Retreat from exclusion? Identities in post-coup Fiji

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Introduction

For many in Fiji, the coups of 1987 represented an attempt to dismiss Fiji's postcolonial policies of multiracial accommodation and to determine much more exclusive identities for its peoples. Aboriginal Fijians—in the vernacular *i Taukei*—stood to gain most from post-coup changes, which promised to grant them, through the economic affirmative action policies of the state, preferential access to jobs, contracts and resources (Ratuva, this volume). While the coups created opportunities to 'sever the apron strings which tied us to inherited colonial characteristics' (*Fiji Times*, 3 June 1989), the harshness of what was required was 'payment for the ease with which we got independence' (*The Age*, 9 September 1991). Indeed, many people in Fiji believed this was Fiji's belated but nonetheless real struggle for independence. However, far from severing 'the apron strings' the coups prompted a massive reassertion of colonial power structures. A new constitution in 1990 gave political power to chiefly and provincial *Taukei* authorities, and foreshadowed a separate justice system for aboriginal Fijians. It was as if the restoration of colonial controls would allow the *Taukei* to bestow upon the future all the certainties the past now represented but which the present so obviously and manifestly lacked.

These contradictions owed much to the differing objectives of classes in Fiji. The nascent *Taukei* middle class expanded after 1987, engaging the chauvinistic rhetoric of the coups in order to gain both space and benefit for itself. At the same time it employed the rhetoric of deregulation in order to weaken the advantages Indo-Fijians were said to have gained under the pre-coup postcolonial accord. However, the long-term viability of this nascent middle class could not be sustained solely by access to cheap state resources. Only a thriving economy promised long term viability. Unfortunately, policies of ethnic exclusion did not inspire business confidence; consequently, the very investment upon which the economy depended for growth shrank drastically (Sepehri and Akram-Lodhi, this volume).

The small but powerful bureaucratic and chiefly classes within the *Taukei* also had agendas. The coups provided them with opportunities to re-establish control over the political system and to refashion the economic base so as to make it less dependent upon already weakened and potentially unstable traditional structures. The Fijian Holdings Company Limited and other state-financed Provincial investment companies expanded rapidly in the decade following the coups (Ratuva, this volume). So too did the fortunes of well-placed bureaucrats, who used access to cheap loans to reconstitute themselves as a strong faction of the country's bourgeoisie. However, in doing so they simultaneously reduced opportunities for others. Indeed, the massive costs associated with the National Bank of Fiji's loan losses so weakened the economy that Fiji may be unable to reap any of the anticipated economic dividends that constitutional reform promises (Robertson 1998:192).

Ultimately, the inability of Fiji's coup leaders to deliver on their promises of a new era for the *Taukei* forced a partial retreat from the goals of 1987. A new constitution ten years later permitted a fairer electoral system and created space in which to develop the interests of civil society. Both goals have been widely praised and accepted by Fiji's peoples, as is manifest in the outcome of the 1999 general elections (Prasad, this volume). However, despite these important concessions, the new 1997 Constitution also symbolises Fiji's continued failure to confront its history, and in particular the way in which colonial and postcolonial élites have fostered and exploited ethnic divisions in order to maintain power and wealth. The 1987 coups were but an extreme consequence of those strategies.

***Taukei* identity: accommodation or exclusion?**

Rhetoric implied that the coups were for the benefit of the *Taukei*. It quickly became apparent however that not all *Taukei* would be allowed to call themselves 'Fijian', the common English language description for the *Taukei*, and so gain from changes in state policy designed to promote *Taukei* economic affirmative action. The 1990 Constitution determined that only people registered on the *Vula ni Kawa Bula* (VKB) could be deemed to be 'Fijian'. Appropriately enough, this colonial register, begun eighty years earlier to record landowners, was housed with the Native Land Commission. However, the VKB mocks the traditions of Fiji. For the past 3000 years Fiji has absorbed—no doubt not always easily—many peoples from the Pacific, resulting in a unique society with both Melanesian and Polynesian characteristics. Paul Geraghty, in *Islands Business*, has argued that there has been no tradition of exclusivity in becoming 'Fijian'. 'Ancestry had very little to do with' qualifying 'as a Fijian in a traditional sense', he claimed (*Islands Business*, February 1992:19). For example, earlier this century Tongan warriors at Sawana were given tribal status equivalent to that found within *Taukei* tribes. The tribe was given the name Toga, and the *Tui Lau* title, associated with a nineteenth century Tongan leader, was resurrected for its head. Similarly, in Rewa one group of Tongans took the name '*Vulagi*', which means outsiders or visitors, and became a dominant family.

Much of this flexibility was lost in a British drive to standardise and regulate relationships after Fiji became a British colony in 1874. More than one hundred years later, coup leader Sitiveni Rabuka continued this trend with his 1990 Constitution. Thus, people whose ancestors came from the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Banaba and Tuvalu, at one time all accepted as 'Fijian', became 'others'. Of course, the *Taukei* had always made decisions about who would be accepted into their communities and who would not. Accordingly, most that came from outside the South Pacific region were excluded. To some extent the different relationships that those who were excluded experienced with their former colonial overlords, the British, combined with their own different cultural inheritances to create new postcolonial Fiji identities. Not surprisingly, these identities were also sustained by reference to one another, including the identity of aboriginal Fijians. As parliamentarian Mesake Baisagale argued, 'the

presence of the Hindi-speaking community is like a covering that keeps the indigenous people together' (*Fiji Times*, 24 March 1995). There was though a cost: in the process the aboriginal peoples of Fiji over time became far more selective in applying the values of sharing and reciprocity which they argued lay at the heart of *Taukei* culture. The unintended consequence of exclusion festered destructively.

Exclusion did not just apply to non-aboriginal Fijians. *Vasu* had both aboriginal and non-aboriginal parents. They were however excluded. *Taukei* were not untouched by this perversity. *Ratu Jo Nacola* declared

my wife is a part Fijian, a *vasu*, and my children are of mixed ancestry but they are every bit as Fijian as the offspring of a woman from my own *mataqali* who marries into another community and her children are accepted as members of my *mataqali* in accordance with our customs (*Daily Post*, 11 February 1994).

Similarly, businessman and politician Jim Ah Koy, whose *Taukei* registration had been challenged in the courts during 1992, argued that 'irrespective of whether I got into the VKB does not alter the Fijianness in me. I can't help the fact that two bloods run through my veins' (*Fiji Times*, 14 October 1994).

A final point can be made about the *Vula ni Kawa Bula*. Its significance within contemporary *Taukei* culture can perhaps be gauged by the fact that many *Taukei* have never bothered to register with the VKB. If 1993 estimates are correct, some 66000 *Taukei*—just under one fifth of the aboriginal Fijian population—have failed to register. As a consequence of this technicality, 20,000 *Taukei* were excluded from voting in 1992 (*Daily Post*, 8 October 1993).

A second restriction on the definition of 'Fijian' has much older roots than the 1990 Constitution. A rigid fixation with patrilineal descent reflects historical disadvantages faced by women (Leckie, this volume). It also fosters exclusion. Any concessions to women have invariably been seen as gestures of goodwill or favour; they were certainly not those of equal rights. Consequently, the state's definition of 'Fijian' came to rest solely upon a father's ethnic classification. No offspring could be recognised as *Taukei* if the father was non-aboriginal, even if the mother's *mataqali* (clan) accepted the child. The marital status of the child's parents was irrelevant. Ironically, there are *Taukei*—even *Taukeists*, members of the extremist *Taukei* Movement which claimed responsibility for the first coup in 1987—whose fathers or grandfathers were not aboriginal Fijians. That did not deter them

from arguing that the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* (BLV), the Great Council of Chiefs, had ruled in favour of patrilineal descent in 1962 in order to 'save the Fijian people from being swamped by others and reduced to a pitiful race of beggars' (*Fiji Times*, 9 October 1993). That the ruling has been largely ignored by aboriginal Fijian people themselves reflects its departure from reality. As in the past, *mataqalis* simply decided for themselves whom they would accept and whom they would not.

The coups' supporters took the BLV's ruling seriously however, and began to quietly review all registrations of aboriginal Fijians since 1962. In 1992 a committee recommended cleansing from the VKB thirty-six *mataqali*-approved *Taukei*, including Jim Ah Koy, former Reserve Bank Governor Savenaca Siwatibau, and Colonel Pio Wong (*Fiji Times*, 10 July 1996). Its recommendations were chauvinistic and sent 'out a sad message for the future of the country', noted the *Fiji Times* (12 July 1996), adding that the heritage of those enforcing it might not bear too close a scrutiny. Certainly, the committee's recommendations contained uncomfortable shades of a 'master race' concept, which had always lain uneasily behind the *Taukei* Movement. Indeed, one of the founders of the *Taukei* Movement declared that *Taukeists* shared the same dedication to their people as the Nazis did to Germans (*Auckland Star*, 24 August 1987).

These attempts to redefine identity assumed that identities are static, homogeneous, and can be measured against an idealised norm. In Fiji this has never been the case. For example, Indo-Fijians are far from homogeneous. At the very least, they came from geographically distinct regions of South Asia. They left at a time when the concept of India as a nation was in its infancy and there was no fully articulated vision of independence. Consequently, the South Asians who came to Fiji were not a singular or united people. They were divided by gender, religion, caste, place of origin and language. They were also divided by their status: indentured or free settler. Ironically, what transcended these divisions were their colonial and postcolonial experiences of ethnic chauvinism and communalism. The Fiji experience created, united and 'indigenised' the Indo-Fijian community.

Aboriginal Fijians too are far from homogeneous. They are divided by commoner and chiefly status, by gender, origin, language, and the geography of east and west. Such divisions assumed new characteristics under colonialism and postcolonialism, much as they did amongst descendants of South Asian migrants. These combined with the

consequences of a monetised economy and urbanisation to provide both threats and opportunities for hereditary chiefs struggling to maintain communal leadership and relevance. Under such circumstances the colonial communal divide provided too strong a possibility for chiefs and politicians to resist. Using communalism, they locked themselves and their people into the rhetoric of ethnic difference and conflict, with all its consequences. Communalism transcended class—or so they believed—and bestowed new meaning on the socioeconomic consequences of change amongst the *Taukei*. Indo-Fijians became the cause of *Taukei* disadvantage, creating a scapegoat that empowered a crusade to draw aboriginal Fijians back into the communal fold.

Divide and rule: colonialism, class and exclusion

The postcolonial party of government until 1987, the Alliance, began by presenting itself as a multiethnic party, despite being dominated by aboriginal Fijians and being controlled by one of Fiji's highest chiefs, *Ratu* Kamisese Mara. When rural *Taukei* deserted the party in droves in 1977, the Alliance successfully wooed them back by pursuing an election campaign that chauvinistically appealed to ethnic identity. Communalism gave the Alliance unity, stability and purpose in the face of division and confusion until 1987. However, these tactics divided Fiji ethnically, frustrated national unity and purpose, diminished the benefits of development, and ultimately produced political instability and economic stagnation. This occurred because Fiji failed to transcend the strategy of divide and rule that had been devised by Britain to sustain colonialism as cheaply and as comfortably as possible. The failure to transcend the strategy of divide and rule was not a recipe for postcolonial development and cooperation; it was a recipe for neocolonial stagnation.

In the wake of the use of communalism by the Alliance, *Taukei* leaders began to rewrite history, portraying Indo-Fijians as colonisers—wealthy, greedy and ungrateful. This occurred despite the fact that those South Asian migrants and their descendants had not been and were not privileged. In fact, the majority of Indo-Fijians in the late 1980s were little better off than *Taukei*. The commonly held image of wealthy Indo-Fijians was highly selective. In 1986 Indo-Fijians held 58.5 per cent of all white-collar jobs; *Taukei* held 30.9 per cent. Indo-Fijians held 69.1 per

cent of professional and managerial jobs; *Taukei* held 17.4 per cent. Yet the vast majority of Indo-Fijians—89 per cent—and the vast majority of *Taukei*—79 per cent—belonged to disadvantaged classes: farmers, wage earners, peasants, unpaid family workers and the unemployed (Sutherland 1992:153–59). These facts though were not allowed to get in the way of political goals. The *Taukei* Movement's spokesperson histrionically observed that Indo-Fijians 'can't leave us for dead socially, they can't leave us for dead economically, and then think that they can take over the political leadership of this country without Fijians fighting back' (Radio Australia, 5 October 1987). Such abuse worked because ethnic chauvinism had long permeated Fiji society as a consequence of divide and rule. Ethnic chauvinism inverted the meaning of the thriftiness and education upon which Indo-Fijians, the Jews of the South Pacific, relied for their security and from which they benefited. As the Leader of the Opposition noted, 'in this country Indians have a lot now which they did not have fifty years ago...The most powerful thing we have today is our education' (*Fiji Times*, 8 April 1996).

Yet it was Britain that had segregated the peoples of Fiji. It developed the best schools for Europeans and for the sons of chiefs. Separate suburbs existed for different ethnic groups. Unions were ethnically segregated, often mirroring different patterns of ethnic employment. Different laws existed for the different peoples of Fiji. Ethnic differences were explained by reference to grand narratives on civilisation and children were raised on the resultant stereotypes. Although postcolonial policies of multiculturalism in education and employment weakened many stereotypes, politically motivated ethnic scapegoating during the late 1970s and 1980s served to maintain them. Moreover, migrants from monocultural rural areas brought with them their own regional variations, and passed these on to their offspring as well. They also retained their provincial identities and loyalties, sometimes grouping together in urban village settlements, sometimes maintaining social links through provincially oriented churches. In the short term at least, urbanisation exerted a conservative influence in stressing difference and fostering exclusivity.

In Larry Thomas's play, *Men, Women and Insanity*, a young woman reflects

The problem is we are all frightened. We like each other, but we don't like each other. If we like each other, then there's something wrong. You see we are not supposed to like each other. That's the way we are

brought up. For the Fijian kid they are told not to like the Indian kid because he is cunning and has no manners. For the Indian kid, he is told the Fijian kid is lazy and good for nothing and you will never learn anything from him. So even if an Indian kid and a Fijian kid grow up together, they will still be an Indian and a Fijian, not people who are friends (Thomas 1995:201–2).

However, behind these ‘everyday’ stereotypes lay a material basis, Sutherland argues.

With Indians being so visibly dominant in high paid professional, managerial and other white-collar occupations, the deepening sense of Fijian disadvantage is even more understandable. For not only did they dominate those economic activities which impacted daily and most directly on Fijian lives, they also commanded the most sought after jobs (Sutherland 1992:153).

Grievances may, over time, have come to be seen in ‘everyday’ stereotypical terms: ‘Indian success, Fijian failure’. Sutherland stresses though, that the basis of these ‘everyday’ stereotypes is actually class.

When, for example, Fijians sneer at an Indian businessman, it is out of resentment and envy. He is resented because he is an Indian (as opposed to say a European). But he is certainly not envied for being Indian. Rather he is envied because he is a businessman. The envy has to do primarily with class not race, even if the resentment might spring from both. Unfortunately, the racial form of the problem invariably hides its class content. And this helps sustain the myth of Indian domination (Sutherland 1992:153).

Grounds for envy based on ethnicity are indeed problematic. They are a myth, and a very convenient one, in a country in which transnational control, with or without local collaboration, is massive.

In the early postcolonial years foreign companies retained their dominance of the Fiji economy, particularly sectors such as utilities, mining, and finance, and controlled 65 per cent of Fiji’s total turnover in 1980. In the tourist retail sector Indo-Fijians dominated the non-hotel retail infrastructure, controlling 91 per cent of it, but accounted for only 26 per cent of retail turnover. The greatest share—some 72 per cent—went to foreign companies (Sutherland 1992:147–50). However, for political mythmakers only the visible infrastructure mattered—the number of Indo-Fijian owned shops, buses and taxis. ‘One of the greatest causes of dissatisfaction that caused the coup’, explained *Ratu Mara*, ‘was the fact that Fijians didn’t think that they have a fair share of the cake’ (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, October 1991).

Ethnic envy was a dangerous weapon for the Alliance to employ politically. It created unrealistic expectations and poisoned communal relations at a time when economic development began to challenge old colonial barriers. As a consequence, it backfired on its propagandists. Sakeasi Butadroka, the leader of the extremist Fijian Nationalist Party, a long time opponent of Mara and his Alliance government, and a staunch advocate of Indo-Fijian expulsion, stood outside Parliament within hours of the first coup on 14 May 1987 and shouted to the crowds that had gathered 'Where is Kamisese Mara? Don't blame Bavadra, don't blame anybody, blame Kamisese Mara who sold Fiji. Where is he? Where is he now? Mara, the bloody Judas Iscariot?' (Robertson and Tamanisau 1988:70). Mara believed the rejection of the Alliance government in 1987 to be cross-communal. Nonetheless, he reserved his greatest condemnation for Indo-Fijians. In any country in which overseas South Asians are 'almost a majority, you have problems', he declared (*Fiji Times*, 4 December 1991). Mara painted a striking picture: a disloyal and ungrateful Indo-Fijian majority avariciously grabbing power and bringing down upon itself and the postcolonial leadership the wrath of an enraged aboriginal Fijian people. His traditional superior and former political colleague, Governor General and later President *Ratu* Sir Penaia Ganilau, was blunter. 'The migrant races in the country have complete control—except for political leadership'. A new constitution, he asserted, would guarantee the *Taukei* the fulfillment of their aspirations (*Fiji Times*, 11 January 1989).

Constitutions, chiefs and communalism

A founder of the *Taukei* Movement and later government minister *Ratu* Inoke Kubuabola claimed that Indo-Fijians did not acknowledge that aboriginal Fijians had 'made their heritage available for others to share. It is time they come to terms with the reality of the situation that exists today' (*Fiji Times*, 27 September 1989). However, this was not true. The 1970 Constitution, not the *Taukei*, gave equality to all citizens of Fiji, including Indo-Fijians. In 1970 Fiji declared that it would abandon the ethnically divisive policies of colonialism and promote instead a new sense of national unity based upon respect for ethnic differences. Multiculturalism did not deny communalism; it just did not accord it precedence over respect for equal peoples. It was an

important symbol of difference for a new postcolonial era, even if it was increasingly honoured only in the breach. However, in 1987 new communal moguls dismissed multiculturalism as a facade. An unwritten agreement, they claimed, made aboriginal Fijian paramountcy the reality. It became convenient to deny that Indo-Fijians were citizens. Aboriginal Fijians were the hosts; Indo-Fijians mere guests. The problems involved in regarding fourth or fifth generation citizens as guests, not equals, and implicitly giving them the same status as immigrants on short term work permits, are obvious. Mara 'lamented on his failure to create a truly multiracial Fiji', Rabuka declared. 'I think he was too cruel on himself, he was trying to achieve something that was impossible' (*The Age*, 21 July 1990). Following the coups no space existed for multiculturalism.

Or for democracy. Democracy meant equality according to members of the *Taukei* Movement. It respected that which communalism had to destroy in order to dominate. The *Taukei* called democracy 'demon-crazy', claimed it to be alien to *Taukei* culture, argued that it was a conspiracy to deprive aboriginal Fijians of the leadership of their own country, and saw it as a means to drive a wedge between commoners and chiefs. *Taukeist*, unionist and government minister Taniela Veitata distributed 10,000 letters to *Taukei* households in 1988 declaring that 'he who is not proud of his race has no right to live and should go hurrying with that crazy demon democracy to bloody hell' (*Daily Post*, 12 December 1992).

In 1988 Rabuka told a provincial council that 'the chiefs are the mainstay of the Fijian race and it is important that the chiefly system be maintained if the Fijian race is to remain united' (*Fiji Times*, 31 October 1988). However, there was no consensus amongst aboriginal Fijians as to whether the chiefs should assume complete political leadership. Politician Kolinio Qiqiwaqa noted that chiefs sold Fiji to Britain in 1874 to liquidate a debt owed by the *Vunivalu* of Bau (*Fiji Times*, 7 August 1987). By way of contrast, the commoner Rabuka justified his first coup by claiming that personal attacks made by politicians against Mara—a high chief—were too much for commoners to bear (*New Zealand Herald*, 19 May 1987). By the time of the second coup, though, his views had changed. 'A lot of people say that chiefs should not participate in politics because in politics you might be subjected to some adverse comments that are unbecoming to your status', he claimed (*Islands Business*, October 1987). Mara

disagreed, retorting that chiefs had always been involved in politics and could not remain aloof as they provided stability and moderation (*Fiji Times*, 3 October 1991). Both men did however recognise that 'for the last 20 years [*Taukei*] have failed to distinguish between culture and politics, between chiefs as chiefs and chiefs as part of the political structure' (Vesikula 1989:12).

The nature of relations between chiefs and commoners was also a subject for disagreement. Leading *Taukeist* and later government minister Filipe Bole regarded chiefs and their people as indivisible (*Fiji Times*, 5 August 1991). Yet for much of Fiji's history, both before and after colonisation, chiefs and 'their' people had been divisible. Indeed, one of the most striking class struggles of twentieth century Fiji is that of chiefs struggling against the social and political consequences of change and the not inconsiderable antipathy of some colonialists to the retention of their roles within society. Britain benefited from the chiefly struggle—it enabled a conservative alliance of chiefs and locally based Europeans to emerge, reducing pressures for decolonisation. It was only on the eve of its departure that Britain, not wanting to be seen internationally as condoning the communalism it had fostered, sought to dismantle the structures of communalism in Fiji by introducing a new power sharing constitution which, while marginally biased towards aboriginal Fijians, was purportedly designed to break down communalism. It is not very surprising that within seventeen years both legacies of the last years of British colonialism in Fiji—power sharing and multiculturalism—were overthrown: the chiefs had to ensure that the communal project remained under their effective control in order to maintain their own social and economic position. At first there seemed no doubt. 'We want the chiefs to hold leadership', Rabuka stated late in 1987 (*Islands Business*, December 1987).

Twenty-one months later Rabuka's position had changed. He was out of the army and had become a politician. He could afford a touch of defiance. While 'chiefs have the final say', 'when it comes to politics these chiefs do not have the mandate of their people' (*The Age*, 17 August 1991). Rabuka wanted chiefs to assume a symbolic role and to modernise by being trained to use 'modern systems of leadership, rather than relying on total loyalty, traditional blood-ties and so on; you make them effective managers' (*Fiji Times*, 29 August 1991). There was a need

to slow down the process of totally making ineffective the chiefly system and hopefully we can introduce certain policies and systems in which we can work at getting our chiefs into an effective ruling group, not to the extent that they rule the politics of the nation, but they rule their own little *vanuas* (territories) and the divisions of the *vanua* effectively, capable of understanding the modern democratic systems that we now live in (*Islands Business*, July 1991).

Any alternative, he believed, eroded the chiefly system and produced a new élite based on competition, education and personal initiative. While Rabuka did not endorse that 'kind of democracy' (*The Age*, 21 July 1990), it was clear that his views concerning the political role of the chiefs had dramatically changed. Many chiefs had expected something different after 1987.

Certainly the Fiji Labour Party's leader, Dr Timoci Bavadra, had promised the chiefs nothing when he upset the postcolonial cocoon by winning the 1987 election. His new deal had been for commoners. He wanted to return to them the management and wealth of their own lands. Bavadra's Minister of Labour and Immigration was unequivocal when he said 'the days of the old leaders club are coming to an end. In the modern world, it is democratic rights that give the commoner Fijian their best chance in life' (*Dominion Sunday Times*, 17 April 1988). Nationalist Butadroka had similarly promised little for the chiefs. 'The time for chiefly leadership had long gone' (*Fiji Times*, 6 December 1988), he declared.

The assumption of such a view had not been expected from Rabuka. He was the chiefs' 'brave hearted champion', as Ro Lady Lala Mara reportedly called him at the first BLV meeting after the coup which toppled Bavadra (*Fiji Times*, 2 November 1995). They anticipated using post-coup circumstances to secure their own status. Indeed, they succeeded in gaining paramountcy in the 1990 Constitution by restoring the political role of their provincial bases and by winning a new role for a much more concentrated BLV, which now became a *de facto* parliament, closed to the public and media. Rabuka accepted that the BLV was 'the supreme constitutional body' (*Fiji Times*, 16 January 1989).

The chiefs saw their post-coup consolidation within the Fiji polity as essential in order to achieve a central goal of the coups: maintaining the unity and self-reliance of *Taukei* culture. For the chiefs, achieving this goal meant restoring to themselves control over many *Taukei* institutions, which were increasingly influenced by commoners. Moreover, the chiefs saw themselves as moderates and regarded their

own self-interest as altruism. Not all *Taukei* agreed. Bavadra for one was dismayed, seeing it as 'the manipulation of Fijian institutions for advantage of a particular proposition shared by the military leader and some members of the interim administration' (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 June 1990). Similarly, the dissident Bauan chief Ratu Jone Madraiwiwi argued that the actions of the chiefs were 'the result of an attempt to shore up a system that is being eroded by change' (Griffen 1997:231). Such actions, he believed, would encourage tribalism and provincialism at the expense of nation building. Butadroka too dismissed the BLV, although this did not stop him from creating his own rival Viti Levu Council of Chiefs in 1992 (*Fiji Times*, 6 December 1988).

The chiefs viewed their critics suspiciously. The Bavadras, Butadrokas, Vesikulas, and perhaps even now the Rabukas of this world sought to upset chiefly power bases inherited from the nineteenth century and frozen by colonialism. They would throw these bases into confusion. They wanted a western fourth confederacy, which might become the revenge of old Colo, once the first casualty of colonialism but now, with western Viti Levu, the backbone of the economy. They would, as Rabuka himself proposed, keep the chiefs one level removed from politics by harmlessly confining them to the Senate, a kind of House of Lords. A Senate of Chiefs might enable chiefs to be involved in politics, Rabuka speculated, while not 'getting down to the level of politics where, look, I can say this against the prime minister, regardless of who he is' (*Islands Business*, July 1991). This was not what the chiefs had wanted. Nonetheless, as time went on, Rabuka—his goal now firmly on succession to Mara once the Interim Government's term ended—identified himself more and more with those calling for reform of the role of chiefs in the governance of Fiji. The coup leader now staked his claim both as a commoner and as a moderate in arguing that

Sakeasi Butadroka, Jolame Uludole, Isireli Vuibau and the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* are all fighting for the same cause—ensuring Fijian political dominance and protection of indigenous rights. The only difference in our style is that we're following different channels to achieve such ends (*Fiji Times*, 11 November 1991).

Nonetheless, Rabuka's emergence as a moderate was relative. He wanted to help 'Fijians live with the threat [from Indo-Fijians]; and not only living and surviving but overcoming it' (*Fiji Times*, 16 July 1991).

His views were the same as nationalists such as Butadroka, except that he promised not to expel Indo-Fijians. Rabuka made no promise of equality or a return to multiculturalism.

Exclusionary economics

When Mara retired as Prime Minister in 1992, he told President Ganilau that 'if our people are misled into believing that economic manna will simply fall from heaven because there is a Fijian government, then those responsible will have to answer to the country when the truth becomes evident' (*Fiji Times*, 30 May 1992). Yet the Interim Government which Mara headed had been created specifically to secure aboriginal Fijian political paramountcy as the necessary precondition of Fiji's economic growth. As a leading technocrat noted, 'businessmen don't care about the voting structure' (*Islands Business*, February 1989). That might have been true for short-term foreign investors, but Fiji in the early 1990s depended to a large extent on internal investment; and many internal investors sought evidence of the government's commitment to an acceptable constitution and to a resolution of land lease negotiations before they committed resources. Indeed, as early as 1988 Westpac Pacific's General Manager had put the case very directly: growth would remain frustrated until such time as people saw 'a democratically elected government in place' (*Financial Review*, 30 November 1988).

The understandable failure of many Indo-Fijian businesses to invest following the coups sent an important message to politicians. As Mary-Louise O'Callaghan wrote, 'if Fiji is really only for Fijians with Indians as guests...not much long term commitment can be expected from non-Fijians or as equal but different citizens' (*The Age*, 1 June 1991). Exclusion thus fostered a form of economic apartheid that could not work in Fiji. Mara too seemed on occasion to accept the fallacy of apartheid. In 1989 he told the National Economic Summit that 'the major challenge on the road to economic progress at this time, and no doubt we will face it in the next 11 years, is national unity' (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, July 1989). Two years later a senior government minister told a Fiji Trade and Investment Forum that 'the welfare of the country takes precedence over the rights of any specialised group' (*Fiji Times*, 16 November 1991). Jai Ram Reddy, the leader of the opposition National Federation Party, also recognised the

impact of economic apartheid, stating that 'the success of my community depends on the success of every other community in Fiji' (*Fiji Times*, 8 April 1996).

Despite widespread agreement about the negative economic consequences of exclusion, *Taukei* leaders did not act to dismantle economic apartheid in Fiji. In 1988 Sir Shridath Ramphal, then Secretary General of the British Commonwealth, could not 'see much evidence of even a will to forge a political settlement' (*The Age*, 17 September 1988). Accommodation was indeed slow in coming. In 1992 Rabuka succeeded Mara as Prime Minister, but he regarded himself first and foremost as a *Taukei* prime minister, not as a prime minister for all Fiji's peoples (*Fiji Times*, 4 August 1994). Only in early 1997 did Rabuka appear to concede that government must serve the interests of other communities and that the *Taukei* would have to learn to accept that there were other communities which belonged to Fiji (*Fiji Times*, 28 February 1997).

'Throughout history, when a state has taken an exclusive and intolerant idea such as religion and ethnicity as its cornerstone', wrote former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, 'this idea more often than not has been the very mainspring of violence and war'.

[A] state that defines its function essentially in terms of ethnic or religious attributes inevitably becomes chauvinistic and intolerant...[A] truly democratic government...cannot be nationalist because it must pursue the good of all citizens, regardless of their sex, colour, race, religious belief or ethnic origin. Democratic government stands for good citizenship, never nationalism (*Australian*, 2 July 1990).

Identity in post-coup Fiji

Fiji, of course, is a modern creation. Prior to colonisation the nation of Fiji did not exist, although parts of the country were known as *Viti*, from which the British corruption derived. The British came to call its aboriginal peoples 'Fijians', but they could just as easily have called them *kai Viti* or *i Taukei*. Over time, the use of 'Fijian' to describe the aboriginal peoples of Fiji has become natural. However, it makes finding a common name to describe the citizens of Fiji very difficult. Sixty-three per cent of the people of Fiji polled in 1995 favoured a common name, but aboriginal Fijians were almost equally divided on the issue. Less than forty per cent recognised 'Fijian' as the logical

national name (*Fiji Times*, 28 March 1995). Clearly, a society in which one community takes for itself exclusive ownership of the country's name will have difficulties making other communities welcome. As a former Deputy Leader of the Opposition lamented, 'I, being a third generation and my children being a fourth generation in this country, born and bred here, are still called Indians...In Fiji, after living together for more than 100 years, we do not yet have a common name' (*Weekender*, 2 April 1994).

For a long time some descendants of South Asian migrants have attempted to overcome this dilemma by explicitly referring to themselves as 'Indo-Fijian'. Indeed, for convenience this term has been used in this chapter. However, this term is highly problematic because it maintains a focus on ethnicity. National identity, not ethnicity, must be the focus for identity in a multicultural country, especially when the variety of relationships between peoples increasingly contradicts rigid definitions and when a substantial proportion of the population is saying in effect 'we believe that our lives here have produced a culture peculiar to Fiji, that is, indigenous to Fiji, and often transcultural. We want to belong'. Unfortunately, many *Taukei* do not believe this or deliberately choose not to acknowledge this publicly. They argue instead, against all evidence, that Indo-Fijians regard India and not Fiji as their homeland (*Fiji Times*, 12 July 1995). Indeed, it is important to recall that ethnic diversity in Fiji extends beyond the two principal communities. Non-aboriginal Fijians and non-Indo-Fijians also regard Fiji as their home, 'the country of their roots, their citizenship and their heritage. They are not strangers and outsiders here. They belong here' (*Fiji Times*, 11 July 1995). They too require a national identity.

Unfortunately, this has not happened. Ethnic identities in the 1990 Constitution were so 'boxed [in] that national identity [was] virtually nonexistent', claimed Yash Ghai in 1993. People might be *Taukei* or Indo-Fijian, but 'in fact we're all of those things and many more; there are many points of intersection'. What the country needed was to start seeing problems as national problems, rather than as communal problems, he concluded (*Fiji Times*, 25 April 1994). President Mara expressed a similar view when told the BLV in 1996 that ethnic integration was the only way forward.

While each race may possibly find solutions to its own problems, it has to be understood that such solutions will react on other races. And therefore, it is only when the races get together to discuss problems, that solid and lasting progress can be achieved (*Fiji Times*, 16 August 1996).

Yet, as former *Taukeist* Filipe Bole noted, aboriginal Fijian paramountcy was 'deeply entrenched' and would be 'difficult to erase' (*The Review*, November 1994).

The role of Rabuka in the growing recognition of the need to retreat from exclusion is contradictory. In his 1995 New Year address Rabuka tried to move beyond exclusivity, just as Bavadra had ten years earlier, when he stated that

for too long we have kept our society fragmented by concentrating too much on our racial origins. We look upon ourselves as Fijians, as Indians, part-Europeans, Chinese, Pacific Islanders. A country that does not have an encompassing identity for its citizens will always be incomplete. I have concluded, after much searching of my conscience, that it is time for us to become 'Fijians'. I will repeat that—all citizens of Fiji should be known as Fijian (*Fiji Times*, 2 January 1995).

In 1996 Rabuka condemned his old soul mates, the *Taukei* Movement, arguing that 'the stance of Fiji for Fijians won't work. We need others. People have to change their attitude. I am for Fiji and I am pro-Fijian. That doesn't mean that I'm anti-Indian. Indians are good for Fiji. Other communities are good for Fiji. What's good for Fiji is good for Fijians' (*Fiji Times*, 6 September 1996).

In 1997 Rabuka welcomed the Fiji Sevens home by referring to 'Fijians of all races' (*Fiji Times*, 5 April 1997). Later, when addressing Commonwealth leaders in Edinburgh on the occasion of Fiji's re-admission to the British Commonwealth, he described the peoples of Fiji as 'the family of Fiji': 'we are all bound together by the reality that we need each other, that we can't do without each other and that we are indeed a family' (*Fiji Times*, 25 October 1997). However, remarkable as these public utterances are by the two-time coup leader, they did not necessarily represent a significant change in attitude. Rabuka acknowledged the continuing strength of 'us' and 'them' perspectives when referring to his days in exclusively aboriginal Fijian schools and in the military, stressing that

my tolerance level of other races was very low. But since coming out of that cocoon I have managed very well to accept that I have to compete with them, I have to look after them, and I have to devise policies and programmes that will be good for them as well as being good for us (*Fiji Times*, 17 January 1997).

For Rabuka to be credible, there is a need to acknowledge that past actions have been misguided. This he has consistently refused to do. In 1994 he declared that 'apartheid here in Fiji...[is] a necessary evil'

(*The Review*, April 1994) and that 'the interests of indigenous people come first' (*The Review*, September 1994). 'I will not and will never apologise for the coups of 1987' (*Australian*, 17 June 1994). He was though prepared to make some concessions. A stagnant economy and growing popular disenchantment with corruption and cronyism left him little choice. A clause within the 1990 Constitution stipulating regular constitutional reviews provided a means by which to make concessions. Moreover, he received unexpected support from Jai Ram Reddy, who had declared dead the multicultural goals that his party had previously pursued while in coalition with the Fiji Labour Party (*Daily Post*, 19 March 1993).

With the majority of parliamentary seats still communally defined, the compromise Constitution that emerged in 1997 retained much of its former communalist orientation (Ghai, this volume). However, it did promise to bring Indo-Fijians into government through the mechanism of a government of national unity. Some small concessions were also made to urban *Taukei*; their proportion of the aboriginal Fijian population rose from 33 per cent to 41 per cent between 1987 and 1997, and they were underrepresented in parliament (*Statistical News*, 1997:4). Rural *Taukei* seats were also adjusted to better reflect population distribution rather than that of provincial authority. One third of lower house seats were no longer communally reserved. Concessions were made to enable greater Parliamentary accountability and to remove the strict definitions of race imposed by the 1990 Constitution. The Constitution gave equal status to the country's three main languages—Fijian, Hindi and English—for the first time, although with local language usage increasing at work places and on the air waves, and with a new emphasis on teaching local languages to all students at school, one colonial legacy might be about to pass. In other matters though the Constitution did not mark a clear transition. 'Besides broad references to equality [and] citizenship rights, Fiji essentially remain[s] a nation of separate identities', sociologist Satendra Prasad wrote at the end of 1997. 'Its political structures and institutions emphasise and feed off the separateness of those identities' (Griffen 1997:317). 'The "us" and "them" mind set...is still in our midst', lawyer Imrana Jalal concurred (*Fiji Times*, 19 June 1997).

Indeed, Rabuka made it very clear that despite the potential of these changes to restore much of the emphasis on multiculturalism eroded by the coups, as far as he was concerned most of the measures were symbolic. He intended to pursue the goal of *Taukei* communal unity. However, given the huge migration of Indo-Fijians from Fiji since the coups, the *Taukei* no longer feared Indo-Fijian numerical domination. They could afford to retreat a little from 1987. Consequently, clauses stressing ethnic exclusivity were no longer required; their damage to Fiji's reputation internationally was deemed now to outweigh their usefulness nationally. Nonetheless, the communal emphasis remained entrenched. The Constitution sidestepped the issue of 'Fijian' as the national name by adopting 'Fiji Islander' as a common name. In this way the communal divide remains. Singular ethnic perspectives and zero-sum relations between communities remain, defining identity and shaping the nation's future. 'It shows that while policies steeped in racism and based on racial supremacy can be instilled into the system almost overnight', the *Fiji Times* lamented, 'any changes towards multiracialism can only be achieved in small doses' (15 April 1997).

Before being adopted as the inclusive national name, the description 'New Zealander' described only Maoris. Today *Pakeha* is the term used to describe the descendants of European settlers. Both *Pakehas* and Maoris are New Zealanders. Some change of that order is required in Fiji. As early as 1969 Ratu Mara suggested 'Fijian' as the logical common name, but the BLV insisted on preserving the national name for aboriginal Fijians. 'Fijian' has thus remained, a little uneasily, the name used to describe only the *Taukei*. This must change. 'If we cannot come together to agree on a common name for ourselves, something that effects each of us equally', the *Fiji Times* editorialised in 1994, 'how can we ever hope to agree on anything more difficult...[which] demand[s] even greater sacrifice and understanding from each other' (*Fiji Times*, 15 October 1994). All Fiji citizens should be Fijians, because the name of the country is Fiji. Those derived from the aboriginal peoples of Fiji—no matter their specific heritage—should be *kai Viti* or *i Taukei*, if they personally wish to be so described. All others should be known by some non-ethnic and inclusive term such as *vasu*. Such an accommodation better reflects the values of sharing, hospitality and respect at the center of the way of life of Fiji.

Conclusion

Even in light of the results of the 1999 general elections, Fiji's retreat from exclusion remains qualified. Powerful interests have too much to lose by conceding to change, while at the same time one of the most important stumbling blocks remains the nation's failure to address adequately issues of identity. Fiji needs to use its official resources to overcome the chauvinistic rhetoric that has been encouraged during the last twelve years. Much of this, as political philosopher Richard Mulgan wrote concerning New Zealand, is due to oversimplifying abstract theories of societies (Mulgan 1989:71). Generalisations and stereotypes not only reinforce distrust and division, they rebound on their advocates by generating a belief in collective failure, cultural backwardness, and a loss of control. A 'victim syndrome' is re-established, as Fiji's most persistent public nationalist, Sakeasi Butadroka, demonstrated when he translated ethnic antagonism into genetic backwardness. 'Indians and Asians have civilised blood in them because when they were civilised we were still cannibals', he said. The *Taukei* need more 'time to develop a better sense of the Western World' (*Fiji Times*, 6 October 1996).

No one has yet been able to adapt in a manner and pace directed solely by themselves. The notion though that Indo-Fijians are 'naturally' better than aboriginal Fijians in education and business is not new, despite flying in the face of logic and causing the infrastructural basis for educational and business success to be neglected. Nor is there evidence for such assertions. The 1996 Fiji Poverty Report demonstrated that while *Taukei* households in general had the lowest incomes, lower income Indo-Fijians were worse off than lower income *Taukei* households. Half of the poor were Indo-Fijian, with incomes fourteen per cent lower than *Taukei* households. *Taukei* dominated middle income groups. Only in the small proportion of high income households were Indo-Fijian households 42 per cent better off than high income *Taukei* (*Fiji Times* 19 March 1997).

These matters are rarely commented on by politicians. Public debate and official assistance to get the picture right is rare. Instead, myths are perpetuated. Even the former managing director of the Fiji Development Bank, Laisenia Qarase, sees *Taukei* development in these terms. '[W]hat we must always keep in mind', he contended, 'is that we are dealing with a problem which has its origins in thousands of years of culture and tradition' (*Weekender*, 25 June 1993). Such beliefs

fit well with the siege mentality Imrana Jalal believes many of Fiji's leaders have adopted, making 'ceaseless calls for ethnic unity and the preservation of tradition and custom, even as they personally discard them to make their own compromises with the modern world'. Blaming someone else might be politically useful for survival in communal electorates, but it is misdirected, she argued. Indo-Fijians do not threaten the so-called 'Fijian system'. Equal opportunity, education, and nuclear families do (*Fiji Times*, 24 October 1996). The late sociologist Simone Durutalo said the same thing in 1993. Indo-Fijians had become the scapegoat even though 'it is not [they] who are the threat to Fijian culture, but the modern way of life' (Durutalo 1993:7).

At the heart of ethnocentrism lies a series of misconceptions about the world and ethnic identity. In many ways race and ethnicity are imperial artifacts. The ideas of race and ethnicity spread as industrialisation fragmented societies across the world. They remain today socially constructed concepts, with no biological basis except in terms of superficial appearances (Jones 1996:172–6). Genes have nothing to do with business acumen; 'success', senator Francis Hong Tiyy noted, is 'based on the acquisition of skills', not race or cultural heritage (*Fiji Times*, 13 August 1992). Aboriginal Fijian nationalists are mistaken when they regard their cultural heritage as an inhibitor; they perform a great disservice to their own communities. Not only do they foster a victim mentality, but they also hide from their people a very important truth: that all societies are dynamic and that they themselves have already survived great changes. As anthropologist Nicholas Thomas wrote, the British may not have dispossessed the *Taukei* as they did Aborigines in Australia or Maoris in New Zealand, but they certainly did not preserve village society in Fiji. In fact, whole villages were relocated or broken up. New health and gardening regulations dramatically changed their appearance, as did the transformation of *bures* and the ending of male and female segregation. Land tenure practices in the country were homogenised, religious practices and authorities changed, the language of Bau became the national standard, and kava drinking became democratised. Even *Taukei* values such as respect, kinship and sharing underwent change, sometimes gaining exaggerated importance as they confronted British efforts to transform them. Consequently, these values are not 'those of timeless tradition'. Nor is the role of chiefs a timeless one. Their reciprocal obligations have been reduced while the removal of traditional priests made chiefs more central than they had once been (Thomas 1992:17–8).

Fiji was and is a dynamic and inclusive society, not the exclusive patrilineal one of the colonial VKB or the master race of the *Taukei* Movement. *Taukeism*, in all its manifestations, produces a victim mentality from which it is difficult to escape. Under the umbrella of aboriginal Fijian nationalism it raised a false notion of indigenosity and a false concept of chiefly protection which served to disguise abuse. Too often, lamented the former head of the Methodist Church, Reverend Josateki Koroi, 'the chiefly dictatorship system is promoted as the ultimate good as though the mastery and exploitation of other races were the high road to the new world order' (*Fiji Times*, 1 May 1992). 'The main culprits are people who have gone to monoethnic schools and see themselves as the select race to run this country', argued Vijay Naidu. '[T]his orchestration takes place not only at the level of political leaders but through the Methodist Church, community leaders, school teachers and the public service' (*The Review*, April 1997).

The *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT), the 1992 replacement for the Alliance Party, told the Constitutional Review Commission that political control 'is the collective right of self determination of the indigenous people' (*Fiji Times*, 11 October 1995). However, contrary to SVT belief, it is not a right promoted by the Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Draft Declaration is designed to encourage special protection and privileges for threatened groups. Disadvantage, not indigenosity, is the criteria for assistance. 'Otherwise the result of special protection is not to achieve equality', Mulgan commented, 'but to offer the possibility of entrenching an unequal position of superiority' (Mulgan 1989:85).

The word 'indigenous' has been hijacked in recent years and given connotations it should not enjoy. In 1990 at a United Nations Development Programme regional workshop on environmental management and sustainable development, a senior government minister claimed that 'the environmental perceptions of their cultural heritage' had served Pacific peoples well before 'the arrival of white men'. Perhaps, he mused, island nations should return to these. Although evidence to the contrary abounds, the image of aboriginal people as noble custodians of the environment is a powerful one. Ironically though the real message to the workshop was the opposite: that 'developing countries could not afford to bend to environmental concern' (*Fiji Times*, 18 April 1990).

Rabuka also believed that 'indigenouness' created a special bond, particularly among the peoples of the Pacific (*Fiji Times*, 26 April 1997). Yet his 1990 Constitution meant that all descendants of Europeans, Indians, Solomon Islanders, ni Vanuatu, Tuvalu, i-Kiribati and others could never regard Fiji as their home, no matter whether they and past generations had been born and raised in the country or were in fact indistinguishable from most 'indigenous peoples'. Indo-Fijians are certainly different from the *Taukei*, but their culture is a branch of South Asian culture now indigenous to Fiji. After 120 years the mix of many different peoples descended from South Asia living in the Fiji environment has produced something different, something unique to Fiji, evolving within Fiji and therefore indigenous to Fiji. The same is true of all other peoples. *Taukei* culture is likewise indigenous to Fiji, even though today it is very different from what it was 100 years ago, and has been greatly influenced by British, Australasian and South Asian cultures (Mulgan 1989:20–1). Moreover, Fiji and its peoples—like peoples in most countries—are integrated into and influenced by a growing global culture that is experienced through the media, professional organisations, business and political organisations, and education.

As one nation, with at least two main peoples and many cultures, Fiji needs to treat identity carefully. Mulgan argues that flexible ethnic identity is an essential lubricant for any ethnically tolerant society. The dangers and injustices inherent in exclusive definitions of ethnicity have already been pointed out. They are not only historically wrong, but they also retard the growth of the nation (Mulgan 1989:132). Some *Taukei* have been dismissive of attempts to forge a stronger, more inclusive, Fiji identity, especially by means of the word 'Fijian'. However, inclusive symbols and language are very important for social and national development. According to one Australian commentator it 'helps create spaces of temporary equality, working tolerance in which every one has a good chance to participate' (Morris 1997:13). If Fiji is to prosper, it will do so only as one nation, with all cultures and backgrounds working together to create a transformed and vibrant society. Calling everybody by the name of the country is such a small thing to do, and yet its consequences are vast. Certainly, it is the first step in overcoming the legacies of colonialism and moving forward. It tells everybody they belong, that they are equal and valued as people and as individuals.

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