The main sequence of events in Fiji’s recent political history is clear enough: in a general election in April 1987 the Alliance Party government of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, which had ruled Fiji through seventeen years of independence, was defeated by Dr Timoci Bavadra’s coalition of the recently formed Labour Party and the National Federation Party. On 14 May, Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, staff officer in the Royal Fiji Military Forces, took government members of Parliament into custody and assumed control of the country. After an abortive attempt by Governor-General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau to find an accommodation between the political parties, Rabuka staged a second coup on 25 September. A month later Fiji became a republic outside the British Commonwealth. By year’s end, Fiji was ruled by an interim government with Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau as president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara as prime minister, and
Brigadier-General Sitiveni Rabuka in the key Home Affairs portfolio with control over the army, police, internal security, and a great deal more besides. Although the sequence is clear, the cause and significance of the events, and the motivations of the leading actors, are still the subject of fierce debate—a debate that is not fully resolved by the literature under review.

The first of many books on the coup to appear was _Rabuka: No Other Way_, the coup leader's own account of events as told to, and by, two journalists. Eddie Dean, an Australian, and Stan Ritova, a Fijian, combined their efforts to produce an account that gives great detail—most of it convincing—on the logistics of mounting the coups, establishing new governments, and maintaining control; _Rabuka_ also covers in some detail Rabuka's protracted negotiations with the governor-general—and the gradual but inexorable shift in the latter's stance—from the time of the coup through to his acceptance of the presidency in the interim civilian government. Through the photographs as well as the text, the reader is presented with Rabuka the family man, the sportsman, and the soldier, the charismatic leader of "his" men. There is, indeed, a strong possessiveness about Rabuka's attitude toward the men under his command—a loyalty and affection that was obviously reciprocated. But dominant above all other facets of a complex character are Rabuka the fundamentalist Methodist, and Rabuka the passionate Fijian nationalist.

The land issue remains central to Fijian politics and to Rabuka's justification for the coup. With some 83 percent of all land in Fijian ownership, but with much of it leased to Indians, and with most of the freehold land in the hands of non-Fijians and foreign business interests, fear of dispossession has long been very real among Fijians and a potent weapon in the hands of politicians. Behind Rabuka's actions, and certainly in the popular Fijian response to the first coup in particular, was a fear of changes to the land law by an "Indian-dominated government" (45). Emotive claims made by the Fijian leadership totally ignored the constitutional entrenchment of the land laws; and there is little evidence to suggest that the Coalition contemplated changing the land laws in the manner claimed. Constitutionally, change would have been impossible without the explicit approval of the Great Council of Chiefs. The response represents a combination of a number of issues—most notably, the failure to translate the constitution into the Fijian language in nearly seventeen years of independence, and the fact that, with or without encouragement by politicians, the Fijian people did not perceive the constitution as sufficient protection for their land rights.

The postcoup strength of the Taukei (landowners) Movement demonstrates the extent of popular Fijian support for Rabuka's move but raises other matters of fundamental importance to any explanation of developments after 14 May 1987. Rabuka argues that a major reason for his action was the fear of unleashing _taukei_ violence against Indians and that, in a sense, the coup was protective of Indian interests. An issue that the book does not even begin to address was why the established Fijian
leadership did not invoke the traditional mantle of chieftainship—emphasized as the keystone of Fijian society—either to control the taueki or to defend the established democratic process. Nor does it explore how far the taueki and Alliance politicians shared a common agenda after the election of April 1987. The allegations of corruption in the outgoing Mara government are touched on, but not explored. The significance of the new Coalition government’s inquiries into alleged corruption is not examined, nor is the reluctance of some politicians to renounce the power and privileges to which they had become accustomed.

Rabuka’s own operations order for the coup does offer some insight. The mission, he notes, is “to overthrow the govt and install a new regime that will ensure that the RFMF and national interests are protected” (62). It is interesting, to say the least, that the interests of the RFMF come before national interest, or perhaps it is assumed that they are one and the same. But within the military forces there was a fear that under the Coalition, military strength at home and on peacekeeping duties overseas might be decreased. Rabuka asserts that the Coalition government intended to introduce policies “which are bad for RFMF and our traditional values” (61).

The election results of April 1987 that produced the Coalition government are not examined. The incidence of post-coup violence, intimidation, and arson is also glossed over with passing regret and specific reference only to major incidents that were widely reported. The routine maltreatment of prisoners and detainees is now too well documented to be dismissed in this way. Such omissions raise questions as to how far the authors have felt free to probe into areas of such sensitivity and how far they have accepted Rabuka’s views at face value.

One area that is clearly documented, however, is Rabuka’s religious outlook, his “starkly fundamentalist Methodism” as the authors put it (11) —and his belief that sins and peccadilloes are readily forgiven by an understanding God. The irony of a coup in defense of “traditional values” that subsume a fiercely intolerant form of Christianity draws little comment. Rabuka asserts that the coup was “a mission that God has given me” (11) to defend Fijian interests, the Fiji Military Forces, and Methodist Christianity. Similarly a coup partly justified on protecting Fiji’s links with the British Crown has seen Fiji excluded from the Commonwealth. Declarations in defense of “human rights” have been followed by oppressive decrees, a gagging of the media, and a proposed discriminatory constitution. Action in defense of “the national interest” has been followed by a serious impact on the economy, particularly through a downturn in tourism, the flight of savings and investment capital, and a loss of skilled personnel because of a sharp increase in emigration. In two years after the coup, Fiji lost more than half its doctors, two-thirds of its lawyers, one-third of its accountants, and nearly one quarter of its public servants. This may secure new opportunities for Fijians, but at a considerable economic cost.

Even on the evidence presented in Rabuka, it would seem that the coup
leader did not fully appreciate the implications of the coup—especially its economic implications and international ramifications. Developments subsequent to the first coup, however, and Rabuka's eventual supremacy over both Alliance politicians and the taukei, reflect both a determination to secure his original ethnic and personal goals, and a capacity to learn quickly the ways of government and politics.

The only other personal account to emerge has been From the Mangrove Swamps, an autobiography by Tomasi Vakatora, who had a public service career as soldier, leader, labor officer, and senior administrator before entering politics in 1976. Vakatora served the Mara administration as a minister, then as Speaker. He asserts that, once the action was taken, about 90 percent of Fijians supported the coup—"Let us not kid ourselves about it" (77). Vakatora talks not about the interests of the military forces, nor those of Methodist Christianity, but simply about fears over dispossession of land. Vakatora was involved in the governor-general's discussions over the Deuba Accord, which provided for the formation of a caretaker government and a review of the constitution. It is a pity that, where he could offer real insight into the negotiations, Vakatora is content with a simple narrative of the main events. His own viewpoint is made abundantly clear—"My candid view is that when normality returns, the Government must embark for a period of years on a policy of deliberate positive discrimination in favour of Fijians in all fields . . . " (89). This presupposes that "normality" means a Fijian-dominated government and discriminatory legislation. That is for the future; for the past, one can only say that From the Mangrove Swamps represents a lost opportunity to discuss in depth Fiji's politics over the past decade by one whose perspective was from within the Alliance Party.

Whereas the coup leader features large in Rabuka—as one would expect he might—he is less prominent in Fiji: Politics of Illusion by Deryck Scarr. In the introduction to Scarr's book, Rabuka appears only in a list of acknowledgments (though first in the list, xvi). Scarr's basic contention is that beneath a facade of racial harmony there were deep-seated tensions between Fijians and Indians, and that the coup was made inevitable by a Fijian fear of dispossession once a government with an Indian majority had been elected. In this view, Rabuka was not so much the instigator of the coups as an instrument of inexorable forces in Fijian politics.

From this basic thesis, or perhaps because of it, Scarr is less concerned with the detailed events of 1987 than with an exploration of broader issues—Fijian feelings toward Indians and toward land, the intimacies of traditional Fijian kin relationships and political alignments that help to explain the respective roles of major actors, and the emergence of the Taukei Movement in defense of indigenous land rights. Inevitably, perhaps, the author concentrates on the Fijian side of things with "Indians" appearing on occasion as anonymous individuals in a largely homogeneous group. This is a weakness, but there is a counter-vailing strength in the detail offered on the views and activities of the promot-
Piecers and supporters of the coup. In particular, the lie is given to Rabuka's claim to have acted virtually alone in planning the first coup. There are also revealing insights into the complex pressures on Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, the governor-general-cum-president, as he grappled with his constitutional obligations, his loyalty to his own people from Cakaudrove, the considerable muscle exercised by the Great Council of Chiefs and, at critical points, the very real possibility of serious violence.

In his analysis of the election of April 1987, Scarr portrays Bavadra's Fiji Labour Party as a "middle-class urban-based, salaried-people's party, mildly left wing" (34). It was not, he says, a working class party and he emphasizes the fact that in the communal seats—the only place where voting support could be reliably measured—it had the support of less than 10 percent of Fijians. "To be brutal," he concludes, "Labour was a front party for the National Federation Party" (35). Scarr makes constant reference to the naivété of Labour politicians, ridicules the extravagant utterances of its more enthusiastic devotees (together with the excesses of the international media), and makes a constant target of Labour-supporting "ideologues" among academics at the University of the South Pacific. Bavadra himself is portrayed as a leader of principle, but inexperienced, naive, poorly advised by the academic ideologues, and manipulated at distance by opportunistic NFP politicians.

As might be expected, the book has not been well received among Labour supporters and notably by some academic staff at the University of the South Pacific, some of whom boycotted a recent conference on Fiji at the University of New South Wales, which published Scarr's work. While individual outrage is easily understood in the light of Scarr's scathing appraisal, what is in effect an assault on Scarr's freedom to publish sits incongruously alongside the Labour Party's avowal of fundamental human rights. And while it might be seen as an explanation of events from a pro-Fijian perspective, Politics of Illusion is no mere apologia for the roles of the Alliance Party or the Taukei Movement. Scarr does examine at some length the allegations of corruption within the Mara government and the willingness of politicians to seek and accept the perquisites of power, though a greater emphasis is placed on the "clumsy arrogance" of "a party grown used to power" (47).

Scarr sees the taukei as having a crucial role between the election of April 1987 and the declaration of a republic in October, but as having been eased to the sidelines with a return to civilian government. He sees the return to office of Ganilau and Mara, as president and prime minister respectively, as a reflection of both customary status and political experience. The pillars of the pre-election establishment were now back in place, though sharing power with Rabuka.

In Shattered Coups, Robert T. Robertson and Akosita Tamanisau see the 1987 coup and subsequent developments as being driven from the Fijian or Alliance side by the "1977 syndrome"—a variation on the process that saw the Alliance Party returned to office after defeat in the 1977 general election. Further, the "collaboration"
with Rabuka by Mara and the Alliance establishment was a response of the chiefly bureaucratic class to the challenge posed to its cliental relationships by the Fiji Labour Party—cliental relationships developed by the Alliance because of its “failure to generate an independent viable bourgeoisie” (14). Aside from the inappropriateness of much of the jargon they use in the book, the authors suggest a further structural reason behind the coups in the long-standing rivalry between east and west in Fiji, and something akin to a conspiracy—nurtured by colonialism and brought to maturity by the Alliance—among the chiefly elites of eastern Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, and Lau to ensure dominance over western Viti Levu. The latter is culturally distinct from the rest of Fiji and was a small-part player in precolonial politics, but is a major contributor to the economy through the sugar and tourism industries.

Certainly the west has supported protest in the past, but it is by no means unique in this; although Bavadra’s home base is at Viseisei, his strongest support is to be found among white-collar workers in Suva. It is something of an exaggeration for Robertson and Tamanisau to claim that the Fiji Labour Party was, at any time, “outstandingly popular” (26), and there are elements of overstatement in the authors’ enthusiastic endorsement of Labour’s position. More serious, however, because they mislead on some of the fundamentals of the situation, are other aspects of this interpretation. By any common definition, Fiji was not a “multiracial nation” (4) at independence but a plur-
power of the bayonet and a functioning multiracial democracy sacrificed at the altar of racial chauvinism and personal aggrandizement” (6). Here, too, we have the essence of the Lal interpretation of the crisis: “The Fiji coups were more about frustrated politicians bent upon recapturing power lost at the polls than they were about ethnic prejudice, though the importance of the latter cannot be . . . lightly dismissed” (7).

Again, the description of Fiji as a “multiracial democracy” might be questioned, but Power and Prejudice is no mere polemic. In much greater detail than the works discussed above, Power and Prejudice discusses the election results and documents the steady erosion of Alliance support among Fijians, culminating in April 1987 with 9.6 percent of Fijian communal votes going to the Coalition, 3.4 percent to the Western United Front and 5.4 percent to the Fijian Nationalist Party (45). At least as important in the final defeat of the Alliance was the high incidence of nonvoting (close to 30 percent) among Fijians. Turning the figures around, the Alliance had the active support of only about 35 percent of potential Fijian voters, much less among Indians, and there was an erosion of Alliance support among General Electors. Following the coups, and the politicization of Fijians by the Taukei Movement, however, the restored Alliance had a newly consolidated power base in the Fijian electorate.

Lal examines in detail the constitutional provisions for the protection of Fijian interests and government programs to enhance educational and commercial opportunities for Fijians, as well as the protection and advancement of Fijian interests outlined in the Coalition’s Speech from the Throne. While Scarr has suggested that “public interest” provisions might have been used to alienate Fijian land, Lal demonstrates quite clearly that no significant change to land tenure or land use legislation could have been made without the acquiescence of the Fijian Affairs Board, the Great Council of Chiefs, and the Senate. Inescapably, this brings us back to the widespread ignorance of the protection of Fijian rights provided by the constitution and the role of taukei leaders (and, no less, Rabuka) in manipulating widespread Fijian fears.

In the final analysis, it was not the constitutional provisions but the fears (and whatever motives actuated political leaders) that became the political reality. Lal examines the threat to the political dominance of traditional Fijian leadership posed by the continuing urbanization of the Fijian population. More specifically, he discusses the challenge represented by the emergence of Bavadra, who was not from the highest rank of Fijian chiefs, and his support from a new generation of urban-dwelling, Western-educated Fijians allied with a tenuously united National Federation Party. The Coalition not only attacked the role of individual chiefs with its allegations of corruption and incompetence, but also aspects of the institution of chieftainship itself. The defense of the land, and Fijian rights of individual performance, became subsumed into a broader issue.
The complexity of these factors makes it difficult to fix with certainty "the cause" of the coups. Lal's view, that the coups were more about politicians seeking to recapture lost power than about ethnic prejudice, again challenges Rabuka's account of his own role and his claim to have acted alone. The issue is best explored, perhaps, by an examination of subsequent events. Although Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and some of his colleagues stood to one side, there were nonetheless close links between Alliance politicians and the Taukei Movement. Politicians who must have been fully aware of the constitutional protection that existed for Fijian rights had little hesitation in stirring up Fijians' feelings on the land issue. Between May and September, two processes were essentially proceeding in parallel: the first, involving the governor-general with Alliance and Coalition politicians, saw negotiations toward compromise constitutional arrangements; the second saw the exercise of power by ministers who included a number of taukei leaders. The latter development represented not only Rabuka's reward to his constituents in the taukei, but was also a measure of widespread discontent among Fijians with the Alliance's recent record.

It might be argued, then, that Rabuka and some, at least, of the Alliance politicians used the populist taukei to achieve personal and political ends in the first coup. But it leaves too many loose ends to see both coups as measures to secure the paramountcy of Fijian interests that had been promised by cession and embodied in the policies of Sir Arthur Gordon. The second coup had the effect of curtailing the excesses of taukei leaders with a taste for power, leaving Rabuka with little alternative but to build stronger links with the paramount chiefs of the Alliance old guard. Whether Lal is right or not, in his claim that the coups were engineered by Alliance politicians to protect their political and personal interests, it is certainly the case that the effect of the second coup in particular, and its aftermath, has been to return them to power, though they now govern under the watchful eye of Rabuka.

There has been no serious attempt to pursue the pre-election allegations of corruption and abuse of power, and no evidence that Russians or Libyans were backing the Coalition (or, for that matter, that the United States gave material aid to the coup). It is also the case that, with no immediate prospect of elections, little power is being shared with the mass of the Fijian people (except insofar as they are represented by their chiefs), while the Indian population has no power at all.

At the end of the day, there is no sign that the simple soldier is interested in returning to barracks. His mission to protect for all time the interests of Fijians has yet to be fulfilled; Rabuka obviously relishes the exercise of power; and his earlier denials of personal motives have been steadily eroded by promotions to colonel, to brigadier, and to major-general. While the complexity of the Fiji coups defies the drawing of too many parallels with postcolonial theories and models, this at least is in the classic mold.

The aftermath of the coups has also
produced its share of publications. Most prominent among these is *Coup and Crisis: Fiji a Year Later*, edited by Satendra Prasad. The book's first, unofficial, publication at the University of the South Pacific threatened to bring troops back onto the campus, and it was subsequently enlarged and reissued from Australia. In documenting developments in the year after 14 May 1987, and in their examination of social and economic conditions in Fiji, the authors—who include Dr Bavadra, politicians of the Fiji Labour Party, and staff from the University of the South Pacific—argue overall that the policies of the postcoup regime represent "sustained assaults on the working people" of Fiji (1). Although this is a fiercely partisan account, with most essays stronger on assertion than analysis, it provides useful material on the impact of political developments on education, employment (especially in the public service), the trade union movement, the economy, and foreign policy.

Partisan in a different way is *The Guns of Lautoka*, by Christopher Harder, the Canadian-born, New Zealand-based lawyer who became involved with the cases of the secessionist chiefs of Rotuma as well as illegal arms-shipper Mohammed Kahan. Both entanglements placed him firmly in opposition to the Rabuka regime (and earned a brief spell of incarceration in Fiji), but the book is much more revealing of Harder than of politics in Fiji. With so much taken up with irrelevant autobiography, anecdotes, and meaningless detail, and the whole written in a breathless style with its author always at the center of the action, most readers will tire quickly and await a later account of the issues that are the subject of the book.

The other major area covered in the recent literature is the impact of the coups on the Fijian economy. A most useful and readable short account is to be found in Bruce Knapman's essay on "The Economic Consequences of the Coups," which appears as an afterword to *Shattered Coups*. Knapman places recent developments in the context of the colonial economy and postindependence trends. With a minimum of jargon and clear illustrations, he reveals a sobering picture of an economy in decline, and documents the measures—devaluation, currency control, reduction of wages—taken to counter the crisis. His prognosis for the future is hardly surprising—"the economic outlook is gloomy" (187).

Knapman's themes and conclusions are largely echoed in the more comprehensive work by Rodney Cole and Helen Hughes, *The Fiji Economy, May 1987: Problems and Prospects*. In a final chapter, "Future Prospects," the authors not only underline the need for a consistent policy in place of ad hoc decision making, but offer some measured advice to the government of Fiji. The issue that remains is whether (or when) short-term political imperatives can give way to long-term planning. The authors conclude that unless there is an end to political uncertainty, and confidence is restored, "Fiji will become a poor country" (87).

A rather different approach is adopted by Kasper, Bennett, and Blandy in *Fiji: Opportunity From Adversity?* The three economists, all from Australian universities, see the aftermath of the coup and the tempo-
emporary suspension of Australian aid as an opportunity for reassessing both the direction of Fiji's economic policy and the economic relationship between Australia and Fiji. The book begins with an analysis of the recent past, then briefly considers the Fiji economy since the 1960s; a major part is taken up by alternative scenarios for the future. The first envisages economic decay in association with racial and social instability, all being the product of instability and a loss of confidence traveling in tandem with a continuation of the policies of the last thirty years. It will come as little surprise that the authors favor a second scenario that would have three components: a guarantee of civil rights and protections; a rapid deregulation of the economy; and smaller government. Perceived reforms would not work; "Only comprehensive, bold and far-sighted reforms can rapidly secure a prosperous and stable future" (63). This second scenario might be well based on economic theory, but it would make little headway against political reality. The whole foundation of the present government and the proposed future constitution rest on the principle that civil rights and economic freedoms will be constrained in racial terms; a scenario that would allow the more commercially active (if politically emasculated) Indian population to capitalize on a deregulated economy, and that depends on such entrepreneurs to rebuild the economy, will hardly appeal to a Fijian-dominated government. Ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians alike will have to hope for a middle way. The Fiji coups and their aftermath have generated an unprecedented list of publications for any issue in the recent history of the Pacific Islands. In publications (books or journals) on the recent history and politics of the region there has been no similar taking of sides or hastening into print. But for the time capsule, or for the elusive general reader, we do not yet have the reflective account, or the considered judgments. It is too soon for that, not simply because feelings still run high and because most of these authors are protagonists to some degree, but because there is still argument over events and details, full documentation is not available, and, although each author makes use of published sources, their access to other information, like their interpretation, is governed by individual perspective.

A deeper understanding of Fiji's recent past will depend on an exchange of information as well as debate on issues in dispute. The books reviewed here were all written in some haste within a year or so of the coups. Each was presenting a point of view, but the authors were not addressing the same issues or each other. Improved understanding, by the major protagonists, the people of Fiji, and the academic commentators, will depend on the debate; but that understanding, with wounds yet unhealed and a Fiji government that has shown little tolerance of political debate, is still some distance away.

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