

*Uncertain Sequel:
The Social and Religious Scene
in Fiji since the Coups*

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Fiji's political stability since the coups of 1987 has depended partly on the interplay near the political summit between two high chiefs and a commoner. Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, the president of the interim government of the republic, was in April 1989 invested as Tui Cakau, the highest title in the province of Cakaudrove, within the Tovata, one of Fiji's three traditional confederacies. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the interim prime minister, is the bearer of the high titles Tui Nayau and Tui Lau in the same confederacy. His authority extends over both southern and northern Lau—the eastern islands of the Fiji group (see Garrett 1988). Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka, the soldier-commoner, does not have the hereditary power of the other two members of the triumvirate. A professional warrior, he is largely a self-made man (Dean and Ritova 1988). He acquired his present power by dissolving a constituted Parliament at the head of troops schooled in abrupt intervention in the Fiji Battalion of the United Nations International Peacekeeping Force in south Lebanon. His troops have seen Israeli units in action.

THE PARADOX OF RABUKA

Ratu Ganilau and Ratu Mara conform to the pyramidal Polynesian structures and mores of ethnic Fijian society. Rabuka, through his upbringing, works within the same framework. He affirms the loyalty and customary duty he owes to high chiefs within a rank-order determined by birth. His activity in the two coups, and as minister for home affairs and commander

of the security forces since, presents a paradox. His behavior, impulsive and often theatrical, looks like the ambitious posture of a Melanesian big man rather than the deferential obedience a Fijian displays in the presence of his traditional chiefs.

Rabuka's attitudes seem puzzling, but in Fiji there are some historical precedents for his exceptional behavior. His assumption of the role of champion of his chiefs is based on the traditional relationship between *bati* 'fighting men' and their chiefs as it existed between his family and Ganilau (Scarr 1988, 64–65); his role as savior of his people is based on a strong sense of special religious calling and the conviction that he was authorized by God. He styles himself a born-again Christian; but the scriptural justification he gives is not primarily from the New Testament. His religious utterances suggest a special, even unique, divine destiny for the Fijians—in much the same way as ancient Israelites believed themselves a chosen people with their own holy land. Modern Israel impressed him; he has Israeli religious souvenirs displayed in the living room of a family house (Dean and Ritova 1988, foll p96). He himself figures in this setting as a prophet. Significantly, he compares his sense of special vocation since childhood with the divine summons to the Prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament, quoting the text Jeremiah 1.5: "Before you were even conceived, I knew you. Before you were born, I called on you and appointed you to be a prophet of mine." Rabuka says "I believe that's the same sort of prophecy that God put in my life." He relates his name Stephen to the first Christian martyr, recalling a church elder who predicted of him "You will be a great man. You will be very brave, and you will be wise" (Dean and Ritova 1988, 162). Genuine parallels with the historical Jeremiah and Stephen are not close. Both were men of humility and manifest nonviolence; but the sense of supernatural authorization need not surprise. In the pre-Christian religion of Fiji priests or prophets could be possessed by gods. They assumed, as Rabuka has, oracular powers for chiefs and their people. Three well-known Fiji prophets, none of whom was originally of the highest chiefly status, have claimed similar authentication since Christianity came to Fiji: Navosa Vakadua ("I speak only once"), Apolosi Nawai, and Ratu Emosi Saurara of Daku village, in the province of Tailevu. Rabuka's spell derives in part from similar prophetic claims on the part of a commoner who possesses sufficient histrionic ability to evoke wide credence. The fact that this particular prophet is a warrior, that he carries a revolver or an M16 in place of the traditional war

club, makes him doubly potent. When the war cry sounds from such a man people fall in behind him.

THE RESPONSE OF THE CHIEFS

The quality Rabuka exuded in the coups posed a puzzle, however, for two high Fijian chiefs, who might have been expected, as a statesman in one case (Mara) and a decorated Fijian army commander-in-chief in the other (Ganilau), to put a bold commoner's pretensions smartly in their place. Their initial reactions along these lines were qualified. Rabuka echoed the warrior challenges and charismatic spells of other days that had helped to form ethnic Fijian society for generations. Rabuka champions both Mara and Ganilau and their people. When he called on the Christian God to lend his effort full credibility, the chiefs were aware that he could expect an incipient widespread response in village after village where their people live. Should they accept him, or reprimand and disown him?

If, in the event, they had taken the second alternative, they would have found themselves face-to-face with the army. At the time of the first coup, Rabuka's rank and file, with the great majority of his officer corps, approved what he did. Colonel Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, his superior officer at the time, was in Australia, and his inevitable private disapproval was publicly muffled. He has now gone to London as ambassador for the interim government in Fiji. Nailatikau is a high chief from the island of Bau, the seat of the highest of all Fiji's chiefs, the Vunivalu, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, a former governor-general and a descendant of Ratu Seru Cakobau, Fiji's self-styled king before the country was ceded to Britain in 1874. Ratu Sir George is ailing and reportedly indecisive. He is the paramount head of the Kubuna confederacy.

The absence of a firm and unified lead from Bau when the Great Council of Chiefs assembles under the interim government leaves any initiative to counterbalance the army to Ratu Penaia and Ratu Mara. They both know the composition of Rabuka's officer corps and its strong loyalty to both Rabuka and the aims of his coups. They also know of Rabuka's self-confessed distaste for the compromises and adjustments of politics and economics (Dean and Ritova 1988, 116); but they are aware of the need, in the cabinet and the bureaucracy, to revive and strengthen Fiji's international economic standing and to try to devise ways of satisfying Australia, New Zealand, and India that the draft constitution will eventually be

amended. This could safeguard human rights, give the army a back seat in relation to Parliament and the executive, and provide adequate representation for Fiji Indian voters.

As it stands in April 1989, the draft has frequently been called draconian by reputed jurists, some of whom have even tried to give technical advice on how to write it. An ethnically balanced Constitutional Review Committee has been touring the country to receive and assess suggestions for amendment before the final draft is presented to the Great Council of Chiefs and an eventual referendum of some kind. While this goes on, Rabuka, conferring with his inner corps of officers, has indicated that he wants the draft substantially intact to preserve the aims of his coup. Other ranks are reported willing to follow him; he has always been a popular commanding officer.

There is tension between the army and those modern technocrats in the interim cabinet and civil service who seek compromise and adjustment over the future constitution. They wish to allay international investor hesitancy while generally sharing Rabuka's goal of Fijian paramountcy. Most heads of government departments have enough experience and training to side with the cabinet technocrats in private and to implement policies that would almost certainly founder if an authoritarian military regime again took over. While the evolution of the future constitution is delayed and the prospect of elections within an earlier foreshadowed two-year period grows more remote, the cabinet and the bureaucracy, with approval from within the private sector, endeavor to create a condition of business as usual. They hope the cabinet will convince the army this is the way forward. Rabuka, who sits in the cabinet, makes ambivalent statements. He says he is loyal to the cabinet; then he qualifies his future intentions by saying he must still confer with his officers. Part of Fijian custom calls for assenting to propositions made by chiefs. In other company, where issues are discussed more widely around the kava bowl, assent may be given on the same day to propositions from other groups. The uncertainty created by these processes in the mind of the Fiji public can be distinctly felt.

Feelings of hiatus and suspended foresight, mostly not expressed in public, were further increased on 12 April 1989, when Ratu Mara announced his intention of retiring in the following December, which would coincide with the end of the two-year term for which he accepted office in the first place. Ratu Penaia's continuation in public office may also be fairly short. Ratu Mara turned 69 in 1989; Ratu Penaia turned 71.

If and when both have returned to their chiefly residences in Lau and Cakaudrove respectively, who will be available among Fiji's high chiefs with the experience and wide respect needed to fulfill Major-General Rabuka's aim of having high Fiji chiefs always visibly in charge? Shortly after the first coup, Rabuka stated that as a commoner he himself would not be a candidate for the highest offices. He declared himself a simple soldier who wanted to go back to soldiering when his aims were achieved. But more recently he has indicated that he would be willing to resign from the military in order to stand for office (*PIM*, June 1989).

ATTITUDES IN THE FIJIAN VILLAGES

While these elements of uncertainty in the higher levels of Fijian society persist, changing attitudes among Fijians at village level are widely reported by family members who come and go between rural and urban environments. Overwhelming support for Rabuka was evident after the first coup. The sentiment "now we are going to get our country back" was reinforced by the Fijian-language programs of Radio Fiji. The voice of the commander and the expressed endorsement of a vast majority of minor local chiefs could be heard in village family houses. The radio, turned on early and turned off late, is background noise in many Fijian homes. Gradually, as army pay had to be cut and recalled reservists returned to the villages, questions surfaced. In many parts of the Fiji Islands, the army's rapidly organized commercial auxiliary group appeared, fishing and farming for money return. The soldiers became competitors for the market. They commandeered boats and vehicles for their work. Local chiefs and people were, in many places, far from happy about the development. The voluntary free delivery of provisions from villages to the barracks fell off. During the proclaimed states of emergency, the army took over equipment without the possibility of protest.

The early impact of the coups on the economy registered in secondary ripples in the villages. Many members of extended families in urban or tourist employment had their pay cut or frozen. Some were laid off for several days a week as a cost-cutting measure. Remittances from city and town to the villages fell off in many places. Requests came to the villages from unemployed or underemployed urban Fijians for increased free supplies of basic foodstuffs grown on the land. The situation is improving as the economy shows signs of revival; but the earlier feeling of disenchant-

ment was permanently swollen by discharged army veterans and civil servants or other urban workers who returned, temporarily or finally, to rural villages to share their own second thoughts in the light of the real situation as distinct from the early promises made by Rabuka on the radio.

A reverse effect of this more sober feeling in the villages could register as a measure of inward and silent revaluation among noncommissioned and lesser ranks in the army. They talk to their family members at home. Those of them with homes on the west side of Viti Levu, the main island, become aware of the restive attitudes of chiefs and people there, many of whom support Dr Timoci Bavadra, the overthrown Coalition prime minister. Others, serving with the Fiji contingents in the peacekeeping forces in Lebanon and Sinai, probably also collect some grumblings from their Fiji relatives at home in the provinces. There is no overt evidence of impairment of fundamental army discipline by these developments, but they establish a body of opinion and sentiment within the armed forces for future reference. The same internal debate proceeds to some extent within police ranks. Rabuka has consolidated army, navy, and police as arms of the security forces, under his unified ministry and command. He has arranged military-type training for police units. The reins have been tightened, with the result that any present or potential dissent, along regional or other lines, can be minimized within the disciplined forces.

THE SILENCE OF THE INDIAN COMMUNITY

Until recently the Fiji Indian community was a majority in the country, but is now a slight minority.¹ Most observers are intrigued by the relative silence of a group once known as vocal and assertive through its National Federation Party. Fiji Indians, broadly, have brought with them an inherited Hindustani common identity; at the same time they are, through family residence over the last hundred years or more, now integrally part of Fiji's complex society, with a fresh identity of their own and pride in their adopted country. Their handling of the present crisis in their community is pragmatic and understandably passive, given that the military hold the guns. Silent citizenship alternates with occasional nonviolent protest. For example, the weapons of industrial short strikes and threats of non-cooperation from major unions—such as teachers and sugar workers—have been used effectively to voice displeasure at decrees of the interim administration. Fiji Indians are avoiding the suggestion that they are unified in open opposition to Rabuka or the interim cabinet. Most are still

farmers, but many are professional or industrial managers or employees in city and town. Many are Hindus, but the Hindu community has its internal divisions. Many others are Muslims, and they too have minor internal splits. Many were passionately fond of Sunday soccer, but there is little articulate protest against the suspension of all organized Sunday sport by interim government order. Some, descended from later Gujerati migrant groups, are prosperous business people and lawyers on a larger scale. They proceed with their work to help the country recover economically. At times the combined silence seems more than mysterious—it is deafening. Why?

“Business as usual” is a potent slogan to ensure prosperity and offset the silence. A precursor of present developments, the late Swami Rudrananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, who came from India to Fiji in 1939 at the request of Mahatma Gandhi through the Reverend C. F. Andrews, epitomized the current trend (R. Garrett 1983). He came to look into education and was rapidly led to fight for a better deal for Fiji Indian sugar farmers. At times strident, he could also be a conciliatory negotiator. He sensed that education offered a highroad out of the small ten-acre sugar farm to a place in the more temperate professional and economic sunshine in Fiji. Hard work and good conditions were needed and would provide for the thorough education of farmers’ children. Talented future generations would go on to advanced tertiary level, then come back as the pride and support of their families.

The Swami detected an important difference between the ethnic Fijian and Fiji Indian societies. Fijians are generally perceived as subsistence-affluence farmers. They like to eat their produce and share it with their kin and their chiefs. The accumulation of money is novel and secondary, even today when they farm for the market. Money, so long as the Fijian custom of *kerekere*, or sharing freely on request, holds valid, is to be distributed to extended family members more or less on demand. By contrast, Fiji Indians are perceived to amass money, keep it, invest it, buy gold with it, float businesses with it. As their children succeed they often become executives in family companies, or legal advisers; or they emigrate to employment abroad where they are able to stimulate family joint ventures, raise foreign capital, and further enrich the home family by remittances. These stereotypes probably apply to only a handful of both groups: just as a few Fijians also amass money and float businesses, so do most Fiji Indians remain peasant sugarcane farmers.

Swami Rudrananda’s astute pinpointing of the sugar industry and of

education as clues to Fiji Indian advancement brought results. In the present interregnum in Fiji most Fiji Indians keep quiet and go about their business, which remains generally rewarding. At first, the sugar farmers thought they should refuse to harvest their cane in the 1987 postcoup season. But they rapidly revised this decision. Economic sense told them that a good sugar crop annually provides the core of the country's favorable balance of payments under the Lomé Convention arrangement whereby preferential prices are given abroad in some areas to Fiji sugar. They therefore continue this contribution to national and personal stability.

Members of their families with specialized training continue to migrate in considerable numbers to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. Others, in the civil service, business, or the professions, remain among planners and participants in small business. A small number are enthusiastic supporters of joint ventures and new small enterprises as these take advantage of the interim government's tax-free zones. They do not seem to fret greatly over the Fijianization of many top posts in the public service. Many of them are retained or consulted with a view to the resumption of "business better than usual." They do not think the younger Fijian business operators and civil servants who are good at economic planning and entrepreneurship are an obstacle, and prefer to treat them as partners. However, they often privately reflect to their friends that many years will pass before ethnic Fijian extended families fit comfortably into the workings of the global free enterprise economy.

Siddiq Koya, the National Federation Party opposition's leader in Parliament for many years, has forsaken politics. He has several well-rewarded tasks, connected especially with the sugar industry. He continues to run his own prosperous law practice, and his relationships with former friends and opponents are not particularly uneasy. Many of his old political colleagues and adversaries within the Fiji Indian community are doing as he does. Many in the business community—increasing numbers of ethnic Fijians as well as Fiji Indians—openly say they wish the politicians would let them alone and go away so that they can resume normal business in relative peace. In this, the Fiji Indian community, after reflection, most probably repeats what the grass-roots, upwardly ambitious sections of Indian society said and did under the Mogul and British empires and now do under India's ruling National Congress Party: "Governments are bad; but under any government we shall try to farm and do business and make a fair return." Some Fiji Indian business executives

openly say: "Give the Fijians as many seats in parliament as they want. They will still need us—for a just return we can lend a hand. We shall do well, whether they do or not" (personal communication).

ETHNIC DIVISIONS

Is there race hatred in Fiji? Motivation for the coups can be ascribed only in part to what people beyond Fiji like to simplify in such terms. Certainly there are Fijian stereotypes of Fiji Indians ("one bloody Indian"); Fiji Indians in turn tend to fit Fijians into categories ("one stupid useless Fijian"). Distance and unfamiliarity based on different sets of family values and traditions create such hostilities; active hatred, comparable with anti-Semitism or anti-Indian hatreds in Kenya or Uganda, is rare, except among extremists. The alarm of Rabuka and the broad-based *taukei* community arose mainly from mounting fears that the marginal Fijian vote, tipping the balance in the 1987 elections in favor of the Fiji Labour Party–National Federation Party Coalition, presaged the slipping of ultimate control over the country's destiny out of the hands of the chiefs and *taukei*, the land's original owners, into other hands, especially those of Fiji Indians.

Within the rather apprehensive *taukei* community, a militant Taukei Movement crystallized. Its adherents, led by some vocal minor chiefs and clergy, immediately fell in behind what the army had done. The leaders, through past affiliations, gathered up restive elements previously mobilized by Sakiasi Butadroka, the founder of the Fijian Nationalist Party. Many of them were identified as street fighters, convicted criminals. Butadroka himself, once jailed for racist behavior under the Alliance Party, remained in the wings, making generally approving noises. His continuing influence among the militant *taukei*—and therefore part of the support Rabuka draws through street marches and demonstrations—is symbolized by his having been given posts under successive interim administrations, at first in the lands department, at present (April 1989) as manager of the limping national Cooperative Association.

Alongside Butadroka, expressing a considerable body of Methodist Church opinion, the Reverend Tomasi Raikivi, a kinsman and ally of Rabuka, has regrouped the earlier militant *taukei* with wavering moderates under the more fetching and designedly reunifying title *Taukei-ni-Vanua* 'the indigenous owners of the land'. Raikivi also has an official

position in the area of land administration, having been dropped earlier as a member of the inner political cabinet. A significant defector from the earlier passionate and hostile Taukei Movement is Ratu Meli Vesikula, a lesser chief from the district of Verata in eastern Viti Levu. Vesikula served in the British army in Northern Ireland as a regimental sergeant-major. After the first coup he supported Rabuka at press conferences and stressed in public that democracy was unsuitable for Fiji. He underwent a change of heart—reported to be deep and sincere (personal communications)—in early 1989, perhaps aided by his being politically marginalized. He renounced his earlier views and became publicly linked with Bavadra in attempts to restore Fiji to full constitutional parliamentary government with a balanced franchise.

These various signs, within an originally cohesive body of Fijian anti-Fiji-Indian opinion, indicate that racist confrontation is less in favor now than in 1987. The economic upturn is accompanied by renewed solidarity in rural and urban workplaces, and in the tourist industry, between people from Fiji's two major ethnic communities. Once more, many are engaged in the same job under unifying managerial aims.

THE TRADE UNIONS

Efforts to divide the trade unions along ethnic lines seem to have had some success. The civil servants' Public Service Association, representing wage earners in the country's biggest employment sector, has been split to some extent by the emergence of the Viti Civil Servants' Union, open only to Fijians and Part-Europeans. The teachers' unions have always been separate—the Fijian Teachers' Association for Fijians, the Fiji Teachers' Union for Fiji Indians. After the coups this was reflected in widely reported hostility in staff rooms and classrooms (personal communications). The bitterness engendered seems to be dying down. The government wants business as usual in the schools. A large exodus of trained teachers—more than five hundred—to work abroad, was followed by the absorption of a surplus of unused recent trainees into the system to take up the slack. The minister of education, Filipe Bole, is a Fijian who has strong ties to Rabuka. However, the permanent head of his department, Hari Ram, is a Fiji Indian. Both are dedicated to steadying a rocking boat and resuming a normal course.

Within the trade union movement as a whole the most powerful force

for many years has been the Fiji Trades Union Congress, which has money. The congress unites a group of strong unions with bargaining power and muscle for industrial action. Its once-active leader, James Raman, seldom surfaces in militant contexts since the coups. Its present general secretary, Mahendra Chaudhry, a trained economist and member of Bavadra's ill-starred cabinet, has by contrast been prominent on both political and trade union fronts. The equally vocal national chairman, Jale Toki, is Fijian. A general meeting of the Fiji Trades Union Congress in April 1989 foreshadowed a general strike if the wage freeze was not lifted and its claims for better working conditions and negotiating forums were not met. Chaudhry, who announced this, was described at the time, in separate statements by four members of the interim cabinet, as a troublemaker who stood in the way of economic recovery and was engaged in politics rather than industrial welfare. Chaudhry drew attention to the collapse of Fiji's defunct Tripartite Forum, in which unions, employers, and the government had sought accommodation under the Alliance government of Ratu Mara. His most caustic critic was Minister for Industrial Relations Taniela Veitata, who was once himself a militant waterfront union leader and is now combatively identified with the realization of Rabuka's aims for Fiji.

By mid-April the troubled union waters were calmed by the announcement of a national economic summit meeting in June, to be fully representative along the lines of similar successful meetings in Australia. The offer mollified Chaudhry, who welcomed the initiative after meeting with Finance Minister Josevata Kamikamica, who is also deputy prime minister and adept at accompanying his economic policies with conciliation and consensus.

INFORMATION AND THE MEDIA

Information about these and many other day-by-day events has been provided, with due editorial prudence, caution, and self-censorship by the country's paper of record, the *Fiji Times*, edited by Vijendra Kumar, an experienced journalist with a sense of the possible and an attachment to accuracy and balance. The editorial and correspondence columns have refrained, as requested by the interim government, from publishing material likely to inflame passions in the community; those parts of the paper have become comparatively tame. The news columns, since the reopening

of the paper after the second coup of September 1987, are treated by foreign journalists as a source of informed analysis of the local Fiji scene. Alert local observers respect the inside sources available to the paper; they note the facts as recorded and are able to interpret satisfactorily by reading between the lines. Some foreign reporters and television team members, who hastened to the country during and after the coups, have drawn hoots of laughter, with inaccuracies and estimates seen, by those who know Fiji, to be wide of the mark. The country is small, inwardly more complex than many, and not amenable to quick diagnoses.

The media picture has been enlivened by the appearance of a new paper, published twice weekly and sold on the streets. *Fiji Post*, edited, after changing hands, by local journalist Stan Ritova, one of the writers to whom Rabuka told his story in the curiously self-revealing book *Rabuka: No Other Way*, calls itself "the pulse of the nation." Ritova, an old hand in Fiji's print media, is pro-Fijian and an open supporter of Rabuka. The newspaper's growing pains give evidence at times of an absence of staff professionalism. Publishing and printing are locally run. Its financing, during the inevitable period of loss while it tries to build circulation and advertising revenue, is something of a mystery. Editorially it is not always predictable. Its jocular comment column by Ritova assumes a down-home tone and is not always approving of those who take to the streets in protest. Some *taukei* hail it as a locally grown effort; in this it contrasts managerially with the *Fiji Times*, which is now wholly owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, though this does not seem to have affected the editorial style or news content.

The old *Pacific Islands Monthly*, now also a Murdoch publication based in Suva, has been upstaged for news and comment on Fiji by its Fiji-based-and-owned competitor, *Islands Business*, edited by Peter Lomas and managed by Robert Keith-Reid, an acute and well-informed observer who grew up in Fiji. He spent time incarcerated in the barracks during the stormy days of 1987. In February 1989, when the interim government gave notice that press comment would henceforth be subject to committee-prescribed guidelines, Peter Lomas declared that no self-respecting journalist would submit to such oversight.

Two vernacular papers, neither a daily, come from the *Fiji Times* stable—*Nai Lalakai* in Fijian, *Shanti Dut* in Hindustani. Both have circulations approaching 15,000, not as great as the *Times*. *Shanti Dut* tends to follow the same lines as the *Fiji Times*; the lively *Nai Lalakai* takes its own mod-

erate, pro-Fijian position. The two papers pay their way, but their impact does not compare with that of radio. Fiji does not yet have television.

Radio Fiji, through its programs in Fijian and Hindustani, has wider influence over less literate sections of the population. On the day of the first coup, 14 May 1987, Rabuka summoned the general manager of the Fiji Broadcasting Commission, the late Dr Lasarusa Vusoniwailala, to meet him in the government buildings. He gave him instructions on what was expected in meeting the coup's aims. Fiji Indian members of staff had gathered nervously in one of the rooms of the radio station, uncertain as to what the coup might mean for them (personal observation; conversation with Vusoniwailala). Some, particularly political commentators, subsequently left; since that day Radio Fiji has often had to serve, either willingly or under pressure, as a mouthpiece for the interim regime. By what it omits and includes in the Fijian program, and by incorporating unitive Fijian national sentiments into the type of local announcements it has always transmitted into the remotest villages, the FBC has submitted to the directives of the minister for information. News broadcasts in English about developments in Fiji are heavily weighted toward government policy items and handouts of speeches at various meetings dealing with development and the economy. Dr Vusoniwailala died after a long illness. His place has eventually been taken by Dr Ahmed Ali, a former academic and Alliance Party government minister, who was one of the few Fiji Indians to publicly support Rabuka during the coups, and was later given a temporary position in the army, briefing soldiers on the intricacies of administration and international relations. Broadcasting policy has not changed greatly since his appointment to the radio post.

Fiji's other transmitter, Suva's FM96, is privately owned and run and depends on advertising for revenue and profitability. It is mainly an English-language station, oriented toward youth and offering music, news, and sports. It observes self-imposed prudent guidelines on political and cross-cultural content, for reasons of survival and to stay out of unnecessary and time-consuming haggling with the government. Both the FBC and FM96 rely for their internationally derived straight news on wire services and short-wave reception. Both take in selected parts of Radio Australia's International Report and snatches of the Voice of America. The FBC picks up the BBC. Controversial matter on Fiji from such sources is culled out, but Radio Australia's powerful transmissions can be picked up on short wave in Fiji.

THE RELIGIOUS SCENE

The large Fiji Methodist Church was divided by reactions to the first coup. Some of its ministers associated themselves with the Fiji Council of Churches in condemning the coup and called for the restoration of constitutional rights. They were probably in the minority. The church has a small Indian division, but its ethnic Fijian membership is estimated at 80 percent of the Fijian-speaking population. Sympathy for Rabuka's action, with its claim to restore ultimate control of Fiji to the indigenous chiefs and people, struck strong undertones of tradition with Fiji Methodism. The land (*vanua*), the chiefly government (*matanitu*), and the church (*lotu*) are inextricably associated in Fijian beliefs and ceremonies. "Our land, our church, our chiefs," say Fijians. In both the coups and since, divisions in the church have persisted.

Within the standing committee, the authoritative body between meetings of the annual conference, a majority has consistently supported the church's president, the Reverend Josateki Koroi. He joined in condemning the first coup, though he has served as an army chaplain in Lebanon and Sinai; his stand at first incurred Rabuka's displeasure, but though he was required for a time to turn in his badges of rank in the army, he has had his status as Chaplain General restored. The undercurrent of disapproval of Koroi among ethnic Fijian adherents of the militant *tauvei* faction thereafter crystallized under the leadership of the church's general secretary, the Reverend Manasa Lasaro. Before his appointment as general secretary Lasaro, an ex-policeman who has also been trained in social work in Wales, had in recent years been an executive of an appropriate technology center for the West German Hanns Seidel Foundation, a conservative aid body with much of its strength in Bavaria. He has also been chaplain to the Fiji Police and active as minister in a local church serving the police barracks and housing complex. Since becoming general secretary he has sought funding from new sources abroad for the church's development work and to consolidate its sizable real estate and property enterprises. He operates from the Epworth House headquarters in downtown Suva. When, after the first coup, Fiji Indian sugarcane farmers temporarily refused to cut their ripe crops around Labasa on the group's second largest island, Vanua Levu, Lasaro went to Labasa and recruited Methodist youth to help bring in the harvest. He did this on his own initiative, demonstrating his solidarity with Rabuka. He also chaired a national

committee to devise a new national flag and anthem. The committee did its work, but its recommendations seem to have been stillborn.

In December 1988, before Christmas, Lasaro increased his public celebrity when he authorized and organized the setting up of roadblocks on a Sunday on key roads in Fiji. His pretext was the strict enforcement of total Sabbath observance, historically one of the features of Methodist Christianity. Rabuka, a Methodist local preacher, at first supported what Lasaro did; then, under some insistence from his colleagues in the cabinet, withdrew and procured the dismantling of the roadblocks. Two forms of public criticism erupted. The first was economic: in the modern world a ban on work, amusements, and public transport is hardly feasible in view of international industrial and commercial realities. Secondly, well over half the population of Fiji, now about 720,000, does not hold the Christian faith, certainly not in its stricter Methodist form. Non-Christians and non-Sabbatarian Christians do not relish conforming to a Sunday decree enforced by law. The decree has subsequently been relaxed to some extent.

In Tonga, which is overwhelmingly Methodist, the Sabbath has been declared under the constitution "sacred for ever." The effect of this on Methodism in neighboring Fiji, where the church emerged largely as a result of the work of Tongan missionaries, has been strong. The day is called *siga tabu* 'holy day'. The word *tabu*, used to translate the biblical word for holy, is ambivalent, both in the Bible and in Fiji's religious history. In the Old Testament the word *holy* carries a negative connotation in that it can imply that any approach to tamper with a sacred object or ordinance within the land of Israel can bring swift judgment. "Do not offend, or shame and retribution will surely follow." In the New Testament, founding Methodists John and Charles Wesley saw a second more positive meaning for the word *holy*. In this sense, the Sabbath is to be observed as a day of worship and rest—not a legal obligation but a willing celebration of the resurrection of Christ and the coming of a new creation. The Holy Spirit no longer inspires fear of judgment; for the Wesley brothers the Spirit's presence meant voluntary acceptance of growth in love, for God and neighbor—"going on to perfection."

In Fiji, before the arrival of Christianity, the word *tabu* was associated with supernaturally sanctioned prohibitions, and the negative connotations of law and fear clung to it, as they often still do when the Old Testament is translated from the Greek and Hebrew originals. The current

strife within the Methodist Church revolves largely round the pretext for the roadblocks and the issue of whether Sabbatarianism in Fiji should be legally enforceable for all. The divisions underlying the strife go somewhat deeper. International media coverage sometimes calls them a conflict between fundamentalists under Lasaro and liberals under Koroi. This is inaccurate. Fundamentalism suggests verbal literalism about every verse of scripture. Lasaro and many of his group do not necessarily hold with that doctrine. Koroi and Lasaro probably do not disagree greatly about the nature of biblical authority; both have been trained to look past the literal sense to the substance of what is being said. Their differences are over what the Bible says as a whole. Manasa Lasaro's group follows a more legal sense of the word *tabu*, as encountered in many parts of the Old Testament; Josateki Koroi's group pursues the voluntarist, but still binding, positive sense of the word as explained by classic Wesleyanism.

A COUP WITHIN THE CHURCH?

In case theological fine points of this sort are judged unnecessary when covering social developments in Fiji, further clarification is needed. Many of the pronouncements of Manasa Lasaro stress that Fiji is a holy land and its people a holy people demanding holy government for all. The implicit identification with ancient Israel, also encountered in Rabuka's thinking, is cultural. Chiefs, land, people, and church are thought of by many Fijians as one in a religious-sociocultural fusion. If one conception is touched adversely the rest tremble. The theme is consonant with the beliefs and programs of the Fijian Nationalist Party; the Nationalists' founder, Sakiasi Butadroka, is a lay preacher in the church and has been a fervent speaker in meetings convened by Manasa Lasaro's group.

When Lasaro set up the roadblocks, Josateki Koroi, as president of the church, dismissed him from his office of general secretary as having exceeded the church's constitutional authority. Lasaro refused to go. Over a period of some months between Christmas 1988 and March 1989 Lasaro continued to occupy the Epworth House headquarters. He shut out members of the church's staff loyal to Koroi, said he was the church's chief executive, called a special limited session of the church's conference, overrode the standing committee, said he and his followers had suspended Koroi as president, and installed a counter-president, the Reverend Ratu Isireli Caucau. Koroi, interpreting the church's constitution, said he was

himself, as president, the church's chief executive officer and declared Lasaro's proceedings unlawful in the light of world-wide Methodist practice.

The confrontation came to a head in March 1989. A visiting three-man mission from the World Methodist Council attempted to present a form of agreement and reconciliation. Koroi accepted the draft; Lasaro and his supporters said they needed more time to consider it, but did not eventually accept. The World Council of Churches, the Fiji Council of Churches, and the Pacific Conference of Churches expressed support for Koroi as president and for the church's constitution. Finally Koroi sought the adjudication of the High Court of Fiji, in order to be able to reenter the church's headquarters and resume direction of the church's normal functioning. The chief justice of Fiji, Sir Timoci Tuivaga, ruled in his favor. The court found that under the law of the Methodist Church in Fiji, Koroi was the chief executive officer of the church, that the Methodist constitution had been violated and its regular working disrupted by what the judge called a "usurpation" having "the appearance of a coup in the church." He finally required the parties in dispute to be reconciled, with Lasaro fully reinstated as the elected general secretary, but under Koroi's authority. The chief justice also ruled that the church's annual August conference was the only valid supreme body in the church and that irregular meetings called conferences by Lasaro had no authority in law.

Manasa Lasaro and his group declined to be reconciled to Koroi, who offered again to work with him amicably under the terms of the court's rulings. The dissenters, with Lasaro, continued in April to occupy the church's headquarters. They proclaimed a "black ban" against cooperating with Koroi and the elected standing committee. The court had stated that an affidavit calling for further court action would be needed from Koroi's side before penalties for contempt of court could be applied. As these would probably involve the jailing of Lasaro, following specific prior warnings from the court, Koroi hesitated as a Christian minister to call for court action involving the possible jailing of a brother minister.

By mid-April the situation seemed in stalemate. The church's standing committee, with Koroi in the chair, again appealed for reentry to the properties and prerogatives of the church under its constitution, asking Lasaro again to be reconciled and to participate in a program to produce unity and full agreement before the annual conference in August 1989 when Koroi, in any case, will be ineligible for reelection to a further term

in office. The standing committee announced that Koroi would visit every outlying division of the church, accompanied by standing committee members, to explain his offer to local people and their chiefs and to call for the church to be reunited in love and understanding. He counted on the support of the church's divisional superintendents and local chiefs for success. He also anticipated seeking the support and blessing of the highest chiefs in each of the three traditional confederacies. Fiji's interim prime minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, is a Roman Catholic. Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau is a Methodist who made clear to both Koroi and Lasaro his concern for the church's unity. Ratu Mara's Catholic wife, Adi Lady Lala Mara, is the highest chief of Burebasaga, one of the three confederacies. Nevertheless, when he visits his home island of Lakeba in Lau, Ratu Mara follows tradition as a chief by worshipping in the Methodist Church with most of his people. Unity in the church, as a community of the people (and their ancestors), under their ministers (*talatalas*) and chiefs, is regarded by most Fijians as crucial to the full integrity of the whole aristocratic and sacral Fijian synthesis. In this light, Koroi's plan to itinerate, if boldly pursued, might succeed in restoring substantial consensus by August 1989. He would then have a further period to consolidate conference decisions before formally vacating the presidency to make way for his elected successor in January 1990.

OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Such a long rehearsal of the crisis in the Methodist Church is necessary before proceeding to discuss the rest of Fiji's multiform religious picture. No other religious body in Fiji wields comparable social influence—or has generated comparable anxieties under the interim government. The Roman Catholics and Anglicans, with the smaller Presbyterian and Samoan Congregational churches and the Salvation Army, all within the Fiji Council of Churches, have given mainly tacit moral support to the Methodist president and constitution. The Roman Catholic archbishop, Petero Mataca, and the Anglican bishop, Jabez Bryce, a Pacific Islander, carry weight in official circles. Realistic appraisal by non-Methodist Christians concedes that the Methodist struggle is related to strong passions generated by Fijian nationalism. Lasaro's approach has been frontal, unbending; Koroi's has latterly aimed at healing breaches. The outcome, as the August conference approaches, is not clearly predictable, though

much of Lasaro's active support so far comes from the twin urban Methodist strongholds around Suva and the neighboring town of Nausori. The pulse of opinion in outlying areas and islands may vary, but is hard to take accurately as yet.²

A second large religious community in Fiji—that of the Hindus—is more loosely knit. The “orthodox” *Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha* has the greatest loyalty and bargaining power. Its voice, even on religious liberty and the draft constitution, has been fairly quiet. It is as though the Hindu majority, many of whom are devoted to the God Rama, is content for the present to allow the play of the Hindu concepts of *karma* ‘inevitable destiny’, *samsara* ‘change in all things’ and *maya* ‘the play of divine forces’ to work themselves out in Fiji in the perspective of eternity. There has been little interference with Hindu worship in Fiji's many temples. Men, women, and children and the gods are regarded as going fairly silently about their regular concerns, awaiting developments with a measure of resignation. The smaller, and once dynamically active, Hindu Arya Samaj reform movement, known for the quality of its educational work and the orderly prowess of many of its adherents, shares for the most part in the general cautious silence of Fiji Indians about religion and politics.

Most Muslims in Fiji belong to Islam's Sunni sect. They turn toward Saudi Arabia in their religious allegiance and convictions. A few—among them affluent and successful members of Fiji society—belong to one of two separate Ahmadiya groups who believe the Islamic messianic age has dawned. The Sunnis, assembled for social witness and action in their Fiji Muslim League, have received money, religious training assistance, and moral support from abroad on a scale comparable with ecumenical aid given to Fiji's Christian churches. The estimated 8 percent Sunni component of the non-Fijian-speaking population has at times in recent years discussed the possibility of separate political representation. Some Muslims have supported Ratu Mara and the Alliance Party. One enigma, in relation to the smuggling of firearms through Lautoka in April 1988, is that several Muslims charged with being accessories in the affair by storing the weapons are known in the Fiji community to have been supporters of the Alliance Party in the past.³ Muslims continue to throng the mosques on Fridays and have observed their annual fast of Ramadan unhindered. One senses among some of them a certain nervousness. Muslims, in normal times firm, but not as in other countries aggressive, have seemed subdued

since the coups. Indeed, in all religious groups except Methodists "no comment" is the usual order of the day; even the Methodists, or most of them, being pious and accepting the powers that be, seem to hope the political crisis and their own internal church upheaval will go away and leave them to enjoy heavenly peace.

The Sikh community, without mentioning the matter overmuch, came in for internal scrutiny from the security forces around the time of the arms smuggling scare. The Sikh crisis in India's Punjab had already shocked relatives in Fiji. Both rural and urban Sikhs had voted predictably and solidly for the National Federation Party, even before independence came to Fiji in 1970. During the state of emergency proclaimed over the arms affair the stores of some Sikh merchants were raided by squads of soldiers carrying M16s. Many houses, not all Sikh, were at that time systematically searched. Sikhs, known for their warrior tradition, were suspect. At the same time, Sikh *gurdwaras* 'temples' appear to be peacefully attended and undisturbed. Sikhs in Fiji are a small minority, and comment among them is restrained. They have found recent international and national events ominous.⁴

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS

Some ask what happened to the Back to Early May Movement, which put forward six points calling for the restoration of parliamentary government and the return of the army to barracks after the first coup. I was involved in that movement. Within a few weeks it succeeded in collecting well over one hundred thousand signatures from many parts of Fiji and presenting a petition to the then governor-general. Detractors of the movement among supporters of the two coups tend to describe its adherents, erroneously, as Coalition (Bavadra) accomplices. In reality they cover a cross-section of political opinion. Many do not vote on party lines. Several of the points they put forward were embodied in the thwarted accord made at Deuba between Mara, Bavadra, and the then governor-general. Rabuka rejected it; Mara then withdrew. Since that time the Back to Early May pleas, notably for a government of national unity and a referendum, have resurfaced in other contexts as the present draft constitution is circulated and criticized. The name Back to Early May did not intend a restoration of the Coalition, but a provisional return to the old constitution of Fiji, pending appropriate revisions. Some of the instigators of the Back to Early May

Movement were jailed, others exiled. Others, alive and well in Fiji, are still at times vilified by the militant *taukei*.

The judiciary is functioning, but not without embarrassment at having to administer laws in which the name and prerogative of Queen Elizabeth II have been elided while most of the rest remains intact. The drafting of a whole new code of laws by a depleted company of qualified writers would be a mammoth work indeed. Magistrates handle lesser cases at a slow pace. Meanwhile, the interim government, with no parliament on hand to enact laws, promulgates decrees, which are inserted in the courts' dosiers. Their future status is up for debate.

The appointment of judges to fill places left vacant in the various courts has presented conundrums to Chief Justice Sir Timoci Tuivaga, who returned to the new *de facto* legal situation out of a sense of responsibility, having previously, while the Queen's writ still ran in Fiji, roundly described what the army did as treason. Rabuka's briefly established administration after the second coup appointed some local lawyers as judges. When a civilian administration followed, these temporary arrangements were revised. One of the problems of the chief justice is to fill the bench with willing nominees with the requisite experience in British law and the prestige to commend themselves to the Fiji Law Society—still a vocal watchdog over Fiji's system of justice. Many of the precoup judges and some respected magistrates were told to leave Fiji or departed of their own volition to other places where the majesty of law seemed less threatened.

Rumblings in the wings of politics inevitably have at their epicenter Dr Timoci Bavadra, the deposed prime minister. From the time of his release by Rabuka he has made his home, as a lesser local chief, in the important west-side village of Viseisei, the residence of a high chief, Ratu Sir Josaia Tavaiaqia, the Tui Vuda. The Vuda coast is the site of the legendary arrival of the ancestors of all the modern ethnic Fijians. Ratu Sir Josaia is minister for forests in the present interim government and was previously a cabinet minister within Mara's Alliance government. He disapproves of Bavadra's politics and maintains his distance at all times, though within the same prestigious village, but as a kinsman he has traditional obligations to give Bavadra immunity from molestation. The situation illustrates the bewildering nuances latent in the ethnic Fijian system of rank, kinship, and duty.

Throughout 1987 and 1988 Bavadra often wrote and spoke. He traveled

through the villages on the western side of Viti Levu, where his power is based among both Fijians and Fiji Indians. He contends for the restoration of the monarchy in Fiji and for a share in government to be given to his own Coalition during the present interim. The plea for the monarchy gains considerable sentimental assent among Fijians, on the ground that when Fiji was ceded as a colony to Britain in 1874 final sovereignty, above Fiji's chiefs, was granted in perpetuity to Queen Victoria and her successors. This is Bavadra's way of reinvoking the figurehead of the queen, as guardian of the country and of true Fijian rights. He wants reentry to the Commonwealth, but knows this will be opposed by countries with the Westminster system of government so long as the army can use final veto power in Fiji.

Bavadra has used the skills of spokesmen from his unseated cabinet, several of whom are still in Fiji. One of them, Dr Tupeni Baba, returned to teach at the University of the South Pacific, where he is now head of the School of Humanities. Krishna Datt, a teacher, trade unionist, and trained historian, still surfaces. The active union leader Mahendra Chaudhry sometimes makes headlines. Richard Naidu, a young exile and Bavadra's former spokesman, is trained in commerce and law. He was deported, but remains busy for Bavadra in Auckland. He was beaten up in Suva by a group of militant *taukei* and was at times confined to the cells. His utterances about these ordeals have been modest and moderate; his cutting and tightly argued public statements and letters (he has experience as a journalist) have sometimes been rather less so. On the other side of the Tasman Sea, in Australia, he is in touch with the Movement for Democracy in Fiji, chaired by Don Dunstan, a former Labor premier of South Australia, who grew up in Fiji. The group has rallied exiles and critics of Rabuka and publishes *Fiji Voice*, a partisan but reasonably well informed periodical news sheet. The effect within Fiji, except insofar as additional support flows back for what Bavadra says and does, is probably more an irritant to the interim government than an inspiration for local opposition.

More potent in effect is the link between Bavadra's travels in the villages and the announcement by an influential group of western Fijian chiefs that they have formed a fourth (western) confederacy. (See Thomas, this issue.) They asked at a meeting of high chiefs for their separate status to be recognized in negotiation and ceremonial. When this claim was ruled out of order at the meeting, the proponents of the new confederacy walked out (*FT*, 22 Nov 1988). The additional force created by this move-

ment will be one of the imponderables when the Great Council of Chiefs finally looks at the draft constitution with the results of the work of the Constitutional Review Committee appointed by the interim government to suggest amendments to the draft before it is submitted to the chiefs and the people.

CONCLUSION

Below the easily visible surface of Fiji society many subgroups, based on loyalties or traditions, are at work. Within a population of less than a million, where Fijian extended families are linked for generations by marriage and old alliances, both genealogies and the obligations arising from the past are known and respected. Steps could easily be taken to deport Richard Naidu; ethnic Fijian society owes him no accumulated honor or respect. On the other hand, drastic measures against such an articulate and apparently unintimidated person as Dr Tupeni Baba are harder to take. He is related to Major-General Rabuka and comes from the same part of the country. Unlike Rabuka, he is a former pupil of the well-known Methodist Lelean Memorial secondary school. Through the close network of Lelean old students, he has been able to converse readily with former schoolmates such as Ratu Meli Vesikula. Rabuka, proud of being an ex-pupil and head boy at Queen Victoria School, which was founded originally for the sons of chiefs (Dean and Ritova 1988, 24–25), has access to a different network. In the coteries of the school's Old Boys' Club, conversation among army officers and reservists about the possible need at some time for a coup to defend the chiefs of Fiji was part of the penumbra of the precoup era (personal communications).

Bavadra's own busy public life was curtailed for a month during March–April 1989. He went to Auckland, New Zealand, to be treated in hospital for an unspecified back complaint. The interim government, in a gesture of sympathy, offered to meet expenses. The Coalition declined the offer, saying it had already made the necessary arrangements. Diagnosis and treatment were described in medically appropriate general terms by Bavadra's doctors. He returned to his Viseisei home on 19 April and attended a delegates' meeting of his Fiji Labor Party in nearby Nadi on 22 April. His absence left a gap in what had, until then, been his sustained leadership of the marginalized Coalition. For almost two years Fiji society has been shaken by fits and starts—states of emergency, unexpected funer-

als of leaders and lesser stirrers. The public draws its breath apprehensively, as prolonged periods of hope alternate with forebodings, or troops appear in the streets. Keys to Fiji's social future offered by the present survey fit various locked doors. Beyond the doors things to come remain unclear, hypothetical: reassuring consensus or renewed crisis? People in uniforms, with or without hand-held firearms, are still in evidence and say they are ready if needed.

Notes

Information cited as "personal communication" has been obtained by the author from a variety of individuals, including business executives, teachers, and associates of those involved.

1 Fiji's *de facto* population as of 31 December 1988 was 718,119, with 342,965 Fijians, 340,121 Indians, and 35,033 others (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, courtesy of Dr Martin Bakker).

2 Observations on the Fiji Methodist crisis are based on personal knowledge of the contending factions. The ecumenical and international Pacific Theological College has been the scene of much debate about the coups. Most faculty members, including Islanders, are bound by their residence and work permits to refrain from politically aligned utterances or actions in Fiji, but at least one faculty member from the Indian subcontinent has had his permission to remain in Fiji questioned as a result of having taken a firmly critical stance against the coups.

3 Information from Alliance Party sources. The mysterious arms smuggling episode has been spottily and circumstantially treated—in a style alternating between flawed thriller and garrulous autobiography—by the Canadian-born, New Zealand-based lawyer Christopher Harder in *The Guns of Lautoka* (1988).

4 Background on Hinduism, Islam, and the Sikhs in Fiji may be found in Garrett 1979.

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