Introduction

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Soldiers rioting on the steps of parliament house in Papua New Guinea; tumultuous politics besetting the presidency in Vanuatu; political assassinations in New Caledonia; confrontation between soldiers and civilians on the troubled island of Bougainville. In other, calmer times, such incidents of terror and violence would have stunned observers of Pacific Island affairs. But in the aftermath of the dramatic events in Fiji, news of upheaval in the islands is increasingly being greeted with a weary sense of *déjà vu*. Such has been their impact that the Fiji coups and the forces they have unleashed are already being seen as marking, for better or worse, a turning point not only in the history of that troubled island nation but also in the contemporary politics of the Pacific Islands region.

The issues and emotions that the Fiji coups have engendered touch on some of the most fundamental issues of our time: the tension between the rights of indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands and the rights of those of more recent immigrant or mixed origins; the role and place of traditional customs and institutions in the fiercely competitive modern political arena; the structure and function of Western-style democratic political processes in ethnically divided or nonegalitarian societies; the use of military force to overthrow ideologically unacceptable but constitutionally elected governments. These and similar issues, rekindled by the events in Fiji, will be with us for a long time to come.

Unlike any other event in recent Pacific Islands history, the Fiji crisis has generated an unprecedented outpouring of popular and scholarly literature, as our Book Review and Resources sections amply demonstrate. Much of the early writing focused on the causes of the first coup (14 May 1987) and on the role of certain prominent individuals and institutions,

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both within and outside Fiji, in instigating it. The apportioning of blame and responsibility for the crisis continues, though perhaps with declining vigor. Important evidence on crucial matters is still not available, and many issues remain clouded by continuing controversy. But most serious observers on both sides of the political divide have largely discarded the early sensational theory of the rather large hand of external forces in precipitating the coups. No new evidence has come to light in the last two years to sustain the charge of external causation. The increasing consensus of both popular and scholarly opinion now is that the true reasons for the coups will have to be sought in the class and communal dynamics of local Fiji politics and history, and in the personal ambitions and fortunes of specific individuals and groups threatened by the verdict of the ballot box. But beyond that small island of agreement about where to look for the causes lies a vast ocean of unending controversy about the motivations and machinations that precipitated the present situation.

Rather than founder in that ocean, the essays in this special issue focus on the impact and implications of the coups. Four of the six essays look at their domestic social, economic, and political consequences, while the remaining two examine their ramifications for regional politics and constitutional theory. Our invited contributors come from different disciplinary backgrounds—history, sociology, political science, anthropology, theology, law, and economics—and analyze events in Fiji since the coups from a variety of scholarly perspectives. All of them have had a long personal as well as academic acquaintance with Fiji; some of them have even been tangentially involved in the events of 1987: John Garrett, for example, was a founding member of the Back to Early May Movement about which he writes in his contribution. The analyses presented here are suffused with different assumptions and values and degrees of detachment from the subject. This is both unavoidable and desirable; no attempt was made, or even contemplated, to require the contributors to conform to a particular line of interpretation.

In their divergent opinions and positions, these essays convey a vivid sense of the complexity of events in Fiji and underline the undesirability of viewing them through a single fixed lens, ideological or scholarly. Despite the problems inherent in trying to decipher the meaning and significance of a still-unfolding event, these essays go a long way toward facilitating a deeper and more informed understanding of the events in Fiji and their implications. I should add parenthetically that this collection of essays

complements rather well the material covered in the Fiji publication, *Coup and Crisis: Fiji A Year Later* (Prasad 1989), which provides a more immediate and politically committed commentary on events in Fiji.

Yash Ghai's essay, which opens the volume, looks at an issue that may at first glance appear to be moot. Politically it is: the coup succeeded, and the military-backed regime currently in power is intent on keeping the reins firmly in its own hands. But for legal and constitutional scholars interested in the study of military coups and political revolutions in the developing Third World, from Pakistan to Uganda, the Fiji coups, especially the first one, provide fresh material for comparative study. How and under what conditions do extralegal seizures of power acquire the trappings of legitimacy and constitutionality? What constitutional conventions govern the power of a ceremonial or formal head of state, especially in a crisis situation, when the elected government is unable or not allowed to function? This second question is of direct relevance to several Pacific Island states that have a Westminster-style constitutional structure similar to that of precoup Fiji. Ghai's essay also provides the necessary background information on the sequence of events in Fiji in the early days of the coup, setting the narrative context for the other essays.

Roderic Alley looks at how the Fiji coup was received in the region and focuses specifically on the responses of the governments of Australia and New Zealand. In the early stages, there was strong official condemnation and much popular protest against the military overthrow of a fraternal Labor government, and there were some short-lived, trade-union-led boycotts against the military regime. There followed a period of vacillation and uncertainty, but in the end both governments adopted an approach "consonant with conventional foreign policy practice conducted by most states." Self-interest, sensitivity to the charges of racial arrogance and bullying tactics by the two white dominions, legitimate concern over the security and future of Suva-based regional institutions, helped along by a confused pattern of events in Fiji itself, all dictated a prudent and moderate approach. In the islands themselves, where the coups were seen as a simple Fijian assertion of indigenous power against an immigrant racial group, there was strong though usually private support for Colonel Rabuka and his stated goals for his people.

The remaining four essays examine aspects of the impact of the coups on Fiji's economy and society. Bruce Knapman expertly analyzes the eco-

nomic consequences of the coups against the backdrop of development trends in the country since independence in 1970. The basic challenge facing the economy, he says, is to grow—in the face of the flight of capital and trained workers, shaky local investor confidence, and a predicted downturn in the world economy—to provide employment, and to "accelerate Fijian participation in the cash economy." Some success in this direction has been achieved, especially with the creation of tax free zones offering a thirteen-year tax holiday and other lucrative concessions to primarily export-oriented companies. One result has been the burgeoning of garment factories, which has brought some relief to a strained economy: more employment, a manageable inflation rate, and a stabilizing foreign reserve. The interim government now confidently asserts that the worst period of economic depression is over. But hidden behind promising tax free zone statistics lie other problems. As Knapman notes, "Nobody seems to have calculated the domestic resource cost of earning foreign exchange by providing women and night-shift-working men in the zones with a job that transforms an unemployment problem into a poverty problem."

John Garrett provides important glimpses of social and religious life in postcoup Fiji. Some of the earlier excesses and abuses of power have been curtailed, Garrett notes, and there is silent accommodation and waiting and apprehension among those opposed to the present regime. The country is still without a written constitution and is ruled by decrees; a severely understaffed judiciary functions, not without some embarrassment; the media, not directly under the control of the interim regime, operate with prudent self-imposed censorship; and there is jockeying for power at various levels, but most conspicuously in the once-united bastion of Fijian conservatism, the Methodist church, to which most of the *taukei* 'indigenous Fijians' belong.

Beyond the public view, in the arena of domestic relations, and in the garment factories where desperate unskilled women, many from broken homes, earn as little as 65 cents an hour, far below the basic hourly casual rate of F$1.35, life since the coups has taken a turn for the worse that no pronouncements about imminent prosperity can hide. Shireen Lateef looks into that grim world. When jobs are lost and wages fall, the women are the hardest hit. To make matters worse, sexual abuse and rapes have increased in the last two years. And women's struggle for equal opportunities, which had just begun to come into its own, is being undermined by a

procoup nationalist ideology and a call to return to traditional, male-dominated values.

The last essay, by Nicholas Thomas, takes us beyond ideologically motivated explanations to the complex world of the Fijian response to the current situation. The removal of the specter of Indian domination, a powerful rallying point for Fijian national solidarity in the past, has opened up old debates and contests for power among the *taukei.* The most obvious, and potentially the most significant of these, has been the formation of the fourth confederacy in western Viti Levu, the Yasasa Vaka Ra. Its creation has been heralded by some as the harbinger of Fijian discordance and invested with all kinds of meanings, even by Dr Timoci Bavadra himself, who sees his Fiji Labour Party as "just the last in the line" of "strong secessionist movements in the west of Fiji" (*Davui,* June 1989, 6). Thomas examines this view, which sees a unitary, persisting pattern of western dissent against eastern overlordship, and argues that western dissent is the sum total of quite different individual acts of protest with specific causes lacking an overarching ideology. The east–west divide cuts across different lines, depending on events, personalities, and circumstances. This, for instance, would explain why prominent western Fijians, such as Ratu Josaia Tavaiqia and Apisai Tora, support Dr Bavadra's call for a fourth confederacy and a greater national role for western Fijians, but remain adamantly opposed to the principles of his multiracial Labour Coalition. The idea of the fourth confederacy has been rejected by the existing three confederacies. Whether this will eventually produce new political alignments on the national political scene, for which the west has a well-deserved reputation, is something that remains to be seen.

All the essays in this volume raise issues that will continue to be watched and felt deeply by the people of Fiji and debated by scholars for years to come. The prospects for speedy recovery and amicable national reconciliation do not look promising two years after the events of 1987, but there is at least one reason for some relief. The much-predicted racial bloodbath, which appeared imminent immediately after the two coups, has mercifully not eventuated, despite all provocations and potentials. Why? An important part of the reason is that the target group, the Fiji Indians, has not done anything to provoke retaliation. Both culture and common sense—all the guns are on the other side—dictate a prudent and generally passive approach. As Eugene Genovese has remarked in another context: "If a people, over a protracted period, finds the odds against

insurrection not merely long but virtually uncertain, then it will choose not to try. To some extent this reaction represents decreasing self-confidence and increasing fear, but it also represents a conscious effort to develop an alternative strategy for survival" (Genovese 1979, 7).

The generally nonviolent reaction of Fijians is equally understandable. The *taukei* are in the driver's seat, satisfied that their dream of political supremacy enjoys much support across the wide spectrum of Fijian opinion. Political and religious divisions—splits in the Methodist church, the formation of the fourth confederacy—have diverted *taukei* attention to other internal issues. And the militant, violence-threatening Taukei Movement, which presented itself to the world soon after the coups as the united voice of Fijian aspirations, has not surprisingly dissolved into quarrelling factions. Its most extreme leader, Ratu Meli Vesikula, who once threatened to put Dr Bavadra in the *lovo* 'earth oven', predicting that "consensus will never be reached between Indians and Fijians" (Lal 1988, 114), is now quite firmly ensconced in the Coalition leader's camp (*Davui,* June 1989, 7) and, as irony would have it, the recipient of some harsh treatment by his militant erstwhile comrades.

Two years after the coups, Fiji is still groping for a constitutional solution that, it is hoped, will kill two birds with one stone: enshrine Fijian control of the political process, and get the other communities to accept a subordinate place in the national political system. The basis for discussion of the new constitution has been a hundred-page draft circulated by the interim regime in September 1988. It is very likely that, barring exceptional circumstances and with some minor modifications, this document will become the constitution of the Republic of Fiji. The proposed constitution is fundamentally different in spirit and content from the independence constitution of 1970. The latter was a carefully crafted instrument founded on the values of balance, compromise, accommodation, and political pluralism. Among other things, it prescribed a Westminster-style participatory democracy with equal representation for Fijians and Indians in the all-elected House of Representatives; entrenched provisions for the protection of Fijian land and other rights that could only be changed with the consent of the nominees of the all-Fijian Great Council of Chiefs in the Senate; and an independent judiciary, free from political interference. Power was in the hands of the elected representatives of the people.

The new constitutional proposals envisage a different kind of society and political system. This is not the place to offer a detailed assessment of the proposed constitution, but some of its basic features should be noted.

In the first place, the practice of parliamentary democracy with equal franchise for all citizens is explicitly rejected and the power of the elected legislature is subordinated to an unelected executive branch. In the proposed structure, the real power will lie in the hands of a small advisory group in the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*—as the Great Council of Chiefs is now officially designated—which will appoint and, should the need arise, dismiss the president, who will be accountable for his actions and decisions only to that body. The constitution is vague on the role and function of the *Bose Levu,* which will have a paramount role in the affairs of the country. The presidency itself will be rotated on a five-year basis among the three existing confederacies of Kubuna, Burebasaga, and Tovata. This structure of power sharing at the top explains the urgency of the western Fijians' desire for a separate confederacy of their own.

Another feature of the proposed constitution is the principle of unequal representation and power in the parliament. The draft proposes a 71-seat unicameral legislature with 36 Fijians, 22 Indians, 8 General Electors, and 1 Rotuman, even though the non-Fijians constitute the majority in Fiji. Neither singly nor in combination will that majority be able to pass or resist amendments that threaten their vital interests. The formerly fully elected House of Representatives will, if the proposed draft is accepted, also include nominees of the president (8 out of the 36 Fijians) and the prime minister (4), who will enjoy all the powers and privileges of elected members.

The prime minister, appointed by the president, will be given wide-ranging powers: he alone will be consulted in the appointment of the chief justice, thus dispensing with the previously mandated consultative role of the leader of the opposition, and his approval will be necessary for the appointment of the director of public prosecutions. The prime minister will always by law be a Fijian, as also will be the commissioner of police, and the chair and at least one member of both the Public Service and the Police Service Commission. Although these are not specifically stipulated in the constitution, one can reasonably assume that the president, the commander of the Fiji Military Forces, and perhaps even the chief justice, will be Fijians. If the proposed draft is accepted, the most important and powerful executive, legislative, administrative, and security posts will be in the hands of the *taukei,* fulfilling the demand for the paramountcy of Fijian interests in Fiji.

The new draft proposes to entrench communalism in the electoral system. Under the new proposals, multiracial voting will be abolished and

replaced with communal voting, with each ethnic group voting for its own ethnic candidates. This is designed to foster ethnic political solidarity. But the removal of any incentive for cross-communal dialogue will perpetuate a divisive communal consciousness at the expense of an overarching, cohesive sense of national consciousness. In the eyes of the draft's proponents, though, the latter goal is not a desirable one.

Among the *taukei,* voting will be on provincial lines. No Fijian will be eligible to be a candidate for the House of Representatives in any constituency except the one in which his landowning clan is registered in the *Vola Ni Kawa Bula,* the Register of Births, with the result that Fijians will be able to be parliamentary candidates only in the area where their clan is located and not where they actually live. This provision, a triumph of provincialism, will frustrate the political ambitions of urban Fijians whose traditional clans may be hundreds of miles away in a remote province, where they might not be known and may not have lived for years. How and if this will work in practice as the urban drift from the villages continues, remains to be seen.

A multiracial committee, chaired by Retired Colonel Paul Manueli, was appointed by the interim regime to gauge the public's response to the new draft. The exercise is designed to give the appearance of wide consultation, but the final say on whether the draft is acceptable or not will lie with only one body, the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga,* which has from the outset come out in favor of the paramountcy of Fijian interests to the exclusion of everything else. It was no surprise that Dr Bavadra and the coalition, now somewhat in limbo, rejected the draft constitution as "profoundly authoritarian, undemocratic, militaristic, racist and feudalistic." Their response, in a closely argued 48-page paper, went on to claim that the proposal, if accepted, "would be divisive and sow the seeds of terrible violence. It would retard our social and economic development. It would isolate us from our valued neighbours, the Commonwealth and the international community." Dr Bavadra reiterated his opposition to the draft in June 1989 when he said that his group "will not accept an apartheid solution" (*Fiji Times,* 26 June 1989).

Within the Fijian community, though, there is widespread support for the pro-*taukei* draft. The various provincial councils that have discussed it have indicated either total support or have sought some minor modifications while agreeing on the ultimate goals of the new draft. Adi Finau Tabakaucoro, former *taukei* academic at the University of the South Pacific and presently a minister in the interim regime, said in 1987, "I

believe in the supremacy of Fijian interests in Fiji. If that makes other people second class citizens, then—well, I don't have to say it." (*New York Times,* 23 May 1987). More recently, Minister of Information Ratu Inoke Kubuabola struck an adamant note when he said, "We will not shift from our objective of ensuring Fijian political control along with indigenous Fijians having a decisive and determining voice in the economy of Fiji" (*Fiji Times,* 24 April 1989).

Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara himself, erstwhile multiracialist, has endorsed these sentiments. He has said that the 1970 constitution, which kept him in power for seventeen continuous years, may no "longer be regarded as an adequate guarantee of their [*taukei*'s] long-term future and as a sufficient basis to ensure the long-term peace and harmony of the entire nation." It must be revised to give full recognition to the "overriding importance that the indigenous Fijians attach to the communal values of duty and loyalty to the unity and harmony of their community and of obedience to, and respect for, their traditional chiefly authority" (*Fiji Times,* 5 May 1988). The Fijian people must learn from history and make history and not become history in their own native land. In language more reminiscent of the militant Taukei Movement than anything else, Mara told the meeting of the Lau Provincial Council on 10 May 1989, almost exactly two years after the first coup, "The Fijian people are all too aware of the destiny of the indigenous Aztecs of Mexico, the Incas of Peru, the Mayans of Central America, the Caribs of Trinidad and Tobago, the Inuits of Canada, the Maoris of New Zealand and the Aborigines of Australia, to name a few" (*Fiji Times,* 11 May 1989).

This was an extraordinary statement from an extraordinary man at the twilight of an extraordinary career, lending support to the discomforting thought that the difference between Mara and Rabuka is one of degree, not one of substance. Ratu Sir Kamisese has expressed his intention to retire from politics at the end of 1989. He has made similar announcements in the past only to be persuaded at the last minute to remain in office, all for the sake of his people and his country. He may linger on the political stage for a little while longer, like an important guest wearing out his welcome. But the situation has changed: he is sixty-nine years old, in failing health, and no longer quite the man in charge, at least not to the degree he has been accustomed to. His political competitors include Brigadier General Sitiveni Rabuka, who has hinted at retiring from the military to lead the country as a civilian (*PIM,* June 1989). In a different Fiji, which he had a large hand in shaping, Ratu Sir Kamisese would have made a tri-

umphant exit, extolled for his commitment to constitutional democracy and genuine multiracialism; now, in the eyes of all but his most ardent supporters, he will depart the political scene with his star on the wane, his reputation diminished, and his place in history uncertain.

What is the outlook for Fiji two years after things fell apart? John Garrett puts it this way: "Beyond the doors things to come remain unclear, hypothetical: reassuring consensus or renewed crisis? People in uniforms, with or without hand-held firearms, are still in evidence and say they are ready if needed." In the words of Dr Samuel Johnson, which will probably find acceptance among most people on both sides of the political divide, life in contemporary Fiji is in a "state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed."

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