so angry with the Promised Messiah ... they should be more angry with, let’s say, Sai Baba — he calls himself God”. Conversely, however, there is criticism by AMJ/Fiji of mainstream Islam in Fiji, especially in reference to what it sees as “so many innovations; for example, when someone dies, they do so many rituals” (Munshi 2003, interview by author).

Muslims from mainstream Islam in Fiji put considerable social pressure on Qadiani Ahmadis: in cases of conversion to AMJ/Fiji, converts are likely to be cut off from their relatives, and there will be attempts to re-convert them. Converts from indigenous Fijian communities are likewise forced to re-join their traditional society, performing customary ritual practices involving pigs and other elements that are anathema to Ahmadis. According to the Qadiani Ahmadis, there is a ‘kind of persecution’ which is based on a stigmatizing vicious circle: Muslims accuse Ahmadis of not being ‘real’ Muslims because they do not perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, but Ahmadis are not permitted to perform the pilgrimage because they are not regarded as ‘real’ Muslims.

The relationship of AMJ/Fiji with other non-Muslim religions is very cordial, generally, and with Christianity specifically, since it is considered the “nearest religion to Islam” ... We should stay together on a common value, and the common value is belief in one God”. Nevertheless, there is concern expressed about the activities of some churches: while Qadiani Ahmadis “are not pressuring people to listen to us” [sic] — maybe “because the religion in this country is Christianity” — attempts to turn Fiji into a Christian state are regarded as “very unfortunate,” and parallels are drawn between Sunni Pakistan and a possibly Methodist Fiji that might treat non-Methodist churches in a way similar to Pakistan’s treatment of the Ahmadiyya (Cheema 2003, interview by author).

Along a different line, Christianity generally is criticized because of its diversity, and some church leaders are blamed for not having done enough to build bridges between Christians and Qadiani Ahmadis after the coup: “Christian churches don’t help the future of Fiji, because of their differences. ... All my Fijian brothers used to say ‘Salam Alaikum’ ... and ... when this thing happened, they were changed .... Still they respect us, but they are changed .... These churches can spread brotherhood, these churches can spread a lot of things in this society because they’ve got a real bold influence, especially in Fiji, but unfortunately, they are not helping in that. They failed ... they failed” (Cheema 2003, interview by author).

Aside from that, a special concern in Fiji is the ongoing emigration, which has interrupted the organization’s otherwise expected high growth rate.

As mentioned above, AMJ/Fiji holds a comparatively positive view of modern media, but some aspects are criticized as running contrary to the Qadiani emphasis on family values. Though it would not be possible to say that members were “not affected by these things, ... our relation system working in our community has been helping lots” (Cheema 2003, interview by author).

**Conclusion**

Although their apologetic fervour is somewhat softened, Qadiani Ahmadis have kept the old missionary zeal from their Qadiani tradition, and, in their understanding, every Christian should become a Muslim, and every Muslim should become an Ahmadi: “the approach of Christians to Islam is getting nearer and nearer” (Cheema 2003, interview by author). Likewise, Hindus are supposed to be open to AMJ/Fiji’s proclamation of the coming Messiah. So the future is seen as very bright by its representatives: there is much hope for
continuing missionary success, though it would be an exaggeration, indeed, to talk about a really significant increase in followers. The modest growth of the Qadiani community is cancelled out by a growing emigration of adherents from Fiji, and reports of widespread indigenous Fijian conversion, with whole villages turning to AMJ/Fiji, bring only exceptions to the general rule, which is that there is only a small growth in membership. In summary, alongside missionary proclamation there is another discourse expressed by AMJ/Fiji leaders, reflecting a reconciliatory attitude and expressing a future vision: “all we can do is to preach ... as a human being ... as a real Muslim we are not allowed to hate anybody. ... Differences of opinion should be discussed with manners ... thus differences never bothered [us]” (Cheema 2003, interview by author). So AMJ/Fiji has, in a way, adapted to the Fijian context, leaving behind the radical-apologetic pattern of action that can be observed in many other regions. As a worldwide religious group committed to its global mission, it is nevertheless aware of its responsibility in the Fijian context.

OTHERS

Bahá’í, Fiji

General Background and Development in Fiji

The Bahá’í faith is a very young world religion that originates from Shi’ite Islam. From its earliest beginnings it tried to emancipate itself from its Irano-Islamic origin, especially by its emphasis on the universalism that is reflected in all aspects of its faith. This aim has indeed been realized, although the conceptual basis of the tenets of Bahá’í faith is rooted in the 19th century religious history of Iran. The origin of Bahá’í is traced back to the work of Sayyid Ali Muhammad of Shiraz (1819-1850), called the Bab (‘gate’), who is said to have announced the coming of the Mahdi — the ‘rightly guided one’ commissioned to fulfill the work of the prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam. Furthermore, the Bab taught the unification of the monotheistic faiths in the Near East into one religion, and preached radical religious tolerance and pacifism. As his teachings were at variance with Shi’ite theology, he and a growing number of successors faced fierce persecution. Quarrels about leadership after the Bab’s death led to the rise of Mirza Hussayn Ali as successor. He declared himself the Mahdi announced by the Bab, and took on the name Bahá’u’lláh (‘Glory of God’). When he died in 1892 and his oldest son Abbas Effendi (1844-1921), called Abdul Bahá’ (‘servant of Bahá’), took over, the Bahá’í movement was finally transformed into a world religion, spreading to all continents. Since the death of the fourth leader, Shoghi Effendi (d. 1957), there has been a collective leadership.

In the Pacific Islands, Bahá’í started in the 1950s when it was brought by so-called Bahá’í ‘pioneers,’ though Bahá’ís had been living in Fiji since the 1920s (for sources for the time of the Bahá’í “pioneering” mission to Oceania, see Effendi 1997). In 1950, a first informal group of Bahá’í believers was formed, and in April 1953 the first local Spiritual Assembly was established in Suva (Bushell 1990:87; for more details see Williams 1989:64ff; Hassall 1992; Hassall and Barnes 2000). In 1959 a ‘Regional Spiritual Assembly’ was founded, and after independence it was transformed into various national assemblies. In the Pacific, there is one Bahá’í temple, in Western Samoa. Fiji was and is an important
centre of Bahá’í in the wider region, though not more so than other centres, which may have a higher number of members.

Basic Beliefs and Practices

Bahá’í faith rests on three basic principles, derived from Bahá’í’s Sacred Scriptures which are made up of the writings of Bahá’ulláh (in the Bahá’í view these contain the word of God for this age) and their interpretation in the writings of Bahá’ulláh’s successors: faith in the oneness of God, the oneness of mankind, and the oneness of religion. According to the Bahá’í’s, “these three principles will lead us to understand all that peace is all about” (Lagilagi 2003, interview by author), and every Bahá’í is working towards this end. More specifically, a major frame of reference is the basic principles written down by Abdul Bahá’: the oneness of mankind, the basic oneness of all religions, religion as the source of love, religion as being in accord with science and reason, truth, the equality of men and women, the fight against prejudice, universal peace, universal education, universal language, the spiritual solution to problems, the separation of religion and politics, and the equality of all people before the law.

The practical aspects of Bahá’í religious observance can be summarized as follows: “to pray and read the Holy Writings every day, to observe the Bahá’í feast from 2-21 March, to teach the cause of God, to contribute to the Bahá’í fund, to observe Bahá’í holy days and attend the 19 fast days, to consider work as worship, to avoid alcoholic drinks and the non-medical use of drugs, to respect and obey the government, and to avoid backbiting and gossip” (Ernst 1996:34, based on a self-description of Bahá’í faith).

Organizational Structure and Resources

Worldwide, Bahá’í is organized according to administrative principles derived from the writings of Bahá’ulláh and further developed by his successors. At the topmost level there is the World Centre in Haifa, Israel (see its website: http://www.bahai.org/); the nine members of the “Universal House of Justice,” the highest governing body, are elected by delegates from the National Spiritual Assemblies in each country. On the national level, the governing body of the National Spiritual Assembly (for an example see National Spiritual Assembly 1979) — also nine persons — is elected by delegates from local Bahá’í communities, which are similarly each governed by a Local Spiritual Assembly also governed by a council of nine persons. There are Local Spiritual Assemblies in Fiji. Elections are held every year, using a secret ballot. According to the basic doctrines of Bahá’í, women have equal rights and are eligible for any leadership position. There is a national youth wing that is overseen by the National Spiritual Assembly, but youth itself is not represented in any governing body as only persons 21 or older are eligible for leadership positions.

Financially, Bahá’í relies on contributions from its members. These contributions are obligatory for every officially registered member and expected during the 19 days of fasting (Qalilawa 2003, interview by author), but it is up to the individual how much to contribute. There is no financial support from overseas or from outside the Bahá’í community, apart from support at the very beginning for setting up the national chapter (Qalilawa 2003, interview by author), in accordance with the principle that “we don’t accept contributions from outside, only from believers” (Lagilagi 2003, interview by author). The finances are budgeted and accounted for, with the books being audited on a yearly basis. At present there are about 7000 members of Bahá’í in Fiji, most of them of Christian background,
with a slight majority of indigenous Fijian origin and some coming from the Hindu community (Lagilagi 2003; Qalilawa 2003, interviews by author).

There are no facilities for religious learning, apart from courses dealing with spiritual matters. Bahá’í makes use of modern media and would prefer to have even more time on radio and TV. Bahá’í tries to make sure that any special events and occasions are covered by the media. Crocombe's observation that "the only non-Christian promotions on radio and television are those of the Bahá’í faith" (2001:29) is no longer valid, however. Every group mentioned here has a presence in all modern media and makes use of modern IT technology without any restriction or reservation. In one aspect, however, Bahá’í is remarkable: from the very beginning of its mission to the South Pacific, it used all modern means for its 'evangelizing' efforts. It used such means, and still does, for reaching out to the indigenous populations in indigenous languages: for instance, on the website of the Bahá’í community of the Marshall Islands, everything apart from the welcome page is in the indigenous language (http://www.mh.bahai.org/main.cfm?doc=31&comm=18&lang=1&action=normal). Bahá’í is very well presented on the Internet, which is another proof of its openness towards modern media: there is an official website (http://www.bahai.org/), an Online Newsletter (http://www.onecountry.org/), a News Service (http://www.bahaiworldnews.com/), a Computer and Communication Association (http://www.bcca.org/), an Association for Bahá’í Studies (http://www.bahai-studies.ca/), and a general Bahá’í index that links to anything relevant to Bahá’í (http://www.bahaindex.com/). The Asia-Pacific Bahá’í Link Page is on http://members.ozemail.com.au/~curtotti/ap/ap.html.

**Activities**

The activities of Bahá’í in Fiji focus on education, spiritual development, and engagement for peace and conflict resolution. 'Change' is understood primarily in terms of "spiritual change": "as the future evolves, there are changes as well. These changes are mostly spiritual in nature. It has to do with the Bahá’ís' daily lives” (Lagilagi 2003, interview by author). For example, there is currently (March 2003) a four year plan for spiritual development based mainly on education at three levels: for children of primary school age, a junior youth programme, and a series of study circle courses in spiritualization. There are no specific outreach programmes, and Bahá’ís are not engaged in anything like evangelization projects involving public preaching and so on. If there is outreach it is confined to individual teaching of anyone interested in Bahá’ís message. Consequently, there has been only a modest, though steady and continuous, growth during the last few years and decades. This general tendency towards an individualistic approach is reflected, again, in Bahá’ís reluctance to participate openly in protests such as demonstrations for peace, or even to participate in political debate. Though its relationship to the state is not very close, “one of our principles is to be loyal to the government of the day” (Lagilagi 2003, interview by author), and consequently, as part of the national reconciliation process, Bahá’í/Fiji has sent a statement about reconciliation to the Ministry of Education, pointing out that "there are spiritual solutions to it” (Lagilagi 2003, interview by author). In spite of this restrained political stance, questions of religious freedom and human rights are concerns for Bahá’í (see Hassall 1997; 1998). Apart from this, Bahá’í/Fiji’s activities are concentrated on education programmes, with a focus on moral education. There are no specific blueprints or plans for social programmes, but the organization has become involved in some community
development projects in rural areas by linking up with initiatives of local populations and bolstering small self-supporting ventures (see also Bahá’í International Community 1980).

Challenges

The Bahá’ís of Fiji do not seem to face any specific challenges. They are not concerned about the possible impact of Christian new religious groups on their membership by means of an aggressive evangelistic approach. “That is going on everywhere,” and if individuals choose to leave the Bahá’í faith, it is considered to be their individual decision. Likewise, no conflict between Bahá’í and other religions has been observed: “no one has come to bother us”. Unlike the situation in some other countries, there are also no conflicts between Bahá’ís and Muslims: “we are very good friends with them” (Lagilagi 2003, interview by author), and events like the burning of the temples after the coup are regarded as being purely political and nothing to do with religion.

The general reaction of Bahá’í to the question of changes in society during recent decades has been: “it has got worse!” In response to questions about the future, however, the problem of change is put into a religious perspective: “everything is part and parcel of God’s plan, and whatever is happening now, there is a reason, in order for humanity to know … to acquire … virtues. … We will have peace, but that will have to go through a process — a long term process”. It is held that the future will be very bright — “not just for the Bahá’í — we see a good future for Fiji as a whole” (Lagilagi 2003, interview by author).

Conclusion

If the information gathered during field research is correct, the Bahá’í community is the only non-Christian religion having an impact on the indigenous sector of Fiji, even attracting more indigenous Fijians than Indo-Fijians. Perhaps this is due to the peculiar trans-ethnic and unitarian orientation of Bahá’í, which has been, historically, not clearly linked to any specific ethnic group, and its universal, ‘global’ outlook may also have contributed to this acceptance.

As a religion focusing its message on peace and unity, Bahá’í is unlikely to have a totally de-politicizing effect, generally speaking, but the policy of avoiding involvement in national politics has been especially emphasized in Fiji. With its focus on spirituality, Bahá’í has some similarities with the Sathya Sai Baba movement. It is not ‘stigmatized’ with a specific religious background, however, having successfully transformed its Irano-Islamic background into a modern, transcultural world religion — unlike Sathya Sai Baba with its Hindu origin. This gives Bahá’í in Fiji a special position, though it has not resulted in a remarkable increase in membership, a situation that will probably not change significantly in the near future.

Preliminary Conclusion

The following remarks are no more than a preliminary reflection on my findings, starting from the question of whether there have been any developments in the non-Christian religions of Fiji that resemble developments in Fijian Christianity, and briefly deliberating on some of the specifics of these religions in the Fijian context. We have first to face the fact
that there is a lack of research into non-Christian religions in Fiji and the South Pacific, and even in introductory standard publications, non-Christian religions (apart from ethnic religions) are hardly mentioned (cf. Swain and Trompf 1995). So perhaps the following reflections will just scratch the surface, being not deeply rooted in long-term research into non-Christian religion in Fiji. Nevertheless, this survey is based on enough material to justify some preliminary conclusions. Some aspects that seem to be of major significance for evaluating the situation will be highlighted.

Major Shifts in the Religious Landscape?

The question from which we started can be quite clearly answered: generally speaking, there have not been any developments in the non-Christian religions of Fiji that resemble developments in Fiji's Christianity. The observation that such developments have occurred has indeed been made by one author: “The Hare Krishna and Sai Baba organizations in Fiji are comparable to several of the Christian (and Muslim) missions there, especially the Assemblies of God, the Seventh-day Adventists, and the Mormons, in that they attend to people who are already Hindu, just as the radical Christian groups seek converts among people already Christian (and Muslims among Muslims)” (Kelly 1995:44). This claim, however, could not be substantiated. First of all, Hare Krishna and Sai Baba (and we may add Brahma Kumaris) are not ‘churches’ or ‘missions,’ but modern movements that are part of a broad spectrum of Hindu traditions; therefore, they are not considered by representatives of ‘mainstream’ Hinduism to be a challenge or threat but are seen as an enrichment. Furthermore, despite some proselytizing tendencies, they have not made major inroads into the mainstream Hindu population; there is no significant increase in membership that could be compared to the success of new religious groups in the Christian context. Finally, they do not hold positions that diverge much from mainstream Hinduism or that could be referred to as ‘fundamentalist.’ Hindu fundamentalism has not so far found its way to Fiji, and it would be quite surprising if it did in the future. The same is true of Islam, where the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat is the most vocal when it comes to announcing proselytising campaigns and missionary efforts. If we take a closer look, however, the alleged conversion successes are in quantity not in any way comparable to the accomplishments of the new religious groups in the Christian context. As to Islam generally, it has been observed that in recent decades it has spread both in Fiji and beyond (Crocombe 2001:648). However, this is not due to conversions in any significant number, but rather to reproduction and migration. In non-Christian religious communities, “there is no growth by conversion” — and if there is, it is “not out of conviction. It’s out of social circumstances” (Bhagwan 2003, interview by author). Generally speaking, we can observe that neither Islam nor Hinduism is making any significant impact on the indigenous Fijian population. If there is any trend that can be observed, it is “the slow but steady increase in the Christianization of previously Hindu (and to a lesser extent Moslem) Indians ... with spectacular increases in the non-mainstream churches” (Geraghty 1997:11). This increase is lacking in the Methodist, Catholic and Anglican Churches, which is due to the fact that the ‘Indo-Fijians’ attracted to these traditional mainline churches are primarily educated professionals who may be less susceptible to the aggressive evangelization of new Christian groups with their emphasis on healing — and also more open to the prospect of emigration (Geraghty 1997:21). But there are also signals pointing in a direction different from
emigration as a primary option. For example, both Hindus and Muslims are investing much money, time and energy in renovating temples and mosques or building new ones. It was said of the new Sanatam Dharm temple built in Nadi, “a great deal of effort was spent to make that into a real showpiece. This was like a statement: ‘we Hindus are here!’”. Another interesting aspect is the recently growing number of new schools run by Indo-Fijians. In particular, “the Muslims have been rejoicing in the fact that their schools are attracting lots of Fijian children” (Mackenzie 2003b, interview by author).

**Religion and Politics: The Coup and its Aftermath**

If there was one event that promoted higher religious awareness among non-Christians, it was the 1987 coup and its aftermath (see Lal 1990): “the winds of change can be pinpointed to that” (Jalal 2003, interview by author). But while the view has been expressed that after the coup “restrictions on Sunday activities put many Indians at a disadvantage” (Crocombe 2001:499), it can likewise be observed that these restrictions had a positive impact on the re-configuration of some non-Christian groups: they used Sundays for their religious gatherings since it was then not possible to pursue business activities and so on.

Interestingly enough, although the coup had a religious undertone, the ‘religious’ dimension has not been considered a prominent factor by academics. Most authors from an indigenous Fijian background lay more stress on ethnic factors, often pointing to a ‘legitimacy’ of ‘indigenous’ claims, while most authors from an Indo-Fijian background focus on socio-economic factors, often deriving their view from Marxist-influenced assumptions and pointing to a ‘legitimacy’ of ‘immigrant’ claims. Only a minority of authors, most of them having a ‘bridging status’, tried to take a view that does not immediately reflect ‘indigenous Fijian’ or ‘Indo-Fijian’ views (Crocombe 2001:457f., fn 4 — see there detailed information on the literature). Other observers, again, tended to focus on purely economic factors, not taking account of the ‘human factor’ (see for example Taylor 1987 in his review on the pre-coup economy).

The coup of 1987, however, cannot be properly understood without knowing its pre-history, which dates back to early colonial times. We cannot go into details about this, and the major lines of development are very well covered by a large body of academic literature relevant to the subject: the system of indenture and the patronizing politics of the colonial masters created a situation in which from the very onset, for Indians, there was no option other than “to participate in the marketplace to survive” (Kaplan 1995:52). Over the years, ethnic categories became the most powerful demarcation lines in the rising multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society of Fiji: “the emergence of ethnicity with its discriminatory pattern of resource allocation has strengthened the colonially created propensity of native Fijians to see politics in ethnic terms” (Durutalo 1986: 52). This type of ethnicity referred to ethnic categories, not to ethnic groups, drawing the demarcation line between ‘indigenous Fijians’ and ‘Indo-Fijians’: “The line between ethnic categories and ethnic groups is arbitrary, but Indians in Fiji are for most purposes an ethnic category, since the Indian community is divided into smaller groups with which the individuals identify” (Naidu 1974:53). Hopes that with growing urbanization and modernization, social differentiation would set free integrative forces and increased inter-ethnic relations, bringing about restraints in racist or communalist tendencies (Mamak 1978), have not materialized. On the contrary, after independence the “politicisation of ethnicity” (Durutalo
1986) caused growing tensions, reaching a major climax in the events of 1987 and its aftermath, with religion becoming a national issue. The Sunday ban became “the most visible, the most obvious manifestation of racism and religious intolerance” (Jalal 2003, interview by author), and the burning of temples and mosques reflected “the negative consequences of an unhealthy relationship between church and state in recent years in Fiji” (Niukula 1997:53). But despite these encroachments by militant Christians, the non-Christians did not pay them back in their own coin. This may have been caused partly by fear, but it is also the positive result of a common history — the joint history of a “multi-racial but not integrated society” (Jalal 2003, interview by author). Nevertheless, 1987 became a watershed in Fiji’s religious history also: it accelerated processes that had already existed but now became more prolific: processes of reaction to (social) change in the context of modernization and globalization. Here, we are concerned only with reactions from the non-Christian religious communities, and our focus will be on the religious dimensions of these reactions.

**Reaction to (Social) Changes: Self-assertion, Religious Resurgence, Emigration**

**The Muslim Paradigm**

One thing should be clear from the very outset: there is no one reaction of Fiji Hindu, Muslims, or Baha’i to the profound changes that have taken place in Fiji and beyond during recent decades. The Baha’i and the two Ahmadi communities are a particular case, anyway. The lowest common denominator between all the non-Christian religions seems to be that “on the religious scene, over the years, the Indo-Fijians have kept a low profile” (Mackenzie 2003a, interview by author), and that there is “a tacit acknowledgement that the culture and religion (Christianity) of the indigenous Fijians should take precedence” (Mackenzie 2002:6). But there may be a major general difference between the reactions of Hindus and Muslims: “Hindus respond more favourably ... to modernization and the forces of change,” while “Muslims have become much more fundamentalist than Hindus have.” This happens mainly on a symbolic level: fifteen years ago, “you would not find a single woman in this country in hijab ... you see them everywhere now.” Likewise, Muslim families that formerly sent their children to ‘mainstream’ schools are “now making a conscious and determined effort to send their children to Muslim schools,” because mainstream schools are regarded as “too westernized” (Jalal 2003, interview by author; Bhagwan 2003, interview by author).

In recent years, Muslims have been told more and more often that Islam is not just a private matter but something that should be publicly and politically expressed. This tendency is also due to the global resurgence of Islam, which has affected the Muslim diaspora in Fiji as well: organizations from Arabia and the traditional heartlands of Islam are sending proselytizing teachers — proselytizing in the sense of seeking to make Muslims ‘true’ Muslims by ‘converting’ them to ‘true’ and ‘proper’ Islam in its Arab form. The case of the Sudanese teacher Abdul Majid who was expelled by the Fiji government in early 2003 illustrates this: “it is because of Majid that the Muslim girls at Suva Muslim schools no longer play sports and have to wear a veil. The veiling of girls at Muslim schools is a phenomenon of only the last ten years” (Jalal 2003, interview by author). This is not to say, however, that veiling is
a deliberate and designated policy of the Fiji Muslim League as the most important Islamic umbrella organization in Fiji. On the contrary, the League’s leadership is quite liberal and fully in compliance with the paradigms and principles of Fiji society, as has become evident in this survey. However, certain individuals and minor groups — small in numbers, but very vocal and influential — are pressing for a stronger Islamization of the Muslim communities — in accordance with the principles of a resurgent Islam in its more rigid Arabian-Islamic form, and this affects Fiji Muslim emigrant communities in New Zealand and Australia as well.

These developments in Fiji Islam are neither simply reactions to modernization processes nor simply a repercussion of globally resurgent Islam. They are not just a response to social change or a plain consequence of the coup of 1987 and its aftermath. Likewise, they do not simply emerge from the religious doctrines of Islam. It is the mixture that matters. Religion as well as “issues such as race, ethnicity, gender and democracy are inextricably intertwined and cannot be analysed in isolation from each other” (Jalal 2002:1). And it is the mixture that makes these developments different from those in the Hindu communities of Fiji.

The Hindu Paradigm

Compared to Muslims, “Hindus respond more favourably ... to modernization and the forces of change”. On the other hand, and especially in view of events since 1987, “what’s happening here has made them feel that they don’t belong here and that for them, this is just a stepping stone to another country”. Another aspect worth mentioning is that the global forces of Hinduism are absent in Fiji: “Hinduism does not operate as a global unified force,” at least not in this part of the world, and the Hindu fundamentalism that is so strong in India does not affect the Fiji Hindu diaspora (Jalal 2003, interview by author; Bhagwan 2003, interview by author). Furthermore, Hindus in Fiji have not — unlike the Muslims — asked for separate political representation by being allocated their own seats. So in a way Hindus reacted with a kind of apathy, more passively than the Muslims, and this reaction was not primarily mediated through religion. Nevertheless, an increase in religious commitment among Hindus has been observed (Kelly 1991; 1995), and this has been partly substantiated by information gathered during this survey. This increase in qualitative terms, however, is often balanced by the impact of emigration on the constituency of organized Hinduism, at least in numerical terms: that is, it may have effected greater individual piety and observance, but it has not brought about a significant impact on the institutional development of the Hindu organizations under consideration. Furthermore, the impact of secularization has also affected a broad spectrum of Hindu practices: for instance, many of the traditional religious events and festivals have shifted their significance (as in the shift from Holi to Diwali, see Kelly 1988) or even lost their religious meaning, as can be observed in the decline of the Ramlila, a traditional Hindu drama, to a mere commercial event (Pillai 1979), and have given way to purely ‘secular’ gatherings like sports tournaments.

Whether these developments are to be interpreted more in terms of Westernization or Fijianization or anything beyond that is still under discussion. Certain phenomena pointing towards a merger of cultural or religious elements of Fijian and Indian origin (Dass 2003, interview by author) — such as beliefs in pre-Christian deities, composite myths, mixed Hindu-Fijian rituals, etc. (Geraghty 1997:18) — should not be over-emphasized, however. The story of an elderly indigenous Fijian man who was buried according to Hindu rituals
— reported on the front page of *The Fiji Times* (15 March 2003) — points to the fact that this blending of cultural or religious traditions is a mere exception to the general rule. Even the search of Indo-Fijian emigrants for their roots “is proving fruitless because western culture has affected their Fiji culture” (Reuben 2002:15). Any effort to refer to primordial cultural or religious essentials is nothing but a construct, similar to Rabuka’s attempt to justify his coup by “invoking a romanticized vision of the past” (Linnekin 1990:172).

Another factor is brought into the complex politico-religious situation by the new Hindu groups, and this needs some consideration. Even though there are not many of them, these groups nevertheless reflect a certain spectrum of modern Hinduism, and introduce another dimension of plurality to the Hindus of Fiji. Both Sathya Sai Baba and the Hare Krishna movement, for example, represent specific forms of *bhakti* devotionalism, though their approaches to spiritual life differ quite significantly. While Hare Krishna (and the former Arya Samaj) have exclusive tendencies, Sathya Sai Baba (and the former Sanatan Dharm) are more inclusive, even ‘liberal.’ This is reflected by the fact that ISKCON/Fiji would like to categorize its members more specifically as adherents of Hare Krishna than of Hinduism, while SSB/Fiji prefers not to be referred to as a Hindu group but as a spiritual movement beyond all particular religions.

It has been observed that more recent Hindu groups like Sathya Sai Baba or the Hare Krishna movement (and we may add the Brahma Kumari) have “carefully insulated their religious practices and plans from political attachments and controversy” (Kelly 1995:64) — quite in contrast to the political engagement of the Arya Samaj, the Sanatan Dharm, or even the Ramakrishna Mission, which have “not been intimidated into political silence” (ibid.). An answer to the question of why this is the case has been given by pointing to “the transnationalism intrinsic to the projects and modes of practices of the newer Hindu missions” (Kelly 1995:65). According to this view, transnationalism has been combined with a de-politicized understanding of religion: even if there is still some apologetic energy among the new Hindu groups, “its political valence has reversed, from the grounding for political mobilization to a place of retreat from political imperatives,” and the spiritual offer those groups have to make is regarded as providing “ways to be real without being national, ways to find particular community while otherwise respecting, and requesting respect from, a world-embracing kinship of humanity” (Kelly 1995:66). A corresponding aspect is a general trend among new religious groups towards “withdrawing from society: everybody minds his own business” (Reuben 2003a, interview by author). This tendency should not be over-estimated, however: today most mainstream Hindus are less outspoken in political matters than in colonial times, but many representatives of the new Hindu groups are not as “de-politicized” as they seem to be at first glance. But the tendency exists, pointing towards a more restrained involvement in national politics, and perhaps silent glances at the option of emigration.

**Divergence in Responses**

As we look at the responses of non-Christian religious communities in post-coup Fiji to the impact of social, economic, and political change in the context of globalization and modernization, we see a certain variety of reactions, depending on the position of these communities in the religious landscape of Fiji.

The Bahá’í and both Ahmadiyya groups are in a way a special case: the Bahá’í have the most clearly inter-ethnic constituency — a peculiarity that may partly reflect their emphasis
on a unity that goes beyond all differentiation whatsoever. Whereas the Sathya Sai Baba, which in a similar way emphasizes the trans-religious dimensions of spirituality but comes from a Hindu background, has not made any impact on indigenous Fijians, the Bahá'í, who transcended their Irano-Islamic origin decades ago, have. So Bahá'í religion is in a way more distanced from the playground of national politics than Sathya Sai Baba, although both of them would prefer not to be involved at all in political affairs. At the other extreme of the spectrum, the Ahmadiyya Lahore group, though very vocal, has not made any impact beyond its own very small constituency, and in sociological terms it may even be considered as a kind of ‘ethnic’ religion (if this category were not too misleading for a group that is characterized by its intellectual contribution to the religious landscape of Fiji). The Ahmadiyya Qadiani, however, have had at least some small success in their evangelistic efforts among indigenous Fijians. One wonders, however, whether this success is in fact numerically and qualitatively very significant: bearing in mind the Ahmadies’ propagandist enthusiasm on the one hand, and the apologetic concern of some Christian church leaders on the other, we may get a more realistic picture of the impact of conversion to Ahmadiyya. In terms of quantity, all these developments are more or less negligible.

Our survey has shown that the major reaction of the Hindu family in Fiji was a kind of resignation in the field of national politics, causing a drive towards emigration. Following the developments of the last ten to fifteen years, which were perceived by many Indians as threatening, Hindus have become more ‘inward’ — both politically (primarily the more liberal ones), and religiously (especially the more conservative ones).

Things are different with the Muslim family in Fiji (apart from the Ahmadiyya groups). Perhaps Fiji Muslims have likewise become more ‘inward’ in some ways, and their direct involvement in national politics (for example, the demand for separate seats) may be not as outspoken today as it was ten years ago or before the coup. But the combination of factors mentioned above has brought about tendencies towards a kind of ‘resurgence,’ transforming this ‘inward’ orientation into a self-reassurance that is mediated symbolically through identity markers perceived as expressions of ‘true’ Islam. The most recent developments on a global level have fuelled this process, and events like the Gulf War made a significant impact on how small Muslim communities are feeling: “these are exactly the kind of things that create the resurgence in right wing Islam” (Jalal 2003, interview by author). In the specific Fijian context, however, one must not over-dramatize those developments that in some parts of the world take quite a dramatic direction. The leadership of Muslims in Fiji is acting very responsibly, carefully nudging the Fiji Muslims’ orientation towards an Islam that peacefully co-exists with other religions and actively contributes to the development of Fiji and the betterment of its society. There is room for optimism that in the future Fiji Muslims will be practising their own Fiji-contextualized Islam, as they have done before and do now. Nevertheless, there are certain tendencies that could cause some concern, and the case of Abdul Majid is symptomatic of these tendencies, which in the future may need closer attention from the leaders of the Fiji Muslims. It should be in their own interest not to have the initiative taken out of their hands by agents claiming to act on behalf of what they proclaim as ‘proper’ Islam.
‘Where the Rivers Meet:’ a Brief Glance at the Churches’ Responsibility

For most of the past fifteen years the leadership of the Methodist Church in Fiji has been closely linked with extremist Fijian nationalists. During this same period there have been numerous incidents of sacrilege against Hindus and desecration of temples, holy objects and books, and also the destruction of copies of the Qur’an on one occasion. Some of these things have been directly linked to Christian prayer groups. The Methodist Church has the declared aim to make Fiji a Christian State ... (Mackenzie 2002:5; on the role of the churches in the coup see Premdas 1995:106ff; on the role of religion in the multi-ethnic structure of Fiji see Premdas 1995a).

Notwithstanding very recent developments that may bring about changes in the relationship between the Methodist Church and the fundamentalist, Pentecostal, and evangelical-conservative new religious groups, this snapshot of the inter-religious situation in Fiji still gives quite an accurate picture of the situation today. Despite the laudable engagement of ‘Interfaith Search’ — an organization that was founded in reaction to the inter-religious tensions following the first coup of 1987 — and the reconciliation work done after the violent events of 2000 by the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education, and Development (ECREA), inter-religious dialogue has still not trickled down to the grassroots level of inter-religious encounter, and even among the religious leaders, support for this kind of engagement is quite ambivalent: “while the leadership of the Methodist Church declines to be involved, although it has never officially withdrawn its membership,” it “has not been possible to draw in to Interfaith Search the pentecostal groups,” and although “the current Chairperson belongs to the Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha, he does this without active support, and similarly, the largest Muslim organization, the Fiji Muslim League, gives no active support (Mackenzie 2002: 6f).

The reason why leaders of non-Christian religious organizations have reservations about being actively involved in Interfaith Search is not due to any kind of suspicion of its sincere engagement — the work of Interfaith Search is highly appreciated, as was made evident time and again during the interviews carried out for this survey by all the respondents, irrespective of their religious background. Rather, it is because of this outspoken engagement that many religious leaders are very anxious not to get involved too much in Interfaith Search’s activities. Ironically enough, this may have to do with the fact that Interfaith Search very vocally raises its voice in cases of inter-religious conflict: “When we have incidents of sacrilege, temple destruction, and so on, ... usually they are not the ones who are crying out. That’s why we as Interfaith Search tend to ... speak out on behalf of them” (Mackenzie 2003a, interview by author). For example, when in 1995 Interfaith Search submitted a comprehensive submission to the Fiji Constitution Review Commission, there was a decrease in participation at Interfaith Search meetings: evidently many members “were concerned and worried that we were getting too political”. This general trend among many of the non-Christian religious groups and organizations towards refraining from political engagement is likewise reflected in the area of social concerns: most non-Christian religions in Fiji address social problems through “spiritual education and moral exhortation — much as the churches do.” On a practical level, there are even projects and campaigns such as blood donation, community work, wheelchair donations, and so on — programmes that
are politically “harmless” — “but clearing streets of beggars is much more problematic” (Mackenzie 2003b, interview by author).

What then is the actual role of religion in this complex Fijian situation? The opinion has been expressed “that there is racial conflict because of the religious differences ... which are one of the root causes of the conflict” (Rigamoto 2003, interview by author). On the other hand, however, it was observed that even with the religious undertones of the first coup and its aftermath, “there is a disparity between word and doing ... a lot of that is hot air, Fijian hot air about Christianity” (Jalal 2003, interview by author). Perhaps the truth does not lie between these differing observations, but comprehends both perspectives: in a multi-faceted conflict situation, religion cannot easily be separated from other — cultural, ethnic, social, for example — dimensions. Furthermore, it cannot be ‘explained away’ by simply characterizing the religious dimension as derivative from social or economic conditions.

There is still a tendency to put categories like ethnicity or ‘race’ very high on the agenda in analysing the complex conflict situation in Fiji (on the relationship between race and politics, see Norton 1990). Even the prize-winning videotape “Where the Rivers Meet” (1998), produced in Fiji as part of the World Council of Churches’ “Peace to the City” campaign, still makes reference to these categories. At the very heart of the conflict, however, lies a political power-struggle, not religious contention or ethnic strife. When it was revealed in 2003 that even some Indian businessmen seem to have been involved indirectly in the coup of 2000, it started to dawn on many Fijians that the whole issue is not so much about race or religion, but about greed and political power. In the political struggles going on in Fiji since independence, religion has been just one facet in a multidimensional spectrum of contributing factors, but became a more salient feature after the coup of 1987 and in the context of global developments — just to mention two parameters causing its growing prominence. Enlightening people about this complex interrelationship between religion and politics, ethnicity, social development, may in the future become one of the most important assignments of church-related institutions like ECREA or Interfaith Search, as well as of human rights groups and similar initiatives, in fulfilment of their commission to promote justice, peace, and religious tolerance.

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