

*“We used to
eat people”*



**Revelations
of a Fiji Islands
Traditional Village**

R. M. W. DIXON

Living in a reed hut on Taveuni—the “garden isle” of Fiji—the author studied the native language and carefully observed their traditions until he was accepted as a (somewhat unusual) member of the village.

Despite five cyclones the summer of 1985, daily life was idyllic. Cannibalism has been abandoned, reluctantly, at the behest of the new Christian God. But the old religion survived beneath the facade and priests danced naked on the beach beneath the full moon. The village pulsed with factions and feuds, resolved by the stern but benevolent chief, whose word was law. Legends told of a princess born as a bird, who was killed and thus became a comely maiden—but the murderer had to be cooked and eaten.

R. M. W. DIXON is an anthropological linguist at James Cook University in Cairns, Australia. He has authored many books on linguistic theory, and grammars based on fieldwork in the Amazonian jungle, in the rainforest of north-east Australia and in Fiji.

Front cover: Tui Nasau, literally “King of Nasau,” or village chief;
background pattern by Joachim Angelton (iStock)



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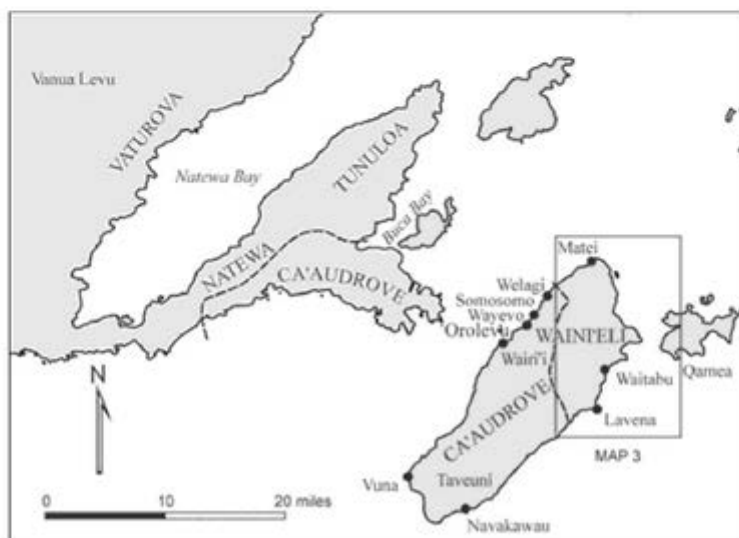
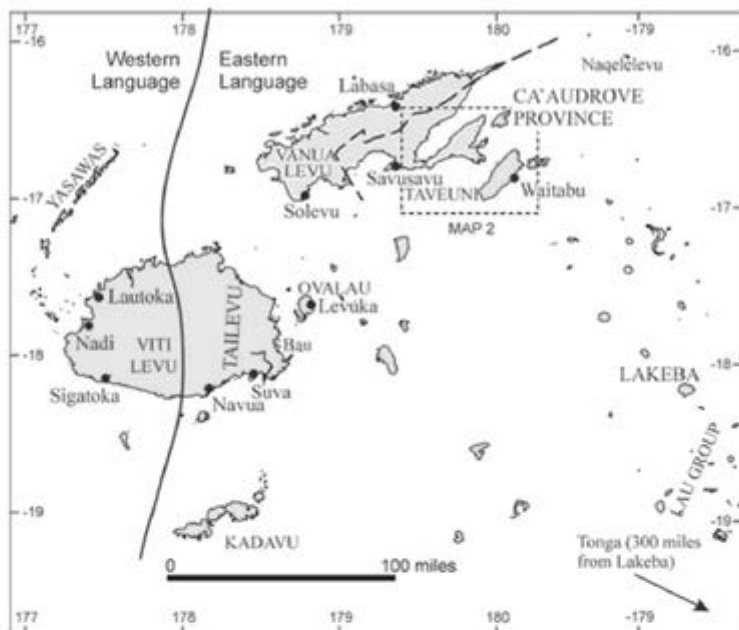
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Maps





Map 3. Northeast part of Taveuni, showing places mentioned in the legend of the Prince of Boumaa and the Princess of Waini'eli ("Do you want to live or do you want to die?").

Opposite, top: Map 1. Fiji Islands. There are about a hundred inhabited islands.
Bottom: Map 2. Southeast Vanua Levu and Taveuni.



Map 4. The West Pacific, showing the location of the Fiji Islands (courtesy Bai Junwei).

Author's Note

This account of my six-month sojourn in a monolingual Fijian village in 1985 was written, in pencil, in three notebooks, between October 30 and December 18, 1988. It was keyboarded by Angela Lansdown between January and June 2016, and then revised by the author. Apart from the pseudonyms Charlotte Ferreiro (Koleta), Qito, and Father Hendricks, everyone is referred to by their real name. My name Robert became Roopate in Fijian.