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ABSTRACT
This article looks into the valuation of time in Fiji with particular emphasis on ‘Fiji time’, an idiom typically employed in reference to unpunctuality or relaxing. The article discusses Fiji time through four exemplars in order to illustrate the degree to which Fiji time is compatible with labour-based valuations of time.

KEYWORDS
Time; clock time; leisure; value; Fiji

Introduction

When we write about time we generally tend to discuss one out of two things – the flow of time associated with history and change or the quantifiable time of clocks and working hours. The difference between the two goes beyond the scale of measurement – years vs. hours – to the way we conceive of time either as a ‘dimension’ or as a ‘resource’. This can be illustrated with the different ideas of value relating to the two times: accumulation and increment of value ‘over time’ vs. the quantification of value in units of abstract time. These two are obviously connected at root through ideas of memory and remembering, as illustrated by scholars as disparate as Nancy Munn (1986) and Keith Hart (1986). But as a rule there is a general-level consensus that an elaborated (conceptualized, systematized) understanding of ‘time’ in the resource sense has only emerged with the capitalist mode of production, in which labour-time becomes an alienated thing to be measured, bought and sold (Thompson 1967; cf. Wajcman [2015] 2016, 37–43).

This article focuses specifically on articulations of the time resource, but in a way that seeks to avoid assuming that it has a pre-established character. The ‘resource’ attitude to time is neither a developmental stage in a fixed series, nor can we assume it always comes with identical ideas about the worth of time. The first point has already been established by Johannes Fabian in Time and the Other (1983), wherein he criticizes anthropology for the way other societies get designated outside ‘our’ time (history, change) or behind it in an imagined sequence. But Fabian extends his criticism to studies of culturally specific ideas about time more generally: such studies, he argues, tend to produce ‘system-internal’ or ‘encapsulated’ time (Fabian 1983, 41). Scholarly depictions of others’ ‘times’, Fabian argues, are not just implicitly placed on an inferior stage of society, they are also isolated in time. In short, Fabian, though he expressly discusses the temporal ‘dimension’, extends his criticism to studies of phenomena like time terminology, which he sees as yet another attempt to carve out temporally disconnected cultures outside a shared history.
Juxtaposing culture-specific time with coevalness – ‘sharing the same time’ – he leaves little room for alternative formulations of this key product of industrialism.

In this article, I argue that despite of its roots in ‘our’ clock time, Fijian abstract time both shares and does not share a common trajectory with North European Protestantism or post/industrial capitalism. The difference at stake can be foregrounded through the terminological slippage between Fabian (1983) and Gregory (1997): Fabian uses the concept of ‘coevalness’ to denote the condition of ‘sharing the same Time’ (1983, 31); Gregory (1997, 7–10) reserves ‘coevality’ for the commonplace contradictions between rivalling value systems. To spell out the difference: Fabian critiques the anthropological tradition for creating bounded ‘culture gardens’ whose remoteness in space assumes corresponding distance in time, so that the people studied by anthropology tend to be placed historically downstream from the anthropologists. Gregory foregrounds the concurrent recognition of often conflicting values that can relate to one another as ‘subalternate’ and ‘superalter-nate’, ‘antagonistic’, ‘non-antagonistic’ and so forth.

This article approaches the different coeval valuations of abstract time through the concept of ‘Fiji time’ commonly applied in reference to both unpunctuality and ample leisure. The idea of an ‘encapsulated’ Fiji time bears the hallmarks of the denial of coevalness criticized by Fabian: in addition to revealing a racialized depiction of the chilled-out islander, ‘Fiji time’ today also stands for indigenous Fijian assumptions of ‘historical downstreamness’, of being behind in (or late from) history. Yet upon closer inspection it also displays complex, coeval valuations that cannot be captured by placing Fiji time alongside North European Protestant time either. This article, in other word, uses ‘value’ as the lens through which I canvass different concerns relating to time. But the value predominantly under consideration here is something different from that which is accumulated ‘over’ time (or spacetime, cf. Munn 1986). Neither do I deal with the cognitive category of time (cf. e.g. Gell [1992] 1996) or temporal experience. Instead, I discuss the kind of time one can conceptualize in great or small amounts: that can be misspent, accounted for, or moralized about.

Indeed, the sense one often gets in Fiji is that some places have been blessed with an abundance of time whilst others have very little of it – or as a fairly widespread conceptualization of ours would have it, that some places are ‘time rich’ (and ‘money poor’). I have already written about the possibility of assigning a positive value to ‘superfluous’ time in a previous article Eräsaari 2017): here I try to accomplish something different. Namely, to present a more comprehensive picture of the way such valuations are born out of not just intersecting histories but also of relations between locations – not just ‘over time’ but over space as well. It is to this end that I have evoked Doreen Massey’s (2005) notion of trajectories or intertwined ‘stories’ that run through time (dimension of change) and space (dimension of relations and interaction).

In Fiji, for example, the historical fact of clock time and the values pertaining to – such as those derived from time discipline or wage labour – can be both affirmed and contested in relation to other places and other ‘times’ such as European, Japanese or Indo-Fijian time. Through such comparisons, the relative worth of time may appear commensurable with those other times, if often revealing the relatively weak exchange value of Fiji time. But at the same time, this also highlights relational perceptions such as the apparent abundance of time in Fiji, which creates room for alternative referents (standards) of valuating time. Hence Fiji time both continue along the Eurocentric trajectory which replaced...
Christian ‘faith in salvation by faith in progress and industry, and the Mediterranean as the hub of history by Victorian England’ (Fabian 1983, 17), and also branches away from the evaluation of time often considered inseparable from that tradition.

**Double times**

The European version of clock time has been obsessed with pace from the outset. This has been convincingly demonstrated by E. P. Thompson (1967), who outlines the history of ‘clock time’ as the measure of labour in industrializing Britain around the turn of the nineteenth century. By locating the historical period during which another time orientation – one based on tasks and natural rhythms – was replaced with that of the clock, he accomplishes two things: shows that what for Marx ([1859] 1993, part 1) constitute ‘the natural units of time, that is, hours, days, weeks, etc.’ are neither a ‘natural’ nor an ‘inherent measure’ of labour. Moreover, he illustrates how the adoption of time as a measure of production does not just affect time use, but a wide range of other sociocultural phenomena, all the way to ideas about a person’s moral worth and the emergence of time thrift at the turn of the nineteenth century. In Thompson’s analysis, the Puritan and Protestant traditions, in particular, were responsible for turning idleness into vice. Thompson singles out the Methodist Church, whose ‘method’, he states, is based on a strict discipline over time; ‘saving all the time you can for the best purposes; buying up every fleeting moment out of the hands of sin and Satan, out of the hands of sloth, ease, pleasure, worldly business’ – even from sleep (John Wesley, Sermon 93, ‘On Redeeming The Time’).

But it could also be argued that ideas of pace, acceleration, exertion and busyness have no natural connection with measured duration. The taken-for-granted assumptions that combined time with speed in early-nineteenth century are quite pronounced, for example, in the testimonial of Henry Booth, Treasurer of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, who thought the railway allowed a traveller to ‘live double times: by accomplishing a prescribed distance in five hours, which used to require ten, he will have the other five at his own disposal’. But he did not just equate time with the distance covered: in a utopian account of the railway, Booth argued that the time thus saved could eventually be utilized in order to combine ‘the energy, activity, and enterprise of a refined and commercial people, with the simplicity and quiet enjoyment of philosophical life’. Booth’s argument thus gradually expands into a technology-driven vision of a future which allows other people in other places to follow Britain’s lead in freeing up more time through faster travel: ‘the Pasha of Egypt’, ‘the land of the proud Mameluke’ and ‘the stately Turk’ would all eventually be able to combine refined busyness with a quiet philosophical life thanks to the railway. (Walker et al. 1831, 194–197). The emergence of ‘energy, activity, and enterprise’ as qualities of refined people may be part of the same historical shift which gave us the clock, but there is nothing in abstract time itself to demand acceleration.

Indeed, Booth’s account contains the opposite valuation too, the ‘quiet enjoyment of philosophical life’. What Booth only mentions in passing, Thompson discusses in more detail: he believes the Puritan depreciation of spare time would grow lesser once poverty had been cured and an automated future would force men to find value in undirected time: ‘Will men begin to lose that restless urgency, that desire to consume time purposively, which most people carry just as they carry a watch on their wrists?’ (Thompson 1967, 95).
Thompson points out that were we to maintain a Puritan time-valuation in a less work-intensive future, we would be bound to value spare time more highly. This could happen in different ways: the ‘market’ value of free time could go up through the exploitation of, for example, the leisure industries, or we might even come up with a guilt-free appreciation of leisure and social relations. In other words, Thompson sketches out potential ways of re-valuing leisure as something that one appreciates either through spending money on marked ‘leisure’ activities or by ‘spending’ time in the company of others or in other non-commodified ways. Although 50 years later it appears Thompson might have predicted the future developments too optimistically, his optimism – just like Booth’s above – serves as a necessary reminder that haste is but a native European condiment to abstract, resource-like time.

In what follows, I look into the valuation of Fijian rather than UK time, but from a ‘Thompsonian’ viewpoint: inquiring into the potential value of undirected or surplus time. Fiji was converted into Christianity by Methodist missionaries who arrived in the islands from the 1830s onwards; wage labour reached the islands by the late nineteenth century, but in present-day Fiji the leisure industry also plays a big part in defining the value of time. Yet none of these ideas were articulated in a vacuum but rather in a cultural setting with its own notions about dignity, pace, propriety or indeed ‘refinement’. These, in turn, became intertwined with the colonial administration’s attempts to protect the indigenous population from the alienating effects wage work, as well as its underlying notions of race and developmental trajectories. In terms of the value of time this gave birth to multiple, coeval attitudes to time.

At the same time a familiar set of temporal measures has won over not just Fiji but most of the globe. It remains a lasting testament to the importance of temporal commensuration that we hardly even notice what an eclectic collection of measures we apply to time: the solar, the lunar, the seven, twelve and sixty-unit systems (e.g. Birth 2012). That is to say that a certain way of measuring time as if it were a physical substance, and of conceiving it as a finite resource, has grown popular even in places where the need to measure labour may be peripheral or absent. The attitudes, moralities and disciplines accompanying the clock should correspondingly be expected to vary between European and Fijian time.

This article, therefore, argues that such valuations are realized through comparison and contrast as much as according to a ‘system-internal’ logic. In this sense, I want to argue that the coeval valuations connected to abstract time are created in relation to ‘other times’ which, to a degree, have the appearance of spatially located ‘things’. In order to accomplish this, I will take what Massey (2005, 80) calls a ‘leap into space’: an initial act of laying out the overlapping ‘stories-so-far’, which allows us to chart out the multiple trajectories that make any given here and now irreducible to a single grand narrative. The Masseyan ‘leap’ can and should later be followed by the act of prioritization and selection from among the messy tangle of stories. It is merely a methodologically necessary part of telling a story, told in the hopes of avoiding the reproduction of the standard unilineal narrative. But ultimately, this ‘leap’ also guides the theoretical approach: once one has worked out the overlapping stories-so-far, it becomes inconceivable to even imagine a neat, single-track hermeneutic analysis of the value of time in Fiji. This article, therefore, presents a relational understanding of ‘Fiji time’, one in which it is ultimately the movement of people and ideas which maintains the various coeval valuations of time. To this end, I present
Fiji time through four spatiotemporal slices which will have to tokenistically stand for the entirety of the ‘stories-so-far’.

**Fiji Time #1**

The July/August 2015 issue of *Fiji Time*, the in-flight magazine of Fiji’s national airline, introduces Fiji’s tourist-friendly districts as leisurely paradises. The popular Yasawa islands in the Western Division ‘are widely known for their laidback pace’, the Northern islands ‘are known for their leisurely pace’; even the sugar-producing town of Labasa is characterized as ‘sleepy’ and ‘relaxed’, whilst in an in-focus interview, the owner of an eco-café near Sigatoka town explains: ‘if you don’t have time, then it’s you who will be disappointed. You need to relax and enjoy this environment and the food will arrive on Fiji time’ (*Fiji Time*, July/August 2015, 49).

In recent years, the notion of ‘Fiji time’ has become a product. Closely related to the notions of ‘island time’ or ‘Pacific time’, it reproduces old, racist stereotypes of chilled-out islanders who hardly notice the passage of time and cannot be bothered to work. Various souvenir shops sell a range of products depicting Fiji time: t-shirts, postcards, wall clocks and other memorabilia. Fiji Air flight attendants instruct Fiji-bound passengers to ‘to sit back, relax, and enjoy Fiji Time’, Fiji Tourism marketing advises the visitor to ‘adjust your clock to island time’, and the same is repeated at the airport by the Digicel and Vodafone personnel selling air time to visitors, and yet again by resort employees who welcome new arrivals by telling them that they ‘don’t have to worry about a thing because they’re on Fiji time now’. The stereotype is also reproduced in a song called ‘Fiji Time’ released in 2013 by the English rock band Status Quo:

please set your watches onto Fiji time;

no need to hurry now, no need to worry now …

In short, Fiji time is marketed as a resource, much like the ‘smiling friendly people, white sandy beaches and sunshine’ – as it was phrased by an employee of a top-end hotel in the Denarau Island complex in the Western Division, who told me he always tries to help his customers to put away their phones and laptops so they can enjoy their leisure in Fiji and learn from the Fijian way of life. This version of Fiji time is a commodity: an exemplar of the re-valuation of leisure through the market discussed by Thompson. Fiji time is sold to overseas tourists and widely recognized as an asset in the cash-poor country’s tourism industry.

**Fiji Time #2**

When I first visited Fiji in 2003, I only heard the expression ‘Fiji Time’ used in reference to a general lack of punctuality: ‘the bus will come eventually, but on Fiji time’; ‘the office will open, but on Fiji time’. Guidebooks like the *Lonely Planet* warned visitors not to get exasperated: nothing ever happens on time in Fiji, everything is always late. The Turtle Island resort in the Western Division even used to have its own time – ‘bula time’ (‘good’, ‘healthy’ or ‘living’ time) – which was always one hour *ahead of official time*.1 A retired hotel employee explained to me that the Turtle Island ‘bula time’ was consciously ahead of standard time, so that when clocks were brought an hour forward for Fiji
Summer Time, Turtle Island would also re-set theirs to keep one hour ahead. In the past, he thought, reference to ‘Fiji time’ did not imply a marketable product in other resorts either. But the concept of Fiji time was always well known; tourists would not mind things happening out of schedule and staff members could just laugh and say ‘Fiji Time, always one hour behind’.

This understanding is not entirely distinguishable from Fiji-time-as-relaxation. Both could easily be defined in terms of a general lack of time discipline, in connection with an industry that finds commercial value in leisure. However, for many of my interlocutors the latter understanding of Fiji Time contains a moral component that goes beyond the idea of missing an appointed hour.

For example, Marama, a retired nurse living in Lautoka town in Western Viti Levu, says ‘Fiji time’ means ‘we are always behind’. Not late, but behind, just as ‘bula time’ was ahead. Mere, a housewife who – just like Marama above – originally comes from the village of Naloto on the East coast of Viti Levu island though now lives in her husband’s village, defines Fiji Time in similar tones:

Keda [i.e. ‘we’] always late, the Fiji time, yeah? […] In Fiji the time is not, what? Not important. Like in other places; Japan, eh? Time is very important in their life. They go with time. – Fiji? Oooh, late!

Petero, a family man in his mid-forties who has only recently moved to remote Naloto after a career in tourism in the Western Division, also defines ‘Fiji Time’ in similar terms:

you’re supposed to be there on time but you’re behind time. All the time, you’re behind time. Not going with time, moving with time, like in some other places; some other countries.

Jone, an elderly Naloto villager who worked overseas as a seasonal labourer in his youth, makes the ultimate contrast: ‘time is time’ only for those who follow the ‘European way’; time only means time overseas, in Fiji ‘you don’t know the time’.

In a 2015 conversation with Mere and her sister, who is a middle-class civil servant from Lautoka town, the two women emphasized how time ought to be spent on projects of personal or collective improvement. For them, wasted time meant wasted opportunity. Mere defined ‘Fiji time’ as ‘Not progress in any way, to move slowly’. The sisters also provided me with a Fijian version of the idea that ‘time is money’ – volia na gauna, kakua ni volitaka, ‘buy time, do not sell it’. Time, they explained me, is actually too precious for selling, let alone wasting.

Fiji Time #2, in short, stands not only for lateness but also for a kind of backwardness associated with missed opportunities: losing out on a career due to missing school, or an entire chiefdom losing its pre-eminence by arriving too late to the scene of the battle, as I was told had happened to the chiefdom of Verata in the war with the chiefdom of Bau (cf. Fiji time #4 below; Eräsaaari 2017). Ultimately reference to Fiji time also implies a historical order among other nations. The fact that most of my interlocutors in Fiji have, by and large, accepted this narrative underlines the sense of inferiority, highlighting ideas of diminishment and loss that Matt Tomlinson (2009) has described in Fiji. This sense of Fiji time was captured by an indigenous Fijian village-school headmaster from interior Viti Levu, who stated: ‘the Indians, they value time – “time is time” – but for us, maybe it’s going to take us another ten, twenty, maybe fifty years’.

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Allocating times to peoples

Clock time is not a recent arrival in Fiji. As a matter of fact, quantified time as a measure of labour reached Fiji already before the Cession of Fiji to Great Britain in 1874: the Council of Chiefs announced an annual tax on all adult males in 1865, one pound of which could be substituted with 10 days’ work at 8 hours per day (Sydney Morning Herald, Aug. 21st 1865). Temporal measures became a compulsory part of primary education in 1916, and telling the time was established alongside with counting money as part of fourth-grade curriculum in 1929. But clock time and its disciplining effects were allocated unevenly within the colony.

The Colony of Fiji developed a division of labour that based on the reification of indigenous culture and the importation of Indian indentured labour from 1879 onwards. The full story of the codification and insulation of indigenous lands and traditions, and the first Governor’s consequent quest for a ‘cheap, abundant and certain supply of labour’ (Lal [2000] 2012, 69) has been recounted elsewhere. For present topic, it is crucial to understand that the colonial government’s decision to guarantee indigenous land ownership was paralleled by an administrative structure which gave a newly established ‘Fijian culture’ the force of law. In contrast to the indigenous population, who were legislated into their villages, onto collectively owned lands, and outside the colony’s plantation economy, the immigrant labour force were typically contracted to plantation work:

They would work nine hours on each week day and five on Saturdays; Sundays and public holidays were free. Monthly or daily wages and task-work rates were specified. For time-work, each adult male was to be paid ‘not less than one shilling’ and every adult female ‘not less than nine pence’, while children were to be paid proportionately to the amount of work done. The same rates applied to task-work, a male’s task being defined as six hours of steady work and a female’s four-and-a-half. (Lal 2012, 72)

Consequently, the colony’s cane fields and sugar mills came to be operated by South Asian indentured labourers whilst the vast majority of the indigenous landowners lived in comparatively self-subsistent villages. It may be argued that this created another version of ‘double times’ – one for subsistence-oriented indigenous village collectives and another for the migrant labourers of the colony’s plantation economy. It was the latter’s time that appears reminiscent of ‘the monotony, alienation from pleasure in labour’ that Thompson (1967, 62) associates with clock time. Indeed, as early as in 1908 the Australian missionary John Wear Burton heralded the birth of ‘New Fiji’ in The Foreign Field of the Wesleyan Methodist Church:

The shrill whistle – morning, noon and night – follows hard upon the heels of the discordant bell and summons the ‘labour’ to the dirty, wheezing, groaning mill or to the warm, wet cane fields. The river is alive with fretful, panting steam launches, tugging and straining impatiently at sluggish, ungainly cane punts. Ever and anon screeching whistles or tooting horns or scrambling sirens hideously and braggartly declare that the New Fiji has been born. (Burton 1908, 262)

This ‘New Fiji’ with its strict labour-time contracts, whistles and sirens, was predecessor to a whole set different articulations of the value of labour or the value of time, as John Kelly (1992) has exemplified in his analysis of work time as sacrifice or ‘worship’ in Fijian Gandhism and its contrast to devotional Gujarati entrepreneurialism. But the colonial administration’s and the Colonial Sugar Refining Company’s efforts to redefine ‘the labour’ as
small tenant farmers or even entrepreneurs (Kelly and Kaplan 2001) is equally illustrative of an administration which allocated phenomena such as commodity valuation and time discipline to the Indo-Fijian community. In contrast to this, as early as in 1884 the Acting Colonial Secretary William McGregor had stated that ‘the natives have not yet learnt our high-pressure ways, and do not and will never value time by our standard’ (Colonial Secretary’s Office 1884, 249). The colonial administration’s protectivist policies soon turned this into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Policies were, to a great extent, based on intimate knowledge of nineteenth-century evolutionist thought, namely Lewis Henry Morgan and Henry Maine (Kelly 2003; Close-Barry 2015). Lorimer Fison, the missionary-ethnographer who wrote a highly influential paper on Fijian land tenure, was an informant and devout disciple of Morgan’s, and defined Fijian society in Morgan’s terms: ‘[t]he Fijian was on his way to the feudal system, but he was a long way from reaching it’ (Fison 1881, 349). Fijians, in Fison’s estimate, had by late nineteenth century attained pottery, bow and arrow, salt-making, and the canoe, and upon the arrival of the missionaries, Fijians still maintained traces of ‘the patriarchal family’ (Stern, Howitt, and Fison 1930). All this evidence appeared to place Fijian society on the ‘Middle Period of Barbarism’: an ‘ethnical period’ preceding private property and alienated labour. Indigenous Fijians were therefore made legislatively incompatible with the colony’s plantation economy, and regulations were passed which required indigenous Fijians to contribute labour and garden produce to their villages and village chiefs, others that severely restricted their movement to the urban centres (Eräsaari 2013, 82–90, 203–207).

In short, the two peoples were placed on very different trajectories: the Indo-Fijian population was administered in a frame of reference attuned to the immediate future: labour shortages, annual work cycles, the colony’s tax deficits, and the like. The indigenous population was placed beyond the near future (Guyer 2007), into social-evolutionist time, the scale of which vastly surpasses an individual’s lifespan. This trajectory, too, was subject to adjustments by later administrative regimes, but even though the original paternalistic policies had been revised by the 1920s, the dichotomy survived. For example, the Government-printed Colony of Fiji: Land and Products, a 1925 booklet for prospective settlers, repeated the idea that

The native Fijian does not make a reliable plantation labourer, his natural temperament rendering him quite unfit for the monotonous duties incidental to cane cultivation, but the Indian coolies have proved themselves eminently suitable for the work, and have been exclusively employed by cane planters generally. (Cited in Reeve 1989, 8)

Corresponding views were expressed amongst the Methodist mission, too. By 1936 Rev. L. E. Bennett of the Methodist mission opined that ‘the influence of the Indians upon the Fijians seems to have been stimulating. The ambition and independence of the Indians seem to have roused the Fijians out of their lethargy’ (1936). Miss I. Hames of the Davuilevu Theological College, for her part, summed up the mixture of paternalism and reformism that was the mission’s dilemma: Fijians should be guided into adopting European virtues (but not the vice) out of their dealings with urban life. How good would it be, she reasoned, ‘if Suva Fijians might receive just the benefits of contact with Europeans (…) and if alertness, briskness of movement, punctuality, well-informed minds, smartness of appearance were the only results’ (Hames 1938). While the ‘Fiji Indian’ was being defined by work, ‘the Fijian’ was defined as inactive.
The first half of the twentieth century witnessed various attempts at dealing with the Fijian communality that had been enshrined by the first generation of administrators: restrictions were placed on ceremonial consumption and sharing practices such as kerekere, independent farming encouraged; the administration sought to monetize village economies, introduced the ‘absentee tax’ and other fees set up to ‘compensate’ for an individual’s removal from the village labour pool, and so forth (see, e.g. Roth 1951; Sahlins 1962; Belshaw 1964; Eräsaari 2013). The value of time particularly occupied planners in the field of education, an area left to the churches during the first decades of the colony, but one which came increasingly under the state’s scrutiny during the first decades of the twentieth century.

The 1930s plans to create a ‘new type of Fijian farmer’, the ‘Fijian Methodist industrial man’ (Close-Barry 2015, 94) become understandable against this background. Within the larger context of the Methodist mission in Fiji, the North European emphasis on time and labour had not been the highest priority. More specifically, the Methodist missionaries were strict about time discipline amongst themselves and highlighted their own ceaseless labour and toil in their correspondence with the Church at home (e.g. Missionary Notices 1881–1886), but as a rule they were disposed to accommodate Fijian culture, much in the manner that the early colonial government sought to do through their model of indirect rule. Yet the church also required money from the colonial administration for maintaining its schools, while the administration was under increasing pressure to make the young colony generate revenue for the crown.

The topic of expanding and standardizing education in Fiji occupied the Legislative Council at least from the 1910s onwards. The core arguments can be found in the Education Commission report of 1926, which witnesses the point at issue between the state and the Methodist church. The colony’s need for an educational reform had grown to a scale where the mission’s capacity alone was deemed insufficient, but the mission schools’ teaching was also deemed impractical: they offered a ‘European’ education – ‘foreign literature and French’ – that was said to serve little purpose for its pupils. Worse than that, it prepared Fijians for civil service jobs of which there were but few. What Fijians really needed, it was argued, was less education and more practical skills: manual and vocational teaching.

The 1926 report employs multiple lines of argument. For one thing, there was a fear that too much knowledge would revolutionize the indigenous population as it was argued had happened in India:

The Indian student (…) fitted in admirably with this bad system. It is no wonder that such a system soon produced an ‘intellectual proletariat’ disillusioned and disappointed in their hopes of official careers, and ready to blame the existing government for their condition. (Education Commission 1926, 8)

The fear of discontent was echoed by the Bua district administrative Ratu Deve Toganivalu, who warned the Commission that the majority of schooled Fijian boys ‘are idle because there are no vacancies in the clerical line for which they have been trained’ (Education Commission 1926, 93). Another authority, Dr D. W. Hoodless, argued that due to it having been necessary to abolish various pre-Christian customs and crafts, Fijians now
had no ‘hobbies’ left: ‘the Fijian now finds himself with a large amount of leisure time for which he has little or no use’ (Education Commission 1926, 91). In other words, although the report’s main claim may have been a widely shared consensus on indigenous Fijians’ need to start utilizing their lands commercially, one can find this argument paralleled by another that proposes it is time in addition to agricultural land that Fijians are wasting. With this in mind, the report called for

a training which is not confined to the learning of subjects in a school room, but which vitally affects the lives of the pupils, carries over from the school to the home and to the village, and shows itself in its influence upon character, improved health, efficient and willing industry, ability to use leisure time well and worthily. (Education Commission 1926, 5)

The chosen model for the way forward was the Navuso Agricultural School, established in 1923 by the Methodist Church in Fiji. Navuso taught commercial farming to boys with an emphasis on practical farm work. Ideologically, Navuso combined the colonial state’s interest in increasing private entrepreneurism with a Protestant work ethic, its stated aim to teach ‘in a practical way the dignity of work and the principle of self-maintenance’ (Education Commission 1926, 67). To this end, each student farmer in Navuso was – and still is – allocated farm land, and once a farm starts producing income, the student farmer pays his upkeep from his farming income. The rest goes into a savings account held in the student’s own name. In 2016 the average pupil left the school with 5000–7000 FJD in his savings account. This is considered good money in Fiji; a considerable nest egg. The students leave the school richer than they entered, the current headmaster likes to point out. The school was recently returned to its original use after having served for years as a secondary school. The current head of Navuso College emphasises the school’s task in direct opposition to village life. The savings accounts, for example, are necessary in order to pull the pupils ‘away from their village games’, he said in conversation in August 2015.

He wants to teach young farmers how to evaluate the monetary worth of their time in order to count ‘how much an hour of this kind of work is worth, how much two hours of someone else’s work’. ‘These young boys, they have education but not the time-management’, he pointed out, which is why the school assesses the young farmers’ work; they will always have to bring in strict records of what they have done with their time, so it can be estimated whether a certain amount of time was spent wisely or not. This astute husbandry of time is what he referred to as ‘time-management’. The key to time management, in turn, is discipline. ‘I always elaborate time and discipline’, he told me: ‘I see time as a kind of God; it can sometimes replace God’.

In 2015, Navuso taught its boys to ‘live like in the village, but using time more wisely’: waking up at four for Quiet Time; second bell and morning devotions at five; morning assembly at six; breakfast at seven; lessons from eight till noon, then lunch and practical duties till the dark falls. This strict time discipline is respected by Navuso graduates as well as those who never went there. One of my interlocutors, for example, swears that the Navuso regime changed his life following a series of prison sentences.

I want to draw particular attention to the way in which the Navuso discipline is articulated in contrast to Fijian life, especially traditional village Fiji. In fact, much of the Navuso teaching is based on the assumption that what makes Navuso so efficient is the removal of boys from the village setting. It is also a common assumption that another time orientation awaits the graduates upon leaving the school. The Navuso headmaster identifies his main
problems with the village, where one ‘can end up wasting time: drinking grog [i.e. kava], solevu [ceremonial events] … One ceremony today, another the next day’. At the same time, he would like his graduates to set a positive example for others: show what they can accomplish in order to encourage other villagers as well. But this is articulated in contrast to a Fijian, village-based time regime which is regarded both coercive and detrimental. Returned to their village environment, the assumption is, even Navuso graduates revert to their village ways.

In this, the school master echoes popular sentiments about time in village Fiji. Take Adriu, for example: an insurance salesman from Lautoka town who holds the view that ‘the more educated people are now working on time’ whilst ‘the laid-back ones [are] living in the village area’. In a 2015 interview he further claimed that the village gradually changes anyone who moves in there, whatever their initial intentions may be:

after a while, you’ll mix up with the rural life, with the village life. So whatever you learn it starts to fade away, you start to go in line with those already in the village life. So you will wake up at about eight o’clock, more and more, and have your breakfast at about nine – ten. At about nine, after nine, you take up your knife and you go up to the plantation. By that time, the sun is already coming up. It’s started to get hot. So when you going to do your weeding or do work at your plantation, after a while you can’t take the heat so you hide or you come back to the village and sleep.

Similarly, a group of cosmetics factory employees from the capital city were keen to point out that ‘Fiji time’ is a village thing; people waste time in the villages, drink kava and relax. But those who come to town do so for a purpose, they come to work for their children’s education or some other reason, and they ‘leave time-wasting behind’ when they move. The list goes on: Joeli, headmaster of a rural primary school, thought that ‘especially in the village setting the use of time is secondary’. Joji, a farmer living outside his home village in Naloto, thinks that ‘wasting of time is the main thing in the village’ and says he ‘hates coming back to the village’. And so forth. Whether addressed as a question of residence, education, or aspiration, they all agree that discipline and time management stand in opposition to Fiji Time #3, which is articulated as a sheer waste of time practised predominantly in village Fiji. It is not just considered backwards or ‘behind’ in terms of an imagined developmental trajectory; it is also thought to hold people back individually, to keep them from fulfilling their potential. But importantly, this idea represents an ‘outside-looking-in’ view on the village, a depiction that is incomplete until counterbalanced with the inverse view.

Fiji Time #4: solosolo vakaVerata

The village where I have conducted the majority of my fieldwork, Naloto, is an hour’s ride away from Nausori town and not much further from Navuso college, just outside of Fiji’s main metropolitan area (‘the Suva–Nausori corridor’) on the East coast of Viti Levu island. Naloto is the largest of the seven villages that make up the ancient chiefdom of Verata, home of a mythical first King of Fiji and a high-ranking chiefly lineage, though its influence has declined dramatically since pre-colonial times (see Tuwere 2002; Sahlins 2004; Eräsaari 2013, 12–13, 59–65, 151–152). Verata is, albeit to a lesser degree, also known for solosolo vakaVerata – acting slowly, or as villagers sometimes jokingly translate it, ‘wasting time in the Veratan way’. Veratan ‘time wasting’ can be described as a specific, localized version of
Fiji time; I have discussed it in more detail elsewhere (Eräsaari 2017), so here I will just sketch it out.

First of all, just as the idea of Fiji time in general can take on competing valuations, so can its Verata-specific version. Hence while solosolo vakaVerata can be translated as ‘slow, steady and good’ – as village-based senior men like to present it – others understand it simply as a reference to being ‘slow’ or ‘late’, or foolishly fiddling around (Raiwalui 1954, 16–17). Rosa, a civil servant working in the Western Division, says Veratanness is a trait that she ought to unlearn:

Most of the time, I’m on that mode. Like, I always have it with me, but I want to quit of it. Most of the time most people told me: ‘You shouldn’t do it. Come on. Does not matter that you’re from Verata when you act slow like that. Now it’s … times change. You should switch your time to this time, don’t always late, late, late.’ (…) It’s not a good thing. But it’s like inside of me. (…) In the blood.

In contrast to urbanites like Rosa, the people of Naloto, Verata, appear to have relatively great amounts of free or non-working time that they spend waiting, relaxing, socializing, drinking kava and so forth. Young men in particular even engage in what I would label ‘levelling with time’ – ‘wasting’ or ‘tying up’ (vesumona) other people’s time. In the case of young families who need to accumulate household goods, it is typically necessary to move out of the village altogether for a while – either by moving to town for work or, alternatively, by moving out of the village proper as independent farmers in a ‘bush house’ (vale ni veikau). Men, in particular, explain the move in terms of efficient time utilization: in the village one is not the master of one’s own time, but coerced into storytelling, kava drinking and other sociable pastimes. Many of them have directly stated that efficient work is possible only beyond the village, both because one can utilize the early-morning cool gardening hours while living near one’s garden and because in the village, one inevitably loses the morning hours to late-night socializing.

But their viewpoint should not be allowed to conceal the fact that collective labour, too, means intensive work and oga (‘busyness’) observable during funeral preparations, for example. But there are also various non-urgent communal tasks from public works to the maintenance of old graves, and as one of the village elders pointed out to me, asking villagers to toil hard would be pointless when there is neither any particular hurry nor anything but kava to compensate the work force with. Such tasks can be objectionable to people in stages of life that require accumulation for house expansions, children’s schooling and so forth.

In a comparative example, Henry Rutz (1984) has contrasted two modes of house building in Fiji, reaching the conclusion that the popularity of the impractical corrugated iron house is explained by the time that a household saves by seizing control of its own temporal resources rather than following the ‘social time’ of ceremonial work characteristic to traditional house building. The ‘pace and rhythm of hospitality and visiting, of storytelling and sleeping, and of the organisation of collective activities such as ceremonial exchanges and building houses’ described by Rutz (1984, 112) seems to underlie Nalotan life-cycle migration, too – particularly since in Naloto, the construction of the corrugated iron house is also a ‘social’ event, even if not as elaborately ‘ritualized’ as the construction of traditional houses used to be. But the Naloto community also takes hold of villagers’ time in relatively ‘individualistic’ contexts, such as preparing garden produce for the
urban market, or going out to work in one’s own garden. ‘People come to talk to you, to hold you’, the insurance salesman Adriu once described visits to the home village.

The fact that senior men from senior lineages, like Adriu above, are not exempt from time-levelling practices illustrates another facet of solosolo vakaVerata: it does not concern only young men or a liminal group; does not connote a period directly comparable with the ‘waithood’ discussed in African ethnography. Even though actual levelling is typically employed by village youth or people still transitioning from ‘youth’ (cauravou) to the married adult category, what makes the practise of slowing others down admissible is the fact that it is connected with recognized and valued ideas: time coercion is possible precisely because resting (vakacegu) and relaxing (cegu) are valued rather than disapproved in the village. Not only is regular relaxing (cegu) part of ceremonial labour and other collective efforts, it is also rated highly among the village rewards offered to honoured guests. In a similar vein, the village Methodist church sermons often emphasize slowness and warn against the dangers of fast or excessive developments. Indeed, the Sunday Sabbath may well be one of the more highly elaborated aspects of Fijian Methodism: as pointed out by Rutz and Balkan (1992), the Sunday Observance Decree was among the first political actions taken by the coup leader Sitiveni Rabuka following the 1987 military coup, and observance of the Sunday Sabbath has continued to animate the discourse since. One could even argue that rest takes on the appearance of an inworldly virtue rather than an after-worldly reward (Weber 1930; Dumont [1986] 1992).

As pointed out, this is reflected in Nalotan life-cycle expectations, too. Just as there is a recognizable spatialized category for the urban employed – eratou mai na vanua ni cakacaka: ‘people from the place of work’ – used on ceremonialized occasions (see Eräsaari 2013, 213–216), so the village is recognized as a place of rest, vakacegu. In the idealized order, one retires – vakacegu – in the village after a working career outside it. A village house reserved for retirement days, for example, may be labelled vale ni vakacegu, ‘house of rest’ or ‘retirement home’ (see Overton 1993). Which is to say that even though young men in particular may complain that they cannot work efficiently in the village, others – villagers who have sampled wage work outside the village and returned – are equally likely to remind you that in the village, ‘you can be your own boss’; that there is no-one to tell you when and what to do.

Most importantly, though, just as the village makes it possible to collectively seize others’ time – force them to adhere to resting as a ‘good’ one seeks in this life – so it also dresses authority in slowness (but see Eräsaari 2015). From this point of view, it is significant that it is the Veratan polity which is known for ‘wasting time the Veratan way’ rather than some other. For example, Verata’s ancient enemy, the chiefdom of Bau (e.g. Sahlin 2004, 13–124), is known for a kind of celeritas marked by the unscrupulous use of force, vere vakaBau, I was emphatically informed in Verata. Verata, for its part, is known for the dignified gravitas of a chiefly ideology which associates paramount chiefs with stasis – ‘just sitting still’ (Tomlinson 2014, 58; Sahlin 2004, 60). In the village elders’ opinion, solosolo vakaVerata does not mean ‘wasting time’, it means being ‘slow but sure’ – Verata can always be relied upon, but in its own time.

What the village of Naloto, in the chiefdom of Verata, displays is a particular version of village-centric Fiji time #4. Verata time appears to combine the time-rich ideas about village Fiji with a specific local symbolism of power or charisma (Geertz 1983), resulting in a mode of time consumption that recalls Toren’s (1998, 111) idea of consumption as
'the arena of competition (…) at once the most banal, the most highly elaborated, and the most subtle of the material acts in which hierarchy could simultaneously be constituted and potentially subverted’. If eating, as Toren argues, once used to demonstrate the chiefs’ *mana* through the annihilation of the *mana* of others, it bears keeping in mind that the prevailing Nalotan idiom for time wasting is ‘eating [the] time’, *kania na gauna*. ‘Eating time’ generally means wastefulness, but a kind of selfish wastefulness that prioritizes the eater’s desires over those of others: people are said to ‘eat money’ (*kana ilavo*) in town when they spend it on cream buns and taxi rides instead of bringing it back to the village. Villagers, on the other hand, are said to ‘eat time’ when they indulge in DVDs and storytelling instead of helping others. Wasting or ‘eating’ time thereby also indicates the ability to appropriate time from others – like ‘taking somebody else’s time’ or ‘keeping somebody tied up for one’s own end against their will’, as two Nalotan men defined *vesumona*, the practice of time-tying others. Control over the time resource comes across as a control over others in a way that may be particularly attuned to Veratan symbols of power.

But this facet of Fiji time also comes across as a kind of dignity that displays superfluous time as a desirable resource, if one which many villagers might not ultimately prefer over the material affluence of the tourism-rich Western Division. Veratans may be lucky in having this alternative ideal to draw upon instead of being simply the people left behind with too much time on their hands (cf. e.g. Mitchell 2004; Jeffrey 2010; Masquelier 2013; Van den Berg and O’Neill 2017) – although they ultimately lack the power to make their version count beyond their own turf. For successful urbanites like Adriu or progressive educationalists like the Navuso headmaster, ‘time wasting’ is a rural, outdated phenomenon; ‘the more educated people are now working on time’. But this, in a way, is the whole point: local traditions like Veratan slowness or Fijian appreciation of relaxation may find new applicability in relation to ideas like time discipline, tourist leisure, urban careers, or time-harried others. Indeed, this was Thompson’s point, too, as I read it: that conditions around clock time change, and so will evaluations of the time thus understood. Times can be both self-differing and exist relationally (Scott 2014) without being ‘encapsulated’ or fully ‘shared’ – without being neither ‘ours’ nor belonging to ‘Others’.

**Conclusions**

In this article, I have looked into different meanings assigned to ‘Fiji time’. The four temporal slices that I have carved out of Fiji could be condensed into (1) leisure and enjoyment; (2) lateness and being behind; (3) waste and ignorance and (4); influence and dignity. Instead of in-depth ethnography, I have sought to make visible the multiple, intertwined trajectories involved in the assessment and valuation of time in Fiji. All these slices seem to owe something to the complex set of ideas connoted by clock time: notions of waste and thrift, of acceleration, of progress, propriety, lateness and so on. For the sake of simplicity, I have located the origin point of this ‘time complex’ in Victorian-era UK, though as the comparisons that indigenous Fijians make between themselves and the Japanese, Europeans or Indians reveal, this narrative, too, is more complex and branches out at various points.

Some of the Fijian valuations herein discussed are relatively straightforward reflections of the unilineal narrative that is generally thought to go hand in hand with the capitalist
mode of production, the time-is-money paradigm and internalized time discipline. ‘Fiji time’ can be understood as ‘behindness’ or backwardness or ‘waste’. But it can also be evaluated in contrast to it, for example, by claiming market value to leisure. But to complicate matters further, ‘Fiji time’ also implies a separate, incommensurate trajectory that highlights relaxation as an autochthonous stress relief or the stateliness of senior personages.

The separation of these ‘times’ dates back at least to the nineteenth century, when Fijian time was quite markedly set apart from the colonial administrators’ time. Yet by the twenty-first century it is also very clear that Fijians do not value time by some undulterated, immemorial standard either. Fiji time both is and is not on the yardstick of ‘UK time’: while clocks and abstract, quantifiable time were introduced to Fiji long since, its use in evaluating economic worth was only selectively applied in the colony of Fiji. The different understandings of ‘Fiji time’ combine new elaborations of these old ideas with inversions of labour-value and even outright rejections of it. Viewed together, the combination of perspectives informing the various understandings of Fiji time defies simple models and is probably best defined in Massey’s unorthodox terminology as ‘throwntogetherness’, or the ‘simultaneity of stories-so-far’ (Massey 2005, 12).

But instead of the plurality of history, what I have sought to highlight in this article is the fact that these differences are created and maintained through the movement of people. ‘Fiji time’ has the tendency to locate the different temporal regimes. The juxtaposition of village and town/school/resort, for example, re-creates the distinction between ‘work’ and ‘life’ previously discussed by Thompson, but giving them distinct locations – which remain aligned with the former colonial policies which reserved the village for the perpetuation of tradition and the town and sugar plantation for labour. These locations elevate time orientations into observable social facts: give them coercive power. ‘After a while, you’ll mix up with the rural life’ is a statement about the social factness of Fiji time in the village; ‘it’s not a good thing, but it’s inside of me, in the blood’ affirms the antithetical pressures one feels in the ‘place of work’.

But while the located temporalities persist, people move about. People go on holidays to Fiji from Australia, Europe, or America, and strengthen the market valuation of leisure just as they create more work for the front-desk employees of Fiji tourism. Fijians move to the dry and sandy Western Division where most of the country’s tourism business remains, where even fruit is said to taste sweeter, or to the rainy Tailevu province in Eastern Viti Levu island to vakacegu – relax or retire. They go to schools like Navuso to have the value of their time impressed on them, and return to the village to find their proprietorship of it contested. But what they teach us is not just how time arises out of the economy, but also of the way time gains a social reality of its own.

Alfred Gell (1992] 1996, 314) once warned the anthropologist not to expect any discoveries through the medium of time: one is bound to rediscover the same temporal phenomena all over again. I have tried to heed his warning and have portrayed the familiar-within-the-exotic: the trajectories of clock time I have discussed have, in a wider scope, parallels in various other global-reach phenomena like Christianity, or class, or nationalism. What I find new, however, is the way in which times are articulated against other times, and concretized through locations and the movement of people: Fijian, Indo-Fijian, European, Japanese; village time, Navuso time, Turtle Island time. If there is a thing to be learnt
from Fiji time, then it is to understand that assumptions and valuations of time become observable in the objectifications people make – in this case in spatial terms – and that mapping times and people is not only ‘our’ preoccupation.

Notes
1. ‘Bula time’ is now generally used for ‘happy hour’.
2. Interlocutors’ names have been replaced with pseudonyms throughout the article.
3. This is also a reference to a popular song called Na Mataniciva (The Pearl) by Sakiusa Buli kokoko, the story of a man who wastes his time in his youth when he should be studying and lives to regret it in his old age, when he understands that an opportunity once lost does not return.
5. During the colonial rule, Fijian girls’ education was established with a view towards parenting, housework, hygiene, and so forth, usually collectively labelled under ‘mothercraft’ and articulated through the need for skilled mothers to save the ‘race’. The objectives of girls’ education thus differed from that of boys, and the schooling schemes were much smaller in scale, but it is nonetheless possible to see a parallel discourse on time utilisation in the context of girls’ education, too. Take Miss F. Tolley of the Methodist mission, for example, who pronounced the need for the church to provide ‘the modern Suva Fijian girl’ with ‘something at which she can work in her spare time’ (Tolley 1932).

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