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INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS

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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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