
Reviews

NIC MACLELLAN

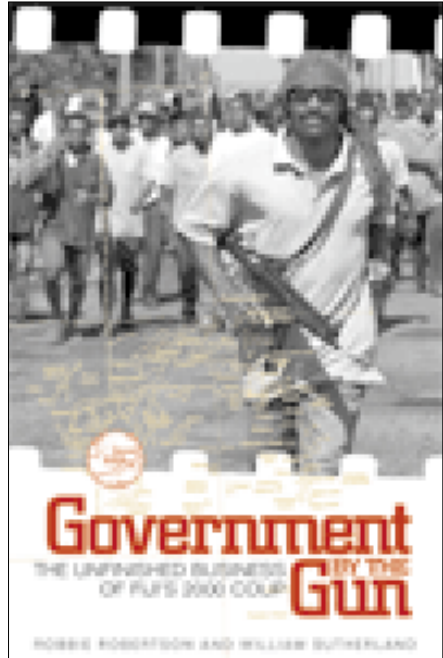
Journalist, researcher and community development worker in the Pacific Islands. He worked in Fiji between 1997-2000.

An engaging analysis of core issues

Government by the Gun: The Unfinished Business of Fiji's 2000 Coup, by William Sutherland and Robbie Robertson. Sydney: Pluto Press, 2001, 372 pp. ISBN:1 86403 139 5.

ON 2 November 2000, I was returning home to Fiji after travelling overseas. Out of the blue, a phone call at the airport warned me that there was shooting at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks - headquarters for the Fiji Military Forces in the capital, Suva. The quickest trip into town from Nausori airport runs past the barracks, but in true Fiji style, the taxi driver told me: "No worries!"

As we neared the barracks, however, and saw men armed with M16 rifles blocking the road, we decided discretion was the better part of val-



our. A quick U-turn and we took the back road in to town. Just another little drama in the weeks after the seizure of Parliament by George Speight and soldiers of the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRWU) — or so I thought.

That night, we gathered at home with our neighbours, a young Fijian woman and a three-generation Indo-Fijian family. In the early evening, the clear night air carried sounds of a fierce firefight at the barracks: heavy

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machine guns, rifle fire and explosions. We muttered calming platitudes, but unspoken was our fear that the attempted takeover of QEB by Speight supporters was spilling beyond the barracks.

This was the army divided — one of many Fijian institutions ripped apart by the events of May 2000. The death toll revealed next morning — three loyalist soldiers shot down in cold blood, and five CRWU rebels beaten to death by vengeful comrades — sent a chill through the community.

Many overseas journalists parachuted into Suva in the aftermath of the aborted putsch by George Speight and former SAS soldier Ilisoni Ligairi. Too many, wowed by Speight's charisma, parroted the mantra of "Fijians versus Indians" to explain the overthrow of the People's Coalition government led by Mahendra Chaudhry and the Fiji Labour Party.

Chaudhry, the first Indo-Fijian elected as Prime Minister since independence in 1970, had certainly earned the enmity of extremists in the Fijian nationalist community. But the aftermath of the May 2000 coup and the army's abrogation of the Constitution on May 29 showed that a central core of the conflict was "Fijian versus Fijian".

This disunity was a fundamental difference between the coups of 1987 and 2000. Sitiveni Rabuka's 1987

takeover was backed by key Fijian institutions, including the army-made up largely of Fijian soldiers ever since World War Two. But George Speight's attempted takeover sowed discord in the judiciary, the Fiji Military Forces, the Methodist Church and the Bose Levu Vakaturaga (Great Council of Chiefs). In my own workplace, there were Fijians with family who were hostages and hostage takers; those who pledged allegiance to deposed President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara or George Speight's favoured replacement Ratu Jopi Seniloli; those who welcomed the upset of the old chiefly established order and those who feared walking home in a climate that celebrated racism and power from the barrel of the gun.

These fundamental tensions within the indigenous community in Fiji are at the heart of this important new book: *Government by the Gun*.

William Sutherland, a former advisor and secretary to Dr Timoci Bavadra — the Fijian leader deposed in the 1987 coup — is the author of a key study of Fiji's political economy: *Beyond the politics of race — an alternative history of Fiji* (ANU, Canberra, 1992).

Robbie Robertson, with his partner Akosita Tamanisau, has long chronicled developments in Fiji, in books such as *Fiji: Shattered Coups* (Pluto Press, Leichhardt, 1988) and

Multiculturalism and reconciliation in a reluctant republic — Fiji after the coups 1988-1998 (FIAPS/ USP, Suva, 1998).

Government by the Gun starts with a brief overview of the events of May 2000: the seizure of Parliament and government hostages; the military takeover, abrogation of Fiji's 1997 Constitution and dismissal of President Ratu Mara; weeks of tension, as the hostages are kept in Parliament for 56 days, a night-time curfew is instituted and Viti Levu suffers rolling power cuts after landowners seize the Monosavu hydro-electricity plant; the appointment of Laisenia Qarase as interim Prime Minister - undemocratic but welcomed by many, as the authors explain: "if nothing else, Qarase was organised and professional."

Beyond their summary of the May 2000 events, the importance of the book is its detailed analysis of Fijian nationalism and the quest for indigenous paramouncy. The authors highlight the contradictions between the demand for Fijian economic and political control in a country where half the population are descendants of Indian indentured labourers, Gujerati businessmen, European planters and a fruit salad of Chinese, islander and "part-European" communities.

The authors look at indigenous rights in the context of Fiji's communal politics, and attempts to create a

democratic and multiracial society while dealing with the legacies of British colonial rule.

Dismissing the rhetoric of indigenous paramouncy, Sutherland and Robertson challenge the notion that all indigenous Fijians have common interests: "Certainly there are common bonds and shared interests but there are conflicting interests as well. The fundamental split is a class division between the elites on the one hand and the poor and disadvantaged on the other and cutting across this are tribal, provincial and regional splits. It has always suited the Fijian elite to hide their class interests behind the rhetoric of Fijian interests and paramouncy and blame the predicament of ordinary Fijians on others — namely the Indians."

Privatisation and opposition

A younger generation of Fijian scholars such as Alumita Duratalo and Sitiveni Ratuva are writing about the quixotic quest for Fijian unity. They have shown how the complex interplay between ethnicity and class benefits the Fijian chiefly and bureaucratic elite.

With the privatisation of government assets throughout the 1990s, a new generation of Fijian political and economic leaders has developed through the public service and statutory corporations.

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Qarase being sworn in as elected Prime Minister of Fiji.

Photo: Pacific Journalism Online (USP)

The transition from Ratu Mara to Laisenia Qarase symbolises this generational shift from chiefs to bankers: Mara, a chief from Lau in the Tovata confederacy, born and bred for leadership, relying on chiefly status as Tui Lau; Qarase, a seasoned veteran of the public service and finance sectors, former deputy chair of the investment company Fiji Holdings Ltd and managing director of the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) and the Merchant Bank of Fiji.

The People's Coalition government, elected in 1999, had challenged the economic legacy of Rabuka's Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) government. In 1993, the Rabuka government established a Commercialisation, Corporatisation

and Privatisation Committee (CCPC) to implement its structural adjustment programme, with a sweeping agenda over electricity, ports, airport, public housing, timber and media.

However, a key feature of Fijian politics since the 1987 coups is the survival of the Fiji Trades Union Congress and the organised labour move-

ment. Union, church and NGO activists in the Campaign Against the Privatisation of Water campaigned against the Rabuka government's 40 percent rise in water rates in January 1998 and challenged the sell-off of public assets. Union activists at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) resisted the sacking of 500 CAA employees at Nadi airport in 1999, as part of the privatisation of government services. These campaigns and the introduction of a Value Added Tax contributed to the massive swing to the People's Coalition in the May 1999 elections (the Labour-led Coalition removed VAT from essential foodstuffs, halted privatisation of government services, and started replacing the boards of statutory authorities).

Sutherland and Robertson argue that while the People's Coalition goals were reformist, not revolutionary, "its

attacks on privatisation upset Fijian corporate interests who regarded privatisation as an important avenue for Fijianisation". George Speight, removed from the board of Fiji Hardwoods Corporation, was just one player unhappy with the Labour-led government, and willing to decry Chaudhry's policies as an attack on Fijian land, culture and "indigenous rights".

Affirmative action — for all?

The authors contend that indigenous Fijian rights were guaranteed in the 1997 Fiji Constitution introduced after the Reeves Commission inquiry. Most importantly, they develop an analysis of affirmative action policies introduced under Laisenia Qarase's Blueprint for Fijian Development, which "advantage the Fijian middle classes, not the disaffected masses that had fuelled the CRWU rebellion".

With extensive documentation, they argue that "from the history of the struggle for Fijian paramountcy, we learn that the main beneficiaries were not the vast majority of ordinary Fijians but the Fijian elite". Attempts to promote Fijian entrepreneurs focuss on grants to indigenous investment companies like Fiji Holdings Ltd — to the benefit of private shareholders.

Many grassroots Fijians got little from the affirmative action programmes of Rabuka's SVT through

the 1990s, watching business and government scandals like the collapse of the National Bank of Fiji.

Government by the Gun argues that Laisenia Qarase will do little better to address the growing sense of grievance and uncertainty about the future among many rural and urban Fijian workers. The quest for Fijian unity has foundered, with a new spirit of provincialism manifested in tensions between the traditional Fijian confederacies of Kubuna, Tovata and Burebasaga, with calls for the creation of a new confederacy in the West — the Yasayasa Vaka Ra.

In spite of the September 2001 electoral victory of Qarase's Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL), the Labour Party has since won a series of court cases — still under appeal — reaffirming their Constitutional right to participate in a multi-party Cabinet and to appoint members to the Senate. Like Pauline Hanson in Australia, Speight has now been pushed from the limelight. His conviction for treason, with a death sentence commuted to life imprisonment, marks an important transition. But like Hanson, Speight's charisma and savvy, amplified by uncritical media coverage, swept his ideas into the mainstream of political life.

Indo-Fijian community splits

Sutherland and Robertson rightly fo-
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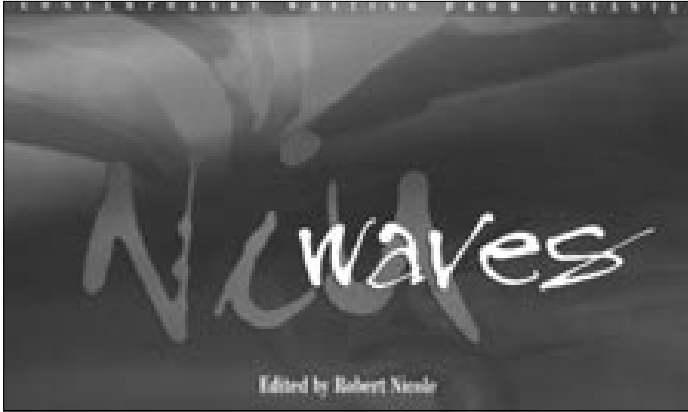
cus on the class and regional divisions in the indigenous Fijian community, but I feel their analysis of the coup is weakened by a lack of analysis of the same crisis in the Indo-Fijian community.

For decades, the dominant party for Indo-Fijians was the National Federation Party (NFP), which struggled for political and economic rights for the descendants of the *girmitya* indentured labourers (a process well documented in *A Vision for Change*, Brij Lal's biography of NFP leader A.D. Patel). But since 1985, the Fiji Labour Party developed as a multiracial social democratic party. Under Mahendra Chaudhry, Labour has eclipsed the NFP's support in the Indo-Fijian community. In the 1999 and 2001 elections, the NFP was destroyed as an electoral force, with the Labour Party sweeping up virtually all the Indian communal seats. Efforts by a younger generation of NFP activists to rejuvenate the party — such as economist Dr Waden Narsey or union leader Attar Singh — have faltered in the face of entrenched opposition from an elite core of the NFP's business supporters.

Sutherland and Robertson are sympathetic to the Labour Party but not uncritical of its leader. A comprehensive history of Fiji after 1999 will need to analyse the conflict between Mahendra Chaudhry and Indo-Fijian businessmen and importers like Hari

Punja, Vinod Patel and Ramesh Solanki, and clashes with foreign investors in timber, gold and media. Chaudhry's long battle with the Murdoch-owned *Fiji Times* — which maintained a running attack on his short-lived government — is worth a study in itself!

Government by the Gun is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on Fiji — an engaged analysis that looks at the core of indigenous issues at the heart of Fiji's ongoing drama.



LISA TAMANISAU

A Fiji journalist who is studying for a Diploma in Pacific Journalism at the University of the South Pacific.

A soothing journey of wit, serious social issues

Niu Waves, edited by Robert Nicole. Pacific Writing Forum and the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific, 2001. 168 pp. ISBN 982 366 009 3

NIU WAVES is a collection of short fiction and poetry by a group of writers who are dominantly products of Fiji but who are also a part of the Niu Waves Writers' Collective. This was

formed in 1995 “to encourage and nurture young writers from the Pacific region” and is informally headquartered at the University of the South Pacific.

It comprises works by the “niuest” members, Mosmi Bhim and Josua Tuwere, and a few other more experienced writers that grasped my attention.

I mused over Mosmi Bhim's “Can't wait”. I fell in love just reading her “Rural reveries”. Then her vividly graphic piece, “Love bites”, which left a sharp after sting.

Josua Tuwere's “My uniform and extremities” was a real chuckle while his “Figure man” left me quite sombre. All had characteristics of deeper meaning beyond the surface of light words.

Susan Sela's pieces are bright and commendable – you'd either cry or

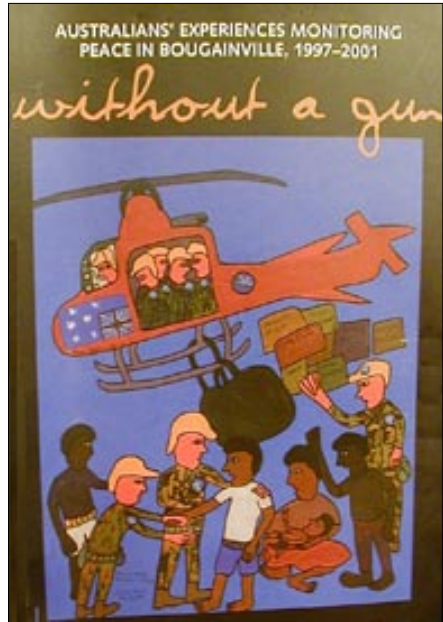
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laugh. And Seona Smiles' "Name games is hilarious.

Niu Waves does have a way with one's emotions. I reasoned that's because it's written by a variety of individuals pushing forth their different themes and perceptions of life — you really need to digest it slowly.

I quietly questioned, however, the appropriateness of certain words and images included in this collection which others like myself would find ill-suited for a younger audience that may be anticipated in secondary schools around the region.

Nicole answers: "We have come to the conclusion that if Oceania's young writers want to write sensual poetry, then Oceania's young readers will want to read about it. We're not helping our young people if we keep suppressing discussions about sex and sexuality."



MICHAEL J FIELD

Auckland-based South Pacific correspondent for Agence France-Presse

Anzac rivalries undermine Bougainville peacekeeping

Without a Gun: Australians' Experience Monitoring Peace in Bougainville, 1997-2001, edited by Monica Wehner and Donald Denoon, Pandanus Books, Australian National University, 2002. 204 pp. ISBN 1 74076 013 1

FIJI'S often maligned military have won for themselves some rare praise for their work in an almost forgotten peace-keeping operation. And the way it all happens suggests their skills may be needed for the next regional conflict — between Australia and New Zealand.

But, it seems, Fijian soldiers find their Australian and New Zealand comrades vulgar and hedonistic.

The tributes come in a new book, *Without a Gun*, which tells of the peace-keeping operations in the Papua New Guinean province of Bougainville, scene of a bitter civil war between 1988 and 1997.

Some estimates put the death toll at between 15,000 and 20,000 and while the book, published by the Australian National University (ANU), tends to downplay the size, it says the impact of the conflict was incalculable.

The breakthrough came when New Zealand diplomats engineered a truce in October 1997. Quickly a Truce Monitoring Group (TMG) was sent in under New Zealand command, and after a peace treaty was signed in April 1998 Australia took over what became the Peace Monitoring Group (PMG). Although dominated by the military, both groups were unarmed.

Fiji and Vanuatu forces, which took part, and the Maori troops of the New Zealand Army, win praise.

It is a collection of chapters written by various Australians involved, edited by Monica Wehner and Donald Denoon. The latter says the Maori were separatist minded, creating one source of tension there.

“There were very tough Fijians with a long experience of peace-keeping rather than peace monitoring in the Middle East and elsewhere. They were much the most experienced of the peace monitors. There were ni-Vanuatu who were culturally much closer to Bougainvilleans than anybody else.”

One contributor, ANU Fellow Anthony Regan writes that the Bougainvilleans wanted the United Nations to send in armed peace-keepers. PNG did not want the UN as it would internationalise what they saw as a domestic issue while Australia and New Zealand were opposed to the UN because it would take time.

Canberra and Wellington pushed for a regional flavour.

“This ensured an appearance of regional endorsement of New Zealand's and Australia's roles,” Regan says.

“Neither country wished to be seen as dominating, and the concept of a regional force was attractive to both Papua New Guinea and Bougainvilleans for similar reasons.

“Even the relatively small contributions from Fiji and Vanuatu had important symbolic value. In fact, the

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force was not a regional initiative, but the contributions of Fiji and Vanuatu proved to be more than symbolic.”

Colonel Bob Breen of the Australian Defence Forces (ADF), who noted the “considerable friction” between Australia and New Zealand, wrote there had been difficulties in the integration of Fijian and ni-Vanuatu military personnel into TMG/PMG.

“Fijians came with a wealth of experience in peacekeeping in the Middle East but found the adjustment to being unarmed and working in monitoring teams, in two cases commanding monitoring teams, a significant challenge.

“The Fijians and ni-Vanuatu found some Australian and New Zealand military personnel vulgar, hedonistic and lacking in cultural sensitivity; some ni-Vanuatu personnel were overwhelmed by the scale of the operation and by long patrols carrying heavy loads over rugged terrain,” Breen writes.

“New Zealand and most ADF personnel tended to treat them as interpreters and appeared condescending of their lack of military experience and skills.”

Music made a difference once in the field in Bougainville.

“Monitors from New Zealand, Fiji and Vanuatu brought their own music and singing,” Breen says.

“Australians do not have much

musical culture to offer but soon joined in and contributed their own interpretations of population Western music....

Music, dancing and singing have contributed enormously to breaking the ice.”

Brigadier Bruce Osborn said there was no doubt the PMG’s multinational nature and its cultural diversity was one of its strengths.

“I think the PMG would still be at the starting line if not for the contribution of civilians, other Melanesians, Polynesians and New Zealanders.”

Andrew Rice, a civilian Canberra public servant who was with the PMG, said the coalition partners made all the difference.

“Aside from the benefits of military inter-operability, the understanding that comes from knowing the meaning of the haka, participating in the ritual of the kava session and having an insight into the ni-Vanuatu way of life cannot be overstated.... Australia’s re-engagement with the Pacific must be more than a romantic khaki-clad adventure.

Aboriginal diplomat Tracey Haines said the contribution of indigenous people in the force was significant.

“I think everyone would agree that the Maori, Fijian and ni-Vanuatu members of the PMG have an advantage over other members cause of their cultural affinity and rapport,” she

writes.

“They have been very effective as peace monitors and can provide valuable tips to others who are less culturally aware. They are recognised as brothers and sisters of Bougainvilleans, due to proximity in the region and cultural similarities.”

Add Major Luke Foster: “Ni-Vanuatu and Fijians had a tremendous advantage in establishing rapport with Bougainvilleans.”

The book makes grim reading when it comes to discussing relations between Australia and New Zealand which appear bad. It suggests the division between the two offers Pacific countries openings to exploit.

Regan said Canberra saw itself as the senior partner, giving rise to New Zealand resentment.

When Jim Bolger lost his job as New Zealand prime minister, his successor Jenny Shipley wanted New Zealand out of Bougainville. Australian Prime Minister John Howard had to work the phone to persuade her to say. But the lead role went to Canberra.

“Tensions were exacerbated by petty competitiveness between personnel of the two countries. New Zealanders regarded their personnel as more culturally sensitive to Bougainvilleans than Australians; conversely, Australians regarded the New Zealand military as less professional

and less properly equipped than its Australian counterpart.

“Australia was willing to take over; some Australian advisers were also keen to reassert what they saw as Australia’s primary responsibility for the south-west Pacific.”

Senior Australian diplomat Rhys Puddicombe says there were significant differences between the militaries of Australia and New Zealand.

“The New Zealand military was heavily weighted with Maori who had instant and close empathy with the Bougainvilleans. The predominance of Maori officers and soldiers was a deliberate and very effective choice. The TMG under New Zealand went out of its way to associate itself with the Bougainvilleans, and make them feel welcome in and around headquarters...

The New Zealand Army had a closer “family” feel.

“On the down side, their vehicle transport was fairly appalling and their communications limited. The Australian-led PMG was larger and much better equipped, but had less of a Bougainville-friendly feel.”

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DAVID ROBIE

University of the South Pacific journalism coordinator and editor of *Pacific Journalism Review*

Welcome new face for critical media studies in South Pacific

Tokwin, edited by Nash G Sorariba, Information and Communication Science in association with UPNG Journalism Studies, University of Papua New Guinea 2001. 107 pp. ISSN 1607-6931

WHILE welcoming this new journal from the University of Papua New Guinea's journalism studies strand, I thumbed through this volume with a growing sense of *déjà vu*. It had a sense of the early issues of *Pacific Journalism Review* — even to the distinctive cover use of the process blue cyan — before this publication had evolved to where it is today.

I should declare my interest here as I was the founding editor of *PJR*, which had its genesis at the Waigani campus of UPNG in 1994.

There is one major difference though. While *PJR* has always stressed work by student journalists and the region's industry journalists doing analytical work, there is little sense of this in *Tokwin*: the only contribution vaguely along these lines in this volume is an article by Neville Togarewa., "West Papua: The story from the past century" (p 60).

But I seem to remember a version of this back in 1995 at a time when Togarewa was on the investigative journalism course at UPNG.

Seriously though, UPNG is to be congratulated on getting back into the critical journalism mode after surviving a really difficult patch. There isn't enough reflective journalism in the Pacific and while Divine Word University has produced some worthwhile media volumes of late (slickly produced with donor agency funds), they

have not had the critical thinking edge that is really needed.

The editor, Nash G Sorariba, is well-known in the region for his short story telling gifts (*A Medal Without Honour* was reviewed by *PJR*). But here he has gathered together a rather eclectic collection here of 11 serious pieces about media issues, ranging from a reprint from *The National* of a defence by Frank Morgan over the need for the UPNG course to continue when it was under threat in 1999 (p 33) to former *Post-Courier* reporter Brian Tobia's treatise on PNG's sex workers (p 18) and H G Mannur on PNG's widening economic gap: "What went wrong?" (p 75).

In fact, the theme of this inaugural edition is globalisation and its impact on PNG, which Sorariba notes in his editorial: "Sounds like another horror story."

In his ominous message about the future, read by me as PNG goes into yet another fractious general election, he says: "Ordinary citizens now understand that the purchasing power of their kina is [sic] gone out of the window. If PNG has to achieve [a] sustained and respectable growth rate, it will have to do a lot of things before the masses instigate a bloody revolution out of frustration."

One hopes *Tokwin* continues its contribution to Pacific media debate and doesn't go the way of *Uni Tavor*.