Political Violence in the South Pacific: Women after the Coups in Fiji

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"If you ask most women in Fiji what defines them most, they will say in response it is our race first then our gender... How can you mobilize as women around gender/feminist issues when you are so torn apart by race issues?"[1]

For many people, to the extent they ever think about the islands of the Pacific, it is as a destination tourism location, a place for dream vacations and romantic holidays. In fact, while some of the Pacific Island Countries[2] may be peaceful places, they are not, and have never been, immune to the trends of violence and militarization happening around the world. In recent years, the effects of globalization, uneven development and environmental pressures such as sea-level rise have been added to the legacies of colonization, including the aftermath of nuclear testing and resource exploitation/depletion.[3] These factors have contributed to an increase in armed violence including, for example, three coups in Fiji (May 1987, September 1987 and May 2000), a bloody ten-year conflict in which more than 12,000 people lost their lives on the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea (1989-1998), and internal armed conflict in the Solomon Islands (1998, 2000) which has resulted in more than 200 deaths and 15,000-20,000 internally displaced people.[4]

These conflicts are played out against a background of economic and political change, and of dissatisfaction with western models of governance and 'development' which have brought increased wealth to some, but have also brought a breakdown in social systems, marginalization and environmental degradation. They fall into a category popularly referred to as 'ethnic conflicts' and they do in fact use ethnic symbols and slogans. Yet they are about far more than ethnic differences. While ethnicity matters," the major source of crisis in the islands is not 'ethnic violence' but

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the militarization of political and social disputes, arising from the interaction of local struggles for power and resources-particularly land, paid employment, and services-and global economic trends that disadvantage small island states."[5] These events affect women in their roles in production, reproduction and in their communities. In other words, women are affected because they are members of their families and communities, and also because they are women.

This paper focuses on Fiji, a country made up of 332 islands, 110 of which are populated. The ethnically and culturally Polynesian island of Rotuma,[6] located about 465 km north of the main islands has been a part of Fiji since 1881. The economy is based on sugar production and tourism, along with some fisheries, forestry products and garment production.

Today, Fiji has a population of about 893,354 people (July 2005 estimate). About 51% of the population is Fijian, 44% Indo-Fijian (descendents of Indian workers brought to Fiji during colonization), and the remaining 5% other Pacific Islanders, overseas Chinese and others. Religious affiliation is Christian 52% (Methodist 37%, Roman Catholic 9%), Hindu 38%, Muslim 8% and others 2%. The Christian population is predominantly Fijian while the Hindu and Muslim population is Indo-Fijian. In terms of land ownership, 83% belongs to mataqali (clans) as joint ownership, leased or reserve land, 9% is designated Crown land, and 8% is freehold.

Fiji is divided into four administrative districts (Central, Eastern, Northern and Western) plus the Rotuma dependency. The chief of state is the president, and the head of government is the prime minister. It has a bicameral parliament, consisting of a senate (34 seats: 24 appointed by the president at the recommendation of the Great Council of Chiefs, 9 appointed directly by the president, and 1 appointed by the Rotuman Council) and house of representatives (71 seats: Ethnic Fijian-23, Indo-Fijian-19, other ethnicities-3, Council of Rotuma constituency-1, free-25). As we will see, the ethnic allocation of seats has been a matter of great contention; each version of the constitution has contained a different apportionment. The underlying issue has been the degree to which indigenous Fijian paramountcy is to be institutionalized in government.

This paper will focus on political violence in Fiji, suggesting that women are being particularly adversely affected by the escalating militarization of Fijian society. It will

look first at the ways in which colonization affected the construction of gender and ethnic identities and then at ways in which the politics of race has been used since colonization in the militarization of the struggle for resources and power. It is believed that understanding this process helps us to comprehend how the culture of violence initiated by militarization and armed conflict spreads throughout society, even after ' peace ' has been established.

The first part of the paper will focus on colonization and the latter part will look at the ways the coups, particularly the third coup in 2000, affected women in Fiji. The impetus for this paper and much of the content of the second half comes from work during a short research stay in Fiji in 2003. My focus was on efforts for reconciliation rather than on the implications of the coups per se but during my stay I spoke with many different NGOs and individual women. I was struck by the difference in attitudes from other times I had been in Fiji. People were visibly uneasy and afraid. While the citations used here come primarily from secondary sources, it was the desire to unearth the roots of what I believed to be fear that led to the writing of this paper. In my pursuit of that goal, I discovered the answer to be much more complex than I had initially anticipated. Not surprisingly, it begins with the ways in which gender, race and class have been constructed since colonization.

In comparison with much of the armed conflict and genocide which plagues our world, the three coups that rocked Fiji can perhaps be seen as being relatively insignificant. Certainly the value of each life lost or ruined must not be minimized. At the same time, especially since the processes of democracy now seem to be working, tensions in Fiji seem to be diminishing. Yet, even with this ' small ' conflict, it is possible to see how violence spreads almost unnoticed through a society and how it is constructed and reproduced within families and communities. It is only through understanding such mechanisms that we can hope to change them.

Ⅰ. The Setting: Colonization and Decolonization

The Pacific Ocean is a vast expanse, covering about one-third of the world's surface and dotted with small islands. If one were to choose one word to describe the region, it might be ' diversity, ' or perhaps ' smallness. ' There is tremendous cultural,[7] linguistic[8] and biological[9] diversity, yet each occurs in a relatively small area. The

tendency to ignore the rich diversity of the region, or subsume it to‘ smallness, ’is perhaps an indication of the disregard and violence, both direct and structural, which has colored relations between the Pacific Islands and the West since first contact in the 18th century.

Colonization of the Pacific Islands by Western powers occurred relatively late, really only beginning in the late 19th century. Spain, Britain, Germany, France, the US and Japan all possessed Pacific Island colonies. Colonization in the Pacific occurred for a variety of reasons, including a desire on the part of the colonizers to be seen as having control over many territories and to spread various types of Christianity. Traditional ‘ settler colonies ’with large white populations were established in Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii, and people from these colonies played a large role in the colonization of other islands in the region. For example, many people came to Fiji from Australia. In many cases, however, the interest of the extra-regional powers in the islands of the Pacific was focused more on strategic concerns, including the possibilities presented for access to ocean resources and/or the ocean itself, rather than on the resources available on the islands.

Regardless of the reason for outside rule, colonization takes power from local communities and puts it in the hands of a resident colonial administration which in turn answers to decision-makers in distant places. This process has far-reaching implications. The extent to which individuals were affected has to do with the ways in which their lives coincided or conflicted with the needs and desires of colonial administrators and the colonial state. Here we will examine some of the implications of this process of the‘ re-creation ’of diverse Pacific societies into modern‘ nation-states, ’focusing on Fiji.

Until contact with Europeans, what today is known as Fiji was composed of relatively autonomous societies which engaged in trade, marriage and warfare with one another. The Europeans formed alliances and provided their favorites with weapons, hoping to influence Fijian politics. This continued until Ratu Seru Cakobau, a paramount chief from the island of Bau, signed a Deed of Cession with Britain in 1874.[10]

Colonial rule in Fiji was a multi-tiered process, building on existing conditions and affecting the construction of personal identities as well as economic, political and social relations. In order to build what would eventually come to be known as ‘ Fiji, ’the

creation of a single‘ Fijian ’identity was necessary and, as we will see, the determination of what constitutes this‘ indigenous Fijian identity ’has proven to be a continuing issue. Determining‘ Fijianness ’involved gender, race/ethnicity and class. The construction of gender in colonial Fiji not only affected who took part in government and who did not, but also affected the ways in which the politics of race and ethnicity were reproduced within different communities. Race/ethnicity was used as a symbol for forging alliances and promoting colonial and elite interests. Class of course also played an important role. In Fiji, women had a lower social status than men, but high ranking women had a more privileged role than those of lower ranks. In general, however, European policies served more often to strengthen existing patriarchal control of women in Pacific societies rather than to challenge it.[11]

The work performed by Fijian women varied according to their rank and also their cultural group. Decisions at the community and village level were generally made by men, while women were responsible for the well-being of the family. They worked the land and were involved in such activities as healing/massage, medicine-making, subsistence agriculture, cooking, pottery, tapa and coconut oil making, and local trading. Women were subordinate to their husbands, and the father was the ultimate decision maker and head of the family.[12]

The main actors in colonization were colonial administrators, white settlers and missionaries. Each of these groups brought with them their own diversity and world views. The white population was not entirely British. “ In the decade 1910-20, unable to recruit‘ rich young Englishmen, ’ the colonial capitial was home instead to‘ many Australians ’... who held all sorts of lowly jobs. ”[13] It seems that the European population in the mid to late 19th century had a reputation for drunkenness and lawlessness, and the British elite found themselves in a difficult situation. At the same time, “ it was in relation to other races that the prestige of the white race was measured, and Fiji ś European elite were preoccupied with demarcating the differences between themselves and the Fijian natives. ”[14] One of the ways this demarcation was asserted was in the area of sexual relations. ‘ Native marriages ’ between European men and Fijian women were seen as being improper and in poor taste. For women, however, “ sexual relations between white and black were seen principally through the prism of molestation. ”[15] Race and male privilege combined to

allow European men to‘ civilize ’Fijian women, while European women became targets of savage aggression.

The Protestant missionaries who came to Fiji were from lower middle-class backgrounds in England, yet they brought a role model to Fijian women based on the behavior of the privileged classes. They also brought new skills such as sewing and other domestic skills. Gradually, these grew in importance relative to women ’s traditional subsistence fishing and farming roles. Moreover, the colonial government introduced laws which impacted on the rights and behavior of women. These laws privileged married women, and disadvantaged those who had been deserted or divorced, as well as unmarried women. Marriage was also regulated by the colonial government. Polygamy was abolished, and marriage was restricted to those age 16 or over for women and 18 years or more for men. When education was introduced, first by the missionaries and later by colonial authorities, it was made available to both girls and boys. In practice, boys were given priority and girls were encouraged to stay home. As a result, males tended to be better educated and to dominate the primarily urban work force.[16]

Colonization impacted the construction of gender roles in politics as well as in the private sphere. Traditionally women were rarely directly involved in politics or public decision making, and colonial attitudes toward women reinforced these roles. There have been relatively few opportunities and little encouragement for women to be active in politics, and when such opportunities exist, strong social pressures contribute to making women unable (or perhaps unwilling) to take advantage of them. An example of the restriction of opportunity would be that adult franchise for women (as well as for indigenous Fijians) was not introduced until the 1960 ’s.[17]

We have seen how the colonial administration assumed control of domestic relations, and how women were excluded from participation in the public sphere. The impact of the British was not, however, limited to gender relations. Britain also had a major and lasting impact on ethnic relations and the construction of identity. This impact has two components: the attempt to create a unified‘ indigenous Fijian ’identity from the multiplicity of Fijian cultures and communities and the decision by Governor Arthur Gordon to use indentured labor from India in sugar production.

According to Robertson and Sutherland, “ ...the single most important feature of

British colonial rule was its attempt to impose on Fijian cultural diversity a homogeneity and uniformity that previously did not exist."[18] In other words, it was not only that Britain brought an entirely different (and culturally diverse) group of people to Fiji, but that in the process of creating the Indian 'other,' the British imposed on the Fijian population an assumption of Fijian unity. Not surprisingly, the British were not completely successful in this endeavor, and thus created the basis for varying, and often conflicting, versions not only of what comprises Fijian 'tradition' and 'culture,' but also of the meaning of the term 'indigenous' Fijian. From before independence, Fijian leaders struggled with the question of who among Fiji's many ethnic groups should bear the title 'Fijian.' These conflicting versions of 'Fijianness' continue to haunt Fiji today.

The presence of a growing Indian population had of course significant implications. Between 1879 and 1916, the British brought 60,595 workers from a range of places in India. Indentured workers were offered the opportunity to stay after their initial five years, and many chose to do so. By the time Fiji achieved independence from Britain on 10 October 1970, the indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian populations were of nearly equal size. Like the Fijians themselves, these migrants were of diverse backgrounds, having different religions, languages and customs. What eventually brought them together as 'Indo-Fijians' was their experience of colonialism in Fiji.

The migrants from India worked diligently, primarily as tenant farmers. Later, other migrants from India came and opened small shops and businesses. The presence of this large Indo-Fijian population eventually came to be described in the rhetoric of ethnic politics as the 'Indian threat' to the future of Fijian culture. The early incorporation of Indians into the cash economy formed the basis for another myth: 'Fijian disadvantage.' The construction of the Indian sub-altern, as opposed to 'indigenous' Fijians and Europeans, polarized the society, but allowed for an alliance of Fijian and European interests. It also allowed for the call for Fijian paramountcy in the face of this perceived Indian threat.

The decision to use Indian labor shaped not only ethnic relations, but gender relations as well. From 1879 to 1920, the plantations relied on indentured labor, and regulations required that forty percent of those workers be women. After 1920, cane was produced on small family farms and only married men were eligible to receive

cane contracts. The farms were too small to support many workers, so men worked in other forms of agricultural work such as sugar mills and harvesting gangs. The everyday work of cane production was supported by the unpaid work of Indian and/or Indo-Fijian women and children.[19] While some Indian and Fijian families lived and worked side by side, the rhetoric of increasingly ethnic and gendered politics called for separation. Some women managed to make personal choices regarding their sexuality which were in opposition to the politics of separation, but they paid a high price. For most women, Indian, Fijian and European as well, their primary role was that of reproduction and segregation was a given in their domestic relations. This was manifested not only in their personal behavior, but in what constituted proper behavior for their children. Thus women were both subject to, and instrumental in, the construction of' race 'and gender in colonial and post-colonial Fiji.

As we have seen, indigenous Fijian women played an important role in the support of indigenous families. With the possible exception of chiefly women, opportunities for women to participate in paid work were restricted by both custom and colonial regulations. At the same time, women's fishing and horticultural activities, as well as their work in the villages, subsidized the costs, resources and care of the indigenous Fijian workforce. This trend has continued, with women making up only 14% of the paid workforce at independence. That figure had increased to 30.5% by 1992, but does not accurately reflect the reality of women's work, particularly in agriculture.[20]

The attempt by the colonial government to construct, on the one hand, a unified Fiji and on the other, create a division of ethnic and gender relations laid the foundations for ethnic and gender tensions today, some of which have been manifested in (and exacerbated by) the coups. Ethnicity was also used by Fijian and Indian leaders to promote their various positions. As the possibility of independence emerged, the main players were the Fijian Association, an ethnic Fijian organization formed in 1962, and two groups representing Indo-Fijians. The National Federation Party (NFP) represented the interests of the cane farmers. Those who opposed the NFP formed the National Congress of Fiji which represented primarily Indian businesses, professionals, and Muslims. The face of politics was chiefly and male, but it was supported by a network of marriages and kinship ties.

In August 1965, a new strategy was put into play. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara called a

meeting of the Fijian Association and those Indo-Fijians not affiliated with the National Federation Party (NFP). While the goal of the meeting was to garner support for separate communal rolls, thereby keeping politics ethnically divided, the rhetoric was multiracialism. The ultimate result of this meeting was the formation of the Alliance Party.

The Alliance Party was primarily portrayed as an inter-racial coalition, but it was dominated by the Fijian Association. It was led by Ratu Mara, whose influence was built through a series of eastern island chiefly linkages. Various organizations representing European, Chinese and Indo-Fijian interests also participated. "These smaller bodies were willing to acknowledge indigenous Fijian primacy in return for undisturbed professional, educational and commercial advantages."[21] In other words, the concessions to multiracialism enshrined in the central ideology of the Alliance Party as "goodwill, tolerance, understanding and harmony among all the Colony's communities,"[22] were balanced by the alliance of European and Fijian elites. This combination of the primacy of Fijian elite interests with multiracialism was an important tool for securing power for the Alliance Party, but was also contradictory from the start. Fijian paramountcy could not be guaranteed under a multiracial ideology.

Against this backdrop of ethnic and class politics, Fiji achieved independence in 1970. Independence came without bloodshed, and without the creation of a unified Fijian nationality. In Fiji, modernization and decolonization served to combine traditional chiefly politics and patriarchy with western models of the patriarchal state, resulting in chiefs being given priority over commoners and men priority over women. Moreover, the values and processes of 'democracy' are difficult to achieve when combined with traditional values based on authoritarian forms of male leadership and/or notions of 'divine right' to political power.[23] The contradictions between the 'equality' and 'democracy' promised by the modern state and the ways in which peoples' lives were organized have had serious implications for Fiji.

II. Political Violence in Post-Colonial Fiji

From independence in 1970 until 1987, the Alliance Party had nearly continuous control of Fiji politics. The Alliance Party, with its traditionalist and in particular

chiefly stance, helped to entrench traditional ideologies that confined women to the domestic arena and excluded them from public decision-making and power. Post-independence political processes reflected this. For example during nearly twenty years of Alliance rule, only two women were appointed to the Senate and three women elected to the House of Representatives. Legal discrimination was institutionalized in terms of laws restricting women's citizenship rights, family laws regarding marriage, matrimonial property, divorce, rape and maternity leave, just to name a few.

The effects of the institutionalized nature of sex discrimination could also be seen in differences in education, job opportunities and health. For example, nutritional deficiencies and related illnesses tended to occur more frequently in women, particularly Indo-Fijian women, than men. Women were, and continue to be frequent victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence. In addition, to the extent that women were incorporated into the urban workforce, they were concentrated in low-wage jobs in the service sector.[24]

The contradictions inherent in the Alliance Party politics surfaced in 1976, when, during a dispute over land issues, the Party found itself unable to support both multiracialism and the call for Fijian paramountcy. The result was the loss of an election in April 1977 to Fijian nationalists. This defeat sent shockwaves through the elite Fijian establishment. Using the' Indian threat 'as a tool, Alliance dominance was re-established in a snap election the following September. It was after this lapse that more and more attention began to be focused on the role of the military in safeguarding elite interests. Military budgets were increased, and young Fijians were encouraged to serve. New alliances began to be formed among elites, military and Fijian business interests.[25]

All the while, Mara portrayed the country as a model of multiracial democracy, virtually free of ethnic tension and conflict. Little or no public acknowledgement was given to inter- and intra-ethnic tensions. The organization of power relations was not publicly questioned, nor was voice given to the concerns about the so-called Indian threat or the future of' indigenous 'Fijian identity that had preceded independence. " The illusion of harmony and amicable understanding in the post-independence era was just that, an illusion, and just as misleading and fraught and dangerous as the

impression of balance and equilibrium and harmony conveyed by an earlier metaphor of Fiji as a three-legged stool.[26] ... The brutal truth, of course, was that Fiji never had a genuinely shared sense among its citizens about what kind of constitutional arrangement was appropriate for it. "[27]

In 1985, a new party, the Fijian Labour Party, was formed. It sought to provide an alternative to the Alliance Party and NFP, and garnered support among indigenous Fijian commoners and the Indo-Fijian working class. Its multi-ethnic platform appealed to working class and poor people, and contained a strong concern for women. In particular, it aimed to help the many unorganized women and domestic workers and to raise the minimum wage for domestic and manufacturing/garment workers. It also promoted an anti-sex discrimination bill which would provide the legal foundation for eradicating all forms of discrimination against women. This was to pave the way for the passage of an Equal Pay Bill. The Party expressed a commitment to including women in all aspects of public decision-making. This was the first time that women had been actively included in the political agenda.[28]

The Labour Party aligned with the NFP to contest the 1987 elections and, perhaps surprisingly, won. Prime Minister Dr. Timoci Bavadra was elected on a platform of moderate social prescription, land reform and the enforcement of Fiji's nuclear-free status.[29] His victory brought a government led by Indo-Fijians to power, although the Prime Minister was an indigenous Fijian.

For a brief moment, it appeared that change was possible in Fiji, but the illusion of racial peace and harmony was shattered in May of 1987, when Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka led a military coup, overthrowing the newly-installed Bavadra government and plunging Fiji into a state of political confusion. Rabuka demanded the suspension of the 1970 Constitution, and was initially refused. After a brief but intense period of rioting, however, an interim Council of Ministers was set up to rewrite the 1970 Constitution. This Council had, by September, more or less reached a compromise which would allow for the gradual return to civilian rule and protect basic rights and liberties. Just at that point, Rabuka staged a second coup, declaring himself head of state, suspending the 1970 Constitution, and declaring Fiji a republic. This had the immediate effect of having Fiji suspended from the Commonwealth.[30]

The period after the coup was one of " deterioration of civil order, human rights

abuses, and the worsening incidence of crime.... Methodist fundamentalism was in full cry."[31] By December, Rabuka had re-installed civilian rule, naming a new government. Of its 21 ministers, 10 had served in the interim regime, and 13 in the former Alliance government. Bavadra was powerless, and remained so until his death in 1989.

Tourism and other industries were hard hit by the coups, and in the years that followed them, economic recovery was slow. Poor families, many of them headed by women, were the hardest hit. Even when recovery began, the benefits failed to reach the poor. Children were victims of the rising post-coup poverty levels as parents became unable to pay school fees.[32] A 10% VAT on goods and services and high level of inflation made things even worse. Conditions in the factories in Fiji's tax-free zones were horrendous and organizing was severely frowned upon. For those who could afford to do so, the solution was to leave. An exodus of Indo-Fijians nearly doubled the average annual departure rate prior to the coups. In the 1990's, the proportion of Indo-Fijians had fallen from 51% to 44%.

Two explanations are offered for the 1987 crisis. One describes it as a 'racial fight' between Fijians and Indo-Fijians;[33] the other calls it a class struggle between the 'haves'(chiefly indigenous Fijians and their supporters) and the 'have-nots' (commoner ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijian working class). Lal acknowledges the importance of both of these aspects, but adds a third element. "...the coups were also an effort to turn the clock back, to fortify old structures and values which sustained them against the forces of change, to shore up the importance of rural areas as well as the power of traditional leaders at a time when the new government was determined to democratize elements of the traditional order."[34]

As we have seen, since before independence, ethnicity had been used to construct politics in Fiji. Before colonization and the import of labor from India, neither a unified 'Fijian'nor a unified'Indian'identity existed; even after the terms were created, there remained divisions within and between both groups. Yet, in the words of Ratu Mara, in Fiji,'Race is a fact of life.' While politicians made rosy assertions of multiracial harmony, in fact race permeated every aspect of life in Fiji, and politicians used the race card to achieve and/or secure power. More and more, they began to use race/ethnicity as a reason for the perceived economic disadvantage of ethnic Fijians. According to the *Fiji Times* of 17 November 1987,"By restricting the Fijian

people to their communal way of lifestyle in the face of a rapidly developing cash economy, the average Fijian has become more and more backward. This is particularly invidious when the leaders themselves have amassed huge personal wealth by making use of their traditional and political powers." After the Labour Party was formed, Dr. Bavadra brought the issue into the open. Although ethnically a Fijian, Bavadra told voters at his campaign rallies that the democratic right of an individual to vote meant free choice, and assured them that they were not compelled to vote along racial lines, and/or vote for a chief. This language represented an attempt to separate class and politics and was, particularly coming from a Fijian, very threatening indeed.

Rabuka, a commoner, was determined to ensure that Fiji remained under political control of indigenous Fijians. In 1990, he imposed a new Constitution which gave the Council of Chiefs power to appoint the President, allocated 24 out of 34 seats in the Senate to indigenous Fijians, and guaranteed indigenous Fijians a majority in parliament by reserving 37 out of 70 seats for them in the House of Representatives.[35] This allocation of seats privileged rural Fijians over urban ones, as 30 of those 37 seats were allocated to rural areas and the remaining 7 to urban and semi-urban areas, even though almost 40 percent of Fijians were urban dwellers. The new Constitution also required candidates to be registered in the 'Register of Native Births' in the constituency in which they were standing. This served to further entrench provincialism, while at the same time threatening the notion of an over-arching 'Fijian culture.' In order to prevent fragmentation and unite disparate groups, the Great Council of Chiefs was asked to sponsor a single Fijian political party. That party, called the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT), was launched in 1990, but failed in its mission of creating Fijian unity.[36]

Needless to say, the 1990 Constitution was met with wide-spread opposition, and a constitutional commission, the Reeves Commission, was established to undertake a critical review of it. This resulted in the Constitution of 1997. "As conceived by the Reeves Commission, an essential role of the 1997 Constitution of Fiji Islands was to establish and consolidate a national consensus on how the country should be governed. If it succeeded in this aim, it would help to put aside the divisions and the bitterness of the 1987 coups and subsequent policies of discrimination."[37] The 1997 Constitution is

generally regarded as being Fiji's most progressive Constitution to date, but it still enshrines some of the idea of Fijian paramountcy and the need to protect the interests of indigenous Fijians. "Paradoxically, it represents both an affirmation of liberalism - especially significant after the repudiation of liberalism in the 1990 Constitution - and a major qualification on it... (T)he paradox reflects not only the tortured ethnic history of Fiji but also the more global concern of how to accommodate ethnic and cultural diversity within liberalism."[38]

The 1970 Constitution was based on the separation of races. The silent agenda of that constitution was political order and stability under the dominance of one ethnic group, namely indigenous Fijians. It was defective, however, in that it provided for national seats which were independent of the communal roles. In contrast, the 1990 Constitution was anything but subtle. By taking away cross-community voting, it politically separated the ethnic groups, thereby making politics almost exclusively ethnic. The aim was to ensure the undisputed and permanent rule of indigenous Fijians.[39]

The 1997 Constitution was different from the previous ones in that it was based on recognition of the multi-ethnic character of Fiji. It sought to promote national unity and provided a system for multi-ethnic politics. It did not, however, completely abandon the idea of privileging one ethnic group above others. For example, it gave for the first time a constitutionally sanctioned role to the Great Council of Chiefs. It also stated that "the paramountcy of Fijian interests as a protective principle continues to apply, so as to ensure that the interests of the Fijian community are not subordinated to the interests of other communities," and provided for the application of customary laws in dispute resolution and in cases concerning traditional land ownership. At the same time, although seat allocations were still based on race, it did provide for multi-party government and ensure that ethnic Fijians were no longer guaranteed a parliamentary majority. The 1997 Constitution also established a Human Rights Commission with a mandate to educate the public about the content of the Bill of Rights and to make recommendations to government regarding human rights. Moreover, the new constitution granted women unprecedented equal rights. Article 38 calls for protection for women against discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender, marital status and sexual orientation.[40]

Interestingly, while Rabuka's administration scrapped the Labour Party's policy for women, the post-coup government did establish a Ministry for Women's Affairs in 1987 as part of a broad-based Ministry of Women, Culture and Social Welfare. Emberson-Bain explains this as a "strategic move by the post-coup regime to peddle a populist, progressive image as well as to assist its efforts to regain its hold on a diminishing ethnic Fijian constituency."[41] She goes on to describe how the Ministry gave liberally to the Soqosoqo Vakamarama, a tradition-bound, chiefly-dominated organization which has village branches throughout Fiji and whose programs emphasize 'women's skills' with a focus on cooking, craft and other 'traditional' activities. There were also reports of discrimination against Indo-Fijian groups.[42] The Ministry did nothing to help the rapidly deteriorating situation of poor women after the coups.

The 1997 Constitution removed the stricture that the Prime Minister be indigenous Fijian. The first elections under the new constitution were held on 5-8 May 1999. Rabuka stood for election and contrary to his expectations, he was defeated. On 19 May, Mahendra Chaudhry became Fiji's first Indo-Fijian prime minister.

One year later, on 19 May 2000, armed indigenous Fijians led by failed businessman George Speight staged a military coup, taking the Prime Minister and the Cabinet hostage. Five of the 31 members of Parliament taken hostage were women.[43] According to Robertson and Sutherland, this coup drew heavily for inspiration on the 1987 coups, but "had two striking features that set it apart: first, it was poorly planned and second, it stunned Fiji's main ruling institutions, which responded in confused ways."[44]

In the wake of the coup, violence broke out in many parts of the country. Bands of men destroyed property, stole possessions, food and livestock and beat, terrorized and raped local residents. Especially vulnerable were Indo-Fijian families, but this time Fijians were shedding the blood of other Fijians too. Curfews were imposed from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am every day, and there was bloodshed, mayhem and looting.[45]

Amnesty International, in their Human Rights Report 2001, described conditions in Fiji as follows:

> A violent attempt in May led to widespread human rights abuses and a

> flagrant disregard for the rule of law. Scores of civilians, police and army officers were injured; some were killed. Thousands were forced to leave their homes as a result of racist or opportunist attacks and fear of violence. Decrees issued under martial law allowed for racial discrimination but preserved other basic human rights. These rights were, however, frequently violated during operations against suspected rebels. As many as six suspected rebels were reportedly beaten to death by soldiers following an attempted mutiny in November. Investigations into alleged human rights violations were hampered by fears of retaliation; no findings were made public.[46]

Ten days after the coup, President Ratu Mara was ousted and martial law declared. Military Commander Voreqe Bainimarama declared himself Head of State, and tried to abrogate the 1997 Constitution, ruling instead by decree. In July, power was transferred to an interim administration and on 13 July the last group of hostages, including Prime Minister Chaudhry, was released under the Muanikau Accord.[47] The new government tried to redraft the 1997 Constitution, but a High Court ruling said the Constitution Review Committee had no legal standing. On 1 March 2001 the Court of Appeal ruled that‘ the 1997 Constitution was still in force and that the pre-Speight coup parliament had to be recalled. ’ This was a major victory for democratic forces in Fiji, but it did not result in the return of the Chaundry government. Later that month, the House of Representatives was dissolved, the Prime Minister resigned, and the President appointed a‘ caretaker ’Prime Minister (this turned out to be Laisenia Qarase, the former Prime Minister of the Interim Civilian Government). This paved the way for elections, which were held between 27 August and 1 September. The elections were monitored and observers, including UN groups, have stated that the elections were free and fair.[48]

As with the 1987 coups, some observers were quick to classify the 2000 crisis as another ethnic conflict. The 1997 Constitution was portrayed as selling out on the interests of indigenous Fijians, and certainly the rhetoric of communal and ethnic politics was called into play. In fact, Speight was, among other things, interested in creating a break with the established chiefly order symbolized by the Mara family and

its influential marriage connections. He did not have the support of the traditional Fiji elite, and his move took them by surprise. The coup resulted in bringing to the surface tensions which had long been present in Fiji society. Among other things, it revitalized long-standing attempts to reorganize the structure of regional alliances formed under the British.[49]

An important factor was the problem of land. Most land (83%) in Fiji is under indigenous inalienable status, 8% is freehold, 3.6% state freehold and 5% Crown land. Most of the sugar cultivation is on leased land, where predominantly Indo-Fijian farmers hold 30-year tenancy leases. Most of these leases were to come due by 2005. Many of the land owners wanted to renegotiate the terms and conditions of the leases, and some wanted to use the land for other purposes. The Chaudhry government, in consultation with the Great Council of Chiefs, was calling for the establishment of a Land Use Commission and reforms of the Native Lands Trust Board. Chaudhry's handling of this very delicate situation was poor from the start, and his insensitivity to the media made things worse. The Land Use Commission was classified and played up by some indigenous Fijian groups as an attempt by the chiefs to usurp commoner land, and was met by a rash of violence, instigated "by indigenous Fijians aggrieved over unsettled compensation claims for tourist development, airport, dam site and plantation acquisitions."[50]

Once again, ethnicity was used to gloss over an extremely complicated situation. In the words of Fiji Women's Rights Movement's Raijeli Nicole, "race is being used very well by politicians and failed businessmen to further their own personal interests. They play on the fear that Indians will come and take over. In the case of Speight, for example, his real agenda was to control the pine, mahogany and raw timber export trade that is reported to be worth US$300 million.... Interestingly, native Fijians and the ethnic Indians in the Western province live together very well. They speak each other's language, they know and respect each other's cultural ways."[51]

III. Implications of the Coups for Women in Fiji

In 2002, an article in the *Sunday Post* reported that, "There has been a notable increase in social ills in the country and now is the time for Fiji to come to terms with its problems and question its direction. Child abuse and incest, drugs, alcohol, suicide,

domestic violence, family break-ups and a weakening family unit are increasing ailments more so in Fiji than ever before.[52] This increase of violence is attributed to the 2000 coup. While the 2000 coup did bring the most visible violence, it is important to keep in mind that the trend toward militarism and seeking violent solutions began before the first coups. This section will give a brief description of post-coup violence against women in 1987, but will primarily focus on the period from the 2000 coup to about 2002. It will look at how the violence affected women, but also address ways in which women resisted the violence and worked for peace.

The 1987 coups resulted in job losses, lower wages and purchasing power and reduced welfare payments. These in turn led to increased domestic tensions and violence against women. The number of divorce cases based on ' persistent and habitual cruelty ' greatly increased, and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) reported a six-fold increase in the total number of new domestic violence cases between 1988 and 1879, as well as increases in rape and child abuse cases. The perpetrators were almost invariably men, usually husbands, but also fathers, brothers, sons and other male family members. There were also increases in the numbers of sexual assaults and gang rapes, as well as in abductions and other violent crimes. The response of the courts to these increases was hardly encouraging. The general attitude was to blame the victim, and to reduce the severity of sentences. The combined effect of the racism and changes in the judiciary after the coups was to " remove existing legal protection, legitimize violence and racism and to allow elements within the security forces and wider community to believe that anti-social actions, especially racist and sexist ones, can be carried out with impunity. "[53]

The militarization of Fiji society was off to a good start after the first coups, and the 2000 coup did nothing to slow the pace. In August 2001, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) published a report on " The Impact of the May 19 Coup on Women in Fiji " (hereafter referred to as FWCC Report).[54] This was followed in January 2002 by a report entitled, " NGO Report on the Status of Women in the Republic of the Fiji Islands " (hereafter referred to as NGO Report). The latter report was authored by three major Fijian human rights organizations, in cooperation with several other groups.[55] A third report, " Gender Profile of the Conflict in Fiji, " was issued by UNIFEM.[56] The following is based primarily on these reports, as well as news clips

and other information available on the internet. Much of the information was confirmed during a short field survey conducted in February 2003.

The coups affected women in various ways. Firstly, both in 1987 and in 2000, many women, particularly Indo-Fijian women, were the targets of direct violence perpetrated by indigenous Fijians. Secondly, the coups had a serious impact on the tourist industry, a large employer of women, and other industries such as the garment industry, forcing many women to lose their jobs or have their hours reduced. This resulted in an increase in poverty. Thirdly, the coups allowed for racial inequality, and many human rights violations occurred. Fourthly, the coups put a stop to legislative changes benefiting women that had been in the process of being promulgated. Finally, the coups had the effect of making the entire society more violent, increasing the incidence of domestic violence, suicide and abuse.

1. Direct Violence and Threats of Direct Violence

Human rights activists in Fiji report that for many months after the 2000 coup, many women, particularly non-indigenous women, lived in fear of violence. In particular, rural Indo-Fijian women were the victims of targeted and orchestrated violence, including allegations of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Many Indo-Fijian farming families fled their homes, some going to a refugee center, and others going to relatives. Some families left their homes at night, sleeping in the bush, only to return in the morning to find they had been looted. Property was stolen and/or destroyed.[57]

Sexual violence and/or the threat of sexual violence was frequent. The FWCC found that beginning on the day of the coup Indo-Fijian women were the target of ‘ race motivated rapes ’(primarily gang rapes). Women were also subjected to sexual humiliations and threats of rape, the purpose of which was to force men into cooperating with demands for money, livestock, food, etc.[58] One such case was reported by the FWCC as follows:

> An elderly couple, dairy farmers, in their sixties, have been living peacefully in a rural community with their neighbours - both Indian and Fijian - for 49 years. One night following May 19th, they were attacked in

> their home by a group of men. Their house was looted and they were assaulted from 9 pm to 2 am. They were kicked and beaten and dragged from room to room. The woman was gang-raped.... They have lost all their belongings, their home and 70 head of cattle.... The case was reported to the police, but so far there has been no action taken.[59]

For Indo-Fijian women, there is a tremendous stigma attached to rape. For this reason, many women were reluctant to report having been raped because they did not want their husbands and other family members to know. When the rape was known, women had to deal with increased tensions in their family relationships.

In addition to rape, the FWCC Report showed that 14% of the women surveyed reported verbal and/or physical abuse to themselves or their families. This abuse included, for example, racist and/or sexual comments, as well as threats of violence. "One Indo-Fijian woman...reported how rebels had poured benzene over her, and then looted the house, all the while threatening to set her alight."[60]

One result of this violence was that people were afraid to go out at night, and greatly cut down on visits to friends and family, picnics, long-distance travel and entertainment such as movies or parties. Schools were closed after the coup, but when they reopened in August, many people felt it was not safe to send their children to school.[61]

Direct violence after the coup was not limited to ethnic violence. The FWCC Report found that domestic violence (tension/arguments, verbal abuse, physical abuse) also became more prevalent, both in indigenous and in Indo-Fijian households, and that women had become more reluctant to report cases of domestic violence when it did occur.[62] Similar to what happened in 1987, particularly in the case of indigenous Fijian women,"there is no law now"was given as the reason for increased domestic violence. Those married to soldiers or police said their husbands felt themselves"above the law,"and therefore able to do as they pleased. Women also reported that the long hours and check-points, etc. increased men's drinking and opportunities for extra-marital sex.[63]

The impact of this direct and/or threatened violence took its toll on the emotional state of women. According to the FWCC Report, 73% of women felt worried after the

coup, and many also reported confusion, frustration, panic, depression and short-temper. Many women reported having difficulty sleeping. In addition, there was an increase in suicide and attempted suicide. The FWCC suicide hotlines reported financial problems and family tensions as the primary reasons for suicide and/or attempted suicide.[64] The decline in the economy resulting in increased financial pressures and poverty since the first coups have no doubt contributed to this rise in the incidence of suicide.

2. Economic Impact

Like many Pacific Island countries, Fiji is moving from a high reliance on subsistence agriculture to high reliance on the cash economy. Even before the 2000 coup, poverty levels in Fiji were high. According to the 1997 Fiji Poverty Report, 25% of the Fiji population lived in poverty and an additional 25% lived near the poverty line.[65] This indicates a high level of vulnerability to crises, be they political, natural or personal disasters. The 2000 coup provided just such a crisis.

Poverty has been exacerbated by the neo-liberal policies of the Fiji government. In addition to high levels of employment in the public sector, employment in Fiji is concentrated in several areas: tourism, manufacturing and cane production. Tax Free Zones and incentives to foreign manufacturers have brought low-wage manufacturing to Fiji in the form of garment factories and fish processing. Employees are primarily women, and the wages they receive are not sufficient to support their families. A VAT (value added tax[66]), currency devaluation and increases in the cost of water have not helped matters.

After the 1987 and the 2000 coups, economic sanctions were imposed on Fiji by the international community, tourism dropped significantly and employment was reduced. Thousands of people lost their jobs or had their hours curtailed. After the 2000 coup, power production at the Monasavu Dam on Vitu Levu was rationed, and curfews were put into effect. The curfews lasted until just before Christmas, 2000. These curfews affected small businesses such as barbecue sellers, who operate primarily at night.

Moreover, after the 2000 coup, job cuts, reduced working hours and pay cuts were introduced across the board. Generally women were laid off first, as women's earnings were not considered to be as essential as men's earnings. Some women lost their jobs

as a result of being afraid to go to work. The *Fiji Sun* reported the following: "Job losses rose to over 7500 by September 2000. A survey by the Ministry for Labour of 897 employers showed that the redundancy figure stood at 7536. 1976 of these redundancies were in the tourist industry, and 1694 in the garment industry."[67] The reduction in earnings led to reduced spending, which in turn affected small businesses, market vendors and farmers as people spent money only on essential goods. Pay cuts and reduced hours also affected domestic workers such as housekeepers and baby sitters. The agriculture sector was also affected. Many farmers had suffered property damage in the coup, and many had been told their leases would not be renewed. This had a serious impact on farming. Increases in fuel and transport costs meant that it was more difficult for farmers to get their goods to market. Handicraft sellers and others who relied on tourism were also seriously affected. Overall, the effect on household incomes was severe, particularly in lower income families. According to the FWCC Report, the number of households earning less than $50 per week more than doubled.[68]

The reduction in employment, coupled with increasing prices, had serious implications for families. Women reported they were having difficulty keeping up with housing and other payments, and some tried to reduce spending by keeping their children home from school and reducing the quality of meals. Children were sent to school without lunch; many of them did not have breakfast, either.[69] Since men had lost their jobs, divorced women found that their maintenance payments were not paid, and court orders could not be enforced. Tensions in families having difficulty making ends meet rose, leading to the violence discussed in the previous section.

According to Brij Lal, "Perhaps the most important consequence in the long term has been the emigration of the country's best and brightest to greener pastures in North America and Australasia, draining the small island nation of skills and talent it can ill-afford to lose."[70] The exodus by primarily Indo-Fijians represents a great loss of important human resources for Fiji.

3. Impact on Legislation and the Status of Women

One of the most serious long term implications of the 2000 coup for women was the fact that legislative and legal reforms which had been in progress before the coup

were ignored and/or obstructed by the post-coup government. Here I will briefly discuss five examples: the legal definition of discrimination, the Family Law Bill 2000, the Industrial Relations Bill, the Evidence Bill and the Blueprint 2000.

Fiji ratified CEDAW in 1995, but had made little progress in incorporating the obligations into national legislation by the time of the 2000 coup. While the 1997 Constitution holds equality to be a supreme value and states that all are equal under the law, there is no constitutional or legal definition of discrimination against women. This omission means that there is much discretion left to the courts as to what in fact constitutes sex discrimination. In addition, under the 1997 Constitution, a Bill of Rights included sexual orientation under the list of grounds for discrimination. After the coup, the government indicated its desire to change this. In fact, sodomy is illegal under the current criminal code and in spite of the anti-discrimination stipulation in the Bill of Rights, gay people continue to be arrested and harassed.

Legal practices and attitudes of the courts and judicial officials, as well as family and common law itself, are deeply entrenched in the sexist and patriarchal nature of Fijian society. The Family Law Bill 2000 was drafted to remove endemic discrimination against women and children. It sought to change nine pieces of outdated legislation which had been passed between 1892 and 1973. After the coup, this Bill was removed from the legislative agenda.[71]

With regard to sexual offences, legislation had been drafted, a Commissioner appointed and public forums convened on legislation regarding sexual offences and gender-based violence. After the coup, work on reforms of evidence rules in rape and protections against gender-based violence virtually came to a standstill. For example, some Courts continued to use past sexual history as evidence in rape cases, and many Courts required corroboration. The Violence against Women Task Force became more or less defunct, with no budgeting allocations. There is no constitutional prohibition of violence against women, domestic violence or child abuse.

The Industrial Relations Bill was released in 1998, and reflected the concerns of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and other women's groups with regard to working conditions and the needs of working women. Since the coups, work on this legislation was subject to delay tactics from both employers and unions, and attempts to bring it to the Labour Advisory Board, a necessary step before it is brought to Cabinet and to

Parliament, were thwarted.

Perhaps of most concern over the long-term are the‘ Blueprint of Fijian and Rotuman Rights and Interests and the Advancement for their Development ’and the Social Justice Bill. The Blueprint is a policy document of‘ affirmative action ’measures which attempts to guarantee political control by, and provide economic opportunities for, indigenous Fijians. It harks back to the long-standing perception of Fijians as economically disadvantaged, and seeks to rectify that situation. It does not directly address gender considerations and/or women’s issues. Robertson and Sutherland characterize this Blueprint as a“ repacking of old recipes, ”(which benefited only elites) and make two points about it. Firstly they point out that for the majority of ordinary Fijians, this Blueprint is unlikely to be any more successful than previous attempts at redressing economic disadvantage. Secondly, they suggest that the Blueprint relies heavily on government grants. The bulk of this government money comes from taxpayers, much of which is paid by non-Fijians. As the Blueprint does not contain any mechanism for accountability and transparency, it will be difficult to assess the degree to which it is successful.[72]

Women’s rights organizations in Fiji do not dispute the meaning of ensuring the rights of oppressed groups. They do, however, object to legislation which clearly gives priority to one group at the expense of the other. Critics say that the Blueprint excludes not only the largest and poorest groups in Fiji - women of all races - but especially the group that is most in need of the assistance it proposes to offer - poor indigenous Fijian women. According to the NGO Report, poor indigenous Fijian women“ ...do not have the knowledge, know how, or skills to tap into the available resources offered by the Blueprint. As it is drafted, and without strict safeguards, the Blueprint will only benefit indigenous women of the already advantaged, upper economic classes and indigenous women of Chiefly rank and power. ”[73] Moreover, it was feared that the funding required to implement the Blueprint would take away resources which might otherwise have been made available for implementing programs for women.

4. Women’s Resistance and Work for Peace

Women were quick to oppose the overthrow of the Bavadra government in 1987.

On 16 May, in what may have been the first protest after the coup, hundreds of people gathered in front of the official prime minister's residence where Bavadra and his cabinet were being held. They sat in the street and began a vigil, refusing demands by soldiers and others to leave. The crowd, led by three Fijian women leaders, linked arms and sang and prayed in the face of raised guns and armored trucks. Arrests were made, but the peaceful protest continued the next day, ending in a march to the city center. Women continued to be involved in the' Back to Early May 'movement in the weeks after the first coup. These women came from a broad range of ethnic backgrounds and political positions. They gathered signatures, prepared leaflets and used political graffiti and other creative methods to call for a return to parliamentary democracy, constitutional government and rule of law.[74]

The political consciousness of women continued to develop after the 1987 coups. In the mid-1990's, 1,200 nurses staged a week-long strike, defying threats of dismissal, a ministerial order declaring the strike illegal and threats of prosecution. In the garment industry, the registration of the Fiji Association of Garment Workers in July 1989 led to organizing and a growing awareness among women in that industry as to their rights.[75] Throughout the 1990's, both indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian women began to find, and raise, their voices.

In 2000, progress made in the nineties faced yet another setback. After the 2000 coup, civil society organizations were forbidden to assemble and free speech was severely curtailed. The television channel was prevented from discussing rights issues during a planned live broadcast. In December 2001, NGOs were prevented from holding peace or anti-war marches, and the Citizen's Constitutional Forum, an extremely vocal and influential human rights NGO, was de-registered. Women's NGOs feared similar treatment. In the words of one organizer," As NGOS are the driving force behind improvements to the status of women, such restrictions, combined with the absence of a legal framework under which NGOs may register, have severely obstructed further work towards equality. "[76]

In spite of these fears, women and women's groups were involved from the beginning in efforts to find peaceful solutions to the crises and have worked to defend the 1997 Constitution. An important example of women's action after the coup was a vigil held daily by the National Council of Women. This was a multiracial peace and

prayer vigil. The first peace and prayer vigil began two days after the coup. It grew into the Fiji Blue Ribbon Campaign, and then into the Fiji Blue Democracy Campaign. Women's NGOs were also very active in the Coalition on Human Rights and Democracy, a coalition which fought the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution.

While some women and women's groups were involved in working for peace and for the restoration of the 1997 Constitution after the 2000 coup, it is important to emphasize that these efforts did not have the support of all women in Fiji. As was noted earlier, the establishment of the Ministry for Women served to promote conservative women's groups having links to traditional as well as political power. While these groups may promote the interests of women to some degree, they are not feminist. At the time of the coup, groups defining themselves as feminist and multiracial included only the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), Femlink Pacific and, to a lesser extent, the Fiji YWCA.[77] These groups worked individually and together, and some members were also involved in other groups active in work for democracy after the coups.

For groups such as the FWRM, both in 1987 and again in 2000, the post-coup agenda was relatively clear-cut. Work had to focus on restoring democracy and constitutional rule. At the same time, the coups threatened the very existence of the organization as the membership separated along racial lines. FWRM refused to work with illegal regimes, and insisted that its agenda must include both women's rights and democracy. The result has been a more politically sophisticated organization, but the struggle to find commonalities among difference has not been easy.

Conclusion

The impetus for this paper was to find reasons for what seemed to be continuing fear after the 2000 coup, even after the return to 'normalcy.' In order to address this question, the paper looked first at the construction of gender, and ethnicity/race from the time of colonization. In thinking about what constitutes 'indigenous' Fijian, it became clear that not only was there not a single Fijian identity, but that the differences in class based on the division between chiefs and commoners and exploited by colonization and the introduction of capitalism, was also an important factor in how events were played out. The institutionalization of sexism and racism in Fiji set the

stage for the expansion of political violence. Militarization of Fiji society after the coups spread and escalated, leading to a general increase in violence across the board. After the coups, women's choices were limited by their lack of economic independence and access to resources. They were brutalized by men whose 'masculine' behavior was affected by that of the army and police. They lost their jobs and their children were unable to attend school. Many were forced to migrate, while others could not afford to do so.

In spite of the fact that relative to many other conflicts around the globe, the level of direct violence in Fiji was comparatively low, political violence led to increases in not only direct violence but cultural and structural violence as well. The political violence that erupted in Fiji in 1987 and again in 2000 had its roots in the ways gender, class and ethnicity/race were constructed during colonization. Attempts by the colonial government to create a unified 'Fijian identity' led to the polarization of Fijian society along ethnic lines. Perceptions of threat and/or disadvantage were manipulated to further deepen these ethnic divisions, while at the same time glossing over significant differences among the indigenous Fijians themselves.

The Blueprint is an example of the structural violence created as a result of these constructions of ethnicity and entitlement. The curtailment of activities of NGOs and civil society organizations is another manifestation of this violence. With regard to the long-term implications for women, a particularly important lesson from Fiji is the setback to legislation for women brought by the coups. Ethnic and nationalist concerns were given precedence over 'women's issues,' leaving the gendered structure of Fijian politics in tact. While there is much talk of peace and reconciliation, it can only come when women and minorities are able to be full participants in decision making. It is encouraging that some of the necessary changes are beginning to take place in Fiji.

Another lesson from Fiji is that the political violence provided an excuse for existing protections for women to be ignored. Rather than protecting women, the police themselves were not only involved in abusing them, but claimed legitimacy in doing so. This calls into question the roles of police and militaries in society, and underlines the necessity for changing these organizations, particularly the ways in which they construct masculinity. Since these organizations are instrumental in the construction

of masculinity in society as a whole, these changes are of particular importance, but for the same reason are particularly difficult. One sign of progress is that the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre now conducts gender training for some Fiji police and military units, particularly those involved in peace-keeping activities.

The entanglement of gender, race/ethnicity and class continues as an extremely difficult reality for people working for women's rights in Fiji today. The quotation at the beginning of this paper reflects that reality. Women's and human rights groups such as those mentioned here have been successful to some degree in bridging the racial divide, but they are still a minority. In a political culture so dependent on the rhetoric of race, and increasingly one which expresses that rhetoric in the language of violence, efforts to find other ways are subject to both direct and indirect violence. Resistance continues, but it is an uphill struggle.

In light of the ways Fiji society has become militarized and violence has increased, it is hardly surprising that during my research stay I sensed fear. The fundamental questions of ethnicity/race, class and gender have yet to be resolved. Hopefully, as marginalized women and men continue to find, and raise, their voices, they will be able to build a new Fiji based not on racism, militarism and authoritarianism but democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Notes

1 Jalal, P. Imrana."Gender Issues in post coup d'état Fiji: snapshots from the Fiji Islands (a short story of life in the feminist trenches)." Keynote Address, Townsville International Women's Conference, 3-7 July 2002, James Cook University, Australia (unpublished paper).

2 The term'Pacific Island Countries'(PIC) refers to the 14 member island countries of the Pacific Island Forum (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu), as well as the non-independent countries: New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Wallis & Futuna, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands, Guam, Tokelau.

3 The story of the demise of Easter Island is proof enough that environmental destruction happens without colonization. The relation to colonization here is through incorporation into the world-economy. For an interesting account of Easter Island, see Diamond, Jared. *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Succeed or Fail.* Penguin Books 2005.

4 Maclellan, Nic."Regional Introduction: Creating Peace in the Pacific-Conflict Resolution, Reconciliation, and Restorative Justice,"in Heijmans, et al. eds., *Searching for Peace in the Aisa-Pacific: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities*. Lynne Reinner, 2004, p. 536 (n.2, 3.)

5 ibid. p.257 (n.9)

6 Rotuma was annexed by the British and remains part of Fiji. As an indigenous minority, Rotumans have a special place in Fijian society. In the context of this paper, they are not included in the term 'indigenous Fijian.'

7 The Pacific is generally divided into three broad geographical/cultural regions: Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia, but each contains many distinct cultures and peoples.

8 For example, Papua New Guinea has more than 700 different languages and the Solomon Islands have more than 150, a function of both geography (mountains are hard to cross) and colonization (borders were drawn according to the needs of the colonizers, not the colonized).
9 Biological diversity refers to both the diversity in the ocean environment and to that in the unique island environments. Typically, there are many biologically diverse groups, but the total number of members in each group is limited.
10 Robertson, Robbie and William Sutherland. *Government by the Gun,* Australia: Pluto Press, 2001, pp.50-51.
11 Cockerton, Camilla.“ Women ”in Rapaport, Moshe, ed. *The Pacific Islands: Environment and Society.* The Bess Press, 1999, p.306
12 Tongamoa, Taiamoni, ed. *Pacific Women: Roles and Status of Women in Pacific Societies.* USP, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1988, pp.4-5
13 Heartfield, James.“‘ You are not a White Woman! ’Apolosi Nawai, the Fiji Produce Agency and the Trial of Stella Spencer in Fiji, 1915. ”*The Journal of Pacific History,* Vol.38, No.1, 2003, p.74.
14 ibid. p.74
15 ibid. p.76. This article discusses the fate of Stella Spencer, a white woman who was said to have been sexually involved with a Fijian man.
16 op. cit. Tongamoa, p.5-7
17 White, Geoffrey M. and Lamont Lindstrom. *Chiefs Today: Traditional Pacific Leadership and the Colonial State.* Stanford University Press, 1997, p.115
18 op. cit. Robertson, p.51
19 Leckie, Jacqueline.“ Women in post-coup Fiji: negotiation work through old and new realities, ”in Akram-Lodhi, A Haroon, ed. *Confronting Fiji Futures.* Asia Pacific Press, 2000, p. 179
20 ibid. pp.178-180
21 Alley, Roderic.“ Fiji ŝ Coups of 1987 and 2000: A Comparison, ”p.3. http://www.womenwarpeace.org/fiji/docs/13_Alley.pdf (3/3/2006)
22 op. cit. Robertson, pp.72-74
23 Thomas, Pamela.“ Introduction: Political participation in the Pacific: issues of gender, race and religion. ” *Development Bulletin 53,* October 2002, p.7
24 More recently, women have been concentrated in the garment manufacturing sector. Their working conditions and pay are poor and they are prevented from organizing. Emberson-Bain,‘ Atu.“ Women, Poverty and Post-Coup Pressure ”in Robie, David, ed. *Tu Galala: Social Change in the Pacific,* Pluto Press Australia, 1992, pp.146-7
25 Halapua, Winston.“ Militarism and Moral Decay in Fiji, ”*Fijian Studies,* Vo.1, No.1, pp.106-107
26 ‘ Three-legged stool ’is a famous metaphor used first by Ratu Sukuna, a Fijian statesman in the first half of the 20th century, to refer to Fiji ŝ three major ethnic groups - Fijians, Indians and Europeans.
27 Lal, Brij V.“ Heartbreak Islands: Reflections on Fiji in Transition, ”*Asia Pacific Viewpoint,* Vol.44, No.3, December 2003, p.336
28 op. cit. Emberson-Bain, pp.147-8
29 op. cit. Alley, p.3
30 ibid. p.4
31 ibid. p.4
32 op. cit. Emberson-Bain, pp.149-150. The Fiji Women ŝ Crisis Centre tried to ease this problem by providing school fees for 50 children and launching a‘ Back to School ’drive to collects books, uniforms, shoes and other essential items.
33 Scarr, 1988 cited in op. cit. Lal, p.337
34 ibid. Lal, p. 337 and op. cit. Lal, 1988
35 27 seats were allocated for Indo-Fijians and 6 for other races
36 op. cit. Lal, pp.337-8
37 Ghai, Yash,“ The implementation of the Fiji Islands Constitution, ”in op. cit. Akram-Lodhi, p.25
38 ibid. p.22
39 ibid. pp.29-30
40 op. cit. Jalal. While feminists see the 1997 constitution as a step forward, many criticize it for not containing a definition of sex/gender discrimination.
41 op. cit. Emberson-Bain, p.154
42 ibid., p.156. The government also claimed to be considering becoming a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women(CEDAW), but did not actually do so until 1995.

43 They were held for 56 days. One woman was released early to attend a relative's funeral. The remaining four women were the first to be released, after rejecting an offer of freedom out of concern for leaving the remaining male captives. UNIFEM,' Gender Profile of the Conflict in Fiji,' http://womenwarpeace.org/fiji/fiji.htm (2006/02/11)
44 op. cit. Robertson and Sutherland, p.1
45 op. cit. Jalal, p.4 and Robertson, p.xv.
46 Amnesty International in FWRM report, p.6
47 The Muanikau Accord provided for amnesty for Speight and his followers and a commitment to redraft the Constitution in exchange for the release of the hostages. In fact, due to failure to fulfill certain provisions, Speight and his group were arrested and charged with treason on 26 July 2000.
48 ' NGO Report on the Status of Women in the Republic of the Fiji Islands,'12 January 2002, p.5
49 op. cit. Alley, p.10. At the time of colonization, there were three large confederacies. The British incorporated the western and central parts of Viti Levu into existing structures rather than creating a new one where no prior confederacy had existed. The creation of a fourth confederacy has been a political question ever since.
50 ibid. pp.10-11
51 Cabrera-Balleza, Mavic." Fiji: Trouble in Paradise. One on One with Raijeli Nicole of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement,"p.2. http://www.isiswomen.org/wia/wia100/soc00013.html, accessed 11/11/2004.
52 *The Sunday Post,* 19 May 2002, p. 2
53 op. cit Emberson-Bain, pp.153-4
54 This was a survey of 414 women throughout Fiji conducted by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) in September 2000. In August 2001, the FWCC published the results in a report entitled" The Impact of the May 19 Coup on Women in Fiji."
55 The three groups include the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) and Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy (ECREA)." NGO Report on the Status of Women in the Republic of the Fiji Islands,"12 January 2002. http://www.iwraw-ap.org/using_cedaw/fig.doc
56 UNIFFEM, Gender Profile of the Conflict in Fiji http://www.womenwarpeace.org/fiji/fiji.htm (2006/02/11)
57 op. cit. FWCC Report, pp.10-11
58 ibid. p.11
59 ibid. p.12
60 ibid. p.12
61 ibid. p.13. Thirty-six percent of the women surveyed said they were afraid to send their children to school. In addition to fear, financial reasons were cited for the reduction in entertainment and for children not returning to school.
62 The survey also reported that some families become closer and their relationships improved as a result of spending more time at home together, since they were afraid to go out after the coup. (ibid. p.18)
63 ibid. pp.17-18
64 ibid. pp.15-16
65 Cited in op. cit. NGO Report, p.8. (The Report says that this 1997 report was based on figures from 1990-91).
66 The VAT on basic food items which had been lifted was re-imposed by the Interim Administration. They also increased bus and taxi fares. op. cit. FWCC Report, p.6
67 *Fiji Sun,* 2 September 2000 cited in op. cit. FWCC Report, p.4.
68 ibid. p.7
69 ibid. pp.6-7
70 " Fiji Islands: From Immigration to Emigration "(3/3/2006) http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/print.cfm?ID=110
71 op. cit. NGO Report, p.10, 25-26. The Family Law Bill was finally passed on 14 October 2003.
72 op. cit. Roberson and Sutherland, pp.103-104
73 op. cit. NGO Report, p.14
74 op. cit. Emberson-Bain, p.157-8.
75 ibid., pp.160-162
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