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

Matt Tomlinson
University of Pennsylvania

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

Pacific Studies, Vol. 25, No. 4—December 2002

> 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

Fourteen months of research in Fiji during June–August 1996 and September 1998–August 1999 was funded by an International Dissertation Field Research Fellowship from the Social Science Research Council and a summer research grant from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. For their generosity and patience as hosts, I wish to thank especially the noble *tūraga* of Tavuki, including the Vunisā Levu, Tui Tavuki Ratu I. W. Narokete, and the Tūraga Roko Tui Kadavu, Ratu Sela Nanovo; Rev. Isikeli Serewai and family; Catechist Tomasi Laveasiga and family; Ratu Josaia Veibataki and family; and also the officials of the Methodist Church in Fiji and the Ministry of Fijian Affairs. In Suva, Paul Geraghty of the Tabana ni Vosa kei na Itovo Vakaviti gave invaluable guidance on language issues. For comments on previous versions of this essay, I thank especially Kristin Cahn von Seelen for her multiple readings and incisive comments. I also wish to thank Karen Brison, Mark Calamia, Ward

Goodenough, Webb Keane, Stephen Leavitt, and Susanna Trnka for their comments and suggestions. Any errors of fact or interpretation are my own.

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).

REFERENCES

Arno, Andrew

1990 Disentangling Indirectly: The Joking Debate in Fijian Social Control. In *Disentangling: Conflict Discourse in Pacific Societies,* ed. K. A. Watson-Gegeo and G. White, 241–289. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

1993 *The World of Talk on a Fijian Island: An Ethnography of Law and Communicative Causation.* Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.

Belshaw, Cyril

1964 *Under the Ivi Tree: Society and Economic Growth in Rural Fiji.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cargill, David
1977 *The Diaries and Correspondence of David Cargill, 1832–1843,* ed. A. J. Schütz. Canberra: Australian National University Press.

Dean, Eddie, and Stan Ritova
1988 *Rabuka: No Other Way.* Sydney: Doubleday.

Dropsy, Audrey
1993 The Church and the Coup: The Fijian Methodist Church Coup of 1989. *Review* (Fiji), 13 (20): 43–57.

Government of Fiji
1995 *Provincial Profile Project: Kadavu.* Photocopy.

Heinz, Donald
1993 The Sabbath in Fiji as Guerrilla Theatre. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61 (3): 415–442.

Howard, Michael C.
1991 *Fiji: Race and Politics in an Island State.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Kaplan, Martha
1995 *Neither Cargo nor Cult: Ritual Politics and the Colonial Imagination in Fiji.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
1990 Meaning, Agency and Colonial History: Navosavakadua and the *Tuka* Movement in Fiji. *American Ethnologist* 17 (1): 3–22.

Lakhan, Asha
2001 A Year On, Ousted Fiji PM Still Bitter over Racist Coup. Agence France-Presse, May 19.

Lal, Brij V.
1992 *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Miyazaki, Hirokazu
2000 Faith and Its Fulfillment: Agency, Exchange, and the Fijian Aesthetics of Completion. *American Ethnologist* 27 (1): 31–51.

Ratuva, Steven
1993 Post-Coup Fijian Nationalism: The Rise and Demise(?) of Taukeism. *Review* (Fiji), 13 (20): 58–64.

Robbins, Joel
1997 666, or Why Is the Millennium on the Skin? Morality, the State and the Epistemology of Apocalypticism among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea. In *Millennial Markers,* ed. P. J. Stewart and A. Strathern, 35–58. Townsville: Centre for Pacific Studies, James Cook University of North Queensland.

Rutz, Henry J.
1995 Occupying the Headwaters of Tradition: Rhetorical Strategies of Nation Making in Fiji. In *Nation Making: Emergent Identities in Postcolonial Melanesia,* ed. R. J. Foster, 71–93. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Rutz, Henry J., and Erol M. Balkan
1992 Never on Sunday: Time-Discipline and Political Crisis in Fiji. In *The Politics of Time,* ed. H. J. Rutz, 62–85. Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association.

Thomas, Nicholas
1992 The Inversion of Tradition. *American Ethnologist* 19 (2): 213–232.

Thornley, Andrew
2000 *The Inheritance of Hope: John Hunt, Apostle of Fiji.* Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Urban, Greg
2001 *Metaculture: How Culture Moves through the World.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.