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ETHNOGRAPHIES OF THE MAY 2000 FIJI COUP

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SUSANNA TRNKA

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SPECIAL ISSUE
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INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS

Susanna Trnka
University of Auckland

A FRIEND RECENTLY WROTE me from Fiji that she spent an afternoon walking past Parliament, along the shore of Suva Point into the heart of Suva's downtown, thinking how peaceful it is now compared to the rioting and destruction that took place there little more than two years ago when George Speight took the members of Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry's government, and in many respects the nation of Fiji along with them, hostage. In fact, it was only a few months after the initial round of violence that the Fiji military achieved its stated objective of "normalization," allowing the citizenry to carry on with the business of daily life. The situation since then, though uncertain at times, has continued to be stable, and Fiji's residents no longer live with looting, electricity blackouts, school closures, military roadblocks, or curfew. In some ways the lives of those who have remained in Fiji have been less disrupted than the lives of those who chose to flee overseas in response to the coup. Despite the fears of many, the violence in Fiji has not (for the moment at least) escalated to the levels of comparable political and ethnic conflicts in Bougainville or the Solomon Islands.

But the reverberations from the May 2000 coup continue. Tourism is on the increase again and the shops in Suva are no longer boarded up, but there is also an increase in violent crime, high rates of migration, and widespread closure of businesses and corresponding job loss.[1] Politically, the future of the country is uncertain. The democratically elected Chaudhry government has not returned to power. In an effort by the military to return the country to civilian rule, the reins of the government were handed over to the then interim administration of President Ratu Josefa Iloilo and Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase in mid-July 2000. Despite Justice Anthony Gates's 15 November 2000 High Court ruling and subsequent Court of Appeal

ruling, both of which found the interim government to be illegal, the interim government remained in place until Qarase's party attained victory in the elections of August 2001. The Qarase-led government has implemented a series of policies aimed at ensuring indigenous Fijian paramountcy, including plans to rewrite the 1997 Constitution, which guarantees a multiparty, more ethnically inclusive government. (For more on the changes initiated by the Qarase government, see Lal's afterword to this volume.)

The essays in this collection describe a time of great upheaval in Fiji, but the arguments they make are about deep-seated and continuing social, political, and economic relations in Fiji. They explore class divisions within Fijian society; chiefly politicking on the local level; tensions between commoners and chiefs, lay persons and clergy, Indians and Fijians, and eastern and western provinces—all factors that contributed to the 2000 coup and that remain unresolved in Fiji today. Many of these are resurgences of historically enduring tensions that played a part in the two military coups of 1987 and the resulting removal of the Bavadra government from power. In some ways—with the storming of Parliament, the imposition of military rule, fears of widespread violence, and talk of impending economic decline—the 2000 coup was even acted out in ways reminiscent of 1987.[2]

But while the similarities between the coup of 2000 and those of 1987 are striking, there were also important differences. The 2000 coup was bloodier and lasted much longer. The violence resulted in a death toll currently estimated at sixteen (Lakhan 2001) and the establishment of Fiji's first "refugee camp" (actually a camp for internally displaced persons) for those fleeing anti-Indian violence in the interior of Viti Levu. It was only after months of civil unrest and escalating violence that the military began to make its presence known and to restore order in many rural areas. Perhaps most important, no single leader has risen above the fray to take the reins of the nation, as did the 1987 coup leader Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, who later became prime minister of Fiji. Throughout, there has been speculation of possible civil war (see, for example, Leavitt in this volume), calls for the Western Division to secede from Fiji, and fears of the breakup of the military into opposing factions. Most notably, on 26 May 2000, members of the military marched into Parliament to join coup supporters; in early July, sections of the armed forces rebelled and took over military garrisons in Labasa; and on 2 November 2000, a renegade band of the armed forces mutinied against Commander Bainimarama's troops in a gun battle that took place at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks.

Lively debate has occurred on the motivations behind both the 2000 and the 1987 coups. Some scholars of 1987 maintain that irreconcilable cultural differences between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians lie at the heart of the political struggles for power (Scarr 1988; Ravuvu 1991). Many, however,

argue that under the banner of ethnic difference actually being played out are cross-ethnic class antagonisms (Sutherland 1992) or multiple cleavages including class, provincial alignments, and tensions around the rights of commoners and the nature of chiefly power (Lal 1995; Lawson 1991; Kaplan 1988). Rutz's highly influential essay goes one step further in undermining notions of a pan-Fijian consciousness by outlining the ways in which "'tradition' has become a rhetorical battleground for a contest of nation making within the Fijian community" (1995:72). He argues that there exist in fact three different "rhetorical strategies" or political and historical visions of the nation (the Royalist Strategy, the Strategy of Betrayal of Land, and the Strategy of Divine Intervention) that have been used, with varying success, in attempts to unite indigenous Fijian society into a single imagined "nation."

Early analyses of the political-economic underpinnings of the May 2000 coup make similar arguments, suggesting that the latest crisis developed out of social, economic, and political cleavages between segments of indigenous Fijian society (Teaiwa 2000), as well as pointing out new sources of tension such as a change in the application of government policies toward business interests. Lal, for example, argues that among Speight's supporters were "young businessmen on the make, who rode the gravy train of the 1990s, benefited from opportunistic access to power, secured large, unsecured loans from the National Bank of Fiji, but then found their prospects for continued prosperity dimming upon the election of a new government" (Lal 2000b:181).[3]

Not nearly so much attention has, however, been devoted to documenting how Fiji's citizenry understood and continues to understand the crises. With a few exceptions, social science has left this task to fiction writers and to the authors of biographical and autobiographical accounts of those caught in the political limelight.[4] This lack of attention to the meanings of the coups in the lives of ordinary citizens of Fiji might in part reflect a bias in the literature on politics and ethnic relations in Fiji toward taking as the unit of analysis the nation-state and the relations of the various population groups within it. The majority of the studies of the 1987 coup focus on the national ramifications of the coup and subsequent elections—their implications for social and governmental policy, and the economic status of the country[5]—rather than undertaking ethnographic treatments of the impact and meanings of the coup for Fiji's citizenry. Such studies are invaluable for understanding the politics in the region, and it is not our goal to criticize them in this volume. Rather, it is our aim to rectify this imbalance in the scholarly literature by presenting analyses of a diverse selection (in terms of ethnicity, religion, class, and geographic location) of communities' responses to and participation in the current political upheaval.

We do so by beginning with the local, by exploring the ethnographic details of everyday life when it is no longer "everyday." In the essays that follow, particular attention is paid to the kinds of local and national discourse that were generated by the elections of 1999 and by the coup that followed one year later. The contributors to this volume were witness to an "irruption" of talk on topics that do not ordinarily occupy much public space in Fiji.[6] During the months of the most intense unrest, in addition to filling local newspapers often from cover to cover, the coup was talked about on street corners, in buses, over innumerable *tanoa*s and basins of kava. In the corridors of the maternity ward in Suva's main hospital, visitors discussed the health of a newborn baby in the midst of relating how they had begun routinely to flee from their homes into the surrounding bush each night in case they were attacked. In the first few weeks of unrest, the hunger for information was almost insatiable. As if on cue, all the customers in a grocery store would fall silent in order to hear the hourly news updates on the radio. It was not unusual to see people buying not one but two or three of the different daily newspapers in order to get the most up-to-date news. This time the coup was televised, so even in many areas where there was no violence, television viewers would tune in hourly to see new images of the chaos. I witnessed a middle-aged woman attempting to listen to the TV news with one ear while holding up a transistor radio, tuned to the hourly news update, to her other ear.

Out of this intensity, there emerged discourses and topics of discussion that had previously not held center stage. In some cases, as Leavitt writes, "the coup worked as a catalyst, forcing out into the open the anxieties and fears that had been in the shadows for some time." In others, the coup created new concerns that were dealt with in public space, be it in the media, between political parties, or on the level of community debate. Trnka thus documents a heightened interest in the meanings of "Indian" identity among Sanatan Hindus. Brison explores the surfacing of previously felt political tensions and the creation of new forms of community consensus. Leavitt describes the "scramble" among various chiefs to make sense of one chief's openly political pronouncements. Tomlinson explores the open exchange of political differences within the framework of a joking debate and a corresponding lack of change in church sermon Bible lessons in a Kadavuan community following the 1999 election. Rakuita reflects on the divisions in indigenous Fijian society that led to the targeting of ethnic minorities.

Some of the forms of discourse we analyze are lengthy narratives, such as the unusual *sevusevu* in which Leavitt took part or the story of Bhabhi's attack told by Trnka's informant, but others are fragments with nonetheless intricate political, social, and cultural resonances, such as Tomlinson's student's exclamation of *"Ku!"* It is by taking seriously these sometimes veiled

and sometimes explicit references, half-stories, jokes, sermons, and debates —in what was said and what was not—that we reflect on the larger political issues that are at stake in the local-level perceptions of politics, ethnic relations, and identity in Fiji.

With the exception of Brij Lal, who monitored events from Canberra, all of the contributors to this volume were in Fiji during the coup (or, in Tomlinson's case, in the year preceding). Rakuita was pursuing his postgraduate studies in sociology at the University of the South Pacific. The remainder of us were involved in a variety of ethnographic projects, such as the role of the Methodist Church in the perception of time (Tomlinson), ethnic identity among indigenous Fijians in Rakiraki (Brison and Leavitt), and social discourses of the body among Sanatan Hindus (Trnka), when the communities in which we were working were affected by the events of the coup. In many cases the impact was direct, in the form of a chiefly informant's call for a mobilization to support the coup leader (Leavitt) or through physical attacks against the people with whom we were working (Trnka). It was these events that compelled us to begin writing about the coup in terms of the experiences of Fiji's citizens.

Many of us first came together to discuss the 2000 coup at the February 2001 Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) conference. With the later addition of the essay from Tui Rakuita and the afterword by Brij Lal, this volume developed out of that session. We would like to thank the organizers of the ASAO conference, especially Jan Rensel, Larry Mayo, and John Barker, for facilitating our late entry into the Miami meetings. Mark Calamia took part in the ASAO session, and we are grateful for his participation and commentary. Our thanks also to Martha Kaplan for initiating the idea behind the panel.

NOTES

1. My assessment of the current situation in Fiji is based on unemployment statistics from the Ministry of Labour, reports of factory and other business closures, and comparisons of crime stories in print and online newspapers in the period before and after the coup. The Peoples' Coalition Web site also offered a plethora of information on the economic and social downturn following 19 May 2000. For example, the Fiji Labour Party's "Message to the People of Fiji on the Anniversary of the Armed Insurrection, 19 May 2001" cited that "thousands of workers have lost secure jobs," "doctors, nurses, teachers, accountants, computer experts, engineers and other skilled people and tradesmen are emigrating en masse in a brain drain that is leaving our own services depleted," and "businesses are collapsing everyday" (19 May 2001, http://www.pcgov.org.fj).

2. For a brief but highly evocative description of daily life during the 1987 coups, see the first section, "'Things Fall Apart': A Personal Retrospective of Fiji in 1987," in Martin Doornbos and A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi's "Introduction: Confronting the Future, Confronting the Past" (2000).

3. See also Lal 2000a, and Kelly and Kaplan 2001. Also newly released is Sutherland and Robertson 2002.

4. The primary exception in the social science literature on the 1987 coups is Lal's edited volume (1990), especially contributions by Lateef and Garrett, but see also Kelly 1995; Kelly 1998; Leckie 2000; and the brief personal reflections of Akram-Lodhi (2000). In terms of fiction, perhaps the most insightful text on 1987 is a collection of fiction, poetry, and personal reflection, *With Heart and Nerve and Sinew* (Griffen 1997), which is dedicated to the former prime minister, Timoci Bavadra. Autobiographies include Anirudh Singh's account of his kidnaping and torture by members of the Fiji military (1992), Thomson's account of his work in the Ministry of Information during the coup (1999), and a large section of Satendra Nandan's novel *The Wounded Sea,* which describes his abduction and detainment as a minister in the Bavadra government (1991). Rabuka's authorized biography (Sharpham 2000) offers a unique perspective from the other side of the events and is a follow-up to his first biography, published in 1988 (Dean and Ritova). In terms of the 2000 coup, Brij Lal and Michael Pretes have edited a recent collection of personal reflections and media accounts of the events from May 19 up until June 2000 (Lal and Pretes 2001).

5. Given limitations of space, it is impossible to produce a bibliography that could do justice to all of the texts on the 1987 coup, but some of the more notable ones include Lal 1992 and Lal's edited volumes (1990, 2000); Kelly 1988; Kaplan and Kelly 1994; Rutz 1995; Sutherland 1992; Scarr 1988; Premdas 1995; Lawson 1991; V. Lal 1990; and many of the contributions to Akram-Lodhi's edited volume (2000).

6. The term "irruption of discourse" is attributed to Matt Tomlinson, who first noted this commonality among the essays in this volume.

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SPEAKING OF COUPS BEFORE THEY HAPPEN: KADAVU, MAY–JUNE 1999

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This essay is an examination of discourse I heard in Kadavu Island, Fiji, immediately after the national elections of May 1999. The election results were distressing to many Kadavuans and propelled the circulation of explicitly political discourse. I examine two related phenomena. First, I consider how Methodists' uses of the Bible did not change during the period of coup discourse circulation. In other words, counterintuitively (and contrary to some themes in the literature on Fiji), political talk of Fijian aboriginality did not increase the citation of Old Testament books with their themes of rightful homelands. This suggests that certain forms of Methodist discourse remained independent of and relatively unaffected by political events. Second, I describe a joking debate at a kava-drinking session through which people of Tavuki village partly reconciled themselves to the election results. Such reconciliation, however, was an emergent fact of a generic practice, and although it changed the tone of political discourse circulating locally, it did not achieve wider political results.

In 1964, Cyril Belshaw wrote with considerable prescience:

> In my opinion, the society of Fiji is at a dangerous point at which if stress is increased there will be an overflow into destruction. During the period in which I was in Fiji [1958–1959], there seemed to be possibilities that frustrations could be resolved both at a social and at a personal level. Since that time conditions have in some respects worsened. Little action has been taken to create the kinds of economic institutions which will make it possible for Fijians to

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> resolve their problems; at the same time the political situation has begun to crystallize in a way which polarizes an almost artificial antipathy between Fijian and Indian. (1964:275)

Belshaw's comments are remarkable for at least three reasons. First, his vision of Fiji's future is apocalyptic: "Destruction" (and not mere disarray) threatens. Second, his reading of the political creation of "an almost artificial antipathy" is subtle and convincing: At many places and times, Fijians and Indo-Fijians have gotten along harmoniously, but in the postindependence period, the publicly circulating discourse of antipathy has accelerated to the point where it now sounds natural and inevitable. And, third, Belshaw's crystal ball was notably lucid: He saw the future correctly. Tracing the recent history of Fiji one sees increasing political chaos. Postcolonial Fiji has witnessed a series of increasingly disturbing events, from the governor-general's refusal to install an elected government in 1977 (Lal 1992: 238–240) to the overthrow of an installed government in 1987; then from the 1987 coups to the 2000 coup and its reverberations that have claimed sixteen lives to date (Lakhan 2001). The passage of time, from this viewpoint, is entropic.

Time and the Politics of Discourse Circulation

How do indigenous Fijians themselves view the passage of time, and what are the stakes? Although traditionalism is a prominent strain in Fijian discourse, statements valuing the old ways invite counterbalanced responses (see especially Arno 1993; Thomas 1992), such as consciously globalist and millennialist themes (e.g., for urban Fijian Seventh-day Adventists; see Miyazaki 2000), or appropriations of Christian narratives by people generating new indigenous Fijian polities (Kaplan 1990, 1995), for example. One prominent public theme in contemporary indigenous Fijian discourse is the present's decline from the past: The past was an age of *mana* (efficaciousness), when the ancestors had power although they were non-Christian. Because of the ancestors' uncomfortable status—powerful and respected but non-Christian and therefore potentially dangerous spiritual actors in the present age—Fijian traditionalism is often intimately bound up with antitraditionalism. The Methodist Church is a key node in the circulation of both traditionalist and antitraditionalist themes, being considered a "traditional" Fijian institution yet called on to defuse the dangerous, non-Christian aspects of tradition, such as "curses" from the ancestors.

Futures can be zones of uncertainty just as pasts are. During research in Tavuki village and district, Kadavu Island, in 1998–1999, I occasionally heard

muted apocalyptic statements as the year 2000 drew near, and people were not sure what to think about it. Because Tavuki, like all of Kadavu, is overwhelmingly Methodist, the statements I heard were Christian versions of the millennium borrowing from the Book of Revelation.[1] But for Tavukians, it seemed that the signs of the world's end might appear elsewhere first. At a kava session in March 1999, one man told me that he had seen a film in Suva (likely a video) that said that white people *(kai valagi)* have "666" on their bodies but that it is not visible. This discourse is borrowed from Revelation's "number of the beast."[2] One night in July 1999, near the end of my fieldwork, a man from Waisomo village told me—he was tipsy from drinking too much kava—that he had heard that Chicago was the headquarters of Satan's *lotu,* that is, the Satanic Church.[3] I also heard a comment about the Pope's possible identity as the Antichrist. And in June 1999, a noblewoman in Tavuki asked me what the "Y2K bug" was, because she had read a news article about it and, she said, *"Au sa retō"* (I am afraid). Apparently, the news article had mentioned a man in Miami who was fleeing to the wilderness in preparation for the millennium. Although certain people worried about local signs of the millennium—one man told me about his dream of Judgment Day in Tavuki, and there were rumors about a tidal wave that would hit the island—it was on foreign shores especially that dangerous signs seemed to be appearing. Thus, where a Euro-American observer sees political breakdown in Fiji, Fijian observers might see a different kind of breakdown—a breakdown of moral identities and technology run amok—and they might see the signs of it sprouting in foreign lands before coming to Fiji. In this context, I will examine discourse I heard in Kadavu around the time of the May 1999 national elections.

Below I will describe a joking debate I witnessed in June 1999, when the results of the elections had become distressingly clear to Kadavuans. In the debate, one man represented the interests of strong ethnic Fijian nationalism, and two other men represented the moderate forces of Christianity (specifically, Methodism) and resignation or reconciliation. Then I will describe how preachers' choices of biblical passages as lessons for their sermons did not change during the period of the elections and immediately afterwards, when explicitly political discourse began to circulate prominently. This fact is rather startling given that Fijians are said to refer to the Old Testament a great deal. In fact, the data show that the Old Testament is not cited nearly as often as the New Testament, even when one might especially expect it to be—namely, at times when questions of rightful landownership are prominent, as during the May 2000 coup. In other words, there is a disjunction here between Fijian metaculture—statements about Fijian culture itself ("Fijians use the Old Testament very often")—and pat-

terns of practice (the Old Testament is not actually used so often). I explore the implications of this disjunction between culture and metaculture below.

In addressing these topics, I am attempting to elucidate the politics of discourse circulation on two levels. The first section of this essay, by describing the joking debate, explicitly addresses the micropolitics of discourse. The event took place during a very tense time in Tavuki, when people fretted over the possibility that an Indo-Fijian would become prime minister because the Labour Party had won the national elections. In the debate, different voices articulating opposed political positions vied for the audience's attention and tried to win the argument. The second section of this essay, by describing the stability of one form of Methodist religious discourse, namely biblical citation, suggests that discourse has a force or power of its own. Both examples illustrate that certain forms of discourse may display (and perhaps help to generate) conservatism and stability even at times of political upheaval.

Elections and Their Discourse: May–June 1999

The national Methodist Church in Fiji was profoundly implicated in Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka's military coups of 1987. Because the majority of ethnic Fijians are Methodists and because of Methodism's deep (but not always harmonious) relationship with Fiji's chiefly authorities, the church was in a unique position to shape the unfolding events of the 1987 rebellion. According to historian Brij Lal: "When the internal debates [of the church] were over . . . the church went along with the views of the coup supporters. Fiji should be declared a Christian state, guided by Christian precepts and ideals. . . . This was a great victory for the coup supporters, for the church's stand sent a powerful signal to the bulk of the Fijian community already torn between their political conviction and their Christian beliefs" (1992:286). Indeed, after supporting Rabuka's rebellion, the national Methodist Church underwent its own internal coup of 1989, which echoed the military coups by bringing ethnic-nationalist leaders into positions of authority.

In his public justifications of the coups, Rabuka personally appealed to Christian themes (see especially Dean and Ritova 1988). He said that Indo-Fijians ought to convert to Christianity, informed his government ministers that the government's new path had "the blessing of God" (Lal 1992:293), told Fijian radio audiences that God had inspired him to the rebellious action (Howard 1991:248–249), and promulgated the Sunday Observance Decree of November 1987, which declared that "Sunday shall be observed in the Republic of Fiji as a sacred day and a day of worship and thanksgiving to Christ the Lord" (Heinz 1993:418; see also Rutz and Balkan 1992).

Conservative Methodists, ardent supporters of the Sunday ban on commerce, marched in the streets and erected roadblocks in support of the legislation. And Methodist support did not end with the creation of new governments and Sunday laws: On 6 July 1991, for example, "almost 10,000 Methodists marched through Suva to present a petition to the President, demanding that Fiji should be a Christian state" (Ratuva 1993:60).

Before beginning fieldwork, I considered myself relatively well informed on what had happened during the coups of 1987 and in their aftermath. Aware of the Methodist Church's role in the upheavals of 1987 and the church's own internal coup, I was keenly interested to see how the national elections of May 1999 would unfold and to observe the role Methodism played in the political process. Partly, I wondered about the possibility of coups.

What I did not realize was the ways in which Tavukians might be thinking of coups, too. One short anecdote will illustrate this. One of my best friends in Tavuki asked me if I would come to his house in the afternoons to help his two sons practice English while they were on a two-week break from school in Vunisea. Figuring that this was the least I could do to repay his generosity in teaching me Tavukian language and culture, I went to my friend's house, where I posed simple questions to his sons, Konilio and Taniela (I am using pseudonyms because they are youth). My questions were often met with a period of silence, then a shy answer. On the day before national elections began in May 1999, however, I decided to try a current events question. I asked Konilio, "What begins in Fiji tomorrow?" He answered instantly, "*Ku!*" (Coup!). I laughed, and Konilio looked bewildered. I realized that he was not joking at all—he did not understand exactly what a "coup" was, only that it had something to do with the transition of governments.

This story sounds funny, but the issues are serious and the implications profound. Coups were something talked about in Tavuki, but I did not hear much of this talk until the time of the elections. In the elections, Kadavuans had voted strongly for one party, Sitiveni Rabuka's Soqosoqo ni Vakavūlewa ni Taukei.[4] The SVT party was considered the party of chiefly interests. By voting for the SVT, Kadavuans were supporting chiefs; more precisely, they were supporting whom their chiefs supported.[5] But nationally the SVT lost badly, and people in Tavuki were frustrated. Moreover, they were quite anxious that Mahendra Chaudhry, Labour's leader, would claim the prime ministership.

In this atmosphere, rumors started to circulate. "*Fijians and Indo-Fijians have begun fighting on the western side of Viti Levu. The prime minister's office has been burned down.*" These rumors turn out to be false, but they

express a sense of the chaotic: social breakdown has begun. But this is not necessarily a feared chaos—in fact, it might be a desirable one. A coup could mean the reassertion of Fijian strength, the recapture of lost *mana.* Overall, however, the atmosphere was tense and the prospects felt grim. The prevailing mood was expressed most succinctly by a friend of mine who told me, over kava, that this was a *gauna drēdrē vei Viti,* a "difficult time for Fiji." The warrant for this statement is that Fiji is the land of and for ethnic Fijians. Times were difficult because Indo-Fijians were poised to take power.

The elections began on 8 May 1999; it was nine days later, 17 May 1999, when the results were clear, that I first heard Tavukians explicitly discuss the possibility of a coup in reaction to the Labour Party's win. A group of us were working on a Methodist Church project, sawing pine logs for lumber, and people speculated that this time, as opposed to 1987, the coup might be led by the police, with Commissioner Isikia Savua in charge. Later, a friend of mine would disagree, saying that the army would have to carry out a coup, since they had the guns. Another friend of mine noted practically that a coup would involve urban Fijians creating civil unrest—the grounds Rabuka had used to justify his takeover in 1987, along with divine mission. As I wrote in my fieldnotes on May 18, "the consensus is that there might well be a coup . . . especially if Chaudhry takes the reins." People were speaking of coups before they happened.

Then something emerged spontaneously to break the tension: an informal joking debate at a kava drinking session in Tavuki's church social hall on 2 June 1999.

The Joking Debate

The three main participants were the *talatala qase* (superintendent minister) of the Methodist Church in Kadavu, Rev. Isikeli Serewai, and two local men, Isikeli Rogo and Kameli Vuadreu. Rev. Serewai spoke as the representative of the *lotu,* "Methodism/Christianity," and his opinions were congruent with those of Isikeli, a carpenter, who argued calmly by analogy. Both of these men articulated a position that is best described as "resigned to the situation and looking for the positive aspects." On the other side was Kameli, who played the comic figure brilliantly, acting as the humorous and volatile voice of the Fijian ethnic-nationalist id.

During the debate, boundaries of propriety were crossed repeatedly by Kameli, and the audience's appreciative laughter marked this event as carnivalesque. Andrew Arno calls the Fijian joking debate "a verbal game—a well-defined, playful form of interaction in which serious issues might nonetheless be ventilated" (1990:242), and his description is apt for the event I

witnessed. Certain norms remained unchallenged, however, most significantly these men's right to speak in public in the first place. All three are respected, middle-aged men who are not chiefs, so they can engage in this sort of playful-but-serious dispute. They sit neither very "high" nor very "low" at kava drinking sessions, but in the long column of men at the sides —the men positioned between the foci of service (the chiefs) and the servants (the young men). No women were present, and while some men added their voices now and then to the debate, most stayed quiet except to laugh when Kameli said something particularly funny.

Isikeli the carpenter said that when the Israelites were in their Babylonian exile, they cried out to God, asking why they were in such a plight. God, said Isikeli, told them they were getting what they deserved. Isikeli then claimed that Labour's victory would get Fijians back on the right track, in analogy with the Jews coming out of the desert: Now Fijians would pay appropriate attention to the pillars of their society, *lotu* (Methodism/Christianity), *vanua* (land, people in a particular territory [represented by a chief]), and *matanitū* (government).

Kameli, voicing the ethnic-nationalist position, would have none of it. Instead of recognizing parallels to ancient Israel, he called up other exoticisms: For example, he joked about *kalou matakau* (wooden-faced gods, or idols), a disparaging reference to non-Christian religions such as Hinduism, the dominant religion for Indo-Fijians. As the foil for Rev. Serewai and Isikeli, Kameli kept people laughing with his energetic, outrageous responses, which, in any other context, would have been considered shockingly rude. Rev. Serewai repeated an assertion he had made before: that it was wrong for people to pray for a particular political party's victory, because doing so was an attempt to influence God. Better, said Rev. Serewai, simply to pray about the elections and not to request that a certain party win. On other occasions, people did not challenge this advice, since it was from the local high authority on such matters. At this debate, however, Kameli asserted that he *had* prayed to God for the SVT to win. People laughed, for here was a mere member of the congregation declaring that he had not followed the minister's advice on prayer—and, I suspect, many people sympathized with Kameli's desire. At another moment, Rev. Serewai recounted how, drinking kava the previous night, he had challenged people to explain why the high chief and former prime minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara had persuaded the leader of the Fijian Association Party to support Chaudhry. The minister said that when he had posed this question (with its implication, I believe, that Ratu Mara must have had good reasons for his disturbing actions), no one could answer it—but Kameli kept chirping, *"Au ma sauma!"* (I answered it!). When Rev. Serewai used the English word "corruption" in criticizing

the SVT, Kameli responded, "*Vosa vā-Viti,*" "Speak Fijian" (colloquial, nonpolite phrasing). When Rev. Serewai mentioned that the national budget would be presented by Chaudhry's government in September, Kameli suggested an alternative occupation for the Indo-Fijian prime minister: He could take his knife, file, and shovel and go to his village (i.e., to farm with typical Fijian tools).

What struck me most about the debate, at the time, was the amount of laughter it generated. People worried deeply about the election results, and here were two respected men arguing that forbearance was the best course. Kameli's voice-of-the-people responses, irreverent and pointed, made people laugh. Gone was the guarded, nervous, upset and angry tone of earlier discussions about the election. But, in retrospect, although the joking debate cooled passions, the core issue of Fijian dissatisfaction with the election's results seems to have foreshadowed the events of a year later.[6]

The Culture and Metaculture of Bible Quotation

In 1993, Audrey Dropsy published an article in the Fijian journal *Review* on the Fijian Methodist Church's internal coup of 1989, a rebellion that echoed the military coups of 1987 in certain ways. In her article, she mentioned how the former church president, Rev. Josateki Koroi, "has pointed out that about 95% of the sermons of the Methodist Church are derived from the Old Testament. These followed the lines of the Jewish book and 'the Jews are one of the most nationalistic people ever'" (Dropsy 1993:51). She continued: "In drawing attention to the highly nationalist Jews and their religion, the former Methodist Church President was drawing a parallel to the Fijian nationalists within and without the Church. He was probably thinking of the popular belief among the Fijian people that they are a lost tribe of Israel" (ibid.).

Intuitively, Rev. Koroi's metacultural claim—that is, his explicit claim about Fijian culture, society, and social practices—seems to make sense. Fijians pride themselves on their Christian identity, compare their ancestors to the ancient Israelites, and fear the loss of their true homeland. So, it stands to reason, preachers would cite the Old Testament (and presumably particular books, such as Exodus) a lot. Indeed, a prominent example of this phenomenon is 1987's coup leader, Sitiveni Rabuka, a Methodist lay preacher who likes to base his sermons on Lamentations 5:2, "Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens" (Heinz 1993:433; see also Rutz and Balkan 1992:66–67).

However, the statistics I gathered during fieldwork in Kadavu show a radically different picture. In this section, I examine several sets of data. First,

I examine the official Methodist Church calendar's daily recommended Bible verses. These verses can be used in the church services held that day, in home worship, or for any similar use, although they must be considered recommendations and not prescriptions. The calendar gives a sense of the official, bureaucratic weighting of different Bible passages: Certain books are presented as exemplary readings more often than others. Next, I present the data of what verses Kadavuan preachers actually preached on during the period of fieldwork. (*Lesoni,* or "lessons," is the term for these verses, which are read aloud during the service and then preached on). I note which verses and books were chosen most often and examine the degree of conformity between calendar-recommended lessons and lessons actually chosen by local preachers. Finally, I break down Kadavuan preachers' *lesoni* into two time periods: before discourse about a possible coup began circulating and after it began circulating. I do this because it is evident that Rev. Koroi's claim was made in a slightly different historical context than the one I am examining. He was speaking at a time of intense political turbulence, whereas during much of my time in the field, the political situation was relatively placid. Since things began to change in May 1999, however, and frustration about Indo-Fijian political gains became a public topic in Tavuki, one might expect the data to begin to lean in the direction indicated by Rev. Koroi. That is, perhaps Kadavuan preachers would quote Old Testament verses more often when their thoughts turned to rightful homelands. In fact, the pattern does not change significantly before the coup discourse period and during the coup discourse period. This suggests that forms of discourse, once circulating, generate a force of their own and may shape events more than events shape discourse. It also suggests that metacultural statements are attempts to accelerate the circulation of certain kinds of culture—for example, to spur citations of the Old Testament that can presumably be used to make political claims—that do not necessarily succeed (see Urban 2001).

The Church Calendar's Daily Bible Verses

The following list summarizes the number of times a verse from a particular book appeared in the Fijian Methodist Church's 1999 calendar. There was no day in the calendar without a verse, but because some days had more than one verse listed, the total number of citations is 367.

Matthew: 51	Genesis: 21	Psalms: 15
John: 31	Luke: 18	Judges: 14
Acts: 26	Isaiah: 17	Micah: 14
Revelation: 22	Colossians: 15	1 Corinthians: 13

1 Peter: 13
Romans: 11
2 Corinthians: 10
Exodus: 7
Ephesians: 6
Mark: 6
Deuteronomy: 6
Galatians: 5
Hebrews: 5
Philippians: 4
Jeremiah: 4
Job: 4
1 John: 3
2 Samuel: 3
James: 2
2 Peter: 2
Ecclesiastes: 2
Amos: 2
1 Kings: 2
Jonah: 2
Nehemiah: 2
1 Thessalonians: 1
2 Timothy: 1
Numbers: 1
Joshua: 1
Titus: 1
1 Samuel: 1
Zechariah: 1
Ezekiel: 1
Hosea: 1

These data are remarkable for a number of reasons. First, although 42 separate books are listed in the calendar (out of a possible 66; that is, 64 percent of all biblical books are mentioned at least once), the proportions of citation are not equal between Old and New Testaments. Twenty-one books out of the 39 books in the Old Testament (that is, 54 percent) are used; 21 books out of the 27 books in the New Testament are used (78 percent). But, more significant, a limited number of books are cited repeatedly, and these are mostly from the New Testament. Matthew alone accounts for almost 14 percent of total references, and together Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the Luke-authored Acts of the Apostles account for 132 of the 367 citations, or almost 36 percent. The Epistles used here (Corinthians, Romans, Colossians, Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus) account for 67 citations, or 18 percent of the total. The sum of all the New Testament references is 246, or 67 percent of the total. The Old Testament books, by contrast, are only cited 121 times, or 33 percent of the total. To put it another way, the Methodist Church calendar for 1999 devoted eight months to the New Testament and only four months to the Old Testament. New Testament books' verses are listed twice as often as Old Testament ones.

To assess Rev. Koroi's claim about preachers' privileging the Old Testament, however, a new set of data is required, the ethnographic data of actual *lesoni* used in Kadavuan sermons during the period of fieldwork. What books' verses did Kadavuan preachers actually choose for their sermons? This information is presented below.

Luke: 16
Matthew: 12
John: 8
Acts: 8
1 Corinthians: 6
Isaiah: 6
1 Timothy: 5
Exodus: 4
Psalms: 4
Jeremiah: 4
Ephesians: 3
Genesis: 3
Deuteronomy: 3
Mark: 2
Galatians: 2

Colossians: 2
1 John: 2
Philippians: 2
Revelation: 2
Proverbs: 2
Joshua: 2
Nehemiah: 2
Ezekiel: 2
2 Peter: 1
James: 1
2 Corinthians: 1
Judges: 1
1 Kings: 1
2 Kings: 1
2 Samuel: 1

These figures are strikingly similar to the church calendar's recommendations: Evidently, preachers prefer to use the New Testament. But before considering these data in depth, it is necessary to determine how often preachers used the calendar's daily Bible-verse recommendation as the *lesoni* for their sermons. That is, how often did preachers follow recommendations from headquarters?

The answer, surprisingly, is not very often. Preachers used the calendar passages (or significant sections thereof, in which case I counted the instance as following the calendar) only 23 percent of the time (21 of 90 instances) and chose their own *lesoni* 77 percent of the time (69 of 90 instances).[7]

In other words, most of the time preachers chose their own *lesoni.* Generally, they ignored the calendar. In this light, the data above are especially interesting considering how similar they are to the data on the church calendar recommendations. It is simplest to present the relevant figures side-by-side for comparison; this is done in Table 1.

TABLE 1. **Data from Methodist Church Calendar and Actual Preachers' Usage Compared**

	1999 Methodist Church Calendar	Kadavuan Preachers' *Lesoni,* 1998–1999
Total number of Bible passages considered	367	109
Number of passages from the Old Testament	121 (33%)	36 (33%)
Number of passages from the New Testament	246 (67%)	73 (67%)
Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) plus the Luke-authored Acts of the Apostles	132 (36%)	46 (42%)
Epistles	67 (18%)	21 (19%)
Most-cited book	Matthew, 51 (14%)	Luke, 16 (15%)
Second-most-cited book	John, 31 (8%)	Matthew, 12 (11%)
Third-most-cited book	Acts, 26 (7%)	John and Acts, 8 each (7%)

The macrostructural similarities in Table 1 are astonishing. Considering that a full 63 percent of the time Kadavuan preachers did not use any church guidance in selecting biblical verses—that is, they followed neither the calendar nor a special program of service—it is remarkable that the figures of comparison are so similar statistically. The percentage of times an Old Testament verse is chosen compared to a New Testament one is exactly the same: The Old Testament is chosen one-third of the time, and the New Testament chosen two-thirds of the time, both in the calendar and for actual *lesoni.* The Gospels are chosen a similar number of times (36 percent for the calendar, 42 percent in actual sermons), and the Epistles are selected almost exactly the same percentage of time (18 percent for the calendar, 19 percent for actual usage).

What do these numbers mean? First, quite simply, they mean that Rev. Koroi's claim—even if it were true for late 1980s and early 1990s Fiji—was not accurate for the national Methodist Church organization in 1999 nor for Kadavuan preachers' own patterns of biblical citation during the period of research in 1998–1999. (On the same topic, but more fundamentally, these numbers present an interpretive challenge: Because Fijians do care about a rightful homeland, why do the church calendar and Kadavuan preachers themselves eschew the Old Testament so often in favor of the New?) Second, and more provocatively, it seems that biblical discourse flows in a particular pattern in Fijian Methodist contexts. Biblical books are chosen in similar proportions both by church officials planning the institutional calendar and by preachers who act, for the most part, on their own. In other words, the patterns themselves seem to be a key but implicit part of circulating religious discourse.

Another aspect of the data should be considered. As mentioned above, Rev. Koroi made his metacultural claim about Fijian Old Testament usage at a time of political instability. Most of the time I was recording *lesoni* in Kadavu, however, there was no threat of political turbulence. As described above, I began to hear talk about the possibility of a coup during the period of elections and their aftermath, in May and June 1999. Is there any difference in patterns of biblical citation before mid-May and after mid-May 1999? That is, as people began to talk of coups—coups intimately tied to notions of Fiji as a (promised) land of and for ethnic Fijians, the rightful inhabitants—did preachers begin to refer to the Old Testament more often?

In short, they did not. The data are presented in Table 2.

The data compared in Table 2 are so similar that they invite important conclusions. One is that Methodist discourse, considered at the textual macrolevel of overall patterns of biblical citation in formal contexts, is not shaped to any evident degree by wider political concerns. This finding sug-

gests that although one frequently hears the scholarly claim that discourse "shapes and reflects" the social environment, reflection is not an automatic, immediate, or even statistically evident thing.[8]

Another conclusion that can be drawn is that there is no automatic or self-evident relationship between metacultural statements and the culture they purport to describe. When claims are made about Fijians' use of the Old Testament (I have heard these claims from Euro-American scholars, too), they are selective descriptions. The data from the church calendar and Kadavuan preachers' *lesoni* show that the New Testament is cited twice as often as the Old Testament. Even when other publicly circulating discourse is explicitly addressing Old Testament–style themes of rightful landownership (that is, when people are discussing Indo-Fijian threats to indigenous Fijian landownership), the patterns of biblical citation remain stable.

This conclusion does not mean that metacultural claims are unimportant, however, for such claims might serve to accelerate certain forms of culture (Urban 2001). For example, Sitiveni Rabuka's frequent citation of Lamentations 5:2 was undoubtedly a politically motivated attempt to define Fijian cultural-historical issues of landownership in biblical terms, which in turn justified his rebellious actions and the actions of his supporters agitating for a Christian state. Additionally, metacultural statements are themselves cultural forms. In other words, metacultural statements comment on culture itself, but those statements themselves are cultural products. When Rev. Koroi claimed that 95 percent of all Fijian Methodist sermons use *lesoni* from the Old Testament, he was presumably not trying to foment rebellion,

TABLE 2. ***Lesoni* Used by Kadavuan Preachers before and after the Prominent Circulation of Coup Discourse**

	Up to and Including 16 May 1999 (before coup discourse)	After and Including 23 May 1999 (during and after coup discourse)
Total number of Bible passages considered	80	29
Number of passages from the Old Testament	27 (34%)	9 (31%)
Number of passages from the New Testament	53 (66%)	20 (69%)
Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) plus the Luke-authored Acts of the Apostles	33 (41%)	13 (45%)
Epistles	15 (19%)	6 (21%)

as was Colonel Rabuka. He was, however, recirculating a bit of cultural wisdom ("Fijians use the Old Testament very often") that is not evident in the data of actual practice.[9]

The Kadavuan data warn that the relationship between culture and metaculture is not an automatic one and that investigations of naturally occurring patterns of discourse can illuminate implicit aspects of social life. Here, it is worthwhile to reconsider Fijian statements of traditionalism. As I noted in the introduction to this essay, traditionalist statements do not always go unchallenged in Fiji and discourses of antitraditionalism may become locally prominent. Yet a skeptical (or even apprehensive) attitude toward aspects of the past does not necessarily generate a positive view of the future. Although Tavukians perceived some dangers from the past working in the present (namely, the baleful influence of non-Christian ancestors), they did not necessarily regard the future positively. Recall their vague suspicions of the millennium, couched in discourse based on the Book of Revelation, in "signs" such as the Y2K bug and moral breakdown occurring in white people's countries.

Newness can be considered a suspicious force in Tavuki.[10] Once, when he was formally installing a man into a church position, Rev. Serewai justified his choice (which might have been considered dubious because the man's forebears had opposed Christian missionary efforts) by declaring, *"E sega ni kā vou, e sega ni kā vācalakā"* (It isn't something new, it isn't a mistake). In this statement, the minister tied legitimacy to historical durability: Newness and mistakenness, he was suggesting, tend to go together. It is ironic, then, that the conservatism of one form of Fijian discourse—the pattern of biblical citation, whether in a church calendar or a preacher's individual choices, whether at a politically placid time or one of great tension and threatened upheaval—honors Fijian values of traditionalism while subverting metacultural claims.

Conclusion: Discourse, Politics, and the Circulation of Pasts and Futures

I have described the circulation of discourse in Tavuki, Kadavu, before the May 1999 national elections and immediately thereafter. The elections worried people not necessarily because they might spawn a new round of coups —this, in itself, was not necessarily a bad thing—but because they threatened to give Indo-Fijians political power. When the Labour Party's overwhelming victory became clear, there was a great deal of tension in the village, which was dissipated after a joking debate in early June. The message that ultimately prevailed at the debate was a conservative one of resig-

nation: Tavukians were not happy about the election results, but the debate let them laugh at it, and passions were cooled. Moreover, I have noted that the biblical texts chosen by preachers remained similar to the ones they chose before the period of prominent discourse about the possibility of a coup. This is another kind of conservatism, in which preachers faithfully followed proportional patterns of biblical citation from the pre–coup-discourse period and from the proportional patterns of Bible passage recommendations printed in the Methodist Church's calendar.

Futures and pasts are things circulated discursively. As such, they can be woven into other strands of discourse to make particular political claims. Sometimes those claims are metacultural—that is, they are culturally formulated statements purporting to describe culture itself. Scholars can analyze the relationship between their ethnographic data and others' explicit claims about local sociocultural life. When there is a notable disjuncture between culture and metaculture, such as the one I have described in this essay, one must ask why. I have argued that the notion that "Fijians use the Old Testament very often" circulates successfully as a cultural product and may be used to accelerate the circulation of certain kinds of culture, as when Colonel Rabuka repeatedly quoted Lamentations 5:2 (Heinz 1993:433). However, its efficacy in spurring certain cultural practices and patterns of discourse circulation is not automatic.

In the end, Cyril Belshaw's comment about Fiji's encroaching chaos seems both prescient and curiously traditionalist. He accurately foresaw the political difficulties generated by the "almost artificial antipathy" between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians. His expectation of an "overflow into destruction," however, sounds most like indigenous Fijians' own visions of the present's tragic decline from the past, when the ancestors were powerful and authority was legitimate.

NOTES

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1. Tavuki is a village of approximately 125 people, and is the seat of the Tui Tavuki, the paramount chief of Kadavu Island. It is also the location of the Kadavu Provincial Office, where the Roko Tui Kadavu (the island's highest government-appointed chief) works, and the village of residence for visiting *talatala qases,* or superintendent ministers of the Methodist Church in Kadavu. Kadavu, the fourth largest Fijian island geographically, has a population of approximately 9,800, over 93 percent of whom are members of the Methodist Church (Government of Fiji 1995).

2. See especially Revelation 13:18 and 14:9. As Robbins describes for the Urapmin of highland Papua New Guinea, "the 666 stands at the crux of a choice between two possible futures" (1997: 51). These futures are intimately linked to places, including places as large as nations and places as specifically localized as individual bodies.

3. The Church of Satan currently has a post office box in San Diego, California. The rumor I heard on Kadavu may have come from the fact that the church's founder, Anton LaVey, was born in Chicago.

4. In the national elections, Kadavuans, like all Fijians, cast votes for two seats in Parliament. One was a communal seat, a position for which only ethnic Fijians were eligible to stand. The other was an open seat, for which any national citizen could run, regardless of ethnic identity. The communal-seat parliamentarian represents Kadavu alone; the open-seat parliamentarian represents Kadavu and two other regions, Lomaivuna and Namosi.

5. In this election, for the first time, Fijians used a progressive vote-counting system in which voters could rank candidates. The SVT's communal-seat candidate, Jim Ah Koy, drew 83.4 percent of the vote against two other candidates (the most lopsided victory of all seventy-one contested seats in the election), and the SVT's open-seat candidate, Konisi Yabaki, drew 57.3 percent of the vote against four other candidates. Since Ah Koy won his communal seat with such a high percentage of first-preference votes, no figure on lower-tier preferences are given in the source reporting election results (*Fiji Times,* 20 May 1999, 25–28). Yabaki, in contrast, did not win his open seat outright on first preferences but on the third tier of progressive votes. Still, he earned 48 percent of the first-preference vote, many of these first-preference votes undoubtedly coming from Kadavu.

6. Some observers, commenting on the coup of May 2000, have noted that the discourse about the coup—that it was about Fijian land rights and political representation—did not jibe with the actors' apparent reasons for carrying out the coup: thwarted business interests, impending fraud investigations, and simple grabs for power. But such commentators, I suggest, miss the point of that discourse about land rights and political representation, which circulated particularly well among many ethnic Fijian communities. George Speight said the things he did because he knew they would work, and he was right to a large extent. He was, after all, echoing his predecessor.

7. The reason the total here is 90 and not 109 is that ten *lesoni* followed neither the calendar nor the preacher's choice but followed special programs devised by Methodist Church headquarters for particular services; I was unable to find the calendar data for

seven dates in 1998; and for two instances I am unsure whether they followed a special program or not, and so have not included them.

8. The first Methodist missionaries in Fiji focused their early biblical translation efforts on the New Testament, particularly the Gospels; see especially Thornley 2000:87–88, 150–151, 232, 245–246, 249–252, 266, 324, 334–335, 340, 354–358, 361, 417, 420–422, 429–431; Cargill 1977:69–70, 73, 78, 80, 82. From the Old Testament, Genesis was favored for early translation (Rutz and Balkan 1992:71; see also Thornley 2000). The priority of the New Testament in Fijian public life endures, as shown by the Bible Society in the South Pacific's production of a new, idiomatic Fijian New Testament in 1987. Regarding the Old Testament, a revision of the 1902 translation has been commenced by the Bible Society but, as of 2001, is not yet published (Andrew Thornley, pers. com.).

9. I noted only one Tavukian sermon that explicitly addressed local people's concerns about an Indo-Fijian government coming to power. The sermon, given by the village catechist, argued earnestly that indigenous Fijians should stand united but defused the political implications by shifting attention from the temporal government of Fiji to the eternal Matanitū ni Xalou (Kingdom of God). Consider this remarkable excerpt (note, Kadavuan "x" = Standard Fijian "k" and Kadavuan "j" = Standard Fijian "t"):

Vei xeda na ivāvāxoso ni lotu	For us, the church's congregation
ina sigalevu nidavu	on this noon
Sigatabu ni Penitixo	Pentecost Sunday
tinixaciwa ciwasagavulu xa ciwa	1999
sa na mini lesu tale mai.	will not return.
Sa da na waraxina gā na Sigatabu ni Penitixo ni yabaxi rua na udolu, dua tale	We will await Pentecost Sunday of the year 2000,
na senituri vou.	another new century.
Sa na vānava tū mada na irairai ni noda vanua	What will our land look like
rairai ni noda lotu	our church look like
na irairai ni noda matanitū?	our government look like?
Dua gā na matanitū sā via vātura jixo	[I] want to propose just one government
sigalevu nidavu.	this day.
Xena sālevu au sa tuxuna xora.	I already told of the path to it.
Xedra gā i sa curumi tū nodra bula ina Yalo Tabu	The Kingdom of God will only be theirs [who] have had the Holy Spirit enter their lives, they [who] have taken Jesus to be their Lord and to be their savior.
dra tauri Jisū me je nodra Tūraga xa je nodra ivābula	
sa na je nodra	
na Matanitū ni Xalou.	
Sa levu na	There is a lot of
na yāvavala	rebellion
na tatamosamosa	noisemaking
na rorogo da i rogoca	the rumors we heard
ni mai cava jixo na mācawa xa	when this week came
na viere sa vāyacori	the things happening [i.e., unrest over the election]

i vāuca tū [bound up] noda bula na tamata	are bound up in our human lives
ina vuravura ni vibuli	in the world of creation
xa da bula jixo xe i dua na ere sa	which we are living in
Au via jinia jixo xe na vāxasama lexalexa	I want to finish the short thought
dua na ere sa vani dravudravua vālevu sara jixo xe noda bula	something is very impoverished in our lives
ni jixo vāvanua	in being traditional
bula vāxoro	village life
na dravudravua ni vilomani	the dearth of kindly love
dravudravua ni duavata	dearth of unity
dravudravua ni caxacaxa vata	dearth of working together
na vua ni Yalo Tabu i vuravura	the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the world
na Yalo Tabu i mini vāvuna na tatawasewase je na duidui.	the Holy Spirit does not cause division and difference.
Naxi ni xena sovaraxi na Yalo Tabu	The purpose of the Holy Spirit's pouring forth
veivāduavatataxi	is to unite
jixo lomavata na tamata	people are united
sa qai sovaraxi xe na yalo ni Xalou	then the spirit of God is poured forth
na Yalo Tabu	the Holy Spirit
me caxacaxa yaco	should work
noda bula na tamata.	in our human lives.

The catechist's rhetorical strategy is a familiar one in Fijian Methodist discourse. He criticizes the present, claiming that people are not acting appropriately, and turns to heavenly power as the only true agentive force in the universe. He turns to this heavenly power twice, first after raising the specter of an uncertain future ("what will our land look like, our church look like, our government look like?"), then after describing the grim, tense local reaction to the election results ("rebellion, noisemaking, the rumors we heard when this week came").

10. Rutz describes the Fijian logic lucidly: "The present is authorized by the past. Current political dialogue appeals to continuity between past and present in order to establish its truths" (1995:78).

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CHIEFLY POLITICS IN THE FIRST REACTIONS IN RAKIRAKI TO THE MAY 2000 COUP IN FIJI

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This essay describes the rationale behind local leaders' scramble to respond to unfolding reactions to the coup in Fiji. Once word spread across the countryside that there had been a takeover of Parliament, people felt an immediate sense that the country was undergoing "another coup." This perception created a need to assimilate the events in terms of prevailing political orientations. In Rakiraki, the Tui Navitilevu made a widely publicized pronouncement of support that provoked a hurried attempt to contain reactions from other high-status figures in the area. The incident brought out into the open the usually submerged conflicts over legitimate chiefly status in the Rakiraki area.

ONE OF THE STRIKING THINGS about the 2000 coup in Fiji, especially to those with only a passing familiarity with the issues, is the fact that even with the attackers arrested for treason and order restored to the scene of the kidnaping, the prior government was not returned to power. The aims of the perpetrators were denounced, yet many of their demands—that an interim government be established, that the 1997 Constitution be scrapped and reinvented—were pursued with vigor. It seemed almost as if in being arrested Speight and company had won.

The fact is that events played out that way because the coup set in motion a process of yet again reconsidering the fundamental questions of race relations and political representation in the country. It is as if this process were the inevitable by-product of a need to respond to a crisis suffused with the stark racial rhetoric of the coup leaders. The many political complexities of the situation continue to confound Western observers, but it does seem to

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be clear that the coup worked as a catalyst, forcing out into the open once again anxieties and fears that had been in the shadows for some time. In the past, such events have proved to offer opportunities for developing new paradigms that accommodate the realities of ethnic opposition. Robert Norton has observed that "Fiji's modern political history has been marked by a recurring pattern of crisis and conciliation: crises that while accentuating ethnic conflict, have also presented new contexts for dialogue and accommodation" (2000:111). As of this writing, with the new elections in August 2001 revealing a starkly polarized nation and with the elected Qarase government refusing to honor the 1997 Constitution's requirement that cabinet seats go to strong opposition parties—in this case the Indian-dominated Fiji Labour Party—any healing accommodation is yet to materialize.

The driving conflicts are among indigenous Fijians themselves over their vision for the future of the country. Scholars have argued that the priority of ethnic Fijian discourse has been in place since the coups of 1987—events that "took away the Other against which Fijian identity had been dialectically shaped by racial politics" and established a new frame by which "the contest over 'the nation' would be de-centered, resurfacing within the Fijian community itself" (Rutz 1995:75). Significant regional and class differences among indigenous Fijians have produced competing visions for the nation, and how those conflicts play out will significantly affect the nation's future. A clearer understanding of the range of cultural factors varying across regions can help to build an analytical framework for seeing what has already happened and for anticipating what is to come. For this reason, a study of different local responses to the coup attempt in May 2000 may offer clues to the relevant underlying cultural patterns that vary from region to region.

A central issue—perhaps the central issue—is the role of "tradition" in imagining Fijian identity, and integral to that is an appraisal of the place of chiefs. In many Pacific societies chiefs stand as universal symbols of "tradition" and "custom" (White 1992:75) while occupying pivotal roles in regional politics. Stephanie Lawson argues that "the political salience of issues concerning chiefly status in Fiji achieved special prominence after the military coup of 1987.... Chiefliness was promoted emphatically as the authentic expression of Fijian 'tradition'" (1997:109). During the crisis in 2000 the country looked to the Great Council of Chiefs for guidance on how to deal with George Speight's actions, and individual chiefs had to decide where they stood on the issue of Speight's calls for indigenous Fijian paramountcy. Behind each chief's decision lurked a host of political tensions in his home region, tensions not only over relations between Indians and Fijians, but also over the very role chiefs should play in national politics. Lamont Lindstrom

and Geoffrey White have argued, in fact, that throughout the Pacific "the status and power of the chief have become public issues" such that in "a general strategy for the comparative study of political culture in the Pacific" researchers should by "looking to the margins and boundaries of the state . . . find critical events that offer strategic sites of investigation." In these local and marginal contexts, they claim, "chiefs are central actors in the dramas of political transformation" (Lindstrom and White 1997:4). Applying such an approach in Fiji means addressing different regional paradigms for the role of chiefs in contemporary national politics.

This essay outlines some central themes in tensions over chiefs' playing politics in the Rakiraki area of the northeastern portion of Ra Province on Viti Levu in Fiji. In Rakiraki, as likely elsewhere in the country, the May 2000 coup brought divisions out into the open as leaders scrambled to respond to unfolding reactions. In so doing they had to acknowledge some conflicts that had previously been hidden under the cloak of decorum. It was not just political allegiances that were at issue. People had to take a stand on what role high chiefs should play in the sometimes unseemly realm of politics, on what place race had in the definition of the nation, and ultimately on where lay the core of "Fijian" ethnic identity. While it was easy to get caught up in the fervor over the image of a new powerful Fijian (see Brison's contribution to this issue), and while it seemed safe to rally around a prominent regional chief's declaration of support for the coup, the reality was that for local leaders the developments raised a host of problems that would have to be addressed in an unusually open and contentious manner.

The central problem was the Tui Navitilevu's public declaration in Suva, on May 21, two days after the coup, that he supported the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution and that there might well be civil war should President Ratu Mara try to interfere by force. He concluded, "We the *taukei* [indigenous Fijians] are ready to make the ultimate sacrifice so as to return this country to the *taukei.*" He made his speech in the context of an emergency meeting held by the Great Council of Chiefs to address the unfolding crisis, but his specific remarks, by deliberately invoking the will of indigenous Fijian landowners, spoke more to his recent appointment as titular head to a newly invigorated political Taukei Movement of radical indigenous Fijians from across the country.

At the time, Karen Brison and I were concluding ten months' ethnographic research in Rakiraki. We first heard about the Tui's statement on the morning of May 22, in an e-mail from Karen's father, who had forwarded to us an article from a newspaper in Toronto, Canada. The Tui Navitilevu's house stood some one hundred yards from our own in Rakiraki, and yet we

had to hear about this in an e-mail from overseas! The local television station had not covered the announcement, but it had been covered on radio. The problem raised by the Tui's statement was not so much its content, the statement of support for the coup; rather, it was the fact that it was the Tui Navitilevu, the most powerful local chief, who was making the declaration. His involvement suddenly implicated by association a host of other chiefs in Ra Province, and it placed the events under an aura of sanctity that suddenly made the usual political machinations uncomfortable. Later that morning we found out that soon after the Tui's statement a prominent Fijian businessman from Rakiraki had telephoned his brother in the village, stating that he was providing some money to buy kava to take around to the other Ra chiefs to present an apology for the Tui's having spoken for them without consulting them first. The businessman's brother, the one designated to take on this chore, was one of the Tui Navitilevu's closest friends and spokesmen. I accompanied him on his visits that day.

The Tui's statement and the subsequent actions in response point up the need to consider several cultural and structural factors that will have varying influences on local events depending on the region of the country in which they occur. First, there remain fundamental tensions over the role of sacred chiefs in the realm of politics. The 1987 coup and its aftermath produced a renewed emphasis on cultivating indigenous Fijian "tradition," and a more prominently political role for chiefs from across the country was one result. Lindstrom and White write that "the Great Council of chiefs found its powers considerably expanded in the aftermath of the military coups that invoked the protection of tradition as a major objective" (1997:14). But for many Fijians, there is real ambivalence over chiefs' widespread involvement in politics, for it is seen to take away from their role as sanctified custodians of tradition. Constructions that identify "tradition" with the chiefly elite and its prominent role in politics risk underestimating the persistent concern in some areas that by becoming politicians chiefs may sacrifice their sanctity. In the case of events in Rakiraki following the May 2000 coup attempt, the Tui Navitilevu's overtly political statements provoked disquiet that could only be addressed by a traditional ceremony of apology.

Second, there is the paramount political question of the future of the land tenure system that ensures that 83 percent of the land remain under ownership of indigenous Fijian *mataqali,* or clans. Before the May 2000 coup, there had been considerable anxiety in the Rakiraki area over the government's potential tampering with the land tenure system. While the pragmatic concerns about retaining land and lease money receipts from Indian tenants determine much of what is at stake, there is an ideological dimen-

sion to the system that defines Fijian-Indian relations according to what Norton calls a "*taukei-vulagi*" (owner-guest) rhetoric (2000:105). This rhetoric sees Indian presence in Fiji as part of a sacred contract with permanent conditions and broad implications for political relations. According to Norton, the concept of a *taukei-vulagi* partnership "gives cultural reinforcement to an inter-ethnic complementarity in Fiji's political economy" (2000:105). In a speech following his takeover in 1987, Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka described Fiji's Indian population as "a gift from God to help us in the development of our country," part of a divine plan that requires continued formal generosity from the ethnic Fijians (cited in Norton 2000:105). It was over this issue of the definition of land relations that the Tui Navitilevu's double role as regional chief and political activist was most important. The Tui's dramatic defense in Suva of the status quo was not simply an announcement by an activist politician—he intended it as a statement of the sacred conditions of ethnic relations in Fiji, and he saw the Chaudhry government as threatening to transform those relations fundamentally. Analysis of the Tui's actions has to take into account their defense of a fundamental construction of ethnic relations that fortifies indigenous Fijians' sense of identity.

Finally, a third conceptual issue deals with the varying powers of chiefs in government across different areas of Fiji. Much has been written of a "tradition of western discontent" (Robertson and Tamanisau 1988:17) in Fiji over the dominance of eastern chiefly leaders in Fiji's politics. The small islands in the center and east of Fiji had strong stratified confederations that were instrumental in accepting British colonial rule, and up to the present the Fijian political leadership has been disproportionately from descendants of those high chiefs. Their political domination has, according to this view, provoked opposition from leaders in the west, which now dominates Fiji's commerce in tourism, mines, and sugarcane. Robertson and Tamanisau have argued that concern over western domination in the elected coalition provoked eastern leaders to back Sitiveni Rabuka in his 1987 overthrow of the elected government (1988). Nicholas Thomas has argued, though, that an east-west division obscures significant regional differences in priorities for protest against eastern political domination. He argues that analyses that describe "a persisting undercurrent of resistance neglect . . . the specific nature of the various protests" (Thomas 1990:132). In Thomas's view, a more fruitful approach will examine the specific political and historical conditions in different regions and their resulting mystifications of ethnic conflict.

These three conceptual themes, when considered together, help to create a regional portrait of the political tensions for the Rakiraki area in response to the May 2000 coup attempt.

Sacred Chiefs and Dirty Politics

The role of chiefs in Fijian politics has been a central topic for analysis by scholars attempting to explain the origins of political upheavals over the past two decades. One well-developed line of argument states that political conflict arises from western threats to the eastern chiefly elite's domination of political power. Stephanie Lawson, for example, argues that Fijian political history has been framed by a "myth of cultural homogeneity among Fijians" in which all of Fiji was supposedly subject to a "grand tradition of eastern chiefly power" (1996:39). Under this paradigm, "the structures and values surrounding chiefly power and privilege in the east have been promoted as the model of tradition for the whole of Fiji, despite the diversity of precolonial structures throughout the islands" (ibid.:38). This situation is the product of the long history of indirect rule by the British colonial administration through which "the mantle of eastern chiefly authority was extended over the entire island group" (ibid.:56). By the time of independence in 1970, political power of the ruling Alliance Party lay "firmly in the hands of eastern chiefs" (ibid.). The only "hiatus" in chiefly dominance lay during the short-lived Bavadra administration, which was overthrown by Rabuka's coup in 1987, an event that "almost certainly had the tacit, if not active, support of Fiji's leading establishment chiefs" (Lawson 1990:820). Similarly, William Sutherland has argued that "functionalist" explanations of Fijian political systems, focusing as they did on the way "chiefs provided protection and subjects reciprocated with deference and material tribute," missed the very dramatic "material basis for chiefly power" (1992:8). Materialist arguments at times even defined chiefly dominance in terms of class, so that Robertson and Taminisau (1988), for example, equate Fiji's "chiefly bureaucracy" with an upper class, seeing Rabuka as a pawn of the "ruling class" (see Ewins 1998b).

Other scholars have noted, though, that even with political domination by a chiefly elite from the east, there are cultural factors that mitigate their ultimate control. Glenn Petersen, for example, argues that an analysis like Lawson's focusing on eastern chiefly control "does not capture [Pacific Islands societies'] participatory character and . . . thus substantially exaggerates the authoritarian aspects of chieftainship" (2000:86). Traditional politics in states such as Fiji emerge from elaborate patterns of exchange and negotiation, and even the supposedly genealogical succession to a chiefly title is subject to considerable political manipulation by other than chiefly leaders. Petersen concludes that "Lawson makes the error of granting credence to post facto claims, which in fact tend to legitimize rather than pre-

scribe succession" (ibid.:87). Underlying a chief's power, then, is a participatory political process that can hold considerable contention and dispute.

Furthermore, the picture of chiefs maintaining political control under the mantle of tradition can obscure a persistent tension in the views of Fijians that, while chiefs should maintain an aura of sanctity in their control, politics itself is dirty business. With commoner Sitiveni Rabuka's successful leadership in national politics, the emergence of a politics run by Fijian commoners has strengthened that tension rather than undermining it; the aftermath of the 1987 coups in fact shifted the role of chiefs more toward sanctifying and moderating policies pushed by others. Thus, Norton has argued that there is a "paradoxical duality" in the role of chiefs that has not been appreciated by writers emphasizing chiefs' pursuit of vested elite interests—namely, that chiefs' self-interested pursuits are tempered by a strong role as "conciliators" in ethnic relations because of their sacred charter (2000:108). Norton describes this side of the chiefs' role as "a symbolic and legitimating one rather than one of political power" (ibid.:113). Chiefly participation in politics, especially at the local level, can interfere with chiefs' sacred duty to the community.

The tension between a chief's sacred duty and the pragmatics of personal politics can be seen in statements by Fijian scholars and commentators about the nature of leadership in Fiji. Tupeni Baba, education professor, Labour Party founder, and Chaudhry government Fijian deputy prime minister, describes the problems that arise from a chief's public declaration of a particular political allegiance, the very thing done by the Tui Navitilevu in May 2000. Baba argues that such actions point directly to a conflict between politics and the traditional position of chiefs:

> The involvement of chiefs in traditional politics has been very much part of their lives as they try to meet the need of their people as well as maintain their own positions. This is very different from publicly endorsing a particular political party, however. . . . The very act of publicly endorsing a particular political party . . . immediately alienates them from those of their people who do not subscribe to these political . . . parties or groups. Such an act is in direct conflict with the traditional role of chiefs as a uniting force in Fijian society. (1997:142)

Baba's point is that political positions are inherently partisan, and by taking strong positions chiefs risk sacrificing their position as sacred figures capable of promoting unity in the Fijian community. Rory Ewins, in his book on

contemporary politics in Fiji and Tonga (1998a), interviewed a range of public figures on their views of politics, and several in Fiji voiced views similar to those expressed by Deputy Prime Minister Baba. Here is a sampling of the comments Ewins presents:

> I think that the Council of Chiefs should be above politics. It should be like it was in the past: that it gives its blessings to all Fijian political parties. . . . Because then it retains its supremacy, rather than coming down to the level of politics. (Government minister, cited in Ewins 1998a:77)

> It's good to have the Great Council of Chiefs, but they should not interfere with politics. They should be above politics. . . . If the Great Council of Chiefs plays party politics . . . if we have problems there, we can't go anywhere else. So we fight among ourselves. (Government minister, cited in ibid.:77)

> Before [Fiji] had the Great Council of Chiefs hanging around and [not interfering]; that's the way it should be. That way people . . . will be happy with the chiefs and will happily go about doing commerce, and [will] happily be Fijian. (Civil servant, cited in ibid.:78)

Underlying such comments is the assumption that "politics" is an endeavor that is inherently partisan and confrontational, and it is an endeavor associated with a leadership style from Western societies. By contrast, a Fijian's chiefly duty is to provide unity in promoting a communal Fijian tradition that holds sober and mutually respectful relations among people as its hallmark.

It was just such a tension over the political role of a contemporary chief that prompted local Rakiraki leaders to feel that they had to scramble to preserve a Fijian respectful decorum in the wake of the Tui Navitilevu's public comments following George Speight's takeover of Parliament in May 2000. The Tui's political involvement was not a big surprise. His own political ambitions were well known—he had, in the last election, run unsuccessfully as a Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) candidate for an open seat. And more recently, just a couple months before the 2000 coup, the Tui Navitilevu had been chosen as titular head of the Taukei Movement, a grass-roots pro-Fijian organization that had considerable prominence in the years following the earlier 1987 coups but in recent years had been relatively insignificant. But his announcement in May was a declaration that

went well beyond his own personal position on the issues; there was suddenly now the prospect that he was speaking on behalf of Ra Province in general, and it was that implication that our hurried visits to local chiefs were designed to negate. What was at issue, ultimately, was a sacred chief's role of speaking for the people when in fact this particular chief was speaking as a politician. The response to our visit to make amends, especially from one young Ra chief, revealed the underlying cultural problem with this situation.

The Tui Navitilevu's political involvement had for some time raised questions among local leaders over whether it was appropriate for him to be involved in politics in this way, first as a candidate for the open SVT position and then later as head of the Taukei Movement. Views along the lines of the statements cited above were also expressed to me by a prominent Rakiraki business leader and government official, the same man who had telephoned from Suva just after the Tui's public statement of support of the coup, calling for a round of apologies and promising to supply the funds for the kava presentations. In an interview with me some three months before the coup, he had expressed some concerns over his friend the Tui Navitilevu's interest in politics. He argued that the Tui's proper role was as steward of tradition *(vanua)* and that he was tarnishing himself by meddling in politics. He told me that on his last trip to the village he had sat down to breakfast with the Tui Navitilevu before heading off to a meeting of the SVT party:

> And that's when we really started to talk about some real issues. And it was good, because [he] was going in different directions, talking about the politics and SVT and his part in that, and I said, "Look—go home"—because they were having a meeting today, as I said—"You have to forget about politics and get the *vanua* and the people, the traditional [way], the chiefs and the leaders together so they can [work with] the people—provide real leadership in the village, in the *vanua*." That's really what I said.

In his view, the Tui's involvement in SVT politics was distracting him from his true role as the spiritual leader of the people. He went on to say that many chiefs had become "confused" by the extent of recent changes and that young people were hearing ideas from the outside world: "They bring in new concepts and they're starting—slowly—they're losing the sort of respect for the *vanua,* for the chiefs." The Tui Navitilevu's political ambitions were, in his mind, interfering with his ability to exercise the kind of leadership that was truly needed.

Safeguarding the Sacred Land

The Rakiraki leader and I had the conversation about the Tui's politics some six weeks before the Tui further deepened his involvement by agreeing to serve as "president" of the national Taukei Movement during a rally in Lautoka. It was at that rally that the Tui Navitilevu outlined his view of the issues confronting the Ra people. In so doing, he identified a second set of themes, those dealing with the spiritual significance of the land. The strategic importance of the land issue and its symbolic association with Fijian identity for ethnic Fijians in this part of the country would play an even more significant role in the events in Rakiraki following the coup. In Fijian cultural ideology the control of land remains central to one's sense of identity as a Fijian. The term for land, *vanua,* has a broad array of "physical, social and cultural connotations" such that the word "embodies the values and beliefs which people of a particular locality have in common. It includes their philosophy of living, and their beliefs about life in this world and in the supernatural world . . . it is the totality of a Fijian community" (Ravuvu 1987:14–15). R. Gerald Ward has emphasized that Fijian concepts of the land are so inextricably tied up with their "Fijianness" that "the retention of an unreal ideal of native land tenure is now a basic component of the creation and maintenance of Fijian identity. . . . The inalienable control of land has become an icon of ethnic distinctiveness" (1996:199).

In political terms, it is the preservation of the chiefly structure that is seen to protect the land tenure system in Fiji. Lawson has pointed out that identifying "the inseparable link" between the chiefs and the land had been a prominent point in the discourse justifying the coup of 1987. The discourse suggested that "in the absence of a strong working chiefly system, indigenous Fijians would lose all their important rights, especially in relation to the land, and therefore virtually cease to exist as a unique community" (Lawson 1996:50). A corollary to such a view states that it is part of the chief's duty to defend the current land tenure system as an essential component of contemporary Fijian identity. Traditionally, that duty has centered on equitably distributing money from land leases and presiding over formal ceremonies dealing with affairs of the *vanua.* But with the recent perceived threat to the land tenure system posed by the rising political influence of Fiji Indians, a new potential political role has emerged for chiefs, and this new role contributes to the potential conflict over what constitutes a chief's sacred duty. Events surrounding the Tui Navitilevu in the weeks before the May 2000 coup illustrate how it came to be that he found himself in a difficult situation as both chief and politician.

In March 2000, the Tui Navitilevu, along with all the other regional

chiefs, had been asked to attend a rally of the newly emerged Taukei Movement to show his support for their protests over the Chaudhry government's incipient policy changes regarding land leases by Fiji Indians. Some chiefs sent representatives, but the Tui Navitilevu was the only chief who chose to attend in person. I drove him to the rally that day, thinking this would be a good event to attend. None of us anticipated what was to happen. Following their march through the town that day, the Taukei Movement leaders asked for a private session with the Tui, and they soon after emerged, declaring that the Tui Navitilevu had agreed to serve as president of the Taukei Movement. The Tui later told me that he had been utterly surprised by the invitation. It seemed clear that the movement leaders had seized upon an opportunity. By agreeing to serve as their president, the Tui would be casting an aura of chiefly legitimacy to the aims of the movement. At the ensuing kava ceremony honoring the Tui's decision, the speeches' rhetoric highlighted the link between the tradition of chiefly guidance in Fijian identity and the need to preserve the sanctity of the *vanua*—meant literally here as "the land"—that is, the sanctity of Fijian control over land. In accepting his new role the Tui Navitilevu announced:

> You see here in just one very short time, inside just eleven months [since Chaudhry's election], you see that the *vanua* [land] has gone to the government. . . . Yes, for me the first thing coming into my thoughts is that perhaps it is the wish of the Lord here, about the things that have been done by the government at this time today, that we the descendants of the owners, that it is right that we should wake up and we should not be careless about our land; we should try to prevent the government here from grabbing our wealth from us, our heritage, our money. My prayer is that we should work together, the owners, at this time today.

The announcement was a plea for chiefly leaders to "wake up" and become involved in land politics on a different level from what they had authorized in the past. The Tui was himself taking a relatively radical position in declaring his intention to work directly, as a chief, to prevent land reform. And he was the only chief placing himself in this position. His characterization of unfolding events as all a part of God's plan sought to link together a religious basis for the current land tenure system and his own position as sacred leader in defending Fijian identity. But at the same time he had identified himself with a radical political movement that would not hesitate to upset the status quo.

A related set of themes, having to do with the role of western Fiji as a pri-

mary site for development, was also articulated at that meeting with the leaders of the Taukei Movement. A representative for one of the chiefs from the Lautoka area, in accepting the *sevusevu,* ceremonial kava, emphasized that the government and the rest of the country of Fiji were becoming wealthy owing to productive commerce in the west:

> It is like it's the words already used, we come sit today from the west in our land, the land that enriches the government of Fiji and enables the money to come, and also the airport, the gold mine, the sugar mills, many big hotels, yes when they want to grab our soil, we have to come together, the high chiefs, come sit this day today to do our duty. We thank you very much. You our children, you are running our movement, thank you very much.

This theme emphasized the idea that much of what went on in Fijian national politics was driven by the interests of outsiders, whether they be Fiji Indians or a government dominated by leaders from the east. The implication was that the country was entering a new era, where tourism, gold, and sugar should occupy a stronger place in determining policies of the nation. The problem was that some of these interests would not benefit at all from any illegitimate appropriation of government power. By agreeing to take such a prominent role in the Taukei Movement, the Tui Navitilevu was placing himself as a hard-liner on a range of issues over which there was no consensus. He risked flouting chiefly sanctity by becoming mired in a grassroots movement, he made claims about the sacred position of the land as the linchpin for ethnic Fijian politics, and he tried to establish the position that it was the sacred duty of westerners to protect their interests against a national government.

Chiefly Hierarchy and Landed Prosperity in the West

Statements at the rally of the Taukei Movement in Lautoka spoke to a long history of resentment in the west over the long-standing eastern domination of national politics in Fiji. The situation had become especially galling with the emerging economic prosperity of the western provinces. But the distinctive regional situation in Rakiraki and the surrounding northeastern section of Viti Levu Island requires consideration of a different dimension of eastern historical dominance—the exportation of a chiefly hierarchical structure that was never a part of the local social paradigm. Martha Kaplan has outlined a careful delineation of competing historical visions of the role of chiefs in the Rakiraki area. The first, promulgated by the confederation

on Bau Island to the east and supported by Fijians across the country, conceptualized the chief as a stranger who, as "a living instantiation of the founding god of the people," presided over the process of chiefly succession for the lower divisions (Kaplan 1995:27). In this view, "a chief was (and is) made *(veibuli)* in a ritual process that conceives him first as a dangerous outsider who marries into a line of autochthonous people. He is ritually murdered in the installation ritual, and is reborn as their god. The chiefly line is therefore a synthesis of outsider and autochthon, or chief and land of the people. The chief is called child chief *(gone turaga)*" (ibid.). Kaplan describes how anthropologist A. M. Hocart's description of the installation of the Tui Navitilevu in Rakiraki in 1912 reflected this conceptualization of the chiefly role, with the people of the land bestowing his title and his subsequent trips along the coast designating who was to be chief in the other communities in the area. In this construction the chief "is . . . regarded as creating and authorizing the heads of the divisions" (ibid.).

Kaplan goes on to argue, though, that another competing vision of the position of chiefs had existed locally, centered among the people actually living on the land in this portion of Viti Levu Island. In this view, the *itaukei,* the owners of the land, were actually the ones who "authorized and controlled chiefly rule with their own complementary authority" by virtue of their special relationship, as landowners, to the gods of the land. In this view the people doing the installation "'made' the chief in installation rituals," that is, because "the original Fijians sprang from the soil itself. . . [a] stranger chief may arrive among them and marry the local woman, but the emphasis in the story is on how the local people meet and choose to install the stranger as chief" (Kaplan 1995:28). Kaplan argues that an appreciation of these two competing visions of chiefly status, one imported from the eastern and coastal areas, and the other local to the hinterland interior peoples, is essential to the understanding of political developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In 1999 and 2000 the Rakiraki people still spoke of the Tui Navitilevu as a regional chief who controlled forty-two villages from the town of Tavua in the west to Viti Levu Bay in the east. This vision of the Tui's influence matches the conception, inherited from Bauan views of regional chiefly control, of the Tui Navitilevu as the dominant regional chief. But the actual amount of land directly under his control was relatively small compared to that of some of the other chiefs in the area, particularly those with land in the interior. So there remained an open question about the true extent of this particular Tui's sacred charter. With his recent active political ambitions, most recently centered on the Taukei Movement and its claim to defend the sacred charter of the land, there was a considerable potential for taking

offense at the remarks he made in Suva in the days following the coup. Thus all the themes discussed here—the potential conflict over a chief's playing politics, the tension over the future of Fijian land, and the competing visions of the Tui Navitilevu's true status as chief for the region—played into the decision to send out the Tui's spokesmen to ask for forgiveness over his remarks. Some of the reactions to that effort underscored the significance of just those themes.

So, armed with kava prestations purchased with money wired by the Rakiraki official in Suva, we set out to announce our apologies on behalf of the Tui. The business leader who had suggested the apology asked his elder brother to serve as the Tui's spokeman. I accompanied this man as he visited three chiefs in the area. He explained through a traditional kava ceremony *(sevusevu)* that he was apologizing for the Tui Navitilevu's having spoken on behalf of all of Ra Province in stating his support for the coup. Two of the three chiefs we visited on that day accepted the kava on behalf of the Tui Navitilevu without any overt expression of disquiet over what had transpired.

The third chief we visited, a younger man with influence over a wide area of land in the interior, through his response to the apology revealed the tremendous discomfort created by the Tui's actions over the previous year. We encountered this chief not at his home but on the highway as he headed home from a morning of shopping. From the moment we approached him, it was clear that he was not particularly interested in receiving any symbol of apology from the Tui Navitilevu. He finally agreed to host us at his home, protesting repeatedly that he had no need for any apology from the Tui Navitilevu. The refrain he used repeatedly in English was "I support the Tui Navitilevu! You people in Rakiraki are nothing! You have no land! I have land!" Once we had settled in to do the presentation of the kava, he had an argument with his spokesman over whether he would himself speak over the kava after receiving it. It was clear that he had no interest in following the decorum of kava presentations, that there was no legitimacy to the apology being offered, and that he wanted therefore the opportunity simply to speak for himself. We began, with the business leader's brother presenting, addressing the chief with a tie of kinship:

> We two come here just on behalf of our people of Navuavua. This kava is just offered from your "father" in Suva. I believe that you heard the words of [the Tui Navitilevu] on the radio. The two of us were not sent from the people or from [the Tui]; we just discussed it in the night with your "father" from Suva who thought that we should come to show this kava and ask that you forgive the things

> heard on the radio, his words, those of [the Tui Navitilevu] in the evening. We ask that our relationship be strong, for politics is just politics.

The attempt was to position the Tui's statements as mere "politics," that it should not affect the sacred relationships among the chiefs or between chiefs and their people. After a perfunctory acceptance by the spokesman reaffirming the ties of kinship, the chief himself broke in, talking about the violence in Rakiraki following the coup and reiterating that there had been no need for this presentation, that he supported the Tui Navitilevu but that the Rakiraki people had nothing. Then he focused squarely on me, asking me, in English, "Do YOU support the Tui Navitilevu? Do you support him?" My companion tried to explain that I would be leaving in a week in any case, but I suddenly felt directly some of the implications of having to cast one's support fully behind what the Tui Navitilevu had been doing. I felt acutely uncomfortable, and since he was clearly not going to let me go without answering, I mumbled something about supporting the cause so as to sidestep any statement about the legitimacy of Speight's actions.

I cannot emphasize enough how, in spite of performing the *sevusevu*, we were engaging in a style of interaction that was unusual. It was clear to me that this chief had found himself under strong pressure by the Tui Navitilevu's actions to state his position. And in fact, on the following day, after the emergency meeting of the Great Council of Chiefs, the radio reported that this same chief had in fact denounced the coup, declaring that he "fully supported" President Mara and that the Tui Navitilevu didn't have the backing of the people because he had lost an election the year before anyway. For me, this announcement placed the chief's comments of the previous day in a new light. I suspected that he had not changed his mind overnight or been influenced by the positions of his fellow chiefs. Nor could I accept that he was being disingenuous in his declarations to us on the previous day that he "supported" the Tui Navitilevu. So I had to find a way to interpret his statements and behavior as refracted through the political realities of the moment. Of relevance were the Tui's Navitilevu's political positioning and the immediate prospects offered by the coup.

It was clear that the chief's statements and reluctance to accept the kava came from a refusal to accept our Rakiraki contingent as a legitimate group to be issuing apology on the Tui's behalf. In his understanding the people from Rakiraki had forfeited any claim to being the people of the Tui Navitilevu when they had failed to get him elected the previous year. The implication of "you Rakiraki are nothing" and "you have no land" seemed to be that the people in Rakiraki, by failing to support the Tui Navitilevu, had

shown themselves to have insufficient dedication to the power of the land issue, perhaps because they did not have enough land to consider it important. This sarcastic assessment carried with it the sense that, by not having appreciation for the sacred "land," the Rakiraki people were forfeiting any claims to being true ethnic Fijians. Any *sevusevu* from Rakiraki, the implication went, had no real basis. This was an emotional statement by someone clearly bothered by being placed in the position chosen for him by those who wanted to issue their apology.

The real peculiarity had to do with his statement of "support" for the Tui Navitilevu coupled with his public announcement the next day that he did not support the coup. His statement of support, spoken several times, had always come at the head of a series of declarations, in an irritated tone: "I support the Tui Navitilevu, you in Rakiraki are nothing, you have no land, I have land." It seemed clear that he was declaring support for the notion that the land is what is sacred, that in supporting the Tui Navitilevu, he was supporting the claim that land was paramount. He was supporting the Tui only in the most abstract sense—as protector of the land, the sacred Tui should be supported, just as he himself, with even more land, should be supported as protector as well. His perspective followed the model Kaplan describes for the hinterland peoples of this part of Viti Levu Island. While the Tui had status as a regional chief of considerable influence, the reasoning goes, ultimate authority comes from the sacredness of the land itself, not from any intrinsic qualities of the chief. The chief who truly has land, unlike the Tui Navitilevu and his Rakiraki supporters, is the one who should be in the position of making pronouncements on the future of the Fijian government and its ties to the land. Even as he declared his support for what the Tui Navitilevu represented, he had managed to convey disdain for what the Tui and his illegitimate Rakiraki apologists were doing. It may well have been that he harbored no strong feelings against the Tui himself, but he clearly resented how the recent unfolding of events was drawing him into a kind of political activity that chiefs should stay above.

Thus, a look at the contours of a relatively insignificant sequence of regional events reveals some significant points to consider as the nation considers its political future. Regional differences in ideology and economic circumstances significantly affect the character of the debate over ethnic Fijian control in contemporary politics. Despite a long history of political dominance by the chiefly elite, the long-standing sacred charter chiefs hold as protectors of the *vanua* can run up against the political maneuvering of the individual men holding the chiefly titles. The "paradoxical duality," as Norton calls it (2000:108), of chiefly participation in party politics can result

in a tempering of political action, but it can also result in a significant compromise of chiefly influence in one's home area. Regional tensions over the sources of chiefly sacred power may further complicate a given chief's capacity to speak on behalf of the people. All of these issues underscore the extent to which an ideology of Fijian political authority, linked as it is to understandings of the sacred character of the land and to the very concepts of Fijian identity through chiefly representatives, drives the political process.

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DISJUNCTURES IN DISCOURSE: EMERGING IDENTITIES AFTER THE 2000 COUP IN RAKIRAKI, FIJI

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This essay examines the way the coup of 2000 crystallized a new ethnic identity among Rakiraki villagers based on opposition to dominant groups within the Fijian ethnic community. The most obvious source of support for the coup was fear and resentment of Indo-Fijians, and it was evident that the coup both drew on and catalyzed such resentments. However, listening to villagers' reactions convinced me that they also supported the coup because they saw it as an attempt by a western Fijian (Speight, whose mother was rumored to be a Ra woman) to overthrow a Bauan-Lauan monopoly on government power, as represented by Ratu Mara. Villagers resented Ratu Mara's attempts to stop the coup and commented that he was more European than Fijian. They embraced Speight as a true Fijian son who exhibited qualities of strength thought to be central to Fijian identity. The essay suggests that, at least in the west, the coup increased existing resentment of the national chiefly structure and strengthened local identities within the Fijian community.

I HAD A STRONG SENSE of déjà vu during a recent reading of *Islands, Islanders and the World.* Bayliss-Smith, Bedford, Brookfield, and Latham, who had completed the manuscript just before the 1987 Fiji coup, pondered their inability to see the coup coming. After the coup, those who "knew" Fiji all said that a coup against a government elected largely through Indo-Fijian support was inevitable (Bayliss-Smith et al. 1988:6). Yet the authors, in the course of studying economic enterprise in Fiji's eastern islands, had been more struck by divisions between an indigenous Fijian elite and commoners of the same community than they had by ethnic tensions. "The expatriate cannot really grasp the inner workings and nuances of indigenous soci-

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eties," a Fijian colleague suggested. "This leads in many cases to a patterned and artificial set of behaviour by many Melanesians in the presence of expatriates, in contrast to the more casual and more real responses in the company of familiar local people" (Lasaqa 1973:309–310, quoted in Bayliss-Smith et al. 1988:6–7). While Bayliss-Smith et al. acknowledge the limitations of an outsider's ability to penetrate local states of mind, they suggest that their own failure to predict the coup stemmed at least in part from "unresolved contradictions" in local attitudes (1988:10). Fijian society, they argue, is characterized by "a complex and changing play of contradictions, in which allegiance and rebellion, ethnic confrontation and cordial interdependence, traditionalism and modernity, clan and class, east and west within the nation all have their parts." As a result, they suggest that "Fijians . . . could not themselves have predicted how they would respond to the pressures of April and May 1987, still less tell us" (ibid.).

My own reaction to the May 2000 coup, which occurred during the last week of a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Rakiraki, Fiji,[1] paralleled that of Bayliss-Smith and company. Like them, I was unprepared for the Rakiraki villagers to rally solidly behind Speight even though hindsight and investigation of the scholarship on the region strongly pointed to the inevitability of the villagers' reaction. I wondered if my failure to anticipate Rakiraki reactions to the 2000 coup stemmed from my inability as an outsider to penetrate the surface of village life. Rakiraki villagers were obviously concerned with the image they projected to the outside world, and there was clearly much that they had not told me.

In this essay, however, I will argue, with Bayliss-Smith et al., that while there was much that I missed in the months leading up to the coup, there was ample evidence that Rakiraki villagers had complex views about national politics and that, in fact, their reaction to the coup had been somewhat unpredictable, perhaps even to themselves. At a moment when indigenous Fijian identity appears to have solidified in opposition to Indo-Fijians, I suggest that such attitudes were by no means inevitable, nor will they inevitably continue in the future. Rakiraki villagers did display deep-seated distrust of Indo-Fijians. Yet many villagers had been willing to tolerate the presence of a democratically elected Indo-Fijian prime minister for almost a year before the coup. Moreover, Rakiraki villagers had entertained many ways of "imagining" their nation in the year before the coup other than as an indigenous polity to be defended from foreign "guests." In some contexts, villagers saw indigenous Fijians as a cohesive group of "host" people with a sacred relationship to the land. They saw this host group as under siege by a crafty, manipulative, Indo-Fijian community intent on wresting economic and political power away from the indigenous Fijians. But on many occasions,

Rakiraki villagers were more concerned with their relationship with other groups within the indigenous Fijian community than with Indo-Fijians. Villagers spoke resentfully of people from the southeast of Viti Levu and from Lau who monopolized bureaucracy and government and who claimed superiority over the western sugar-producing regions of Viti Levu. In still other contexts, many villagers, particularly those who were younger and who worked for wages outside the village, spoke of themselves as part of an international community united by religion and/or economy. In this mode, villagers argued that ethnicity should make no difference in politics and that the national focus should be on promoting development within Fiji. Villagers also disagreed on the role of the traditional Fijian *vanua* and their chiefly leaders in the larger nation. Some people argued that chiefs, as the head of sacred *vanua,* should have a strong role in politics, while others felt that *vanua* and national politics should be separate and that the chiefs should not "dirty their hands" by involving themselves in political wrangling.

I argue, then, that instead of stemming from deep-seated primordial hostilities, Rakiraki attitudes toward the coup were shaped by many contingent factors surrounding the events of the coup and the way they unfolded in the village context. Kaplan and Kelly (2000) and Kelly and Kaplan (2001) suggest that the process of forming consensus and shaping identity always involves a complex series of negotiations among various players all of whom have, themselves, multifaceted approaches to the situation at hand. Thus no single factor, be it economic or political interest or deep-seated cultural values, is a prime mover. Instead, people work out their ideas in the process of negotiating about real issues with real stakes, and the eventual outcome is always unpredictable, since how their various interests and ideas will interact in any particular situation is difficult to forecast.

I will pursue these ideas in my analysis of the Rakiraki reaction to the coup. I will argue that particular local circumstances under which the coup unfolded created an illusion of a solid consensus in Rakiraki behind reserving high government office for indigenous Fijians, even though this did not exist before the coup and might well again evaporate as future events bring other kinds of group oppositions to the fore. I suggest, first, that an illusion of consensus was created by a well-known Fijian preference for avoiding public mention of conflict (Arno 1985, 1993). Before the coup, there had been significant disagreement among villagers about the Chaudhry government and about the Fijian nation more generally, so people had generally avoided discussing national politics. The consequence was an absence of clearly formulated views. However, Speight's actions were so dramatic that it was impossible for villagers to maintain their silence any longer: There was a general need for public discussion in the wake of the crisis to help

people to understand the situation. Furthermore, a rumor that George Speight was "a true son" of Ra Province, of which Rakiraki is a part, made villagers feel enough confidence in others' support for him to venture their opinions in public. This confidence was increased when the local high chief, the Tui Navitilevu, came out publicly in support of the coup. When people began to discuss the issue, the cultural preference for the preservation of public harmony created a tendency for discussions to reach consensus quickly around what seemed to be the safest (that is, most likely to be generally agreed on) view of the coup. This consensus crystallized around local loyalties, since these were the most certain common ground among villagers. Stephen Leavitt's essay (this volume), however, shows how a similar mix of values and beliefs in a neighboring area led to an opposite conclusion: People came out against the coup. This case demonstrates the way identities and beliefs are catalyzed and shaped by particular local configurations of circumstances.

I also argue, however, that the reactions of the villagers to the coup show that indigenous Fijian identity is fluid and could change quickly. Speaking with individual villagers revealed nuanced and complex views of national politics and local identity. People had divided in the 1999 election in unpredictable ways. And communications I received from a couple of villagers after the coup indicated that some people, who had been swept along by the public consensus in support of the coup, had backpedaled in response to economic hardships faced after the coup.

My analysis of Rakiraki attitudes contributes to the literature on ethnicity and nationalism in Fiji by reaffirming the complexity of indigenous Fijian forms of imagining their ethnicity and their nation. Lawson (1996), Norton (1977), Kaplan (1995a, 1995b), and Lal (1992b:104–105) note that the indigenous Fijian community is divided by differences in rank, social class, and region. Kaplan (1995b) and Norton (1977), for example, show how people in the "western" sugar producing region of Viti Levu, stretching from Sigatoka to Rakiraki, have long resented what they see as the dominance of the groups from the southeast of Viti Levu and from Lau in national politics. Lawson also suggests that commoner Fijians have sometimes protested chiefly dominance in politics in general. For instance, Butadroka's Fiji Nationalist Party argued for a return of power to commoners from the hands of chiefs who had sold them out to the British (Rutz 1995). Lawson (1996) and Lal (1992b:105) both argue that national politicians have managed to suppress this dissension from within the Fijian community over the years by raising the specter of Indo-Fijian threats to indigenous Fijian political and land rights. And Lal (1992b:105) and Rutz (1995) argue that the indigenous Fijian community has been increasingly divided over the last decade, as was

shown, for instance, by the way Rabuka's Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) party did not win a majority in the 1992 elections as indigenous Fijians split their vote among many parties. The situation in Rakiraki confirms these views by showing that even the reality of an Indo-Fijian government did not cause indigenous Fijians to forget their differences. Speight's actions may have aggravated tensions between Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians, but they did not unite the indigenous Fijian community.

Examining Rakiraki discourse also shows a shift in conceptions of the Fijian nation. Before the coup, in contrast to many existing analyses of indigenous Fijian views of their nation, many indigenous Fijians in the Rakiraki area were prepared to accept the legitimacy of a government led by an Indo-Fijian. The coup had the unfortunate effect of hardening the opposed perspective, that nonindigenous Fijians could only be "guests" looked after politically by "host" indigenous Fijians. As Foster notes (1995), "imagining" a nation involves more than developing a sense of shared history and peoplehood; it also involves developing a master narrative that shows who the various players are in the nation and how they are related to the larger whole. Rutz suggests that, for many indigenous Fijians, the nation is a sacred entity based on the God-given relationship between ranked Fijian clans and the land (1995). Non-Fijians can only be "guests" of the true owners of the land (see also Norton 2000; Ravuvu 1992). Lawson argues that, at least before 1987, this view was so strong among indigenous Fijians that they could not accept the legitimacy of a nonindigenous Fijian government, even if it was democratically elected (1991). Norton's more recent research on the constitutional review commission in the early 1990s shows the strong carryover of these attitudes (2000). Norton found that most indigenous Fijian groups who made submissions to the forum felt that the Fijian nation should be based on the premise that political power remain largely in the hands of the "host" indigenous Fijians, who could then be trusted, in accordance with their cultural emphasis on generosity and hospitality, to look after the interests of their Indo-Fijian "guests." Only one group with indigenous Fijian members, the Citizens' Coalition, called for race-blind representation with special protections for indigenous Fijian rights.

Examining Rakiraki discourse, however, suggested that some villagers viewed the nation as an extension of the sacred Fijian *vanua*, while others held a view much more similar to that of the Citizens' Coalition. In fact, before the coup, Rakiraki villagers had conceptualized themselves and their nation in many different ways. However, the coup and the events that followed it catalyzed villagers who had previously had no clear opinion or consensus on ethnicity, self, and nation to a much more shared and well-defined view centered on racial and regional identity.

After the Election: Rakiraki Perceptions of Cultural Identity and Nation in Fall 1999

When we first heard of Chaudhry's election as Fiji's first Indo-Fijian prime minister in May 1999, my anthropologist husband, Stephen Leavitt, and I wondered whether this election would lead to a coup and jeopardize our carefully laid out plans to spend the next year in Fiji on sabbatical. Our arrival in Nadi, and later in the village of Rakiraki, where we had lived two years before, seemed just to confirm that things were business as usual in Fiji. Following our usual practice, we started attending any sort of public gathering on offer: church services, community meetings, district political meetings, and so on. In none of the meetings was the new government even mentioned unless in such a veiled fashion as to elude us and our local informants altogether. We had less access to the gossip that went on around kava circles before and after meetings since, particularly in the beginning, our linguistic skills were not up to helping us to follow the local dialect. But the reports that we got about this gossip never involved the Chaudhry government. People were more interested in local status battles and in the general issue of long-term land leases of Fijian land to Indo-Fijian farmers that were about to expire.

In retrospect, I suspect people were avoiding public mention of the election because of deep differences in opinion. The Methodist district pastor was a Lauan who came from the same village as Ratu Mara, the Fijian president who had urged ethnic Fijians to accept the Chaudhry government. This alone would have been sufficient to suppress any criticism of the Chaudhry government in church and in events attended by the district pastor. A more significant problem, however, was that the regional high chief, the Tui Navitilevu, had run for office as a representative of Rabuka's SVT party and had been defeated. The SVT had made the radical move of forming an alliance with the dominant Indo-Fijian party, the National Federation Party, for the election. This alienated both Indo-Fijian and indigenous Fijian voters, many of whom had defected from these two most popular parties but had split along ethnic lines, Indo-Fijians to vote for Chaudhry's Labour Party and indigenous Fijians to vote for a number of Fijian parties. The Tui, then, had taken a moderate position in joining the SVT in their alliance with the main Indo-Fijian party. That his villagers did not support his views was shown by his resounding defeat in the election. The silence on the Chaudhry government that we witnessed in our first several months in Fiji, then, was likely the result of major disagreements about the issue of concessions to Indo-Fijians between many villagers and two of the respected leaders of the village, the Tui and the district pastor.

Differences in opinion regarding the issue of Indo-Fijians in the Fijian

nation also seemed to extend down the status ranks in the village. One issue dividing villagers was whether there was anything intrinsically wrong with having an Indo-Fijian prime minister. One of my closest informants, an older woman who was well read and politically active, said that she felt that Fijians should not be forced to accept a "foreigner" as their prime minister. Another informant, however, a young woman who had married into Rakiraki, said that she herself had voted for Chaudhry as had many of the younger people she knew. She said that it didn't make any difference whether the prime minister was indigenous Fijian or Indo-Fijian; what mattered was the way whoever it was ran the country. This view was shared by all the Indo-Fijians we spoke with. My second informant said that under Rabuka and the SVT Fiji had just stagnated. Chaudhry had promised economic change, and from her perspective, as the wife of an army officer, he had delivered, since one of his first acts had been to raise the salaries of the army.

Stephanie Sienkiewicz, a Union College undergraduate who was one of seven students who accompanied us to Fiji in fall of 1999, also asked people about their responses to the election that had brought Chaudhry to power. Sienkiewicz found that many of the indigenous Fijians she spoke with were not opposed to the idea of an Indo-Fijian prime minister:

> One Fijian woman's comments about the prime minister indicate this since she makes no reference to his ethnicity at all. "We'll see how he works out. Rabuka was with us for five years. We'll see how this one keeps his promises." Similarly, a Fijian man told me that Chaudhry was elected because he is able to do the job.
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> Another Fijian man told me that most Fijians want a Fijian prime minister but that Fijians must have voted for Chaudhry for him to be elected. He stated simply, "More people voted for this party and this party won. So an Indian is the prime minister." He told me that most of the Fijian leaders were corrupt and he thought that people were influenced by campaigning to choose the Labour Party that is now in power. People thought that it was good for this prime minister to be in government because he said he was going to solve the land-lease problem. This informant's ideas about the election show that he didn't think of the Fijian and Indian community as two autonomous groups but as one mixed society: "They might have been influenced by campaigning, what they tell people they are going to do. So many promises are going to come. So people might have heard that and they changed their views. Never mind that it's an Indian prime minister. We just want to get a better life."[2]

When I asked him if he thought that the prime minister of Fiji

should be Fijian he responded, "Oh, it doesn't matter, as long as he looks after the people, to serve the people, Indian or Fijian or part Indian or part Fijian. A Fijian was there from the time of independence until last year. There was not much change in Fiji during that time. The leaders have gotten power only for themselves. That is what most of us think. Even some of the scholarships, most of the scholarships have been given to their children. And the poor people have to struggle for the education of their children. Anybody can be the prime minister if he serves the people."

Some of the Fijians I interviewed told me that many Fijians pretend to want only a Fijian prime minister but have actually voted for the Indian candidate. "That is what most people now say, that they don't want an Indian prime minister. That is their choice, and now they want to change again"; the same people who say there should be a Fijian prime minister are the ones who in fact voted for Chaudhry. But, "the people have had their say so that's it. That's how it is, democratic." (Sienkiewicz 1999:171–172)

These views, then, reflected a deep difference of opinion about the nature of the Fijian nation: Some believed that the Fijian nation should be built of the same building blocks as the traditional Fijian polity in the village, the *vanua,* with hereditary chiefs playing a large role and Indo-Fijians as guests staying out of communal decisions. Others felt that the nation should be separate from the traditional rural polity and that perhaps the prime minister should just be whoever could prove himself able to do the job best. These views also dispute Lawson's contention that indigenous Fijians do not accept the idea of legitimate change in power within a democratic government (1991). Lawson argued that before the 1987 coup, indigenous Fijians only seemed to accept the legitimacy of democratically elected governments because they were never put to the test by the victory of an Indo-Fijian party. Comments by Rakiraki people interviewed by Stephanie Sienkiewicz and myself, however, reveal that some people were prepared, a couple of months after Chaudhry's election, to accept the legitimacy of the democratic process.

Also implicit here was a resentment of the long years that eastern Fijians, Ratu Mara and Rabuka, had held power during which, in the Rakiraki view, too little help had come their way. Thus, one of Sienkiewicz's informants complained about the way scholarships only went to the rich while poor people struggled. During our 1997 stay in Rakiraki, when Rabuka was still prime minister, some Rakiraki people had complained to me that all the local government positions went to eastern Fijians. An informant who was

strongly opposed to having an Indo-Fijian prime minister told me in 1997 that she had voted for Bavadra, an indigenous Fijian from the west who led the same Labour Party that was later led by Chaudhry. She said that she did this because she thought all resources were funneled to eastern Fijians under Ratu Mara's government. Significant regional resentments, then, contributed to Rakiraki villagers' ambivalence about the Chaudhry government: Many people did not like having an Indo-Fijian prime minister but had not been happy with the prospect of returning Rabuka to office either.

A division in local opinion was also evident in attitudes toward another issue, that is, the place of chiefs, and particularly the local high chief, the Tui Navitilevu, in national politics. One of my closest informants suggested that the Tui's defeat had been a great tragedy that signaled the imminent disintegration of traditional Fijian society. The Tui's defeat, she argued, showed that local indigenous Fijians no longer respected the sacred and time-honored idea of the Fijian *vanua* with hereditary chiefs at the head. Everyone was now just out for himself or herself; such an attitude would erode Fijian communal solidarity and pave the way for Indo-Fijians to take over the country. Others, however, including a man who Stephen Leavitt describes in this volume, suggested that they respected the Tui but just felt that traditional chiefs should not dirty their hands by dabbling in secular politics. This indicates, as Rutz suggests (1995), significant differences in ways of imagining the Fijian nation among indigenous Fijians.

Just this small taste of the debate about politics gives a sense of how complex the issues were and how people could easily end up on either side of the issue depending on what they focused on first. My informant who felt that chiefs should be integral to the government, for instance, had not voted for the Tui, because he represented the SVT, whose coalition with the National Federation Party she opposed; she also disliked Rabuka because he was an eastern Fijian. Conversely, a local Indo-Fijian storekeeper told me that he had voted for the Tui Navitilevu, even though he did not think Fijian chiefs should have a privileged position in national politics, because he favored the idea of Fijians and Indo-Fijians working together. The ambiguities surrounding the election made it difficult to predict how anyone felt about it and, I suspect, kept villagers relatively silent on the topic.

While the villagers remained silent on the Chaudhry government, there was a great deal of discussion of another issue, the imminent expiration of long-term leases of ethnic Fijian land to Indo-Fijian cane farmers. I suggest that people were willing to discuss this issue because there was consensus on it. This is significant, because it was Chaudhry's moves toward reforming the land-lease system that allowed villagers to feel that there was enough consensus against him to make it safe to publicly criticize the idea of having

an Indo-Fijian prime minister. Many of the ethnic Fijians were claiming that they were not going to renew land leases; in fact, several villages had had meetings in which it had been agreed that leases would not be renewed. One of the most successful indigenous Fijian cane farmers in Rakiraki explained to Stephanie Sienkiewicz why he did not want to renew his land leases. His words are significant in that they reveal both the centrality of land to his identity and the potential for the land issue to create discord within the indigenous Fijian population. This man told Sienkiewicz that he wanted to take back his land not only because he could make a lot of money from it, but because it would allow him to reunite his family and lineage, the members of which currently had to live in different areas to get jobs. The farmer told her:

> We want our land back because it was leased out to Indians seventy or ninety years ago. I wasn't born by that time; I'm only fifty-six now. That land was leased out by my great-grandfather to Indian people. Some of us don't have any land at all. We just have a small piece to plant our cassava, *dalo* [taro root], and yams. That's for daily living. And a source of income, to plant sugarcane and other crops to sell in the market, we haven't got any leftover land. Because all of our land has been leased out to Indians for a very long time. . . . We gave them the right to lease. If we have enough, we should give them land so they can make a living. [But] right now, the Indians have more of the better land. . . . If we lease the land back to them, it will take another ninety years. . . . [And] Fijians don't want to [make shorter leases either]. In our *koro* [village] meeting we decided that. We just want the land back. . . . We haven't got enough land. Because most of our land was taken by [Indians]. Even my house is half chained to Crown land. At the back of the house is the Crown land. It is owned by the government. But that's our *mataqali* [lineage] land. We know that's our land. Because this land, only one of my sons can have. But the rest are on their own. That's why I told them to get a good education. Three of them can share to buy a tractor to work on the land. . . . You can't buy a truck if you lease out the land. . . . We can mortgage it through the bank so that we can buy what we want to use for the land, tractor [and so on]. . . . We'll have to share. In our *mataqali,* we've got four brothers. We'll give to every house contract numbers so we can work together, work out that land, so we can get our source of income out of that land. (Sienkiewicz 1999:120–122)

Taking back land was linked in this man's mind with the possibility of once again becoming a strong, autonomous, local group, beholden to no one. Under the existing arrangement, this man's lineage was split up by the need to find jobs. But if they could take back their leased land, they could, once again, become a strong, autonomous group. Landownership, then, fostered a strong local identity.

The farmer went on to explain that he wanted back not only the land leased out to Indo-Fijians, but also land that had been claimed by the Crown when the land was registered in the early twentieth century. His feelings of being abused by the government were apparent and suggest that the land issue had led to tensions within the indigenous Fijian community. The farmer told Sienkiewicz: "We haven't got enough land to share. Us is enough. We haven't got enough land. We begged the government. We still have more land on the government side. A European came and bought it for two shillings from our great-grandfathers. It belongs to the government now. We are reapplying again. We have lots of [people in our] *mataqali* and not enough land" (1999:121). This man, then, resented an indigenous Fijian government that, in his view, had failed to return to his group what was rightfully theirs.

I suggest that the land issue was tapping into a strong local identity and a strong sense of having been abused at the hands of southeastern and Lauan chiefs acting in alliance with the British. Kaplan (1995b) notes a longstanding resentment among people in the Rakiraki area of Bauan chiefs brought in by the British to act as *roko tui* (administrative officials) under the British colonial administration. The British could not find strong regional chiefs in the Ra area, where *vanua* tended to be smaller and ranking within *yavusa* (clans) was not as pronounced as in southeastern Fiji (Norton 1977). And so they imported Bauan officials in an attempt to make western Fijian culture conform to the Bauan model (Kaplan 1995b). The British, in alliance with southeastern Fijians, also set up three administrative confederacies in Fiji, each under the head of a paramount chief or *roko tui.* Western Fiji was divided between two confederacies, both of which were headed by *roko tui* in southeastern Fiji.

The Rakiraki people's continued resentment of these arrangements was evident in several ways during our stay. In early 2000, all of the western chiefs met in an effort to formulate a plan to construct a western confederacy (Lal 1992b mentions earlier efforts along these lines). Even though these plans came to nothing, people continued to express resentment at the notion of being subordinated to southeastern confederacies. One woman insisted to me that the west had never been conquered by the southeast. The three confederacies were just an administrative fiction. Tensions were also appar-

ent in a wedding, just a few weeks before the coup, that many Rakiraki villagers attended in Suva. The bride was the daughter of the Tui Navitilevu's sister and the groom was a close relative of Adi Lala Mara. Adi Lala, the wife of Ratu Mara, is the Roko Tui Dreketi, *roko* of one of the three confederacies, Burebasaga. The Rakiraki women who attended the wedding had told me beforehand that this would be a glorious event, since it brought together two such prestigious families, the family of the Tui Navitilevu and the family of the Roko Tui Dreketi. In the minds of the local people, this was a marriage between equals. At the wedding, however, the Rakiraki women were very irritated by signs that the groom's side saw themselves as being of higher rank than the bride's side. Instead of sitting together as was usual at a wedding, the Rakiraki women complained, they had had to eat separately from the women of the groom's side and had had to wait until the women from that side had eaten first.

The *sevusevu* (ceremonial presentation of kava) presented by the Rakiraki people at the wedding also asserted the Rakiraki view that the two parties were of equal status. The *sevusevu* also subtly raised the possibility that the family of the groom might view the Rakiraki people as uneducated "country bumpkins." The Tui Navitilevu's herald, Eroni, opened by asserting that he would speak in his local dialect, because he did not know Bauan, the national standard Fijian taught in schools and the language of the Rewa area from which the Roko Tui Dreketi hailed. In fact, I had heard Eroni perform prayers in fluent Bauan on many occasions. His insistence on speaking in Rakiraki dialect, then, was a subtle assertion of an autonomous local identity: Rakiraki people would speak in their own dialect, not adopt the Bauan dialect in deference to a higher-ranking group. Eroni also presented the *sevusevu* as going from the Tui Navitilevu to the Roko Tui Dreketi, thus moving the two to equivalent status. A *sevusevu* is generally presented from the highest chief of one group to the highest chief of the other group, whether or not these people are present at the occasion. A possible alternative here would have been to say that the *sevusevu* was coming from the Roko Tui of Kubuna, the confederacy of which Rakiraki was a part. This construal would have acknowledged the Tui Navitilevu to be an underling of the Kubuna confederacy and, thus, a lower-order chief than the Roko Tui Dreketi. This *sevusevu,* then, played with the tendency of the urban southeasterners to view the rural people from the north and west as inferior and reframed this relationship as one between equals under Fijian tradition and under God. In fact, *sevusevu* in western Fiji are always delivered in local dialect rather than in Bauan Fijian. In this way, they assert (and reflect) strong local identities and a rejection of the view of Fiji as a united chieftainship led from the southeast and Lau.

Winter 2000: The Buildup to the Coup

The first signs of local discontent with the Chaudhry government began to emerge in January 2000, though these signs were so subtle that I failed to pick them up at the time and was surprised to see them in transcriptions of meetings after I returned from Fiji. In the new year, the head pastor in the Rakiraki Methodist Church began routinely to mention in his opening prayers in church that indigenous Fijians were facing very hard times. I was puzzled by these words and asked my research assistant about it, but she only guessed that he must mean that Jesus might soon appear, since this was the dawning of the new millennium. I suspect now that the pastor was referring to current political events that were generating discontent with the Chaudhry government. The Chaudhry government started to call for a reconsideration of land laws in Fiji, arguing that the Fijian economy was sure to collapse if ethnic Fijian landowners displaced Indo-Fijian tenant farmers on a large scale. Rakiraki villagers had been complaining all along about the Chaudhry government's policy of compensating evicted Indo-Fijian tenants with $26,000 payments to help them start a new life; villagers argued that the indigenous Fijians who were reclaiming their land should receive a similar payment to help them start out as farmers. After Christmas, Chaudhry arranged for groups of Fijian chiefs to tour countries like Malaysia, where land reform had paved the way for prosperity, and began putting forward plans for Fijian clans to surrender their "unused land" to the government, which would find ways to use this land to increase the general prosperity of the country. I first heard about these plans in gossip after a meeting where a couple of senior men joked that the chiefs must have enjoyed the rugby game they saw in Malaysia but certainly would not have been interested in anything else. The Chaudhry government also suggested that the Native Land Trust Board, which oversaw the distribution of lease money for Fijians' lands, was corrupt and should be reformed. All of these moves generated anxiety in Rakiraki people that began to show up—albeit hardly in an overwhelming flood—in public speeches and in the gossip after meetings.

In early January 2000, one of the two villages composing Rakiraki, Navutulevu, invited a pastor who had been thrown out of the Methodist Church —the church that dominates Fijian villages—to speak at a new holiday, "Navutulevu Day," invented just for the new millennium. My notes about the occasion indicate that people believed this event had been planned as a slap in the face of the district Methodist pastor because of the sacking of a popular local lay preacher. This sacking was by far the most popular topic of conversation during this period. Rereading the transcripts of the service

and reviewing the events that followed suggest that there was a deeper meaning to the event. The guest speaker stated that Fijians, like Abraham, had been called by God to leave the old village and start a new way of life in the new millennium. Fijians, he said, should return to the land and work communally as the kibbutzniks had done in Israel to grow new crops and make the country prosper. The result was that a few weeks later a party of young Navutulevu men went up to a neighboring area to plant a kava plantation—an event that was spoken of positively in both villages as promising a new road to Fijian prosperity.

The connection between this event and Chaudhry's talk of Fijians turning over unused land was not evident to me until I reviewed the transcripts of the service and noticed that the leader of Navutulevu had introduced the guest speaker with the following words:

> The father of Amaleia, from Jerusalem, worked well and had good health in the house of the King of Susani, and then he said, "We go now, we build a fence in Jerusalem that the enemy will not be able to attack us." It is like that in Navutulevu. We should build the fence in Navutulevu so the enemy cannot attack.[3]

The headman's words were so veiled that they meant nothing to my research assistant. In retrospect, however, it seems most likely that the fence he was building by sending a party of young men to use "unused" land was a fence against the Chaudhry government. This interpretation was supported by the remarks of one of the pastors in the Methodist Church, a few weeks later, when he blessed the annual offering of first fruits of the new year in church by saying that Fijians should not be afraid of the soil; they had been put on earth to grow crops for the Lord. He continued:

> One thing that we are worried about much at this time today, our land, is the root of fighting in the government. They want to take the land, that which is not being planted. That is the main reason why the government wants to take the land. Because it should be planted. It doesn't matter if it's your land, the government will plant it for you. That means the land should be just planted. It is right the things said here should cause pain to us, the owners. Yes, but one thing you should do, you should work your land. I don't want, myself, the giving of lease [money], because it's right that we should just plant our land. . . . [It is] our duty to plant it, put it in the soil, everything, because it will look nice to the Lord to see here and see his farmers are healthy.

These two speeches reveal that indigenous Fijians in Rakiraki were beginning to feel anxious that their land would be taken away just when they felt themselves to be at the point of reclaiming this land. The speeches also reveal a wider anxiety about the place of Fijians in the nation: The Lord gave indigenous Fijians a special place in the nation as guardians of the land, but Fijians had turned away from the Lord by not working their own land; they were ashamed to be farmers. Fijians had to build a fence against the enemy by returning to the land and, in doing so, building up the nation of Fiji. These comments implicitly spoke to the popular Indo-Fijian view endorsed by the government that Indo-Fijians had built up the nation of Fiji through their hard work as cane farmers (see Trnka, this volume). Fijians, the two speakers suggested, must take back the land and build up the nation themselves through fulfilling God's plan for them. The Chaudhry government's challenge on the land, then, cut to the root of ethnic Fijian identity and, at least in Rakiraki, catalyzed a strong sense that indigenous Fijians must build their own nation, without interference from Indo-Fijians. The potential for this issue to create divisions within the indigenous Fijian community was also evident here. The pastor was criticizing the many indigenous Fijians who had, in his view, left their sacred role in the nation and the *vanua* by spurning farming in favor of urban wage labor. At stake here, then, was a wider issue of how individual Fijians should be linked to *vanua* and nation.

While there were rumblings about the Chaudhry government's plans for land reform, these did not by any means produce a popular movement to displace the government. In fact, in late April, just a few weeks before the coup, there was a large public march in Lautoka, a town about two hours' drive from Rakiraki, to protest land reform. The Tui Navitilevu personally attended the march along with two close friends, but no one else in the Rakiraki area went. One man commented to me afterwards that he thought it was wrong for the Tui to get mixed up in that kind of thing.

Significantly, however, popular support in Rakiraki for the protest over land was increased when the Tui Navitilevu was asked to head the Taukei Movement in a Lautoka meeting. After that, several Rakiraki men announced their intention of going to the next march in Suva, a march that coincided with Speight's takeover of Parliament. I suggest again that popular support was mobilized when this became an issue involving regional relations rather than ethnic relations. Villagers were mobilized by the prospect of becoming a strong, autonomous, local polity. They were rallying around their Tui where they had previously failed to rally as indigenous Fijians united against an Indo-Fijian threat.

The significance of regional tensions in the movement were, for instance,

apparent in the words of Apisai Tora, the head of the Taukei Movement who hailed from the west, just outside Nadi, before the Lautoka march. Tora started by protesting the disrespectful attitude that Chaudhry had shown toward the whole indigenous Fijian community in his land reform efforts. He showed the assembled protesters a letter that he intended to present to Ratu Mara after the Suva march:

> This is a letter to the gentleman president of the government, the honorable gentleman the Tui Nayau [Ratu Mara]. This is a letter from the party of the *taukei* [i.e., owners of the land or indigenous Fijians] and the supporters of the Taukei Movement to be given to the commissioner, when we arrive there, who should then go to give it to the gentleman president. It is written in English. Yes, here is the translation into Fijian. [Reads letter.] We hope that you have a long life and are blessed, President, in your high position. It is shown here, the Taukei Movement's unhappiness and anxiety about the things that have been done by the government of Mahendra Chaudhry, that started from the time when the election of 1999 was won. We want to show our unhappiness at the disrespectful way he is treating us, the descendants of the owners, by trying to take away our land. Then there are the things I have already explained, about ALTA, we are also unhappy about these. And also the Land Use Commission, they are giving away money to the evicted tenants and not thinking of the owners who are starting farms on the land. And also the Mahogany. All these things said and done by the government. The Taukei Movement hasn't done anything. . . . Just him [Chaudhry] he has done everything, had tyrannical ways. Presumptuous, conceited has been his leadership.[4]

But then, after inviting the Tui Navitilevu to head the protest movement, Tora pointed to the particular importance of the west in the nation of Fiji, implicitly suggesting that the interests of the west might not be properly safeguarded by a leader from another area of the country: "The duty that called us together this day today is one that confirms the blood and the membership in the *vanua.* They come sit today the chiefs from the west in our *vanua,* the *vanua* that enriches the government of Fiji and enables the money to come, and also the airport, gold mine, sugar mills, many big hotels, yes when they want to grab our soil. [They have] come together the high chiefs . . . come sit this day today to do their duty. We thank them very much." Tora's words clearly played on racial hostilities, chastising Chaudhry for ignoring the sacred customs of indigenous Fijians and for threatening

their key place as the owners and hosts in Fiji. Tora located the ultimate power in Fiji in the hands of an indigenous Fijian, Ratu Mara, on whom the movement would call to tell Chaudhry that he had gone too far and must respect the sacred status of the indigenous Fijian community within the nation. Implicit here, though, was the idea that having an Indo-Fijian prime minister was not, in itself, unacceptable; the problem was that Chaudhry had failed to show respect for Fijian culture. But Tora also appealed to strong regional identities by pointing out that the west was the source of much of Fiji's wealth. Since Chaudhry, himself, was from the west, Tora must have been implicitly addressing these words to Ratu Mara, a Lauan who might need to be reminded of the central role of the west in the Fijian nation.

The Week Following the Coup

My first inkling that Rakiraki village was going to go strongly in favor of Speight came when I went to visit a neighbor a few hours after the coup occurred to find out if the rumors of the coup were true. I found my neighbor sitting with a bunch of friends around a kava bowl and the radio. The assembled men were happy to explain the reports to me and to tell me that George Speight, the leader of the coup, was from Ra. Speight, one man told me, was a true Fijian, being both from Ra and in the military. He had done what needed to be done: He had stood up to the Indo-Fijians who were trying to overextend their power and had shown them the strength of indigenous Fijians. These were words I heard repeated many times in the following days. Even a young woman who had voted for Chaudhry, after initially opposing the coup under instructions from her husband, was within a couple of days saying that anyone who opposed Speight was just a big *quari,* or homosexual. A local schoolteacher cheerfully told me that she had been willing to give the idea of having an Indo-Fijian prime minister a chance but that Chaudhry had clearly shown that it was a bad idea by moving forward on land reforms. Now they would have a new constitution mandating an indigenous Fijian prime minister. It was good that the coup had shown them a new generation of indigenous Fijian leaders like Speight, since the old leaders like Ratu Mara were clearly past it. Another neighbor suggested that Ratu Mara, who had come out publicly against the coup, was not a true Fijian at all: He had straight hair and seemed to prefer to speak English; he must be mixed race and probably mostly European. Speight, in contrast, was a true Fijian and a son of Ra. Indeed, Ratu Mara had elected to address the nation on Fiji One, the national television station, in English. He was probably trying to speak, as president, to all Fijians, indigenous and Indo-

Fijian alike, sending a message that Fiji was a multiracial nation. But this use of English struck a sour note with my neighbor, convincing her that Ratu Mara was not a true Fijian. After a news report on a march in Ba where indigenous Fijians had joined Indo-Fijians in condemning the coup, some senior men gossiping after a meeting wondered how anyone opposed to the coup could call himself or herself a Fijian.

These comments revealed a hardening of antagonistic attitudes toward Indo-Fijians. Just a week before the coup, my husband and I had encountered several of our indigenous Fijian neighbors at a local Indo-Fijian wedding. Several of them had told us how they had many Indo-Fijian friends whom they had grown up with as playmates. But on the night that Speight and his men took the Fijian Parliament hostage, an Indo-Fijian elementary school on the outside of Rakiraki burned to the ground. A young neighbor told me that she had been awoken by the fire in the middle of the night and had gone with some other villagers to watch the school burn. On the way they had passed the house of an Indo-Fijian and had jokingly called out that they would burn his house down if he didn't tie up his dog. On the way back, the young woman continued, they noticed that the dog had been tied and had been amazed that the Indo-Fijian man had taken them seriously. The woman was amused but seemed at the same time slightly ashamed. Some villagers later suggested that the Indo-Fijians must have burned the school down themselves. A few days later, three Indo-Fijian–owned stores were looted and burned in Vaileka, a nearby town, while many of our indigenous Fijian neighbors watched.

Even at the height of the coup, however, expressions of antagonism toward Indo-Fijians were mitigated by more conciliatory messages. When the young men burned the three stores in Vaileka, one neighbor told me, they had invited the assembled viewers to go in and loot the stores, but, she said, many people had been too ashamed to do this. A village meeting was held a few days later in which a senior man delivered a message from the Tui Navitilevu, who was in Suva, asking that the looting in Rakiraki stop and expressing shame at a report that the young men who had done the looting had said that the Tui had asked them to do it. The senior man said:

> The DO [district officer], the *roko,* and one police came to my house around noon. As you have just heard before, there has been looting in our *vanua* here, Rakiraki. The DO talked about a phone call from Lei Uluda [the Tui Navitilevu], who rang from Suva. He called and asked that there be no more looting in our *vanua.* Let it be enough. This message is especially for families with children who loot. Also, he said that he is very, very sad when he heard that

> his name was drawn in. [The looters] said the Tui Navitilevu said that they should loot. He was very sad that his name was drawn in. They said that he said that the damage should be done. He was very sad and ashamed when he heard that report of the looting in Vaileka being associated with him. Yes it was really something. It really pains me, and I feel shame at this report. Because of that I then called you together today that we could discuss this important message. . . . Yes I speak especially to you the boys who are suddenly caught up in this kind of thing. Let it be clear to you of this *vanua* here of Rakiraki that there is one leader, the honorable gentleman the Tui Navitilevu. You should think of each of the women who brought you up to serve the *vanua* well, and also you should think of the church of the *vanua* of Rakiraki and of its leader of the big division of Ra. What will the rest of the villagers say about the *vanua* when things like this happen here.

Here the senior man relayed a message from the Tui expressing shame at the looting and asking the Rakiraki people to help round up the looters. Indeed, local indigenous Fijians turned out in large numbers to help the police round up the young men responsible. When a young man was taken by the police the next day, I heard no complaints from the family, even though they said that they did not think that he could possibly have been involved, since they had known where he was at the time of the looting.

Also striking here, however, were the terms in which the Tui and his spokesman in the village condemned the looting. The Tui had little to say about the importance of respecting Indo-Fijians. He was more disturbed by the idea that he had been made to look bad when the young men said he had told them to do the looting. The spokesman stressed that everyone must respect the Tui as his or her leader and take care to project an image of being a united, orderly *vanua* to the rest of the world. What seemed to be at issue here, then, was that Rakiraki people should support their local leader, who was now vying for power on a national stage, and project the image of being a strong, united polity behind him. The appeal here, then, was to foster local pride, implicitly vis-à-vis the other indigenous Fijians with whom the Tui was vying for power.

Consistent with this emphasis on local pride was the way Rakiraki villagers' comments indexed the emergence of a kind of indigenous Fijian identity centered on a display of local strength and autonomy. Speight, unlike Ratu Mara, was a true Fijian, because he was strong and because he was a warrior. Several women commented to me admiringly on how muscular and fit Speight looked when he appeared on an evening news broadcast. Further-

more, this display of warrior strength was closely linked in people's minds to Ra Province, of which Rakiraki was a part. Ratu Mara, from Lau and perhaps even mostly European, was not a true Fijian because he refused to stand up and display strength. Besides, he was an old man and not from the military, according to a few villagers. Ra people, then, were not educated professionals like easterners; but they were the strength of the nation.

These analyses were particularly interesting in that they required a very selective way of looking at Speight. Speight, as the Fiji One broadcasts made known, was half-European and had been educated in the United States. He was a businessman, not a military man. His ties with Ra, on his Fijian mother's side, were somewhat unclear. One woman claimed that he had grown up in her home village nearby but quickly backtracked when I asked her if she had ever met him. Furthermore, Speight spoke only English, and that with an Australian accent, in Fiji One broadcasts. Thus, he was, objectively, no more obviously Fijian than Ratu Mara. The Rakiraki people's strong desire to regain local autonomy and the image of being a strong region, protecting Fijian rights in a way that southeastern and Lauan chiefs had failed to do for all their erudition and wealth, was evident in the way that they embraced Speight as a military man and true son of Ra despite evidence to the contrary.

I suggest, in concluding, that the coup and the preceding moves toward land reform by the Chaudhry government had created consensus where none had existed before. Villagers had been divided on the issue of what the Fijian nation should look like and what role chiefs should play in it. However, everyone had fears of crafty Indo-Fijians tricking ethnic Fijians out of their land, and Chaudhry had played into those fears. Furthermore, in coming out against the coup, Ratu Mara tapped into local anxieties about domination by southeastern Fijians and pushed Ra people toward supporting the coup. These two common factors—plus the Tui Navitilevu's coming out in support of the coup—gave the villagers enough common ground that they could safely talk about the coup. And, in the process, they came to an increased sense of solidarity that swept along in support of the coup even people who had voted for Chaudhry and a young neighbor who had previously preferred the company of Indo-Fijians. What emerged was a strong desire for local autonomy and a desire to see their region as the true guardians of Fiji.

I also suggest, however, that the burst of regional pride catalyzed by the coup was a product of local circumstances and could just as easily evaporate as those circumstances change. People had come together to talk about the coup because it was such a dramatic and potentially fearful event that cried out for interpretation. In coming together they had, in accordance with

Fijian values, tried to generate consensus among themselves. But as the crisis faded in following months, so perhaps did this strong consensus. I received a letter from a young woman written on July 8, a few days before the hostages were finally released. She wrote: "Even for us Fijian or real Fijian we are living with fear nowadays. If we go in town, we are not walking like before, we are walking fast and rushing to whichever place we are going to. Oh Karen and Steve, we miss our beloved Fiji as it is known before, beautiful Fiji, no more." She said that she now wished that the coup had never occurred, and she regretted that her Indo-Fijian landlord now lived in fear of his indigenous Fijian neighbors.

NOTES

1. Fieldwork from August 1999 to June 2000 was supported by a Union College grant. Previous fieldwork in Fiji in 1997 was supported by a National Science Foundation grant.

2. This and other interviews were conducted in English and tape-recorded.

3. This and other public speeches were tape-recorded and translated from the local dialect of the speaker to English by me with the aid of a local research assistant.

4. This speech was tape-recorded and translated from Nadi dialect by me with the aid of a Fijian research assistant.

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FOREIGNERS AT HOME: DISCOURSES OF DIFFERENCE, FIJI INDIANS AND THE LOOTING OF MAY 19

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This essay focuses on Fiji Indians' reactions to the property destruction and ethnic violence that followed the 19 May 2000 coup. In particular, it explores why, in the first few weeks following the coup, Indo-Fijians despaired over the looting of downtown shops, rather than over other acts of seemingly more direct anti-Indian violence, such as the burning of Indo-Fijian homes and physical attacks against Indo-Fijian men and women. I analyze how Fiji's Sanatan Hindus discursively posited Indians, on the one hand, as central to the development of Fiji as a "modern," capitalist nation, and Fijians, on the other, as detrimental to national "progress." Looting, in particular, came to represent the demolition of all that Fiji Indians considered themselves to have built out of the nation of Fiji.

ON THE MORNING of 19 May 2000, just after coup leader George Speight and his gunmen walked into the Fiji Parliament and took Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and forty-three members of Parliament hostage, crowds of predominantly indigenous Fijians broke into 169 shops and restaurants in the capital city Suva and began to help themselves to the contents. The looting was only the first of a profusion of illegal activities ranging from rapes and house burnings to peaceful roadblocks that sprang up across Fiji in the following months.

Much of the violence that occurred was ethnically focused, as Fiji's ethnic Indians, who make up approximately 44 percent of the population (Bureau of Statistics 1996), became the targets of frequent physical attacks from indigenous Fijian youths. However, it is difficult to assess just how

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widespread the violence was that followed George Speight's attempted governmental overthrow. Many incidents either were not reported or were not covered by radio, TV news, or the three major news dailies.[1] What is known is that interethnic violence occurred in major urban areas (most notably Suva, Nausori, and Labasa), small towns (including Korovou and Rakiraki), and rural farming areas (Vunidawa, Muaneweni, Dreketi) at a scale unknown in Fiji since the violence of *girmit,* or indenture, when South Asians first came to Fiji's shores.[2] About fifteen kilometers from Suva's downtown, in the middle- to lower-class, predominantly Hindu village in which I conducted fieldwork in Nausori, in the first two weeks following the coup, the boys' side of an Indian-run Christian school was burnt down, and a small Hindu temple on the main road was burnt beyond recognition, with all of the *murti,* or religious images, irreparably damaged. In a neighboring village, Indo-Fijian houses were stoned and some of their occupants reportedly injured. In the first few days after the coup, no one dared to leave the neighborhood, afraid that even a quick trip to the market or post office might invite attack. None of the popular communitywide Hindu *puja*s, or prayers, were held, Indo-Fijian women rarely ventured out of their homes at all, and, as in all of Fiji, schools were shut. Just over an hour's drive into the interior in Vunidawa, Indo-Fijian homes were set on fire, their occupants fleeing into the surrounding bush. There were also reports of Indian women being raped. On a national level, Mahendra Chaudhry, the first ethnic Indian prime minister, was being held hostage and at times subjected to brutal treatment. In the beginning, it was commonly thought that the coup itself was motivated by the desire to remove ethnic Indians from political power in Fiji. (Since then it has become generally accepted that big-business interests and splits within indigenous Fijian society, along with possibly other, still unknown, factors, were more central to the impetus behind the coup than was anti-Indian sentiment.)

This essay focuses on how Sanatan Hindus responded to incidents of governmental instability and escalating interethnic violence and what these responses reveal about shifting notions of "Indian" identity in Fiji. Approximately 80 percent of the Indo-Fijian population in Fiji is Hindu, and the majority follow Sanatan Dharm. Sanatan Hindus in Fiji describe themselves as Hindus *(Hindu log)* or, along with Muslim and Christian Indians, as Indians *(Hindustani log),* and I use both terms here. I do so despite Kelly's warning that the identity of "Indian" or "Indo-Fijian" was constructed by Europeans (1995a) and that it in fact erases the multitude of internal differentiations made among "Indo-Fijians" themselves, such as Gujarati or Indian, North or South Indian, Muslim or Hindu, Arya Samaj or Sanatan Hindu (Kelly 1998).[3] My purpose here is not to argue against Kelly's point

but to explore the ways in which Sanantan Hindus used the notion of a pan–Indo-Fijian identity (namely, that of being "Indian") to make sense of the impact of the coup on their lives. In doing so, I focus on shifts in Hindus' perceptions of Indians' and Fijians' relations to capitalism and to the modern capitalist state as well as their corresponding reassessment of the stakes of being Indian in Fiji in the first five months following the May 19 coup.[4]

As a departure point I find it useful to adopt Fredrik Barth's now classic notion of ethnicity and ethnic change (1969). Rather than assuming a static, primordial ethnicity, Barth's groundbreaking move was to contend that ethnicity should be understood as constantly shifting, constructed and reconstructed through interactions between members of ethnic groups and those they consider outsiders. By doing so, Barth rephrased the guiding question of research on ethnicity from a documentation of the supposedly "objective criteria" that constitute ethnic groups (such as shared language, dress, and so forth) to a focus on the interactions between ethnic groups, particularly on the ways in which these interactions give an ethnic identity "continual expression and validation" by its members (1969:15, 17). As he puts it, "The critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (ibid.:15).

While Barth's insights into the transactional nature of ethnicity cannot be overestimated, recent ethnographic treatments have begun to reexamine the historical and symbolic importance of the meanings ascribed to the various attributes of ethnic identity. Linnekin and Poyer (1990) and Nicholas Thomas (1992), for instance, argue that the "cultural stuff" of ethnic-group identification is hardly irrelevant to the ways in which ethnic boundary lines are drawn. Thomas, in particular, turns his attention to the historical processes by which ethnic identities are created in the first place, urging awareness of the specificities of the processes of "accommodation and confrontation that shape particular understandings of others" and the ways in which these processes "thus determine what specific practices, manners, or local ethics are rendered explicit and made to carry the burden of local identity" (1992:213).

My intention here is likewise to employ Barth's appreciation of the constructed and oppositional nature of ethnic boundary lines without losing sight of the historical processes behind the selection of the "cultural stuff" that particular ethnic identities entail. Specifically, I argue that by drawing on well-known racial stereotypes that were in circulation before the coup,[5] Sanatan Hindu responses to the events of May 2000 reinforced many prevailing racial conceptions. However, certain events of May 19, such as the wide-scale looting of Suva and Nausori that became a central theme in

Indo-Fijian community dialogues during the coup, sparked a renegotiation among Sanatan Hindus of the boundary line between "Indians" and "Fijians" on the basis of Indo-Fijian perceptions of increasing disparities between ethnic groups. The result was that, in local discourses about the coup, Hindus represented themselves as the harbingers of modern capitalist commerce and posited Fijians as generally outside of and antagonistic to the world of modern national development (and so greatly reduced the historical role of the British that in some Hindu villagers' narratives it is erased completely). Finally, I examine the cultural, historical, and political dimensions behind such racial stereotyping of Fijians and Indians to suggest not only how these discourses of oppositional identity make use of Sanatan Hindu religious values, but also how they are closely rooted to the historical positioning of Indo-Fijians and Fijians in relation to capitalism.

Talk of Looting

The looters of May 19 were predominantly indigenous Fijians of all ages—youths, elderly women, middle-aged men, women carrying infants. Some of them were violent, leaving behind smashed windows, broken glass, and burnt-out buildings. But others appeared, from the television news footage shown later that night, to be serenely strolling into stores and simply pocketing the merchandise. Not that everything that was stolen could be pocketed—people walked off with large kitchen appliances, and pickup trucks drove away with stolen TVs. Taxi drivers found themselves being paid with a portion of the takings—be it a piece of jewelry or one of a dozen frozen chickens. The looting continued for hours. A garment factory owner I spoke with claims he let his employees off for the day, thinking they would get their children out of school and go home early, but instead they flocked to downtown Suva to take part in the pillaging. Police or military presence was almost negligible, and those present did not actually do much to stop the looters. Police Commissioner Isikia Savua (who has since been investigated but cleared of colluding with the coup leader) was shown on the evening's television news coverage standing alongside his police officers in the middle of the street, forlornly watching as shops were broken into, shaking his head in a show of disbelief and despair (whether it was genuine despair or merely a show of it is another question that has yet to be answered).

It is out of such scenes of chaos that the topic of looting came up over and over again in the conversations of many of Suva's and Nausori's residents. However, given everything else that was going on in the country, it is at first a bit surprising that, from May 19 until about the end of June,[6] Sanatan Hindus spoke of the looting as by far the leading example of how

terrible *(kharab)* the coup was for Fiji. Why did their despair over the coup focus primarily on looting rather than on the hostage taking, the school and temple burnings, the stoning of homes? What do the ways they talked about looting say about Indian identity and about ethnic relations in Fiji in general?

The majority of the shops in Fiji are owned by "Indians," "Gujaratis" (migrants from the Indian state of Gujarat who came independently to Fiji, many in the 1920s and 1930s), and "Europeans" (anyone of white skin including Australians, Americans, and New Zealanders) rather than "indigenous Fijians" (the native inhabitants of Fiji), although they employ members of all ethnic groups. But it was not only shop owners who were visibly affected by the destruction. Even persons whose primary relationship to business enterprises was as customers spoke of the looting as if it were a personal attack. The concern over looting was thus not about the destruction—or potential destruction—of one's own property per se, but about assaults on commercial establishments and commodities in general and on what they represent to the Sanatan Hindu community.

One of the first public statements regarding the looting came from indigenous Fijian political leader Adi Kuini Speed, the coalition government's deputy prime minister, who depicted looting as a moral breach of the rules of Christian society. Expressing shock and deep dismay, Speed, who was lying ill in a hospital bed in Canberra, Australia, gave a radio statement in which she said that she grew up thinking that to be Fijian was to be caring, generous, and kind but that the actions of the looters and rioters were flagrantly "unchristian" (interview with Adi Kuini Speed carried on FM 96 on 20 May 2000). Many indigenous Fijians reacted likewise. Sera, a young indigenous Fijian schoolteacher, echoed Speed's moral outrage over the lack of Christian ethics displayed by the looters, as she shared with me how she was struggling to make sense of the coup as "God's will." While initially she did not agree with Speight's actions, she felt compelled to make sense of them in terms of Christian theology. Sera was not alone in her attempts to reconcile God's will with the workings of Speight, and the solution she later embraced was that the former president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, had, as a member of the Freemasons, been practicing Satanic rituals such as the drinking of human blood and that Speight was thus God's prophet in the fight against evil (a story that was widely spread and led to the burning of the Levuka Masonic lodge). This explanation provided her with a sense that no matter how chaotic and confusing the events of the moment, Speight was acting within a moral order, and his purpose was in fact divinely guided.

In contrast, the Hindus with whom I spoke did not describe the looting or the coup itself in overtly religious terms. They seemed to be disturbed

primarily by its economic implications. Many of them expressed great distress over shopkeepers' losses of goods and money, over insurance companies' refusals to cover these losses, as well as over the physical damage to business establishments and how long it might take to "rebuild" the downtown. Community reactions to looting involved an almost complete lack of allusion to the *Ramayana* or the *Geeta* (the main holy books used by Sanatan Hindus in Fiji), references to moral codes of behavior, or appeals to a sense of divine justice. It was not until months after the coup that a few such allusions were made (one woman, for example, told me that a-*pandit* [priest] explained to her that the source of the conflict was the internal struggle over land and that the Fijians were fighting among themselves over property rights in the same way that brothers turn against each other in their fight for land in the *Geeta*), but these references were few and far between and did not constitute the same level of community debate, much less public debate, as did those about Christian ethics and the coup.

Rather than try to compartmentalize and contrast these two sets of discourses—talk of looting as a breach of Christian ethics and talk of looting as economic destruction—I want to suggest something altogether different. Specifically, a close look at Hindus' talk of looting in terms of economics unearths another kind of discourse, this one about the connections between religious morality; the development of a modern, capitalist state; and the social position of Fiji's Indians. But first, it is necessary to know something in general of the role that Indians have played in Fiji.

A Brief History of Indians in Fiji

Following Fiji's cession to Great Britain in 1874, the colony's first governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, devised a scheme that would enable Fiji to generate income without "endangering" the traditional way of life of its native peoples by requiring them to enter the labor market. Drawing on the models of Indian indenture in colonies such as Mauritius and Trinidad, where he had previously held the position of governor, Gordon implemented the importation of men and women from India to work Fiji's sugar plantations. Between 1879 and 1916, some 60,000 Indians were brought to Fiji. Having lost their caste status and survived often appalling conditions, the majority of *girmitiya*s, or indentured laborers, stayed in Fiji after their indenture contract expired.

Later to be called "Fiji Indians" or "Indo-Fijians" in the social science literature and simply "Indians" in common speech as well as by a myriad of postcolonial bureaucracies (school records, medical records, the Fiji census, voter registration, and so on), Fiji Indians were first categorized as laborers

or "coolies" (Kelly 1992). The creation of the identity of "Fiji Indians" was part of a larger project of compartmentalization of Fiji's populace into three primary ethnic groups (the "three-legged stool")—indigenous Fijian, Indo-Fijian, and European—that was undertaken during the era of British rule (Lal 1995; Scarr 1988). Even before the "coolies" were herded together into the cramped living quarters of the plantation "lines"—resulting, for Hindus, in a breakdown of caste and, for those of South Indian origin, in the imposition of a unifying language, as they were forced to adopt a dialect of Hindi now commonly referred to as "Fiji Hindi"—there were conscious attempts to wear away distinctions of caste, class, and religion in the holding bays for indentured laborers in Calcutta and Madras (Sanadhya 1991; Kelly 1988). What resulted was not only a legacy of historical, social, and cultural difference between Indians and Fijians, but also the creation of shared cultural, political, and historical features—including the legacy of indenture itself—that have led some scholars to assert the existence of a pan-Fiji Indian identity (Jayawardena 1980; Brown 1978). Others have resisted this idea, arguing that the multitude of differences among "Fiji Indians" makes the classification, while useful in analyses of the racial taxonomies employed by the colonial state, detrimental to understanding and accurately portraying the histories and contemporary realities of those currently classed under it (Kelly 1998).

The Contemporary Politics of Race

Any analysis of politics in Fiji, past or contemporary, cannot, however, escape noting how prevalently such racial or ethnic categories are employed. While there is disagreement on the nature of the true forces behind Fiji's political upheavals,[7] it is clear that they are undertaken in the name of purported racial solidarity among Fijians and racial prejudice against Indians. Major General (then lieutenant colonel) Sitiveni Rabuka, who conducted the 1987 coups, states that his aims in overthrowing Bavadra's government were to restore power into indigenous Fijian hands. Drawing on the popular conception of Bavadra's labor coalition as an "Indian government," Rabuka claims that the coup was undertaken in order to combat "the Indian design for political domination" (2000:10). One of his motivations in supporting the rewriting of Fiji's constitution, he asserts, was the transformation of Fiji into a Christian state. "I believed then," he writes in retrospect, "that if my Indian brothers and sisters could be converted to Christianity, then the relationship between the two main communities would be less tense, and we would have more in common" (ibid.:13). Rabuka's anti-Indian sentiments were not new to the world of Fijian politics. They were echoes, though

echoes with the political and military might to back them up, of decades of previous calls to banish Indians outright from the country, most notably those of outspoken *taukei* leader Sakeasi Butadroka.

In the late 1990s, Rabuka softened his stance. Recognizing the limits of the 1990 Constitution, which was widely acknowledged to be discriminatory against Indo-Fijians, he played a leading role, in collaboration with the Indo-Fijian political leader Jai Ram Reddy, in the writing of the new 1997 Constitution, which was to pave the way for a more multiethnic government. It was a step for which Rabuka has been praised but also one to which he attributes his loss in the 1999 election. He explains:

> The poetic irony is that Mr. Reddy and I, the main architects of the 1997 Constitution, which was designed to bring about greater national unity, were essentially rejected by the voters. That was the price we had to pay for bringing in so much change in the process of Fiji's transition. Mr. Reddy was probably punished by the Indians for getting too close to Rabuka, the coup-maker. My own SVT Party lost ground because it was seen as selling out the Fijians. But our multiracial vision for the country was right and I have no regrets about embracing it. (Rabuka 2000:18)

While the Rabuka of 2000 was known to espouse the necessity of a multicultural, multiethnic Fiji, his recent statements on politics and race in Fiji have also reiterated his strong anti-Indian bias (Sharpham 2000).

In reporting about politics and nationalist activities, the Fijian media knowingly or unknowingly often reinforce the notion of Indians as outsiders in Fiji. For example, a Fiji One TV news report following Butadroka's death on 2 December 1999 described his political aims as the removal of "Indians and other foreigners" from Fiji. Many indigenous Fijians use similar language, distinguishing "locals" or indigenous Fijians, on the one hand, from "Indians and expats" or "foreigners," on the other.

To some extent, these sentiments of being outsiders, or at least not quite "locals," were voiced by Indo-Fijians themselves. One middle-aged Hindu woman, for example, told me that many Indians did not think that Fiji needed an Indian prime minister. "It is not our country," she said and then paused. "Well, it is our country but . . . you wouldn't want someone from outside leading your country, why should the Fijians want it?"

None of the Indo-Fijians I spoke to, however, debated their right to live in Fiji. A common distinction was made between owning land and renting it, with Indo-Fijians claiming they have no desire to deprive Fijians of their

land but do want security in their rights to live on it (83 percent of land is legally reserved for indigenous Fijian ownership, making land rights, both leases and ownership, probably the most contentious issue in Fiji). Indo-Fijians also acknowledged the emotional attachment that generations upon generations of living in a location can produce. Many speak at great length and with great fondness of their homes in Fiji. The Indo-Fijian poet, novelist, and one-time minister in the ousted Bavadra government, Satendra Nandan, has poignantly expressed the bond between Indians and the land of Fiji through the metaphor of the human body. In his novel *The Wounded Sea,* he depicts the mass migration following the 1987 coups as the dissolution of the human body, describing it as "the hemorrhage of exodus" flowing "like the blood from a ruptured artery" (Nandan 1991:134). Thus, while they have not been in their home country as long as their native counterparts, as Nandan notes, Indo-Fijians' roots in Fiji have a profound psychological and emotional depth. "One gets used to one's country as one gets accustomed to one's body," he writes (ibid.:147). (For more on how emotional bonds to geographic places are evident in Indo-Fijian fiction, see Trnka 1999.)

A Belonging Tinged by Violence

Whether in fiction or in the narrative accounts related by Indo-Fijians among themselves, violence is never far away from these stories of belonging. In mid-July 2000, during the height of the coup, a middle-aged Hindu woman told me the following story about her natal village in Vunidawa in Naitisiri Province (from which George Speight hails). We had been sitting in her kitchen in Nausori drinking tea when I overheard the final phrase of a chant being repeated over a Hindi-language radio station. "This is our country" *(Yeh desh hamara hai),* a class of schoolchildren droned. I repeated the phrase and Devi corrected me: "This country is also ours" *(Yeh desh hamara bhi hai).* Then, almost without a pause, she told me:

> About four or five years ago in Vunidawa, during rugby time, my brother was going out to milk the cows. Bhabhi [brother's wife] was doing the dishes, when she heard someone in the house. It was a Fijian who knew them, who was Brother's friend. He was wearing a stocking on his head, so you could see only his eyes and nose. He came up behind Bhabhi, and when she turned he hit her with a piece of firewood, cutting her hand. [She gestures between the thumb and pointer finger.] She cried out and Brother heard her. When Brother came into the house and saw the man, they began

> to fight, and the stocking on his face was pushed up [she gestures]. An uncle heard the commotion and came in. The Fijian ran off into the bush.

"But they knew the Fijian, he was their friend?" I asked.

Devi nodded. "They used to exchange *dalo* and cassava," she said. "They did not pay him money. He was their friend." She continued: "They called the police, but they did not do anything. It was about five years ago."

"Why during rugby time?" I asked.

Devi looked at me as if this should be obvious. "Because they [i.e., the Fijians] need ticket money and money to buy things at the game, not just *dalo* and cassava," she said.

Almost without exception, when asked to explain to an outsider why such violence occurs, Hindus turned to the explanation of differing attitudes toward work between Indians and Fijians. A common self-description of Sanatan Hindus is that Indians are generally extremely hardworking. In comparison, they regard Fijians, regardless of age, class, or gender, as "lazy" and generally uninterested in work. Fijians were frequently described as living the "easy life" without labor but as "wanting everything" that Indians produce. These attitudes are furthermore interpreted as necessarily leading Fijians to reap the rewards of the modern economic system (namely, mass-produced goods) by breaking its rules, primarily through theft.

John Kelly has commented on the religious basis of Fiji Indians' approach to work in his essay "Fiji Indians and the 'Commoditization of Labor'" (1992; see also Kelly 1991, 1988). Kelly's interest is in distinguishing attitudes toward labor between "Indians" and "Gujaratis," but his insights are also useful in looking at interethnic tension. Advocating "a cultural approach to capitalism" (1992:97), Kelly states that for many Hindus work is understood in terms of a Gandhian conception that advocates labor as a crucial means of cultivating the relationship between the devotee and God (ibid.:108). As part of *bhakti,* the devotional form of Hinduism that is widely practiced in Fiji, "labor is necessary to self-development and labor in a capitalist enterprise is labor in service to community and god" (ibid.:113). This religious dimension of work is sometimes explicitly stated by Hindus, as when, a few months after the coup, in late July, Devi explained to me: "Hindu people are blessed because they are very hardworking and therefore they grow, [they are] always gaining, generation after generation is blessed. Fijians pray a lot, but God does not hear [them] because they do not work, they do not sweat. God blesses the Hindus. It's a payback [the English term]."

Sanatan Hindu responses to the looting thus engaged the terms of a wider religious discourse on labor relations. A moral value is placed on men's and

women's labor outside of its productive value or market value. Labor is valued for what it means in terms of one's relationship to God, in that work—and in particular the "sweat" or physical exertion of work—becomes as much as an offering as the incense, flowers, and *prasad* (food offerings) that form the Sanatan *puja*.

But to leave the story here would be to extract what is really one part of a much larger narrative of identity, religious morality *(dharm)*, and the nation. While it is possible to focus on the relationship of Sanantan *dharm* to notions of work as does Kelly, what became increasingly vocalized in the months following May 19 was a discourse on the interrelationship between Sanatan notions of work, ethnic difference, and national development, often encapsulated by Hindu responses to looting. In order to understand why such significance was attributed to looting, it is important to understand the intensity of the disruption and sense of dislocation to which the coup gave rise.

Absurdity and Despair

Among the most widespread and enduring reactions to the coup were expressions of the absurdity of the events that were occurring. In its simplest form, the sense of absurdity was conveyed by a shaking of the head and a wordless look of disbelief, or by wordless and uncontrollable laughter, as when a week into the coup a group of men assembled at the local shop read in the newspaper about how long the continued negotiations between the military and the hostage takers were expected to take and broke into a round of laughter. On another occasion, when I asked a group of people about a nearby school that had been set alight the night before, they only shook their heads and laughed. For many, their inability to put their sentiments into words was a reflection of the profound sense of confusion and despair they felt in terms of both their immediate activities and their sense of the future.

The best way to characterize their responses to the situation might be to say that they found it absurd. To borrow a definition from Merriam-Webster's dictionary, the absurd is the "ridiculously unreasonable, unsound, or incongruous" or that which has "no rational or orderly relationship to human life" (2001). The term conveys the kind of unbelievableness and incomprehensibility with which many in Fiji approached the events following the coup, though it gives little insight into how such a state might be communicated. In Fiji, people responded to the confusion of the coup by making direct statements of disbelief, by laughing and making jokes, and by comparing life to fantastic fictional narratives, especially popular film. The pace of events, both in terms of the political maneuvering taking place and the spread of violence, was often hard for people to keep up with, and many

expressed a lack of comprehension of what was happening. Thus, the most common remark about the future, short or long term, was *"nahi sako jano,"* or "it cannot be known." Just as frequently, however, people remarked that the instability could not possibly carry on much longer and that very soon the situation must come to right itself, with a return to their regular routines of community prayer, schooling for children, and, very often, a return to work.

Confusion and often fear were frequently expressed through laughter and humor. The day after Fiji Hardwood Corporation, of which Speight used to be the chairman, was set on fire, for example, a neighbor who saw us on the street pulled over his car, shaking his head and laughing. "What is going on *yar* [friend]?" he cried out to my husband. A union organizer, he explained that there was some concern that his workplace might be the next to be torched. He laughed and pointed to the trunk of his car: "I have the whole office in the back!"

A spate of jokes, many focused on the coup's leader and his supporters, began on May 19 and showed no sign of waning over the next four months. Although joking, especially to diffuse tension or anger, was not uncommon before the coup, there was a proliferation of political and interethnic jokes after May 19 (and in fact on May 19 itself). Many made fun of the violence to which they or their relatives were falling victim. Others underlined the dislocation people felt and the desire to return a sense of normality to their lives. On his way to work on the first day after the daytime curfew was lifted, a young man mimicked jumping over land mines and dodging bullets on his way to the office. His wife a few days earlier, while watching the looting on TV, had exclaimed, "It's cashierless shopping!" and later, "It must be a rebate sale!" None of these jokes were standardized, and as far as I am aware, all of them were told only once. Like the wordless laughter, they were fleeting expressions of the absurdity and fearfulness of the situation people found before them.

Attempts to make sense out of the unlikeliness of the events occurring in their lives also led many to relate the coup to popular action films. Subramani has masterfully captured the attempt to make sense of experiences of unexpected violence by drawing on the popular narratives of film in his short story "Captive in Liberated Bush," which depicts the torture of an Indo-Fijian suspected of political subversion during the 1987 coups. Describing the character's perception of his abduction, Subramani writes: "He would probably end up in the trunk of a car, like the young man in the movie. For a moment he was amused by the thought that he and his captors had watched the same movie, sitting next to each other at the Regal on a Saturday afternoon" (1997:246–247). Many of those who experienced the unrest

of 2000 likewise noted that incidents of violence were "like a film," as opposed to what they expected from the realities of everyday life.

Along with attempts to regain a sense of mastery over, or at least comprehension of, the situation, there was a growing sense of despair over the overturning of normal social relations, expectations, and daily routine. It was not uncommon when visiting houses in the middle of the day to find the occupants sleeping because of job loss and unable to sleep at night because of fear of attack. Fear of burglary or attack transformed houses that had previously been easily accessible (during the daytime); they now looked abandoned with their curtains drawn, the front doors locked, and the front gates padlocked all day long. One family told me that they locked themselves into their bedroom each night so that if someone should break in to their house, he could help himself to their belongings without attacking them. For women especially, the complete halt of communitywide prayers often meant an end to socializing beyond the realm of their family relations, leading many to rely on the telephone for news and other forms of contact. As the situation wore on and there was still no sense of a governing body in charge of the country, and the evening curfew was extended yet another few weeks, women and men alike complained of boredom. Reflecting on the lack of work due to the continuation of school closures in early June, one schoolteacher remarked to me that the situation had become boring. "We can't leave the house, we can't do anything," she said. But Fijians, she added, can move about and are "enjoying" themselves. When I asked her how long she thought the situation would last and what sort of government might result, she shook her head as if to dismiss the question and said, "We just want to go back to work."

The bouts of boredom gave way to bouts of increased stress. In July in the interior of Viti Levu, Indo-Fijian families fearing their houses might be burnt would commonly leave their homes at night and sleep in the bush, to return to their homes in the morning. In the village in which I lived, there was great alarm on the night of 21 July 2000, when four rebels tested the resolve of the military checkpoint at a nearby bridge. The official news media reported that soldiers fired warning shots after four men drove a car across the bridge during curfew without stopping at the checkpoint. The men then abandoned the car and hijacked passing vehicles and drove off in the direction of Suva. That night the story spread over the telephone that this was actually a larger mobilization of Speight's supporters and that the village's small Hindu school was the next property to be taken, sending many into a panic. One man telephoned me after the shooting to advise me that (in the dead of night) all the women including myself must immediately flee the area because "four hundred Fijians" carrying lighted torches were

marching up the entryway to the village, ready to set all of the houses on fire. Nothing of this story eventuated, but it reflected the acute uncertainty and fear under which villagers were living. (Unconfirmed reports later suggested that on the same evening close to four hundred Speight supporters were preparing to quit their camp in Kolobo and were looking for another site to take over in Nausori.)

By September 2000, increased military and police presence led to an end to the worst of the violence. By this time the desire of many for the military's promised return to "normality" was so strong that they were eager for the widely expected "second coup" to take place, so that life might finally return to something close to its old rhythms and routines. The anti-Indian sentiments of Major General Rabuka were widely known, and if anyone needed reminding of them, two months before the May 2000 coup his soon-to-be published biography by John Sharpham was introduced to readers of the popular *Fiji Times* newspaper under the headline "Migration the Key: Rabuka." The article noted:

> Former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka hopes Indians will migrate in large numbers. "We tighten the controls, then Fiji is no longer attractive to the Indian settler as it has been in the last 120 years," he says in his new biography. Mr. Rabuka said migration would reduce Indians to "manageable" levels. And he suggested that Indian dominance of the country would lead to Fijian intolerance. (Rika 2000)

With such racially inflammatory statements, Rabuka was not well liked among villagers. And yet, after months of unrest it was not an uncommon hope that Rabuka and former president Ratu Mara would be the ones to once more take the reins of power, as they at least might return some sense of stability to the country. (To date, a "second coup" has not taken place.)

Discourses of Development

In such a setting of disruption and overall social upheaval, talk of interethnic comparisons proliferated. A large part of these discourses of difference involved comparisons of Indian and Fijian approaches to labor, as described earlier. But there was also increasing talk of financial spending patterns and of the relationships between labor, spending, and the development of the Fijian nation.

While it was not unusual before the 2000 coup for Hindus to be critical of the widely practiced Fijian custom of redistributing wealth and goods, the amount of time and interest these topics raised swelled during the

months of unrest. The main criticism was of the ways in which employed Fijians treated money. Rather than saving and providing for the needs of their immediate families, it was said, Fijians were "unable" to save money and therefore were prone to spending a week's pay in a single day. Then, when their finances were used up, they would return to their Indian colleagues and request, or *"kerekere,"* more cash.

Most of the negative examples that Hindus gave were of Fijians' inability to save and wisely allocate resources for their family needs. But accumulation and investment are necessary for yet another kind of enterprise, namely, the further "development" of the nation. With regard to Kelly's statement that "labor in a capitalist enterprise is labor in service to community and god" (1992:113), it is necessary to ask, for which community is this labor undertaken? In different contexts labor—communal, familial, or individual—is undertaken for different communities. In discourses on labor after the coup, the notion of labor for the development of the nation often arises.

One of the "paybacks" for all the work Fiji Indians have been doing has been the development of Fiji. Development, or moving the country "forward," is described as the transformation of the dirty into the clean (using the religiously laden terminology of becoming *saf*), of the clearing away of the bush and the replacement of "jungle" with development. "When Fijians were here," Devi stated, gesturing around the village, "it was only jungle. Then Indians came and cleaned it." During a discussion of the local history of his village, another man told me: "Indians are the ones who developed this country. They did the hard work." (It is noteworthy that these statements leave out the role that not only Fijians but also the British colonialists played in the creation of Fiji as a developing nation, a point that will be further explored later in this essay.)

While these descriptions of difference draw on cultural and historical differences in labor and economic relations, what is lacking in them is an understanding of the rationales behind these actions—exactly how and why a redistributive economy might work, for example. Instead, Fijians' practices are interpreted as "shortcomings" in which the desire for pleasure overshadows any ability to plan for the future.

At best, both before and following the coup, Fijians were described by Indian villagers as living a *"jungli"* or primitive life outside of capitalist commerce, with small-scale violence (such as Bhabhi's attack) occurring when Fijians occasionally desired cash for commercial goods. But during the coup, the representation of Fijians' behavior as antithetical to that of Indians changed so that Fijians began to be depicted as directly hindering capitalist commerce and national development, by, on a mass scale, stealing rather than paying for goods, smashing down shops, and frightening away the foreign investment that is necessary to Fiji's financial well-being. Looting as

well as the other activities of the coup were often described by Indians as moving the country backwards *(piche)* in time. Differences arose only over how many years back in time, ten years, twenty years, or more. While watching a news broadcast about some of Speight's demands, an Indian woman exclaimed: "Indians have built everything we have. But they want us to go back to being laborers, like during *girmit.*" Some went so far as to depict such destructive behavior as nonhuman. "The Fijians are animals," one Indian man bluntly told me. "They want everything for free. . . . They look at us going ahead, and they want what we have."[8]

Talk of Fijians' destructive capabilities became part of daily conversation in the weeks following May 19. It represents not so much a change in the perceived relationship between Indians and Fijians but, in its images of destructiveness, a change in the stakes of that relationship. It is this view not only of Fijians' power but of their potentially destructive use of it that explains the fascination with looting. Many Hindus considered all Fijians as sharing the sentiments of the looters, whether they took part in the looting or not. And with Fijians not only making up the majority of the population in Fiji, but also in control of the majority of political power, Hindus perceived looting as the first sign of a very serious threat to capitalist commerce and thus to Fiji's status as a modern nation. The seriousness of the threat was in contrast to many places in the world, where looting is a weapon of the minority that might temporarily shake up the economic system but is not seen as a possible first step to the end of modern life. The civil disturbances in Los Angeles following the Rodney King verdict, for example, sent a ripple of anxiety through American life but did not seriously raise the possibility of the end of the capitalist economic order in California.

The imagery of Fijian destructiveness came hand in hand with a shift in Hindus' perceptions of what their place in Fiji might be. Before the 2000 coup, everyone spoke of relatives overseas and of their own, vaguely formulated desires to migrate. After the coup, anyone with the means and the ability began to pack his or her bags. No longer content to be foreigners in Fiji, many Indians have decided to call another country home. As early as the first week of June, two thousand people were applying each week for passports, while the average number of applications before the coup was seven hundred.[9] These numbers include Fijians and members of other ethnic groups who are currently also taking part in the exodus. However, according to the migration patterns reported by the Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics (from the months immediately preceding and following the coup), Indians have made up between 84 and 91 percent of the total population of migrants leaving Fiji each month.

Part of this exodus was fueled by Indo-Fijians' fears that Fijians' "inability" to plan for the future will be (or already is) the source of the irrespon-

sible spending not only of their family's income, but also of that of the nation as well. The May 2000 coup itself was explained by some as the overtaking of the country in order to satisfy the indigenous Fijians' momentary desires for money, status, and power, without taking into account the nation's economic future. And when the interim government was installed, villagers complained that the members of the new cabinet were all already "bankrupt" and likely to "spend" away the country's resources, leading the country into certain economic decline. (They were very likely making reference to the 1995 bankruptcy of the National Bank of Fiji, which has been popularly attributed to a large number of defaults on loans to ethnic Fijians.)[10] The suggestion was not only that the ministers were spending the money to line their pockets, but also that they were taking resources that belonged to the nation as a whole and redistributing them to Fijian recipients: not necessarily "stealing" but changing the rules to benefit Fijians rather than Indians. Thus, while observing the swearing-in of the interim government on television, a middle-aged woman exclaimed, "What do the Fijians want?" and a young girl replied, "They want *everything*, look at their budget," and went on to outline the ways in which government money was going to be channeled to Fijian recipients.

This was not a difficult task to undertake, as the interim government soon made public an explicit outline for rerouting funds toward indigenous Fijian beneficiaries in a document called the "Blueprint for the Protection of Fijian and Rotuman Rights and Interests, and the Advancement of Their Development." The stated objective of the Blueprint is the "advancement and acceleration of their [Fijian and Rotuman] development, so that they can participate on an equitable basis in the progress of our country" (Blueprint 2000). Its directives include rewriting the constitution to restrict the positions of head of state and head of government to Fijians, significant changes to the land laws in order to strengthen the legal powers of landowners over those of tenants, increased spending on development projects specifically aimed at Fijians and Rotumans, making an increased number of loans available to Fijian and Rotuman businesses, a tax exemption for Fijian companies, increased funds for Fijian educational scholarships, and reservation of 50 percent of various business licenses for Fijians.

The interim government's strategies can be in part attributed to the fact that, without the pejorative terminology, Sanatan Hindus are not the only ones making the comparisons between Indian and Fijian relations to labor. In a number of his speeches following the coup, military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Filipo Tarakinikini also spoke of Fijians' "inability" to incorporate themselves into the capitalist system. Referring to proposed changes to the constitution to better safeguard indigenous Fijian rights, Tarakinikini stated: "Constitution or no constitution, it still does not ensure prosperity

for the indigenous. Education is the key. Making sure that indigenous Fijians get a grip of what's called entrepreneurship; you know, being able to save for a rainy day, to be hard on ourselves today in order to guarantee a better tomorrow so to speak. All these things are alien to our culture" (Manueli 2000). Tarakinikini's views of ethnic groups' differing relations to capitalism were voiced in a different way by the indigenous Fijians whom I spoke to, many of whom called Indians "greedy" or said that "all Indians are rich."[11]

There are two points here. The first is that Hindus' notions of ethnic difference employ ideas not only about one's relation to labor within a capitalist framework but also about the use of money, investment, and the acquisition and distribution of goods. Building on the discursive linkages between capitalism, labor, and God (that have been so well documented in Kelly's discussion of *bhakti*) are comparative judgments of different systems of investment and redistribution and their relationship to the development of a "modern" nation.[12]

The second point is that while Hindus use religious notions of *bhakti* and work in determining ethnic differences, they are not doing so in a vacuum. The interim government (and the different governments that preceded it) is no stranger to the language of ethnic comparison. The terms of ethnic difference used by Hindus are drawn not only from Sanantan notions of labor, but also from the terms of debates on Fijian and Indian rights that are used in governmental and other public spheres.[13]

The problems with these discourses are many, but perhaps the most important is the way in which they take historically constituted differences in relation to capitalism and represent them as essential, unchanging cultural and ethnic traits. They do so by sidestepping the history of colonialism that placed Indians, first as indentured laborers and then after their contracts expired as "free" men and women, firmly within the relations of capitalist labor within Fiji (for an in-depth exploration of how British colonialists categorized Indo-Fijians as "labor units" or "coolies" as well as Indo-Fijian resistance to these identities, see Kelly 1988 and 1992) and through a system of "protectionism" kept the majority of Fijians out of the paid labor market. The divisions between "Indian" and "Fijian" "cultures" were moreover codified and enforced by years of colonial regulations, as many scholars have documented (e.g., Lal 1995; Kaplan 1998; Kelly 1995b). Instead, these discourses use the characterizations of "laziness," on the one hand, and "greediness," on the other, to create the image of a dichotomy of irreconcilable cultural identities. Discourses of ethnic difference furthermore ignore present-day realities of capitalism in Fiji, such as regional differences in government representation, productivity, and government spending, and cross-ethnic class differences.

What such ethnic stereotyping does, however, underscore are the tensions that exist around differing relationships to labor and financial spending power in Fiji—tensions that did in fact contribute to the political unrest. The coup can thus best be understood in terms of a crisis in one's relation to capitalism not by attributing these tensions to essential cultural differences, but by placing such discourses in the context of the complicated interplays of differing cultural values, class, regional diversity, and the historical construction of ethnic difference.

Though the tools for it were available, there were few serious attempts among villagers at a cross-ethnic class-based or regional analysis of the coup. Even when people realized that the impetus for the coup might, in part, lie within indigenous Fijian society and further recognized that more than likely a number of prominent ethnic Indian businessmen had financially supported Speight, the primary mode of making sense of the coup and surrounding events remained Indian and indigenous Fijians' contrasting relations to labor. The perceived boundary line between "Indian" and "Fijian" was reconceptualized to allow for new kinds of difference (of Fijians as being potential destroyers of modernity in Fiji versus merely belonging to another system of economic practice) alongside a reinforcement of the previously held notions of ethnic identities as based on relationships to capitalism.

Looting became a dominant theme in Sanatan Hindus' talk of the coup, because it was perceived as a direct assault on what Indians have made out of Fiji. It represented an undoing of over a century of labor, decades of it enforced labor under the brutality of *girmit,* that went into transforming Fiji into a "modern" state. In threatening to overturn the conditions considered necessary by many Indians for modern life, looting, for many, made their continued habitation in Fiji seem impossible. Expressions of absurdity likewise highlighted the sense of despair people felt as their daily routines, sense of safety, and at times comprehension of the events occurring around them were set off balance. But the perceived target of the attack was not just Indians, but the country as a whole, as the acts of looting and violence were seen as directly impacting the future chances of peace, stability, and prosperity of the entire nation.

What role—if any—narratives of looting will play in local histories of the May 2000 coup cannot be foretold. But if local narratives of the 1987 coups are any indicator, I suspect images of looting will be central ones. More than a decade later, one of the most common ways for Hindus to explain to an outsider the injustices of the 1987 coups was to describe the Sunday Observance Act. The Sunday Observance laws were put into place after the second coup in 1987. They were intended to enforce Sunday as a day of Christian worship and thus prohibited not only business activities but also non-

Christian gatherings. Without exception, everyone who spoke to me of the Sunday Observance laws stressed their limitations on labor. A common story was of Indian women taken away from their homes and forced to work in the military barracks, because they were caught washing their families' laundry on a Sunday. The focus was once again on work prohibitions, as opposed to the regulations against non-Christian public gatherings, including picnics or even the internationally publicized case of children taken in and beaten at a police station for playing soccer on a Sunday (Amnesty International 1987). The levels of ethnic violence in 2000 were much higher, resulting in the establishment of Fiji's first refugee camp for Indians fleeing violence in the interior. It is therefore likely that interconnections between references to interethnic violence and notions of labor, spending, and development, such as in the story of Bhabhi's attack, will continue to play a role in discourses of difference.

No discourse is without its ruptures, however, and Sanatan Hindus' talk of ethnic identity is no exception. In the midst of talking about the impact of the coup on their own communities, many Indo-Fijians wondered aloud, "What is the future of Fijians in Fiji?" One Indian man described to me how at the height of the violence he enlisted the aid of a Fijian friend to drive up to Vunidawa to rescue his relatives whose house was being stoned by Fijian youths. In the village in which I lived in Nausori, the men organized a patrol to guard the neighborhood from violence—its members were both Indians and Fijians. These ruptures, with their refusals to totalize difference, undermine state categories of racial division. And it is in them that Fiji's hope for the future lies.

NOTES

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1. On one occasion, for example, I was told by multiple informants that Indian customers exiting a local grocery store had been attacked and beaten, and had their groceries stolen. When I asked why this was not being reported in the media, they responded that the radio and television news feared that disseminating such stories

would incite further violence. The level of violence is even more difficult to assess when it comes to documenting cases of violence against women. On 16 July 2000, the news media announced that there was one "confirmed" case of rape (FM 101), despite widespread talk of numerous rapes of Indian women occurring in the interior region of Viti Levu. In the course of everyday conversation about the coup, I was told of at least three rapes of women known in the village where I lived as well as of other attempted rapes or violent attacks against women.

2. The violence of *girmit* has been widely documented. Notable sources include Kelly 1988 and Naidu 1980.

3. This is in addition to distinctions that can be made according to class, regional heritage, education, and, in some cases, caste.

4. My observations are based on research conducted in the Suva/Nausori area from January 1999 until the end of October 2000, with the exception of five weeks in late August and September 2000.

5. It appears that these derogatory stereotypes surface primarily during times of political tension. Mayer (1973), who conducted fieldwork in the early 1950s, writes that in times of conflict Indo-Fijians derided indigenous Fijians for their monetary practices but also remarks that such comments were infrequent. Norton (2000) quotes similar statements from Indo-Fijian submissions to the Constitutional Review Commission, whose task was to assess Indo-Fijian political rights under the discriminatory 1991 Constitution. While I heard occasional comments regarding a Fijian inclination to thievery and "laziness" before the coup, it would be difficult to exaggerate the contrast between those comments and the talk that became widespread during the troubles.

6. Interest in the topic of looting that took place on May 19 generally died down after the end of June. There was, however, brief mention of new incidents of looting that occurred sporadically in the following months.

7. Scarr, for example, upholds the banner of irreconcilable ethnic difference (1988), while Sutherland argues that the real impetus was class antagonisms (1992). Lal offers the most sophisticated analysis, citing a mixture of factors including class, provincial alignments, and tensions between chiefs and commoners (1995).

8. Before the coup, I never heard Indo-Fijians describe Fijians in such terms. A few months after the coup, animality became a common metaphor, most often expressed out of great anger and frustration, as, in another example, when a market vendor faced yet another round of the continuous looting of his produce by Fijian youths. "Bastards! They're animals!" he cried out.

9. Fiji One news, 5 June 2000.

10. My thanks to Matt Tomlinson for making this point.

11. Thomas furthermore notes, as regards differences in development and underdevelopment, that "rural Fijians constantly affirm the moral superiority of the Fijian way to the

customs of Indians and those of white foreigners, [but] they also lament that Fijians are 'poor'" (1992:223). It would be a gross simplification, however, to claim therefore that Indians and Fijians make the same claims about ethnic difference, for what is of interest here is the ways in which these differences are ascribed various religious, moral, historical, and political meanings that in turn are used in identity construction.

12. The reason for the differences in the discourses that Kelly and I document is likely that Kelly's focus is on the public discourses of Indo-Fijian political parties and religious bodies (including many published accounts), which do not employ the kinds of interethnic comparisons of relations to modernity and labor that I document in private discourses and gatherings among Sanatan Hindus. This discrepancy would also explain the differences in how Kelly and I treat Indo-Fijian pride in the development of Fiji. In 1988, Kelly wrote that Indo-Fijian public discourse following the 1987 coup reflected pride in their part in the cooperative, multiethnic effort to modernize Fiji: "All the races of Fiji were portrayed as pioneering, and Fiji was imagined as a harmonious synthesis of like-minded communities, come together for the same goals: modernization, spiritual and material development, and prosperity" (1988:415). He also briefly noted that many Indians who spoke in public with pride in Fiji's development "privately" expressed their own personal interest in migrating (ibid.:416). He did not, however, elaborate on why they wished to do so (i.e., what alternative vision of Fiji compelled them to do so), which may have involved notions of interethnic differences similar to those I explore here. (Similar expressions of ethnic stereotyping are, however, noted in Mayer 1973; Gillion 1977; and Norton 2000.)

13. This is a topic in its own right, demanding more than the brief attention it receives here.

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TAUKEI–VULAGI PHILOSOPHY AND THE COUP OF 19 MAY 2000

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This essay analyzes how the 19 May 2000 civilian coup in Fiji drew upon an indigenous philosophy of *taukei-vulagi* (native-foreigner) relations to mobilize support for the antigovernment rebels. Fears of political disempowerment—grounded in the political realities of the Chaudhry government as well as in political propaganda—led many "ordinary" Fijians to support the motives, if not the methods, of the coup. The coup itself, I conclude, can best be understood as a manifestation of the friction between two categories of Fijians—old guards associated with the colonial era and the educated marginalized elite—with Indo-Fijians (contrary to their wishes) dragged in to establish a buffer between the two. This scenario begs the question of why Indo-Fijians were the easy scapegoats in a conflict that was exclusively intraethnic in nature. The essay addresses this question through an examination of the dynamics of identity formation in the context of Fiji's political economy.

PEOPLE THE WORLD OVER have multiple identities. They essentialize one to suit a particular circumstance that they find themselves in at a given point in time. This behavior becomes problematic, however, when your "other" essentializes you from his or her strategic position (reverse essentialism), thus confining you to an identity that is not in your interest at that particular moment in time. This is the paradox that governs ethnic relations in Fiji today.

Introduction

May 19 of the year 2000 will be best remembered for a few seemingly isolated events on the political landscape of the Fiji Islands. Exactly one year

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had lapsed since a coalition government, led for the first time by an ethnic Indian prime minister, took office. It also happened to be five days after the thirteenth anniversary of the first coup led long ago (or so it seems) by an ambitious lieutenant colonel in the then Royal Fiji Military Forces. This event culminated in Fiji's expulsion from the Commonwealth and the subsequent pariah status accorded it by the international community. It also led to a new constitution weighing heavily in favor of indigenous Fijians that was drafted and promulgated by the former governor-general, then-president of the new Republic of Fiji, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, only to be drastically altered several years later by a convergence of internal interests and outside pressures. A book about the coup maker titled *No Other Way* (Dean and Ritova 1988) documenting the same period likewise later claimed that the coups were undertaken in the name of the indigenous.

The year 2000 will also be remembered for the emergence of yet another book, this time a biography, titled *Rabuka of Fiji.* Apart from narrating the story of a young indigenous lad growing up from humble origins to assume the prime ministership of Fiji, this book by Central Queensland University (Fiji International Campus) lecturer John Sharpham also contained some explosive allegations relating to the alleged part played by then opposition leader Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in the first coup of 1987. This role was in direct contradiction to the assertions contained in *No Other Way,* according to which the coup was motivated by Rabuka himself. As history would have it, when the civilian coup of 2000 took place some thirteen years later, the principal orchestrator of the first coup was chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs, the highest authority on indigenous affairs, while his co-conspirator, according to the second book, occupied the highest public office in the land, the presidency itself. These two alleged conspirators, authors of an insidious plot to overthrow the legitimate government of the day through illegitimate means, were now by an ironic twist of fate the principal moderators of indigenous rationality gone berserk after the coup of 19 May 2000. This was the stage from which an illegitimate plot to overthrow the government raised its ugly head for the third time in a span of just thirteen years.

Stated Motives of the 2000 Coup

The gist of the contention seemed to arise out of the widely held perception among the indigenous population of the 1997 Constitution's failure to address adequately the true nature of the indigenous linkage to the *vanua.* This linkage encapsulates the whole notion of indigenous identity and, in turn, regulates its interaction with "the other."[1] Some of the salient features in the 1997 Constitution that lent credence to this indigenous view were the

new electoral boundaries based on demography rather than provincial lines, the increase in national seats at the expense of communal ones, and the preferential voting system.[2] All these are radical deviations from the 1990 Constitution and as such were viewed by the majority of the indigenous as attempts to deprive them systematically of their rights in their own homeland.

In contrast, exponents of the new constitution, such as the Citizens' Constitutional Forum, actively propagated prevailing liberal discourses as the only way toward peace and harmony (Ghai 1998).[3] Indeed, the director of the Human Rights Commission in Fiji touted the new constitution at a public seminar, saying that, judging by the liberal tone of the document and the international acclaim it had received, it was indeed a document worthy of celebration.

But alas this was not how it seemed to the indigenous mindset, especially in light of the ensuing election results that enabled an ethnic Indian, for the first time in the country's history, to become the prime minister in a land to which the indigenous claimed exclusive rights. This momentous change in the political landscape whipped up old indigenous fears that stemmed from what they perceived as a distortion of the *taukei-vulagi* relationship.

The Philosophy of *Taukei* and *Vulagi*

To understand the multifaceted alterity that regulates the relationship between *taukei* and *vulagi,* a contextualized synopsis of the indigenous reality before contact with colonialism is critical.[4] During the precontact era, the most significant aspects of sociopolitical organization within indigenous societies were the different *vanua.* One can only be a *taukei* in a specially designated *vanua:* One is identified with and derives an eternal identity from this identification. Elsewhere, one takes on the identity of a *vulagi.* Apart from the *taukei* relationship, an indigenous person also enjoys a wide array of relationships with other *vanua,* these being in the form of *vasu, tauvu, mataqali, vei tabani,* or *vei tabuki,* to name a few. Variations of these definitive relationships connecting a particular *vanua* to others are found in all indigenous societies in Fiji. One may assume any combination of these relationships, in which one still is ultimately a *vulagi.* In matters relating to rights (especially land rights), the *taukei* is unsurpassed. This dominant status changes as the relation one has with a particular *vanua* changes; such a status change happens through physical movement, rather than through social mobility.

This ancient philosophy seems to have been nationalized with the emergence of a distinct nation-state via colonialism. Hence what used to be an

identity that hinged solely on the *vanua* from which one hails has been transformed into a national identity, an identity that parallels what is happening on the political front. This transformation has resulted in what is known today as the "*kai viti.*" Indeed this term became the collective identity of the people of hitherto different *vanua,* as the colonialists in their bid to form a nation-state merged indigenous socioeconomic systems, which were demarcated and influenced by distinct geographical spaces. As in the instance of the *vanua,* the new label of "*kai viti*" denoted the claim to exclusivity by hitherto different categories of indigenous people in a wholly different political environment.

How Whites Overcame the Dichotomy

Apart from the crucial roles played by beachcombers like Paddy Connell, James Housman, and Charles Savage in destabilizing or, in some cases, consolidating the power constellations in the *vanua* (France 1969),[5] "giving rise to new and powerful states" (Derrick 1946:38), colonialists and subsequent members of the white population in general were accepted (in some cases, actively sought out) in indigenous society owing to the growing influence of Christianity. Apart from relaying the Gospel, missionaries began to displace traditional healers and teachers with the help of modern medicine and the written word. This displacement prompted Fijians to accept Western forms of reasoning exemplified by scientific rationality. The cumulative effect was the instilling in the indigenous of the notion that benevolent superiority is personified in whites. Such fallacious notions led to the passive acceptance of the Manichean allegory that professed features of Western civilization as the epitome of truth. "White" became the synonym for power, civilization, intelligence, and superiority (Fanon 1967). That is, by a deliberate twist of logic, the medium became the message.

In contrast, the Indo-Fijian experience in Fiji entered a different developmental trajectory, and it has since then been doomed to an orbit of political inertia, hedged in from diametrical forces exemplified on the one side by the *taukei-vulagi* philosophy and from the other by Indo-Fijians' own wish to emancipate themselves from the yoke of political and ideological tyranny. In this light, the *taukei-vulagi* philosophy that the indigenous regard as an intrinsic part of their culture constitutes a form of "repressive tolerance" to Indo-Fijians who have come to regard this land as their home.[6]

The Indo-Fijian viewpoint in turn has never sat well culturally and historically with Fijians. Culturally, it contravenes the precepts on which the *taukei-vulagi* viewpoint is premised. Historically, it goes back to past colonial policies that sought to discourage alliances between the new settlers and

the indigenous population. The colonial administrators and their supporters rightly deemed that a coalition between these two ethnic groups would pose a threat to their hegemony.[7] If dividing the two ethnic groups was meant to douse the Indian threat, then this colonial policy was a failure, for by the time that the indenture system was formally abolished in 1920, Indo-Fijian resistance against colonial rule had taken on a nationalistic character (Kelly 1991). Indo-Fijians spearheaded resistance movements right across the country during the strikes of 1920 and the great strike one year later (Gillion 1977). In the political arena, the new agenda was to expand the franchise so that Indians could be included. In short, what the Indian leaders wanted was nothing less than equality with Europeans. Needless to say, these aspirations met staunch resistance from Europeans and the state. A meeting of Europeans in 1923 declared, in the words of lawyer J. C. Dive, that Europeans "will resist, and will also encourage native Fijians to resist with all means at their disposal, the contemplated attempt to admit Indian residents of Fiji to the body politic or to granting to them any measure . . . of political status" (in Lal 1992:87). Thus the alliance between the Europeans and the native Fijians was launched (see Norton 1990).

These changes reflected developments taking place in the sugar industry, with the emergence of the plantation system as a consequence of decentralization. For instance, in 1892, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company began an arrangement that would see European farmers leasing and tilling their own individual farms. Two years later, formerly indentured Indians were allowed into the scheme, with land leased from either the company or native Fijians (Gillion 1962). This was the catalyst that led ultimately to the erosion of European control in the sugar industry. By 1897, the total amount of cane produced by Indian farmers in the Navua area was more than the sum of that produced by their Europeans counterparts and by the company itself (Gillion 1977). This trend was to carry on into independence, with Indians wholly dominating the sugar industry. With these developments in the political as well as economic arenas, it is not surprising that, by the turn of the century, the notion of Indians as competitors in the colonial political economy was entertained seriously by Europeans, and the idea of the *girmitiya* (Indian laborer) as independent private property owners (mainly through long-term leases) to be envied infiltrated the Fijian consciousness.[8] The developments occurring in the political and economic arenas in Fiji, plus the fact that Indo-Fijians had minimal impact on the ways of life of the indigenous, increasingly facilitated the view among the indigenous that Indo-Fijians were and still are their main rivals in a sociopolitical system that was concocted in the name of indigenous interests by their benevolent white masters.

Thus, on the eve of independence in 1970, an explosive mixture of antagonistic cultural, economic, and political crosscurrents were already at play. This was brought to the fore in the events constituting the coups of 1987.

An Encore to 1987?

Around eleven o'clock on 19 May 2000, the unthinkable happened. It was especially so in the light of the cooperative climate that had led to the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution. Five men, headed by a dubious personality who goes by the name of George Speight, acting in the name of indigenous interests, rewrote the history of the Fiji Islands by illegally taking over the government during a parliamentary session. Their main grievance was the submersion of the *taukei-vulagi* relationship to the rationality of liberalism and hence the negation of this ancient philosophy as well as the erosion of indigenous identity. In other words, the rebel group pointed to basic incongruities between the *taukei-vulagi* philosophy and the universally acclaimed liberalist tone of the 1997 Constitution, for, from an indigenous perspective, the new liberal constitution is thought to facilitate widespread oscillation in the configuration of power in favor of Indo-Fijians.[9] These incongruities, in their view, had created an atmosphere of insecurity within indigenous circles.

Compounding this problem was the perception that Indo-Fijians have done very well for themselves and have dominated key areas, such as the financial sectors of the economy (Ravuvu 1991). This view partly suggests the developmental quandary Fijians have found themselves in, despite policy measures under the various constitutions that have sought to redeem their status as far as economic participation in the country is concerned. According to this view, Indo-Fijians have profited disproportionately from national and international economic policies in Fiji. Take, for example, the Lome agreement, which translates into a preferential arrangement between the European Union and ACP (African, Caribbean, and Pacific) countries. Under this deal, Fiji exports a quota of 163,000 tons of sugar to the European Union, at between two and three times the prices dictated by the world market (Grynberg 1997). Unlike the seepage that occurs in the tourist industry, the effects of the sugar protocol reach right down to the primary production level. An immediate consequence is the amelioration of social conditions, exemplified by better housing and the number of nongovernment schools in the cane belts (Prasad and Lodhia 1997). However, during the initial period of Lome in Fiji, the majority of the farmers were of Indian origin. Since Lome is confined only to sugar in the case of Fiji, these farmers were deemed to be, and indeed were, on the receiving end of "sectoral

aid." The fact that Lome does not cover predominantly Fijian industries like mining and logging, where the indigenous play a dual role as both laborers and owners of resources, further accentuates the notion—from a Fijian point of view—of the "Indian" as politically astute, independent, and now the chief beneficiary of a sectorally discriminating aid program. In this way, Lome became a potential site of interethnic dissension in postcolonial Fiji. The advent of preferential agreements for sugar (and not for gold or logging) lent credence to the idea of Indians as rich and powerful in a land they first inhabited as laborers. As a consequence, the chauvinistic notion of the "Indianization of Fiji" surfaced again to be used to great effect by demagogues among the indigenous.[10]

These notions were compounded by the abrasive leadership stance adopted by Prime Minister Chaudhry and the irresponsible manner in which his mouthpieces verbally assaulted fragile egos in a matter simultaneously of concern to the nation and at the heart of the indigenous identity, namely, land. The issue of the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act and the Lands Use Commission was played out at a time of intense political tension with both the main players, the Native Land Trust Board (the legal custodian of all native lands) and the Chaudhry government, claiming to be acting ultimately in the interest of the indigenous. The majority of Fijians though, through a nationwide campaign by the board and for other various historical reasons, sided with the Native Land Trust Board rather than with the government.[11] Baseless propaganda to stir up latent emotions within the ethnic divide was used indiscriminately as the conflict continued. For example, some landowners were misled by their board representatives about ways in which the renewal of the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act would result in the complete alienation of their land.[12] The three daily newspapers further proliferated stories of friction across the ethnic divide. As a consequence, other government policies and actions were subsequently viewed solely from a racial angle.[13] This led to increased agitation within the indigenous community, and protest marches ensued in the two major urban centers of Suva and Lautoka.

The question, however, of indigenous interests taking a back seat in the Chaudhry-led coalition government, as was argued by Speight and his group, is a problematic one. From a purely political perspective, by virtue of their outright majority in the legislative branch of government, it was well within the constitutional power of Chaudhry's government to legislate policies that may have favored certain sections of the community if it chose to do so. Indeed the Chaudhry government instituted certain bills that were perceived by some leaders of the Fijian community to be detrimental to the well-being of indigenous inhabitants.[14] The feeling of insecurity that was

spawned by this legislation was perhaps further exacerbated by the ominous silence of the Fijian cabinet ministers, apart from a few halfhearted attempts by one of the two deputy prime ministers to address the growing anxiety. To a large extent, this apathetic attitude was a reflection of the fragmentation occurring in Fijian society.[15] The apathy further assured Chaudhry of his power and authority, and convinced him that he was well within his rights to elevate class issues at the expense of ethnic ones. Chaudhry paid scant attention to the fact that leadership does not occur in a vacuum but is located within a matrix of polemical ethnic relationships and volatile social attitudes that can affect the configuration of power in a country. History has shown that sociopolitical aberrations are bound to emerge given the right set of circumstances. This is especially so in Fiji, where the politics of ethnicity has tenaciously held sway over other considerations. The existence of powerful institutions dominated by the indigenous people like the Great Council of Chiefs, the Native Land Trust Board, and the army, coupled with our immediate past history, lends credence to the view that Chaudhry's attitude was politically naive. What may have been theoretically possible for the coalition-led government was problematic when applied to the reality of ethnic relations in Fiji.

In short, what happened in Parliament on that fateful day could be interpreted as a reflection of the massive unrest in the indigenous mentality—unrest caused by a combination of real and perceived fears fueled by a trail of propaganda bordering on the demagogic.

In Whose Interest?

But was all that was done really in indigenous interests? That is a question that needs to be answered in these uncertain times. These are the facts:

- On Friday, 19 May 2000, a civilian coup was purportedly carried out in the name of the indigenous people.
- It was carried out by a handful of treacherous army officers, led by a civilian who had personal resentments against the coalition government after being unceremoniously dismissed as the chief executive of the government-owned Fiji Hardwood Corporation and also from the chairmanship of the board of the Fiji Pine Commission (another government-owned entity). At the time of the coup, Mr. Speight was also in the midst of bankruptcy proceedings.
- The rebels managed to whip up sympathy for their cause (but not for their method, as some took great pains in distinguishing)[16] by appealing to the

dormant fear on the part of Fijians that their own way of life had been overturned by a constitution that erased the vital distinction between the *taukei* and the *vulagi*.

- Some Fijian parliamentarians (mainly members of Fijian-dominated parties, a few known nationalist figures, and others of varied inclinations best known to themselves) rallied behind the cause of the original coup makers in forming a new government while demanding that the president step down.
- The Great Council of Chiefs was hurriedly convened to try and sort out the constitutional mess, since it was the only legitimate institution that could determine the fate of the president of the republic.[17] The resolution that came out of that august body, short of relieving the president of his duties, generally accommodated the wishes of the self-elected government of George Speight.
- The self-styled government did not accept the council's resolutions; neither did they accept two subsequent proposals from the president.
- The rebels did not give up their cause when the president dismissed the Chaudhry government and imposed a state of emergency, leaving a way for their grievances to be accommodated.

The question remains, why didn't members of the rebel group agree to the resolutions of the Great Council of Chiefs? Furthermore, why didn't they trust the council as the legitimate authority to look after indigenous interests?

In light of the above and given the validity of the Great Council of Chiefs as the supreme authority on matters pertaining to things "indigenous," it is the argument of this essay that the civilian coup was a manifestation of the friction between two categories of Fijians, with Indo-Fijians (contrary to their wishes) dragged in to establish a buffer. On the one hand, the old guard, associated with the colonial era, still has a tight grip on indigenous affairs and hence national ones by virtue of being themselves members of the Great Council of Chiefs. On the other, there has emerged a group that I shall call the educated marginalized elite. This group consists of young frustrated chieftains and eommoners who, on the whole, are products of Western education, enabling them to acquire a semblance of sophistication based on both valid and scholastic pretensions.

Furthermore, the members of this elite have hitherto been excluded from real power as far as indigenous and national affairs are concerned. Indeed, just as some of them were on the verge of entering the corridors of power via the election process, the government changed hands, leaving them on

the outside. The views of many of the new MPs who ran on a Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) ticket during the last elections were out of line with those of many of the indigenous. Nevertheless, the results of the last election shocked Fijians, even the most ardent Fiji Labour Party supporters. There was a belief among Fijian voters that the SVT, which made up the last government, disenchanted with it as the majority was prior to the 1999 elections, was going to win again. Therefore by casting a vote against it, one was not necessarily trying to get them out but trying to get new ideas in—people from other parties who could make substantial contributions to the machinery of good governance by joining a multiparty government as stipulated in the new constitution. The election results went beyond everybody's expectations.

Many of these young elites are also embroiled in this strand of politics in their own *vanua.* Indeed a quick check would verify that at least two avid supporters of the civilian coup are members of families that are seeking support from the masses to legitimize their bids for the paramount chiefly titles in their respective *vanua.* Another one is trying to ingratiate himself to his *vanua* after his family spent decades as important members of another ethnic group in Fiji; the circumstances surrounding his and his family's entry into the Vola ni Kawa Bula, or the Fijian Registry,[18] give a strong impression of opportunism. To complicate this further, he was on the verge of politically tarnishing himself and his family with his legal problems. Another is a lawyer who has seen better days. Another is going against his paramount chief. Another is an on-again off-again businessman whose forays into the political arena have met with abject failure. Another is an MP who used to explicitly endorse the Chaudhry government for its development programs in rural areas but now sings the praises of the other camp. The list goes on, with different agendas and interests competing to find expression as various people attempt to shape this largely amorphous movement of social unrest.

Behind this ominous state of affairs lies the subtlety of Fijian politics, which follows a set of unwritten protocols revolving around the pulse of perceived Fijian aspirations and that change with alternations in ethnic feelings, all the while portraying an image of suavity and detachment. For example, the endorsement of the president by the Great Council of Chiefs alongside its accommodation to most of the principles of the coup makers' demands, though contradictory to the observer's eye, would seem like solid backing for the president. Not so in the Fijian political context, for the council could also have been casting a resounding vote for the coup makers while, mindful of international and internal pressure for the return of the lawfully elected government, putting forward a resolution that would make the president's position untenable. This would result in the president stepping down

on his own without compromising the council's reputation within the international community and, more important, the president's dignity among his peers and the people—a dignity that would have been tarnished in the event of an overt show of support for the rebels.

To a great extent the motives of the people who held the nation-state ransom were based on the assumption that the *vanua* or Fijian politics can be hijacked and influenced at the national level. They assumed that once they exercised self-serving power on a national scale, *vanua* politics would automatically realign itself to the general direction of their interests and thus lead to the nullification of the countercurrents in Fijian politics that marginalized them. In other words, this group sought legitimacy in their own respective *vanua* through a political campaign on a national level.

The rebels' public rejection of the initial proposal made by the Great Council of Chiefs had two important implications. First, it became clear that the council was sincere in backing the president. (This conclusion is derived from the assumption that the rebels could not afford to risk a public rejection of the Great Council's resolutions unless they had nothing to lose by it.) But more important, Speight and his government posed a culturally loaded question to the indigenous people: Whom do you want to believe are the true citadels of indigenous interests, them (the Great Council of Chiefs as an institution) or us (the rebel government)? The question of legitimacy followed naturally.

Hidden behind the veneer of inflammatory interethnic rhetoric, such questions were the only way of amassing and maintaining indigenous support for Speight's egotistical cause. They were the rebels' only hope for making one of the noblest and grandest institutions in the country succumb to their not so noble intents. An overt move against the Great Council of Chiefs would have resulted in mass desertion from their cause. But a movement formed in the name of the indigenous in this country, based on real fears of disempowerment, lent itself to being sabotaged by the few who saw the means to fulfill their desires and in an un–Fijian-like manner grabbed at it.

To conclude, witnesses to the May 19 coup have seen a drama of the most vicious kind. On the one hand, we have seen the principal actors behind the coup question the legitimacy of the Great Council of Chiefs as the supreme body of authority on indigenous affairs. On the other hand, ordinary men and women were the victims of duplicity on a grand scale, and led to believe that the main threat against Fijian interests was, as always, going to come from the outside. On closer look, the aims of those who purported to be the leaders of the civilian coup and the goals of their supporters who celebrated outside Parliament do not appear to be the same. Indeed they were as dif-

ferent as chalk is from cheese. The May 19 coup was a classic case in which the motives of a genuine protest movement with genuine problems arising out of real or imagined fears was hijacked and shaped to dovetail with the interests of a few.[19]

Fiji was never in any danger of being taken once and for all from the hands of the indigenous. Constitutionally, this connection is safeguarded. The coup that was staged to prevent the compromising of indigenous identity is now, however, eating away at the social fabric that holds the indigenous together.

There is a final question: To which indigenous group should the destiny of indigenes be entrusted? This question was brought to the fore by the backstabbing from within the ranks that pierced the heart of indigenous interests under the tenacious façade of the politics of ethnicity. That stab, reminiscent of Brutus long ago, is now poised to remain the cruelest blow taken at indigenous interests and aspirations for a long time to come.

NOTES

I wish to acknowledge Professor Nii-K Plange for his insightful comments on identity formation in Fiji and Dr. Mike Monsell Davis for his many helpful suggestions during the drafting of this essay.

1. This is a philosophical term that denotes the uniqueness of two separate entities. The relationship between "the self" and "the absolute other" has acquired a political connotation, resulting in an asymmetrical power relationship in favor of the self in the context of Western philosophy. This is, with certain qualifications, certainly true with the *taukei-vulagi* relationship. The only obvious difference, in my mind, is the existence of an essential reciprocity in the *taukei-vulagi* relationship that is often looked on with disdain in Western philosophy.

2. According to the 1990 Constitution, electoral boundaries were based on old provincial boundary lines. This arrangement, dividing Fiji into fourteen provinces, was established in the colonial period by colonial administrators who based electoral boundaries on (sometimes fallacious) approximations of how certain *vanua* were politically subordinated under other *vanua.* Under the 1990 Constitution, each province was accorded at least two communal seats and could be assured appropriate representation in Parliament. There were a total of thirty-seven Fijian communal seats. In contrast, the 1997 Constitution decreased the number of Fijian communal seats (as well as the communal seats of other ethnic groups in Fiji). Overall, the 1997 arrangements seem to favor national seats over communal ones; there were twenty-five national seats to twenty-three Fijian communal ones. To ordinary Fijians, the new allocations meant a loss in the number of provincial representatives in Parliament. (This was the main reason why Apisai Tora was so disillusioned with the changes to his constituency during the last election.) The preferential voting system furthermore worked against the dominant Fijian party, costing them several seats in the last election that they would have won in a "first past the post" system (see Williams and Saksena 1999).

3. This is demonstrated by their submission to the Constitution Review Commission in which they assert that indigenous rights must be based on human rights as dictated by international conventions (Citizens' Constitutional Forum 1995). (An interesting view that outlines the pitfalls of liberalism, the basis from which the concept of "human rights" as we now know it emerged, is offered by Parekh [1995], who states that liberalism is full of paradoxes and contradictory impulses.)

4. I am grateful to my friend Francis Waqa Sokonibogi for his valuable comments on these ideas during a chance meeting a few weeks before the so-called civilian coup.

5. For an overview of the influence that the beachcombers, missionaries, and traders had on indigenous societies, see chapter 2 of France 1969.

6. The term "repressive tolerance" was first used by the critical theorist Herbert Marcuse in his analysis of the oppressive nature of capitalism. Here it is used to signify that the tolerance displayed by the *taukei-vulagi* philosophy is repressive in the sense that it does not negate the basic distinctions between the self and the other that have been the motivating factor behind Indian dissension in the colonial period.

7. This section derives from a conversation I had with Professor Nii-K Plange on the process of identity formation and how it factors into ethnic relations in Fiji.

8. Fijian land is communally owned. The belief that individual ownership of property will yield greater development is reflected in the implementation of the Galala (literally, "Free") project, where villagers were given specific areas of land to live on and to cultivate on an individual basis (i.e., without the communal obligations that are found in Fijian villages). A division thus took place between the individuals concerned and communal values.

9. This is a contentious issue in light of the "Compact" that comprises the second chapter of the 1997 Constitution (number 6[j]) and the ensuing application of the "Compact" (number 7[1 and 2] in the same chapter).

10. This sort of language was used in the material handed out by Speight's supporters in Parliament. The ambiguous nature of such documents opened them up to manipulative interpretations on the part of Speight's supporters in their attempts to convince people of their cause.

11. From these contentious beginnings in matters pertaining to policy decisions, the confrontation, to judge by subsequent events such as the prime minister's dismissal of the Fiji Development Bank board on which Mr. Qarikau was a member, also became a private feud between Mr. Qarikau, the general manager of the Native Land Trust Board, and Mr. Chaudhry. Suffice it to say that the matter about the dismissal ended up in court.

12. Constitutionally, this is not so. However, the merits of the arguments for the retention of the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act remain to be seen and are another issue altogether.

13. As an example, the removal of indigenous civil servants from senior government posi-

tions was interpreted by most Fijians as ethnically motivated. The issue of efficiency or inefficiency of that person was hardly considered.

14. The bills concerned had to do with land and with the powers of the Great Council of Chiefs and of the president of the republic. Only one of these bills reached the upper house for further consideration. Indeed, if the bills had been debated in the two houses and had activated the advisory role of the Great Council of Chiefs as was dictated by the 1997 Constitution, they would have provided insight into the effectiveness of the constitution in protecting indigenous interests, and at the same time the democratic process would have been sustained. Alas, all of this was dashed in the presumptuous events of May 19.

15. This is exemplified by the existence of five main ethnic Fijian parties of various ideological orientations.

16. These included M. Leweniqila, Rabuka, and Ah Koy.

17. The legitimacy of the Great Council of Chiefs is legally derived from the Constitution of 1997.

18. The Fijian Registry is a genealogical record of people who are regarded as indigenous. This is primarily for the purpose of landownership and titles.

19. Franz Fanon (1967), in describing the Algerian revolution, highlighted this pattern by problematizing the nature of the native bourgeoisie left behind by their former colonial masters.

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AFTERWORD: THE DEBRIS

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This afterword to the collection places the essays in the context of current scholarship and media attention to the 2000 coup. It also provides updated information on the Qarase government and the current political situation in Fiji.

RUMORS OF A COUP had done the rounds of the kava bowl around the *koros* of Fiji for some time, intensifying as protest marches against Mahendra Chaudhry's Peoples' Coalition government gained momentum in late 1999 and early 2000. The Taukei Movement, revived by Apisai Tora, the quintessential chameleon of Fiji politics, orchestrated the rebellion. "Trust is like a mirror," Tora said of the government. "Once broken, it can't be restored." Arresting imagery but unconvincing coming from someone of his checkered political background. Unconvincing to the believers in rational discourse, that is, but not to Fijian nationalists and others variously aggrieved with the government, amidst worsening poverty and unemployment caused by structural reform policies of the Rabuka government of the 1990s and a deep, unarticulated fear of being marginalized (see studies in Lal 2000b). The protest leaders tapped into this unsettling reservoir of fear, resentment, uncertainty, and confusion with promises of better things to come once the Chaudhry government was out of the way.

On the other side of the island, in Suva, a group of men began to plan the precise method of ending the life of the Chaudhry government. The full truth may never be known, but some things are clear now. The desire to derail the Chaudhry government had been expressed soon after the 1999 elections by a few prominent politicians who had lost in those elections;

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many of them had been active in 1987. They courted like-minded nationalists, leaders of the powerful Methodist Church, traditional elders and chiefs, and some senior officers of the armed forces. They all agreed that the government should go, but how? On that question, there was no consensus. Nor, as it happens, was there much agreement on who should lead the putsch. At the very last minute, George Speight, a part-Fijian failed businessman sacked as chairman of the Fiji Hardwood Corporation by the Chaudhry government, articulate, athletic, harboring political ambition and eager for the limelight, stepped forward, leading a group of armed gunmen into Parliament on May 19, the first anniversary of the Peoples' Coalition government (Lal 2000a).

Speight sought to portray himself as an indigenous Fijian patriot, a dutiful son of the soil trying to secure what his people desperately wanted: political power to determine the future of Fiji. He spoke no Fijian, though, which dented his authenticity, despite invoking his Fijian name, Ilikini Naitini. But Speight by any other name was still Speight. His past record of commercial failures also caught up with him. Most people, including Fijians, saw him as a front man for other interests, institutions, and individuals. George Speight was no Sitiveni Rabuka, the 1987 coup maker, who could be believed as an authentic Fijian cultural hero, a dutiful commoner rallying his people behind him. That was one significant difference between the 1987 and the 2000 coups.

There were others. In 1987, the then Royal Fiji Military Forces claimed responsibility for the coups and were, in turn, held responsible for them. For that reason, the army ensured law and order, thus preventing widespread looting and arson. In 2000, however, the army dithered and was hobbled by internal divisions, indiscipline, and insubordination. Some soldiers, especially from the elite Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit, participated in the coup, but the army itself refrained. When riots broke out and arsonists torched sections of Suva, the army failed to intervene in a timely fashion, as did the police, commanded by Isikia Savua, a former soldier, who was accused of complicity in the coup but later cleared by a closed-door tribunal. The integrity and professionalism of both the army and the police forces were impugned (Lal 2002). It was similarly the case with Fiji's judiciary. In 1987, the judges of the high court stood firm on the side of the constitution purportedly abrogated by the coup and advised the governor-general to do likewise. They refused to join the revolution (Lal 1988:81). It was a different story in 2000. Now, the chief justice, Sir Timoci Tuivaga, accepted "as a matter of political reality" that the constitution had indeed been abrogated and used the authority of his office to lend legitimacy to the coup, drafting a decree abolishing the highest court in the land, the Supreme

Court. Tuivaga's controversial judgment, overturned later by the Fiji Court of Appeal, embroiled the judiciary in a bitter public debate.

Only the press came out of the crisis with its reputation intact (Dobell 2001). In 1987, the military shut down the two dailies, the *Fiji Times* and the *Fiji Sun*, for a week, plunging the country into news darkness. The only source of objective information about what was happening in the country came from overseas, principally from Australia and New Zealand. In 2000, the daily press not only reported freely, or as freely as might be expected in the circumstances, it also reproduced articles from overseas critical of the coup and its perpetrators. Many major newspapers from Australia and New Zealand had their own reporters on the ground. Their harrowing reports of looting and thuggery portrayed a side of Fijian ethnonationalism the world had not seen before. Indigenous nationalism, the message came through, could be just as brutal and repressive as white racism. The reports also portrayed the unfolding tragedy of Fiji as a complex struggle for power within sections of the indigenous community in which race was used as a scapegoat. There was no television in Fiji in 1987. In 2000, television was a major source of news for most urban households, carrying live pictures of the events taking place at the parliamentary complex at Vieuto. Speight himself was a regular feature for weeks, slick, bantering, taunting, teasing, but, in the end, unconvincing as a champion of the indigenous cause. Not with a name like George Speight.

What was truly revolutionary in 2000 was the Internet. Events happening in Fiji were relayed to the world in real time. Speight himself trawled through the Internet to prepare himself for daily press conferences. The Internet was a great democratizer. Victims of the terror and violence in Muaniweni had their story documented and relayed to the world. Numerous chat sites enabled people from various viewpoints to engage in debate (and trade insults and abuse). A number of Fiji Web sites appeared—mushroomed—carrying commentary, discussion, and propaganda. The Internet thus became both a source of information and a tool of resistance. Sitting in Canberra, I could access Web sites in Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji, and read stories on the Fiji coup published in all the major international newspapers. It was the availability of raw, unprocessed information that enabled people to make up their own minds about the reasons for the coup in Fiji. It was one reason why there was lack of sympathy for the "Fijian cause" this time around compared to 1987.

Much of what appeared on the Internet at the time of the coup is now lost to history, depriving future researchers of a sense of how people perceived events as they unfolded. We tried to capture some of the reaction as

the gun was still smoking, so to speak, in *Coup: Reflections on the Political Crisis in Fiji* (Lal and Pretes 2001). The contributions are initial, often anguished reactions, pieces from the heart, while the hostages were still incarcerated in the parliamentary complex, people trying to make some sense of the unfolding events as madness engulfed their lives. Most of the pieces in the book, and indeed in the media, both print and electronic, were highly critical of George Speight and his actions. Only a handful of correspondents attempted a justification of the coup. I suppose, for supporters, there was no need to defend the overthrow of the government: Action spoke louder than words. For the targets, words were their only instrument of resistance.

Scholarly analysis of the 2000 coup has been late in coming. This, too, is in marked contrast to the 1987 coups (Lal and Peacock 1990). There was something about the 1987 events that took people by surprise. Until then, Fiji had been hailed as a model of multiracial democracy that functioned despite all its faults, the verdict of the ballot box respected. Sitiveni Rabuka's intervention changed all that. It was the Pacific Islands' first modern coup, and for that reason, among others, it elicited much scholarly interest. People tried to make sense of what went wrong. But a similar interest in George Speight's coup thirteen years later is lacking. Perhaps it is the fatigue factor. Perhaps it is an index of general disenchantment with the events in Fiji: If the people of Fiji cannot see the havoc coups wreak, if they cannot get their act together, there is little the world can do to help. Perhaps some see the Fiji crisis as a symptom of the Melanesian malaise, when institutions of good governance break down and tribalism triumphs at the expense of the nation-state, as leaders revert to the law of the jungle or the club. And there is no quick remedy in sight.

This collection of essays, the first of its kind to deal with the 2000 coup, fills a gap in our understanding. Written by anthropologists with extensive field experience in Fiji, the contributions to the volume attempt to give us some sense of how the unfolding events in Suva filtered down to the rural areas out of touch with the modern world of instant communication. They raise and seek to answer important questions. How and why was someone like George Speight, a public nonentity, a failed businessman, not even a "true" Fijian, transformed overnight into a savior of "his people"? Why did Fijians support him in such large numbers when privately they doubted his method and his mission? How was "grassroots" support mobilized? The contributors' careful reading of local texts and contexts suggests a more complex picture than macrolevel analyses portray. The coup was not a simple conflict between two ethnic groups. People perceived national events through the prism of local loyalties and traditional affiliations, and responded accordingly to calls for ethnic and political solidarity. The manner in which such

culturally powerful and traditionally respected institutions as the church orchestrated Fijian public support for the coup through selective references to the Old Testament, for example, is important in understanding how Fijians understood the meaning of what was happening in Suva.

This collection, more than most recent commentaries and even scholarly analyses, also offers a look at how the coup was understood by its victims, principally Indo-Fijians, in areas terrorized and ransacked by the rebels. These were people who had lived side by side with the Fijians, who spoke their language, who understood the protocols of indigenous culture, who worked and played together, and, yet, at a critical moment in their lives, they felt deserted, or worse still, set upon, by their Fijian friends and neighbors. Many Indo-Fijians in Muaniweni, Dawasamu, and surrounding areas in southeastern Viti Levu fled their homes of several generations to refugee camps in Lautoka. Others sought the support of friends and family. In other places, hundreds found themselves evicted from native leases they had lived on for several generations. Their future is grim. Since the coups of 1987, nearly 80,000 Indo-Fijians have migrated to North America, Australia, and New Zealand. Emotionally uprooted and made to feel unwanted, many more will leave, draining the country of skills and talents it cannot afford to lose. Their hopes and aspirations deserve attention.

Speight's intervention has clearly changed Fiji's political landscape. The new prime minister, Laisenia Qarase, has promised to enshrine Speight's nationalist agenda. He has, for instance, signaled that he will review the 1997 Constitution to entrench Fijian political control. He has justified this agenda by invoking some curious arguments. Fijians own 83 percent of all land in Fiji, and this fact, he asserts, must be reflected in the composition of Parliament. It is an argument that appeals to many Fijians, but it will be rejected by the international community. The idea of a property-based franchise is both obsolete as well as obnoxious. Why privilege landed property, one may well ask, when one could easily note other contenders such as gender or the amount of tax the different communities pay? There are other problems as well. Sooner rather than later, those Fijian provinces that have more land (western Viti Levu, for instance) will demand greater representation precisely because of that fact at the expense of the smaller, scattered maritime provinces. Where will the fragmentation end?

But the Qarase government is undaunted. They have put in place race-based programs of affirmative action exclusively for indigenous Fijians and Rotumans under the banner of a "Blueprint of Rotuman and Fijian Interests" (for more discussion, see Lal 2002). The government also proposes, under the "Blueprint," to transfer all Crown and state land to the Native Land Trust Board, to set up a Land Claims Tribunal to "deal with long-

standing historical land claims," to establish a Development Trust fund for Fijian training and education, to increase royalties to Fijian landowners for mineral and other natural resources extracted from their land, the compensation to be determined by the cabinet and not through an act of Parliament, to exempt Fijian-owned companies from company tax for a period of time, and to reserve 50 percent of licenses (import, permit) for Fijians as well as 50 percent of government contracts for them. Similar schemes have been tried before, many ending in failure. Qarase himself, as head of the Fiji Development Bank for nearly two decades, was in charge of many of these programs, and he knows better than most people that throwing money at the deep-seated problems facing the Fijian people trying to enter the commercial sector is not the appropriate answer. But he is not concerned with the economic viability of his programs; he is much more concerned to consolidate his support among Fijians.

Preserving Fijian support behind his party and promoting Fijian political unity in general is the paramount policy objective of the Qarase government. To that end, the prime minister has worked hard to bring all shades of Fijian political opinion under one umbrella irrespective of how divergent the political stance of the different factions might be. And so Apisai Tora—the perennial Fijian political dissident, a champion of western Fijian interests, the founder-leader of the ultranationalist Taukei Movement—received a position in the Senate. The elite of the Kubuna Confederacy, such as Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, received plum positions. Ratu Finau Mara, the unemployed son of the former president, was appointed Fiji's Roving Ambassador to the Pacific Islands. The coup-supporting former president of the Methodist Church, Rev. Tomasi Kanailagi, was rewarded with a place in the Senate, where he has intensified the call for Fiji to be declared a Christian state. The list goes on.

Qarase's strategy is understandable. His political survival depends on rallying Fijians to his side. But the co-optation strategy and the politics of patronage will soon run their course. What then? The social and economic problems facing the Fijian people are more deep-seated than many leaders are prepared to acknowledge. And to speak of "the Fijians" in the singular is as misleading as it is dangerous, for the community is ridden with class, regional, social, and rural-urban cleavages and tensions that have surfaced in recent years as the the fear of Indo-Fijian dominance has receded with the lower birth rate and increased flow of migration. The real question is not whether there should be a Fijian head of government but which or what type of Fijian will be acceptable to the militant minority. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was a Fijian, and he was unceremoniously removed from office after being ridiculed by Speight and his supporters. Sitiveni Rabuka was a Fijian,

and he was rejected by the Fijians (and later became an intended target of an assassination attempt). Commodore Frank Bainimarama is a Fijian, and some Fijian soldiers tried to kill him. Laisenia Qarase is a Fijian, and he was the target of a kidnap attempt led by Speight supporters. In short, all Fijians are not peas in the same pod. Many Fijians reject democracy—"democrazy" they call it—as a foreign flower unsuited to the Fijian soil. But what are the alternatives? Theocracy under the tutelage of the Methodist Church? Monarchy headed by the Cakobau family? A military dictatorship? An apartheid arrangement based on the discredited and discarded South African model? The truth is that, as the community grows and its various subterranean tensions become increasingly apparent, hastened by globalization and the stark realities of living in a complex, multiethnic society, liberal democracy, with all its faults and failings, may turn out to be the only way out of the hopeless cul-de-sac the country finds itself now in. There seems to be no other way.

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