

Coup editorial content:

Analysis of the Fiji 2000 political crisis

Both the *Fiji Times* and the *Daily Post* reinforced the colonial myth that Fijian chiefs are the rightful rulers of Fiji, emphasising that Fiji, and this presumably means Fijians, was not ready for a multiracial constitution.

By LYNDA DUNCAN

THE EDITORIALS of two established daily newspapers in Fiji, *The Fiji Times* and the *Daily Post* were analysed for their comment during the period 1 May 2000 —31 July 2000, a period covering the takeover of the Fiji Parliament on May 19, the taking of politicians as hostages, their subsequent release and the events relating to the political crisis.

The two newspapers selected for this research, *The Fiji Times* and the *Daily Post* were selected because they are both published in Fiji and because they employ journalists who are trained within Fiji. These newspapers are not published in a western country and therefore are not providing western commentary on a crisis in a developing country. They are newspapers that are commenting on events in their country of publication. The two papers are similar in size and are difficult to classify, belonging neither to the tabloid press nor the quality broadsheet print media.¹

The media context

Fiji has a fairly extensive media infrastructure with three major daily newspapers, *The Fiji Times*, *Daily Post* and *The Sun*, one commercial television station, Fiji One, eight commercial radio stations, three monthly business magazines (at the time of the attempted coup), and numerous other commercial publications. A research media survey published in April 2000, where participants of the poll

were asked the question: “Did you read a particular newspaper yesterday?” showed, however, that newspaper readership is generally falling (*Pacific Media Watch*, April 2000).

Four percent of those polled had read the *Daily Post* (down from 9 percent in 1998) while 30 percent had read *The Fiji Times* (down from 35 percent in 1998), while Fiji One, the only commercial TV station in Fiji, claims to have a reach of 80 percent of Fiji’s population (*Pacific Media Watch*, April 2000). There continues to be intense competition between the three daily newspapers for readership and while newspapers remain a fairly inexpensive source of information they will remain an important information source for people within Fiji. Certainly the significance that the government places on what is reported in newspapers is an indication of the considerable role newspapers have in Fijian society.

The editors of both papers during the crisis period were Fijian², and while this research excludes analysis of an Indo-Fijian perspective of the crisis, I wanted to compare how the two Fijian editors responded to George Speight’s claims that the takeover was conducted in the interests of indigenous Fijians. While it is noted that editorials reflect the views of the owners of the press, it was also noted that the editors generally share the world view of the organisation’s executive.

The Fiji Times was first published over 130 years ago, making it the longest running newspaper in Fiji and the South Pacific. It is a foreign-owned newspaper, part of the Rupert Murdoch news conglomerate. During the Fiji political crisis, Netani Rika was acting editor in the absence of Russell Hunter, an Australian who was refused an extension of his work visa by the Chaudhry government. *The Fiji Times* was several times singled out by The Chaudhry government for bitter criticism and at one stage was accused by Chaudhry (1999) of “fanning the fires of sedition and racism”, a charge the newspaper rejected. *The Fiji Times* was considered a vocal critic of the Chaudhry government and its editors were generally thought to have a personal distaste for Mahendra Chaudhry and his style, particularly towards the media (Robie 2000b).

The *Daily Post* has a slightly different ownership structure because its shareholders include the government (about 40 percent), and private enterprise (60 percent). The paper underwent a major revamp in February 1999 with the Rabuka government purchasing its 40 percent shareholding in the paper at that

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stage. Ranjit Singh was appointed as general manager and Jale Moala remained as editor.³ The Chaudhry government's decision to retain its shares in the *Daily Post* surprised many and Chaudhry was criticised by economic commentators and members of the public when he revealed that the government planned to invest more money in the paper (Digitaki 2000).

The daily circulation of the *Post* is well below that of *The Fiji Times*, estimated at approximately 9,500 per day. The *Daily Post*, however, also publishes its editorials on the internet. The *Post* and *The Fiji Times* cover Fiji national and foreign news, features, business and sport. The *Times* dominates the advertising market. However, the *Post* has seen an increase in government advertisements because of the Chaudhry government's policy to restrict its advertising to the *Post*.

The two newspapers are different in structure and this was reflected in their coverage of events since the Labour-led government came to power. *The Fiji Times* has been accused of being anti [Chaudhry] government, while the *Daily Post*, being partially government owned, was more muted in its criticism and balanced in its reporting since the election in 1999. It would be expected therefore that the *Times*, while maybe critical of the methods used, would be more sympathetic to the aspirations of the crisis perpetrators, while the *Post* would have little sympathy for the overthrow of the government. It is also expected that these positions would be reflected in the editorials because editorials are the only segment of the paper that allows editors and editorial boards to express their opinions of events.

My hypothesis proposed that *The Fiji Times* represented and reinforced the ruling class ideology in Fiji, a ruling class who were determined to consolidate political power by promoting the role of the chiefly elite and thereby disguising the tension caused by class relations in society. However, the *Daily Post*, as a partially government owned organisation would be more likely to represent

government interests, including a return to democratic rule and to discuss the importance of class relations as a social change agent in Fiji. Nevertheless, the *Daily Post* is also expected to reflect in part the dominant ideology because of partial ownership of the paper by private companies.

Of the total editorials analysed between the period May 20 to July 13 when the hostages were held in Parliament Buildings, the majority were devoted to the political crisis. The editorials were analysed according to the following themes:

- colonial legacy
- ethnic rule legitimacy
- role of chiefs
- appropriateness of democratic system
- role of different sectors in society
- existence of social class in society
- other

Approximately one-third of both papers' editorials commented on the role of different sectors in society during the crisis, while the democratic system and the role of individual chiefs and the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) were the next most frequent editorial topics. Neither paper mentioned the existence of social class within Fiji, although division between Fijians and Indo-Fijians, and between Fijians was mentioned.

Colonial legacy

The editorials rarely mentioned a connection between the current situation and historical events. However, the *Daily Post* did comment on how there appeared to be a post-colonial pattern of attempted government overthrows without analysing why countries that had been subject to colonial rule appeared to be subject to such political crises. *The Fiji Times* did attempt a link between the 1987 coups and the 2000 parliamentary takeover by observing that the current takeover had changed the perspective that the 1987 coups were a "one-off political crisis" (15 July 2000). However, no analysis of any linkage between the 1987 and the 2000 events was provided.

Ethnic rule legitimacy

The Fiji Times declared that the crisis occurred because Fijians did not trust an Indo-Fijian Prime Minister to deliver security of Fijian rights and guarantee of Fijian leadership, while the *Daily Post* (30 June 2000) blamed the current crisis

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The *Daily Post* (18 July 2000) recognised that "no single ethnic group can lay claim to the ownership of Parliament". However, The *Daily Post* was contradictory in its position because the day before (17 July 2000) it had criticised the Fiji Council of Churches for "sowing the seeds of division [at the 1999 election] by sanctioning a political party when a mainstream Fijian political party was already in power". This message reflected the emphasis by the *Daily Post* on the importance of Fijian unity and in particular the ingrained belief that political stability requires all Fijians to unite behind the chiefly leaders. This statement supports the belief that all Fijians should vote along ethnic lines and should trust the GCC to deliver what is in the best interest of all Fijians.

The Fiji Times did not mention the ethnic separation that exists in the political system. However, it criticised Indo-Fijians for not taking up positions that were offered to them

in the interim administration put together to replace the Chaudhry Government. No attempt was made to analyse why Indo-Fijians might not have considered such a position appropriate. Such analysis would have had to consider the bias towards Fijians in Parliament and the reluctance of Indo-Fijians to support an administration that has resulted in the disempowerment of their race. *The Fiji Times* editor expressed the view that one of the roles of the interim government was to ensure that Fijian interests would be secure. *The Fiji Times* acknowledged that racism existed within Fiji, but blamed certain individuals for using the perceived division between Fijians and Indo-Fijians for self-gain. This places the responsibility back on the individual and does not recognise that the structure of government has contributed to the ethnic divide. It also glosses over the division that exists within the Fijian community, especially on issues of governance, ideology, leadership and poverty.

The division of the House of Representatives along ethnic lines and the

THE Fiji Times

THE FIRST NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED IN THE WORLD TODAY

MONDAY, MAY 22, 2000 40 PAGES \$06 FWSKT 13th YEAR No. 122



No threat, no surrender — a gunman orders journalists to the ground after shots were fired at Vaini yesterday evening.

Gunmen fire warning shots

Schools to stay shut

JOURNALISTS ducked for cover as shots rang out around the Parliament Complex last night.

The shots rang out around here and gunmen showed at least one person down before they fled.

A government vehicle was positioned at the entrance while armed guards were strategically posted at the exit.

Several stood behind the gate, one crouched around the parked vehicle covering all possible angles and at least two others were seen standing near the entrance to the

site to "keep your head down" and "stand behind the vehicle".

Journalists and photographers were allowed to go to the complex but told to stay down.

The shooting lasted for more than 10 minutes.

Security officials said the shots were fired as a warning to the police.

But they leader George Speight said the shots were fired from outside Parliament.

He said military commander Commodore Frank Bainimarama had ordered him over the phone that some of his

said they were gunfire the shots had been fired by security guards inside.

Mr Speight said this was not true, adding there might be a third party within the parliament.

Later Mr Speight said he would avoid confrontation and will continue to pursue dialogue with President Ratu Sir Kamaloso Mara.

He expressed his concern over Ratu Sir Kamaloso's comments that the press be moved back one kilometre from the complex.

As a result, he said, his security officers asked the

constitutional.

Mr Speight stressed he would promote further dialogue to resolve the impasse.

"We have resolved to proceed, Chaudhry and his associates and we are committed to ensure their safety," he said.

On Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry's health, Mr Speight said the Labour leader was in good health and his personal physician Dr Shekhar Bhat would remain in the complex with him.

Those who have seen Mr Chaudhry say there are no medical injuries and he appeared

unharmed in several areas are expected to remain closed today because of transport's problems.

The Education Ministry has asked management of schools to assess individual circumstances and decide whether to hold classes.

Teachers have been advised not to send children to school if transport is a problem.

But parents are waiting for the police to give them the go-ahead to resume operations.

The University of the South Pacific will be closed but the Fiji School of Medicine will hold normal classes.

All essential civil services will operate as normal.

But operations would not include election centre transport and mail. Most companies which will open have arranged transport for their staff.

Meanwhile, police are expected to provide limited assistance to companies as normal.

All hospitals will operate as normal. Patients have been asked by the Ministry of Education not to send their children to school until further notice.

The Fiji Public Services Association has called on members to close workplaces for the Government to stage a protest tomorrow.

Attempts for contact from the Fiji Teachers Union, the Fiji Teachers Association and the FTTC

Gunmen fire warning shots: *The Fiji Times* on 22 May 2000.

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dominant position of chiefs in the Senate was not mentioned and this has contributed to the belief that Fiji, by necessity, must be divided by race. There was no discussion of the appropriateness of the government structure that was set up at independence in 1970, nor was there commentary on how democracy can effectively operate within a electoral system biased towards one race. Although the *Daily Post* recognised that Fijians were not united, the editor expressed the view that Fijians should be a united group, thereby, along with *The Fiji Times* affirming that the two main races in Fiji should be separate, homogeneous units, with the same aspirations, beliefs, opinions, wants and needs.

Role of the chiefs

Both *The Fiji Times* and the *Daily Post* were very clear about the role Fijian chiefs should take during the crisis and in the future. Both papers saw the chiefs, especially the GCCs⁴ as responsible for resolving the situation and for providing the future leadership of the country. No questions were raised as to the legitimacy of the chiefs taking on these roles, the legitimacy appeared to be taken for granted and therefore did not need to be questioned. In contrast, both newspapers ignored the role of Indo-Fijians in resolving the crisis and as future leaders. It is more realistic to assume that the editors do not see a leadership role for Indo-Fijians in Fiji because both *The Fiji Times* and the *Daily Post* made mention of how the chiefs needed to act on behalf of *all* people in resolving the crisis, thereby indicating that the chiefs could understand, include and represent Indo-Fijian interests in their resolutions and therefore it is not necessary for Indo-Fijians to take on active leadership roles. *The Fiji Times* recognised that division existed within the GCC, and that tension has been caused by the traditional role of the chief in modern society (3 and 13 July 2000). The newspaper also noted that chiefs represented different political ideologies and often had different political agendas. Despite these observations *The Fiji Times* always reached the conclusion that it is the GCC that should provide the “way forward” for Fiji and that they can do this on behalf of all sections of the community.

The *Daily Post* did not recognise any real division between the chiefly elite, and even stated that George Speight’s takeover of Parliament was the cause of the chiefly, tribal and provincial interests being raised for the first time, interests which are “totally against the grain of Fijian tradition” (7 July 2000). The *Daily*

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Post gave more space to the role of the chiefs, and to the protection of their power structure. It asserted that the GCC, responsible for protecting and promoting Fijian interests, should decide the future of Fiji. A fundamental role of the chiefs, (13 July 2000) was considered to be in “upholding the fabric and structure of our culture” and advising “common Fijians” to “submit to the will of the chiefs”.

The legitimacy of the chiefs as the rightful leaders of Fiji was upheld by both papers, with this leadership not just on behalf of Fijians but also Indo-Fijians. This reflects how editors and publishers can use their position to ensure that dominant ruling interests get their message across to the public. Protection of the chiefs leadership role in government attempts to consolidate the position of the chiefs and the GCC in society and to consolidate the power base of the newspaper owners.

Democratic system

The issue of whether the democratic system inherited from the colonial government at independence was appropriate to Fijian society was not discussed by either *The Fiji Times* or the *Daily Post*. However, the key message from both papers was for a return to democracy, indicating that both accepted, upheld and regarded as appropriate the democratic political system in the governance of Fiji. *The Fiji Times* commitment to democratic rule appeared to depend on firstly ensuring that Fijian interests were protected through an appropriate constitution (17 June 2000). While it appeared that *The Fiji Times* used the editorials to support a democratic system, there were also statements made that seemed to undermine this position. The editor used the paper to voice criticism of Mahendra Chaudhry and his government early in the crisis, and rather than supporting the return of the democratically elected government insisted on his resignation because he must “accept responsibility for the role he has played in the lead-up to the crisis” (26 May 2000). *The Fiji Times* displayed strong support for the interim government despite the lack of mandate from the voting public and urged the entire nation to back this administration because it was could be “trusted to chart a way forward for people of all races” (5 July 2000). Democracy then appeared to be the right political system for Fiji as long as Fijians, and especially the GCC dominated the leadership positions.

The *Daily Post* editorials focused more on the legitimate political options that had been available to George Speight through which he could have aired his grievances instead of overthrowing Parliament. The *Daily Post* criticised

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Speight on a number of occasions for failing to use the democratic political structure and noted that taking the law into one's own hands was "not Fijian" (7 July 2000). However, The *Daily Post* like *The Fiji Times*, did not advocate a return to the Chaudhry government, commenting that "while understandable that he will protest loudly and internationally, this will only lead to further tension and racial feeling" (23 June 2000). By July 14 the *Daily Post* was prepared to deny Chaudhry his right to protest stating that "Chaudhry must not begin a protest campaign but must consider whether there would be a better way to exercise leadership".

Despite both papers declaring their support for a return to democracy neither paper was prepared to advocate the return of the Chaudhry government. The concept of democracy, while acknowledged as basis of the political system appeared to take second priority behind Fijian self-interest. This was demonstrated by the insistence of both papers

on a return to constitutional rule that protected Fijian interests.

Societal sectors

Trade and sporting bans imposed by Australia and New Zealand were condemned by both *The Fiji Times* and the *Daily Post* and were considered interference in Fiji's domestic situation. The *Daily Post* called them "misplaced, illegal and uncalled for" (26 June 2000) and accused the international community of "diplomatic blackmail (16 June 2000)⁵. *The Fiji Times* were concerned that bans would cause further misery for the "innocent victims" (22 May 2000)². It accused Australia and New Zealand for being "hypocritical bullies" for placing bans on Fiji sport teams while not applying the same restrictions to Pakistan (15 June 2000). Both papers considered the political crisis an internal matter and therefore not subject to interference from external communities.

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being lax in their duties in the lead up to May 19, observing that “if security forces had been alert to political developments and unusual activity then the May 19 crisis could have been uncovered and stopped” (18 July 2000). This position differed from the paper’s first impression of the military’s performance when it lauded the military for accepting executive authority and bringing a feeling of safety and security to the nation (31 May and 1 June 2000). *The Fiji Times* was vocal in its condemnation of the army for “not doing enough to end the crisis” (1 July 2000).

The Daily Post praised the military for its decisions and recognised its role in restoring law and order. One point of concern raised by the paper was how some members of the military had turned against the government (25 May 2000). This betrayal, the editor believed should be addressed by the media. This was the only occasion that the role of the media was raised by either paper during the period May 19 to July 31. The role expectations of other cultural institutions were also absent, with the exception of the role of the church, specifically the Fijian Council of Churches which was criticised by the *Daily Post* for becoming involved in politics and thereby contributing to the split of the Fijian vote at the 1999 election (17 July 2000).

Social class

The existence of social classes was neglected by both editors, who preferred to examine society in terms of ethnic class interests. *The Fiji Times* recognised individual interests, in particular the Fiji Council of Trade Unions head and of Cabinet members in the new interim administration. The emphasis was on the relationship of the individual to the state, and not of any conscious class group action. *The Daily Post* did not mention individual interests. It referred only to the “chiefs” as leaders of “common” Fijians.

The election results in 1977, 1987 and 1999 showed that Fijians voted for political parties that represented their interests, not necessarily the interests of the Fijian chiefs. Indo-Fijians are also not a homogeneous unit as demonstrated by the wealthy elite’s general support for the Alliance Party. While both papers did recognise that differences existed between Fijians, the editors encouraged Fijians to unite to ensure a stable society, thereby encouraging the concept of ethnic homogeneity and ignoring the different interests that exist within each ethnic group.

Summary of themes

While the interpretation of events and behaviours have been perceived differently on occasion, the papers were in agreement on how society should be structured and never questioned why this structure had developed and if this structure was appropriate for Fiji.

Government ownership of a newspaper does not, in this situation, appear to guarantee the loyalty and support of the paper. While this may lend to affirmation of the media as an impartial commentator, I believe that it supports the claim that the media works in the interests of the dominant elite. It was because Fijian chiefs were subject to the leadership of an Indo-Fijian prime minister and a government that included a socially diverse range of people that the *Daily Post* did not call for the reinstatement of the Chaudhry government. The Chaudhry government was not controlled by the chiefly elite and it pursued policies aimed to address poverty both within the Indo-Fijian and Fijian communities. A reminder of the failure of the political party generally supported by the chiefs to address these social and economic differences that existed in society could have led to further disintegration of the power base of the chiefs and the weakening of the traditional Fijian social clan structure⁶.

It would be a mistake to treat the chiefly elite as a homogenous unit because the chiefs do have different political agendas, interests and priorities. However, these differences appear to be inconsequential when what are considered ‘fundamental’ rights of the Fijians and dominance of the chiefly elite are perceived to be at risk⁷. The GCC acts as a coordinating body through which the chiefs can air their differences but come to some consensus on policy positions. The result is that the GCC appears to be a cohesive and coordinated body on issues of Fijian security and therefore be representing the interests of all Fijians.

One measure of whether the newspapers supported the dominant elite is to consider to what degree the editorial messages differed from the demands of George Speight to protect “indigenous” Fijian interests. The editors of both papers supported his initial demands that the Chaudhry government be dismissed and the 1997 Constitution abrogated. While the editors did not agree with the method Speight employed, neither editor supported the reinstatement of the 1997 constitution nor did they consider that there was a further role for the Chaudhry government in Fiji politics. The papers did not support the reinstatement of the 1990 Constitution nor did they foresee any role for most of Speight’s supporters in an interim administration. Both upheld the protection of

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Fijian interests, particularly political leadership and land ownership. Neither *The Fiji Times* nor the *Daily Post* overtly supported equal leadership of the Indo-Fijians with the Fijians or mentioned any future role in political authority for any race except for those categorised as “Fijian”. To what extent the reinforcement of Speight’s initial demands was the result of a form of censorship in place during the crisis period is considered.

Self-censorship?

At the time of the armed takeover of parliament there was no similar takeover of the country’s radio and television stations, or the newspaper offices. Either the group did not consider the country’s press as a threat to their campaign, or were hoping to use media freedom to their advantage⁸. Unlike the Rabuka coups no official censorship was imposed on the press. It appeared as if the media organisations were free to report on the crisis as they wished.

There were, however, constraints on press freedom. A number of events occurred during the crisis that have been interpreted by the Committee to Protect Journalists⁹ as attacks against the Fiji media and therefore defined as a form of censorship. It is impossible to know for certain if, and to what extent, these events had an impact of the editorial content in *The Fiji Times* or the *Daily Post*¹⁰. The role of the media was not mentioned by either paper between May 19 to July 31, nor was there any condemnation of the treatment of the press by George Speight or his supporters.

It could be that the editors perceived there was no threat as they did not refrain from criticising George Speight and the methods he employed in pursuing his aims. If the editors had perceived any threat to them or the paper, editorials that were critical of him would probably not have been published. There was also no noticeable difference in the tone the editorials adopted from July 13 once all the hostages had been released to provide any indication that the editorials were adopting an approach of “careful reporting” during the time the hostages lives were at risk. It can then be assumed that the documented attacks on journalists did not directly influence the editorial content of either newspaper and therefore the opinions expressed in the paper accurately reflected the opinions of the editors. This rebuts the first part of the hypothesis that the Fiji media during the armed parliamentary overthrow was subjected to control and therefore censorship by the perpetrators of the political crisis, and this would be reflected in the editorial content over the crisis period.

If the media in general did not perceive much of a threat to them or their organisations during this crisis this begs the question of how the media reacted during the crisis¹¹. On May 21, Ratu Mara directed Fiji TV not to broadcast any statements by Speight or his supporters. This direction was not applied to other sections of the media and from May 19 to his arrest George Speight had numerous interviews with media organisations and organised daily press conferences. William Parkinson, then president of the Pacific Island News Association, noted that during the crisis “all parties [involved in the crisis] have gone out of their way to make themselves accessible [to the media]” (*Fiji Times*, 10 July 2000:7) demonstrating that the media was intimately involved in the strategies developed by each of these parties. The accessibility to George Speight and the attendance of journalists at his press conferences led to charges that the media had “turned a two-bit terrorist into a celebrity” (Parkinson 2000). The media has also been accused of becoming tools of Speight’s crusade to dismantle Fiji’s democracy through the coverage that he received.

It appears that George Speight used the media to ensure coverage of him and his demands, thereby giving him a degree of legitimacy. The decision not to directly control the media organisations in Fiji, allowing the entry of foreign journalists into the country and holding daily press conferences drew the media into the crisis and ensured that daily sales of newspapers remained high. The media then could be seen as an indirect accomplice to Speight in the crisis through keeping his profile high, and by giving a lot of attention to his claims that indigenous Fijian interests were put at risk by policies of the Chaudhry government. George Speight maintained a degree of effective control over the media by setting the terms and the place for media briefings, and ensuring that there was enough “drama” to keep media interest in him and his cause high¹². While there was widespread condemnation of Speight in media reports of the crisis, there can be little doubt that he manipulated the media to further his objectives.

Conclusion

Neither editor provided in-depth analysis of the causes of the political crisis nor related it back to historical events. Instead, both papers tended to write sensational statements rather than promoting audience thought. They both neglected to place events in a social or political context. There were some key differences in the editorial content between the *Daily Post* and *The Fiji Times*:

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❑ The *Daily Post* emphasised the need for Fijians to unite behind the chiefs, thereby ignoring the ideological differences that exist between the chiefs. *The Fiji Times* recognised these differences existed not only in the community in general, but specifically between chiefs.

❑ *The Fiji Times*, while supporting the leadership of the chiefly elite, saw the interim administration providing leadership while the *Daily Post* saw the GCC in the main leadership role.

❑ The *Daily Post* believed the military was doing a good job in controlling the crisis situation, but *The Fiji Times* was critical of the military's handling of the crisis and speed of resolution.

❑ The *Daily Post* saw George Speight as the cause of the crisis, effectively ignoring the historical, political and social causes. *The Fiji Times* emphasised the importance of Fijian mistrust of an Indo-Fijian led government to secure and protect Fijian interests.

❑ *The Fiji Times* also recognised the tension between traditional Fijian social structure and the structure of modern society, noting that this had led to a leadership vacuum. The *Daily Post* did not recognise this tension, instead it promoted enforcing the traditional social structures by "common Fijians submitting to the will of the chiefs".

There were also similarities in the position of the two papers including:

❑ the condemnation of George Speight's methods but not of his reason for overthrowing parliament;

❑ the analysis of society along ethnic lines;

❑ the belief that the chiefs are the rightful leaders of Fiji, both now and in the future;

❑ the return to democracy was considered vital, as long as Fijian interests were protected regardless of the impact on the Indo-Fijian community;

❑ the crisis was considered an internal matter and therefore not subject to outside interference; and

❑ no recognition of social class interests and relations in the structure of society.

Both papers reinforced the colonial legacy that Fijian chiefs are the rightful rulers of Fiji, emphasising that Fiji, and this presumably means Fijians, was not ready for a multi-racial constitution. It appears that neither editor fully comprehended the political process required to amend the Constitution because there was no mention of the special status accorded to Fijians in the 1997 Constitution and how this is well protected due to the two-thirds majority requirements in

both houses for any change. The absence of this type of analysis strengthened the belief that legislation is easily changed on the whim of a prime minister when this is not the reality. This reinforces the perception that an Indo-Fijian prime minister is a “dangerous situation” for Fijians.

The overthrow of the Fiji Parliament on 19 May 2000 caused political and social upheaval, not only in Suva but also through the entire country. The consequence of this action has been to destabilise Fiji politically, socially and economically, and this will continue to impact on the country for years to come. The analysis of the causes of this situation therefore requires consideration of the political, social and economic environment in which the crisis occurred and links made back to the influence of historical events. This environmental analysis and the historical linkage was missing from both *The Fiji Times* and *Daily Post* editorials. Editorials are opinion pieces, which may be why some of the political and social analysis was missing. However, opinions should be backed up by analysis if a structured argument is to be presented. It would be expected that the editorials contain this degree of analysis and consideration of political and social issues.

Notes:

¹ Tabloids tend to concentrate less on political issues unless they are of a scandalous nature. Broadsheet print media are generally aimed at the more educated, wealthy and articulate part of the population (*see* Hope 1996:124). Although these two Fiji newspapers are tabloid-sized, they do carry articles on political issues.

² Fiji Islanders was the name given to the citizens of Fiji in the 1997 Constitution. In this paper the term Indo-Fijian refers to the Fiji Islanders of Indian descent, while the term Fijian refers to those of Melanesian and Polynesian descent.

³ Jale Moala remained editor of the *Daily Post* until 15 June 2000 when he migrated with his family to New Zealand. Mesake Koroi took on the role of acting editor after Moala left.

⁴ The Great Council of Chiefs is a body that was set up by the colonial government to represent Fijian interests in political matters. This council has assumed greater importance since independence and is seen as one of the most powerful institutions in Fiji. It is often used as the final decision-making body.

⁵ The “innocent victims” appeared to consist of everyone except Speight and his supporters, the military and the chiefly elite.

⁶ the clan structure did differ between the Melanesian and Polynesian dominated clans in terms of hierarchy, however all clans were lead by chiefs.

⁷ Despite calls from the western chiefs in 1987 and in 2000 to set up their own

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confederacy in Fiji this has never come to fruition and appears to drop when the chiefs perceive the need to act as a cohesive body.

⁸ There have been claims that George Speight was brought in at the last minute to head the armed takeover because he had media experience and was considered “media savvy” (see Robie 2000b).

⁹ The Committee to Protect Journalists is a non-partisan organisation.

¹⁰ Analysis of whether, and to what extent, the newspapers covered these attacks on the media could provide an indication of the impact of censorship, however this is outside the scope of this article. This article is concerned with whether the editorials contained any indication of media restriction.

¹¹ Rumours did circulate that supporters of George Speight were to descend on the hotel where foreign journalists were staying, causing a number of these foreign journalists to flee to Nadi and back to their home countries in the belief that their safety was at risk. This type of threat did not appear to exist against Fiji media organisations, with the exception of the attack on Fiji TV and the attack on a *Fiji Sun* reporter.

¹² The detention of journalists within the parliamentary complex one evening on the pretext that the military were on orders to shoot to kill anyone who broke the curfew is one demonstration of the dramatic action Speight employed.

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