

Introduction

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The Auditor General's report to the Parliament on the Fiji government accounts for 2003, released in September 2004, pointed to numerous cases of corruption and lack of accountability in the management of public funds. While the Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase expressed shock at these disclosures, few of his fellow citizens shared his surprise. The pattern of corruption, after all, is familiar, and so are the events that accompany the annual release of the Auditor-General's report: the Auditor-General and his staff are shown to have done an excellent job; the media publish detailed accounts of funds unaccounted for; newspaper editorials call for swift action against those responsible; Parliament's Public Accounts Committee promises to examine the report in due course; the government finds a few sacrificial lambs who are led to the slaughter; and little changes. The ritual of the Auditor-General's report is then over for another year, all concerned having played their traditional parts in the drama.

Governance issues are at the heart of an event such as this. In one sense 'good governance' is an incontestably good thing, rather like motherhood. Who could be against an approach to government and public administration that emphasises being efficient, accountable, transparent and responsive to the public? In other senses 'good governance' is more contentious.

As preached by aid donors and international institutions, good governance is the product of globalisation and a market-oriented economic policy, and, because it places responsibility for economic and administrative success so clearly in the hands of the governments of developing countries, it is --- in the view of some --- a Western excuse for global inequality. Then there is the cultural dimension: how much

does good governance depend upon Western assumptions about how people should rule each other and about individual interests and responsibilities, and how much do the cultures of Fiji need to adapt to modernity to make good governance a reality? Or is good governance only a question of fundamental honesty and morality?

Aware of these complexities, the contributors to this special issue of *Fijian Studies* have approached governance from a number of different perspectives.

Opening the discussion, Steven Ratuva points out that in ethnically diverse post-colonial societies a liberal democratic system can be seen as a "neutral" political arena where different ethnic groups interact and negotiate'. In the case of Fiji, he argues, liberal democracy, with its inherent assumption about the primacy of individual interests and choices, has been 're-adapted' and come 'to facilitate diverse communal representations'. Fiji has become what Ratuva calls 'an example of a "communal democracy"' and this has led to the state becoming a site of power contestation. The Fiji Parliament has been both the symbol and the physical site of power contestation even when 'proper' democratic channels have been usurped, as in 1987 and 2000. The coups of those years have temporarily undermined civil order, delayed economic development and brought into question the nation's international reputation, democracy, and good governance credentials.

Next, Anare Tuitoga focuses on the coup of 2000. He divides interpretations of the coup into three main types. The first, attributed to Brij Lal, recognises Fiji's problems as deriving from 'a political system based on race'. It is a system that 'encourages ethnic chauvinism, poisons multi-ethnic discourse, and hinders the search for solutions to Fiji's deep-seated social and economic problems...' The second interpretation, drawn from the work of Robbie Robinson and William Sutherland, emphasises 'the indigenous question'. This view notes the exploitation of ethnic Fijian disadvantage and the appeals to indigenous identity and chiefly rights as a means of ensuring a further chapter in 'the long story of chiefly dominance': a story that is now a part of class politics. The third interpretation, favoured by Jonathan Fraenkel among others, rests on a 'clash of dynasties' argument that sees the Speight coup 'as a rising of Kubuna against the Tovata confederacy'. Tuitoga notes that 'these three interpretations should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as different emphases'. He points out that 'all three contribute to understanding the 2000 coup'. Neverthe-

less, he clearly favours the third view, and supports it with a well-researched case study of Speight supporters from the Kubuna confederacy.

Ratuva, having identified the political form that democracy has taken in Fiji, presents grass-roots civic education as a way out of Fiji's current unsatisfactory political situation. He sees education as a means of transforming passive political actors (*homo civicus*) into active political agents (*homo politicus*), and has put his views into practice by leading a UNDP team that sought to determine the level of the 'political literacy' of Fiji's population. The team found that, by the people's own reckoning, their knowledge of political issues was 'inadequate'. This central point made by Ratuva is corroborated by Tuitoga, who recognises 'the powerful influence of traditional loyalties', which he sees people maintaining 'even in the face of their disillusion[ment] with the contribution of chiefs to their welfare'. He argues that while the 'poor education of Fijians was not one of the proximate causes of the 2000 coup... it was certainly an underlying, structural factor that helps to explain the rapid mobilisation of villagers in support of a populist politician...'

Our third contributor, Ashwin Raj, also notes the importance of increased attention to education, particularly among indigenous Fijians. Many development issues, Raj argues, 'remain unresolved', 'underperformance in the field of education continues to be a problem', and 'economic affirmative policies pursued by successive governments have done little to improve the living standards of many grass-roots indigenous Fijians'. Like Ratuva and Tuitoga, Raj identifies widely recognised problems, and reminds us that 'coups executed in the name of Fijian nationalism' damaged Fiji's economy and the country's standing in the international community. However, he does not share what is now an equally widely recognised view that democracy and good governance offer answers for Fiji's deep-seated economic, social and political problems.

Raj makes it very clear that he has no confidence in the neo-liberal interpretation of democracy and good governance. He points out that they are presented as central components of good governance, which is presented as 'a purely technical matter' rather than a matter of politics. A 'close reading of neo-liberalism in post colonial Fiji', he maintains, 'shows that "good" does not necessarily translate into "effective" governance'. He revisits the years after the 1987 coups, when

the Fijian government of the day embraced the economic adjustment policies that have now become such a familiar part of this period of globalisation. The removal of price subsidies, the privatisation of government assets, and export-oriented policies that included new foreign exchange regimes leading to devaluation of the currency, were, Raj recognises, all celebrated facets of 'good' governance. The question is whether they have amounted to 'effective' governance. Raj says they have not. Instead, the garment industry, a product of this period, has exploited women workers and tax free zones host 'sweatshops' where the exploitation and the disempowerment of workers cannot be seen as democratic. For Raj, government and economy in Fiji operate in the context of what he calls a 'narrative of the exploitation and disempowerment of workers' that is central to capitalist labour relations and neo-liberal policies, while the problems of the country are 'largely and quite conveniently ... read as a problem of "race" and poor governance'.

Using a post-modernist frame of reference, Raj draws on Foucault's prison imagery. The idea of governance that 'presupposes the condition of normality' is imposed on developing countries from outside, he says, and 'requires the constant creation of deviant subjects to manage and discipline...' This is not all. Echoing the 'development of underdevelopment' theses of the late 1960s and early 1970s, he points to the Fijian elite who preach good governance while claiming to speak on behalf of worker and grassroots citizens, the disempowered people he calls 'subalterns'.

Raj is among those who, our fourth contributor Graham Hassall argues, see good governance as 'foreign to the Pacific region', and as a tool used by donors, and, we might add, by other members of the global community, 'to discipline and punish stragglers in the conversion to the policies of neo-liberalism'.

Differing perspectives notwithstanding, all contributors to this issue would agree with Hassall's opening observation that 'tension exists in the Pacific between ideals of governance and realities on the ground', and that 'tensions exist between introduced concepts of law and governance [and we could add of 'democracy'] and Pacific traditions of authority, state and society...' Hassall emphasises that in Pacific Island countries, including Fiji, 'much of the energy of those in high elected political offices is focused on maintaining their hold over executive power...' He talks of the 'fragile formation of executive

power' and notes that politicians' need to maintain their hold on power means much of their attention goes to matters such as patron/client relations, leaving 'less energy available to focus on governance needs'. While politicians focus on power and the resources of the state, he says, 'the needs of the people in their care grow ever greater'.

Hassall sees democracy as an important part of the solution to the political shortcomings of Pacific Island nations. He admits that the Westminster model 'requires the formation of a "government" and an "opposition"'; it 'presumes the existence of political parties where none existed'; and it 'depends on a model of political debate that doesn't reflect Pacific traditions of dialogue or consultation'. Whether Ratuva's *homo politicus* would supply the missing component in this scenario remains to be seen. Nevertheless, Hassall clearly hopes that civil society will offer a form of democracy that will ensure that the economic, social and political rights of all residents of Pacific Island countries are observed. He notes that 'an active and confident civil society, aware of its rights, and upholding values of free speech and free association, can provide feedback on the performance of government, and constitutes a "space" for discussion of alternative policy options'. He also notes that civil society 'plays a crucial role in monitoring the activities of the state, reporting abuses, and offering critiques'. At the same time Hassall worries that 'the work of NGOs [civil/non-government organisations] can be undermined by an undercurrent of rivalry between prominent personalities, entanglement with political processes, and competition for scarce donor resources.'

Hassall notes the central role played by the media, 'one specific group that plays a significant role in relation to both civil society and the state', and the media is central to the argument of the last contributors, David Robie and Shailendra Singh. They bring the media and education together, arguing that educated and well-informed journalists provide the information civil society needs to monitor democracy and enhance good governance. They recognise that journalists in Pacific Island countries will lack authority if, as happened in Fiji, successive Prime Ministers deride their work as 'uncertain', lacking in verbal communication skills, inaccurate, given to blurring facts, and heavy with conjecture and opinion. Singh has previously argued that the real concern of government is 'media control rather than media standards' and we can add that significant media control by any government undermines the 'watchdog' role of civil society. This point is

underlined by Singh's observation that the media has exposed 'some massive financial scams'. Yet Robie and Singh caution against dismissing complaints against the media out of hand, for the very good reason that a lack of media standards strengthens the government's hand. In Fiji it strengthened the government's argument for media legislation.

Robie and Singh note that the debate surrounding legislation to control Fiji's media promoted pleas (made in Parliament) for 'an "urgent review" of salary and working conditions' of journalists and similar calls (made outside Parliament) for improved standards in journalism. When they examine tertiary education for journalists, they find that university-trained graduates remain poorly remunerated for their skills, training and qualifications. It seems a sorry state of affairs when, of the media graduates surveyed by Robie and Singh, more than 78 percent 'believed they should be paid an extra starting salary margin over untrained staff'. They obviously were not being paid this margin at the time of the survey.

All contributors to this issue point out that education is not receiving sufficient attention in Fiji. Ratuva hopes civic education will help. Tuitoga believes formal education must be more valued by indigenous Fijians who comfort themselves with their special status *vis a vis* the land. Raj recognises the 'underperformance' of indigenous Fijians in education. Hassall, at this point in total agreement with Ratuva, talks of circumstances that can lead to 'the transformation of comparatively docile subjects into interactive citizens'. As all our contributors recognise, education is a means of promoting these circumstances. However, Hassall cautions that, 'as educational levels rise [in Pacific Island countries] and expectations for material development rise also, resentment at lack of delivery of good governance may create an environment in which further political instability can be expected...' Finally, Robie and Singh show that, if civil society is to provide an avenue for democratic input, for scrutiny of public policy and for the accountable and transparent use of public funds, governments must be given no excuse to curb media freedom.

Civil society can perform its role only if sound and accurate information reaches the public.

We cannot and must not contribute to the ignorance that has cost Fiji so dearly in the past. Information must be available to all, or to use Raj's schema and terminology, the elite must not be allowed to

keep the trappings of modernisation, including democracy, for themselves while 'subalterns' remain ignorant, exploited and without a voice.

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