

## **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

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."<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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),<sup>5</sup> "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 *tauvei-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 *tauvei-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.<sup>6</sup>

The Indo-Fijian viewpoint in turn has never sat well culturally and historically with Fijians. Culturally, it contravenes the precepts on which the *tauvei-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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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 *tauvei-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 *tauvei-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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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)<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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 *Sogosoqo 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,<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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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