

1987 to 2007: The Complexities of Fiji's Four Coups

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Introduction

Fiji politics is often conceptualised as two distinct ethnic groups, one indigenous and the other migrant, warring within the bosom of a single state. However, the December 2006 non-racial coup raises questions about the 'ethnacist' arguments of the past. It shows that previously ethnic race analysis was used to mask indigenous power struggles. This paper provides an account of Fiji since the first coup in Fiji on 14 May 1987 and shows how race was used by the various Fiji governments and indigenous activists to justify the nationalist control of the state. Moreover, the paper highlights the contradictions and divisions within both the Indo-Fijian and the indigenous Fijian communities in Fiji, especially following the latest takeover.

Coup One

On 14 May 1987, Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka along with ten soldiers in gas masks hijacked and incarcerated the elected government of late Dr Timoci Bavadra. One of the reasons given by the coup leader was that he was protecting an elected government from the wrath of the indigenous nationalist *Taukei Movement*, which organised noisy demonstrations in April 1987. Kenneth Bain, a political observer, reported that 'at ten am [on 14 May] in Suva, the face of Fiji was damaged beyond recognition; and no plastic surgery would restore its shattered image' (1989:3). There were a number of players involved in the May 1987 coup including members of the Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), indigenous activists of the nationalist *Taukei Movement* and Fiji's powerful hereditary chiefs who refused to accept the political ascendancy of the Fiji Labour Party and the National Federation Party (FLP-NFP) coalition government under the leadership of an indigenous Fijian commoner Dr. Timoci Bavadra (Sharpham 2000: 96-98).

Brij Lal (1988, 1992) saw the defeat of the Alliance Party that ruled Fiji from 1970 to 1987 as the principal cause of the coup. He argued that the Alliance Party led by indigenous chiefs did not want to relinquish power to an indigenous Fijian commoner or to the trade union members of the Fiji Labour Party. Victor Lal (1988) analysed the possibility of foreign involvement in the Fiji coup and contextualised the events of May 1987 within the cold war political framework. Victor Lal argued that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had worked with the indigenous Fijian pro-western military and indigenous nationalists to undermine the newly elected government in 1987. Robert Robertson and Akosita Tamanisau (1988) and William Sutherland (1992) argued that the rise of the FLP-NFP coalition was an expression of multiethnic class aspiration which allegedly threatened the neo-traditional chiefly political hegemony whereas Michael Howard (1991) and Stephanie Lawson (1991) highlighted that the eastern chiefs – the eastern chiefly oligarchy - were not prepared to relinquish their traditional political authority to a commoner indigenous Fijian. For Andrew Scobell, 'the May 1987 coup in Fiji is best understood when analysed under the rubric of civil-military relations, especially how an army defines its political role' (1994: 198).

At a closer look, it becomes clear that the military is part of the chiefly dominance in politics since independence in 1970 (Halapua, 2003). It is also clear that pervasive influence of chiefly politics was effectively used by the FLP-NFP coalition to entice urban indigenous Fijians and General Electors in the lead up to the 1987 elections. Moreover, the coalition clearly emphasised class distinctions and capitalised on the developments on the industrial relations front where the Alliance Party had, by 1987, alienated a large segment of the working population of all races in Fiji through a series of economic reforms and corrupt conduct. According to indigenous political activist Jone Dakuvula, the coalition had during the election campaign criticised the lack of success, and the corruption of the Alliance Party in feathering its own clients' nests at the expense of the mass of workers of all races. Dakuvula emphasised that the newly elected government had no policy to takeover indigenous land as claimed by indigenous nationalists and further argued that constitutionally, the new government did not have the capacity for such action (Dakuvula, 1992: 70).

Indigenous historian Asesela Ravuvu provides an alternative indigenous nationalist viewpoint by arguing that the coalition victory in the 1987 elections rekindled indigenous fears of Indo-Fijian political domination and a possible threat to native land. 'Indigenous Fijians largely saw the elections as a clever stunt, performed with strings, mirrors and "de-

mocracy” and in the end Indo-Fijians had wrestled power away from indigenous Fijian chiefs’ (Ravuvu 1991: 87). Historian Deryck Scarr largely supports the analysis of Ravuvu and argues that the FLP was union-led, ideological and heavily university influenced; it looked as though it was more in touch with a small, socially isolated campus that was politically naïve, and that had an imported trade union concept of politics. Scarr further asserts that the coalition could have acquired native land through the Crown Acquisition of Lands Act under the guise of peace, order and good government (Scarr 1988: 14). However, Section 68 of the 1970 Constitution provided safeguards for indigenous institutions and indigenous land. Section 68 states that any bill for an act of parliament that alters any provision of a) the Fijian Affairs Act; b) the Fijian Development Fund; c) the Native Lands Act; d) the Native Land Trust Act ; e) the Rotuma Act; and f) the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act (ALTA) – that is a provision that affects indigenous Fijian land, custom, or customary rights - shall not be passed unless it is supported in the final voting by the votes of not less than six of the members of the Senate appointed in accordance with the advice of the Great Council of Chiefs.

The 1970 Constitution provided Fiji’s indigenous chiefs a permanent legislative veto on all entrenched legislations. Nevertheless, indigenous issues were taken out of constitutional context by the *Taukei* militants and used to misinform indigenous Fijians. Moreover, the *Taukeists* erected roadblocks, fire bombed the office of the Attorney General Jai Ram Reddy, organised noisy protests in Suva and petitioned the Governor General, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, to amend the 1970 Constitution so as to entrench chiefly rule in perpetuity. Senior members of the RFMF were also approached by the *Taukei* members through the Methodist Church. Lieutenant Colonel Rabuka was willing to take on the nationalist cause. When the military intervened in Fiji’s politics on behalf of the indigenous nationalists, it justified the takeover by emphasising that the coalition government had links with Libya and the Soviet Union.

Coup Two

Following the coup, the coup leader Sitiveni Rabuka established a military council, and Governor-General Ratu Penaia Ganilau commissioned a Constitution Review Committee. Led by a Fiji born European John Falvey, Commission was to look at the deficiencies of the 1970 Constitution, which was deemed by the nationalists to have failed indigenous Fijians after seventeen years of existence. The review of the constitution was stacked with individuals who supported the May 1987 coup.

The final report of the Committee was inconclusive. Meanwhile, Indo-Fijian sugar cane farmers threatened to boycott cane harvest as the Governor-General attempted to bring the Alliance Party and the coalition together in a series of meetings after he had dissolved parliament, granted amnesty to Rabuka and promoted Rabuka to the position of the commander of the RFMF. The actions of Ratu Penaia Ganilau were seen as suspicious by the coalition and the late Dr. Bavadra challenged Ratu Penaia’s decision in court. Immediately, the *Taukei Movement* went on the offensive criticising the Coalition of infringing on indigenous tradition by taking a high chief to court. A similar argument was used in the 1982 elections against then leader of opposition Jai Ram Reddy who was accused of maligning Lauan high chief Ratu Mara by emphasising that the chiefs of Fiji had ‘clubbed and ate their way to power’. While discussions between the Alliance and the coalition resulted in a framework for a government of national unity, the army commander Sitiveni Rabuka saw the move as against the ‘objective’ of the May coup. On 25 September 1987, he deposed the Governor-General in a second coup, imposed martial law and banned all commercial activities on Sundays. By the end of 1987, Rabuka established an interim government with Ratu Mara as the interim Prime Minister and Ratu Penaia as the President. Despite handing over authority to a ‘civilian’ government, Rabuka continued as the Minister for Home Affairs. In 1989, the constitutional review process restarted with the appointment of a senior military officer and former Military Commander, Paul Manueli, to chair the Constitution Review Committee. The Commission documented the grievances of the *Taukei Movement*, the chiefs and the army and largely ignored the submissions from the FLP and the NFP coalition. In 1990, a new racially weighted constitution was promulgated. Unlike the 1970 constitution, this constitution ensured that indigenous Fijians, and in particular chiefs, had a significant control and influence on political power, and the military continued to play a political role in the affairs of the nation.

In 1990, the FLP and the NFP fractured following the death of Dr. Bavadra. Soon after Sitiveni Rabuka was elected leader of the chief sponsored *Soqosoqo ni Vakevulewa ni Taukei Party* (SVT), which won the 1992 general election. The SVT won 30 seats with 66.6% of all Fijian votes (Premdas, 1993:1006). Tensions erupted between two aspiring candidates within the SVT, Sitiveni Rabuka and Josevata Kamikamica, for the position of the Prime Minister soon after the 1992 elections. Rabuka survived the leadership challenge, largely through the support of the Fiji Labour Party. Discontent over the SVT leadership issue, however, was not fully settled. The Rabuka government also got embroiled in a contro-

versy surrounding a million dollar settlement for Suva businessman Tony Stephens, who was allegedly wrongfully detained by the military in 1988. The new Rabuka administration through its Attorney General Apaitia Seru offered an out of court settlement to avoid the embarrassment of defeat in a major civil suit involving the army and hoped with such a settlement to thwart legal actions from others who may have had their freedom restricted under the security decrees imposed after the May 1987 coups. After a tumultuous six months Prime Minister Rabuka on 4 December 1992 proposed a Government of National Unity (GNU) (*The Fiji Times*, 1 January 1993) but his calls for 'the promotion of national reconciliation, stability and unity' were met with widespread criticism from the Indo-Fijian opposition parties and from within the SVT. Senior FLP member Tupeni Baba remarked that while on one hand Rabuka was promoting the GNU, on the other he contradicted himself when he stated that 'the NFP leader Jai Ram Reddy and his FLP counterpart Mahendra Chaudhry would gain very little from being part of such a government because it was based on the 1990 Constitution' (*The Fiji Times*, 18 January 1993). Not only Baba but SVT backbencher Josevata Kamikamica expressed serious reservations about the GNU, and Namosi MP Ratu Ifereimi Buaserau went further and called on Rabuka to step down as Prime Minister (*The Daily Post*, 15 March 1993). The final showdown between Rabuka and dissidents within the SVT erupted over the 1994 budget. Opponents within the SVT criticised the government for raising duties on basic consumer items, including powdered milk, canned fish and rice. On 29 November 1993, the 1994 budget was defeated (*The Review*, December/January 1994: 10). Seven SVT MPs voted against the budget including Ilai Kuli, Ratu Emosi Vuakatagane, Ratu Serupepeli Nivalu, Ratu Viliame Dreunimisimisi, Viliame Saulekaleka, Viliame Gonelevu and Josevata Kamikamica. On 15 January 1994, a new indigenous Fijian political party, the Fijian Association Party, was formed in Suva (*The Fiji Times*, 17 January 1994).

In December 1993, the Great Council of Chiefs met to deliberate on indigenous Fijian disunity. It was the same chiefs that had blessed Rabuka's May 1987 coups and had sponsored the SVT, which was supposed to unite indigenous Fijians against the Indo-Fijians. Rabuka was asked to explain the defeat of the 1994 budget. He responded by arguing that if indigenous Fijians were to protect and safeguard their collective future as a community the best guarantee was to ensure that they keep effective control of the national government (*The Daily Post*, 17 December 1993). In fact, Rabuka was sending contradictory messages to both the indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian communities. As a result, he was alien-

ating his most important support base - the indigenous nationalist hard-liners, who expressed concern about the proposed GNU.

Fiji went to the polls again, in April 1994. This was due to indigenous Fijian disunity. The SVT was returned to office. Tensions also increased during and after the elections within the Indo-Fijian camp as the FLP lost support and won only seven seats compared to thirteen in 1992 whereas the NFP increased its total share of communal seats from fourteen to twenty. Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka quickly developed a working relationship with the NFP and finalised the composition of the Constitution Review Commission (CRC) (House of Representatives, Daily Hansard, 31 March, 1994:7). On 15 March 1995, the CRC was appointed, with Sir Paul Reeves, Brij Lal and Tomasi Vakatora as members. After more than a year of hearings, the CRC Report was tabled in the Fiji Parliament on 10 September 1996. A Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Constitution then started negotiations, reaching a consensus by April 1997. It was agreed by all parties that there would be forty six communal roll constituencies and twenty five common roll ones. Opposition leader Jai Ram Reddy played a crucial role in breaking the impasse by sacrificing one Indo-Fijian seat to the General Voters. Under the new deal, the Prime Minister of Fiji could be from any ethnic group and the Senate would remain an appointed entity, contrary to the recommendations of the CRC. The Constitutional Amendment Act of 1997 allowed for a multi-racial cabinet, but retained some of the discriminatory provisions of the 1990 Constitution.

The new constitution deal was hailed by both the regional and the international community as a landmark achievement. Unfortunately not everyone in Fiji was happy with the constitutional outcome. The FLP leader, Mahendra Chaudhry, called the deal a 'sell-out' and similar sentiments were expressed by indigenous Fijian nationalists. Chaudhry, in fact, launched one of the major campaigns against the constitution consensus, labelling it 'a recipe for continued ethnic compartmentalisation'. Following the constitutional consensus, the focus shifted to India after Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Reddy informed the Government of India about the new constitutional deal and requested support in moving the country forward. However, Chaudhry urged India to be cautious and take into consideration the unresolved issue of expiring leases under ALTA. Furthermore, Chaudhry sharply criticised the constitutional consensus and cautioned the Commonwealth Heads of Government against Fiji's re-entry into the Commonwealth. Indigenous Fijians largely saw Chaudhry's actions as anti-indigenous Fijian, which resulted in further erosion of the already dismal indigenous Fijian support for the FLP.

Dissent within the SVT increased after the promulgation of the new constitution as indigenous SVT members further split and formed the *Veitokani ni Lewenivanua Vakarisito* (VLV) Party in 1998. In the western part of Fiji, veteran politician Apisai Tora spearheaded the establishment of a regional political party, the Party of National Unity (PANU). The FLP successfully negotiated an agreement with the FAP and the PANU for a Coalition to contest the next general election, scheduled for May 1999. The VLV candidates in the lead up to the 1999 elections continually attacked the SVT, charging that the party had lied and cheated its way to power. In a long list of complaints against the SVT, the VLV argued that the government was largely responsible for the National Bank of Fiji scandal in 1995, high unemployment, Tony Stephens' deed of settlement fiasco, escalating crime, and impoverishment of indigenous Fijians. In response, the SVT targeted the leader of the VLV, Poseci Bune, accusing him of misuse of office during his tenure as Fiji's representative to the United Nations. However, the VLV remained undeterred and one of its candidates, Napote Vere, claimed that there was a mafia group within the SVT with plans to ensure that the party held power at all cost. According to Alumita Durutalo (2000: 90), 'the 1999 elections saw the re-emergence of pre-colonial *vanua* under the guise of alternative Fijian parties, including the FAP, the VLV and the Party of National Unity (PANU). The FLP successfully consolidated the Indo-Fijian votes and fragmented the indigenous Fijian ones through pre-election preference deals with its coalition partners; as a result it won thirty six seats (Ramesh 2007: 17). One academic argued that the result of the 1999 general election was achieved by 'artificially manipulating the electoral systems to discriminate against extremist parties' (Fraenkel, 2000: 104). Another argued that the FLP led coalition was a more class based political party, that had a momentum similar to the one in 1987 (Prasad, 1999:57). The FLP, the FAP and the PANU combination concentrated its campaign upon economic and social issues, including highlighting the causes and consequences of low rates of economic growth, declining investment rates and high unemployment rates.

The outcome was a landslide victory for the Coalition. The FLP won an outright majority; with its partners, it demolished both, the NFP and the SVT. The FLP leader was sworn in as the new Prime Minister.

Coup Three

The FLP led coalition did not hold as the PANU founder, Apisai Tora, resigned from the party and the FAP split into two factions, one led

by Adi Kuini Speed and the other by Tailevu chief Ratu Tu'akitau Cokanauto. According to a survey in 1999, 'indigenous Fijians felt threatened by the (real or perceived) influence of Indo-Fijians, represented by prime-minister Mahendra Chaudhry' (de Vries, 2002:321). In April 2000, the indigenous nationalist *Taukei Movement* was reinvented.

At the height of a nationalist protest march in Suva, a small group of heavily armed men invaded parliament and incapacitated the government. Unlike the 1987 coup, in 2000, government ministers were held captive for fifty six days. But like the 1987 coup, this one was also disguised as a nationalist push for indigenous political control. However, this propaganda ended up exacerbating divisions among the indigenous Fijians as chiefs from Fiji's three confederacies - *Tovata*, *Kubuna* and *Burebasaga* - jostled for power and influence through the Great Council of Chiefs. According to Brij Lal, the 2000 coup had the effect of fostering Fijian political fragmentation on an unprecedented scale. 'Within the indigenous Fijian society, for instance, old assumptions about the traditional structure of power have been questioned in novel and potentially significant ways' (Lal, 2000: 281-82). As in 1987, the military intervened, abrogated the 1997 constitution and installed a nationalist interim government led by Laisenia Qarase. Qarase went on to form the *Soqosoqo ni Duvata ni Lewenivanua* Party (SDL) in 2001 after the Fiji Court of Appeal declared that the military-appointed Interim Government failed to establish that it was the legal government. It ruled that the Constitution Amendment Act 1997 (Fiji Islands) remained the supreme law of the country and had not been lawfully abrogated by the military commander, Commodore Frank Bainimarama (Head 2001: 1). Unlike the 1987 coup, the 2000 coup saw large scale racial attacks against Indo-Fijians by supporters of George Speight. According to Suzanna Trnka, the 2000 coup opened the door for not only political and economic crises, but also widespread violence. Outbreaks of civilian violence - much of it focused against Indo-Fijians or against commercial properties occurred across the island of Viti Levu, on Vanua Levu and on smaller neighbouring islands such as Levuka and Turtle Island. Anti-Indian violence was particularly intense in Naitasiri, the home province of George Speight, where residents reported physical brutality against Indian families and the rape of Indian women. Numerous Indian families were driven out of villages and off their farmland in the interior, many of them settling in Fiji's first "refugee camp" in Lautoka. In towns and villages across the nation, Indo-Fijians felt afraid to leave their homes and curtailed social and religious activities as well as their children's schooling (2007: 5).

Following a High Court and a Court of Appeal decision rehabilitating the constitution, Fiji again went to the polls, this time in August 2001. George Speight cast a long shadow over the election campaign. 'Fijian political parties competed with each other to court his supporters, promising to fulfil his agenda of enshrining Fijian political control in perpetuity' (Lal, 2002: 87). The election gave victory to a 'Fijian ethno-nationalist party, which was dedicated to maintaining indigenous control over government and entrenching Fijian paramountcy' (Stockwell, 2005: 388).

However, by 2003, differences between the army commander Frank Bainimarama and the government of Laisenia Qarase became public after it was alleged by the army that the government wanted to replace the Commander with an appointee from overseas. Worse, the government intervened on behalf of the chiefs convicted for their role in the 2000 coup. Former Vice President Ratu Jope Seniloli, former Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu and the SDL appointed Senator Ratu Josefa Dimuri, were convicted of coup related offences but released on compulsory supervision orders following the intervention of the SDL government (Ramesh 2006). John Connell argues:

The continued ramifications of the 2000 coup are evident in court cases, fear of a further coup, continued discussions over the fate of coup leader George Speight, and uncertainty over the role of Indo-Fijians in the evolving political system. This has been complicated by concern over corruption in the banking system, judiciary, government and police force. Several such problems are similarly bound up with issues of ethnicity (2007: 86-87).

The Qarase government within six years after the May 2000 coup implemented racially discriminatory legislations and refused to work with the opposition in finding a solution to the expiring sugar leases under the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act (ALTA), which could only be amended by a two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Robertson and Sutherland emphasised that nepotism, cronyism and colonial style command structures in Fiji disregard transparency, dialogue and accountability. They propose an outcomes based policy framework on indigenous development with specific performance indicators, timeframes and audit requirements (Robertson & Sutherland 2001: 124). However, the Qarase government was not transparent and worse it had squandered an estimated twenty million dollars to provide farm equipment in areas that had support for the May 2000 takeover. Moreover, the SDL established a commercial arm of the party and provided government contracts to its political contributors. Such corrupt practices prompted

heated debates in parliament as the SDL routinely diverted opposition attacks by emphasising race. Ratuva noted that continued interethnic suspicion helps to widen the ethnic gap while the political situation is worsened by continuing power struggle over leadership. Moreover, the FLP's insistence on demanding multiparty government created an 'atmosphere of uncertainty' (Ratuva 2002: 22).

Coup Four

Durutalo noted that 'Fiji's continuing political tensions, strongly expressed in 2005, are multilayered. Beneath the much explained interethnic conflict, which emerged as part of Fiji's colonial legacy, are other struggles that have evolved from time immemorial and intensified through modern competitions for power' (Durutalo, 2006: 396). As noted earlier, the chiefs were divided over the takeover in 2000. Also noted is that following the election of the SDL led government in 2001, the military became increasingly hostile towards government policies.

In 2005, the SDL government proposed three legislations: Racial Tolerance and Unity Bill (RTU), the Qoliqoli Bill and the Land Claims Tribunal Bills. The RTU hoped to promote reconciliation and tolerance, and provide amnesty to the 2000 coup conspirators, the Qoliqoli legislation sought to return foreshore and marine resources to indigenous Fijians and the Land Claims Tribunal expected to hear application by aggrieved indigenous landowners whose land was alienated through deceit. Before the 2006 elections, the SDL absorbed its coalition partner, the Conservative Alliance Matanitu Vanua (CAMV), much to the disappointment of the army, which campaigned in the indigenous Fijian villagers against the SDL party before the 2006 elections.

Following a racially divisive election in May 2006, a new SDL led multiparty government was formed. The government was considering reintroducing legislations which were seen by the military as a threat to national security. On 13 November 2006, the military ordered the government to withdraw the bills. After a series of public exchanges and an unsuccessful attempt by the SDL government to have the commander of the RFMF removed, the New Zealand government offered to mediate talks between the two disputing parties. On 29 November the SDL allegedly agreed in Wellington to: reaffirm that the events of 2000 were illegal, review the contentious bills, seek direction from the Director of Public Prosecutions on investigations against the commander and senior army officers, discuss the possible non renewal of Police commissioner's contract, not seek military and police intervention under the Biketawa decla-

ration of 2000, review the role of the Police Tactical Response Unit, review the commercial arm and role of the Native Land Trust Board and direct the Ministry of Home Affairs to respond to the military's concerns about force structure, allowances and promotions (Meeting between Prime Minister Qarase and Commodore Bainimarama, 29 Nov. 2007). The army commander was not happy with the agreement and ordered Prime Minister Qarase to 'clean up' his government immediately or risk a military takeover. Tensions between the military and the government reached breaking point on 1 December when the army commander accused Qarase of lying, clarifying that no agreement was reached in Wellington (*The Fiji Sun*, 2 Dec. 2006).

On 5 December the military tightened its grip on Suva and confiscated government vehicles allocated to members of the cabinet. This paralysed the government as the cabinet members were immobilised. In the evening, the commander of the RFMF assumed executive authority and effectively incapacitated the Qarase government (*Fijilive*, 5 December 2006). Soon after, a number of SDL appointed individuals to various statutory boards were dismissed as the commander set in motion his 'clean up' campaign. An anti-corruption unit was established to investigate fraudulent practices at the Native Land Trust Board and the Fiji National Provident Fund. An interim government was sworn in after Bainimarama transferred executive power back to the President of Fiji, Ratu Josefa Iloilo. By January 2007, the Fiji Human Rights Commission received some fifteen reports of soldiers humiliating or beating people who made what the military termed 'inciteful comments' (*Time*, 25 Jan. 2007). Besides reports of beatings, two indigenous Fijians died allegedly after being physically abused by soldiers while in detention.

Unlike the previous three coups, the 2006 coup was enthusiastically embraced by a significant number of Indo-Fijians who disliked the ethnically exclusive policies of the SDL. Since the SDL was voted into office by 80 per cent of indigenous Fijians, many in the indigenous community felt robbed of their 'democratic' choice and started passive resistance in the form of letters to the editor and anti army web blogs. The European Union (EU) together with Australia, New Zealand, US and Britain applied smart sanctions. The most important perhaps is the EU's multimillion dollar package for the restructure of the sugar industry, which was decimated by the events of 2000. The EU along with the South Pacific Forum (SPF) wants Fiji to hold democratic elections within two years. However, the interim Attorney General, Aiyaz Khaiyum has disclosed that Fiji will hold a national census in 2007 and use the information to redraw electoral boundaries. There are also indications that the interim gov-

ernment plans to review the constitution and possibly remove communal seats. Such ideas have been strongly condemned by the human rights lobby Citizens' Constitutional Forum and members of the deposed SDL government, which is taking legal action against the military takeover.

The interim government is coming under increasing scrutiny for its actions in suspending the Chief Justice Daniel Fatiaki and appointing Justice Anthony Gates as a replacement. The Forum Eminent Persons' Group, established by the Forum Foreign Ministers in December 2006, was advised during its mission to Fiji in January 2007 that the 'Fiji Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court may confront an operational crisis by mid year as offshore judges may not seek reappointment or refuse to sit in protest against the events of 5 December' (Forum Eminent Persons' Group Report, Fiji, 2007: 12). It seems that the commander of the RFMF will ultimately face the courts. The latter may end up upholding the 1997 Constitution and rejecting the 'doctrine of necessity' argument. Under that scenario, the commander will have to repeat the events of 1987 when Rabuka executed the second coup and deposed the Governor-General and the judiciary that was appointed under the 1970 Constitution.

Conclusion

In twenty years, Fiji has had four coups. The coups of 1987 were supported by a majority of indigenous Fijians because the *Taukei Movement* successfully instilled fear in the community of a possible coalition attack on indigenous land. Similar arguments were used in May 2000 but the George Speight group was also out to oust Ratu Mara, thereby causing divisions among indigenous Fijians. Once the 2000 takeover became a stalemate, Speight supporters turned the takeover into a race pogrom by attacking Indo-Fijians in rural areas. The military intervened and established an indigenous Fijian dominated government only to dispute its policies after the 2001 general election. Unlike the 1987 and the 2000 coups, the 2006 takeover by commander Frank Bainimarama was against corruption. As such a large proportion of Indo-Fijians felt obliged to support the coup. Indigenous Fijians, on the other hand, were confused because previously large sections of the community supported Rabuka and Speight, and felt cheated of their democratic choice. In 1987 and 2000, for a number of leaders of the indigenous community, democracy was a 'foreign flower' and the democratic system of government was simply incompatible with the indigenous tradition. In 2006, some indigenous Fijians including the Great Council of Chiefs argued in favour of the constitutional government and the rule of law. Similar contradictions also befell

the Indo-Fijian community which previously supported the constitutional government and the rule of law but saw the non racial coup of Bainimarama as a saving grace from the years of inter communal animosity and the racially divisive policies of the SDL. The complexities surrounding this contradiction demonstrate the deep seated communal undercurrents of Fiji politics. It also highlights that race still remains a defining political force, despite efforts by the December 2006 coup leaders to steer the country towards more inter communal discourse. The question is: will the forces of moderation unleashed by the latest coup be able to restructure race relations in Fiji and more importantly provide effective institutional mechanism for cross cultural discourse?

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