

Rabuka of Fiji: Coups, Constitutions and Confusion¹

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21 May 1987. Exactly a week after the National Federation Party-Fiji Labour Party Coalition government was ousted in a military coup. At the Suva Civic Centre, the Great Council of Chiefs had concluded a tense meeting hurriedly convened to consider the turbulent events which plunged Fiji into its worst political crisis in modern history. A huge bused-in crowd of Fijian men and women sat on the lawn across the road, clapping, singing, and drinking kava, while the Royal Fiji Military Forces band played 'Onward Christian soldiers', 'I did it My Way', and 'Bridge Over Troubled Waters'. Across Sukuna Park, another crowd, of Indo-Fijian men and women and children, watched the 'carnival', apprehensive, bewildered, frightened. A hush descended upon the lawn as the coup-maker, Lt Col. Sitiveni Rabuka, appeared on the balcony. An athletic, handsome young man with a massive handlebar moustache, and dressed in powder blue safari jacket and sulu, he spoke in Fijian for a few minutes, explaining why he had carried out the coup and urging his people to remain calm. Then, with both fists punching the air, as the crowd roared approval, he said '*Sa noda na qaqa*', 'Rest assured, we have won'. He would dedicate his life to realising the aims of the coup, Rabuka said, to more thunderous clapping. Fijians must rule Fiji: that was God's wish.

Ten years later, a mellowed, greyer, balding man, legs bent and body slightly stooping, but still with a ready smile and at ease with himself, is addressing a multiracial election rally in his home town of Labasa. 'You cannot build a nation up by tearing each other down', he says to a rapt audience quizzically assessing the man who so profoundly disturbed their lives a decade earlier. 'That is why we focused on the need for us to

be united - the indigenous Fijian people, the sons and daughters and grandchildren of those who came as indentured labourers, or in the following waves of business people, however and by whatever methods, by whatever means they arrived in Fiji, they are an inextricable part of the society of Fiji, the new Republic of the Fiji Islands.' He recalled the contributions of the immigrant communities to the development of Fiji. 'We owe it them. We owe it to [the Europeans], we owe it to the indentured labourers, we owe it to the generations of Indians who have come here to Fiji, we owe them what we now have in Fiji. Tomorrow's Fiji is our responsibility. We are committed to building a Fiji of unity' (Fiji Times, 10 Apr. 1999). A thunderous applause, but of a different kind, from a different audience, and for a different purpose.

This apparent change of heart is one of the more remarkable transformations in the history of Fiji, a coup leader, a strident hero of ethnic chauvinism, God-appointed (*Steve: The Hand of God*, the tee-shirts proclaimed), a Christian crusader with a mission to convert all heathens to his faith, the faithful servant of Fijian hopes and aspirations, turning into a messiah of multiracialism and cross-cultural understanding, a national statesman, a regional peacemaker. Truth can be stranger than fiction. The best way to chart these changes in Rabuka's political life in the last 10 years is to examine two published accounts that encase his life, one at the beginning, and one at the end.² Written at different times and moods and with different purposes and audiences in mind, the books nonetheless share and moods and with different purposes and audiences in mind, the books nonetheless share a basic goal: to tell Rabuka's story from his perspective, to place on record his side of the a basic goal: to tell Rabuka's story from his perspective, to place on record his side of the story. Authorised accounts have obvious pitfalls. The subject's achievements are often exaggerated; events are observed through partial lenses with little contextual assessment and reflection; and the tone is celebratory, with few qualifications, reservations or disagreement on interpretation. But they have their uses, not least in recording as faithfully as possible events observed from a particular angle with all their partiality and exaggeration. Both books suffer from the handicaps of the genre but they also provide insights into the life and (often deeply conflicting) thoughts and candid

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² Rabuka now regards the earlier book as a 'gung-ho' account of his life in 1987, a raw, young man caught in the whirlwind of a great event. The latter book, he says, represents his more mature self. It is important to note that the university which published the book also gave him an honorary doctorate. It also managed to secure a prime site in Suva for its Fiji campus. Sharpham was its first head.

admissions of personal and moral failings of a man who changed the course of his country's history. These books are an indispensable part of modern Fijian historiography.

Both begin by locating Rabuka's childhood in Drekeniwai village on the island of Vanua Levu. Both offer an idealised picture: enchanting natural environment, carefree lifestyle, deeply caring communal life. Rabuka tells Dean and Ritova of 'a beautiful village ... nestling at the foot of some high hills. The sea and the reefs abound with fish and sea-life, and there is no problem going out and catching fish for lunch or dinner. As a young boy, I spent many hours on the rising tide - early in the morning, or late in the afternoon - armed with a 5-pronged home-made spear, stalking the fish in the shallow water' (*No Other Way*, 20). Sharpam also writes about Rabuka being born 'in a tropical paradise of palm trees, white sand and blue lagoons, with surf breaking over distant reefs' (*Rabuka of Fiji*, 23). Parents and elders were loving and considerate. When Rabuka was born, both accounts record, great things were prophesied for him: it was not for no reason that he was named after Stephen, the apostle, who was stoned to death for preaching the gospel. Like many young Fijian boys of his generation, Rabuka went to local provincial schools and eventually to the Queen Victoria School, the school created exclusively for Fijian boys from chiefly backgrounds but opened after World War Two to commoners. His academic record was unimpressive, but Rabuka's strengths lay elsewhere, in leadership. In his final year, he won the coveted place of school prefect, where his leadership instincts and skills showed, winning him the coveted GK Roth trophy.³ Joining the army had been Rabuka's childhood ambition, which he now fulfilled.

Rabuka's background provides important clues. He spent his most formative years in exclusively Fijian settings: the remote village in Cakaudrove, the isolated secondary school in Tailevu, and the exclusive club of the Fijian army. There is no hint of exposure to, or experience of, the social milieu of the wider multicultural community, of the type Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara had experienced as a student at the Marist Brothers High School or as a District Officer in Ba, or Timoci Bavadra had as a doctor and civil servant in various parts of Fiji.⁴ Rabuka was unmarked by multiracialism, loyal to his culture and traditional leaders, his faith,

and imbued with deep pride in himself as a Fijian. The self-contained Fijian world, ordered according to rank, governed by ritual and protocol, and sustained by the Methodist faith, was the only world Rabuka knew. As time and circumstance increased the gulf between Rabuka's military career and the world he had left behind, village life began to acquire a romantic hue, as a site of order and beauty and freedom from want. Rabuka wanted, as he often said, to recreate his childhood. He was, in fact, trying to do what Ratu Sukuna, the grand panjandrum of Fijian society, had tried to do a couple of generations earlier.⁵

QVS reinforced that isolation. The school's mission was 'to give its pupils an academic QVS reinforced that isolation. The school's mission was 'to give its pupils an academic education in a broad and modern sense which will fit them to take up posts in the various education in a broad and modern sense which will fit them to take up posts in the various civil services - educational, medical and administrative - and enable the best of them to proceed abroad for further training: and yet to centre this discipline of the mind in an environment reflecting the predominantly agricultural life of the community and calling for a practical approach to the problem of life and social and economic co-operation in Fiji' (Lal, 1992: 160). This vision assumed a racially compartmentalised Fiji, but much damage was done because the vision remained narrow, focused on Fijian ethos and ideals, uninformed and uninfluenced by any real understanding of the cultural values and aspirations of other people in Fiji's plural society. The same was also true of most Indo-Fijian leaders who trained in communal educational institutions with little social exposure to members of other communities.

Many bright QVS boys went into the public service and others to universities in New Zealand, which helped to diminish some of the effects of communal education, introducing them to new ideas and experiences, but Rabuka went straight into the army. Rabuka was a natural for a military career. He was enthralled by the romance of army life, 'the sense of adventure I had as a young man - going to war, going to fight, appealed to me' (*No Other Way*, 22). Culturally, too, he was well equipped, being from the warrior tribe in the village, a bati. There was also the possibility of going overseas. 'I liked the regimented type of life, where everything was orderly. That's the sort of life I enjoyed most because it was the sort of life I was brought up in - my mother and father being strict discipli-

³ George Kingsley Roth was a British colonial servant who spent much of his career in the Fijian secretariat, succeeding Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna as the Secretary of Fijian Affairs in the late 1950s. He wrote a eulogising book (Roth, 1953).

⁴ Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's account is in Mara (1997). Bavadra's reflections are in his collection of speeches in Baba and Bain (1999).

⁵ This is the thrust of Deryck Scarr's biography of Sukuna, where he argues that the great Fijian leader wanted to take Fijian society to its 19th century moorings, to the 'classic patterns of his childhood' (1980: 23. See also pages 58, 154-5).

narians. Also, there was the well-structured community that I grew up in, where everybody had a rank' (*No Other Way*, 22). This life formed a particular world view, reinforced a particular ethos requiring the demonstration of self-assurance and physical prowess, including (as happened in Rabuka's case, and continues unabated by his own admission) reckless philandering. The army forged strong male bonding and helped cultivate a wide network of loyal colleagues and friends which Rabuka would put to good use in later years. But it also produced a narrow vision, a rather mechanical understanding of the world. It took Rabuka years to outgrow this mind-set, which hampered him when he entered upon the political stage. 'I was taught to command, not to lead', Rabuka told a Canberra gathering in March 2000. And that is absolutely right. The rules and rituals of politics, how that game was played, the massaging of egos, the cultivation of coalitions not through coercion but through consensus, was alien to military life.

Ill-equipped though Rabuka was for national leadership of the kind he assumed after the coups, he learned quickly. National responsibility widened his horizons. Fiji's complex problems, Rabuka soon learned, defied simple military solutions. He expressed his frustration graphically. Being Prime Minister of Fiji, he said, was like being the driver of a bus. His hardline supporters were pressing him to go faster and faster. *Dabao, Dabao*. Press the accelerator harder. But he could not, because he had to think of the welfare of the passengers. The more he compromised and sought the middle path, the more he was seen by Fijians as reneging on his promise to realise the aims of the coup. That, as we shall see, caused his downfall in the 1999 general elections. While appreciating the complexities of governing a multiracial society, he also began to see through the personal agendas and ambitions of his Fijian colleagues, masked as 'Fijian' interests and aspirations. His openness and guilelessness began to be exploited by people who abused their access to him, among them the new-found friend of the Fijian nationalists Anthony Stephens, whose opportunistic association with people close to Rabuka embroiled the Prime Minister in a scandalous effort to defraud the government, and nearly brought about his downfall.⁶ Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, a lifelong friend, embarrassed Rabuka by listing women with whom Rabuka had had affairs, in an effort to win back a cabinet portfolio. Rabuka learnt a valuable lesson in human vanity and egotism.

He also learnt much, as he grew in national stature, about chiefs and their role - and their perception of his own role as a commoner. By the

late 1990s, Rabuka was still respectful of chiefs, and knew that certain privileges would be denied him because of his non-chiefly origins; but he also became more critical. The chiefs, he said, like Timoci Bavadra a decade earlier, must not politicise their status by getting involved in party politics; or if they did, they should bear the consequences of electoral politics, including criticism (see Bain and Baba, 1999). They should play their 'traditional' role of guardian of their people, in their villages, districts and vanua, rather than getting embroiled in national politics. He questioned the tenets and foundations of the modern chiefly system, invoking the Melanesian model of attained leadership rather than the Polynesian model of 'ascribed' leadership. By virtue of his deeds, he said, he should be accorded chiefly status. He talked about 'merit chiefs', asserting that the 'dominance of customary chiefs in government is coming to an end' and soon 'aristocracy' would be replaced by 'meritocracy'. He has also alluded, cuttingly, to the stifling nature of the chiefly system, saying that big chiefs - and he had Ratu Mara in mind - are like the banyan tree under which nothing grew (Lal, 1998: 21). But these criticisms have not hampered his standing, especially among those, both chiefs and commoners, who are critical of the long dominance of national and Fijian politics by the eastern hierarchies of the Koro Sea. With their support, he won the presidency of the chiefly sponsored Fijian political party by beating one of the highest Fijian chiefs of all, Ro Lady Lala Mara, as well as Ratu William Toganivalu. And after his defeat in 1999, he was able to be elected (and then re-elected) chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs. Although he will not say so publicly, Rabuka has his eye on the presidency of the republic. There is a hint of that ambition in Sharpham's book. When asked whether the head of state has to be a chief, he says 'Not necessarily, not necessarily. It does not have to be a chief. It could be a merit leader' (p. 320). Rabuka's ascendancy is symbolically significant. He was the first commoner to reach the highest elected office in Fiji, which had hitherto been occupied by a high chief, and for a month by Dr Bavadra, thus questioning the implicit ideology that governing is necessarily the business of chiefs. His success earned him powerful friends as well as powerful enemies: hero to some for breaking the glass ceiling, and villain to others for over-stepping his culturally sanctioned role in society.

But for the coups with which his name will forever be associated, Sitiveni Rabuka would have remained an anonymous colonel in the Fijian army, or perhaps a middle-ranking bureaucrat or even a minor politician. Sharpham discusses his problems and disappointments in the army, denying him the promotion he thought he deserved. Rabuka had applied for jobs outside the army, including the post of Police Commissioner: he was

⁶ This is discussed at length in Lal (1998).

looking for a way out when the victory of the NFP-FLP Coalition solved his dilemmas by presenting the opportunity to intervene. Sharpham presents interesting though mainly familiar details about the steps leading to the coup. We now know, for example, that Captain 'X' of the Dean and Ritova account was Captain Isireli Dugu; and we know from Rabuka himself the names of influential politicians and others who were his collaborators. But what is of enduring interest is Rabuka's reasons for the coups. His explanations - or excuses or rationalisations - have varied. He carried out the coup to avert a bloody civil war threatened by the more extreme members of the Taukei Movement, he told a stunned nation that afternoon. He felt God had asked him to do it, he said on another occasion. He did it for the peace and security of the indigenous people. He did it to give them power usurped at the ballot box by a cunning people keen to disinherit the Fijian people of their legitimate place in their own land. It was a coup that had to happen because, as he had said in 1977, he could not countenance the thought of 'serving a government that was dominated by Indo-Fijians' (*Rabuka of Fiji*, 59). And he acted alone, with the support of a handful of picked men in the army. There was, he said in 1988, 'no complicity beyond the essential military personnel who were involved in the pre-coup organisation' (*No Other Way*, 39).

A decade after the coups, Rabuka still believes that he did what had to be done. He regrets the pain the coups caused, and has apologised to the victims for the chaos and trauma, but he insists that he had no alternative. His acceptance of personal responsibility is on the record. But the question often asked is: who else was involved? Could a third-ranking member of the Fiji military forces have carried out the coup by himself, without a nod or a wink from others, especially the chiefs, among them Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau and Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara? In his 1988 account, Rabuka admits to a conversation with Ganilau seeking reassurance from his paramount chief about the security of Fijian land under the new government. Ganilau hesitated, or, as Rabuka recalls: 'He beat around the bush a bit. I realised then that even he had doubts about the security of Fijian land.' This lack of certainty, Rabuka told the authors, 'influenced him to go ahead with the coup' (*No Other Way*, 45). Sharpham provides a fuller picture of relations between Ganilau and Rabuka, the former keeping a watchful eye on his protégé's career in the army, intervening on his behalf at critical points in his career, all because he regarded Rabuka as 'his boy' (p. 184). Rabuka is still at pains to absolve Ganilau from foreknowledge and responsibility. That Ganilau had no knowledge of what was afoot is difficult to believe; and I have been assured by many Fijians whose opinions I respect that it is inconceivable. My own view remains

that Ganilau, a traditional, politically unambitious chief close to his people, was probably emotionally supportive of Rabuka's thoughts and actions but constitutionally too constrained to bless them. And there is nothing particularly surprising about this: Ganilau did not hide his deep Fijian roots and his defence of Fijian interests (see Lal, 1992: 309).

The other high chief, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, was a man of different mettle, and his action - or non-action - has been the subject of great debate. Did Mara know of the coup plans beforehand? Much has been made of Rabuka's recollection of a discussion he had with Ratu Mara on a golf course just before the coups. This is what Rabuka recalled in 1988 (and Mara has confirmed that he did indeed play a round with Rabuka). Rabuka wanted Mara's opinion on the 1970 constitution. 'We were talking about politics, and I asked how can the Constitution be changed? He (Mara), said the Constitution could not now be changed. The only way to change it ... and to use his exact words ... is to throw it out and make a new one, and the likelihood of that is nil' (*No Other Way*, 80). Rabuka felt then that Mara was resigned to being Leader of the Opposition. Sharpham's account elaborates on the 1987 conversation. To Mara's resigned sense that nothing could be done to overthrow the 1970 constitution, Rabuka now recalls saying 'I can do that, sir', to which Mara replies, 'OK, let's talk' (*Rabuka of Fiji*, 104-5). Rabuka outlined a number of options: a political coup, a military coup, a people's uprising, all within a month when the military commander would be away in Australia and Mara himself in Honolulu. Rabuka worried about possible intervention by the United States and the United Kingdom. 'Leave those to me', says Mara, to Rabuka's relief. 'Rabuka', Sharpham says, 'believed that he had Mara's support and his blessing' (p. 105). Certainly, some of Mara's statements at the time come close to endorsing the Rabuka line. In May 1988, for instance, Mara asked his people to make, and not become, history in their own land: '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 1988). And he had endorsed the Rabuka and the Fijian nationalist position that the 1970 constitution could 'no longer be regarded as an adequate guarantee for their [Fijians'] long-term future and as a sufficient basis to ensure the long-term peace and harmony of the entire nation', and which had to be revised to recognise 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).

Ratu Mara has denied any foreknowledge of the May coup. Equally, Rabuka has stuck steadfastly to his account, braving a libel suit. Why did Rabuka not reveal Mara's alleged steadfastly to his account, braving a libel suit. Why did Rabuka not reveal Mara's alleged foreknowledge before? Why now? Sharpham suggests that in the early years Rabuka deferred to his high chiefs and shielded them from any allegation of involvement. He is still protective about Ganilau; but his relations with Mara soured. Rabuka believes that after he had done the deed, he was expected to move aside, and let Mara and his men run the country as they had done for years. Tension between the two sometimes erupted into the public arena, both men accusing each other of petty grandstanding. Rabuka felt used, saying that he was expected to play the role of the Tall Guy'. When Mara publicly backed Rabuka's rival Josefa Kamikamica, an unassuming technocrat and Finance Minister in the post-coup interim administration, as his successor as Prime Minister, relations deteriorated further, reaching a nadir when Rabuka handily beat Adi Lady Lala Mara for the presidency of the Great Council of Chiefs' political party, the *Sogosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei*. Rabuka's growing confidence, his rapport with ordinary Fijians and a certain charismatic presence on the national scene, it is said, dismayed the older leader whose unchallenged stature as the great leader of his country was beginning to be eclipsed. Fiji did not have room for two unequally ranked men of destiny, each convinced of his indispensability. Rabuka's own cup of disillusion was full with the emergence of the Christian Democratic Alliance, in whose founding the members of the President's own family played a prominent part. Rabuka felt that Mara himself was silently behind the party. Feeling betrayed and undermined, used and discarded, Rabuka no longer felt obliged to protect others.

Who knew what, how much, when, acts of commission and omission, roles and responsibilities of individuals will be debated for a long time. Gaps remain, and pieces of the puzzle are still missing. Sharpham offers an intriguing piece of information that could stand greater scrutiny. He mentions that the game of golf between Mara and Rabuka was arranged by the wealthy and influential Fijian-Chinese businessman Jim Ah Koy, a staunch Rabuka supporter and financier and later a powerful member of his cabinet (p. 104). Why did Ah Koy arrange the game of golf? What did he know of what was about to happen? Who financed the protest marches preceding the coups? One member of the Bavadra government detained after the coup told me that he had heard soldiers taking

the name of Ah Koy's company (Kelton Marketing) in the army barracks in hushed tones. With time and more revelations, it may be possible to construct a fuller picture.

Assuming power was easy, but governing proved more difficult. Internal dissensions and individual ambitions destabilised his party and fractured the Fijian community to the extent that he could form government only in coalition with other (non) Fijian parties and with his arch-enemy Mahendra Chaudhry's tacit support. Lack of political experience combined with his military mind-set compounded his difficulties. Accountability and transparent governance suffered in a political culture founded on patronage. Corruption and mismanagement flourished. These problems were serious, but nothing compared to the problem of reviewing the racially weighted constitution that brought him to power. The opposition Indo-Fijian parties and the international community demanded an impartial review. Rabuka was caught in a bind. His innate sense of fair play and advice from all independent sources told him to sanction the review, but nationalists in his party cautioned against significant retraction. Hence, throughout the 1990s, contradictory statements flowed from his office, dismaying friends and foes alike. The only thing consistent about Rabuka was his inconsistency, people said.

Nonetheless, to his credit, Rabuka delivered on all his promises, a point that NFP leader Jai Ram Reddy made over and over during the 1999 election campaign. He worked closely with Reddy to produce fair and comprehensive terms of reference for the Constitution Review Commission. He agreed, against the advice of many in his own party, to an independent chair of the Commission. Rabuka allowed his party to make an uncompromising submission in defence of Fijian rights (Rabuka himself did not make the submission as Sharpham states on p. 215), and then allowed dust to be kicked up. But, and again against the wishes of his parliamentary colleagues, he chaired the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee to shepherd the report of the Commission through parliament. His performance as chair was masterly, Reddy has told me, fair, consistent and accommodating. When negotiations floundered, Rabuka and Reddy often met to break the deadlock. Reddy has no doubt that Rabuka's leadership was vital to the success of the review. And Rabuka has told me of his deep trust in, and respect for, Reddy. There are not many politicians like him, men of transparent integrity, Rabuka has said of the man he and his associates most feared at the time of the coup. The two men formed a fruitful partnership similar, perhaps, to the friendship and trust that Tomasi Vakatora and I developed as members of the Constitution Review Commission.

But when did Rabuka reach his road to Damascus? Rabuka says 'It was time of growth for me. I had to make a decision between political survival and national stability, and I opted for national achievement' [*Rabuka of Fiji*, 218]. But that leaves many questions unanswered. Sharpham mentions, as have others to me, the importance of a visit to Brussels in 1997. 'The European trip seemed to make a significant difference to Rabuka, as if the dynamic and major changes unfolding in Europe at this time galvanised his thinking about the direction Fiji might take' (p. 225). European leaders, including Jacques Chirac, hinted that they might buy more sugar from Fiji and provide more economic assistance if Rabuka agreed to amend the constitution. Rabuka listened and learned. At home, representatives of the main diplomatic missions were making similar promises privately, urging Rabuka to see himself as a man of history, amending past wrongs, learning from his mistakes, retrieving his reputation. He could, they said, be a different kind of colonel from his counterparts in Africa and Latin America. I have been told, but have no way of verifying, that this pressure and advice played an important role in facilitating dialogue among the principal leaders. There were other factors as well. The Fijian population was increasing to the point where they constituted an outright majority, and this diminished the long-held Fijian fear of Indo-Fijian dominance. Rabuka's improving relationship with Reddy played its part. And so did the momentum for compromise and reconciliation generated by the unanimous report of the Constitution Review Commission. Rabuka's transformation, then, was a product of many influences.

The Rabuka-Reddy partnership on the constitution review translated into an electoral coalition to contest the 1999 general election under a revised, non-discriminatory constitution. Rabuka and Reddy lost, for reasons that have been analysed elsewhere.⁷ From Rabuka's perspective, two things counted against him. One was the sorry record of his government in office, mired in corruption, speaking with discordant voices, embarking on electorally costly, and mis-timed unemployment-creating reforms in the public sector, all adroitly exploited by his opponents. Secondly, Fijians from a variety of backgrounds and political persuasions held Rabuka responsible for the success of the constitutional review exercise, which, they felt, had whittled down Fijian interests and compromised their aspiration for political control. The aims of the coups had been betrayed by their architect. Sharpham's account of the election brings out some of the

⁷ The election literature and commentary is growing. My own analysis is in Lal (1999).

deeper sadness Rabuka felt at being let down, not only by Indo-Fijians who refused to forgive him for the coups, but by his own people, whose divisions brought about his defeat. His party defeated, Rabuka resigned his seat in parliament to become the independent chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs, and the Commonwealth peace envoy to the Solomon Islands. Reddy, whose party did not win a single seat, left politics to become president of the Fiji Court of Appeal. Two of the major actors on the political stage were now in the audience.

What of the future? Rabuka disavows any interest in another political career, but would consider re-entering the political arena only if there was a groundswell of support. Elevation to the presidency is not impossible. For the present, though, he will use his base as Chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs to continue to speak out on national issues as an elder statesman. His task will not be easy. He has made powerful enemies among his own people for who he is and what he has achieved. Fijian society is fractured and drifting, the much-hoped-for political unity at the national level damaged by rivalry among Fijian leaders, provincial and regional tensions, and divergent agendas for change. Even among his former colleagues, some want to replace the present constitution with one similar to the 1990 constitution, cementing Fijian control of the political process. There are landowners who do not wish to renew their leases to Indo-Fijian tenants for political as well as economic reasons. The demand for Fijian political paramountcy will not go away. On the other hand, many people in Fiji look up to Rabuka for national, statesmanlike leadership, to urge caution and moderation among his people. When asked what he considered his most important contribution to the country in the last decade, he pointed to the bridging 'role I played between civil strife and civil society' (*Rabuka of Fiji*, 318). It is his fate to continue playing that role. Jai Ram Reddy agrees: 'I hope for the sake of Fiji that he remains what he was in that critical period of [constitutional] review, that he remains the Rabuka for all the people, for that is where the future is.'

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