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**PACIFIC ISLANDS  
STAKEHOLDER  
PARTICIPATION  
IN DEVELOPMENT:  
FIJI**

William Sutherland



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**OCTOBER 1998**

**A Report for the World Bank**

**Prepared by: William Sutherland**

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## FOREWORD

As in all societies, prospects for economic and social development for Pacific Island economies are conditioned by the country's social fabric, cultural heritage and traditions, all of which exert a powerful influence over the pattern and prospects for development. Recognising this, when providing analytical advice and support for policy makers in Pacific economies the World Bank is obligated to move beyond a perspective that focuses merely on economic factors to one that incorporates each society's social and cultural dynamic and which acknowledges the influence these aspects play in social change and economic decision-making.

The series of Stakeholders studies was initiated in 1996 in order to provide a basis for this broader approach and, over the ensuing twelve months, reports have been prepared for Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati. For each country the form of the study has varied, reflecting differences in the social and organizational characteristics of each culture. In some, the role of traditional or customary organizations is stronger and more pronounced; in others, formal community structures and organizations may be less defined or play a different role in various parts of the country and in relation to different spheres of social life. The linkages between traditional and introduced structures of power are also different in each country: in some, the boundaries may overlap quite clearly; in others, the functions of the government, the role of the church and the strength of traditions, for example, may continue to be quite distinct.

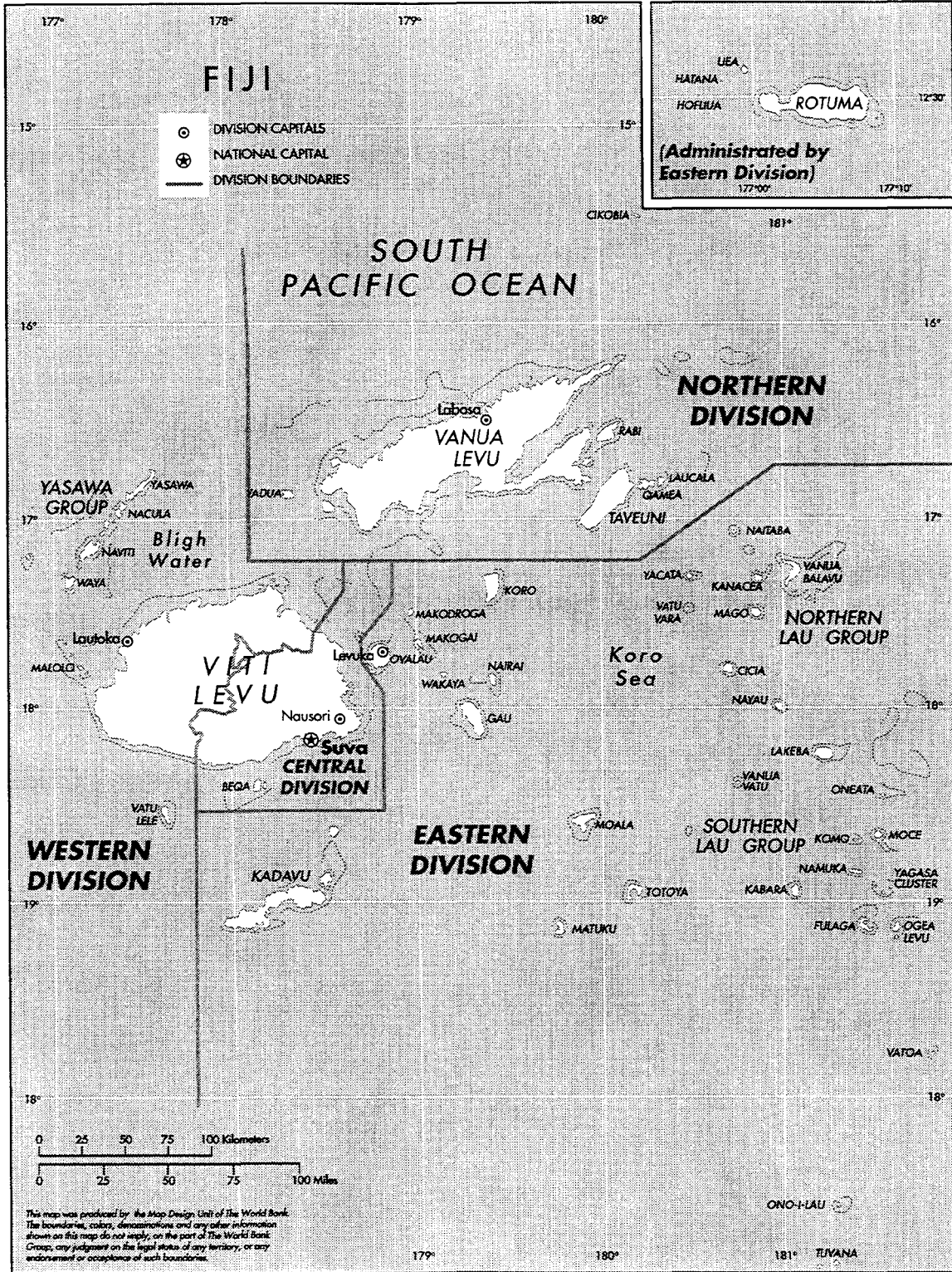
We also wanted to consider in more detail the social patterns as well as the political dimensions at work in influencing social change and to understand better how Pacific Island societies function. Who are the important players in a community or society and how do they interact formally and informally? What are the structures that define their roles and how do they manage the interface between the needs of the in-group and those of the wider society? How do different social groups define their values and set their priorities and to what degree does the articulation of traditional or customary values influence decisions about economic development and the distribution of the benefits of development? These are some of the questions we wanted to explore.

Each country study has been prepared by a consultant who has extensive familiarity with and knowledge of the social and political dimensions of that country and who could readily provide information about the culture and analysis of the issues surrounding key aspects of the society, such as leadership, decision-making and community perceptions of government and development. The studies have provided timely and valuable input into the economic and sector analyses undertaken as part of the World Bank's program in the Pacific during 1996 and 1997. I hope they will continue to be critical in informing such work in future years.

*Klaus Rohland*  
*Country Director: Pacific Islands*









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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The situation in Fiji today is fluid and uncertain, and two issues preoccupy the country—the review of the constitution and the impending expiry of native land leases. These issues inform in a fundamental way the many other issues of current concern.

An understanding of these issues, the reasons for their persistence, and the ways in which they have been managed until now is essential if the World Bank is to plan and execute more effectively its future developmental interventions in Fiji. In this study, therefore, the primary emphasis is on understanding the key issues and the dynamics which energise them. It is in that context that key stakeholders are discussed.

The Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) submitted its report in September 1996. It was considered by a parliamentary Joint Select Committee whose recommendations, along with the CRC report, were debated in the parliament in 1997.

A major sticking point was the proposed electoral system. The former system was based solely on ethnicity: Fijians had 37 seats, Indo-Fijians 27 seats, Rotumans 1 seat and General Electors 5 seats. The CRC proposed 25 ethnically-reserved seats and 45

open seats. It has also proposed a preferential voting system in place of the simple majority system. There is strong indigenous Fijian opposition to the proposals, especially within the ruling party, the *Soqosoqo Vakavulewani Taukei* (SVT), and in most of the Provincial Councils. However, with the backing of the Prime Minister the recommendations of the CRC were, by and large, approved by the Parliament in mid-1997.

In 1997, 47 native land leases expired. By 2005, more than 5,000 leases will have expired. The vast majority are held by Indo-Fijian sugarcane farmers and the evidence suggests that most of the indigenous landowners want their land returned. Landowner intentions will be important but the final decision on whether or not to renew leases rests with the Native Lands Trust Board (NLTB). Leaseholder anxiety is widespread and how the NLTB decides will have far-reaching consequences for the sugar industry.

This study argues that the most critical political project facing the government today is how to address the demand for the 'paramountcy of Fijian interests', in the name of which the coups of 1987 were staged. But this demand is not unproblematic. Ten years down the

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track there are growing doubts about the distribution of benefits that have followed in the wake of the coups, disagreements about the role of tradition and the relevance of western-style democracy, and anxieties about the future.

At a wider level, the continuing political uncertainties and ethnic tensions have had detrimental effects on the economy generally, and investor confidence in particular. Fijians still command state power, and their use of ethnically-discriminatory policies, especially in relation to resources and access, continues to be a source of discontent.

On the other hand, the balance of forces has for some time now been rather more delicate than in 1987 and could well change significantly in the wake of upcoming decisions.

To better appreciate why this situation has arisen, why it has persisted for so long, and where it might lead, this study describes the broad parameters and dynamics of society, culture and politics in Fiji. Within that framework it examines the key issues of current concern, discusses key stakeholders and draws broad conclusions and lessons that might be useful for developmental interventions in the future.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALTA	Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act	FSC	Fiji Sugar Corporation
AP	Alliance Party	FTUC	Fiji Trade Unions Congress
BLV	Bose Levu Vakaturaga	GCC	Great Council of Chiefs
CRC	Constitutinal Review Commission	GEP	General Electors Party
CSR	Colonial Sugar Refining Company	GVP	General Voters Party
FAB	Fijian Affairs Board	NBF	National Bank of Fiji
FAP	Fijian Association Party	NES	National Economic Summit
FCGA	Fiji Cane Growers Association	NFU	National Farmers Union
FDB	Fiji Development Bank	NFP	National Federation Party
FLP	Fiji Labour Party	NLC	Native Lands Commission
FNPF	Fiji National Provident Fund	NLTB	Native Lands Trust Board
FPTL	Fiji Posts and Telecommunications Limited	SVT	Soqosoqo 'ni' Vakavulewa 'ni' Taukei
FPSA	Fiji Public Servants Association	VCSA	Viti Civil Servants Association



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## INTRODUCTION

Of the many stakeholders and actors in Fiji, those that might be identified as key will vary depending on the issue involved and the circumstances surrounding it. Those discussed in this study have been identified because of their importance in relation to the major issues of current concern.

The study is not, however, an exhaustive or detailed account of key groups or personalities but rather an investigation of the salience of key stakeholders in the context of the histories and dynamics of the major issues facing the country. The stakeholders are therefore discussed in the context of several key questions: What are the major issues facing Fiji today? Why have these been so durable and persistent? How have they been managed in the past and how are they being handled now?

It is unlikely that the major issues of current concern will be fully resolved quickly. It would therefore appear to be useful to know why these issues are so difficult and likely to persist for some time yet. This would allow more informed judgements about the likely effectiveness of developmental interventions in the future. It is difficult, however, to be specific and detailed

about the lessons which might be drawn from the study, for here again much depends on the particular issue and circumstances. The conclusions and lessons presented at the end of the study are therefore general rather than specific.

### **FLUIDITY AND UNCERTAINTY IN FIJI**

Fiji today is in a state of flux. It is delicately poised between, on the one hand, the promise of a brighter future and, on the other, by the worrying prospect of continuing uncertainty and sluggish economic performance or, worse still, a backward slide into heightened racial tension and economic recession. Its immediate future at least is generally seen to hinge on the outcome of current negotiations on two key issues—the constitution and the land question.

Submitted in September 1996, the report of the Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) has been the subject of intense discussions throughout the country and is now being considered by the parliamentary Joint Select Committee on the Review of the Constitution. Its report was presented in mid-1996.

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Also the subject of extensive interest is the large number of native land leases, held mostly by Indian canefarmers, which will expire over the next few years. Forty seven are up for renewal in 1996 and uncertainty about their future has caused much anxiety.

For the economy as whole and investor confidence in particular, decisions taken on these two issues will be critical. The likely outcome is that on some, perhaps most, aspects compromises will be reached, and this will allay immediate anxieties and open the way for further forward movement; on others, however, the outcomes are likely to be less determinate.

This broad assessment reflects the complexity and sensitivity of the Fiji situation. Beneath the constitutional and land questions lie deep and interconnected tensions and contradictions whose persistence and durability are underscored by their long histories. What are these tensions and contradictions? From whence do they spring? How have they evolved? Why are some so intractable? How have they shaped perceptions? Answers to these questions are central to an understanding of the current difficulties and where they might lead.

### **THE APPROACH, SCOPE AND ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

The study is organised around two key explanatory principles. The first is the distinction between causes and symptoms. Chapter 2, therefore, is more than just a list of key socio-cultural and political parameters of development in Fiji. It also probes these parameters to uncover underlying tensions and contradictions as well as the forms

that the latter have taken. From this will emerge a broad picture of the historical origins and trajectories of key issues of current concern. This will allow a better appreciation of why some problems are more intractable, more persistent and more durable than others.

The second organising principle is that explanatory adequacy requires attention to process and dynamics. Social outcomes are the product of interactions and the study is centrally guided by the need to indicate the dynamics of interaction and thus to show how and why those dynamics throw up different outcomes in time and space.

Context is never static: parameters shift, priorities change, new challenges emerge and contingency constantly lurks. In this kind of fluidity, stakeholders vacillate between their multiple identities, perceptions alter, age-old customs are questioned, alliances become less stable, leadership is challenged, and personality often assumes heightened salience.

That being the case, it is not possible here to investigate fully the changing dynamics of society, culture and politics in Fiji. What is possible, however, is to identify their key elements and trace broad historical contours, and I approach this task by asking the question "How have social relations been managed?" Chapter 3, therefore, is a survey of the management of social relations and the competitions they express. It is organised around four key dimensions of social management: the *forms* it takes; *strategies* that have been adopted; the various *modes or styles* of engagement; and the various *levels* (of society) at which social management is conducted.



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This sets the scene for Chapter 4 which, drawing on the themes developed in Chapters 2 and 3, surveys the main issues facing Fiji today, major stakeholders and key actors. Again, the emphasis is on interactive dynamics, and to further illustrate the influence of socio-cultural and political factors, the chapter concludes with a more detailed look at a few key issues and developments.

The issues facing Fiji today are numerous and complex. Pressures are mounting for the political goalposts to be moved, but the heels of extremist indigenous nationalism are digging in. Basic rights and freedoms are under scrutiny, and even Fijian custom and tradition, long considered sacrosanct, are being questioned. Key institutions like the church, the media, and even the Great Council of Chiefs are under stress.

From external sources too have come added strains as the imperatives of globalisation have created new challenges, but the state's attempts at meeting these have had a mixed

reception. The private sector sees them as largely inadequate; some, especially aspiring Fijian entrepreneurs, see them as a threat; and various community groups complain that they seriously erode the state's role as welfare provider.

In seeking to explicate the socio-cultural and political context of development in Fiji, the study shows that these contextual parameters are fluid rather than fixed, contested rather than given. It also shows that many of the problems are not amenable to easy resolution. In so doing, it acknowledges the role of contingency and the unexpected.

The central argument of the study is that the most critical political challenge facing the government is how to address the demand for the "paramountcy of Fijian interests". That demand will shape in critical ways the outcomes of negotiations currently under way and, thereafter, the future of the country. The study concludes with a presentation in Chapter 5 of possible future scenarios and some broad conclusions and lessons which might be helpful for developmental interventions in the future.



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## SOCIETY, CULTURE AND POLITICS: A CONTEXTUAL MAPPING

### OVERVIEW

The key foundational parameters of society, politics and culture in Fiji are identified here as tradition, ethnicity, western liberal democracy, and capitalist economy and ethics.

Several observations about these need to be made. First, all of these parameters are highly complex and are considered here only in broad outline. Second, they are interrelated and each one cannot be adequately understood without reference to the others. Third, both the salience and the forms they have taken have varied over time. Some understanding of historical trajectories and changing forms is therefore necessary in order better to appreciate the way they have shaped the key issues of current concern.

Fourth, none of the broad parameters exists in any 'pure' form. The nature of Fijian tradition, for example, is now significantly different from what it was in pre-Contact times. Certainly there are core values and practices which have persisted since then, but today there are significant disagreements about what precisely Fijian tradition means. The same is true of 'western liberal democracy' in Fiji. Various ethnic aspects of Fiji politics, for example, offend the key democratic principle of representative government.

One example is the under-representation of Indo-Fijians in parliament and their constitutionally-mandated exclusion from key public offices, e.g. the President, Prime Minister and Head of the Public Service. There are other examples as well but the general point was well put several years ago by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Filipe Bole: "Here in Fiji, after 1970 we declared ourselves a democracy but we were nevertheless prepared, in our electoral system and in our laws, to accept democracy only by degrees".<sup>1</sup>

An initial sense of the importance of socio-cultural and political factors in Fiji's development process can be obtained by a quick glance at the major issues facing the country today (and in the brief account which now follows these are italicised).

Two key issues are *the constitution* and *the land question*. Fiji's first constitution, adopted in 1969 on the eve of independence in 1970, was replaced by a new one in 1990. Promulgated three years after the coups of May and September 1987, the 1990 constitution had as its principal foundation the objective of protecting the '*paramountcy of Fijian interests*'. This is a longstanding objective and,

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as already mentioned, how to address it is the most critical political project facing the government.

Unhappiness with the 1990 constitution on the part of stakeholders who were disadvantaged by its provisions, especially the majority of Indo-Fijians, led to the promise of a constitutional review. That review was undertaken in 1995 by the Fiji Constitution Review Commission (CRC).

Its report, entitled The Fiji Islands: Towards a United Future, was submitted to the government in September 1996 and the expectation was that the government would decide on its recommendations by the end of that year. (In the end, Parliament decided on the report in mid-1997.) Of the many particular issues raised in the review process the two which commanded the greatest attention, and which are integrally linked to the question of Fijian paramountcy, are *political representation* and *land*.

On representation, the critical aspect is ethnicity. Here the tension is between, on the one hand, the desire to entrench Fijian political supremacy and, on the other, the wish for fair and adequate representation for all ethnic communities.

On land, 83 percent of the total area is native land, i.e. owned by indigenous Fijians, while the remaining 17 percent is either freehold or state-owned land. Here the main issue now is the *impending expiry of a large number of native land leases*, most of which are held by Indo-Fijians, especially sugarcane farmers. With a growing number of Fijian landowners declaring their wish to take back their land, there is much anxiety about the likelihood of lease renewals. While the rights and

wishes of landowners will be important, the involvement of the government, and especially the Native Lands Trust Board (NLTB), will be crucial.

Underlying Fijian desire for return of their land lies the broader objective of *Fijian economic advancement*. Fijians are realising more and more that political supremacy might be necessary for 'Fijian paramountcy' but is not sufficient. Greater economic power is also required.

Since 1987 that recognition has found increasingly explicit and public expression, especially through calls for greater assistance for '*Fijians in business*'. (This widely-used phrase usually refers to the low level of Fijian involvement or success in business.) State response to that, however, has provoked complaints of discrimination by non-Fijians. Preferential lending by the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) and the state-owned National Bank of Fiji (NBF), as well as the allocation of import quotas to Fijians, have been cited as examples of this.

It is well-known that Fijians have not been very successful in business, but their disadvantage is wider than that. It also takes the form of *Fijian underrepresentation in the professions* as well as *Fijian educational underachievement*. Although clearly related, the latter especially has long been a cause for concern. In comparison to the performance of other ethnic groups, Fijians have generally not achieved very well. This has been widely discussed and, again, the state's response has centred largely on preferential access to resources. The dissatisfaction this has occasioned is illustrated by the complaints from other ethnic communities about the bias in favour of Fijians in the *allocation of scholarships*.

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This problem is but one aspect of wider concerns about *access to state resources* and *distributional questions* more generally. Here particular concerns are numerous and range from *gender bias* in state policy and funding, increasing neglect of the *rural sector* and *unemployment* through to *favouritism*, *urban poverty* and the *rising level of crime*.

Finally, there are a series of persistent concerns about the state and *state/civil society relations* which range from particular ones like the *role of the military*, the relationship between *church and state*, *citizenship*, *national identity* and the need for a *common name* for all nationals through to more general ones about *individual rights and freedoms*, *the place of tradition* and the *relevance of western-style democracy*.

That many of these issues are longstanding testifies to their complexity and the depth of the cleavages from which they spring. Ethnic cleavages are especially salient and these take intra-communal as well as inter-communal forms. In relation to Fijians, for example, beneath the communal, cohesive and caring image of their community lie tensions between chiefs, chiefs and commoners, men and women, provinces and regions—tensions which, significantly, have surfaced in increasingly public ways since the coups. Indo-Fijians too are internally-divided, with caste, religion, language, gender and class being key lines of cleavage. The same is true of the other communities, especially those of 'mixed race'.

How effectively these cleavages and tensions are managed will depend on the capacities and willingness of stakeholders and also the efficacy of the

modes of engagement that are adopted. Within these determinants, particular outcomes will be shaped, and complicated, by the influence of personality, contingency and multiple identity.

Fiji is a small society and is thus characterised by a high level of social intimacy—'everybody knows everybody's business'. In that kind of situation, force of personality can be especially important. Contingency is also important, and so to the multiple character of identity. How, for example, a politician behaves at particular times will depend on which of his/her multiple identities—gender, ethnic, religious, linguistic, class etc.—he/she attaches importance to and assumes on a specific occasion.

Against this glimpse of key issues, we turn now to the broad contextual parameters of development in Fiji.

## TRADITION

As mentioned earlier, Fijian tradition is contested. The *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*, Great Council of Chiefs (GCC), for example, is widely held as the bastion of Fijian tradition and culture. Its origins, however, lie not in pre-Contact Fiji but in the Council of Chiefs (*Bose Vaka Turaga*) created by Fiji's first colonial governor, Sir Arthur Gordon. Not all the chiefs of Fiji signed the Deed of Cession to Great Britain in 1874 and for some time not all were members of the Council. In time, membership was broadened but it was not always unproblematic.

At independence in 1970, for example, membership was extended to all Fijian Members of Parliament, whether chief or commoner. That tradition continued until soon after the coup of May 1987. In the previous

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April the electoral victory of the Fiji Labour Party (FLP)/National Federation Party (NFP) Coalition ended 17 years of Alliance Party (AP) rule. The Coalition had been projected by the AP as an “Indian-dominated Party”, a strategy which added fuel to fears about further “Indian domination”. In the wake of the May coup this led to doubts within the regime about the loyalty of Fijian Coalition Members of Parliament, but there were tensions within the regime as well. Membership of the GCC became even more problematic.

Support by the GCC was crucial for the viability of the post-coup regime and in the jockeying for position within the GCC the rules of the game were changed yet again. Actual or eligible members whose loyalty was deemed suspect were excluded. The “time-honoured” practice in relation to membership, which appeared to have become part of the custom of a core “traditional” institution, was now shown to be contingent on the imperatives of power.

More generally, the substance and meaning of tradition itself have come under increasing questioning, not only by outside observers but by Fijians as well. This has given rise to a debate about the “authenticity” and the “reinvention” of tradition.<sup>2</sup>

That debate aside, there can be no doubt about the fundamental importance of tradition in Fiji and the particular aspects that are discussed below have been selected because they illustrate particularly well the relevance of past practice to the current situation.

### **Social Organisation, Authority and Land**

Pre-Contact Fiji was composed of separate, often isolated, societies between which were significant variations. These variations are acknowledged but the focus here is on broad similarities. Fijian societies were (and remain) hierarchical, and authority was broadly constituted along several key lines: status (chiefs over commoners); gender (males over females) and age (elders over youths). There is no generic Fijian word for chief. Instead chiefs are identified by gender; the words for male and female chiefs are the same as for the genders—*turaga* (masculine) and *marama* (feminine). Generic titles are also gender-based and vary between areas, eg., *Ratu* or *Momo* (male) and *Adi*, *Ro* or *Bulou* (female).<sup>3</sup>

At the base of the traditional Fijian societies were elemental patrilineal descent groups, *i tokatoka*. Essentially extended families, *i tokatoka* combined to form *mataqali*. *Mataqali* which shared a common line of ancestry to an ancestor god formed *yavusa* and the various *yavusa* within particular localities formed a wider body politic, *vanua*. (The word *vanua* is also used to refer to the land or the people of the land). Historically, *vanua* were joined, often by conquest, to form the widest political unit, *matanitu*, which were referred to variously as states, governments or confederacies. There were three—Burebasaga, Kubuna and Tovata.<sup>4</sup>

In the wake of the 1987 coups these traditional political alignments assumed particular importance when chiefs in the western region of the main island, Viti Levu, attempted to form a fourth confederacy, Yasayasa Vaka Ra. Although it was rejected by both the

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regime and the GCC, their attempt was significant because it brought to the surface a longstanding regional cleavage between eastern and western Fijians which continues to be a source of tension today. I will return to this later.

Traditional chiefly authority had three bases - spiritual, personal and material. *Mana* was the spiritual basis. A chief's *mana* derived from a claimed special relationship with an ancestor-god. By virtue of the spiritual authority so bestowed, the chief was *tabu* (sacred) and accorded the greatest respect. Chiefs commanded deference and obedience and were not to be questioned or challenged.

Chiefly *mana*, however, had to be sustained through personal performance and achievement. Concern for, and advancement of, the welfare of their subjects had to be demonstrated and there was ample scope for this. Decisions taken on matters of village life were opportunities to display wisdom and caring, and organised social occasions—births, deaths, marriages, inter-village gatherings—were perfect opportunities to display chiefly generosity.

The chief was also protector and victory in battle demonstrated personal leadership and military prowess. It also brought added prestige and served as a powerful political legitimator of chiefly authority.

Land was (and remains) central to Fijian tradition and culture, materially and spiritually. Unlike other means of subsistence (e.g. working implements), which were individually owned, land was collectively owned (although there appears to have been a small degree of private ownership). This fact of collective ownership, combined with the

spirituality of the land, underlines its enormous importance.

Land was not a commodity to be bought and sold, nor even used as collateral for transactions. It was the fountainhead of material and spiritual wellbeing and the collective was not to be dispossessed of it—except, of course, by force. Designs on land by outsiders were therefore to be resisted with the greatest energy and resolve (and Indo-Fijians were for a long time viewed as outsiders).

In view, then, of the central place of land in traditional Fijian society, influence over its use was a major source of power. Chiefs had control over access to land and it is that which was the material basis of their power and authority.

For our purposes, the land issue is important for another reason. The relationship of women to land mirrors very well their place in the wider society.

### **The Situation of Women**

The Fijian expression for the traditional Fijian way of life is *vaka vanua* and the situation of women in Fijian custom and tradition is described by Cema Bolabola as follows:

Fijians saw the land and its people as components of a *vanua* and believed that the gods lived in the depths of the land and the sea. Any breach of norms was interpreted as a breach against the *vanua* and offenders were punished. Those who conformed to the laws were rewarded generously by the gods with good harvests, children—especially sons, or other good fortune.

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Fijian customs and traditions were linked to the land, and religious ceremonies and rituals were for the gods of the land. Because only men performed leading roles in such functions, their status and, consequently, their rights to land, were confirmed.

The status of women was inferior to that of males as seen by their secondary roles: marginal participation, or exclusion, from ceremonies, rituals, decision-making, and wars. Women's low status was reflected also in their sitting position at ceremonies and meals, and their allotted bathing spots in village rivers, usually at the lower end. The degree of women's participation in cultivation had no necessary relationship to the control of land. Fijian women owned limited property, mostly the handicrafts they made, whereas men held primary rights to homes, homesites, and tracts of land for gardening or food gathering.<sup>5</sup>

The introduction of statutory law, Bolabola adds, has brought some changes: the "land rights of Fijian women are [now] based on both customary and statutory law. The customary land rights involve complex relationships of descent and marriage, but their main land rights are of usufruct only, which reflect the role and status of women within Fijian society".<sup>6</sup> Women were rarely title-holders and "even when title passed through a woman, it was still from one man to another. Land rights could be transferred to their children, upon the women meeting their traditional obligations, and could be forfeited if they committed a wrong".<sup>7</sup>

### Primacy of the Group

The key constituent unit of the traditional social structure was the *mataqali*. It was the basis of the primary line of division at the village level and therefore the primary determinant of social identification and attachment. Residence was in the village (*koro*) but one's place in the broader social structure was determined by the *mataqali* to which one belonged. It was (and remains) the landholding unit. While, therefore, commoners deferred to their *mataqali* chief (*turaga ni mataqali*), prime attachment was to the *mataqali*. The group, not the chief, was the primary social referent.

*Mataqali* also formed the basis of the broad social division of labour. The word *mataqali* literally means type and *mataqali* were differentiated, broadly and hierarchically, along occupational lines. At the apex were the chiefs; next came their functionaries—spokesmen, heralds, priests and warriors; and then a host of occupational classes—weavers, builders, fishers, gravediggers and so on.<sup>8</sup>

### Core Values

A central feature of traditional Fijian societies which emerges from the foregoing is the primacy of the group, and it is this which explains much about the core traditional values of earlier times as well as of present day Fiji.

At the heart of these values was the primacy of collective wellbeing. Premium was thus placed on order, stability, responsibility, caring, generosity, reciprocity, and respect for those entrusted with prime responsibility for ensuring the common good, especially patriarchs, seniors and chiefs.



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Often these core values took localised forms. Order, for example, was often seen in terms of what was appropriate for the particular community rather than all communities. Similarly, respect was often accorded one's own chiefs rather than all chiefs. This is important for understanding patterns of loyalty, attachment and alliance.

### **Social Intimacy, Conformity and Support**

For the many small societies that made up pre-Contact Fiji, distance, topography and the limited forms of transport and communication meant relative confinement to particular localities and high levels of social intimacy. In that kind of situation, effective and enforceable norms and modes of behaviour were especially important for social harmony, and through various processes of socialisation rules, regulations and the requirements of protocol were imbibed and reaffirmed in ritual.

Central to this whole process were the twin tasks of instilling a clear sense of place and reaffirming the primacy of the group.

Conformity and compliance were therefore important and rewarded through various means—acknowledgment, acclaim and other forms of positive reinforcement. Precociousness, pretentiousness and wayward behaviour were frowned upon and penalised through direct or more subtle (but often no less effective) forms of punishment, including gossip, ridicule and social ostracism.

For example, a woman's place was in the home and women who aspired to pursuits outside it, especially in public life, risked gossip, rebuke, scorn or derision, often from other women. This

was also true more generally of persons who sought to move beyond their station in life, and today this attitude continues. A common form of put down is the charge of *viavia levu*, literally 'want to be big'.

Acceptable styles of interaction, or modes of social engagement, were therefore quickly learned and the language of social harmony went beyond words and forms of address to include attitude, posture and other aspects of demeanour. Modesty and self-deprecation were expected; assertiveness and self-promotion discouraged; and seniors (chiefs, men, parents and elders) were to be listened to not questioned.

In face-to-face contacts, such principles of social engagement translated into particular styles of interaction: soft-spokenness; avoidance of eye-contact (especially with seniors); care not to cause offence, especially to visitors and guests; and indirect, subtle, nuanced or elliptical ways of addressing sensitive issues.

For those not schooled in these ways, especially foreigners, the scope for misinterpretation and misunderstanding was considerable. For those who were, communication and other forms of interaction were easy, but there was another important effect.

The norms of social behaviour engendered an intellectual culture which was not especially open to critical enquiry and debate. In these highly structured societies where sense of place was strongly developed, the socially-sanctioned modes and conventions of dispute resolution were widely understood. Disagreement should be resolved in private rather than in public, consensus and quiet

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diplomacy were preferred over an adversarial style, and criticism was to be muted.

In this kind of situation, the scope for open debate and critical thinking was highly circumscribed. Stymied by the weight of authority and received wisdom, and constricted by convention, for many there was little room for the expression of independent thought and the development of skills of argumentation.

On the other hand, the rules of social behaviour were also underpinned by a generalised commitment to caring and sharing which, very importantly, formed the basis of traditional safety nets, both moral and material. The commitment to caring, coupled with a strong oral tradition and the high levels of social intimacy, made for personal bonds which were important in the management of personal grievance or crises.

In the kitchen or garden or around the kava bowl, for example, away from the strictures and scrutiny of the collective, confidences could be shared, advice offered, and comfort provided. And there were material safety nets as well. In times of need, the family, the village and the *mataqali* would rally to provide food, shelter and other forms of material support.

Today, urbanisation and a host of other factors have weakened the traditional safety nets yet the call on them continues to be great. Indeed, persistent fiscal difficulties and the weakening of the system of state welfare has led to increasing abrogation by the state of its welfare responsibilities to traditional and community organisations.

Supporting the commitment to caring were the core values of mutuality and reciprocity. Manifest in times of need, they were also exhibited in normal times through various forms of exchange that were part of customary practice. Three examples are *kerekere*, customary borrowing which carries an obligation to reciprocate in the future; *solevu*, formal exchanges of gifts between villages; and *solu*, organised collections for particular purposes. In such customary exchanges there was great pressure to give, and give generously. Prestige was largely a function of generosity.

Such practices continue to this day and are employed not only by Fijians but others as well. They are employed by political parties, churches, trade unions, social clubs, schools and other organisations. For many Fijians, however, the capacity and willingness to contribute have come under increasing stress. Rising prices and low incomes reduce capacity; increased individualism and new aspirations—education, cars, television—test willingness. In the 1970s Fijian sociologist Lasarusa Vusoniwailala wrote of the “rising cost of Fijian communalism”. His analysis is still valid today.<sup>9</sup>

What emerges from all this, then, is a picture of traditional Fiji characterised by communalism and caring. It is a picture that is close to the romantic image of Fiji that has often been portrayed. But there were tensions and conflicts as well.

### **Cleavages and Tensions**

Social tension had several bases - gender, seniority, status, unequal wealth—and took various forms—domestic violence, youthful rebellion,

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jealousy, chiefly rivalry and tribal warfare. Beneath these manifestations lay important structural tensions (e.g. between chiefs and between chiefs and commoners) which had material causes (land and tribute)—and which are still relevant today.

Land immediately contiguous to the family home was the exclusive preserve of family members but land beyond that immediate area, the bush or jungle (*veikau*), was held collectively by the *mataqali*. Access to *mataqali* land was secured through the consent of the *mataqali* chief. Judicious exercise of that control called for fairness and adroitness in the management of disputes about access and use. Maintenance of that control in the face of external challenge called for courage and prowess.

Control over access to land, therefore, was one underlying source of tension. Exaction of tribute was another. Charged with the divinely-ordained task of ruling and ensuring the welfare of the group, chiefs were not to be burdened with the drudgery of producing the material requirements of life—food, clothing and shelter. That was the responsibility of their subjects. To meet their material needs, therefore, chiefs appropriated some of the surplus produced by commoners. The mechanism of wealth appropriation was the payment of tribute, which took two main forms: *lala* and *sevu*. Through these, chiefs commanded certain types of labour and service and the best produce.

In this appropriation, therefore, lay a hidden source of tension between chiefs and commoners. The more the chiefs wanted, the less subjects could keep. Increased demand for tribute could be met by greater productive effort on the

part of subjects or by warfare. With conquest came new bounty, prisoners who could be worked as slaves and of course new land. Inherent in both options, however, was the possibility of disaffection, anger, or violence. How to contain latent tensions and manage it when it erupted were, therefore, major concerns. Today warfare is not an option but appropriation continues in other forms and so too, therefore, the underlying tensions.

The management of social relations took various forms. Tensions between tribes and chiefs could be settled by war and surrender (*soro*) or could be contained by non-violent means, including intermarriage, forming alliances, negotiation, or reconciliation and forgiveness (*bulubulu*)—methods which often relied on the use of chiefly functionaries (spokesmen, priests and warriors) and which are still relevant today.

In relation to chief-subject relations, tensions arising from land disputes and the extraction of tribute could also be managed through the use or threat of force or by non-violent means. An important example of the latter was to return to subjects some of the tribute taken from them, and here customary exchanges such as those described above were useful for that purpose. They were occasions on which chiefs could display magnanimity and generosity and in so doing ensure continuing loyalty.

Today, however, that mechanism is not as effective because it is rather more difficult now for commoners to gauge the true extent of chiefly generosity. Previously, chiefly wealth was visible—food, mats, tapa cloth, artifacts and so on. These days much of it is in bank accounts, shares and investments,

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hidden away from the eyes of subjects but knowledge of which raises doubts about traditional chiefly caring.

What is more, many chiefs today have taken on other, non-traditional roles. As modern political and economic actors, they have taken on new obligations, often to non-Fijians, and with these competing claims there is often less time to attend to the needs of traditional subjects. Some of those new obligations arise from their roles in the western-style system of government.

## **WESTERN LIBERAL DEMOCRACY**

### **Values, Authority, Structure**

With successive waves of European arrivals in the last century came the seeds of democratic principles, values, practices and institutions. Further nurtured by formal colonisation, they laid the basis of the western democratic system of government. In time, however, especially after the arrival of Indians, that system became less and less democratic.

Missionaries introduced Christian values and practices and were highly successful in their efforts at conversion. Today almost all Fijians are Christian, the vast majority (about 85 percent) being Methodist, followed by Catholics and several smaller denominations. Central to the missionaries' evangelising strategy was the conversion of chiefs. That secured, subjects generally followed, and very soon the church (*Lotu*) became a key institution, and its continuing political importance is indicated by the critical influence of key leaders of the Methodist Church in the events of 1987 and beyond.

Various values introduced by the Christian missionaries dovetailed with other western, secular values. Faith in the Christian God was central but so too was individual conscience. For their part, other European settlers stressed the importance of universal authority (the rule of law as opposed to the bible) but also individualism (as opposed to communalism) and private property (as opposed to collective ownership). Education too was important in this regard, and here the importance of religious schools is especially noteworthy.

With formal colonisation by Britain, earlier impacts such as these were further reinforced. The separate societies and polities of the pre-Contact era were now brought under a single central state and the locus of power and authority shifted from the chiefs to the colonial government.

The nature of power and authority also changed. Personal, charismatic authority concentrated in the hands of the chiefs now gave way to the rational, bureaucratic authority of the state and its institutions—the legislature, judiciary, public service, army and so on. The effects of these changes quickly penetrated into civil society.

### **Political Organisation**

Grounded on key western values, especially those relating to individual rights and freedoms, new forms of political organisation emerged, including interest groups, the media and, later, political parties.

Political representation initially took the form of nominated membership in the Legislative Council. Elections followed later. Europeans were the first to get the vote, in 1904, and Indo-Fijians

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second, in 1929. Fijians did not get it until 1966 and the lateness is explained largely by the long-held view of the colonial government that Fijians were not ready for the rigors and demands of modernity.

For Arthur Gordon, the first governor, regional variations in the traditional social structure were a problem. To introduce the uniformity necessary for administrative convenience and social control he constructed his own model of the 'traditional' social structure. This formed the basis of the Native Administration he created in 1876. In 1946, with some modifications, it became the Fijian Administration, which has continued to this day.

### **The System of Native/Fijian Administration**

This "separate" system, which has been described as a "state within a state", was justified in terms of protecting the interests of the Fijian race, a justification which later became the claim for the 'paramountcy of Fijian interests'. Covering virtually every aspect of Fijian life, the system created a tiered structure of administrative units.

At the bottom level were the villages (*koro*), each headed by a village headman (*turaga ni koro*). Contiguous villages were grouped into districts (*tikina*), each headed by a district head (*buli*) to whom all *turaga ni koro* were responsible. Districts were grouped in turn into provinces (*yasana*) whose boundaries often corresponded with traditional ones.

With a few exceptions in the early stages, each province was headed by a *Roko Tui*, each of whom was responsible to the governor. In addition there were District Councils (*Bose ni*

*Tikina*) and Provincial Councils (*Bose ni Yasana*), and at the apex stood the Council of Chiefs (*Bose Vaka Turaga*). Composed primarily of chiefs drawn from the provinces, the Council of Chiefs accorded recognition to the three traditional confederacies and came to be regarded as the very embodiment of the Fijian body politic.

Within this system also existed institutions charged with the critically important responsibility of managing Fijian affairs in relation to land. A Native Lands Commission (NLC) was established and later on control of all native land was vested in the Native Lands Trust Board (NLTB). Together with the Fijian Affairs Board and the Ministry of Fijian Affairs they make up the higher echelons of the system of Fijian Administration that exists today.

Early concerns about various aspects of the system led to a major reorganisation in 1944 and a further review in 1985.<sup>10</sup> One issue which continues to cause concern is the distribution of rents derived from leases of native land, a concern which illustrates (i) the underlying traditional cleavage between chiefs and commoners and (ii) the impact of the increasingly bureaucratic nature of the system.

Of the Pacific Islands in general, Ron Crocombe, a leading scholar of land tenure in the Pacific Islands, makes the following general observation, "With the introduction of a money economy.... it is tempting for chiefs to interpret their titular right of control for public benefit as an individual right of ownership for the personal benefit of the chief".<sup>11</sup>

In relation to Fiji in particular he gives the following account:

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...in Fiji...the rental income from clan land is shared by law so that 30 per cent goes to the three levels of chief [village, district, provincial], 25 percent to the Native Lands Trust Board for administration, and only the remaining 45 per cent to the ordinary members of the owning clan. Since that law was introduced nearly half a century ago, the population of Fiji has grown by almost three times, but the number of chiefs remains the same because the number of clans was fixed by the Native Lands Commission. So Fijian commoners are in this respect three times worse off than they were when the law was made. Moreover, at that time chiefs undertook much administrative work for the Government and their share of land rent was one way of compensating for that. Since then, most of those chiefly tasks have been taken over by the government and paid for by the public (and by foreign aid). The extent of leasing, and the value of land, have both escalated many times over since that law was made. Each of these factors enhances the benefits to chiefs and deprives commoners in relative terms. The growing wealth of chiefs, in areas where land renting is extensive and there is relative poverty of commoners, is rationalised by chiefs (who also have disproportionate power in Government) as being based on ancient custom. However, a more equitable distribution of benefits would reflect that custom much more accurately.<sup>12</sup>

For the vast majority of Fijians, especially commoners, the 'separate' and 'protective' system which regulated their lives also had important political consequences. Cocooned for a long period from the political mainstream, they were exposed to fewer opportunities than the other ethnic communities to acquire and develop the kind of knowledge, skills and resources necessary for effective participation in the evolving, increasingly modern polity.

It is not surprising therefore that Fijian electoral participation and political parties did not emerge until quite late, until 1966 in fact. The extended history of Fijian marginality from the political mainstream, however, did not mean that they were immune from the deepening imbroglio occasioned by the presence of immigrant communities, to which I will return later.

### **Cleavages and Tensions**

Co-operation between the colonial state and various chiefs did not guarantee political peace and harmony. As mentioned earlier, Fijian society was divided by various cleavages. These did not disappear after colonisation. Often, however, those tensions were confounded by the presence of the coloniser and there were significant instances of commoner resistance against the colonial rulers and their chiefly supporters. Also evident in these conflicts were chief-commoner, inter-chiefly and regional tensions.<sup>13</sup>

Western-style government exacerbated those cleavages and brought new ones as well. The open political competition allowed by that system was exploited by immigrant communities and produced outcomes which were seen

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increasingly by Fijians as disadvantageous to them.

But the immigrant communities also had their own complaints about the political system, and of these an especially important one was Indo-Fijian dissatisfaction with an electoral system which systematically discriminated against them. In their struggles for political fairness, however, they were viewed with suspicion, especially by European and Fijian elites who feared what they called the 'threat of Indian dominance'. The fact that by 1945 Indo-Fijians had become the largest ethnic group did not help matters.

The western system of government, then, allowed for new aspirations, and the pursuit of these generated problematic outcomes. Indo-Fijian attempts at securing political equity were wholly legitimate but success was seen by others to threaten their own interests. That perceptual cleavage found expression in the ideology of racialism, which in 1987 intensified greatly and today cuts across the whole gamut of issues which preoccupy the country. An adequate appreciation of its full import, however, is possible only against an understanding of capitalist practice and ethics in Fiji.

## **CAPITALIST PRACTICE AND ETHICS**

### **Structure and Values**

The economic transformation of Fiji dates back to the early European traders and planters through whom new economic values and new forms of economic organisation were introduced. Alongside subsistence activity, there was now wage work, and the organisation, pace and intensity of work was also changing. In the plantations work was contracted,

organised, timed, supervised, rewarded differently and geared to different ends—money-making and the market. Products were commodities to be bought and sold rather than exchanged for their usefulness, and workplaces were now more structured than previously.

Plantations, factories, shops and later mines were hierarchically organised and regulated by formal rules enforceable by new laws. In time the pressure to engage in wage work increased as the colonial state required taxes to be paid in cash rather than in kind.

Supporting this transformation was a new set of values—individualism, private ownership, frugality, sacrifice, deferred gratification; new understandings of productivity, efficiency and work; and a new conception of welfare in which primacy was attached to material wellbeing.

### **Capitalist Development and Ethnicity**

The proportion of Fijians who were drawn into this new economy, however, was small, and Fijian reluctance to undertake wage work proved problematic for the burgeoning sugar plantation economy dominated by an Australian company, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR).

The problem of the labour supply was resolved primarily by the importation of indentured labourers from India, beginning in 1879. With that the capital/labour axis assumed a predominantly ethnic, i.e. European/Indo-Fijian, form, and later Fiji would be described as a "three legged stool"—Fijian land, European capital and Indian labour.

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For some time Europeans controlled the economy—plantation agriculture, commerce, the professions, finance and, from the 1930s, gold mining. In the all-important sugar sector, the CSR increasingly moved away from production to concentrate on the more profitable activity—milling. Most of the indentured workers chose to remain in Fiji after the expiry of their contracts and many took to growing sugar cane in small landholdings, the majority of which were leased from Fijians. The CSR kept the sugar mills until 1973 when they were bought by the government.

In the other economic sectors European dominance was increasingly rivalled by Indo-Fijians from about the 1920s. Indo-Fijians saw education as a principal means for advancement and the fruits of sacrifice and study soon became evident in their increasing presence in commerce, the professions and the public service. Business acumen, hard work and a strong disposition to save brought success which challenged European economic dominance.

This caused much anxiety among their European competitors who, fearing the growing competition, began talking about the 'threat of Indian domination'. In that effort they won support amongst the Fijian leadership. Therein lies the origins of ethnic tension in Fiji. The ethnic cleavages, however, were not always clear-cut for there were important intra-communal cleavages which, as I show later, paved the way for significant inter-communal alliances.

As happened elsewhere, capitalist development in Fiji was (and is) uneven. Sugar production is concentrated in the western side of Viti Levu and the second largest island, Vanua Levu. Gold

mining is in northern Viti Levu. Tourism, which took off in the mid 1960s, is concentrated in the coastal areas of western and south-western Fiji. Commercial timber production began in the 1970s and the "green gold" is produced mainly in western Viti Levu.

The great bulk of the wealth of the country, therefore, is generated in the western region and a persistent grievance among western Fijians is that their resources have for a long time been the basis of a large chunk of national cake but their share of that cake is disproportionately small.

### **Cleavages and Tensions**

The subsistence sector, in which Fijians predominate, continues to be important but the modern, capitalist sector is by far the dominant one. Their coexistence has generated tensions which are as important today as they were a century ago.

Rural Fiji is the heartland of traditional Fijian culture but its viability is increasingly tested by the imperatives of the capitalist economy. Money is a necessity but many lack the capacity to earn it. Customary obligations compete with modern aspirations, and in any case are increasingly difficult to meet because of rising prices.

Land is sacred but group ownership prevents its use as collateral. More and more, the market is making inroads which the subsistence sector is increasingly unable to withstand and villagers thus leave for the towns.

Urban bias, however, is only one manifestation of the uneven development in Fiji. The greater development of coastal areas compared with that of the hinterland is another.



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A third is the higher level of resource development in the western than the eastern region.

Uneven development also has a sectoral dimension. The tourist and sugar sectors, for example, are more developed than manufacturing and the construction industry. The same is true within sectors. Within tourism, the accommodation subsector is more developed than the handicrafts subsector.

There were class and ethnic cleavages as well and they too were reflected in the economic organisations which emerged in the course of capitalist development in Fiji.

### **Economic Institutions**

The formation of trade unions was resisted for a long time. The first, formed by teachers in 1924, was followed in the 1930s by two organisations of Indian sugarcane farmers, the Kisan Sangh and the Maha Sangh. Further significant growth in the trade union movement had to await pressure from Britain for the enactment of "enlightened" labour legislation in the colonies.

A five fold increase in the number of trade unions in the 1940s paved the way for the formation of the first peak union body which today is called the Fiji Trade Union Congress. The predominance of particular ethnic groups in particular economic sectors or occupations was a major reason for the ethnic splits which for a long time afflicted the trade union movement and continues to do so.

Employers too formed their own organisations—sectoral bodies, chambers of commerce and eventually

a peak organisation which today is called the Fiji Employers Federation. As with the trade unions, employer organisations shared common interests but were also divided by particular ones. Business competition and rivalry ensured that.

At the state level were legislative, administrative and negotiating arrangements which formed the locus and institutional basis for the system of industrial relations. Today at the centre of that system are the various arms of the Ministry of Labour, the Permanent Arbitrator and the Sugar Tribunal.

Apart from the settlement of industrial disputes, these economic institutions were encouraged to co-operate for the national good and the state has, over the years, set in place various mechanisms to facilitate this. In the 1970s, for example, it established the Tripartite Forum which brought together representatives of government, employers and employees. Although it did not last very long, there was agreement between the three groups of stakeholders that the principle behind the arrangement was a good one, and recently there have been suggestions for its revival.

Another example is the annual National Economic Summit. Convened by the government, it brings together representatives of all the major interest groups, including women, youth and the churches, to discuss the government's economic plans and priorities.

Evident even in constructive initiatives such as these, however, is the pervasive influence of the fourth contextual parameter of development in Fiji—ethnicity.

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## **ETHNICITY**

### **Heterogeneity and Multiple Identities**

Fiji's ethnic composition is usually portrayed in terms of the three major groupings—Fijian, Indo-Fijian and Others—but all are internally divided. Within the Fijian community, as has already been said, are traditional and regional cleavages. Indo-Fijians are divided along caste, linguistic and religious lines as well as by place of origin ('North' versus 'South' Indians). Similar sorts of cleavages exist within the smaller ethnic communities—Europeans, 'mixed race' persons, Chinese and Pacific Islanders.

The profound and pervasive influence of ethnicity in Fiji is self-evident but in addition to the principal cleavage between the major ethnic groups are important secondary ones which divide them internally. What is more, cutting across the ethnic cleavages are class ones. Members of all ethnic groups are to be found in the business sector, the professions, the small but growing middle class as well as among wage workers, farmers, subsistence workers and the large pool of unemployed.<sup>14</sup>

The complex pattern of social differentiation engendered by these various cleavages ensures that despite the unquestionable importance of ethnicity, the dynamics of social relations do not always follow a clear and unambiguous ethnic logic. Another reason is multiple identity—ethnic, gender, class, age and so on. Both of these factors are important for an adequate understanding of the cultural and political dynamics of Fiji.

To illustrate, despite the animosity which historically Indo-Fijians have had to endure, not all have given

allegiance to the 'Indian' party, the National Federation Party (NFP). Hindu/Muslim tensions which their ancestors brought from India were played out in Fiji (and still are) and Muslims generally supported the Alliance Party. For their part, Hindus overwhelmingly supported NFP. A significant number, however, supported the 'Fijian' party, the Alliance Party, and among these were prominent members of the Indo-Fijian business class.

Examples such as these show how in social relations multiple identity can lead to contradictory and unexpected outcomes. They show that choices are shaped by the particular identities to which primacy is attached. Obviously these emphases can and do change over time—and that is important for understanding the shifting loyalties and fluid coalitions which characterise Fiji's past and present.

Ethnic heterogeneity and multiple identity, then, underpin the complex and shifting pattern of social behaviour in Fiji. Running through them, however, are deep and durable divides, which are indicated by demographic trends.

### **Ethnicity and Demography**

Trends in the ethnic composition of Fiji's population since the 1960s are shown in the Table on the following page.

As mentioned earlier, until 1945 Fijians were the largest ethnic group. In that year, the number of Indo-Fijians surpassed that of Fijians. In the 1990s the higher Fijian population growth rate compared with that of Indo-Fijians was boosted after the coup of 1987. This disparity was further increased after the coups of 1987 by Indo-Fijian

**COMPARISON OF TOTAL POPULATION DISTRIBUTION  
BY ETHNICITY: 1986-1995**

	1966		1976		1986		1995	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Fijians	202,132	42.4	259,926	44.2	329,305	46.0	403,288	50.7
Indo-Fijians	240,747	50.5	292,858	49.8	348,704	48.7	346,523	43.5
Others	33,848	7.1	35,284	6.0	37,366	5.3	46,267	5.8
Total	476,727	100.0	588,068	100.0	715,375	100.0	796,078	100.0

*Sources: Kesaia Seniloli, Fiji, in R.V. Cole ed. Pacific 2010: Challenging the Future, Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University, 1993, p.66; and The Fiji Islands: Towards a United Future, Report of the Fiji Constitution Review Commission, Parliamentary Paper No.34 of 1996, Suva, Fiji, p.790.*

emigration. Over 14,000 Indo-Fijians, many of whom were highly skilled, left the country.<sup>15</sup>

**The Saliency of Perception: The ‘Threat of Indian domination’**

For about 50 years, then, Indo-Fijians were the largest ethnic group, a demographic feature which fuelled perceptions of a ‘threat of Indian domination’. That perception had political and economic dimensions as well. At the political level, the long historical struggle by Indo-Fijians for political equality was often portrayed by their opponents as yet another attempt at domination.

What was more, their opponents argued, Indo-Fijians wanted full rights of citizenship but were unwilling to meet their obligations as citizens. They pointed, for example, to Indo-Fijian reluctance to fight during World War II as evidence of that unwillingness and, more generally, their selfishness, lack of patriotism and lack of loyalty. That argument has been challenged but it influenced popular perceptions very strongly.

The negative impact coloured views about Indo-Fijian political organisation and mobilisation and severely limited the possibility of inter-communal co-operation. Not surprisingly, the major political parties were, and came to be seen as, ethnic ones: the National Federation Party, founded in 1960, was the “Indian” party; the Alliance Party, established in 1966, although “multiracial”, was the “Fijian” party. Today, following the demise of the Alliance in 1987, the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) is the “Fijian” party.

The Fiji Labour Party, formed in 1984, sought to cross ethnic barriers but was projected by the Alliance Party as dominated or controlled by Indo-Fijians, and when the FLP formed a Coalition with the NFP to form the government in April 1987, opponents of the new government claimed that the threat of Indian domination had become reality. Not only were Indo-Fijians numerically superior, it was argued, they now had political power. That claim was vigorously contested by the FLP and others but for many that

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was the reality. What was more, opponents claimed, Indians also had economic power. The validity of that claim, however, is questionable

A brief survey of the major economic sectors shows that what is perceived as 'Indian economic domination' is in fact Indian preponderance in some sectors. To take the sugar sector first, the most profitable subsector—milling—is owned by the government. Most of the sugar cane is produced by the large number of Indo-Fijian tenant farmers working small plots. Their hard work, the fact that they do not own the land they till, and their very modest standards of living hardly makes them 'economically dominant'.

The same is true of Indo-Fijian involvement in tourism. Again, the most profitable and the largest subsectors by far, accommodation and travel, are controlled by others, mainly foreign companies. Very few Indo-Fijians are employed in the gold mines, which are owned by an Australian company. The same is true of the commercial pine industry, which is owned jointly by the government and a foreign company, as well as the commercial fishing industry, a large chunk of which is government-owned.

The financial sector is dominated by foreign banks, including Westpac and Australian and New Zealand Banking Corporation, and foreign insurance companies like the Colonial Mutual Assurance Company. The local banks, the National Bank of Fiji and the Fiji Development Bank, are government-owned.

The utilities sector—electricity, water supply, telephones and so on—is also

owned by the government. And the public service and the subsistence sector are dominated by Fijians.

Together these sectors account for the bulk of GDP and are not controlled by Indo-Fijians. It is in the other sectors that their presence is strong—manufacturing, retail, local transportation and the professions. Yet even in some of these, they are faced with large and powerful competitors. In retail, for example, Indo-Fijians own many shops but have to compete with the two large rivals, both foreign-owned, Morris Hedstrom and Burns Philp.

It is the large number of Indo-Fijian entrepreneurs in these areas which captures the popular mind. It is their preponderance and visibility which are the source of jealousy and antagonism and which are equated with dominance.

The 'threat of Indian domination', then, is open to serious question. Nonetheless, the perception continues in a powerful way and its salience is further heightened by the demand for 'Fijian paramountcy', in the name of which the coups of 1987 were staged and which today informs the key issues facing the country.

How the competing objectives are pursued, the effectiveness of the strategies being adopted, and what the likely outcomes might be are the questions to which we now turn. We begin in the next chapter by surveying the ways in which social relations have been managed. Chapter 4 will then revisit the major issues of current concern in a more detailed way and in Chapter 5 the major findings and lessons are drawn.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Filipe Bole, *Fiji's chiefly system and its pattern of political self-reliance*, in R. Crocombe, U. Neemia, A. Ravuvu and W. vom Busch eds., *Culture and Democracy in the South Pacific*, Suva: *Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific*, p.69. For another Fijian view on this issue, see Isikeli Mataitoga, *Westminster-style democracy and cultural diversity: a critique of the Fijian experience*, in R. Crocombe et al., *Culture and Democracy in the South Pacific*.
- <sup>2</sup> See for example, Roger Kessing, "Creating the Past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific", *Contemporary Pacific*, 1, 1 & 2 (Spring & Fall), 1989; and S. Lawson, *Tradition versus Democracy in the South Pacific: Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa*, Melbourne: *Cambridge University Press*, 1995.
- <sup>3</sup> Useful accounts of Fijian society and tradition include Rusiate Nayacakalou, *Tradition and Change in the Fijian Village*, Suva: *South Pacific Social Sciences Association*, 1978; and *Leadership in Fiji*, Melbourne: *Oxford University Press*, 1975; John Nation, *Customs of Respect: The Traditional Basis of Fijian Communal Politics*, Canberra: *Development Studies Centre, Australian National University*, 1978; Isireli Lasaga, *The Fijian People: Before and After Independence*, Canberra: *Australian National University Press*, 1984; and Cema Bolabola, "Changes in Fijian Leadership", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 14, 2 (1978):154-159.
- <sup>4</sup> For a recent discussion of this, see Bole, op.cit.
- <sup>5</sup> Cema Bolabola, *Fiji: customary constraints and legal progress*, in *Land Rights of Pacific Women*, Suva: *Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific*, 1986, p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.56.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> For fuller discussion, see Bole, op.cit.
- <sup>9</sup> Lasarusa Vusoniwailala, "Communication, Social Identity and the Rising Cost of Fijian Communalism", *Pacific Perspective*, 12, 2 (1976):1-7.
- <sup>10</sup> R.V. Cole, S.I. Levine and A.V. Matahau, *The Fijian Provincial Administration: A Review*, Suva: *Parliamentary Paper No. 55 of 1985*.
- <sup>11</sup> R. Crocombe, *Trends and Issues in Pacific Land Tenures*, in R. Crocombe and M. Meleisea eds., *Land Issues in the Pacific*, Suva: *Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific*, 1994, p. 11.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.11-12.
- <sup>13</sup> For fuller discussion, see W. Sutherland, *Beyond the Politics of Race: An Alternative History of Fiji to 1992*, *Political and Social Change Research Monograph 15*, Canberra: *Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University*, 1992, pp.39-42.
- <sup>14</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.151-159.
- <sup>15</sup> K. Seniloli, *Fiji*, in R. V. Cole ed., *Pacific 2010: Challenging the Future*, Canberra: *National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University*, 1993, p. 65.



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## MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

The way in which social relations in Fiji have been managed has varied greatly and an assessment of the effectiveness of the approaches presently being followed would benefit from an understanding of past practice. Previous approaches have drawn on practices generally associated with the key foundational parameters identified in the previous chapter. There were, in other words, traditional Fijian approaches, democratic methods, practices associated with capitalist economies, and particular cultural and individual styles.

Invariably, the conduct and management of social relations has involved a mixture of these approaches. To bring some order to the enormous range of mix, the following survey is organised around four key aspects of social management: form, strategy, style and level.

### FORMS OF MANAGEMENT

Three broad forms of social management can be identified: ideological, political and cultural.

#### **Ideological**

The ideological form of social management refers to attempts at

shaping values and attitudes, and in the case of Fiji there are three major examples of this: racialism, defensive radicalism and developmentalism.

#### *Racialism*

Racist ideology in Fiji is manifested in many ways but its principal axis is the antagonism towards Indo-Fijians. This is illustrated by the following well-known stereotype: 'the smiling, hospitable Fijian and the greasy, selfish Indian'. The history of this and other similar attitudes is a history of attempts at managing and controlling social relations through the propagation of attitudinal and value biases.

These have become so embedded in consciousness that they have taken on a pertinence and materiality of their own. The literature on this is large and it is generally agreed that racist ideology has been highly effective for the pursuit of two principal objectives: social control and the furtherance of sectional interest.

In the negotiations leading up to independence in 1970, it became obvious to those who eventually won power that realisation of their objective would require cross-ethnic cooperation. That, they also realised, required a 180

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degree ideological turn. The Alliance Party was formed in 1966. Its three constituent parts were the Fijian Association, at the top of which were Fiji's four paramount chiefs, all from the eastern part of the country (Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau, and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau); the Indian Alliance; and the General Electors Association. Reflected here was the country's ethnic composition and the Party formally adopted multiracialism as the key plank of its ideological platform.

Until the electoral demise of the Alliance Party in April 1987, multiracialism was the official ideology but despite salutary attempts at building inter-communal harmony, ethnic tensions remained and surfaced in various forms and on many occasions. The most testing occasion until the coup of May 1987 was the electoral defeat of the Alliance Party by the National Federation Party in April 1977.

The defeat was caused by splits within the Fijian community. Nationalistic Fijians led by Sakeasi Butadroka (still a major political actor) were dissatisfied with the Alliance for not doing enough to advance Fijian interests, and in the western region many Fijians were angry because they were not getting a fair share of the benefits flowing from the exploitation of their resources.<sup>1</sup>

As it happened, tensions between leaders of the victorious National Federation Party delayed their decision on the formation of a new government. That cleared the way for the Governor-General, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, to ask the defeated Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to head an interim government pending fresh elections in the following September 1977. That time around

the Alliance Party won handsomely, due to Fijian voters closing ranks and resurgent support for the Alliance from Indo-Fijians who feared a repeat of the heightened ethnic tensions following the NFP's victory earlier in the year.

In the ensuing years the ideology of multiracialism sat uncomfortably alongside continuing evidence of racist thinking and practice. In April 1987 the Alliance was again defeated but this time racialism returned with renewed vigour and violence to set the scene for the coups and then underpin the regimes they produced.

#### *Defensive Radicalism*

Another example of the use of ideology in the management of social relations is what has been described as defensive radicalism. This refers to the display of hostile attitudes towards foreign actors deemed to cause domestic problems. Foreign companies are a common target as well as foreign governments and international organisations.

But the enemy can also be an ideology, and for a long time it was communism/socialism. Today it is, at least for some Fijians, democracy—that 'foreign flower' which threatens 'custom and tradition'. This kind of radicalism is defensive because it is deflective. It seeks to shift attention away from other, internal causes of disaffection.

#### *Developmentalism*

A third example is the ideology of developmentalism. This finds strongest expression in state policy and is indicated, for example, by appeals for sacrifice, belt-tightening, hard work, saving and so on. It is predicated on the view that welfare depends fundamentally on a healthy and



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growing economy which, at times, requires hard decisions and deprivation.

But this ideology, too, is problematic for the management of social relations. Sometimes it is constructive, at other times not. The tendency for the government to rely more and more on the community to shoulder more responsibility for social welfare has already been mentioned. For many Fijians, for example, this often means recourse to traditional safety nets but these too are coming under increasing stress. Furthermore, this added pressure on families and traditional organisations raises doubts in Fijian minds about their leaders, who traditionally were expected to ensure the welfare of their followers.

Developmentalism has also been problematic because of the primacy it attaches to economic growth at the expense of non-material welfare. Again the Fijian case is illustrative. The money economy, many Fijians feel, has created new aspirations the pursuit of which has undermined traditional mechanisms and networks of support. Increasing individualism, family dispersion and urbanisation compromise the cohesiveness and intimacy which traditionally allowed scope for meeting non-material needs.

These problems point to a wider one, the contested nature of the very concept of developmentalism. Churches, trade unions and community organisations, for example, question the privileging of economic growth over considerations of equity, access and distribution.<sup>2</sup>

### **Political**

Political forms of social management are deliberate and organised attempts,

often through institutional means, at influencing power relations and state policy. Without wishing to suggest clear lines of division between these and other forms, the political forms refer to relations between political state institutions; political parties; the media; churches; trade unions; producer associations; employer organisations, and pressure groups, including community organisations like the Fiji Students and Youth League, *Soqosoqo Vaka Marama* (Fijian Women's Association), Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Coalition for Justice and Peace, and the Citizens Constitutional Forum.

### **Cultural**

Cultural forms of social management draw on cultural particularity. Chiefly censure or reprimand, for example, is an effective mechanism of control within the Fijian community. But cultural forms of social management have also been employed in positive ways. Cross-cultural educational programmes, interfaith gatherings and interethnic participation in cultural festivals, for example, have served to enhance mutual respect and understanding.

### **STRATEGIES OF MANAGEMENT**

Cutting across these forms of social management are a range of strategies which can be broadly categorised as follows: management by fiat; accommodative strategies; and adversarial strategies.

#### **Management by Fiat**

Management by fiat refers to the regulation of social relations by outright exercise of authority. One example is chiefly directive. Another is government

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decree, a strategy which was used extensively in the immediate post-coup years. However, as the level of internal opposition and the scrutiny of the international community began to grow, and as the regime recognised that key economic imperatives were being seriously compromised, the efficacy of this strategy became more and more suspect. One illustration of this is the recent lifting of a ban, imposed in 1988, which forbade work, commercial trading and, for some time, sporting activities on Sundays.

### **Accommodative Strategies**

A whole range of accommodative strategies have been adopted in Fiji and are illustrated by various instances of electoral cooperation: the formation of political coalition, industrial arbitration and conciliation; tripartite dialogue between employers, employees and the state; state-community consultations through seminars, conferences and other meetings; cross-communal political dialogue, and national consultations, like the National Economic Summit (NES).

The NES is an important source of input into government policy-making. It has several subcommittees which consult interested parties, receive submissions and advise the government on their areas of responsibility. There are subcommittees on Economic Strategy, Private Sector Development, Public Enterprise Reform, and Indigenous Fijian Participation in Business.<sup>3</sup>

The hallmarks of accommodative strategies are commitment to dialogue, willingness to compromise, and search for consensus. Consultation, co-operation, promise and concession are

their key underpinnings. Although they have not always led to determinate and/or positive outcomes, the many instances of success suggest a general recognition of their cost-effectiveness and that they are preferable to adversarial strategies. Much, however, depends on the issue involved and the intensity with which protagonists view it. On land matters, for example, positions are likely to be much more unbending than on, say, the question of citizenship.

### **Adversarial Strategies**

Adversarial strategies tend to be employed when the stakes are high and feelings intense. Here the management of difference often involves extreme and at times noisy forms of behaviour. Rigidity, perception of serious threat and antagonism thus lead to management by confrontation.

At one extreme, adversarial strategies rest on the actual or threatened use of force. Examples include the coups; attacks on Indo-Fijian places of worship; and the threat of violence. In June 1994 Prime Minister "Rabuka told the House of Representatives he could not guarantee that there would not be a third coup or that it would be bloodless". That provoked NFP and Labour Party MPs to walk out of parliament.<sup>4</sup>

At the other extreme are strategies which lean towards exclusion or withdrawal. Examples of these include withdrawal from negotiations, boycotts of parliament, and exclusion of key stakeholders (as in the case of closed meetings, industrial strikes and lockouts). In between these lie strategies like demonstrations, public denunciation, personal attacks, and use of the media to mount campaigns against rivals.

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## **MODES/STYLES OF ENGAGEMENT**

Effective management of social relations, especially in small societies like Fiji, is a matter not only of strategy but of the modality and style as well. On modality, a distinction can be drawn between public/formal and private/informal modes.

### **Public/Formal**

Public/formal modes of engagement are those which exploit public institutions and for which there are formal rules. These include public enquiries, commissions and committees of various kinds, formal submissions, lobbying of politicians, and exchanges through the media. In Fiji, the capacity to employ such methods is limited to a minority, including the state, large institutions and interest groups, and well-resourced individuals.

For many rural dwellers, farmers, wage workers, women, youth and the unemployed there is not the capacity, and often not the willingness, to exploit such methods. The state, given its resources, including its ownership and control of key media organisations like Fiji Television, is especially well placed to exploit these methods in its efforts at managing social relations.

### **Private/Informal**

For the majority of the population, private/informal modes of social engagement are more important than public/formal ones. Personal, family, village and church ties, social and sporting occasions, and discussions around the kava bowl<sup>5</sup> are avenues through which people can more comfortably engage others on political, cultural and economic issues,

including sensitive ones. The relative privacy, informality, and closeness of such links and occasions, make for more ready and open expression of personal opinion and, importantly, criticism.

These are critical sites for gauging of public opinion. The English language daily newspaper, The Fiji Times, has recently begun a programme of social surveys on topical issues and the published results are a new and significant guide to popular thinking. There is a long way to go, however, before they can begin to rival the importance of the other, private sources mentioned above.

Much of this applies also to the private/informal modes of engagement employed by Fiji's elites. For them the key sites include social (mostly male-dominated) clubs and associations; the golf course, the cocktail circuit, and of course private gatherings. An example of the last of these is the informal Diners Club formed by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in early 1992 "through which he shared his experiences and offered advice to select members of the Fijian political elite". At that time the rift between Ratu Sir Kamisese and Rabuka was wide and the latter "was not among the select few".<sup>6</sup>

### **Style**

Running through all of this is style. In Fiji it is often said that what matters is not so much what is said or done but how. Here two aspects of style are important: cultural and personal.

It is too risky to speak of unique cultural styles but there are perceptions of stylistic difference between cultures. At times, for

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example, the forthright, matter-of-fact and to-the-point style of some Europeans is contrasted with the vague, ambiguous, oblique, elliptical style of many Fijians. Similarly, the business-like approach of company representatives seeking quick and firm decisions is contrasted with the reflective, consensual and often time-consuming approach adopted at traditional Fijian gatherings.

In addition to such differences, there are also differences in personal style. It is not uncommon for comment, public and private, to be made about the warm and accommodating style of some leaders or the aggressive and intransigent style of others. It is often felt that outcomes have been shaped by personal style.

The general point here is that lessons can be learned from the range of styles that have been adopted in the conduct and management of social relations. Some conduce more than others to peaceful and nonthreatening management of sensitive issues, and

here *bulubulu*, a traditional Fiji method of reconciliation and forgiveness springs to mind. Similarly, some styles are more efficient than others in terms of generating quick, clear and unambiguous decisions, especially under tight time constraints.

### **Levels of Management**

In concrete situations, the particular mix of form, strategy and style will vary and it is difficult to generalise about the efficacy of particular mixes. Much depends on the circumstances and, very importantly, the level at which social relations are being managed. Mixes appropriate at the national level might well be different from those at the regional, municipal, village and community levels. It is not possible within the scope of this study to probe these in any detailed way but such investigations could be useful in planning future developmental interventions.

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### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> See *W. Sutherland*, op. cit., pp.165-172.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *Kevin Barr*, *Poverty in Suva*, Suva: Fiji Forum for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation; and *Let's Change the World: Catholic Social Teaching Today*, Suva: Chevalier Publications, 1994; and also *C. Slatter*, *Banking on the growth model? The World Bank and market policies in the Pacific*, in *'Atu Emberson-Bain ed.*, *Sustainable Growth or Malignant Development? Perspectives of Pacific Island Women*, Suva: Marama Publications, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of these in relation to the 1995 NES, see *The Review*, May 1995: 22-29. Hereafter *The Review* is cited as *Review*.

<sup>4</sup> *Review*, November 1996: 27.

<sup>5</sup> *Kava* is a non-alcoholic traditional Fijian drink used on ceremonial occasions and is widely-drunk socially.

<sup>6</sup> *B. V. Lal*, *Rhetoric and Reality: The Dilemmas of Contemporary Fijian Politics*, in *R. Crocombe, U. Neemia and W. vom Busch eds.*, op. cit., p. 107.

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## THE CURRENT SITUATION

### OVERVIEW

In the survey which follows the key concern is to give further flesh to the influence of socio-cultural and political factors and the dynamics which lie beneath the fluidity and uncertainty which prevail. This is done by first surveying key stakeholders, actors and issues and then focussing on a few recent developments which illustrate the central themes and argument of the study.

### STAKEHOLDERS

#### Political

Soon after the promulgation of a new constitution in June 1990, the proposal to establish a 'Fijian Party' was announced, and eventually in October 1991 the SVT was formed with the blessing of the GCC. The SVT included many former members and supporters of the Alliance Party.

Today, with 31 of the 70 seats in the House of Representatives, the SVT is the largest political party in the parliament. Led by Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka, it governs with the support of two independents, 4 MPs from the General Voters Party (GVP) and one from the General Electors Party (GEP).

The two independents are Paul Manueli, former head of the military and now Minister for Home Affairs; and Ratu Jo Nacola, previously a minister in the FLP/NFP Coalition government of 1987 and presently Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Telecommunications.

The GVP is the successor to the General Electors Association, an arm of the former Alliance Party. Two of its four Members of Parliament are in the present Cabinet: Vincent Lobendahn, Minister for Labour and Industrial Relations; and Leo Smith, Minister for Health.

Internal disputes within the GVP in 1996 led to the formation of the GEP under the leadership of David Pickering. The sole GEP member of parliament, Pickering was a longstanding and strident critic of the government and in parliament in 1995 exposed the scandal surrounding the National Bank of Fiji. In 1996 he was made Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation.

On the opposition benches sit the National Federation Party (20 seats), the Fiji Labour Party (7 seats), and the Fijian Association Party (5 seats). The parliamentary wing of the NFP is led

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by Jai Ram Reddy and that of the Fiji Labour Party by Mahendra Chaudhry, who is also General Secretary of the largest trade union, the Fiji Public Service Association.

The Fijian Association Party (FAP) broke away from the SVT and is led by Mr. Josefata Kamikamica who previously held senior portfolios but who twice unsuccessfully contested elections under the FAP banner. The parliamentary wing of the FAP is led by Ratu Finau Mara, son of the President and former Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Following the passage of the legislation on the new Constitution in July 1997, the Prime Minister brought into the Cabinet two Opposition FAP members, Ratu Finau Mara and Viliame Cavaubati, to assist in the period of transition towards Fiji's new Constitution.

Despite its working majority, the SVT-dominated government has been plagued by a series of crises. Internal criticisms have at times been harsh and relations with the GVP and GEP have not always been easy. Cabinet reshuffling has been one way of containing critics and balancing interests. There have been ten reshuffles since Rabuka won the 1992 elections. The one in mid-1996, was revealing.<sup>1</sup>

Prime Minister Rabuka brought in the 2 GVP and 1 GEP Ministers, along with two former cabinet colleagues with whom he had had strong disagreements—Rabuka's uncle, Militoni Leweniqila, and Ratu Inoke Kubuabola who is from the same province (Cakaudrove) as Rabuka. Significantly, Rabuka dropped Ratu Timoci Vesikula as Deputy Prime Minister and appointed Kubuabola Acting Prime Minister in his absence. Another important new entrant to the

cabinet was Isimeli Bose who took over from Jim Ah Koy as Minister for Commerce, Industry, Trade and Public Utilities.

Ah Koy, a prominent businessman was demoted to Minister for Youth, Employment Opportunities and Sport. He has since, in the latest reshuffle, been moved to the Finance portfolio. Before that Ah Koy demonstrated similar economic thinking as Finance Minister Berenado Vunibobo, a key figure in the government and for a time widely regarded as an alternative Prime Minister.

Since Bose took over from Ah Koy there has been a significant shift in economic thinking which is likely to have consequences for the government's, especially Vunibobo's, reform agenda and the question of Fijian economic advancement in particular.

The tricky balancing act which the Prime Minister has had to perform testifies to the pressures on his government both from within its own ranks and from outside. Internally, SVT factional interests have had to be juggled and, externally, he has had to accommodate traditional, provincial and other stakeholders. In seeking to reflect the various interests in the composition of the cabinet, policy-making has become increasingly problematic. Rabuka has also had to contend with the close scrutiny of the parliamentary opposition, private sector and community groups.

Among the important stakeholders outside of the government, are extremist Fijian nationalists who have in Sakeasi Butadroka a longstanding and vociferous advocate. There are also the western Fijians, some of whom are pressing ahead with their efforts to form

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a fourth, Western confederacy. Indo-Fijians, for their part, are divided in portive of power-sharing which they see as essential for harmony, stability and progress. The smaller ethnic communities fear further political marginalisation and, stressing their contributions to national development, are insisting on fair treatment, particularly in access to resources.

The fortunes of these various stakeholders will depend critically on the longterm outcome of the constitutional review, especially on the question of political representation, to which I shall return later.

### **Bureaucratic**

At the bureaucratic level, the key stakeholders can be identified as those who command the upper echelons of state institutions, including the military; the large group of middle and lower level public servants; and the parastatal organisations.

The military, although somewhat smaller now than in 1987, continues to be seen, at least privately, as a major force but there is not the public evidence to allow judgements about its likely future behaviour.

In the civilian sector of the bureaucracy, key stakeholders include high ranking officials in the Ministries and, very importantly, the Public Service Commission and the Prime Minister's Office. Fijians overwhelmingly dominate the upper levels of the bureaucracy.

In the middle and lower levels, ethnic composition is also important but so too are tenure and conditions of employment. Public sector reform has long been an objective of the government but has been difficult to

achieve. On the one hand the government has met strong opposition from the Fiji Public Service Association. On the other hand it has had to contend with the large number of Fijian public servants who see the government as 'their' government. And in a country where personal and family connections are strong and are exploited on a regular basis, it is not surprising that public servants have had reasonable success in opposing public sector reform by winning the support of key politicians.

This is illustrated, for example, by a major reversal by the Cabinet in late 1994. Earlier that year Finance Minister Berenado Vunibobo succeeded in getting his 1995 Budget adopted but a key element of it was reversed soon after while he was away from the country. As The Review put it:

Berenado Vunibobo's 1995 Budget, as most government budgets of the past few years, said the right things, articulating the need for austerity measures and public sector reform. But it took Labour Minister Militoni Leweniqila only a month to convince Cabinet colleagues to reverse the Vunibobo wage order which they [had earlier] unanimously voted for. Not surprisingly Vunibobo was away in the United States when Cabinet decided to succumb to union pressure in reversing a key policy initiative.

In both the 1994 and 1995 budgets, the rhetoric and brave determination of two Finance Ministers have been destroyed by a Cabinet more

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interested in political expediency.<sup>2</sup>

That decision, The Review further observed, would also impact on parastatal organisations, especially the Government Shipyard, Fiji Posts and Telecommunications Limited (FPTL) and Fiji Electricity Authority: “the backtracking by the Cabinet on the public service wage order means it is unlikely public enterprise reform will take place in the immediate future.”<sup>3</sup>

In his former capacity as Minister for Public Utilities, Ah Koy had pushed hard for reform of public enterprises and at the beginning of 1996 was optimistic about the likely outcomes of his efforts.<sup>4</sup> Later that year, The Review reported that his successor, Isimeli Bose, would “focus on [reducing] the cost that public enterprises add to doing business in Fiji—for example, how to reduce electricity and telephone costs”.<sup>5</sup>

Whether and how precisely he will do that remains to be seen. One thing is certain, however; resistance will be encountered from the public enterprises concerned as well as consumers.<sup>6</sup>

### **Traditional**

Traditional stakeholders are another important group. At one level, they include the vast majority of Fijians, for whom Fijian custom and tradition must be given central place in the wider body politic. For them constitutional recognition of Fijian custom and tradition is essential.

The language in which such recognition will be framed, however, is likely to continue to be general rather than specific. The contested nature of Fijian tradition requires

such broad language and within the broad compass the claims of particular traditional stakeholders will be contested. Commoners, chiefs, easterners, westerners, provinces and so on will invoke, assert and pursue their self-perceived traditional rights and interests.

Overlaying and informing these claims will be those of the key institutions of the system of Fijian Administration, including the district and provincial councils, Native Lands Trust Board, Fijian Affairs Board and of course the Great Council of Chiefs.

It is likely that the claims of traditional stakeholders will continue to be couched in terms of ensuring the paramountcy of Fijian interests, a goal which intersects in important ways the interests of many non-traditional stakeholders.

### **Economic**

In the monetary economy, the major stakeholders are employers, producers and wage workers, all of whom have various organisations, including umbrella ones, to advance their interests. For employers there are Chambers of Commerce, various sectoral organisations and the Fiji Employers Federation. For workers, there are the many trade unions, often divided on ethnic lines, and the Fiji Trade Unions Congress.

In some industries, e.g. garment manufacturing and fish canning, unionisation has been either absent or difficult to achieve and in those, significantly, most of the workers are women.<sup>7</sup>

In the sugar sector, farmers are divided between the Fiji Cane Growers Association and the National Farmers



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Union. Finally, in the subsistence sector the major stakeholders are village and other rural dwellers, who although generally weak and powerless are nonetheless electorally important and have a major interest in the delivery of state services.

### **Community**

At the community level the range of stakeholders is wide and includes the media, educational institutions, churches, religious organizations, village committees, women's and youth organisations, and various other pressure groups.

### **KEY ACTORS**

The range of stakeholders outlined above provides an indication of key actors in Fiji. The following account adds to that but is no more than a broad and selective sweep.

### **Political**

Apart from the Prime Minister, the President and Cabinet Ministers, the key actors at the political level include the leaders and senior members of political parties, many of whom have already been mentioned. The present (1997) Cabinet are as follows:

Prime Minister and Minister for Fijian Affairs, Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Regional Development - **Sitiveni Rabuka**

Attorney-General and Minister for Justice - **Ratu Etuate Tavai**

Minister for Lands, Mineral Resources and Energy - **Ratu Timoci Vesikula**

Minister for Health - **Leo Smith**

Minister for Finance - **Jim Ah Koy**

Minister for Fijian Affairs - **Ratu Finau Mara**

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries, Forests and ALTA - **Militoni Leweniqila**

Minister for Foreign Affairs - **Berenado Vunibobo**

Minister for Communication - **Viliame Cavaubati**

Minister for Public Works, Infrastructure and Transport - **Ratu Inoke Kubuabola**

Minister for Commerce, Industry and cooperatives - **Isimeli Bose**

Minister for Urban Development, Housing and Environment - **Vilisoni Cagimaivei**

Minister for Tourism, and Civil Aviation - **David Pickering**

Minister for Labour and Industrial Relations - **Vincent Lobendahn**

Minister for Youth, and Sport - **Jonetani Kaukimoce**

### **Bureaucratic**

The head of the military is Ratu Epeli Ganilau, son of the former Governor General, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, and son-in-law of the President. In the Public Service, several key figures have been dominant in recent years and their influence has earned them the description "the men behind the leader [Rabuka]".<sup>8</sup>

They are Poseci Bune, former head of the Public Service Commission and now Ambassador to the United Nations;

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Filimoni Jitoko, former Secretary to Cabinet and recently-appointed Ambassador to London; Jioji Kotobalavu, Head of the Prime Minister's Office; and Isikeli Mataitoga, former Director of Public Prosecutions and recently-appointed Ambassador to Australia. The replacements for the three who have already left, or are about to leave, on overseas postings are likely to be Fijians.

The major exception to Fijian influence in the higher reaches of the Public Service is Dr Ahmed Ali. Former academic, political adviser, politician and Ambassador to Malaysia, Dr Ali now heads the Policy Analysis and Research Unit in the Prime Minister's Office. The Unit was established soon after his return from Kuala Lumpur in 1995 and is a key source of advice for the Prime Minister. Fijian journalist Jo Nata, after an extended interview with Dr Ali,<sup>9</sup> described him as "the man with Rabuka's ear" but who "is not popular with [Indo-Fijians] but does not give a damn", "blatantly pro-Fijian" and "has accepted the course of events in Fiji".<sup>10</sup>

In the parastatal sector, the heads of public enterprises will continue to be key players as the government pursues its efforts at public enterprise reform. Special mention should also be made of Isoa Kaloumaira who heads the state-owned Fiji Development Bank, a centrepiece of the government's attempt to help Fijians in business.

### **Traditional**

Among the key traditional actors, the President, Ratu Sir Kamises Mara is the most important. In addition to the enormous traditional respect he commands, the former Chief Minister and Prime Minister also continues to be seen as a source of inspiration and leadership in non-traditional matters.

In 1995, for example, the private sector, concerned about Fiji's "economic sluggishness" and the government's inability to correct it, called for his guidance and assistance under a constitutional provision which allows the President to convene an advisory council "to advise him on matters of national importance".<sup>11</sup>

The influence of other chiefs may not be as great but is significant nonetheless - especially the heads of the three traditional confederacies, Burebasaga, Kubuna and Tovata. The collective importance of the chiefs is reflected in the critical influence of the Great Council of Chiefs.

Also important are the heads of key institutions of the Fijian Administration, including the Minister for Fijian Affairs (presently the Prime Minister), heads of the Provincial Councils, and General Manager of the Native Lands Trust Board, Ratu Mosese Volavola.

At the other end of the spectrum of traditional actors are commoner Fijians. Those in the rural areas are especially renowned for their attachment to tradition and loyalty to chiefs. But such attachment and loyalty have clan, provincial and regional roots which in the past have been sources of tension, and they still are.

Urban Fijian commoners are becoming increasingly educated, articulate and vocal, and for many the demands of tradition are seen more and more as obstacles to personal advancement. The late Fijian sociologist Simione Durutalo wrote that the pursuit of new aspirations by Fijians would shape in important ways "the future of our past".<sup>12</sup>

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## Economic

At the level of the economy the key actors are business and union leaders; senior members of the professions, especially accountants; and the makers of government economic policy.

Again too numerous to name, key actors in the private sector include the heads of foreign companies and financial institutions as well as major local entrepreneurs like Hari Punja, Motibhai Patel, Vinod Patel, Jim Ah Koy and Peter Lee (who is also Chairman of the Fiji Trade and Investment Board).

In the area of state economic policy Finance Minister Jim Ah Koy is the leading figure. The approach to economic reform and development of the former Finance Minister, Berenado Vunibobo, included liberalisation, deregulation and public sector reform and came to be dubbed "Bobonomics".

The former Minister for Trade, Industry, Commerce and Public Utilities, Jim Ah Koy, generally supported Vunibobo but his successor, Isimeli Bose, has made significant policy departures. Although he favours competition, he is also sympathetic to local entrepreneurs who oppose total deregulation. As a report of a recent interview with the Minister put it:

He is keen on protecting the interests of local entrepreneurs—the Hari Punjas, the Vinod Patels and the Mahendra Patels—and long established businesses such as Shell, Carlton Brewery and Morris Hedstrom. "They have put their money where their mouth is"... Already the minister has advised the [Fiji Trade and Investment Board] to take special care of these

local investors and make sure that they receive support.. And he is going to "fight very hard" to protect the big local investors. "I will run to their help whenever they need me".

While the minister is aware of the World Trade Organisation rules promoting a freer trading environment, Bose insists that at the end of the day, it's the national interest that "must come first".<sup>13</sup>

That report appeared in August 1996, and the level of concern in the private sector about deregulation was indicated in a survey of businesses conducted in the following month: 55.6 percent of businesses said that the "most critical" issue facing them was deregulation. The next most important issue was the constitution.<sup>14</sup>

Key actors in the sugar sector include the heads of the government-owned Fiji Sugar Corporation and Fiji Sugar Marketing Company, the Sugar Tribunal, Sugar Canegrowers Council, Fiji Canegrowers Association (FCGA) and National Farmers Union (NFU).

The FCGA and the NFU (which replaced the two original canegrower associations formed in the 1930s, the Kisan Sangh and the Maha Sangh) have a history of rivalry which intensified in 1992. The NFP/FLP Coalition disintegrated in the lead up to the 1992 elections amid differences over how to oppose the 1990 constitution. The ensuing bitterness spilled over into the canefields as the two parties vied for support among the Indo-Fijian sugarcane growers.

In 1995 the rivalry between the FCGA and the NFU erupted again in the elections for the Sugar Cane Growers

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Council. Leading the FCGA was the young and dynamic Jagannath Sami and, on the other side, the NFU was led by Mahendra Chaudhry, leader of the FLP and the NFU since its inception in 1978.<sup>15</sup>

Within the trade union movement the leading figures include Mahendra Chaudhry and Pratap Chand, General Secretary of the Fiji Trades Union Congress. Also important are the leaders of the predominantly Fijian trade unions, especially the Fijian Teachers Association, Goldmine Workers Union and the Waterside Workers Union.

### **Community**

At the community level perhaps the most significant figure at the moment is Rev Ilaitia Tuwere, the new head of the Methodist Church. Other influential figures include leading media personalities, e.g. the editors of and key writers for the Fiji Times, Daily Post and The Review; academics; lawyers; and women like lawyer Imrana Jalal of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and businesswoman Mere Samisoni.

Against this broad sweep of major stakeholders and actors, we now revisit the major issues of current concern.

### **MAJOR ISSUES**

The fluidity and uncertainty of Fiji today have deepened the pervasive anxiety and apprehensiveness which set in after the coups and whose persistence have engendered a sense of malaise. There is a general air of unease as people speculate and worry about decisions to be taken.

In this kind of situation, what would in

more certain times be relatively minor concerns take on added urgency. The consequence is that most of the issues in Fiji today are seen as major ones, and the list is long.

Among the 'big ones' (apart from the state of the economy and the need for public sector reform) are the review of the constitution, especially the question of political representation, and the native land leases that are about to expire. Cutting through these is the critical issue of 'Fijian paramountcy' which in turn sits at the root of the debate about the relevance of democracy in Fiji.<sup>16</sup>

All of these big issues inform in fundamental ways a whole series of particular concerns relating to, among other things:

- citizenship;
- individual rights and freedoms;
- the situation of women;<sup>17</sup>
- the role of the media;
- national identity (whether there should a common name for all Fiji nationals)
- Fijians in business;
- church/state relations;
- the role of the military;
- education;
- health;
- housing;
- the rising level of crime;<sup>18</sup>
- unemployment;
- natural resources development;
- urban poverty; and
- rural neglect.

How these issues are decided will depend on the impact of the broad socio-cultural and political parameters discussed in this study as well as efficacy of the strategies adopted to manage the various issues. The

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influence of those factors can be further illustrated by examining a little more closely the interactive dynamics behind key issues and some important recent developments.

The cases selected for consideration might suggest a privileging of Fijian over other interests. That is not the case. It simply reflects the argument advanced here that the most critical *political* project facing the government today is how to address the question of Fijian paramountcy. The reality for some time now has been that Fijians monopolise political power and that many, backed by that power, insist that their interests be advanced.

This is not to suggest that the interests of other groups—ethnic, private sector, union, women and so on—are not vitally important. They are. Nor is it to deny the frustration and deep sense of injustice which many rightly feel. It is just that at this crucial historical juncture the realities of political and state power in Fiji are such that the broad trajectory of development turns fundamentally on the Fijian question.

## **ILLUSTRATING THE DYNAMICS**

### **Charting the Future: The Constitutional Review**

On the review of the constitution the position of the vast majority of Indo-Fijians is clear. They want outcomes which will ensure that they are treated fairly and will allow them to enjoy, along with everyone else, the full benefits of citizenship. The smaller ethnic communities have similar wishes. Among Fijians there is support for the something like the status quo but there is also evidence of growing support for change.

The key line of disagreement, of course,

is the ethnic one, particularly between Fijians and Indo-Fijians, and a brief examination of the SVT submission to the Constitutional Review Commission in 1995, and reactions to it, will give a sense of the gap which separates the two communities and the intensity of feelings in each.

The preamble to the SVT submission captures the essence of the party's broad position. In part it says:

The 1990 Constitution is here to stay. Indeed, it is on account of this fundamental consideration that the government has taken the position that the review of the constitution will be of a general nature, with the 1990 Constitution as its basis. At the same time, the government has ensured in the terms of reference of the constitutional commission, that the review will not be a popular test of, or a public referendum on, the general acceptability of the 1990 Constitution.<sup>19</sup>

On Indo-Fijians, the SVT's position was clear and was reported in this way:

"It probably never occurred to Indians that Fijians do not ...trust them politically", the SVT summarised its political attitude towards Indians. Indians, the submission claims, lack commitment to the country and this is shown by their readiness to withdraw economic support as a means to achieve their demands and also to move elsewhere when the opportunity arises...

The SVT says that "The leopard never changes its spots", as one sub-heading in the

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document reads. The SVT claims that the overriding Indian motive is political control in Fiji..." Several Indian submissions including that of the coalition (NFL/FLP) is typical of the Indian tactic to water down Fijian control. While on the one hand they claim to recognise Fijian's interests etc; on the other hand they keep trying to erode them [altogether]"<sup>20</sup>

Indo-Fijian feeling about the submission was captured by the reaction of Jai Ram Reddy, Leader of the NFP:

It is an irresponsible document, which fosters division and hatred in our already divided society. It is a recipe not for integration; for bringing our various people together into a united, progressive and peaceful nation. It is, instead, a recipe for further polarisation. It negates the very foundations upon which our society is built.. It claims to be inspired by Christian belief, yet it is a negation of fundamental Christian values. It is full of hatred of fellow human beings. It is calculated to increase the Fiji Indian's sense of rejection by the indigenous community. Not content to insult, abuse and ridicule Fiji's Indian community, and its leaders, both dead and living, the submission seeks to castigate the entire Indian race here and elsewhere in the same breath.<sup>21</sup>

For his part, FLP Leader, Mahendra Chaudhry, felt that the attack on the Indian community was "unjustified and

unwarranted" and asked "why malign an entire race which has contributed so much to Fiji's development and progress?"<sup>22</sup>

Even the Fijian Association Party (FAP) was shocked by the tone of the SVT submission which, in its view, was "insulting to Fijian intelligence". According to one report, "what [FAP] leaders found offensive [was] not the SVT's recommendations *per se* but what they [saw] as racist overtones laced with veiled threats".<sup>23</sup>

One year later there was growing evidence among political leaders of a shift away from the sentiments of the SVT submission, and a major turning point was the report of the Constitutional Review Commission which was submitted in September 1996. About the 1990 constitution, the report said this:

...the 1990 Constitution is not a product of consensus among the citizens of Fiji as a whole about the long term basis for the structure of the country's government. Nor does it meet their widely shared desire for a system of government that takes proper account of Fiji's multi-ethnic character. Instead it has created an air of uncertainty which has affected the ability of every community to work for the economic and social benefit of all. This in turn affects Fiji's ability to attract overseas investment and compete successfully in the international community.<sup>24</sup>

The main thrust of the Commission's recommendations is "to encourage the emergence of multi-ethnic parties or coalitions" because "progress towards the sharing of executive power among

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all ethnic communities is the only solution to Fiji's constitutional problems".<sup>25</sup>

Reactions to the report have varied but it appears that the voices of moderation have gained the ascendancy over those of extremists like Butadroka and Ilesia Duvuloco, leader of the small, nationalist Vanua Independent Party.<sup>26</sup> Jai Ram Reddy and other Indo-Fijian leaders have expressed cautious optimism and on the Fijian side leading figures have adopted an accommodative approach and have shown a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue. In the words of then Foreign Minister Bole:

We have to learn to live and work with other races and treat them as equal partners. If you can't accept others, then you might as well shut Fiji out from the rest of the world and no one will be the loser but the Fijians themselves.<sup>27</sup>

Prime Minister Rabuka's message to parliament was similar. Speaking about the work of the Joint Select Committee on the Review of the Constitution, he said:

The central focus of our joint deliberations must be on a constitution that brings everyone and all communities in Fiji together".<sup>28</sup>

FAP leader, Josefata Kamikamica applauded the Prime Minister:

He has made a very positive start and we can only hope that he continues along this track.<sup>29</sup>

The General Electors Party expressed qualified support for the Commission's

report but, in the words of its national secretary, Grahame Rouse, was heartened because the Commission encouraged everyone to "look at the future for the country as a whole".<sup>30</sup>

While the positions of the political leaders were encouraging (although some, including Rabuka, have been criticised for their inconsistency), at the level of the wider community views continue differ, often quite strongly, and there continues to be much fear and suspicion. But there are significant disagreements within ethnic communities as well, and those in the Fijian community are especially important. It is significant that most of the Provincial Councils have rejected the Commission's report. However, chiefs are not of one mind.

Ratu Filimoni Ralogaivalu, a Cabinet Minister in the FLP/NFP Coalition government of 1987 and a chief from the province of Bua, is an example of the conservative Fijian view of the report. Its recommendations, he said in an interview late in 1996, were in conflict with "the purpose of the 1987 coup and the embodiment of Fijian aspirations and frustrations". The 1990 Constitution, he added, had given Fijians a political advantage that they did not want eroded "because they've lost out in commerce and even in agriculture where they own 83 per cent of the land". The Fijian people, he also said, "are still waiting to see benefits of the 1990 Constitution so they don't want any changes yet".<sup>31</sup>

Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, a lawyer by training, the current Permanent Arbitrator and recently installed in the high chiefly position of Roko Tui Bau, articulates the opposing view:

We've had the 1990 Constitution for six years and what has

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it brought us? Political instability, economic stagnation and a lot of uncertainty.<sup>32</sup>

On the matter of Fijian unity, he said:

I can't understand how the idea of Fijian unity behind [the 1990 Constitution] relates to everyday bread and butter issues for the ordinary Fijians...Fijian unity is not a realistic proposition because it cannot be guaranteed. And over time, as different interest groups develop within the community, unity will become increasingly difficult. Fijian unity has also become an excuse for a particular group of Fijians to sustain themselves in power.<sup>33</sup>

In 1997 government handed down its decision on the constitutional review and the single most important issue, political representation. The 1990 Constitution laid down a strictly ethnically-based system of election and the following distribution of the 70 seats in the House of Representatives:

- 37 Seats for Fijians
- 27 Seats for Indo-Fijians
- 5 Seats for General Voters
- 1 Seat for Rotumans

The Commission proposed a preferential system electoral system called the Alternative Vote system, a reduction in the number of ethnically-reserved seats from the present 70 to 25, and the creation of 45 Open seats across 15 3-member constituencies. The proposed distribution of seats would be as follows:

- 25 Reserved Seats for the Ethnic Communities with
  - 12 Reserved Seats for Fijians
  - 10 Reserved Seats for Indo-Fijians

- 2 Reserved Seats for General Voters
- 1 Reserved Seat for Rotumans
- 45 Open seats which anyone, irrespective of ethnicity, can contest.

This was seen by the Commission as a first step away from the existing ethnically-based system towards a fully open system sometime in the future. Some, however, especially conservative and extremist Fijians, opposed it as too radical, despite the view that, especially with the present demographic trends, it is possible for Fijians to win the majority of seats.

The main worry about the proposed Alternative Vote system was the uncertainty about its likely outcomes. In January of 1996 the Australian National University hosted a seminar to examine the Commission's proposed electoral system. It was felt that further discussion and inputs from electoral experts might help the deliberations of the Joint Select Committee on the Review of the Constitution.

Invitations were sent to several members of the sub-committee of the Joint Committee charged with examining the proposed electoral system. Filipe Bole of the SVT accepted the invitation, apparently with the approval of the Prime Minister. Jai Ram Reddy of the NFP, Krishna Datt of the FLP and Dr Fereti Dewa of the FAP also accepted. Jioji Kotobalavu, Permanent Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office, was also supposed to come.

Closer to the time, it was announced that Bole and Kotobalavu would not be attending, and they did not. Back in Fiji there were criticisms of the upcoming seminar. There were suspicions that it was an attempt to marshal support for the proposed electoral system and, as one report put it, was denounced by the Prime



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Minister as “the work of foreign forces trying to interfere in Fiji’s constitutional reform process”.<sup>34</sup>

I was a participant in the seminar and my view is that the, often very technical, discussions about the proposed electoral system as well as other similar ones produced much information and clarification which would have been useful to the work of the Joint Committee. It was emphasised throughout the talks that the choice of electoral system was entirely for the people of Fiji to make and that the purpose of the seminar was simply to consider alternative systems and the range of possible outcomes that each might generate.

How much of the discussion found its way back to the Joint Committee is difficult to say but on the basis of reactions from Fiji it is probable that, despite their value, insights gained by the parliamentarians who attended the seminar will be viewed with suspicion.

That aside, although doubts about the proposed electoral system existed, in July 1997 the Fiji Parliament unanimously passed the new Constitution Amendment Bill which paved the way for a more democratic political system. The Bill removes the parliamentary dominance of indigenous Fijians, changing the number of indigenous Fijian communal seats for 39 to 23 in a new 71-seat Parliament. The legislation was endorsed by the President and will take effect ahead of elections scheduled for early 1999.

#### **What to Do with the Land: The ALTA Debate**

The Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act regulates the leasing of all

native land. Between now and 2005 more than 5,000 ALTA leases will expire and the majority of these are held by Indo-Fijian sugarcane farmers. Of the 43 which will expire in 1996, 29 are held by sugarcane growers and a further 7 by rice farmers.

In 1994 the NLTB commissioned a survey of leases about to expire in 1996. Wide consultations were held with interested parties and the intentions of landowners and tenants were sought. Some landowners saw the return of their land as an opportunity to get into commercial farming and the Native Lands Trust Board expects that this is what will happen in most cases. As General Manager Ratu Mosese Volavola recently said, “in only a few cases will the land taken back by the landowning units be used for other purposes like village extensions or subsistence farming”. This is consistent with the government’s attempts to encourage more and more Fijians to get into business.

Decisions on leases, however, rest ultimately with the Board. As Volavola put it in early 1995, “the decision on whether or not to issue a new lease after expiry will be made by the Board”.<sup>35</sup> Later that year, however, the SVT’s position on ALTA was made clear in its submission to the Constitutional Review Commission. Described as “a cause of great discomfort to Indians”, the SVT position was reported as follows:

The party wants agricultural leases to be based on the normal landlord/tenant relationship. This has been interpreted as the SVT not wanting a statutory long-term blanket regulation to govern it. It argues that landowners

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should enjoy the same rights as landlords to terminate, extend, or increase the rentals.

[Says the SVT], "When the same rights are being invoked under the ALTA legislation there is a big outcry to change the law to accommodate farmers likely to be affected by the expiry of leases. The ALTA is a normal landlord tenancy agreement preserved under the constitution and it should be allowed to operate normally because, like others, Fijians need to survive and are entitled to utilise their land resources which have been taken from them for more than 100 years".<sup>36</sup>

The greater freedom of choice which the SVT advocates for Fijian landowners could mean reduced decision-making powers for the NLTB under the ALTA. For Indo-Fijian leaseholders, existing statutory regulations at least require consideration of their interests and their anxiety about the SVT position is precisely that it could mean loss of that statutory protection. A very recent development does little to allay their fears.

A report tabled at the meeting of the Great Council of Chiefs on 28 January 1997 indicates that up to 80 percent of landowners in Ba District, the heartland of sugar production in Viti Levu, want their land back when the leases expire. Learning of this, the Fiji Cane Growers Association has warned farmers to prepare to lose the leases on their lands. Farmers, the Association is reported to have said, should prepare themselves for the loss of their farms and cut their financial

losses by not making any more improvements to them.<sup>37</sup>

Much will be at stake when the NLTB decides on the leases which expire in 1996. In all likelihood those decisions will be affected by the way in which the wide constitutional issues unfold. Resonating through all of these will be the persistent claims about Fijian paramountcy, but a central foundation of that paramountcy—Fijian tradition—is coming under growing stress.

### **The Great Council of Chiefs: Tradition, Rivalries and Roles**

As has been indicated in Chapter 2, the GCC is not a unified, cohesive monolith. Mention was made earlier of post-coup changes in GCC membership in order to exclude rivals and others of questionable loyalty. But that strategy was always problematic because it risked alienating chiefs (and subjects and supporters) as well as undermining the collective *mana* of the Council. Those risks were likely to be all the more serious if the chiefs affected happened to be high ranking ones, which is precisely what has happened.

In mid-1996, for example, a high chief from Bau, Ratu Tu'uakitau Cokanauto was "dropped" from not only the Senate and the GCC, but from his position as chairman of the Tailevu Provincial Council as well. Ratu Cokanauto is connected to the President, Ratu Sir Kamaisese Mara. His elder brother, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, is the President's son-in-law and previously was head of the military until Rabuka took over in 1987. Also "dropped" from the GCC were the President's son, Ratu Finau Mara, and Senator Tevita Loga.<sup>38</sup> Senator Loga is also well-connected:

[He] knows the chiefly Mara family better than anyone

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else in [the province of] Lau. He is close to Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara as the Tui Nayau [title of the paramount chief of Lau] and is the President's herald and traditional spokesman.<sup>39</sup>

Many believe that the rift which developed between Rabuka and the President after the coup has not fully closed.

Chiefly and political rivalry within the Fijian leadership is neither new nor recent. What is significant about recent rivalries, however, is that they have exposed in a much more public way than previously intra-Fijian tensions as well as the longstanding controversy about the role of chiefs and the GCC in 'modern' politics.

The significance of all this is that much greater because these tensions and disagreements are occurring at a particularly crucial moment in Fiji's political history. Two recent developments illustrate this well.

The first was the defeat of Ratu Apenisa Cakobau, son of the late paramount chief of Bau, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, in a by-election in Tailevu Province. Standing as the FAP candidate and beaten by a commoner, SVT candidate Lagisoa Delana, Ratu Apenisa was magnanimous in defeat: "I'm happy with the result. The people have made their choice".<sup>40</sup> But he cannot have been especially happy about the split within his family which, as Delana acknowledged, contributed in no small way to the outcome.

His elder half brother and two half-sisters rallied against him and behind Delana, and this after he had earlier supported one of his half sisters, Adi Samanunu. She had successfully

contested the Tailevu seat in the snap general elections of 1994 but was subsequently disqualified because of her British citizenship. Of her support for Delana, one of his Ratu Apenisa's supporters said: "that is the thanks he got for supporting her when she needed it".

One report on Delana's victory described it thus: "the victory is even sweeter for the SVT in that it destroyed the myth that it had been riding on the chiefly wagon which had spurred the party to victory in the previous elections".<sup>41</sup> A veteran SVT campaigner agreed: "If there was doubt that Tailevu belongs to the SVT, this would have cleared it once and for all... It was not the chiefs or the Cakobaus who made the choice, it was the people of Tailevu".<sup>42</sup>

There may be truth in this but the voting figures suggest that a more tempered assessment is closer to the mark. Delana got 49.5 percent of the votes (3,656), Ratu Apenisa 37.4 percent (2,775), and Iliesa Duvuloco of the extremist Vanua Independent Party got 13 percent (957). Contrary to what some supporters of the SVT think, it is doubtful that these figures point to a weakening of support for chiefs, at least in the rural areas. There are several reasons for this. First, support for tradition and for chiefs has always been strong in the rural areas and Tailevu is a rural constituency. Second, Delana acknowledged that his victory "would not have been possible without the chiefly support [he received]". Third, the level of support for Ratu Apenisa was significant.

On the other hand, in terms of the wider debate about the place of tradition and the role of chiefs, the dynamics of the Tailevu by-election are telling. Chiefly rivalry was intense; voter loyalties were

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split; and for the rest of the country looking on, especially other Fijians, here was further evidence of a divided Fijian community. But another development provided even more.

At the meeting of the GCC in July 1995, the link between the Council and the SVT was raised and the discussion reopened longstanding questions about the role of chiefs and the GCC in the political process. Fijian journalist, Ifereimi Nadore, put the issue in this way:

There is no doubt about the status of the Great Council of Chiefs. It is consulted by the government on every national issue and no doubt its decision has a bearing on such issues. But is the council just a government rubber stamp or does it have a mind of its own? Especially when its sponsorship of the governing SVT party would appear to give it a political "bias".<sup>43</sup>

In a letter to the President in May 1995 Adi Kuini Speed, wife of the former Prime Minister Dr Timoci Bavadra and current chairperson of the FAP, raised the issue of the role of the GCC. A report on her letter is worth quoting at length:

In the letter, Speed said there was a widely held perception in the Fijian community that the GCC's sponsorship of a political party demanded allegiance that was contrary to the country's democratic process. She said that, while the FAP accepted that traditional loyalties would play a part in determining political outcomes, Fijian voters should be able to make free choice without the collective pressure of the GCC.

The council's involvement in party politics, she said, also undermines its authority to speak on issues concerning Fijian interests and important national issues...

"If the GCC is sponsoring a political party then grassroots Fijians will always identify themselves with it rather than any other party. There's an unwritten demand for your allegiance to the SVT because it is a chiefs' party. And this is contrary to democracy", said Speed.<sup>44</sup>

At its July meeting, the President "told the GCC that the time had come for the chiefs to decided who should represent their views in parliament", and in the ensuing discussions the chiefs "seem[ed] divided about the SVT-GCC link".<sup>45</sup> One view was that the link eased communication with parliament and should not be disrupted: "We don't want the GCC to be part of the political warfare. The role of the SVT is clear, that is to hear our view and relay the message [to] parliament". Another favoured an apolitical stance for the GCC: "Let the politicians play their part. The most important thing is the people we serve. If we favour a particular party then our views will be taken differently".<sup>46</sup>

How precisely the debate ended is unclear but the difficulties facing the chiefs stemmed not only from the thorniness of the issue but also the Council's *modus operandi*. Again, Nadore's account is illuminating:

Members of the GCC admit that individual thought and opinion is not common in GCC meetings—they prefer collective decisions by consensus

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with hardly any opposition. Vice-President of the Senate and GCC member Ratu Josefa Iloilo said that although...proposals put forward by government were unanimously agreed to, some members had different feelings. "It is normal procedure because we have to go with the numbers, unlike the parliamentary system where views are considered. It would be very difficult to change the system...unless democracy is enforced. But only time will tell", said Ratu Josefa.<sup>47</sup>

Time has told. It has been reported that at its meeting which started on 28 January 1997 the GCC decided to sever its ties with the SVT:

...council members have become concerned [that] the council had become politicized and had lost its independent voice. The council has passed a motion restating its independence as an advisory body to government and the President.

The motion effectively distances the council from the SVT and council members hope this will wipe out what had been a growing perception that the council was merely rubber-stamping government decisions.<sup>48</sup>

Significantly, the council meeting reportedly also received a report recommending measures to train traditional chiefs to play a greater role in government.<sup>49</sup> The origins and authorship of that report are not clear, nor precisely what the recommended measures are. What is clear is that

"traditional chiefs" are still seen as having an important role in government. And time will tell whether or not the recommended measures require further preferential access to state resources.

Illustrated in the developments described above, then, are key divisions within the Fijian community, the tension between tradition and democracy, the interests of major stakeholders and actors, as well different styles and approaches to the management of key issues.

All of these can be further illustrated in relation to the question of access. Yet, here too the whole issue of Fijian paramountcy looms large and is also problematic because of its impacts on other ethnic groups, the national economy and the need for economic reform.

### **Access, Reform and Fijian Economic Advancement**

The growing doubts and complaints, including within the Fijian community, about Fijian economic advancement in the wake of the 1987 coups were recently articulated by Fijian sociologist Steven Ratuva:

Coup makers and their friends took advantage of the post-coup political and economic confusion to enrich themselves through preferential loans, and quick promotions through the civil service and corporate bodies. Government's affirmative action for Fijians only benefits middle class Fijians who have links to the corridors of power and the owners of bank vaults. Very little has trickled down to

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the ordinary Fijians, in whose name everything was supposedly done. But one thing is certain, ordinary Fijians are going to pay for all the debts that were incurred in their name.<sup>50</sup>

Among the debts Ratuva had in mind were those which led to the near-collapse of the state-owned National Bank of Fiji. The publication of the names of major debtors, among whom were prominent Fijians, provided one set of evidence for the Ratuva's case. But there were other telling developments as well.

In 1995, the Fijian head of the Housing Authority became a casualty of allegations of corruption and mismanagement in his organisation. Also in that year the head of the Office of the Public Trustee and another senior office both Fijians, faced criminal charges in relation to an alleged scam about the use of trust funds.<sup>51</sup>

Concerns about favouritism in access to state resources have also been made in relation to the appointment of military personnel to, often senior and key, civil service positions. As one report put it recently: "It will be interesting to see whether the government will continue to position military people in key civilian jobs, despite recent embarrassments". It then proceeded to note some recent appointments.<sup>52</sup>

Mention has already been made of Fijian dominance in the higher levels of the civil service. But Fijian access to civil service positions is much wider than that and the trend began soon after the coups. In the first two years, for example, the proportion of civil service positions occupied by

Fijians increased from 46.8 percent to 53 percent, while Indo-Fijians registered a fall from 47.6 percent to 43 percent and others a drop from 5.6 percent to 4 percent.<sup>53</sup>

This 'Fijianisation' of the civil service was supported by Fijians who in 1988 broke away from the Fiji Public Servants Association and formed their own Viti Civil Servants Association.<sup>54</sup> They and other Fijian public servants will test the government's resolve in relation to public sector reform.<sup>55</sup>

Another area in which unequal access takes a strong ethnic character is education, and here a major source of discontent is the government's policy on the allocation of scholarships. Only Fijians are eligible for scholarships awarded by the Fijian Affairs Board, and as for scholarships awarded by the Public Service Commission, Indo-Fijian sociologist Vijay Naidu had this to say recently: "it is understood that [they] are allocated at the outset along ethnic lines: 50 per cent to ethnic Fijians; 50 per cent to non-ethnic Fijians".<sup>56</sup>

Naidu also made this observation: "there does not seem to be any application of a means test. Thus relatively well-off ethnic Fijians have access to these scholarships". That reminded him of earlier days "when there were no FAB awards but overseas awards, particularly to pursue law degrees, [some of which] went to children of prominent ethnic Fijians although other Fijians with better aggregate scores were by-passed".<sup>57</sup> The smaller ethnic communities have also complained for a long time about discrimination against their children in the allocation of scholarships.

This pattern of unequal access to state resources is justified on the ground that Fijians have for too long

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lagged behind the ethnic groups. Compared to the success of the other ethnic groups, according to this line of argument, Fijians have suffered from educational underachievement and underrepresentation in the public service and the professions. Preferential treatment was therefore necessary.

The point of critics like Ratuva and Naidu, however, is that there has been a worrying tendency for the benefits of such treatment to flow disproportionately to elite rather than ordinary Fijians. What is more, this became even more possible with greater Fijian state power after the coup. But the politics of access reaches into the private sector as well.

The problems facing Fijians in business have been known for a long time and were recently discussed yet again.<sup>58</sup> They include insufficient capital, lack of collateral, weak business skills and the "incompatibility between sound business practice and traditional customs". Among the latter are customary practices like *kerekere* and *oga* ("social obligations for traditional celebrations and money raising activities").<sup>59</sup>

To help overcome these problems state resources have been made available to Fijian entrepreneurs. Preferential access to soft loans from the Fiji Development Bank is one example. The lending policy of the National Bank of Fiji is another. In the words of Visanti Makrava, the Rotuman who headed the NBF while it tottered towards near collapse, "I think I've done a lot to achieve the goals of the coups for Fijians and Rotumans".<sup>60</sup> A key question here, however, is which Fijians and which Rotumans?

The names of major debtors were

published in July 1995 and among them were those of prominent Fijians, including parliamentarians.<sup>61</sup> Public cynicism inevitably followed. Eighteen months later, in late December 1996, Prime Minister Rabuka reportedly threatened to call snap elections if more members of parliament were charged over the "NBF scandal". He was reacting to reports that more parliamentarians were about to be charged.<sup>62</sup>

The government's rescue package included a capital injection and a plan to restructure the bank. In August 1996 NFP leader Jai Ram Reddy reacted to the latter in this way:

It is very difficult to pontificate to [NBF] workers about the need to restructure, to make people redundant, to reduce the size of the bank when they can see for themselves that those who have brought this bank down have not suffered at all, they are still enjoying the perks of office.<sup>63</sup>

Fijian sociologist Steven Ratuva added: "The people who really are responsible are difficult to get because of their position in the political hierarchy".<sup>64</sup>

Public confidence has been dented by the NBF "debacle", not least because of the consequences for taxpayers, as the following recent analysis by Fijian journalist Paul Yavala clearly indicates:

The taxpayer will be footing a bill of around F\$34 million each year for the next ten years, to shoulder the NBF burden. As [Finance Minister] Vunibobo puts it, the annual interest of F\$18 million for the next two years is "about the same size as the cost of about 1,500 teachers in our school

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system, or the salaries of the established staff that work in hospitals and health centres or the capital cost of the Fiji Road Upgrading Project”.

The minimum total cost to the taxpayers over the next ten years will be \$335 million...[A]ssuming that the \$335 million was to be shared equally among the 75,000 tax paying workers (excluding around 20,000 workers below the tax threshold of \$5,000), each individual will be required to pay an additional \$4,446...[that is] an extra \$446 a year in taxes.

Currently, someone earning an average gross salary of about \$12,000 a year is left with a takeaway monthly salary of \$845 after deducting \$840 in [Fiji National Provident Fund] contributions and \$1,013 in tax. And assuming he is the sole breadwinner for a family of two school children living in the greater Suva [the capital city] area and spends \$250 on monthly rent, \$300 on food, \$50 on clothing and similar expenses, \$160 for transport and other expenses and \$40 for utilities, that leaves him with just \$45 for other purchases, let alone school fees and other incidentals. So imposing an extra \$446 a year would simply force the sole breadwinner to borrow heavily, reduce costs, move further out of town and take other drastic action.<sup>65</sup>

The NBF crisis, as Makrava the former

NBF head intimated, was linked at least in part to the objective of Fijian economic advancement. That objective is also having other problematic effects, including on the government's attempts at broader economic reform.

In the lead up to the 1995 National Economic Summit (NES) the reasons for the lack of Fijian business success were addressed (yet again) by the 19-member NES subcommittee on Indigenous Fijian Participation in Business. Chaired by Fijian businesswoman Mere Samisoni, it made a case for continued state support, and among its recommendations were ones which threaten to compromise the government's reform policies. Its view of their likely effect on Fijian entrepreneurs and what should be done about it was reported in this way:

The government's deregulation policy runs contrary to its policy of enhancing indigenous Fijian business participation because most Fijians are involved in small enterprises which are in their infancy and cannot compete in terms of economies of scale and product quality with more established (and mostly Indian) companies which developed during Fiji's import-substitution era. Therefore, Fijian entrepreneurs should be protected. The group says infant industries and primary industries like dairy and rice should be protected under the GATT clause which allows local industries 40 per cent protection.

Because of the need to replace market entry barriers for



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Fijians, they should get equal opportunities in government services that will be contracted out [as well as in] government entities and services to be privatised. Apart from a 50 percent opportunity [for] Fijian business participation in the economy, the group also proposes that tenders by Fijian suppliers should enjoy a 15 percent preference margin.<sup>66</sup>

The reference to "Indian" companies illustrates yet again the durability of the perception about 'Indian economic dominance'. Indeed, at about the same time Finance Minister Vunibobo, in an interview with the BBC, reportedly said of the business community that it "essentially belongs to the Indian community". He also made this telling statement:

The Fijians seem to have developed the feeling that by having political control, they are the master of the house. It doesn't work that way. You have to have a significant say in influencing the economy...but at the end of the day the Indian business community could squeeze the country dry if they choose to do so because of their hold on the economic levers. The Fijians realise that now. That is why there is so much input, so much concern, about helping and encouraging Fijians to get into the economic mainstream.<sup>67</sup>

Against this kind of fear and suspicion, it is not altogether surprising that the subcommittee on Indigenous Fijian Participation in Business decided at its first meeting in January 1995 to

exclude its non-indigenous members. As a result, Daniel Elisha, an Indo-Fijian and President of the Fiji Chamber of Commerce was asked to leave the meeting.

The Consultative Committee on Economic Strategy (another committee of the NES), however, disagreed with the decision. Elisha "was later invited back and the decision overturned". A letter of apology from Samisoni to Elisha explained that the initial decision was due to a misunderstanding on the composition of the subcommittee.<sup>68</sup>

Apart from the slight and offence they cause, developments such as this do not help the cause of those who believe that Fijian businesses have much to gain from greater collaboration and cooperation with their Indo-Fijian counterparts.

Looking to the future, some Fijians will no doubt continue to blame others for their 'lack of economic advancement'. They will not, however, be able to do that in relation to the divisions which have plagued the Methodist Church since the coups. That was entirely of their own making. Fortunately, there is now someone in whom there is much promise not only for a healing of wounds but also for putting church-state relations on a more even keel.

### **Church and State: Methodists, Tradition and Politics**

The support of key sections of the Methodist leadership for the coups and their considerable influence on subsequent developments has been well documented. Their power was demonstrated again in 1995 when the government sought to lift the Sunday Ban they instigated back in 1988. More

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than 12,000 of the faithful marched through Suva in protest.<sup>69</sup>

But by 1995 divisions within the Church's hierarchy had deepened. The province of Rewa had broken away and established its own Ministry, there were rumours of scandal, and the Church's finances were in a mess. On the horizon, however, was a "voice of sanity" in the person of Rev Ilaitia Tuwere. A humble man and Fiji's foremost Christian theologian, Tuwere was elected to lead the Methodist Church in July 1995 and took up the position in 1996. Of his new role, he had this to say:

I am deeply conscious of the fact that I am no longer an individual or just another *talatala* (church minister). I am now the symbol of unity and I want to live up to that expectation. It's a big job. There are lots of challenges, thorny questions and loneliness ahead. I am ready to face those things.<sup>70</sup>

In his report on an extended interview with Tuwere<sup>71</sup>, Fijian journalist Jo Nata described the task facing the Reverend in this way.

He took over a church which over the past seven years has become increasingly politicised in its role and secularised in its teachings and direction. The unholy alliance between the church under his predecessor Rev Manasa Lasaro and Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka's government caused much concern within and outside the church.

The divide in the church which resulted when Lasaro and his followers forced out previous president Rev Josateki Koroi in 1989 was still deep. The church under Lasaro lived an elevated profile by aligning itself with Rabuka's SVT Party. From the militancy with which it fought the Sunday Ban issue in the late 1980s to assisting the SVT to election victories later, the Methodist Church has found itself a new weapon of assertiveness that could be used to influence national events and developments through its largely Fijian grassroots membership.

With more than 265,000 members, the Methodist Church is the largest and most influential church in the country. Church meetings which were to discuss religious matters were in tone and content decidedly political. Sermons were not only a menu of Fijians' political ascendancy and aspirations but fiercely nationalistic in presentation and undertone. Tuwere has made it one of his priorities to curb this flirtatious behaviour between the church and the state. He wants the church to be just the church.<sup>72</sup>

The more that other key actors in Fiji can be like this 'voice of sanity', the brighter the prospects for Fiji's future. The evidence of history suggests, however, that the prospects may be dimmer than many would hope. And it is to the lessons of that history that we now turn.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See, Review, July 1996:25-27.
- <sup>2</sup> Review, January 1995: 39.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> See Review, February 1996:18-24.
- <sup>5</sup> Review, August 1996:39.
- <sup>6</sup> At the end of 1993, in addition to 12 'commercial' statutory authorities, the government had full ownership of 5 public enterprises, majority ownership of another 5, and minority ownership of a further 4. Its total investment in these organisations was F\$156.5 million. See Review, May 1995:25.
- <sup>7</sup> See 'Atu Emberson-Bain, Backbone of growth: Export manufacturing and Fiji's tuna fish wives, in 'Atu Emberson-Bain ed., *Sustainable Development or Malignant Growth? Perspectives of Pacific Island Women*, Suva: Marama Publications, 1994.
- <sup>8</sup> See Review, May 1995:12-13; and December 1995:26.
- <sup>9</sup> See Review, December 1995:27-31.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.
- <sup>11</sup> For fuller discussion,, see Review, May 1995:17-18.
- <sup>12</sup> Simione Durutalo, "The future of our past", SSED Review, 1985. This is a publication of the School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific.
- <sup>13</sup> Review, August 1996:38.
- <sup>14</sup> Review, November 1996:58.
- <sup>15</sup> For a fuller discussion, see Review, March 1995.
- <sup>16</sup> For useful discussions of constitutional developments, see S. Lawson, "Constitutional Change in Fiji", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 15, 1 (January 1992):61-84; and Guy Powles, "Constitutional Reform in Fiji" *Pacific Economic Development*, 11, 1 ((June 1996):73-75.
- <sup>17</sup> For general discussions on the situation of women in Fiji, see K.G. Gannicott, *Pacific 2010: Women's Education and Economic Development in Melanesia*, Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University, 1994, Chap. III; P.M. Aucoin, "Domestic Violence and Social Relations of Conflict in Fiji", *Pacific Studies*, 13, 3 (July 1990); S. Lateef, "Current and future implications of the coups for women in Fiji", *Contemporary Pacific*, 2,1 (Spring 1990); V. Griffen ed., *Women, Development and Empowerment: A Pacific Feminist Perspective*, Kuala Lumpur: Asian and Pacific Development Centre, 1989; and Jesse Tuivaga, *Fiji*, in T. Tongamoa ed., *Pacific Women: Role and Status of Women in Pacific Societies*, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1988.
- <sup>18</sup> See, for example, Review, November 1994; and January 1996.
- <sup>19</sup> Quoted in Review, November 1995:17.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> Quoted in Review, November 1996:15.

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- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *See ibid., pp.15-16.*
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid., p.23.*
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid., p.22.*
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid., p.25.*
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid., p. 17.*
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid., pp. 17, 18.*
- <sup>34</sup> *Radio Australia External Service, 13 January 1997.*
- <sup>35</sup> *Review, February 1995:15.*
- <sup>36</sup> *Review, November 1995:18.*
- <sup>37</sup> *Radio Australia External Service, 29 January 1997.*
- <sup>38</sup> *Review, July 1996:11.*
- <sup>39</sup> *Review, September 1995:29.*
- <sup>40</sup> *Review, July 1996:28.*
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> *Quoted in ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> *Review, September 1995:36.*
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid., p.37.*
- <sup>48</sup> *Radio Australia External Service, 29 January 1997.*
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> *Review, August 1996:13.*
- <sup>51</sup> *Review, January 1996:21.*
- <sup>52</sup> *Review, February 1996:13.*
- <sup>53</sup> *J. Leckie, "State coercion and public sector unionism in post-coup Fiji", New Zealand Journal of Industrial Relations, 16 (1991):67.*
- <sup>54</sup> *For fuller discussion, see W. Sutherland, op.cit., pp.196-197.*
- <sup>55</sup> *For fuller discussion, see Review, December 1995:39.*
- <sup>56</sup> *Review, May 1996:15.*
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>58</sup> *See Review, May 1995:28-29.*
- <sup>59</sup> *Mere Samisoni, Opportunities, Support and Problems of Indigenous Business in Fiji; and Fijian Women in Business. See also Daphne Kaloucava, Opportunities and Problems of Indigenous Business in Fiji. All in*

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*John Hailey ed., Indigenous Business Development in the Pacific, Honolulu: Pacific Islands Development Programme, 1996.*

- <sup>60</sup> Review, January 1996:20. For a fuller discussion of the NBF saga and an extended interview with Makrava, see *ibid.*, pp.12-20.
- <sup>61</sup> See Review, July 1995.
- <sup>62</sup> Radio Australia External Service, 30 December 1996.
- <sup>63</sup> Quoted in Review, August 1996:17.
- <sup>64</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*
- <sup>65</sup> Review, August 1996:18.
- <sup>66</sup> Review, May 1995:28-29.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.
- <sup>69</sup> Review, April 1995:25.
- <sup>70</sup> Review, August 1996:28.
- <sup>71</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.28-34.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.



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## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

### SCENARIOS

The outcomes of the constitutional review will be the key to Fiji's immediate future. Decisions taken on the land issue will also be important. A likely scenario is as follows.

On the constitutional review, the government is likely to retain the electoral system or some slight variation which goes a little way towards the system proposed by the Constitutional Review Commission (CRC). On most of the other constitutional issues, its decisions are likely to be much closer to the Commission's recommendations. This assessment is based on the evidence surrounding several key developments:

- the continuing opposition to the 1990 Constitution, especially from Indo-Fijians;
- the shift within the political leadership, especially among key Fijian leaders, towards compromise and accommodation;
- the demise of the extremist leaders within the Methodist Church;
- the string of crises and

'scandals' which have raised community doubts about the government's performance; and

- the insistence by the private sector that continuing political instability and uncertainty is bad for business and economic growth.

Ten years after the 1987 coups there is growing political fatigue, increasing pressure to lift economic performance, and greater articulation of concerns about access and distribution.

On native leases, it is likely that most will not be renewed. How successful landowners will be in putting their returned land to productive and profitable use, however, is another matter. The record of Fijians in business is not cause for confidence.

For those who will lose their leases, the future does not look promising. This is especially true of the large number of Indo-Fijian sugarcane farmers, and how their plight is managed will be a key task with important consequences. That task will be shaped in turn by how the sugar industry generally responds to the impending end to preferential access for Fiji sugar under the Lome

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Convention. Major restructuring is likely, and the inevitable displacements will cause stress and instability if the economy is unable to absorb those affected.

An alternative scenario is for decisions on the constitutional review and native land to be based primarily on the demand for Fijian paramountcy. Here the influence of extremist Fijian nationalists may be significant but not necessarily critical, for even amongst moderate Fijian leaders are many who insist on Fijian paramountcy. The position adopted by the Fijian Association Party in relation to the SVT submission to the CRC is evidence of this. The kinds of developments mentioned above, however, suggest that this is scenario is less likely. Either way, the balance of forces will be critical.

### **BALANCE OF FORCES**

The next general elections are not due until 1999 but on present indications there is no guarantee that the SVT government, at least in its present form, will continue in office. At the parliamentary level, Prime Minister Rabuka has shown increasing deftness in holding his government together in the face of disaffection within his own party and withdrawal of support from his junior partner in government, the General Voters Party. He now has the GEP on his side as well.

Withdrawal of GVP and GEP support will wipe out his present majority of 3. The prospect of that happening might not be great but neither is it insignificant. Much will depend on their assessment of upcoming decisions. But the same is true of all the other parties as well. Between the 5 parliamentary groupings any

number of coalitions is possible. Add to that the interests of party factions and the number of permutations increases even more.

Two other considerations are worth noting. One is the position of the military. Little is known about this, but many were (and probably still are) worried about Rabuka's threat in 1994 about the possibility of a third coup. Although possible, this is unlikely. Too much is at stake, including the country's international reputation, and there is plenty of evidence that the forces of moderation are gaining ascendancy over extremist ones.

The other consideration is what might yet come out in the wash of the NBF saga. It is only slightly more than a month since the Prime Minister threatened to call snap elections if more parliamentarians are charged in relation to the NBF affair. Were that to happen, it is not at all certain that the SVT would retain its seats. In that event, a different coalition government could well emerge, but how stable it might be is another matter. A snap election, however, is unlikely. A more likely scenario is yet more reshuffling. (Ed: The Cabinet was reshuffled in July 1997, just after the Parliament voted out the Constitutional Issue.)

In sum, then, at the governmental level power is finely balanced but is likely to remain with the SVT. But that will depend on key decisions it makes in the course of 1997, and those decisions will further illustrate the urgency and durability of some issues and the perceived lesser importance of others.

### **ISSUES: PERSISTENCE AND DECLINE**

Among the issues that are likely to continue to be important are political



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representation and the electoral system; native land leases, Fijian tradition and the GCC; Fijians in business and the public sector; democracy and governance; rights and freedoms; favouritism; the effects of the NBF crisis; the situation of women; economic reform; access and distribution (especially in relation to scholarships and development finance); and resource development.

On the last of these, mention should be made of the planned multi-billion dollar copper mine in Namosi Province. It has run into difficulties and may not eventuate. If it does, however, it will be Fiji's largest development project, and great care and sensitivity will be necessary in the handling of environmental issues and relations with the landowners. There are lessons to be drawn from similar projects elsewhere in the Pacific Islands.

As suggested earlier, in the charged political atmosphere that prevails in Fiji even comparatively minor issues take on added urgency. Citizenship and a common name are two examples, but these are unlikely to be major sources of tension. Two issues of great prominence in the past but which are likely to decline in importance, at least in terms of the public debate, are relations between military and civilian authority (including the placement of military personnel civil service positions) and church-state relations.

### **RISKS AND CONTINGENCIES**

Ethnic relations are already problematic and there are signs of jealousy about the economic success of recent Chinese immigrants. The government has shelved its plan to increase Chinese immigration as a means of boosting the economy. Should

the plan be revived, however, ethnic tensions could worsen.

The rising level of crime is seen as another threat to public safety and investor confidence, and recent attacks on Indo-Fijian places of worship do not augur well for the future. Within the civil service, continuing discontent about Fijian predominance may well lead to worsening morale and lower productivity. In the wider community, the level of knowledge, awareness, confidence and articulacy is rising, especially among educated, urban youths. That, alongside the prospect of higher unemployment, could well prove problematic. At the wider political level, there is speculation about what might happen if the President were no longer on the scene. He has been widely seen as a stabilising influence and his departure could well lead to problematic and unexpected outcomes.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS**

The current situation may be fluid and uncertain but there is reason for hope, and in terms of future developmental interventions some broad lessons can be drawn.

Consultation is crucial. Fiji is a small and intimate place, and word gets around. Stakeholders learn quickly about developments which are likely to affect their interests and react, often strongly even if not publicly, to exclusion. Knowing who the key stakeholders are and where their interests lie helps. So too is knowledge about and access to information sources.

Consultation without transparency, however, is likely to arouse suspicion. Fiji is not only small, it is also highly

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porous. When stakeholders suspect that discussions are not as open as they might be, good and worthy initiatives can quickly run into difficulties.

A feel for and sensitivity to local styles is also important, and so too is a sense of what is appropriate in different circumstances. There is agreement, however, that cultural sensitivity should not come at the expense of

reasonableness, firmness when required, and efficient and effective dialogue and decision-making.

On substantive issues, clearly there is a desire, often a commitment as well, to move forward. How precisely interventions might be made within these spaces and possibilities, however, will depend on the particular issue and the circumstances surrounding it.

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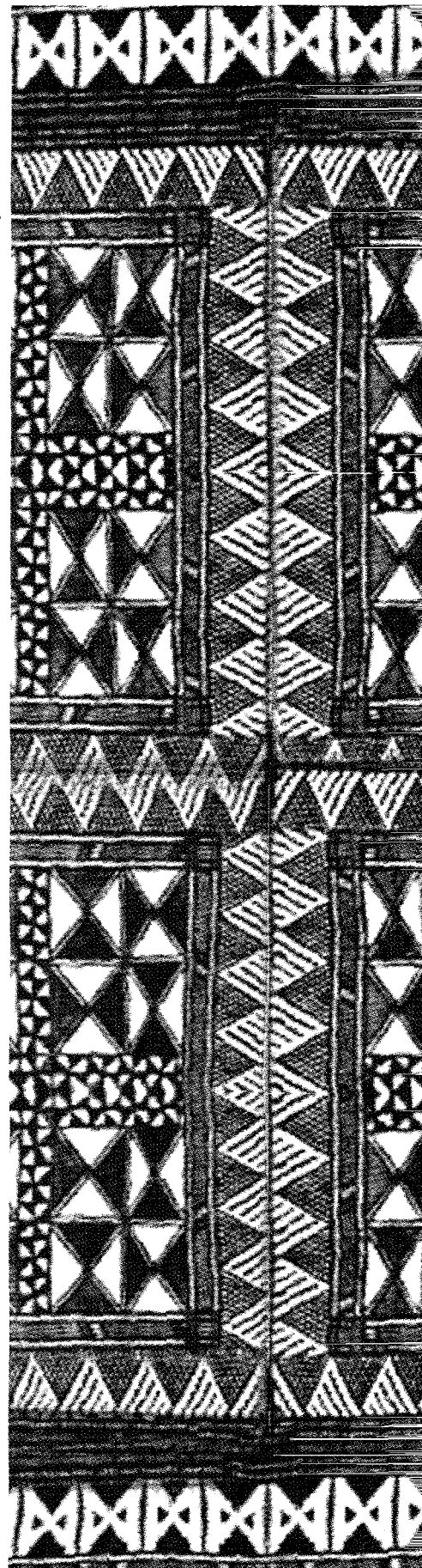
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