence.

I would now like to shed some light on the other neglected aspect of the Lami by examining

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<sup>51</sup> Most of the Lami, including the spokesman, denied any relationship between the Viti Kabani and the Lami. Some, however, say otherwise (Kasuga, 2001: 339–340).

it in each of its manifestations: Tabanivono Cooperative, Bula Tale, Bula Tale Communist Party, and subsequent years. To state my conclusion first, viewing the Lami in this way will illustrate how the Lami coped with situations flexibly.

First, I would like to look at the Tabanivono Cooperative, the earliest stage of the Lami movement. This group was established soon after rules for cooperative societies were formulated in 1949. The government aimed to facilitate the development of new cooperative movements suited to Fijian society by supervising the formation and maintenance of official and unofficial cooperative societies. It also provided opportunities for Fijians to learn about economics and modern business methods, creating human resources capable of managing cooperative societies (Nand, 1969: 41). The Tabanivono Cooperative established in this period.

As for the Bula Tale, its unique way of life with its goal of reducing ritual obligations at occasions such as weddings and funerals began around 1961. The colonial government recognized the urgent need to develop Fijian society in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and its newly formed commissions published the Spate report in 1959 and the Burns report in 1960. Interestingly, these reports recommended among other things that Fijians move away from “communal” traditional culture (Spate, 1959; Burns, 1960; Lal, 1992: 182–186). The contents of both reports were widely publicized via various contemporary media. To put it simply, these reports aligned with the Lami’s aims in that they suggested reducing traditional ritual obligations.

The Bula Tale Communist Party also synchronized somewhat with the government of the day. The Bula Tale Communist Party was established in 1961, just when local political concerns were mounting in anticipation of the 1963 legislative council elections. Despite the upheaval, no one political party was able to draw support from the whole Fijian community, and a variety of parties grew up all over Fiji (Lal, 1992: 188). Aside from its rhetoric of Communism, the Bula Tale was one of these.

After the period of the Bula Tale Communist Party, especially after their relocation to Ba Province, the Lami began to adopt *loloma* as their slogan, though many aspects of the old Lamian way of life survived. Lami members avoided publicizing their activities and instead emphasized the idea of *loloma*, which was palatable to Fijians, probably because of their bitter experiences in the uproar surrounding the Bula Tale Communist Party. We may say that they detached themselves from the currents of the time rather than accommodating them, a change from their predecessors’ attitudes up until the period of the Bula Tale Communist Party.

To sum up, what comes clear when we pay attention to the development of the Lami instead of its way of life is its receptiveness to the government policy of the day. Previous studies tended to miss this aspect of the group, partly because they focused unduly on the Lami’s anti-establishment attitudes. The parallels between the Lami’s vicissitudes and government policies in

the first to the third periods may be more than coincidence. The Lami coped with the changes of its times: it began its activities as a cooperative, it accepted the recommendations of government reports, and it participated in party politics.

## **8.2 Meaning of the Lami Movement**

The Lami was not just receptive to the changes of its time; it also had a radical aspect that went beyond government policy. Though the colonial government sincerely tried to protect Fijians, the result of its policies was to hinder them from acquiring enough experience and skill to enter the commercial sector. Consequently, Fijians remained mainly in the subsistence sector even in the late 1960s. This was unique among the various ethnic communities in Fiji. Most Indians, descendants of contract laborers, attained firm positions as sugarcane farmers and even embarked on commercial ventures, such as retail, that became competitive with European vendors. In stark contrast, Fijians inhabited an underdeveloped sector of the colony.

What is remarkable about the Lami can be understood in this context. As explained in section 4, the Lamian way of life mirrors the recommendations of the Spate and Burns reports in its goal of reducing ritual burdens for Fijians. Such recommendations were seen in some parts of Fijian society as threats to their traditions. Ratu Mara, who began to distinguish himself as a statesman on behalf of the Fijian community in the 1960s, reportedly dubbed the Burns report “a report about the Fijian people, written by Europeans for the benefit of Indo-Fijians” (Lal, 1992: 186; cf. Mara, 1997: 56–57).

Under these circumstances, the Lami tried drastically to reduce Fijian traditional obligations in its search for a better life. This aspect of the Lami movement is one reason the group was regarded as unique in Fiji. Yet their methods were not seen as entirely un-Fijian because they sought not the individualism associated with Europeans and Indians but rather a communal existence. Though successive leaders of the Lami were neither elite nor well educated by any account, they tried hard to change their society for the better, making use of the limited resources near at hand in their own ways.

Thus the multiple meanings of the Lami movement become clear to us. In its economic aspect, the group appropriated new frameworks such as cooperatives and renovated them for their own purposes. In religious terms, the Lami was motivated in part by religion but chose to maintain moderate attitudes toward religious obligations in order to avoid lowering their standard of living. To sum up, the Lami movement was another Fijian attempt to create a space for innovation, depending neither entirely on tradition nor exclusively on western modernity.

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