

## **How Modern was Speight's Coup? The Case of Naloto**

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### ***Abstract***

*The key element in Fiji's political instability in 2000 has been variously identified as race, class and intra-Fijian politics. This paper, based on a survey of a group of Fijians who supported George Speight in the parliamentary complex, concludes that intra-Fijian politics and traditional loyalties need greater emphasis in explaining the events of 2000. The people of Naloto are traditional warriors (bati) to the Vunivalu of Bau and often display militant behaviour as if attesting to their traditional status. Their ancestral spirit Dradra also connotes this type of military aggression. The coup was a time to display how ferocious they are. The Naloto people's prominence and the support they received from Naitasiri during the May 2000 coup can be attributed to the fact that they belong to the vanua of Waimaro. Many undoubtedly were willing to sacrifice their lives for the sole purpose of returning Fiji to indigenous leadership. Speight's relatives felt they could not stand by without supporting him. To legitimate his execution of the coup as well as their own support for him, they ensured that he was rooted in a mataqali and addressed by his Fijian name, even though they had little contact with him.*

Nothing is more fundamental to good governance than the orderly and constitutional transfer of power from one party to another in a democratic political system. Without it, civil society is weakened and accountability of government is undermined because power-holders govern without the checks and balances provided by the knowledge that they might lose the next election. The way is then

open for corruption; respect for the law diminishes and good governance is further impaired. Understanding why the constitutional transfer of power in Fiji has been repeatedly disrupted, and why stability is immediately threatened if a non-Fijian becomes Prime Minister, lies at the heart of understanding the conditions required for good governance in this country. This article focuses on the most recent disruption – the coup of 2000 – and seeks to throw new light on why it was sustained.

The bare facts are well known. The 1997 Constitution of Fiji, combined with a new electoral system, delivered a result at the elections of 1999 that was unexpected by many analysts. Fiji suddenly had its first ethnic Indian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, leading a Fiji Labour Party government. For a year the country simmered. Then on 19 May 2000 a group of civilians, led by a Fijian called George Speight and assisted by a rebel army contingent, marched into Parliament and seized the parliamentarians, whom they kept hostage for the next 56 days. The army intervened, deposed the President, abrogated the Constitution, imposed a curfew and maintained a loose cordon around the Parliament while parleying with the rebels. When the hostages were finally released, the army arrested hundreds of rebels. But the army did not restore the deposed Prime Minister. Instead, an unelected government under an indigenous Fijian Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase, came into office with army approval.

A series of court judgments have since determined Fiji's constitutional situation. In the Chandrika Prasad case of March 2001, the Court of Appeal declared there was no justification for the 1997 Constitution to have been abrogated and that it remained the supreme law of the land. A High Court ruling later approved the President's dissolution of Parliament. Fiji went to the polls in August 2001, electing a Fijian coalition government under Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase. Since then the courts have been ruling on the constitution's power-sharing provisions, with the Supreme Court declaring in 2003 that the government is constitutionally obliged to include members of the Fiji Labour Party in the cabinet, and determining the form such inclusion should take in a decision in 2004.

Interpretations of the 2000 coup are of three main types. Professor Brij Lal, the most prolific interpreter of Fiji's politics over the years and a member of the Constitution Review Commission, argues that 'a very large part of Fiji's problems derives from having a politi-

cal system based on race. An obsession with race encourages ethnic chauvinism, poisons multi-ethnic discourse, and hinders the search for solutions to Fiji's deep-seated social and economic problems, which have little to do with race but everything to do with colour-blind forces of globalisation' (Lal 2003: 347). Lal recognises that the political dynamics of the 2000 coup shifted quickly from a division between the two major ethnic groups to one of inter-Fijian rivalry. In mid-2000, as the hostage drama at the Parliamentary complex continued, he wrote 'It is almost a truism now to say that this crisis, as it unfolded, became more about intra-Fijian rivalries than about race' and he reported the view 'that Mr Speight represents the interests of the Kubuna confederacy against the long ascendancy of the traditional hierarchies of the Koro Sea' (Lal 2000: 282). But he does not emphasise the intricacies of intra-Fijian politics, which he is inclined to regard as a barrier to progress and development.

The second interpretation comes from Robbie Robertson and William Sutherland. They stress what they call the 'indigenous question', by which they mean both ethnic Fijian economic disadvantage, and the exploitation of appeals to Fijian identity and Fijian rights by chiefs and other members of the elite who benefit by using mass Fijian support to gain political power. Robertson and Sutherland see 2000 as a further development in a long story of chiefly dominance as part of class politics (Robertson and Sutherland, 2001).

A third view sees the 'clash of the dynasties' as being at the heart of events in 2000. Jonathan Fraenkel has argued that Speight saw the coup 'as a rising of Kubuna against the Tovata confederacy', and he is inclined to take Speight at face value: 'The politicians who have stood at the helm of Fiji's politics since independence are all from that region: Rabuka, Mara and former Governor-General and *Tui Cakau* Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau. Rabuka belongs to the *bati* [warrior] clan serving the traditional paramount chief of the confederacy of Tovata, the *Tui Cakau*. Speight's clan, the *mataqali* Namua, and all those from the Wainibuka area, bear a similar relationship to the high chiefs of Bau, the traditional rulers of Tailevu and the *matanitu* of Kubuna. People from Wainibuka formed the hard core amongst Speight's supporters, who held out right to the end, when they were rounded up by the military at the Kalabu Fijian School' (Fraenkel, 2000: 301).

These three interpretations should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as different emphases. All three contribute to under-

standing the 2000 coup. The question is not one of asking which interpretation is right but rather of deciding where the emphasis should go.

Here I propose to take the third of these interpretations as a starting point. Through a case study in Wainibuka, I aim to show why one group of Fijians chose to give their full support to George Speight's coup. The case study is of the *tikina* of Naloto. The people of Naloto figured prominently in the coup of May 2000. Why did a large group of able-bodied men congregate at the parliamentary complex to be part of the guard force for the duration of the hostage takeover? These men were more than willing to sacrifice their lives for the cause, which was, in their minds, to return the governing of Fiji to the indigenous people who would be sympathetic to the plight of Fijians and legislate bills beneficial to them. They were willing to die for the sake of their aspirations, and their motives need to be understood. Were they supporting Speight mainly for the wider reasons offered by Lal, and by Robertson and Sutherland, that is, fear of Indo-Fijian domination, fear of losing land, and resentment over economic disadvantage, or were traditional loyalties of the kind identified by Fraenkel also of key importance?

### **The Setting**

The *tikina* of Naloto consists of three villages Naivicula, Nasau and Naveicovatu and is part of the greater Wainibuka area. Wainibuka is in the province of Tailevu. These three villages are located in Tailevu North along the Kings Road and to reach them one travels beyond Korovou town which is the urban centre servicing most of the villages in the Wainibuka area. Naivicula is located about ten kilometres inland from the Kings Road while Nasau further along is located fifteen kilometres inland. Naveicovatu is even further along the road from these two villages, but it is located on the main (Kings) road. Anecdotal accords recount that prior to the construction of roads these villages were linked and could be reached if one were to trudge through the dense forest.

There is also a settlement called Namau which is about thirty kilometres from Korovou along the Korovou-Natovi road where some of the people of Naloto have chosen to settle. Some of the reasons for the resettlement included some villages becoming too small to contain

everyone, some villagers getting involved in disputes so uprooting themselves from the villages to set up houses in Namau, while for the Roman Catholics Namau is in closer proximity to Natovi which is the location of the parish serving the spiritual needs of those in the Tailevu North area.

Naloto consists of the *Mataqali* Turaga (the chiefly mataqali), Colata, Tokaimalo, Nacobogi, Naicuna, Burenitu, Buremaci, Namoa, Nasekavo, Rara, Nasalamai and Namoto. These *mataqali* are scattered throughout Nasau, Naivicula, Namau and Naveicovatu. Nasau village is the seat of leadership and is the traditional residence of the *Vunivalu* of Naloto who is normally addressed as *Na Ulumatua* or the elder. Supposedly the fifth in line to the title - the *mataqali* Nawakura - and its lineage reside in Naivicula. However in recent years this has changed and Naivicula and the *mataqali* Nawakura have taken prominence with their lineage paid more importance. Whilst there are still people living in the villages many however have become part of the rural-urban drift and are now settled in Fiji's urban centres in search of better employment opportunities as well as better educational prospects for themselves and their children. As is a common practice amongst Fijians they make an effort to return to their villages during the festive seasons or on other occasions in order to maintain links with their relatives who have opted or are forced to remain in the villages or on the *dela ni yavu*.

How do the Naloto villagers generate a livelihood? Apart from money that is sent from the urban centres by relatives, the villagers engage in farming activities. Their fertile land permits them to cultivate *dalo* (taro), banana and cocoa amongst other crops. At one stage all these produce were part of a thriving export business, which was a result of the initiatives by the Ministry of Agriculture. However today villagers must sell in the local markets and transport their produce there. They have other products such as lemon, lime, *rourou* (dalo leaves) and *ota* which are part of a home grown industry. This is a farming community which cultivates crops and harvests the produce for consumption as well as for sale in the urban centres namely Korovou, Lautoka, Nausori and the Suva markets.

## **Education**

Education matters. A better educated Fijian population would be

less likely to offer blind support to a populist such as George Speight. Poor education of Fijians was not one of the proximate causes of the 2000 coup, but it was certainly an underlying, structural factor that helps to explain the rapid mobilisation of villagers in support of a populist politician such as Speight.

For Indo-Fijians education is a priority. For them this is not a matter of choice but an issue dictated by circumstances. Education for them is a form of security, as they cannot lay claim to land because it belongs to the indigenous population and is inalienable. The Indo-Fijian community regards education in the same vein as Fijians regard their land. For the Fijians, especially those living on Viti Levu, the value of education has not been internalised. For the people of Naloto there is always the land. This explains the nonchalance with which education is viewed.

During informal discussion with the villagers of Nasau some recounted their school days. One of them, Etika, explained how he would be sent off to school every morning. In his days they had to walk between Nasau and Wailotua, a distance of two to three miles, to attend school. With great mirth he recounted how he would leave home in the morning with his friends and midway between the two villages they would spend the day playing in the bushes, go swimming and fishing then return home in the afternoons. He did not complete primary school. He is now a parent and works as a *vakatawa* (teacher) for the village.

Etika's tale raises the question of the relevance of the curriculum that is taught in schools. One can infer many things from his story. If he finds it more interesting to play truant rather than attend school then school for him must be wearisome. It is tedious because it is not relevant or the teachers' transmission of the subjects is the cause of the lack of interest. Or the curriculum does not reflect the rural environment where it is used. Perhaps this is a call on the Ministry of Education to reexamine the teacher training programme in the Teachers' Colleges especially its relevance to Fiji's society especially the rural areas. Most schools in Fiji today emphasize academic subjects which will compel students to compete to acquire limited white collar jobs. They demote other aspects of developing the whole person. Education is supposed to encourage or facilitate that which should be observable in the citizens' lives, and to form characters where people are able to live together united in their diversity. Or as Subramani says, '...much

more is expected from education, especially in sustaining social cohesion.' (Subramani 2000:2) I dare to say that Fiji's education system has failed in this regard because what eventuated in May 2000 signals the need for policy makers in the education sector to appraise the direction in which education in Fiji is heading. Otherwise coups will continue to be the way of life in Fiji.

An examination of the three villages indicates that within these villages academic achievements vary considerably. In Fijian society nurses, doctors, teachers and others in the civil service are sources of pride and joy and are held in high esteem. If a village can boast of having a large number of teachers, nurses, doctors, and other civil servants from its ranks then it is thought of as a village with many well-educated people. Under this criterion, amongst the three, Naveicovatu leads, followed closely by Naivicula. For example within the Naituku family of Naveicovatu there are doctors, nurses and teachers. Other families in the village also boast of having nurses or teachers. Naivicula also has nurses, teachers, and civil servants such as agricultural officers, amongst its ranks. Nasau's numbers are not as numerous as their relatives from Naveicovatu and Naivicula. These villages are at a distance from Korovou, the nearest urban centre yet apart from Nasau the others seem to have performed well. This is due to several factors. Etika's account of his school days and the need to walk two to three miles in order to attend school attests to the first factor. The distance of Nasau village from the school at Wailotua contributes to the dismal performance of a student. Rising at about five o'clock, washing in the cold river, preparing for school, and then off to school is no mean feat. Students arrive at school exhausted from having to rise earlier and trekking through poor road conditions for long distances. At school the more likely scenario is to find students falling asleep during their lessons. This helps to explain why Nasau lags behind the other two. The schools for Naveicovatu and Naivicula are, by contrast, approximately ten minutes walk from the respective villages. Well educated parents tend to have well educated children. By the same token, lack of encouragement from the home is a stumbling block to the students of Naloto succeeding at school. The Naituku of Naveicovatu, for example, has been relatively successful. Now two more family members have enlisted in the British Army and Navy respectively. Their success is attributed to the encouragement from within the home. Senior Naituku, the patriarch of the family, was a teacher and it is with

this background that he is able to inculcate in the lives of his offspring the importance of acquiring a good education. Nasoni Tuitoga, a Nasau villager, was an agricultural officer before his retirement. As a civil servant he was posted to the agriculture stations to which his superiors thought appropriate to dispatch him. He explained that he often advised his daughters to aim at succeeding at their academic endeavours because he had no desire to see them secure lowly paid jobs like the one he ended up in nor be sentenced to be someone's wife in the village. His daughters did heed his advice and encouragement; today they are faring well in the niche they have created for themselves. The encouragement within the home has contributed positively to the success different families in the three villages are now reaping. Generally, however, the concept of education is yet to take hold amongst many Fijian communities particularly those in the rural areas such as Naloto.

Financial constraint is also a contributing factor to many Naloto people dropping out of school prematurely. Sources of income for them used to be the thriving banana and cocoa export industries. Today this industry is a memory of the past. Now they market *dalo*, *ota*, *dalo* leaves, and other items. Transportation is a problem especially if the villages do not possess a village truck. Naveicovatu may not find this a problem as it is on the Kings Road. However this poses a problem for Nasau and Naivicula as they are located inland. For them daily survival takes precedence and if their children do not perform well in school and need to repeat a level even at primary, more often the choice would be dropping out of school precipitately. It should, however, not be thought that this is a group of illiterate and ignorant villagers. These are a group of people who are very creative when it concerns their daily survival. They may be ignorant in the ways of the western world but in their traditional society they are indeed knowledgeable and very well informed. The problem for Fiji is that their traditional knowledge and expertise, while it may underpin their daily survival, does not contribute to the political stability of the country as a whole.

### **Fiji for the Fijians**

Poor levels of education may be one of the many reasons for the persistence among rural Fijians of a strong sense of the binary opposi-

tion between the categories of *itaukei* and *vulagi*. The people of Naloto are quite adamant that they do not want to have a *vulagi* (visitor) to rule Fiji. Even though the Indo-Fijians have lived in Fiji since they first arrived in 1879, the Naloto people still view them as visitors, and are not prepared to accept them as equals, as Fiji citizens. As guests, Indo-Fijians can exercise only certain privileges, and these privileges do not include being elected to run the nation in which they are guests. One person I interviewed used the analogy of a household. If you are a guest in a home it is not your prerogative to usurp the household head and begin functioning in his place. For him this was similar to what the Indo-Fijians are attempting to do in Fiji. They want to be the head of the household in a home that is not theirs. The argument that there were more Fijians than Indo-Fijians in Mahendra Chaudhry's government is regarded as irrelevant. The Fijians of Naloto do not deal in percentages. To them '*era sa voli oti nai Taukei oqori*' (those Fijians have already been bought) referred to the Fijians who were part of Chaudhry's Coalition government.

To confirm the strength of this belief among Fijians in Naloto is in no sense a discovery. The Fijian belief in the limited rights of *vulagi*, after all, was the fundamental political resource of the coup makers Sitiveni Rabuka and George Speight, enabling both to rally Fijian opinion. It continues to characterize political discourse in Fiji, as could be seen in the objections made to the use of the term 'Indo-Fijian' by Adi Litia Cakobau in 2004. Fear of Indian domination after the 1999 elections was becoming an obsession. Some Fijians from Naloto went on a destructive rampage once Speight gave license to it. Varinava Tiko, a son of Naloto and known for his role in the infamous closure of Korovou town, was involved in terrorizing Indo-Fijian farmers in the Dawasamu (Waidalice) area. The farmers in the Dawasamu area, when asked, said that they could not fathom this change in Tiko whom they trusted because he as an agricultural officer used to visiting them and offering advice on farming techniques. They had always gladly welcomed him into their homes.

Rural Fijians in Naloto have little conception of multiculturalism or multiracialism. The primary schools the villagers attended were populated predominantly by Fijians, mostly their relatives. Secondary schools of choice were Queen Victoria School (QVS), Ratu Kadavulevu School (RKS), Adi Cakobau School (ACS), Ballantine Memorial School (BMS), and Lelean Memorial School (LMS), all Fijian-

dominated, largely boarding, schools whose students attended rural schools first. Contact with Indo-Fijians was minimal, confined to dealing with the middlemen who came to collect their agricultural produce such as dalo, bananas and cocoa. This was no opportunity for any form of worthwhile dialogue except of a business nature as they haggled for mutually beneficial prices. Little wonder then that they view multiracialism with suspicion because personal experience had not provided them with the opportunity to interact with people of other ethnicity. That is why they clamour so loudly for a change in the Constitution to ensure the rights and dominance of Fijians. Some accused Ratu Mara, whose platform was always multiracialism, of selling out to the Indo-Fijians. Mara noted that his philosophy was formed during his time as a student of Marist Brothers High School (MBHS) where he was the only Fijian in a school of thirty-three (Mara, 1997). He had always advocated multiculturalism even in the face of vocal opposition from within his own party. He believed that 'people of different races, opinions and cultures can live and work together for the good of all, can differ without rancour, govern without malice, and accept responsibility as reasonable people intent on serving the interests of all' (as cited in Finn and Wesley-Smith, 2000: 1).

### **Loyalty to Chiefs**

Traditional Fiji prided itself on having a highly organised and well-ordered society under the leadership of chiefs. As time progressed and people became more educated the place chiefs occupied and the esteem with which they were held slowly diminished as people became more enlightened in the ways of the modern world. Many commoners now question the value of the chiefly system and are divided over whether it should be retained or abolished. Many Fijians believe their chiefs are more of a burden than a help.

There is a feeling amongst the people of Naloto that the support of their chiefs has been minimal. The people voiced great dissatisfaction at the way they have been treated in the past and continue to be treated today. It appears to them that a lot of the development has been concentrated in Eastern Fiji. They alluded to the former Alliance Party as an example of a party which was stacked with Eastern chiefs who were strongly influenced by the Polynesians and adopted a hierarchical system. For Naloto and the other *colo* (highland) part of Fiji where

the people were more Melanesian in physique and led a more egalitarian lifestyle, the practice in the East was associated more with the foreigners from Polynesia. That is one of the reasons why Ratu Mara became unpopular amongst them. They felt that he was targeting mostly the Tovata Confederacy, particularly the people of Lau, as recipients of most development projects.

The more educated people in Naloto and Wainibuka quote what is a common saying amongst the elder folks - that the Bauan chiefs are more famed for '*mai qo ka sa guileca na yani qori*' (give us more but we have forgotten to reciprocate). Reciprocity was a common practice in Fiji. Today that does not seem to be the case especially between the chiefs and their people. In today's capitalistic society hoarding for oneself is gradually becoming the order of the day. Note the constant squabbling and contesting of chiefly titles as a result of claimants wanting to receive the larger portion that is shelled out from the outcome obtained from the natural resources of the *mataqali* or province. The recent case of the battle for the *Tui Cakau* title in Taveuni in the *vanua* of Cakaudrove is a good example where it was taken to court and the Native Land Commission before Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu was finally upheld as the rightful holder of the title. In order to survive some chiefs no longer have qualms about exploiting the traditional system and practice to their benefit.

Many chiefs are not well educated. To divert attention from this they enforce traditional obligations, sometimes demanding more than people can give. A good example is the *Bose Ko Viti*, the annual Methodist Church conference. The practice is that the paramount chief of the province 'volunteers' to open the Conference. Naturally he or she will expect the members of the province to provide the money that will be given to open the Conference. After the 2002 conference, in the name of the Tui Nayau, Lau province 'volunteered' to open the 2003 Conference. The people of Lau were then obliged to contribute because they did not wish to see their chief shamed. People will contribute what little they have even though the result will be that their children will be deprived of the funds that could procure school books and materials thus help them acquire a better standard of education. No one wants to be regarded as niggardly. This is a way of socially controlling the people. Chiefs use traditional obligations to enhance their standing in the community.

The minimal contact that chiefs have with their people has led to

a gradual loss of trust between the common people and their chiefs. What irks the commoners is that they are 'never actively consulted for their input, interpretation, understanding, consensus and acceptance to collectively integrate our Fijian culture, traditions and language into the development process, connecting who we are in identity, spirit, satisfaction and self-worth' (Samisoni, 2000:41). This is more so where commoners can better articulate their views while chiefs are unable to display the same level of fluency or clarity of thought.

My research in Naloto suggests that Speight's supporters in the Parliamentary complex, while they were disillusioned with what chiefs had done for them, and equivocal in their feelings about chiefs, were nevertheless willing to go where chiefs led.

### **Naloto and the Coup**

Like many other Fijians, the people of Naloto were not sure how to react to events in the first days after the Speight group seized the Parliamentary complex. Too much was uncertain; too much unknown. But, from the second weekend of the crisis, they became convinced that they should be guided by their loyalty to George Speight. Busloads of people from Wainibuka and Naitasiri arrived at the Parliamentary complex where the hostages taken by Speight were kept. The people of Naitasiri were the first to arrive. Wainibuka and parts of Naitasiri belong to the *vanua* of Waimaro. The modern notion of *vanua* is that it is a confederacy. There are three confederacies - Kubuna, Burebasaga and Tovata. This concept, was introduced during the Colonial days for ease of administration. It involved the grouping of the various *vanua* under one banner. Prior to the colonial days there were about thirty two *vanua* and Waimaro was one of them. A *vanua's* population varied in size. Its group members related socially and politically. They could be located in a single locality or they could be scattered. Waimaro is a good example of the latter as some live in Tailevu North, some reside in various parts of Naitasiri while others inhabit the far flung Matuku Island in the Lau Group. The people of a *vanua* share the same values and beliefs, recognizing their political and social relations which splitting into smaller groups would not affect. This explains the early and continued presence at the Parliamentary complex of the folks from Naitasiri.

The people of Naloto are very militant and display aggression of-

ten associated with military life. This is not coincidental, as traditionally they are the *bati* (warriors) for the *Vunivalu* of Bau. This means that they are the warriors for the Cakobau family at Mataiwelagi. Mataiwelagi is the traditional residence of the *Vunivalu*. They align themselves closely with the *Vunivalu* as they are traditionally obliged to function as his soldiers. In the past they were part of war parties that invaded Lovoni on Ovalau, Verata, and Naitasiri. They took the *Lotu* (Christianity) to other parts of Fiji on behalf of the *Vunivalu* when he converted. Anecdotal accounts reveal that *Dradra* (Bloody) is the name of their ancestral spirit and it is this war-like characteristic that seems to make them revel in warfare. Even today some of those questioned prided themselves on being part of the group in the parliamentary complex and on even being captured by the military. From observation during discussions around the *tanoa* (kava bowl) with them it seems that the men associated their participation in it as a display of manhood. Other men who did not participate were spoken of as 'the women who stayed at home'. As one of them explained, it gave them a sense of accomplishment and they felt that they were fulfilling their role as the *Vunivalu's* warriors. Not only were they warriors fulfilling their obligations, but they were also demonstrating their loyalty to the late *Vunivalu's* daughters ?Adi Samanunu and Adi Litia ?who became associated with the events of May 2000. Speight even proposed Adi Samanunu as Prime Minister of the post-coup government. Their involvement gave rise to the call to fulfill their traditional obligations to support them.

The Naloto people are also related to George Speight. One of the main reasons given by them for their involvement in 2000 was that they could not stand by on the sidelines indifferent while their relative executed the coup. They were obliged to stand and be counted in this whole affair. They legitimized his existence as a Fijian by supplying information on Speight's blood links to them. George Speight's family is listed in the *Vola Ni Kawa Bula* (VKB), a register of all indigenous Fijians, as belonging to the village of Nasau of the *mataqali* Namoa. However today the family has opted to reside in Naivicula because Sam Speight Senior is the chairman of the Rewa Cooperative Dairy Company Limited and, more importantly, because he is responsible for the daily affairs of the Dritabua Cattle Farm, which supplies milk to the Rewa Cooperative Dairy Company Limited. This attempt to root Speight in Nasau and to identify him as Fijian is the villagers'

way of countering the accusation from some quarters that he is an up-start part-European who has no claim to executing the coup.

However one wonders if this is a merely romanticized notion of a relationship as it would bring fame to Naloto. Speight hardly spent time in the village. He was born and raised in Suva, attended Suva Grammar School, a multiracial school where more part Europeans strolled its corridors, and travelled abroad for his tertiary studies. Having led an existence as a part-European it is ironic that he championed the cause for indigenous supremacy.

The support Speight received from Naloto, however, was genuine. The people of Naloto went to excessive lengths to legitimise Speight's right as an indigenous Fijian to execute the coup. They began referring to him by his given Fijian name, Iikini Naitini. Incidentally following the 1987 coup, when elections were called, his father Sam Speight underwent a name transformation and emerged as Save-naca Tikoinaevo. Speight was a failed businessman who was facing an impending court case for his role in a mahogany deal when the coup conveniently happened. The ordinary people of Naloto perhaps did not realise this because they lacked the critical ability to discern that they were used as pawns in the hands of the powers-that-be with vested interests.

Supporting Speight excited their imagination, as these are warriors, the *Vunivalu's bati*. It afforded them the opportunity to come to the aid of the *Vunivalu*. It was also an occasion to display their ferocious fighting spirit. For them, an intellectual discussion on their being exploited was irrelevant and pointless as they rationalised that as warriors it was their duty to defend the good name of Naloto, Waimaro, and the *Vunivalu* and to assist one of them who had initiated the *vaka cibi i valu* or the call to war. It is outsiders or the more educated discriminating members of the *yavusa* Naloto who express indignation and sometimes anger over the way their loyalty was exploited. The subtlety between recognising that one is being exploited or genuinely appreciated would emanate from one's standard of education as well as from exposure to the wider environment or the possession of a critical faculty. The level of education achieved by the people of Naloto as displayed by their action is an area which arouses sympathy and a cause for echoing the words of Jesus Christ on Calvary when he cried out 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing.' (Luke 23:34).

This explains why they supported Speight in his effort to overthrow Chaudhry's government. In the final analysis blood became thicker than water irrespective of whether Speight ever spent time in the village. It was sufficient if they could trace their blood ties and connection with him. Nothing else mattered. Being members of the warrior class also egged them on to support him. As warriors they felt it their duty to fight for the sake of Fiji. They are of the belief that the *Vunivalu* is the paramount chief of all chiefs in Fiji and by implication the king of Fiji. Therefore, as his army it was their traditional duty to fight on behalf of the rest of the indigenous population.

## **Conclusion**

In explaining the reasons for Fijian support for Speight, we need to give greater emphasis to the powerful influence of traditional loyalties, which people maintain even in the face of their disillusion with the contribution of chiefs to their welfare. The persistence of traditional loyalties has implications for maintaining political stability, and therefore, good governance in Fiji. One is that of leadership. Fijian communities, whether rural or urban, need good leaders who are well educated with broad and informed views about international issues and domestic concerns. They should be able to strike a balance between the modern world and the traditional, leading their people into understanding both without sacrificing one for the other. Of great importance is that these leaders be transparent as well as accountable, commanding the respect and trust of the indigenous population as well as those of other ethnic groups. This leadership issue concerns all facets of Fijian social structure and should reach as low as the *Turaga-ni-Koro*.

Another implication is the need to disseminate information to rural dwellers in Fijian. Important documents such as the Constitution, land legislation, and information about the electoral system must be translated into Fijian and disseminated to those living in the rural areas as well as those in the urban centres. These serve no purpose if they continue only to decorate the shelves of Ministries' offices.

Development projects must be seen to be evenly distributed across the provinces and should be sustainable. If they are to be income generating then it is the onus of government to ensure that markets are available. Thorough and adequate training of the rural com-

munities in their environment initially, ensures that they are prepared before these projects are executed.

The Ministry of Education's Curriculum Development Unit must revisit its curriculum beginning from Year One through to Year Thirteen. Many Fijian students drop out along the way; there are very few alternatives provided for them. The over emphasis on academic subjects with the ultimate goal of attaining white-collar jobs is detrimental to the students. Also many students opt to attend schools in urban centres because the urban schools have perceived as having better facilities and better-qualified and experienced teachers than the rural ones. But when they drop out, most cannot find gainful employment nor can they fit back into their villages. Many prefer to remain in the urban centres and add to the growing annual figure of unemployed. In order to survive many either take to the streets or engage in delinquency ranging from misdemeanours to violent crimes. Many of these young people have land in their villages but they prefer the easier life of the cities and towns because the education system has raised their expectations for white-collar jobs and offers few alternatives when they drop out of school prematurely.

In setting out to conduct this research I was filled with a sense of righteous indignation that the Naloto people could have participated in the occupation of the Parliamentary complex in 2000, and more generally in support for Speight. However after observing the hardship that some of them face in trying to make a living, I realised that there is little room for sanctimonious umbrage because they are disadvantaged in so many ways. Road conditions are poor, health centres - the nearest one being at Nayavu village - are far away and schools are ill-equipped. The Naloto people shared their stories with me without restraint, especially their dissatisfaction with the various governments that had been elected to lead Fiji. They emphasised the unfairness of the development projects that seem to target those in the eastern parts of Fiji whilst forgetting the interior dwellers.

To return, then, to the original question: in explaining Fijian support for Speight's coup, what should we emphasise? Race? Class? Or competition between Fiji's traditional family dynasties and chiefs, and the strength of traditional loyalties to them?

This paper has argued that traditional loyalties to kin and to chiefs have not been given the prominence they deserve in explaining the politics of Fiji in 2000. They must be seen as central in the events

of 2000. Without those loyalties, commoner Fijians could not have been mobilised by George Speight, the Mataiwelagi clan in Bau, and others who were pursuing political ambitions within the Fijian polity. In other words, George Speight's coup, and in particular Fijian support for it, was less 'modern' than it looked. Modern discontents about lack of development fuelled support for the coup but those discontents were expressed through fierce loyalties and attachments that have their origins in Fiji's pre-colonial history.

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