

Literature Review

The Art of Governance: A Review of Discussions of Governance in Pacific Island Countries

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When reviewing the literature on governance in Pacific Island countries it is soon clear that when authors, scholars, aid providers, and a range of other commentators, including local elites, offer their views on governance, their discussion focuses on the need for 'good governance'.

Many of those promoting good governance advise that free trade is the best mechanism for ensuring economic growth and the eradication of poverty in developing countries. They advise that steps must be taken to increase the scope of market exchange and to increase both market and government efficiency. They insist that free trade is the avenue through which optimum use be made of each country's available resources. It is against this background of neo-liberal informed advice that Pacific Island governments have then been told they must practice good governance through overhauling and restricting the size of their bureaucracies and promoting efficiency, transparency and accountability. They must adhere to routinised and predictable rules and regulations and oppose any abuse of power. The rule of law is to be observed. Corrupt activity must not be tolerated. At the same time, Pacific Island governments are urged to respect and promote human rights and democratic principles. They are expected to encourage the development of an active and informed civil sector and they are advised they must adopt an environmentally sustainable approach to development. They also must promote gender equality. This is quite a 'shopping list'¹

¹ In the context of developing countries, the good governance agenda (with its focus on market distribution of resources, efficiency and routinised rules and regulations) displays a marked urban bias. And as well, we should ask - Which good governance

Transparent and Accountable Government and the Fight Against Corruption

The combination of a climate where good governance is being actively promoted and the widely held view that corruption is prevalent in many Pacific Island countries has led many of the most well informed commentators on development and politics in Pacific Island countries to focus on the need for greater transparency and accountability. Prominent among these commentators is Ron Crocombe, who in his knowledgeable and readable book confidently titled *The South Pacific*, devotes a whole chapter to the problem of corruption, the behaviour of some Pacific Island elites and the need for improved accountability. He does this even before he offered his chapter explicitly focusing on 'Governance'. Crocombe has drawn on his extensive knowledge of the politics, history, culture, communities, intrigues and personalities involved in government in a very wide range of Pacific Island countries. His comment is hard-hitting. This can be seen by his opening remarks. He notes that 'corruption, fraud and other forms of theft are the fastest ways for a few to get money, but at the expense of the majority in income and quality of life'. He continues by arguing that 'lots of resources were stolen from Pacific Islands governments and people during the 1990s, mainly by senior politicians, officials and businessmen, both foreign and local.' He then adds that 'few were

issues will make a difference to the lives of peripheral urban residents? These are the people who wrest a living from informal employment and who are expected to find even this vulnerable form of support harder to access as their numbers increase. It is expected that more and more rural residents will come to live in the larger Pacific Island cities. As Manoranjan Mohanty pointed out in his most interesting paper titled 'Urban Government and Sustainable Development: Some Issues and Challenges in Urban Fiji' prepared for the Development Research Symposium (Governance in Pacific States: reassessing roles and remedies) held at the University of the South Pacific (and co-sponsored by the Australian National University) between September 30th and October 2nd 2003, the United Nations Development Programme's widely accepted estimate is that by the year 2015, sixty percent of the populations of the bigger Pacific Island countries will be urban (as opposed to the 1999 figure for Fiji of just 49% of the population classified as urban residents). Moreover, many consider these figures to be conservative. Newly arrived and temporary urban residents often live an informal existence that is beyond the scope of those gathering documented population information. Mohanty has also discussed the role of informal sector employment in urban Fiji in his contribution (with Mahendra Reddy and Vijay Naidu) to the first edition of *Fijian Studies*. See Reddy, Naidu and Mohanty (2003).

punished' (Crocombe, 2001: 512-63).

When writing his 'Corruption' chapter Crocombe referred to Peter Larmour's work. He used Larmour's excellent discussion papers presented and published by the 'State Society and Governance in Melanesia Project' at the Australian National University. The discussion papers (together with working papers) published by this project provide a virtual treasure trove of information on governance (and other matters) in Pacific Island states. I will comment on a number of the papers published by this project in this review² (See Larmour, 1997 and Larmour, 1998a). However, for the present I would like to note that together with his own concern over the need for good quality staff in government institutions if good governance is to be practised, Crocombe has drawn on Larmour's work to highlight issues such as the Solomon Islands Ombudsman Commission's failure to report to Parliaments for long periods of time, while in Fiji, the role of the auditor-general's department is seen to have been pushed aside. In the meantime, in Vanuatu when the government appointed a commission of inquiry into corruption advised that the minister of finance be relieved of his position due to 'fraudulent dealings', the commissioner and the commission were dismissed and the minister of finance stayed.³

As Larmour has noted, 'a characteristic of corruption is often the attempt to conceal it' (Larmour, 1997: 1). This obviously means that avenues are needed for the exposure of corrupt dealings. This is in spite of cases where corruption is exposed and appropriate action does not follow. The need to expose corrupt dealings means that the role of civil society is seen to be central and the role of the media is considered to be vital in providing information for the general public. It should also be remembered that the media (particularly in the form of local language radio broadcasts) is a most effective way of providing

² All discussion papers published by the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, are available on the web. The address is <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/melanesia/>

³ This observation about the side-lining of the Fiji Auditor General's Department's work is confirmed by the argument that Michael Morgan presented to the Development Research Symposium. In his paper titled 'Overview: Vanuatu and Fiji Parliaments', together with examining the structures and administrative particulars of operations in both the Vanuatu and Fiji Parliaments, Morgan took a close look at the issue of probity in relation to both Parliaments. Also see Crossland (2000).

information for local communities, both urban and rural. Though, having drawn attention to this point, I should add that in nations housing various cultural, religious and/or racially defined groups, access to local language broadcasts may be used to further particular interests. In Fiji at the time of the coups, the promotion of particular political interests using local language broadcasting can be seen to have contributed to social instability in the nation.

In his discussion paper explicitly titled *Corruption and Governance in the South Pacific*, Larmour set himself the task of attempting to understand corruption in relation to a range of issues in South Pacific politics: 'tradition, identity, landownership, privatisation, aid, and sovereignty.' He adds that these are the issues that must be included in a comprehensive study of governance in the region (Larmour, 1997: 2). Both Larmour's relatively brief papers and Crocombe's large tome have much to offer when considering governance in Pacific Island countries. Both authors note the danger to good governance that comes from members of South Pacific Island governments having direct business interests. They also both note the habit of defending or camouflaging corruption as tradition. Nepotism, questions of identity and unity, the slanting of elections and the sale of national sovereignty are also practices that both authors identify as obviously undermining good governance.

Institutional Capacity, Leverage, Aid and Conditionality

Several issues related to corruption, including weakness in the institutional capacity of various Pacific Island governments, have been noted and discussed by a number of other authors. These include Barrie Macdonald in his contribution to a book that Peter Larmour edited titled *Governance and Reform in the South Pacific* and Michael Goldsmith in his first chapter contribution titled 'Codes of governance in the Pacific' to a collection edited by Elise Huffer and Asofou So'o titled *Governance in Samoa*. Goldsmith's chapter for the Huffer and So'o collection differs from other contributions to the collection because it does not focus on either community perceptions and arrangements or on Samoa *per se*.

He is concerned with many of the same issues that Macdonald has broached in his chapter in the collection edited by Larmour (Mac-

donald, 1998; Goldsmith, 2000).⁴ Macdonald uses the first section of his chapter to discuss his proposition that 'the implementation of the good governance agenda, however well-intentioned, may well depend on a further worsening of economic conditions, living standards and failings of civil society... in Pacific Island countries'. He considers it likely that matters will have to worsen before sufficient leverage is exerted 'to ensure the acceptance of good governance provision as the condition for development assistance'. Macdonald has pointed out that 'leverage exercised by donors has long been a feature of aid relationships...' and that 'external pressure for reform implies conditionality...' It certainly does! In this case it is conditionality based on the effective implementation of the good governance agenda by the governments of the aid recipient countries of the South Pacific region. And, as Macdonald has argued, to date, there has been a 'somewhat crude imposition' of this conditionality. Moreover, there is an obvious 'incompatibility between the pressure for economic restructuring and the encouragement of democratisation' (Macdonald, 1998: 39).

Macdonald has also noted that 'the World Bank's view of the responsibility of governments to maintain a market-friendly economic environment has not passed unchallenged'. Indeed, policies clearly predicated on neo-classical assumptions have been accorded a noticeable degree of suspicion.⁵ For his part, having also taken on the question 'Why has the term "governance" achieved such prominence recently in discussions of economic development and political reform in the Pacific?', Goldsmith offers an answer that differs somewhat from that given by Macdonald. This is because he begins by citing what he calls 'the so-called "doomsday" scenario that draws attention to worrying trends in Pacific Island countries'. Matters such as the growth of urban slums (usually in the form of squatter settlements), and declining rates of education and employment, are cited before he moves on to look at 'the problem of so-called "weak states"'. Goldsmith then joins the chorus who cite Larmour's work. This time it is Larmour's essay titled 'Research on Governance in Weak States in Melanesia'

⁴ Both Macdonald and Goldsmith follow in the footsteps of Adrian Leftwich's argument in his book *States of Development*, (Leftwich, 2000). All three authors trace the origins and events leading up to 'the emergence of the good governance agenda in the early 1990s'. See Leftwich (2000: 105-26).

⁵ This suspicion is clearly evident in both Macdonald's chapter and Leftwich's book. See Macdonald, 1998: 23-9 and 39, and Leftwich, 2000: 112-4.

(Larmour, 1996) and later his essay on corruption in the same State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project collection (Larmour, 1997). He combines this material with Peter Dauvergne's contribution to his edited book titled *Weak and Strong States in Asia-Pacific Societies* (Dauvergne, 1998/9). The latter outlines the corruption and clear lack of institutional capacity exhibited by central Solomon Islands governments. It has been widely acknowledged that this corruption has done much to deny badly needed funds to Solomon Islanders at the same time as it has sealed the unsustainable fate of their logging industry. (Larmour, 1996; Dauvergne, 1998; see also Dauvergne, 1998/9).⁶

Goldsmith is then ready to go on to join many other commentators in noting the apparent growth in corruption in Pacific Island countries and then he too voices his suspicion of the connection between neo-liberalism and ideals of good governance. He wrestles with this topic by first noting that 'the catchphrase "failure of governance" has become an accepted way of summarising' situations where weak states are 'riddled with corruption'; where states have been vulnerable to succession and regional crises; where there are also pressing economic and fiscal problems; where development is 'hampered by enormous infrastructural problems'; and where the practice of government is 'vulnerable to depredations by multinational companies and venal politicians'. Then, he wants us to know that 'one can always question the implied need for neo-liberal solutions and structural adjustment programs' that have been put forward 'in response' to the economic and political ills he has outlined (Goldsmith, 2000: 11).

Privatisation, Restructuring and Downsizing

As I have noted, almost all those discussing governance in Pacific Island states pay particular attention to the need for increased accountability and transparency. This is not only seen as a means of countering corruption, but also as a goal that would be assisted by the

⁶ For further comment on the bad (indeed dreadful) governance practices that have been a part of Solomon Islands' logging industry see Judith Bennett's excellent discussion paper titled 'Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands ? Though Much is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism' (2002). See also Bennett (2000).

privatization of 'suitable' government holdings and an accompanying provision of greater space for free market activity and the re-organization and downsizing of government bureaucracies. It is also presented as requiring the active participation of members of civil society. The latter, consisting of individuals voluntarily grouped together in non-government associations, are charged with ensuring the correct political, administrative and economic behaviour of those who exercise economic and political power. The 'need' for both privatization of government holdings and for public enterprise restructuring is reflected in comments such as the following account of past governments' development 'with their sluggish, centralised bureaucracies, their preoccupation with rules and regulations and their hierarchical chains of command [that] no longer work very well'. This comment is found in a contribution by Appana (2003: 50). For his part, and in his usual direct and no-nonsense fashion, Crocombe has noted that in Pacific Island states 'governments have demonstrated their lack of competence to operate commercial (and many non-commercial) businesses'. He argues that often this has been 'because the incentives can be manipulated to provide corrupt gains for individuals and political parties rather than for the public' (Crocombe, 2001: 378). I think this is a widely held view, by scholars and the general public alike⁷ and that a similarly 'dark' (or at least cynical) observation by Larmour is equally widely recognised. Larmour has noted that even when Pacific Island governments have privatized their business interests they may well make the enterprises concerned more efficient because they would be accountable to consumers, 'or it [the process of privatization] may simply transfer public resources to well-connected private hands' (Larmour, 1997: 6).

This is a common problem associated with privatization of government holdings in Pacific Island countries and elsewhere. When it comes to restructuring Fiji's institutions of government Appana notes that this process can be traced back to as early as 1989-92 and that by 1998 some sixteen of Fiji's government departments and statutory bodies 'had been re-organised or undergone some sort of reform'. In

⁷ It is certainly a view that is supported by the widely discussed demise of the National Bank of Fiji and one that is strongly re-enforced by the publication of a book (based exclusively on sources already available in the public domain) written by Roman Grynberg, Doug Munro and Michael White (2000).

October 1996 the Public Enterprise Act had been passed by the Fijian Parliament and, as Appana has stated, the act provided the necessary legal (and conceptual) framework for public sector reforms that included measures to 'reorganize, commercialise and corporatise public enterprises and to improve their accountability'. Appana notes the savings that governments may enjoy by 'cutting the umbilical cord of reliance' that public enterprises have exploited. He notes that there is the possibility of removing and so lessening government financial responsibilities and the possibility of realising dividends for taxpayers. Unacceptable levels of performance would be changed and, in line with the neo-liberal advice that privatizing of government assets leads to more market opportunity in an economy, Appana then points out that it was 'hoped that the introduction of public enterprises to the market would lead to a more competitive and vibrant [Fijian] economy'. Indeed, in 2002 a delegation from the International Monetary Fund advised the new Fijian Qarase government that 'acceleration in the pace of structural reforms would achieve fiscal consolidation, as well as efficiency in public sector management and government's financial management'. It would also, the delegation argued, 'remove the obstacles to investment' (Appana, 2003: 59-60, 62-4 and 67.)

Fiji's public sector reform experience has been mirrored in most other Pacific Island states. It is a process that has resulted in the shedding of public sector employees. Roderic Alley in a chapter aptly titled 'Public management in the South Pacific' in his book *The Domestic Politics of International Relations* (Alley, 2000) offered an informative and detailed account of this situation. He began his chapter by pointing out that 'effective utilisation of slender resources will require systems of governance able to maximise limited human and social capital'. He then goes on to note that public sector reform in Pacific Island countries has been pressed under the 'prescriptive rubric of "good governance" and rather than focus on the neo-liberal content of the good governance agenda per se, he argues that this 'seemingly neutral terminology' is bound to provoke debate about the appropriateness of external models for domestic consumption. Like almost all other authors on this topic he recognises that in Pacific Island countries 'public sector management has been grossly deficient'. He points to structural problems that have included 'incoherent planning, budgetary, and resource allocation functions', as well as deficiencies in data gathering and statistical evaluation, and internal auditing and forecasting that

has been 'either weak or nonexistent'. His list does not end there. He adds 'indifferently managed public enterprises, including marketing and commodity boards' and 'inadequate return on capital because of relatively high wage costs, overstaffing, and political interference'. It is a damning list. Alley then talks about the mounting pressures to reform this situation. He recognises bilateral development assistance, donor pressure, [Pacific] Forum Economic Minister proposals, and ADB [Asian Development Bank] prescriptions'. These, he notes, have resulted in 'significant, often painful changes to PIC [Pacific Island country] public sectors' (Alley, 2000: 183-6; 200).

One of the most painful changes to come with public service restructuring, even the most painful change, has been the substantial reduction in the number of civil servants in Pacific Island countries. Employment opportunities have been considerably reduced. Long gone are the days where as Crocombe has pointed out (though he is certainly not the only scholar to make this point), 'after independence, government staff generally swelled, not to the level of internal and external funds available, but far beyond both'. It is an observation that, in his usual slightly acerbic manner, he combines with the argument that '“stealing from the grandchildren” became a way of life for governments using jobs as the bait for re-election - a potent weapon where paid employment is scarce and government is the main employer, and usually pays more than private employers'. Crocombe goes on to note that public service downsizing has taken place in every country with 'working hours for civil servants reduced in a number, early retirement schemes initiated in several, and retiring age reduced or made mandatory where it had not been enforced'. He then notes the Asian Development Bank's role in providing bridging loans and grants to a number of Pacific Island states so that this process could be effected and so that the effects of the process could be somewhat cushioned (Crocombe, 2001: 547-8).⁸

Both Crocombe and Alley, like so many other commentators, recognise that public accountability requires 'the vigilance of a vibrant

⁸ The Asian Development Bank has recently offered a loan to the Fijian government to facilitate the eventual privatization of the country's creaking and very inefficient water supply system. While the terms of the loan provided ensure that privatization of this service will take place, it is yet to be seen if further funds will be provided for the purpose of off-setting the expected increased cost to consumers of purchasing water from a private supplier.

civil society exercising its civil and political rights'. Crocombe asks whether the recent growth in civil society in Pacific Island countries will continue while Alley recognises the arguments of Pacific scholars who worry that 'the new orthodoxy [the term used by Adrian Leftwich in his book *States of Development* to denote the neo-liberal approach to governance] that requires everyone to cooperate in the strengthening of the private sector' may well weaken what he calls 'undeveloped civil institutions'. Both authors have cited Futa Helu's argument in a discussion paper titled 'Tradition and Good Governance' (also published under the auspices of the State, Society in Melanesia Project). Crocombe draws attention to Helu's view that the future of civil society in Pacific Island countries could be 'bleak'; Alley cites his concern that a weak state is likely to be unable to 'assert its interests successfully against internal and external opposition'. Helu also worries that 'democracy in the region primarily means universal franchise and related powers'. He argues that this has meant that 'fairness' and 'justice' are being too readily overlooked. He, therefore, proposes that the present definition of justice be modified to read 'governance is a just, free social order emerging from the interplay of state and non-state actors' (see Alley, 2000:191; 201; Crocombe, 2001: 558 and Helu 1997: 2-3).

Federalism and Civil Society in the Solomon Islands and Civil Society Elsewhere

A number of scholars have argued that in the context of weak states the associations, institutions and organizations of civil society are not so much a threat to government as a welcome replacement. They argue that non-government organizations can effectively counter corrupt behaviour by government elites while, at the same time, providing for the efficient delivery of services. The latter include such essential services as the provision of water, health care and educational facilities. Currently, these arguments are widespread. It is apparent that they are the concern of many on-the-ground practitioners working in Pacific Island countries.

In the case of the Solomon islands it seems that this concern over service provision and the attendant belief that it could be much better delivered by local initiative than by the existing weak and corrupt centralised state apparatus is contributing to a renewed federalism debate. A federal system for the islands was recommended as long ago as the

1987 Constitutional Review Committee. However, successive governments ignored it. Now, after significant civil unrest and a period where the country's economy had deteriorated to the point where the government, as Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka notes, had debts 'well over its ability to repay'. Kabutaulaka notes that 'by the end of 1997, for example, the government had accumulated SI\$1.2 billion in debt, more than double its 1998 budget' (Kabutaulaka, 2001: 16;19). Uncontrolled spending, non-collection of revenues and significant and blatant levels of corruption had brought this resource rich country to this unenviable position. It is therefore little wonder that, having recognised the historical background to present tensions together with contemporary mismanagement by successive governments in Honiara, Kabutaulaka urges that 'in our search to resolve the Solomon Islands crisis there is a need to look beyond ethnicity as the only cause of the crisis'. Judith Bennett's body of scholarly and very thorough, interesting and readable work on the situation in the Solomon Islands is further confirmed by Kabutaulaka's urging that we 'look beyond ethnicity' (See Bennett, 2002).

When members of grassroots Solomon Islands communities were asked about the benefits or otherwise they expected from a decentralised federal system their perception was (i) that such a system would ensure that resources are kept in their area and that these resources would not have to be shared with their country-men living in other provinces and (ii) that a more decentralised system may do much to avoid the conflict and civil unrest that has beset their country in recent times. The first view seems selfish though pragmatic and the second protective and pragmatic. Kabutaulaka, who has also written a number of articles detailing the corruption surrounding the exploitation and extraction of the Solomon island logging resource (Kabutaulaka, 1998), collected this grassroots information and presented it in a particularly well received paper titled 'Federalism and Governance in a Weak State: The Case of Solomon Islands' at the Development Research Symposium at USP in 2003. He observed that the adoption of federalism in the Solomon islands will require a change in political culture (and so in the views that drive civil society decision-making) at community level. In other Pacific Island countries the promotion of a vibrant and active role for civil society continues. With civil society seen by aid donors and by commentators and a wide range of both foreign and domestic policy makers as the space between family

and/or kin grouping on one hand and state and government on the other, the scope for action is considerable. It is associations and organizations formed voluntarily by individuals operating in the public space designated as civil society that are to act as 'watch-dogs' to ensure that those who enjoy political, administrative and economic authority do not behave in inappropriate (and quite possibly corrupt) manner. As Iati Iati has pointed out in his contribution to the *Governance in Samoa* collection, theorists have defined civil society as 'that set of diverse non-governmental institutions, which is strong enough to counterbalance the state...' However, care must be taken with the concept in societies such as Pacific Island societies where kin groupings and alliances are strong. Civil society status is not granted to groups 'generally conceived and defined in kin terms'. Civil society is to be seen to lie beyond the reach of traditional ties and yet traditional ties can and do lead to electoral outcomes; Parliamentary systems explicitly include those of chiefly rank, and church groups have come to be embedded deep within village and kinship identities and expectations (Iati Iati, 2000).⁹

Government, Community, Tradition and Governance

It has been argued that in a number of discussions focusing on the politics of the Melanesian societies and communities of the Pacific region there is a common misconception often shared by commentators and aid providers. The misconception is that as collective economic action exists and is traditional it can be the basis of further development. Faced with the applause afforded community and tradition based approaches to development, some scholars are pointing out that it is not enough for 'development planners, observing a degree of community cooperation and collective ownership of land in the tenure systems of Melanesia' to simply agree with this idea without examining a number of issues more closely. They point out that 'the individual nature of usufructuary rights and household-based commercial and collective economic action' has very often been overlooked and that

⁹ This is a view that accords with the sophisticated discussions offered by both Geoffrey Hawthorn and Rob Jenkins in their contributions to an excellent theoretical account of the concept of civil society as it is played out in developing countries edited by Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani. See Jenkins (2001) and Hawthorn (2001).

consequently development projects may, at best, last only a short time.

In her discussion paper aptly titled 'Myths of Community Management: Sustainability, The State and Rural Development in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu', Penelope Schoeffel expands her argument by noting that in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu there have been hundreds of small-scale aid-funded fisheries projects. The donors have provided ice boxes, fishing tackle, and in some instances, freezers, engines and boats, to youth groups, village groups or fishermen's cooperatives. But these assets become a source of dispute. She notes that it is common for 'community-based projects, whatever their purpose', to become a source of dispute. Questions arise over 'who has control of them? Who determines how, when, and by whom the assets are used? Who is responsible for maintaining or replacing assets?...'. Her list continues before she turns to offering a specific example. It is a water supply project in Vanuatu that, she argues, amply 'illustrates the pitfalls of substituting community management for local government services'. The water supply system supplied to various communities as development funds became available was 'usually simple'. It was usually a 'low-cost gravity fed system' that fed water from a suitable spring to a large tank 'from which water flows downhill in pipes and through sub-tanks to the various village outlets'. So far so good. Usually a water users' committee was to be formed at community level to oversee the collection of water user fees, keep records of expenditure and identify a person capable of maintaining the plant when necessary. However, the failure of maintenance was very high. It seems of 22 plants installed on one island only four are still working. Payments for maintenance work had not been made because local community based governance did not work. As Schoeffel described it: 'Some said that because the pipes were on their land, they should not have to pay water fees. Some felt they should not have to pay because it was the responsibility of the government to look after the scheme'. It seems that still others 'said that they followed *kastom* and did not vote in elections, therefore they should not have to pay for things the government did' and some water users decided that their community committee in charge with water supply already had enough money or they argued that they did not have enough money to pay fees (Schoeffel, 1997: 2-4). The problem with what appears to be an appropriate scheme coupled with a chance to effect grassroots governance is clear enough. Moreover, it is a sce-

nario that can become even more complicated when some of Vanuatu's citizens are not only complaining about the government's provision of services, or more correctly the lack of the same, but also over an 'unsatisfactory' political situation in their country because politics controls everything, which means that 'chiefs are no longer able to control their island and their people'. It is perceived that only the government has power and that it is the government, having established its own island councils, that strongly opposes *kastom* and is 'against the chief's "big men"'.

The conclusion, reported by Philip Tepahae in his discussion paper titled 'Chiefly Power in Southern Vanuatu', is that 'the people are unhappy'. This unhappiness of the people must be fed still further by the widely held perception of corruption at the top level of Vanuatu's political system where anglophone politicians and a francophone minority push their claims to formal political power (Tepahae, 1997: 2-4; Ambrose, 1996). It is now only left to point out that there are problems with side-lining 'traditional' forms of authority and there are also problems with attempts to harness it to 'development'. In the later case I find I am agreeing with Helu's observation that 'there are problems with using traditional customs'. However, in the case of Helu's argument it is an observation made in the context of an overall thesis contending that 'traditional customs have to be used to promote social cohesion, economic security, and justice for good governance' (Helu, 1997: 3).

Security and Fragile National Identities

Together with his useful contribution to the considerable body of work concerned with the corruption and environmental damage associated with logging in the Solomon islands, Kabutaulaka is also the co-author of a useful and very topical chapter on security in the South Pacific. In this chapter, titled 'Rethinking Security in the South Pacific: Fiji and the Solomon Islands', Kabutaulaka and Sandra Tarte begin by pointing out that widely held 'perceptions of the South Pacific as a peaceful political backwater belie the complex and often intractable security challenges the island nations confront'. The authors point not only to the effect on Pacific Island states of the Cold War giving way to globalisation, but also to the colonial legacy of the two countries they are considering. They point out that the analysis they offer

points to 'some broad parallels between Fiji and the Solomon Islands'. Both countries have suffered conflicts and social upheaval that 'are the product of long-term social and economic developments' and like other authors such as Judith Bennett, they trace out matters such as the connection of 'the fragile nature of national identity' to a colonial past. In Fiji, the authors point out, there is a need to resolve the contradiction between indigenous Fijian governance (with its presumption to rule) and national democratic governance'. There certainly is such a need!

In Solomon Islands the tension the authors point to centres on a 'lack of agreement on the structure of the state, and the relationship of its various constituent parts'. This, they observe, is 'evidenced by the demands for self-rule and autonomy by the provinces'. They conclude that in the case of Solomon Islands 'the threat of national disintegration has been, and remains, a very real possibility' (Tarte and Kabutaulaka, 2002: 61-81). Maybe federalism is, after all, a solution to Solomon Islands' current situation in the sense that it may off-set far worse images of spontaneous disintegration of the nation. In any case, since the two authors wrote their chapter, the Australian Liberal government has certainly taken this threat very seriously. Leaving aside accusations of domestic electoral advantage that might be drawn from discussions of a Pacific 'arc of instability', the 'real possibility' of national disintegration obviously lined up alongside other political challenges and priorities of our time to play its part in the decision to form and send RAMSI (the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands).

In the case of Fiji Tarte and Kabutaulaka point out that 'the armed takeover of parliament on 19 May [2000] and the kidnapping of the government unleashed forces that threatened to engulf the country in civil war'. They also had the capacity 'to damage forever the delicate social fabric of the nation' (Tarte and Kabutaulaka, 2002: 64).¹⁰

¹⁰ Tarte and Kabutaulaka also offer very useful bibliographic references. For example, Henningham, Stephen. (1995). *The Pacific Island States: Security and Sovereignty in the Post Cold War World*. London: Macmillan, 1995; Lal, Brij. (2000) 'Chiefs and Thieves and Other People Besides: The Making of George Speight's Coup', *Journal of Pacific History*, 35 (3): 281-93; and Reilly, Benjamin. (2000). 'The Africanisation of the South Pacific'. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*. 54(3): 261-8. Further useful sources on this topic are Camilleri, Joseph A. (2000). *States, Markets and Civil Society in the Asia Pacific*. London: Edward Elgar; pp. 322-53 and Robertson, Robbie

The authors are certainly not alone in expressing this point of view.

Brij Lal in his own chapter in his edited collection *Fiji Before the Storm* (and in his other publications) has shown that he clearly agrees with that proposition. Lal has added that 'the indigenous Fijian middle class, or at least sections of it, provided the brains for [coup leader] Speight's agenda, the Fijian social underclass provided the brawn'. It did! This underclass, he notes, could not understand why they 'remained behind, mired in poverty and destitution, unemployed and unemployable, while others had moved on.' Speight's 'frequently invoked' phrase 'paramountcy of Fijian interests' supported his otherwise very flimsy claim to power. It struck a chord and enfranchised his followers (Lal, 2000a: 175-94, especially 186 and 189). I would like to add that if the indigenous Fijian movement that condoned and effected the invasion of Parliament in 2000 can be seen as civil society in action, what does this mean for the advocacy of civil groups (including grass roots community based civil groups) promoting the good governance agenda?

Civil Society, Gender Equality and Race

Commentators concerned with good governance recognise the considerable benefit to be gained from promoting both the rule of law and civil society. They insist on the impartial and predictable application of a country's rules, regulations and laws and they are keen to promote democratic practice, civil society, community participation and the observance of human rights and gender equality. In a very useful monograph compiled and presented on the basis of encouragement and funding by the Parkinson family of Fiji, there is a short essay by the well respected and well known human rights lawyer Imrana Jalal. In her contribution she very bravely combines four issues. These are the rule of law, the role of women and of non-government organizations and the racial/cultural divide that has been so much a part of politics. Jalal notes of women's non-government organizations in Fiji that are driven by 'a passion for justice and democracy and a deep seated belief in multi-racialism'. She argues that the Fijian government [like all governments] must recognise that 'civil society is not the enemy but a partner in national development'. Jalal notes the 'enormous

and William Sutherland. (2001). *Government By the Gun, The Unfinished Business of Fiji's 2000 Coup*. Annandale: Pluto Press.

skills and talents' of civil groups, including women's civil groups, and advises that their 'energies ought to be more effectively harnessed and utilised.' She approves and clearly commends the commitment of these ideal type civil society groups. Then, she turns her attention to women's non-government groups that are race-based. The good governance credentials of these groups are obviously not good in the sense that while they are free associations of individuals they do not freely admit individuals. Jalal argues that in the Fiji context, and 'like communal [race based] schools these are or ought to be a relic of our colonial past. The Soqosoqo Vakamaramas and Sri Sewa Sabhas of the world need to open their ranks to others and be more inclusive' she argues. If they don't do this they 'cannot play a positive role'. She adds that 'as they currently exist they reinforce [racially based] communalism and entrench hierarchic social classes' (as in Gravelle, 2002: 24-5).¹¹

The need to reject racial prejudice is similarly reflected in recent comments published by Brij Lal. In a short contribution to the first issue of *Fijian Studies* (titled 'Debating Fiji's Democratic Future') Lal asks 'Why is it that in Fiji, Fijians and Indo-Fijians are apparently so deeply attached to their primordial roots?' He answers his own question saying 'the answer is simple'. It is, he argues, because in Fiji there has always been 'a racially-based electoral system which forces people to vote along racial lines'. This, he contends, is a part of a system where 'public memory... is racially archived'. He goes on to observe that 'one is asked to state one's "race" on the immigration card... One is required to declare one's racial identity when s/he takes out a driver's license or opens a bank account. And then we blame people for thinking racially!' (Lal, 2003: 157-62).

Economic Provision and A Pressing Need to Promote Increased Equality of Opportunity

In Fiji on-going economic growth combined with citizen participation not only in decision-making but in self-help groups is also widely being held to be the answer to successfully dampening

¹¹ Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi also made a contribution to the Parkinson Memorial Lecture Series. He too notes the importance of observing the law. He clearly states that 'justice requires that those who break the law regardless of the nature of the cause be punished for it'. Madraiwiwi, a former judge of the Fiji High Court, was the keynote speaker for the Lecture Series. See Gravelle (2002: 8).

widely being held to be the answer to successfully dampening social tension. In the economic literature the effect of the 1987 and 2000 coups has been obvious and much debated. However this has not been the only matter of concern. A perceptive discussion that broaches not only the economic needs of the country, but also the issues associated with distribution is John Cameron's chapter 'Confronting social policy challenges in Fiji' in A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi's edited collection *Confronting Fiji Futures*. Cameron begins strongly by pointing out that it is social policy that is instrumental in effective redistributive measures that can 'ultimately reduce the experience of uncertainty and insecurity'. He clearly agrees with Helu's argument cited above that there is a pressing need to reduce the degree of inequality in Pacific Island societies, in this case in Fiji. He then adds the argument that the fairer distribution of wealth would be an investment in trust and that this is the way to build an inclusive polity (Akram-Lodhi, 2000, see especially p. 133).¹²

A central problem for Fiji has been inequality in access not only to influence, but also to employment and other forms of income security. This is a problem that we can expect to worsen as the European Union's change in agricultural subsidies significantly reduces the relatively high price it has paid for sugar produced in Fiji. A very useful account of the problems and prospects of not only the Fiji sugar industry, but also the garment and tourism industries can be found in Paresh Kumar Narayan and Biman Chand Prasad's contribution to the first *Fijian Studies* issue. They note Fiji's narrow resource base and the failure (they talk of an 'inability') to diversify the export base of the economy. They note that when it comes to tourism 'the major drawback' is that 'a large part of the income leaks out of the country'. (This is, of course, a common problem associated with tourism.) They then note that 'the success of the garment industry has, as in the case of many developing countries (we could add particularly in the case of the now numerous 'Asian tigers' and mainland China) depends on export processing zones with the taxation relief and other producer benefits these zones provide. They conclude that this is useful, but that 'a necessary, though by no means sufficient, condition for the success of export processing is cheap labour' and, as Jacqueline Leckie (2001) has pointed out, it is mostly women's cheap labour-time that is sold.

¹² See also Sepehri and Akram-Lodhi (2000).

The loss of preferential markets is an obvious concern when it comes to ongoing availability of employment in this mostly urban sector. Though many are concerned over the exploitative nature of garment industry employment, this industry, as Narayan and Prasad (2003) note, has contributed to employment generation. However, it is 'vulnerable to the international trading environment where access to traditional markets such as Australia and New Zealand are no longer guaranteed'. And, when this concern is married to the importance of the sugar industry to Fiji's rural sector, then not only are the allegations of corruption and mismanagement in the Fiji Sugar Corporation that 'have surfaced quite often' an ever more pressing problem, but the present decline in sugar productivity due to the non-renewal of land leased for sugar production, 'particularly after the May 2000 coup when many farmers were forcefully evicted from their land', is very serious indeed. However, relief is not at hand. The Cotonou Partnership Agreement provides a very clear outline of the change in the European Union's approach to agricultural subsidies (Narayan and Prasad, 2003; Holland, 2002: 168-71; and Reddy, 2003.)¹³ This change will have a negative effect on the price to be paid for a considerable proportion of Fiji's sugar crop, and must cast a long shadow over the future. The life-style and even the very subsistence of sugar producers and their families is under threat. This is a scenario that for many is too frightening even to consider.

Conclusion

Over the last two or more decades the extensive 'shopping list' offered by those promoting the good governance agenda has become a condition for the receipt of aid. This situation has up-ended the previ-

¹³ This situation can be expected to be the source of a substantial increase in the already very large proportion of Suva's urban residents who, at best, dependent on the informal sector for their day-to-day needs. (It has been estimated that in Suva fifty one percent of urban residents depend on the informal sector, while in Fiji as a whole thirty seven percent of the economically active population is engaged in the informal sector). This situation makes it most likely that Fiji's urban population will, as note above, increase to a figure higher than the United Nations Development Programme estimate of sixty percent by 2015. These figures refer to employment in Suva in 1999 and employment in the informal sector in the country as a whole in 1996. Reddy, Naidu and Mohanty, 2003, especially p. 136. Also see Mohanty, 2003.

ous view that such universally applauded goals as institutional accountability and capacity, the promotion of human rights, democracy, environmental sustainability and gender equality would come in the wake of the improvement in economic well-being and living standards that were expected to result from the provision of development funding. In other words, today, good governance is to be installed before development aid is provided, rather than be expected as a consequence of the provision of development assistance.

It is now generally agreed that this change of approach was fuelled by a number of issues and circumstances, including increasingly entrenched donor disappointment with the outcome of development aid programmes often as a result of corrupt practices. As this literature review demonstrates,

a greatly improved standard of governance in all developing countries, including in all Pacific Island countries, is now expected. It is widely seen as the remedy for all the ills of the past. Now, it remains to be seen if this very tall order can actually be met.

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