

*The Fiji Times and the Good Citizen:  
Constructing Modernity and  
Nationhood in Fiji*

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The task of constructing nations and nationalism has been difficult in many Pacific Island states for a number of reasons: because they came to independence without any struggle against colonialism, or because they are composed of many distinct ethnic and cultural groups, and because of limited and uneven economic development. This has been particularly the case in Melanesia, including Fiji, where secessionist sentiments have not been unusual and national identity is weak (Connell 1993). This paper briefly examines the nature of nationhood in Fiji and, more specifically, examines the manner in which the main national daily newspaper, the *Fiji Times*, has constructed emerging notions of what citizenship and nationhood might entail. It examines how, as in “established nations,” a sense of what Michael Billig has dubbed “banal nationalism” is created through repetitive reference to the seemingly familiar experiences of successful citizens (Billig 1995).

Fiji has a population of about 800,000. Rather more than half of those are indigenous Fijians, and somewhat less than half are Indo-Fijians—the descendents of migrant laborers brought to the then British colony between 1879 and 1916 to work in the sugarcane industry. Minority ethnic groups within Fiji include Rotumans, of whom there are about 9,000—Polynesians from the rather remote island of Rotuma, incorporated within Fiji in a moment of nineteenth-century imperial cartography. Smaller minorities include Chinese, Europeans, part-Europeans, Banabans, and others. Fiji experiences greater ethnic diversity than most Pacific Island states and, like New Caledonia, is unusual in that the historic indigenous population represents a relatively small proportion of the total population.

Fiji achieved independence in 1970, early in Pacific terms, as the United Kingdom began withdrawing from the region. Subsequent history has been marked by tensions between the two dominant ethnic groups—Indo-Fijians and Fijians. The ascendancy of an Indo-Fijian dominated government led to two coups in 1987 and a further “coup” nearly succeeded in 2000. Much has been written on the coups from diverse perspectives, and though several writers have interpreted them in terms of economic problems and class issues, most have concluded, or at least conceded, that ethnic differences have had some—and perhaps the most critical—role to play.<sup>1</sup>

Until recently the economy was based on the trilogy of tourism, sugar, and garment manufacturing, each influenced by local stability and external conditions. There is considerable dependence on exports, whose success is threatened by movements toward free trade, while land issues and global prices are challenging the viability of the sugar industry. Cane workers (primarily Indo-Fijians) have moved away from the sugar industry as many land leases have not been renewed, contributing to a growing urban settler population. Just over half the population are now urban residents. This internal migration has been paralleled by international migration, mainly of Indo-Fijians with skills, especially from the health and education sectors. International migration has recently become so substantial that remittances have become second only to tourism as a source of national income (Connell in press). These macroeconomic circumstances have posed problems in urban areas, including housing and service delivery, as the urban population has grown.

Contemporary Fiji therefore experiences economic challenges, notably in both the textile and sugar industries (hence the need to develop substitutes that would diversify the rural economy), alongside the difficulty of developing manufacturing industry. Unemployment is high. Economic difficulties have contributed to social problems, such as rising suicide, domestic violence, and prostitution. Drugs, especially marijuana, grown in Fiji, have become more common. Increased crime and violence, and the growth of settlements, numbers of “street kids,” and the informal sector have led to some repression by national and urban governments (Lal 2002, 2003; Mausio 2003; Connell 2003). The continued ramifications of the 2000 coup are evident in court cases, fears 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. Newspapers are replete with related stories, and in recent years a series of car crashes and house fires have added a further somber note to most issues. As in most other national newspapers, casual reading of Fiji's press suggests that "all news is bad news."

Fiji thus faces considerable tasks in creating an economic structure, both sustainable and supportive of the bulk of the population, and in developing institutional structures that enable all groups to play an effective part within the nation. Indeed the positive perspective that marked the first years of independence has disintegrated under the weight of economic and political problems. The news media plays an important role in the discursive construction of such images and identities, yet there have been remarkably few attempts to examine the role of the media in post-colonial Pacific nations, with reference to nationhood (see also Chanter 2002). Nonetheless, while the extent to which readers identify with the sentiments constructed through the media is always questionable, its power largely rests in its popularity and daily presence; hence its role in nation building is potentially considerable.

### THE FIJI TIMES AND THE PEOPLE

Fiji has three daily English-language newspapers, alongside two weeklies in Fijian and one in Hindi. The *Sun*, the *Daily Post*, and the *Fiji Times* are in English; the *Daily Post* is partly owned by the government, and the *Fiji Times* is owned by News Limited. The *Fiji Times* has the largest circulation and is usually regarded as the most authoritative. In the early 1990s it had an audited circulation of 31,000 (Layton 1992), and that has now risen to over 40,000.

At the start of 2003 the *Fiji Times* began a series of feature articles titled "People": initially irregular, by late in the year the articles were included on a daily basis, as they have proved highly popular. Most had a fairly standard form—up to a thousand words about a particular individual (or very rarely a couple or group), accompanied by a photograph, and occupying a central, standard place in the newspaper (on page 8), close to the editorials and letters page. The journalists who wrote these stories were usually young and female but have been of at least three different ethnicities over the duration of the column. According to the editor, Samisoni Kakaivalu, the idea for "People" came to him after a round of golf,

through the belief that the newspaper needed to achieve a more “positive balance” and that this would be achieved by focusing on “special people” who had “made it” (pers comm, 9 Feb 2004). This would contrast with news items about crime, economic woes, and political struggles. Kakaivalu also anticipated that the newspaper would thus achieve greater local content.<sup>2</sup>

During the course of 2003 there was considerable positive response to the features. Many readers contacted the *Times* with information on people who had “made it” and should be included. The *Fiji Times* placed its own notices in the paper:

Do you have a story to tell about your neighbour, friend or family member? A neighbour, friend or family member anyone would kill for? Someone that you would be proud to boast about when you're with your friends or family. Someone that has an interesting story to tell. If you do we'd like to hear about them. Write or email. (21 Dec 2003)

Through the process of focusing on ordinary people who had “made it” the national newspaper, aided by those people who phoned, wrote, or e-mailed in with suggestions, has largely inadvertently played a significant role in defining and perhaps determining what a successful nation should be.

These components of a successful citizen and nation are analyzed below through examining key themes in a sample of more than sixty “People” features from late 2003 and early 2004. Several extracts are given in some detail, because it is as much the language of these accounts, as the actual topics, that contributes to the construction of particular themes.<sup>3</sup>

### SUCCESS AS A MORAL FABLE

Success, in the *Fiji Times*' perspective, is possible in diverse ways, including the arenas of education, sport, business, and the arts, but not through institutional religion and politics. It usually comes from some degree of successful struggle against adversity and by overcoming odds. In this way a “moral fable” is told, replete with homilies, clichés, and predictable metaphors, through which the “good citizen” and a moral economy emerge. Over time, “People” stories have balanced ethnicity and gender, emphasizing that all may become good citizens. Because of perceived notions of success (alongside accessibility and public response to the newspaper), most of those featured are from urban areas or relatively accessi-

ble rural areas. The following accounts have been grouped somewhat arbitrarily, because there are overlapping and interlocking themes within the dominant discourses.

### THE ENTREPRENEUR AS HERO

Underlying almost all “People” stories are notions of economic success and participation in the modern market economy, whether by simply selling vegetables or handicrafts or by establishing successful businesses. Other than in stories about education and sport, success is measured at least partly in economic terms. Since Fiji has many successful entrepreneurs, those who are featured tend to be ones who have overcome challenges, such as limited education, illness, blindness, and amputations, or who have been particularly innovative. (Because I also examine economic themes later in this dialogue, this section is shorter than the “People” section’s focus on business would otherwise merit.)

Business operations are alien to indigenous Fijian community traditions and values, so some differentiation from the past is necessary. For the proprietor of several ventures in the Rewa area, “A golden rule that Peni feels has contributed to the success of the business is the no-credit rule, which applies to family and friends” (9 Feb 2004). The Fijian practice of *kerekere* (reciprocal exchange) has no role in modern business. None of the stories on business, or broader commercial development, discussed the material rewards of success. Emphasis was on the process, usually through individual effort, and not on the outcome.

Occasionally success may be acquired overseas. Titalia Tamanalevu established a business in the United States, initially dealing in second-hand clothes sent to Fiji for retail. As that business became successful, she expanded into restaurant ownership, a movie entertainment business, and a graphics company. Significantly, “Even though she’s made a life out in the US, she never fails to come home for Christmas and The New Year” (21 Dec 2003), justifying her presence in the column.

### BEYOND ETHNICITY AND GENDER

Success can be achieved away from one’s ethnic roots: “Thomas depicts a person who sees Koro as his home and even calls himself a Koro islander despite his Indian origin. He and his small family are the only Indian people on the island of Koro” (1 March 2004). Similarly, a “People” column

titled “Ashok Drives Goodwill through the Mountains” featured an Indian bus driver who worked six days a week driving through the predominantly indigenous Fijian Naitasiri area. “He is so popular that villagers call him Momo (Uncle) Ashok. He has been doing this run for 25 years. To more than 20 villages along the 70-kilometre route the name Ashok is associated with modernisation, transportation and a sense of relief. It is not unusual to see villagers run out with a bowl or jug of grog [kava] to cool Ashok’s parched throat almost every stop. In some of the most remote parts of Fiji ‘it is this need for development that has driven me to serve these villagers all these years. It is the least I can do’ the humble bus driver says” (5 Feb 2004). In such cases the ethnic geography of Fiji has been successfully transgressed.

In a more general sense, mobility (including social mobility) is part of modernity. A fifty-year-old Fijian woman, Mere Kasaqa, “has felt more at home on the Mamanuca islands after spending 32 years as an employee for one of the country’s largest resorts.” Mere Kasaqa also demonstrates other modern virtues, as “she believes the very concept of a woman being successful at supporting herself in the 21st century is something that has always driven her to excel in her field.” Moreover, “My sister and I are some of the oldest workers on the island and still enjoy working here very much” (4 Feb 2004).

Transgressing ethnic or gender boundaries may take other forms. Joseph Sadal, selected for the Fiji Under 21 Rugby World Cup squad, “is the only Indian boy in the Fijian dominated team and the first too” in a sport almost exclusively ethnic Fijian. Further, “although he looks more Indian Sadal has got Chinese, Samoan and Fijian blood too. Sadal’s inclusion in the team will inspire other non-Fijian rugby players to try and wear the white jersey” (6 Feb 2004). At its simplest, for one senior public servant, “he did not consider race an issue where a job was concerned. He said he was a civil servant and it was his duty to serve the public and the nation with the best of his abilities and this is what he intended to do regardless of race, colour or creed” (21 Jan 2004). Terms like “race” and even “blood” blithely enter such texts.

More subtly, Mary Ah Kee, born in Suva, is an electrician of Chinese and Fijian ethnicity. “Though she is the only female working with close to a dozen males in the workplace, she enjoys life at the workshop. She is there usually from 7.30 AM to about 8 PM, and ‘plans to continue in the electrical profession, hoping to pursue a degree in the near future’” (12 Dec 2003). Renuka Devi is one of very few female taxi drivers, but

“is not scared of meeting all sorts of people at night.” She is “on the road from 7 AM Monday to Saturday and an hour earlier on Sunday [and] normally calls it a day at 11.30 PM. Her future plan is to run her own taxi business” (10 Dec 2003). For one Vedic preacher, “in today’s modern world Indian women are making a name for themselves in many male-dominated workplaces and also getting involved in unusual jobs” (6 March 2004). One of the very few “People” columns not to focus on an individual discussed the benefits of yoga and was accompanied by a photograph of several individuals of both sexes and at least three different ethnic groups (24 April 2003). While gender and ethnicity are not often emphasized, it is evident from the names and photographs of individuals that they represent a range of ethnic groups and are relatively evenly divided by sex. Constraints of ethnicity, geography, and gender are to be overcome in a range of ways.

#### OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

Being handicapped or aged is not necessarily disadvantageous but naturally requires triumph over assumed inherent adversity. “Peni has come a long way since he lost both legs and has become a successful businessman. The fact that he is disabled has not stopped him becoming a respectable businessman in the Rewa delta. Peni lives life like any normal person despite losing both legs in a car accident 14 years ago. Peni has proved that despite disability anyone can overcome it and live life normally” (9 Feb 2004).

Similarly: “If you think farming is a difficult task, then how about trying to farm with the aid of crutches? This is the exact situation that 66-year-old Sevanaia Namino has to put up with. ‘I only have one wish and that is to be young again so that the productivity in the farm can be twice as much.’ Mr Namino added that handicaps in life should never be an excuse for laziness. ‘I have never been bothered about the condition that I live with and I enjoy walking to my plantation and seeing my produce grow.’ Mr Namino’s advice to all young people is to make use of the barren land and take farming as a profession and you will never regret that decision once you see the profits from it” (16 Dec 2003).

Other disadvantages are also to be overcome. Akuila Rewatabua is blind, has worked as a telephone operator and as an interpreter for the Peace Corps, won a gold medal in Japan in the 1981 Asia Pacific games, and was pursuing an education degree at the University of the South

Pacific (USP): “My basic dream is to become a teacher” (9 Jan 2004). Jiwa Matakibau was a slow learner, enrolled as a carpentry student at the Labasa Special School. “He did not see his disability as a stumbling block to acquiring life skills. Now he can repair anything at his home and is part of the school’s team that makes crutches for the Labasa Hospital” (16 Dec 2003). The case of Sifa (in the section on Self-belief) is similar.

Lisi Sahib came out of retirement to manage the Save the Children Fund office in Labasa, though “having eight kids should be a hassle for any woman” (24 Jan 2004). As one florist noted, “For me I learn as I go along and age is not a barrier. If you are ashamed to learn because you consider yourself old, you will not reach your goal” (29 Jan 2004). Another community worker began a computer course at the age of fifty, followed by another course in chaplainry. Such efforts benefit not only the individuals but also the wider society, as people continue, or become able, to play a productive role in society.

#### HARD WORK, DISCIPLINE, AND PRACTICE

Success needs the frequent application of effort in several ways, including energy, discipline, and thrift. “Vilitati, 64, is a grandfather who supports his family by selling juice at 20 cents a glass daily at the Suva market. ‘I am the sole breadwinner of my family. I look after my wife, three of my sons and a grandson. We share a one-bedroom flat. I like this work because I can start at any time. I am my own boss.’” His wife had just started an adjacent business selling pies baked by herself and a niece. “Together with her husband’s income they hope to feed and clothe their family” (28 April 2003).

Hard work overcomes adversity. “With seven children to attend to life is hard for Akanisi Melaia as she tries to make ends meet for her family. The Nasekula villager can be seen sweating under the scorching sun selling what is commonly known as the ‘pasela’ or parcels, consisting of a few pieces of fish, a piece of dalo [taro] or two, chilli and lemon. With a husband who is also trying his best to support his wife and children through farming in the village, Akanisi is a dedicated wife and mother. Despite standing in the hot sun for almost eight hours, Akanisi will probably earn \$5 a day once the expenses have been deducted. ‘It’s not much but we have to struggle and go out of our way to earn a decent living’” (30 Jan 2004).

A similar story: “Bijendra Prasad is an ordinary farmer who goes about



his business every day. But his success makes him an extraordinary farmer. His is a tale of hard work, sacrifice and good management. . . . For 19 years Bijendra worked like a slave. He admits his family went through some very hard times.” He still gets up at 2.30 AM to milk the cows and “admits that sometimes he forgets to knock off work until it’s very late and his wife is forced to go out and look for him. ‘If you are willing to put in the hard work and long hours you are bound to reap the rewards’” (2 Feb 2004).

While in some respects Akanisi and Bijendra are the deserving yet still poor, others have achieved more obvious upward mobility. A plantation manager “after ten years of hard work became the manager of his company” (13 March 2004). Hard work is a common theme. Jimmy is a Rotuman florist who has operated his own business in Suva for over 25 years and combines this with tutoring and training in flower arrangement, a skill which began as a childhood hobby; “he has come a long way without formal academic certification” (11 Dec 2003). Sailosi, or Raj, born on Koro, “is an Indian man who has a Fijian name and is also a Christian.” Although his family lived not far from Suva he visited them infrequently: “I like my independence and privacy.” As a shoe repairer he enjoyed being his own boss, and his day begins at 7 AM and ends at 5 PM, Monday to Saturday. He “is determined to earn a living through sweat and hard work. And he is glad he is making a successful living out of it” (14 April 2003). Hard work, merged ethnic identity, and individualism are thus combined.

As in the case of the Rotuman florist Jimmy, taking on several jobs is often important to success. While waiting in the United Kingdom to be accepted for the Royal Air Force, Vini Vunivalu took on three jobs: “My day started at 7 AM at McDonald’s restaurant until 12 PM. I would then rush to my second job as a sales representative with a telephone company until 7 PM and my third job was back at McDonald’s until 1 AM. . . . There were times when I felt really lonely but I knew I had to struggle to give my children the best” (5 March 2004).

Also as in Jimmy’s case, acquiring new skills on the job or undertaking training is valuable. A bar-and-grill owner sought further training for his staff: “It will be a long term process but what we want now is to get the restaurant running and then we can start sending some of our employees for further training” (28 Feb 2004). In a rather different sense, Guru Ji learned his spiritual and meditation skills by isolating himself in a cave for three years devoid of human conduct. The healing skills he acquired

through this period of devotion allowed him to earn financial rewards (8 Jan 2004).

Flexibility and persistence are also important. A baker who hawks his sandwiches and cakes around Suva “does not mind cleaning toilets in offices or doing other odd jobs just as long as he is earning a decent living,” but “having worked in other fields and having travelled to other parts of the country Atu is sure to stick to this job” (22 Jan 2004).

Finally, it is necessary to be thrifty and invest income or spend it on children. Columns repeatedly refer to ways even small incomes can be turned into productive and social outcomes. A group of village youth from a remote area “travelled all the way to Ba to cut sugarcane so that they could raise enough money to record their debut album on CD. They were being paid close to \$1000 a month, with each of them earning about \$300. ‘We just combined our earnings so that we could pay for the recording and the rest goes to the family back in the village’” (20 Dec 2003).

## EDUCATION, SPORT, AND HEALTH

Central to the achievements of many are not merely training, learning, and working hard on the job, but also successfully completing formal education. Sporting success also follows training and application. In both contexts achievement is possible at a relatively young age.

Hard work is necessary for educational success. Eighteen-year-old Timi Urunakairewa was the top student in his high school, despite having ten older siblings, none of whom reached sixth form. Timi gets up at 4 AM to study, since this is a quiet time. “Seeing that his older siblings dropped out of secondary school at different levels, Timi was determined not to end up like them. ‘My mother drowned but when she was alive she used to encourage me to work hard in school and that nothing is impossible.’” Timi said he wished to be an auditor or a rugby international “to travel the world” and “his advice to young people his age is to stay focused on your dream no matter how big it may seem” (22 Dec 2003). Significant to this discourse is the fact that male ethnic Fijians are the weakest performers in the school system. Further, private profit is not the only goal of all this effort. For a doctor, “five years of sweat and hard work finally paid off. ‘I had to sacrifice the urge to go and watch a movie during my free time to open my books and learn as much as I could. I intend to become a civil servant and put something back into the community’” (8 Dec 2004).

Sanya, “the karate kid,” won her first gold medal in karate at the Fiji Games in 1998, when she was only in primary school. She more recently gained a medal after triumphing over sickness on the day of the event; she attributed her success in sport and education to practice, training, and parental support (19 Dec 2003). The same factors that enable success elsewhere are also valuable in sport; as a rugby coach argued, “It’s not only discipline in the game but in all aspects; like being punctual to training and being diligent with their training programmes” (19 Jan 2004).

Sporting success becomes a model for wider success. It is important both as achievement in itself and as a measure of health and well-being. In a more modern society it has additional virtues; as a racing car driver noted, “parents should encourage their children to take some sports because being a sporty person—there is a guarantee that it is a stress reliever” (8 March 2004). A column on yoga exercises, directed by a visiting Indian, emphasized that “if you’re looking for mental, physical and spiritual health try yoga” (24 April 2003). Physical health is important.

## INITIATIVE

Not everyone can be successful; a further factor is initiative. Peni started a Rewa water-taxi business “after seeing the struggle of boat drivers to get fuel for their boats,” and then recognized the need for a marine service station, a taxi business, and eventually a mini-supermarket, which “provided employment for the youths of various villages” (9 Feb 2004). There was no precedent for Jimmy’s floriculture business, discussed earlier. Two Fijians from distant Gau and Vanua Levu came together to establish “what may be the first bar and grill owned by two indigenous Fijians in the capital city” after “a story of challenges, sacrifice and struggle” (28 Feb 2004). Indeed, indigenous Fijian entrepreneurial success is relatively rare, despite its being a focus of national policy for many years. Again virtues are often combined: a couple who made the first CD of Catholic hymns overcame a lack of finance and “had to make do with recording, eating and sleeping in one room [and] having to attend to their three children” (26 Jan 2004). “In our changing society there are many pioneers and one of them is Mere Lomaloma Elliott. She has been a pioneer all her life—as a student, an employee in the tourism industry and the media” as a presenter on Fiji’s first twenty-four-hour radio station (7 Jan 2004).

Titilia Tamanalevu’s business in the United States resulted from her seeing clothes being discarded by Americans though they had been scarcely

worn. “Everywhere I looked there were all sorts of business. I promised myself that I would one day get into one. So I had this idea after seeing new items being thrown into the bin” (21 Dec 2003). Jope Makario, a Lololo Pine Station manager, “is young ambitious and has a vision for the resource owners who own the land on which thousands of pine trees stand. He said the indigenous community was starting to realise the potential of their resources, [and] the younger generation of Fijians had a lot of dreams and ideas that they wanted to fulfil” (13 March 2004). This emphasis on productive indigenous Fijian use of resources is particularly significant in a context where Fijians are often perceived as having no incentive to work hard but being content to merely live off money from land rented to Indo-Fijians (see, eg, Brison 2003, 338), or working only to fulfill particular, limited needs.

#### SELF-BELIEF AND GETTING BACK ON TRACK

It is evident that a series of homilies are built into the “People” texts, none more evident than those championing the successes of people who have been “failures” but managed to learn from or overcome past mistakes. Thus Noa Ratuleni returned from three years in jail to a “broken family” but was willing to work as a sugarcane laborer and get up at 4 AM to prepare breakfast for his children so they would gain an education. “I am pleading to companies to give me a job. I am willing to do anything whether it be washing the toilets or running errands I will be happy.” Noa said he regretted not making the most of his chances when he was younger. “My advice to young people is to grab hold of every opportunity and don’t waste it and throw your life away” (24 Feb 2004).

Viniana Vunivalu, who left Fiji to train successfully with the Royal Air Force in England, overcame a difficult childhood: “I grew up in Nabua where only the fittest survive. My father left for the UK when I was 12 and my mother brought me up on her own. I had a brother who died in 1999. At 17 I was pregnant with my first child then I got married and looked after my sickly mother” (5 March 2004). Through hard work she eventually succeeded. The message is similar in another story: “Success doesn’t come knocking on your door unless you go out there and get in yourself. And to be successful one has to be humble says rugby team coach and mentor Lote Rasiga” (11 Feb 2004).

Sifa was a student at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, but “the nightlife was even greater than I expected and I began to drift away

from my studies . . . what was lacking was self-discipline.” He became an alcoholic and was admitted to the psychiatric hospital. But there he developed “an obligation and a responsibility” and, after being “overwhelmed by the nurses’ patience and understanding,” he found hope in the Bible and returned to the university (9 March 2004).

Others remain in the process of getting back on track, such as the Suva “shoeshine boys,” many of whom have left difficult family circumstances and earn small incomes from polishing shoes on city streets. “Epeli only wants two things, one is to go back to the village, to his land and plant and if someone could help him get the farming tools he’ll need. And if that isn’t possible, to go back to school to learn about computers and management skills” (17 July 2003). Even those on the lowest rungs of the informal sector need not be excluded from success.

#### COOPERATION AND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

Though “People” has largely focused on those who have achieved success, few individuals can be wholly successful on their own. Skills must be acquired from others, and it is normal to have at least some degree of social support, usually from immediate relatives. Sanya attributed her success to “parental support, love and care.” Sevanaia Namino’s neighbor ensured his well-being, while Timi was “very lucky to be part of a large family who have supported me in my education” (22 Dec 2003). Similarly “We have all come together as a family to help Asha in getting things started for the veterinary clinic” (12 Jan 2004). Members of Eunice’s family are “supporting me all the way” (21 Feb 2004). For a bar owner, “If it wasn’t for my wife’s support I wouldn’t be the man I am today”; she was “part of the team” (28 Feb 2004).

Occasionally family support may be reciprocated. Titilia Tamanalevu sends clothing goods from the United States that her relatives in Fiji then sell in retail outlets. She “has been able to provide jobs for her nieces, nephews and cousins either directly or indirectly” (21 Dec 2003). The column noted, “It is amazing that a person like her would even bother to think of sending stuff back home to relatives” (21 Dec 2003), although such a practice was previously not unusual in Fiji (Stanwix and Connell 1995). The implication of such a comment is that extended family structures may be weakening.

Nuclear families remain crucial for everyone. When one Fijian woman became the first ever to be accepted into the Royal Navy, she immediately

flew back from England to thank her family for their support. She also said, "Because I know that when I get back I will be there for quite a while, so I might as well spend time with my family" (20 Jan 2004).

Families are not always involved, especially where successful individuals have migrated. Peni, who came from a rural area to start his business, had only himself and bank loans; "coming from the village he had nothing to support him or friends" (9 Feb 2004). A rugby coach named Lote observed that "time management and working smart are the things that hold his team and his family together." He said, "What I have done is get these boys together and tried to get them involved with something instead of wandering around the village aimlessly. With the money we get from all of our games one tenth of it goes to the Methodist Church. Trying to discipline adults mentally and physically on and off the field is a real challenge." (11 Feb 2004). For two Indo-Fijian women in the Suva settlement of Wailea who had helped each other when their husbands were ill, "neighbours were more important than families because they were the first people to seek help from in times of difficulties and grief" (25 Jan 2004).

Workplace relationships may even emulate family relationships. For Mere Kataqa, working on a tourist island far from her home area, there were opportunities to "build relationships [at work] which makes the island seem like a 'big happy family.' She said with such an atmosphere to work in, the difficulties of being kept away from family and loved ones is eased" (4 Feb 2004). Here new kinds of real and imagined communities emerge. Though these do not replace families, they offer new sources of support, especially when people are away from home places.

## RELIGIOUS VALUES

Although no "People" column has focused on formal church workers, individuals in several of the columns have championed religious values, usually those of Christianity. Thus Titalia Tamanalevu had not only migrated from Fiji to the United States to attend a Latter-day Saints temple, since there was none in Fiji, but also attributed her business success to the Mormon practice of tithing. "What I have been able to achieve is all through the payment of an honest tithing" (21 Dec 2003). But such direct correlation of religion and success is rare.

Mere Elliott, a project manager in Auckland, New Zealand, attributed her success to her parents and their values: "My father was a results-

orientated person and my mother's life was prayer centered and full of patience. I owe everything I have been able to achieve to God Almighty and a very, very understanding and loving husband and the family back here in Fiji" (7 Jan 2004). For Bilsy Gukisuva, a rugby coach, the Bible verse that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13) has been "a motivating factor. If you believe that God's given you that talent, use it to your advantage but at the same time make sure you use it to give praise to the Lord" (6 Jan 2004). Eunice Heritage, a bank manager and Red Cross volunteer, argued, "I believe that if people help one another that is Christian principles itself and though I don't belong to any denomination here I believe that helping people is church itself" (21 Feb 2003). The family reunion of an extended Kadavu family began with a church service and one of the family, a lay preacher, "reminded the four generations how important it was to raise their families on Christian principles" (15 March 2004).

Yoga played a spiritual and religious role for some, but comments on Hindu values were generally less evident. Swami Ji, visiting from India and holding daily lectures at the Vishnu Temple in Lautoka, advocated spirituality and meditation as means of achieving inner peace. "He calls himself a technologically aware guru who is trying to reach out to the world through his daily updated website and emails" (8 Jan 2004). There may be other perspectives. The account of Pundit Sitha, an astrologer, notes that as he moved from advising on family and friends to advising on finances, "I started to understand why a lot of people always go to such gifted people for future readings" (12 Feb 2004). Religion may underpin capitalism and, as in the case of Titilia Tamanalevu, capitalism may underpin religion.

## TRANSFORMING TRADITION

Tradition in any sense, as established custom(s) and modes of behavior or as the production of artifacts, art, and music, is largely absent from "People," other than in family relationships, and medical and spiritual knowledge, or in the marketing of cultural products.

A rare exception was a feature on a Samoan student at the University of the South Pacific, Allan Alo, who acquired a comprehensive Samoan tattoo in five days, because, he said, "Tattooing stands for valour and courage and all those qualities that a man takes pride in." Yet the feature noted that alongside completing a master's degree, he was also a dance

choreographer exploring the fusion of different Pacific and other styles such as jazz (4 March 2004). Somewhat similarly, Rotuman filmmaker Vilsoni Hereniko remembered his father's repeating to him a Rotuman saying, "Make sure you complete what you set out to do." Thus Hereniko said, "Trying to hold on to that kind of advice was very hard at times, but it made me realise the that the movie had to be finished or I would disgrace my family's name. . . . I see this whole project as a labour for the land and its culture" (2 March 2004). Discussions of "tradition" are thus couched in the language of change.

They may also be couched in commercial terms. "For a Naitasiri native to make a sisi-ni-Lakeba *salusalu* (garland) is quite an unusual thing because this particular *salusalu* is only made by people from Lakeba in the Lau group." Raibe Isoa learned the skill after marrying a husband from Lau: "the skill of making garlands was a perfect wedding gift from her husband. . . . Raibe and her husband have a stall at the Suva Flea market and their day starts at 7 AM selling *salusalu*, grass skirts and handwoven handbags" (10 Feb 2004). Again, Indian "tradition" is less evident, apparent in how Swami Ji carried a laptop and, like Pundit Sitha, offered advice that would be of material value.

### ETHICS, RESPECT, AND SERVICE

While adhering to ethical and religious virtues is likely to enhance the chances of success, they are also inherently positive. Leslie Korwa, who set up his own successful pet shop in Suva, noted that most of his customers were expatriates "who care for their pets like they would their own children. Local people feed them with leftover food and scraps from the table [but] 'children who grow up with animals in the house grow up with responsibility.' He says that people should learn to respect animals and their nature [and] believes that if people showed more responsibility in the community, there would be fewer stray animals on the street" (23 Feb 2003).

A potential USP student who had overcome initially bad examination results noted, "If there is one thing I have come to appreciate, it is the fact that I was taught the importance of sacrifice when I was young. I have four younger siblings who are still at school, my mother is a teacher and to top it off my father is a minister. That's a family full of motivation to pick up the pieces, let go of your ego and work towards your dream" (10 Jan 2004). Successful people embody virtue: "Ratu's warm personality is one



of a kind and very welcoming” (20 Feb 2004). Giving back to those who have supported the successful is a pervasive theme, whether in Titilia Tamanalevu’s business supporting kin, or in Vilsoni Hereniko’s returning from Hawai‘i to make a feature film in the Rotuman language because “I wanted to give something back to the island” (2 March 2004). Eunice Heritage, the Red Cross volunteer and bank manager, “is the type of person that would help anybody—someone who has a really big heart and a good role model to her employees. Eunice won A\$1000 (F\$1338) and gave it all to charity” (21 Feb 2004). Working for charities and nongovernmental organizations is a recurring theme.

The same values recur regularly. “It’s very hard finding loyal employees in the work force nowadays but for Samson Mani, hard work, perseverance and sacrifice were values that kept him with media company *Fiji Times Limited* for 35 years,” while his retirement meant that “he will now work on his farm to make up for the time away” (16 Feb 2004). Service is a pervasive theme, and it may take particular forms, as in Mere Kasaqa’s thirty-two years as an employee of one company in the tourist industry: “We worked our hearts out to make sure that our guests felt at home. Nowadays some people just come for the sake of making a living rather than putting their heart into the job” (4 Feb 2004).

Despite a strong emphasis on individual values and achievements, a degree of cooperation and a wider outcome are both central. All these people are benefiting others—kin and the nation—in what they do. A photo of Albert Cerelala, a USP geography graduate and a climate change awareness officer working on a project sponsored by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, is simply captioned, “Albert’s aim is to educate all of us about saving our environment” (3 Feb 2004).

In stressing these ethical virtues, “People” plays a key role in bridging an important divide. As Nancy McDowell discussed for Kragur Islanders in Papua New Guinea, “If they relinquish the centrality of reciprocity in relationships, they must also give up their core belief that to be good, to be moral, is to be generous and hospitable; if they engage in predominantly market-driven relationships based on commodity rather than gift, individual rather than social networks, they necessarily relinquish being virtuous” (2003, 503). Yet in Fiji it is evident that virtue may also be acquired through new forms of loyalty, family and workplace relationships, and also by adhering to (usually) Christian values, while morality comes through hard work and practice. Prosperity and virtue are not mutually exclusive.

## CONCLUSION: TOWARD MODERNITY?

The national newspaper plays a role in shaping notions of a successful and inclusive nation. In a country where politicians and even religious leaders infrequently champion an inclusive society, journalism has taken on that role. Simultaneously, “People” plays a straightforward role in challenging the otherwise pervasive sense that “all news is bad news,” as good citizens build the nation. While journalists are an educated elite, and edit the stories, a populist element rests in individuals nominating others to the *Fiji Times*.

The media’s role in the continual production of ideologies is masked by readers’ perceptions of newspapers as being neutral or objective (McFarlane and Hay 2003, 214). In “People” columns ideology is produced through the repeated employment of particular means and routine symbols of interpreting achievement. What are in some ways benign, familiar, and superficial stories of a reassuring normality (Billig 1995, 7) emphasize consistent themes associated with nationhood, citizenship, and the moral economy. Within this neoliberal world, people are effectively encouraged to regard and develop themselves as rationally, economically independent, and active subjects, with their capacities and subjectivities explicit targets for transformation (see also Lawrence 2005).

Through “People” stories, readers gain a sympathetic understanding of the personal and otherwise hidden details of the economic and social life of (mainly) individuals, overcoming challenges and vicissitudes. These model lives, constructed in part by the readers themselves, become discourses for others to comprehend, validate, and even replicate in their own lives: elements of a bottom-up construction of the nation-state otherwise absent in Fiji (Kelly and Kaplan 2001, 198). The state itself is never mentioned.

Model lives are modern lives as modern values replace the old. Divisions and constraints—of ethnicity, gender, age, or ability—may be overcome, with movement away from a Fijian and a colonial past. The past is never idealized in “People.” There is an absence of history (other than personal), and the factors that contribute to success are the antithesis of the trilogy of chiefs, land, and church so pervasive in earlier narratives of the nation (Rutz 1995), and that remain significant, perhaps especially so, for rural Fijians seeking to negotiate modernity (Brison 2003, 347). Religious values are featured in “People,” but the institutions and their lead-

ers are absent. Similarly, the duty, loyalty, and respect deemed necessary for harmony of community and chiefly allegiance are transferred into a wholly modern form. A new social space is being created where good citizens have no need of primary allegiance to an old order, and relationships are not necessarily hierarchical. Such discourses lie in the shadows of less all-embracing debates, dating back more than half a century to colonial times, over the particular relationship between the constraints of culture, Fijian entrepreneurship, and the development of a modern economy and nation.<sup>4</sup>

Over time, “People” stories have largely balanced subjects by ethnicity and gender, and have focused on such appropriate national virtues as hard work, thrift, and self-reliance, while ignoring failure, extended kin relationships, and many aspects of “tradition.” However, by 2004 there had been some shift toward those who had not succeeded (such as invalids or school children who lacked the fees to go to school), as the column came to be seen as a potential means of assisting and encouraging such people (Kakaivalu, pers comm, 2004), who were otherwise aspiring good citizens. Virtue therefore goes beyond norms of reciprocity. “People” stories subtly shift morality away from kinship/tribalism toward notions of class—or at least cooperation outside local and ethnic bounds. The old Fijian order of chiefs and *mataqali* (landholding groups) is wholly absent, though families—nuclear families—remain a source of strength. In what is often seen as a divided nation, the “People” feature affirms notions of nationhood and modernity, focusing on those who have transcended ethnicity (and regionalism), and challenged the “old order” of local identity and community. The nation is thus inclusive in terms of regions, ethnicities, gender, and ability—and, belatedly, of those less successful.

Social mobility, aspirations, initiatives, innovations, and effort are all encouraged, and even shoeshine boys and former criminals may aspire to management skills. Market vendors, farmers, and businesswomen can all participate and achieve mobility (both social and spatial) and progress. Economic success, especially in business—where individual endeavor and self-help are prized—is a key marker of progress, especially where it involves training, hard work, and long hours—in direct opposition to widespread notions of a prevailing “Fiji time,” where urgency is absent and the pace of work unhurried. Several stories emphasize the success of indigenous Fijians in business, a success that parallels, and perhaps follows, efforts at positive discrimination made by various governments to achieve a more balanced ethnic structure of business activity. New prestige

and status can be acquired without threat to others, and everyone has a place. Social mobility, marriage, and migration may take some successful people away from Fiji, but they retain or develop the virtues of good citizens and cherish their national roots and families.

Championing the good citizen, and the implicit appeal to a generic modernity, is not necessarily a national phenomenon, in that there are no appeals to tradition, or to the blending of old and new. Modernity's virtues are universal and ubiquitous (only to be challenged by pointing to structural circumstances where not all with aspirations can succeed on these terms). Indeed, as James Ferguson observed in urban Zambia (1999), urban residents—just like those in “People”—sounded as if they had read 1950s texts in modernization theory when they stressed the need for strong nuclear families, independent individuals, and the need to work hard and try new things in order to bring about economic development (Brisson 2003, 335). In this largely neoliberal discourse, there is almost a fetish for commerce and individualism; success is primarily achieved in the private sector, where initiative and hard work (“working smart”) may be more likely rewarded. As Edward LiPuma phrased it: “The encompassing voice of capitalism must enter even as an uninvited guest into an understanding of national culture and identity” (1995, 40). However, working for non-governmental organizations and the public service is also to be praised, as are alternative everyday virtues (the “humble” Indian bus driver, etc). An ethos of hard work and progress promotes a code of discipline, morality, and propriety, situated within the realities of everyday life.

Moral and material well-being are combined in new ways, in the slow shift to individualism and capitalism, but where capitalism is involved it is a materialism of production and not consumption. Virtue is largely its own reward (see also Foster 2002; Dundon 2004; Gewertz and Errington 2004). The practices that are entailed in being a good citizen are those of contribution. Being a good citizen demands participation, hard work, sacrifice, and so on, rather than consumption, and the outcomes are personal success, measured in terms of career and family well-being (usually involving the success of children): “Akanisi is focusing on her children and making sure they get a good education. One thing is certain is that she will see to it that her children get proper jobs and have a better standard of living” (30 Jan 2004). Social mobility is central.

Many of the pages of every issue of the *Fiji Times* are filled with advertisements for the needs of modern citizens: mobile phones, cars, cosmetics, household appliances, Coca-Cola, and educational courses. It might

reasonably be assumed that readers of the national newspaper, most of whom are aspiring urban people, seek such commodities and are fulfilled as they acquire them, but no linkage is ever made in “People.” These are as much accoutrements of hard work, social mobility, and modernity as they are symbols of successful nationhood. While LiPuma argued that there is a deep connection between the rise of the nation and the emergence of the possessive individual (1995, 40), here virtue precedes—and does not necessarily lead to—the acquisition of material wealth. Morality is underpinned by Christian, Muslim, or Hindu ethical values, in themselves facets of modernity (LiPuma 2000). Education and sport are linked to both self-help and notions of morality (or “muscular Christianity,” that is, vigorous physical activity conducive to good health and religious duty).

Modernity is primarily an urban phenomenon, but it may also be associated with those who seek to engage with the urban world by marketing to it—hence the challenges to defining and refining modernity in rural Fiji (Brison 2003). There is little hint that success might be achieved in outer islands or the remote inland; hence the only stories from such places are of those who come from elsewhere and have transgressed ethnic (or other) divisions. As LiPuma observed: “For kinspeople to become ‘citizens’ they must be enveloped in a new social space” (1995, 61). That social space is the newly imagined communities of nuclear families and workmates, which take an urban form.

In Papua New Guinea the transformation of the rural Maring, as they have been incorporated into the outside world, has been seen in similar terms: as a process of moral re-education that inculcates “respect for knowledge, God, law and the state [as] essential for the shaping of a good modern citizen as well as good citizens of modernity,” which would entail self-control, self-sacrifice, self-advancement, and self-salvation (LiPuma 2000, 233). Elsewhere in Papua New Guinea villagers themselves have emphasized the need for discipline, hard work, order, and control, to succeed in business and life (Errington and Gewertz 1995, 35). As the “People” stories indicate, in Fiji respect for knowledge and other individuals was necessary to create a new kind of state (rather than the new nation that was being created in Papua New Guinea); therefore, law and the state—notably politics and institutional religion—were absent from “People,” since the effective challenge was to overcome discredited notions of the state.

During a period of social, economic, and political difficulties, Fiji’s

national newspaper has played a subtle but indefinable role in shaping notions of what a modern nation and its good citizens might be, through depictions of the everyday lives of ordinary yet inspiring citizens who are both familiar yet exceptional, successful and moral, within a virtuous and equitable society. The *Fiji Times* continually fosters a national consciousness through accounts of lives and activities so easily understood that the process of gradual acculturation to shared values is barely registered (Billig 1995, 8), so managing the implicit creation of consensus in a ritual of repetition and routine. The media (here the *Fiji Times*) is the vanguard of the middle class, but implicitly it is through the emerging strength and numbers of that middle class that an effective nation may be sustained. In a small, repetitive, unobtrusive, and ultimately familiar way, the national newspaper plays a small but influential role in (re)creating the nation in a time of adversity.

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## Notes

1 See Howard 1991; Lal and Pretes 2001; Brison 2002; Ghosh 2004; Davies 2005; Field and others 2005.

2 During the same period the *Fiji Times* also hosted other, somewhat similar columns. A weekly column, "Countrywide," focused on agricultural success by people, while a column in the weekly *Sunday Times*, titled "Winners," focused mainly on business success. The themes that typified "People" were thus intermittently replicated and reinforced elsewhere in the paper.

3 The People column has continued at least until July 2006 and can be accessed on the *Fiji Times* Web site <<http://www.fijitimes.com>>

4 For example, see Spate 1959; Belshaw 1964; Watters 1969; Fisk 1970; Fisk and Honeybone 1971; Lasaqa 1984.

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### *Abstract*

Constructing national identity has proved difficult in the Pacific, especially in Fiji where there are significant ethnic divisions. The “People” column in the *Fiji Times* has provided a populist focus on “good citizens” who have become successful, often in commerce. Such people have demonstrated values and directions such as hard work, training, education, initiative, and cooperation outside the nuclear family. Religious values have assisted, but “tradition” plays no role. Good citizens have achieved social mobility and often transgressed gender, geographical, and ethnic constraints. They constitute part of a new, modern, moral economy and social space that provides the basis for a modern nation where history and ethnicity have limited place.

KEYWORDS: Fiji, media, citizenship, modernity, morality, nationality