

DISSERTATION DEFENSE

Interrogating the Vanua and the Institutional Trusteeship Role of the iTaukei Land Trust Board (TLTB): Understanding the Economic Marginalization of iTaukei

By

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Fiji is often perceived as an exceptional case in critical colonial discourses. That is, despite ninety-six years of British colonial rule, indigenous rights to land was protected in the hands of its indigenous peoples, the *iTaukeis*, in addition to the preservation of its socio-political structure. The dissertation contends however that the very institutions that define *iTaukei* indigeneity have created land dispossession and disempowerment. The study examines the question: Why is it that the vast-majority of *iTaukei* landowners are perpetually economically marginalized despite owning almost ninety percent of the land in Fiji? This question is important because Fiji is an agricultural economy and therefore land is the single most important asset in economic production. Yet the owners of this important asset, the *iTaukeis* are marginalized from its productive use. Drawing from a wide variety of primary, secondary and archival sources the study makes the contention that the socio-political structure of *iTaukei* society articulated under the *Vanua*, and the institutional arrangement that regulates the rights of access to *iTaukei* land under the trusteeship role of the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board (TLTB), were colonial projects of exclusion, political oppression, 'invisibilization' and land dispossession. Such structures were established under the British colonial government to secure the availability of *iTaukei* land to non-*iTaukei* and corporations for economic development. *iTaukes* on the other hand, were placed on Native Reserves and restricted to subsistent agriculture. The dissertation further argues that the economic and political empowerment of *iTaukei* landowners both present and future hinges on institutional reforms in the trusteeship role of the TLTB. This should include the nurturing of entrepreneurship of *iTaukei* landowners to become active participants in Fiji's agricultural economy, as oppose to subsistent agriculturalists, and putting in place the necessary measures to ensure the accountability of the TLTB in the administration of *iTaukei* land.

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