

Chiefs, Coups and Kava: Conflicts and Conflict Resolution in Fiji

Hermann Mückler

On May 19th 2000 the civilian entrepreneur, selfmademan and selfappointed Fijian politician George Speight overthrew the elected Fijian government in a civilian takeover. The third coup in Fijian history since independence of the country and not the last. The coupleader claimed to represent Fijian indigenous interests against Indo-Fijian domination and underlined in his media statements the necessity to protect indigenous rights against democratic rules which only led to a marginalization of traditional custom and values in Fiji for the indigenous Fijian population of Melanesian and Polynesian origin. Speight ousted an elected coalition government, headed by the Indo-Fijian Mahendra Chaudhry. Once more a coup interrupted democratic development in the island state, whose democratic tradition was weakly developed since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1970 (vgl. Mückler 2001).

Democratic rule was already interrupted twice by two military coups in 1987 because the government then was perceived by a group of nationalistic Fijians with an affiliation to the military as dominated by the Indo-Fijian (Indian) community. The second 1987' coup saw the British monarchy and the Governor General replaced by a non-executive President, and the country changed the long form of its name from "Dominion of Fiji, Member of the British Commonwealth", to "Republic of Fiji" (and later in 1997 to "Republic of the Fiji Islands"). The coups contributed to significant Indo-Fijian emigration with serious effects on the countries economy. Indo-Fijians, deriving from Indian migrants from the subcontinent which came to Fiji mainly in the years 1879 to 1916 intended for indenture work in the sugar cane fields, counted for almost half of the total population of about 750.000 in Fiji in the years before 2000. The population loss and "brain drain" since 1987 and furthermore since the year 2000 resulted in significant economic difficulties but ensured that indigenous Fijians of Melanesian ancestry became the majority (see Field et.al. 2005; Mückler 2002; Ewins 1998; Chand et.al. 1998;).

The antidescents of the events of 2000 began in the year 1990, when a new constitution institutionalised the ethnic Fijian domination of the political system. Sitiveni Rabuka, the Lieutenant Colonel who carried out the 1987 coups became Prime Minister in 1992, following elections held under this new constitution. Three years later Rabuka established the Constitutional Review Commission, which in 1997 led to a new Constitution, which was supported by most leaders, the indigenous Fijians and the Indo-Fijians alike. Fiji was readmitted to the Commonwealth of Nations and elections in 1999 brought on this occasion a Indo-Fijian dominated government. The coup at the brink of the new millennium, instigated by George Speight, effectively toppled this government of Mahendra Chaudhry, who had become Prime Minister following the 1997 constitution. The then head of the Fiji Military Forces Commodore Frank (Voreqe) Bainimarama assumed executive power after the almost forced resignation of President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Fiji was rocked by two mutinies at Suva's Queen Elizabeth Barracks, in late 2000 when rebel soldiers of an elite platoon (the Counter Revolutionary Warfare, CRW) went on the rampage. The High Court ordered the reinstatement of the 1997 constitution, but in September 2001, a general election under a new constitution, drafted by the coup benefitors, was held to restore democracy and was won by interim Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase's nationalistic party "Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua", which acted in clear favor of indigneous Fijian interests.

The following years showed a significant rise of confrontations between the two main ethnic groups, the indigenous Fijians and the Indo-Fijians, caused by the termination of

thousands of land lease contracts which primarily affected the Indo-Fijian community seriously. Hundreds of Indo-Fijian farmers were forced to leave the country with their families after their agricultural leases expired with no hope that the majority of the indigenous Fijian landowners who traditionally and constitutionally based control most of the land, would opt for a renewing or renegotiating of the land leases. The termination of the land leases were instrumentalized by radical indigenous Fijians and the ethically biased administrative body for administering the land case, the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB), and used by them as an opportunity to get rid of the Indo-Fijians. Negotiations for new land leases were driven by unrealistic demands for a significant higher amount of money for new leases. Unaware of the economic and demographic consequences, nationalistic indigenous Fijian institutions and interest groups encouraged the termination of land leases in a confrontational campaign.

But the consequences for the indigenous Fijians were serious too. The sugar industry lost the majority of the predominantly Indo-Fijian farmers who provided the sugar cane and the farmers lost their only means of livelihood. Most of these leases, which were administered by the Native Lands Trust Board were and are on native land and much therefore depends on the goodwill of the landowning units to allow their land to be leased by others. The emigration of Indo-Fijians, facing no future perspective in Fiji, came to new peaks and the brain drain increasingly reduced the country's ability to cope with the challenging economic trends of a successive competitive global world economy.

In the year 2005, amid much controversy, the Qarase government proposed a Reconciliation and Unity Commission, with power to recommend compensation for victims of the 2000 coup, and amnesty for its perpetrators. However, the military strongly opposed this bill, especially the army's commander, Commodore Frank Bainimarama. He agreed with detractors who said that it was a shame to grant amnesty to supporters of the present government who played roles in the year 2000 coup. He strongly questioned the appeased legislation which was the basis for the Qarase government. His attack on the legislation, which continued unremittingly throughout 2005 and 2006, further strained his already tense relationship with the government. In late November 2006 and early December 2006, Bainimarama was instrumental in the 2006 Fijian coup d'état. Bainimarama handed down a list of demands to Qarase after a bill was put forward to parliament, part of which would have offered pardons to participants in the 2000 coup attempt. He gave Qarase an ultimatum date of 4 December to accede to these demands or to resign from his post. Qarase adamantly refused to either concede or resign and on 5 December President, Ratu Josefa Iloilo, was said to have signed a legal order dissolving Parliament after meeting with Bainimarama. On 5 December 2006 another Fiji government was ousted, this time again by the military forces, as it happened twice in the year 1987. Fiji was again in the headlines of the world news.

The coup of Bainimarama and the ousting of the Qarase government was heavily criticized by New Zealand and Australia, who for quite doubtful reasons opted to forget, that the constitutional basis of this ousted Fijian government was despite elections in 2002 more than questionable. The Qarase government was the direct successor of the ousted Indo-Fijian government of the year 2000, and was strictly biased to represent indigenous Fijian interests against representing the whole country. The 2000 coup sympathizers in the government had never since undertaken steps for a re-implementation of the constitutionally correct elected 1999 government. Bainimarama therefore can truly be seen as the only significant person who acted in favour of the constitution which was acclaimed and approved by the majority of the Fijians, including the indigenous Fijians in 1997. The military, slovenly spoken, was the only institution of the country which represented and acted in favor of all people and all groups of Fiji (Mückler 2007; see about the traditional role of the military in Fiji: Halapua 2003).

Once more Fiji showed itself to the outside world as a country of political instability, of confrontation between different political fractions and incapable to find a political solution apart from an open overthrowing of ruling bodies. Compared with the surrounding neighbouring countries Fiji once more looked to outsiders like as it was historically seen by its neighbours: a fierce and, in parts, uncontrollable island state. It is worth to look at Fijis „history of conflicts“ but also to Fijis abilities to solve conflicts, as the island group was in the past a hegemonic power whose influence spread to Samoa and Tonga, and even further.

Much has been published about Fijian history in precolonial times, especially about the dynamics and significant changes which took place in the first half of the nineteenth century. Much has been written by contemporary authors, mainly missionaries and early European/Australian settlers (see e.g. Williams 1858; Calvert 1858; Im Thurn/Wharton 1925; Waterhouse 1866) and much more has been published since (e.g. Brewster 1922; Henderson 1931; Legge 1958; Routledge 1985, to mention only a few), predominantly in colonial times and continuously since. The decisive element of the precolonial period of western influence were the numerous contacts between whalers, sandalwood traders, bêche-de-mer-collectors, beachcombers and copra traders and the indigenous Fijian population and, at the same time, the growing number of settlers of European ancestry, which quickly changed the patterns of power between the local chiefs and chiefdoms (see Brown 1973; Derrick 1974).

The introduction of firearms was probably the most significant symbol of the advent of technical change which had direct influence on the indigenous political landscape. European advisers who trained local people in the use of guns and the necessary adoption of a different tactical behaviour in using modern 'distance-weapons' which replaced gradually the traditional clubs and spears, the existing power balance swayed and disappeared rapidly in the first half of the 19th century. This development increased the speed of clashes between rivalling chiefdoms significantly. Adding the introduction of new political ideas about European-style statehood, the nation state and its legal-bureaucratic and executive instruments – all these factors together brought an innovative push to which the Fijians had to adapt themselves. Not to forget the missionaries and the introduction of Christianity which not only led to a significant change of traditional religious practice and to some extent a decline of values and habits. The massive influence of the fast growing Methodist church, one of several Christian denominations in Fiji, in the 1840s mainly conducted by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, caused the first significant identity crisis in terms of reflecting own cultural values and the incorporation of European-style custom.

Beyond this effect, the missionaries used traditional rivalries and the highly institutionalized and sometimes (in the case of the dominating chiefdom of Bau) personalized chiefly authority to achieve their religious tasks. The mission in the beginning had only few followers until it managed to convert the powerful chiefs. Convincing the dominant chiefs of the advantage of the new belief was initially successful in the Tonga-influenced eastern part of Fiji, the Lau Islands, where Ma'afu, a cousin of the Tongan king, extended his influence in the years 1847 to 1853. His major rival, chief Cakobau of the chiefdom of Bau reluctantly accepted Christianity when he came under political pressure in his attempts to spread his influence over the whole western Fijian islands and therefore increasingly relying on Tongan support. Ratu Apenisa Seru Cakobau, the later *Tui Viti* or 'King of the Fijians', was finally victorious in the Bau-Rewa war (which lasted from 1843 to 1853) with the help of 2.000 Tongans who fought on his side in the battle of Kaba, the peak of the war in 1855, against the chief of Rewa Roko Tui Dreketi, his own half-brother Mara Kapaiwai and other rebellious chiefs of Bau (see Sahlins 1991; Routledge 1985: 68ff; Waterhouse 1866; Thomson 1908). The traditional leading role of the chiefdoms of the eastern side of Fiji, partly (as in the case of Cakobau) influenced by and in close relationship with the Tongans, became the pivot in the rally to extend influence over the whole Fijian archipelago. The main players in this arena

were on the one hand the high chief of Bau with the center at Bau (a small island off the south-eastern coast of the main island Viti Levu and primarily a naval base of skilled fisherpeople, traders and canoe builders), on the other hand some of the chiefs of Rewa, a region in the south-east of Viti Levu which relied heavily on extensive agriculture. Bau had grown fast in the first decades of the nineteenth century through a policy of intermarriage with leading families of Rewa and Cakaudrove and the utilisation of maritime skills of the original inhabitants of the small island.

The Bau-Rewa war, initially caused by a dispute over a valued pig in 1841 (Sahlins 1991: 53) and perpetuated through tensions between the related families of Bau and Rewa over the favourite wife Qereitoga of the Bau 'war-king' (*vunivalu*) Tanoa, marked in the final analysis a significant step forward in political evolution. The war originally started as a measure taken against a personal oriented offence which asked for revenge between heavily interrelated chiefly families of Bau and Rewa. The close kindred relationship between the protagonists in this conflict arose from the so-called *vasu*-relationship which marks a special relation between a man and his sisters son, and a strategically oriented policy of intermarriage. With the duration of the war and the rejection of Rewan offers of ritual apology (*i soro*) by Cakobau, it transformed more and more in the attempt of Bau to aspire total political control not only over Rewa but over the whole Fiji archipelago. The conscious involvement of neighbour chiefdoms, the intriguing play off of allies against each other and the inclusion of outsiders broadened the conflict over the years. Whereas some authors suggested that it was not planned that at the end of the war Fiji was for the first time unified under the rule of one chief, the English methodist missionary Reverend John Hunt wrote as early as 1845 that „the idea of universal domination of the Fiji islands“ quickly emerged in Bau (Hunt Journal 19. October 1845, cf. Sahlins 1991: 59). The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1991) showed very detailed the interrelatedness between all involved acting leaders. I want to summarize the conclusive obvious fact, that family ties and kindred not necessarily settle a conflict, but (in this case) even increased the destabilizing effects between chiefs. To speak with Routledges words „The ramifications of *vasu* relationship kept emotions at white heat and imparted an irresistible momentum to the struggle“ (Routledge 1985: 68).

The influence of kindred relations, the knowledge about descent and common ancestors always played a significant role in Fijian history and in the individuals' orientation, identification and prestige until the present day and particularly in the competition for qualified political jobs. Existing controversies and disputes between family members had been pushed in their political entanglement to a higher level with far reaching consequences.

The Bau-Rewa war marked the shift from local wars on a low level between small scale chiefdoms to a comprehensive war of much greater size in its hegemonic attempts of the protagonists and its implications for the involved. In precolonial times, war was not unusual in Fiji, but in the mid-nineteenth century some of those numerous chiefdoms emerged as regional powers which associated or split in their overlapping attempts to extend their influence. In the 1860s twelve chiefdoms existed, that were decisive for the further development of the Fiji islands: Bau, Rewa, Navua, Nadroga, Vuda, Ba, Rakiraki, Viwa, Macuata/Naduri, Bua, Cakaudrove and Lakeba. A closer circumscription, after the Bau-Rewa war, included Bau, Cakaudrove and Lakeba. The relation between war and the emergence of the chiefdoms was widely discussed in the past decades (see e.g. Service 1962; Fried 1967; Flannery 1972). Carneiro (1995) underlined this close relation in his evaluation of chiefly conflicts in Fiji (see also Ferguson 1995: 26ff) and stressed the formulation of greater chiefdoms as a step taken in political evolution which transcended local autonomy of single villages to clusters of villages and greater political entities on their way to state formation. Such steps followed almost immediately after Cakobaus victory in the Bau-Rewa war and led to the first confederation in 1865.

Cakobau's hegemonic claim in the arena of the remaining high chiefs but also the increasing number of settlers and the their linked acquisition of land and its administration demanded a authoritative and centralized government. Political instability, legal insecurity and a high crime rate not only prevented further economic development of the islands, but also threatened Cakobau's authority to rule effectively. This fact (together with problems which arouse from a conflict with an American trader and imperialistic attitudes by the US, blackmailing Cakobau for excessive compensation for a burnt warehouse) led him to offer a cession of the Fiji islands to the British crown which was at first rejected. Though in the needs of Cakobau it was a wholly European idea to establish an indigenous national government aided by counsels of respectable Europeans (France 1969: 73). The British Consul H.M. Jones, in his search for a power capable of concluding treaties with the British Government finally invited the chiefs of seven *matanitus* (traditional confederacies under the guidance of a high chief) to a meeting at Levuka, the then 'capital' of Fiji. The formation of a confederation of chiefs was decided which purported to act as a central government. The chiefs agreed to meet annually and to pass laws which would be effective throughout Fiji. The election of Cakobau as the first President who received a salary for this administrative job was the consequence of this distribution of power. This idea was sound but the confederation never worked effective. It was not really rooted in the western areas of Fiji, and its authority in the east was insecure. The chiefs who agreed to this early form of nation state were not traditionally allies and were too preoccupied with the affairs of their own chiefdoms to pay much attention to newly created forms of "nationalism". The diversity of provincial interests which has always characterized the struggle for influence in Fiji, was too dominant, and there was, in 1865, no reason for the chiefs to subordinate to the national good (France 1969: 74).

Only in those regions of Fiji which were under direct influence of Bau, the registration and administration of land sale and lease (the major obstacle on the way of developing plantations and industry) worked well. The range of this government primarily covered the north and east of Viti Levu. The far east, the Lau islands, were still under Tongan influence, and in the north of the archipelago, on the island of Vanua Levu, the chiefdom of Bua itself formed a short living government, based on a kind of informal democracy and backed by the Tongans (see France 1969: 74ff). Bua, Lau and Cakaudrove were the Tongan chief Ma'afus strongholds against Baus expanding importance. This confronting division also reflected a different European involvement in economic terms in the Fiji islands. While the merchants of Levuka were backed by the British, the German firm of Henning Brothers, which had its headquarter at Lomaloma, carried on an extensive business under Ma'afu's protection, seriously rivalling the British claim of monopol-like superiority in the Fiji islands (Burns 1963: 84; Wehler 1969: 209-210; a detailed and unbiased history of the successful and hence for the British 'dangerous' German trade activities in the Fiji islands prior to cession still does not exist).

All these attempts were finally made to adopt a stringent strategy for the administration of land. Land, *vanua*, as the main source of identification for the Fijians and therefore highly valued, became in mid nineteenth century the focus in the pursuit to develop a strategy to prevent the buy-out of land to settlers and plantation owners. The term *vanua* for 'land' has not only physical but also social and cultural dimensions which are closely interrelated. *Vanua* marked the cardinal point for the people in their orientation, their traditions and customs, beliefs and values. Its social and cultural dimensions are a source of security and confidence and they provide a sense of identity and belonging. Summarized, *vanua* is often described as an extension of the concept of self (Ravuvu 1983: 70) – an explanation, which is sometimes challenged (eg. Lawson 1991: 95) by noting, that *vanua* does not mean a static system in the occupation and use of land by different groups, as it is indicated by those who stress the absolute importance of the *vanua*-concept for almost all parts of Fijian life up to

present times. The use of the word *vanua* also stands for a social and political unit with its roots in a particular territorial area and is at the same time integral part of the hierarchical structure of indigenous Fijian society (see Nayacakalou 1978 and 1985; Ravuvu 1983; Routledge 1985). It comprises a cluster of villages with historical allegiances to a chief. Several *vanuas* thus form a *matanitu*, a traditional confederacy.

The British recognized the importance of land for the Fijians and almost immediately introduced measures to restrict the sale and lease of land when Fiji became part of the British Empire in 1874 after Cakobaus second and finally successful attempt to cede the country. This marked a significant halt to a permanently lingering situation. Cakobau's claim to represent Fiji as a whole was challenged by several chiefs. Especially the western provinces of Viti Levu argued that he had illegitimately the role of *Tui Viti*, King of Fiji, and strongly opposed Bauan dominance (Legge 1958: 28). Cakobau's reign the years before cession provided a wrong image of retarded dynamics between the existing chiefdoms. Nevertheless rivalries between single chiefs but also between the *matanitus* continued. The partial immunity of the western chiefdoms and also the people of the interior of Viti Levu for Bauan and other 'eastern' hegemonic approaches was caused by their greater regional decentralization, smaller groups of people and – compared with the eastern parts of Fiji – the absence of the close influence of the strict hierarchical structure which distinguished Polynesian social and political structure from more small-scale western Fiji Melanesian-style forms of political representation. The Fiji archipelago is often characterized as been located at the point of intersection between the cultural areas of Melanesia and Polynesia. Without being able to draw an exact line between Melanesian and Polynesian imprinted parts of the islands, the unsuccessful attempts of eastern chiefdoms to gain total control over the western parts obviously mark a gap.

This gap widened in other fields during the colonial administration. With the close relationship between eastern chiefs and colonial administrators, not only the Fijian dialect and the chiefly procedures of the east continued to dominate, but also forms of direct political dominance of the east over the interior of Viti Levu and the west were finally established. This found its peak in the so-called Colo war. Shortly after the cession in 1874, the first British Gouverneur Arthur Gordon had to pacify unrest which spread in the interior of the main island among the *Kai Colo*, the Hill Tribes. It was caused by the fact, that, firstly, these tribes were not involved in the process of decision-finding for the cession and therefore opposed the new colonial government, and, secondly, made the new government responsible for the introduction of a measles epidemic which subsequently caused a dramatic decline in Fijian population. To suppress the uprising, Gordon made use of a new founded "Armed Native Constabulary Force" which consisted primarily of Fijians from coastal and eastern parts of Fiji (Brewster 1922; Howard 1991: 26). Marginalisation of western interests continued in the Native Administration despite the fact, that industrial development took place mainly in the west. Most of the main industrial installations which emerged in the twentieth century, the biggest harbour, sugarmill and the sole international airport, as well as the export products sugar, gold and in the past decades increasingly tourism (due to stable weather conditions) brought the west to the forefront of Fijian economic development, while political power remained primarily in the hands of the "traditional" chiefdoms of the east up to the present day.

With the British establishment of a colonial administration, they recognized three confederacies (Tovata, Kubuna, Burebasaga), out of at least seven then influential *matanitus*. They implemented a structure of regional responsibility in establishing an administrative and legal-bureaucratic apparatus for governing the islands, and at the same time lowering the number of involved acting chiefs in the newly established councils at district, provincial and divisional level. The top of this administrative pyramid of a Native Administration with close

interaction and involvement of indigenous Fijians under the two columns “indigenous rule“ and “paramountcy of Fijian interests“ was the Great Council of Chiefs, the *Bose Levu (ni) Vakaturaga* (see: Legge 1958: 202ff; Macnaught 1982). With the colonial attempts to resolve the land issue most of the land sale contracts signed prior to the cession were cancelled and new ones negotiated. This not only reflects the respect of the colonial administration for Fijian land, but also the strategic chance for the British to re-group their own economic interests and the opportunity to throw out all other potential competitors from other countries, especially the Germans, who had already carried out successful business in the Fiji islands. With the growing plantation industry (cotton, copra and sugar) the need for workers increased dramatically. Because of the difficulties in recruiting Fijians and the criticized problematic practices of recruiting workers in island Melanesia, Gordon introduced Indians from the Indian subcontinent to Fiji, a measure already approved and implemented in different parts of the British Empire to guarantee a steady flow of manpower for the growing (sugar-)plantation industry.

With the arrival of Indians in Fiji since 1879, the situation changed totally. First it caused a dramatic change in demography which led to the fact, that indigenous Fijians became around the mid 20th century a minority in Fiji, but it also meant a successive sharing of power between the Europeans, the Fijians and then the Indians. For Fijian rivalries the advent of Indians in Fiji had a direct impact: a closer cooperation between the chiefs against a new and foreign enemy with a totally different cultural and religious background. Though not helping to overcome historically grown animosities, the chiefs used the Great Council of Chiefs as the instrument to balance colonial politics and later decisions made under the parliamentary system in independent Fiji after the year 1970.

The existence of a 'two-branch-system' of decision-finding and political representation – on the one hand the 'modern' legal bureaucratic parliamentary party system, on the other hand the 'traditional' Great Council of Chiefs (which was never traditional in the narrow sense of the word, as it was introduced as a permanent body by the colonial administration), brought a new dimension into the conflict between the chiefs. The interrelatedness of both levels of political representation is mirrored in the fact that several chiefs were (and are) member of parliament and at the same time member of the Great Council of Chiefs. This fact not necessarily means a conflict of conflicting interests, but it increased the potential chance of confusion over different responsibilities against the state and its bodies and the traditional supporters of the own region. While the Great Council of Chiefs and its subordinate councils remained a solely Fijian body, the parliamentary system with its commissions included Indian representatives (in the succeeding generation 'Fiji-Indians' or 'Indo-Fijians'), which led to the situation, that all political decisions were made between these two poles. Indo-Fijians often argue that access to power is biased due of the fact that indigenous Fijians are in both bodies whereas Indo-Fijians are only present on the parliamentary level. Recent years, however, showed that internal rivalries between Fijian chiefs who are members of the Great Council of Chiefs increasingly paralyzed the bodies capability to act as a strong and powerful instrument to push indigenous Fijian interests. These present rivalries are not only based on historical animosities, but also in more recent involvement in economic activities and have hence created a competitive challenge between the Great Council of Chiefs' members in gaining access to influential jobs.

Since independence, the family of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara dominated indigenous Fijian politics. George Speights failed coup in the year 2000 successfully obtained the resignation of the president (and the Indian-dominated government). He had several times accused Mara of illegalities and the involvement of family members in commercial activities to extend control over paramount titles. Speight himself labelled the coup as a confrontation between the confederacies of Kubuna and Tovata. This provocative but true statement was based on the

fact that since independence primarily members of chiefly families of the old confederacy of Tovata had the top jobs in government. To count a few: Sitiveni Rabuka, the coupleader of 1987 and afterwards prime minister of Fiji, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and finally Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, the former General Governor of Fiji (see: Mara 1997; Tarte 1993). They all belonged to the so-called *bati*, or war-clan, out of whom the paramount chiefs of Tovata were traditionally elected. Speight on the other side belonged to the clan of the *mataqali* Namua which is located in the region of Wainibuka. This clan had in the past close relations to the high chiefs of Bau, the traditional rulers of Tailevu and the confederacy of Kubuna. People from Wainibuka were the closest supporters of Speight during the coup days.

The rivalry or discrepancy between representatives of the confederacies Kubuna and Tovata again touches historical circumstances. As Joe Fraenkel (2000: 301ff) stated, the conflict can be traced back until the cession in 1874. Ratu Apenisa Seru Cakobau's position as 'Na Tui Kaba ni Vunivalu', shortend to 'Tui Viti' in its meaning of 'King of Fiji' signed the then highest position a chief could obtain. This title lost its significance with the cession, after Cakobau had clearly explained, that „...none of you [Bau chiefs] will drink the cup of installation as Vunivalu when I die as I gave Fiji to the Great Queen Victoria and heirs forever“ (Macnaught 1982: 50, cf. Fraenkel 2000: 301). This past event, respectively statement, was the motive behind the demand of Fijian nationalists, that with independence it should be continued where Cakobau ended, instead of installing a multiethnic parliament. With other words, a bridge to the past with a re-installment of Fijian chiefly authority was attempted but not achieved when a bicameral parliament was established in 1970. With Ratu Sir George Cakobau's death in the year 1989, a direct descendent of Ratu Seru Cakobau and *Vunivalua* titleholder, the title *Vunivalu* is vacant because of the interrupted continuity in colonial times and the uncertain modes of forwarding which caused a lack of legitimacy of potential titleholders. During Speight's actions in the year 2000 a reanimation of the *Vunivalu* was attempted in installing Ratu Jope Naucabalavu as president, who, in a next step, as chief of Bau would have had the legitimacy to appoint a 'new' *Vunivalu*. Behind the scenes, rivalling interests lessened Speight's room for action. When Ratu Epeli Nailatikau in mid July 2000 layed claim to the title, rivalling competitors criticized him as Tongan, because his legitimacy and connection to the chiefly line of Bau derived from a line of descent that passed through the matrilineal side (cf. Fraenkel 2000: 302, 25n).

Also on Speight's side were the following chiefs of Bau: Adi Litia Cakobau and Ratu Epenisa Cakobau who successively appeared on stage. They were seen on the level of the provincial chiefs in the *Bose ni yasana* (provincial councils) and also in the measures taken to end the hostage crises. At the ceremony in the parliament building while administering the delivery of the (from the army) stolen weapons, they represented the rebels side with offering a whale's tooth (*tabua*), the traditional symbol of apology, to the assembled chiefs. Allies of Speight emerged also from other parts of the Kubuna confederacy. As for instance members from several villages of the province of Tailevu and from Speight's mothers village from the province of Ra. Also the paramount chief of Naitasiri, Qaranivalu Ratu Inoke Takiveikata and the parliamentarian representatvie of the Lomaiviti-Islands in the Koro Sea Simione Kaitani were supporters. A similar connection showed representatives from the islands of Ovalau and Gau.

But it would be incomplete to limit the conflict to a rivalry between the confederacies Kubuna and Tovata. Several chiefs of the province of Rewa, which is part of the Burebasaga confederacy and the most influential, were involved in the coup. President Mara's wife is the highest titleholder in Burebasaga. Her half-brother Ratu Mosese Tuisawau changed sides and supported Speight with criticizing the Mara dynasty to improve his own chances to be installed as Roko Tui Dreketi. And finally there are the chiefs of the western provinces, who – although traditionally linked with the Burebasaga or Kubuna, opted against Speight. The Tui

Ba i Buli, Ratu Sairusi Nagavoka led the group of chiefs, who called for a fourth, western, confederacy, which should have been created under the name Yasayasa Vaka Ra. Some even voted for a total split from the rest of the country and preferred the founding of an independent state. The opposition against Speight derived from the fact, that during both coups, 1987 and 2000, the overthrown primeministers came originally from the west. With excellent economical conditions, this was not an unrealistic option, but would have created severe problems for Fiji as a whole. A two days meeting at the Mocambo hotel, which should have paved the way for a decision about the establishment of a fourth confederacy, finally failed because of missing unity among the participants. Even in the western part of Fiji Speight had supporters, so vice-president Ratu Josefa Iloilo, the leader of the radical Fijian nationalist *taukei*-movement Apisai Tora, and the chief of Nadroga Ratu Osea Gavidi, who was interested in a sale of the valuable mahogany reserves and therefore close to Speights own past economic goals (Fraenkel 2000: 303).

Summarizing the involved protagonists role during the 2000 coup and in the aftermath, it reflects a heterogenous situation, marked by personal attempts rooted in family liabilities, historical commitments and the gain for political and economic control over resources. The Great Council of Chiefs, as the body, where representatives of all different fractions met, was hence often seen by outsider observers as a 'tiger without teeth' who only "reacted" the first two weeks of the coup, while Speight and his followers "acted" – until the army with Frank Bainimarama as leading figure took command and finally forced a "solution" which led to a situation which is questioned since.

The Great Council of Chief's capability to act immediately was lowered through the traditional ceremonies and custom rules, which had to be recognized and executed at every session of the council. While Speight directed from his headquarter in the parliament actions throughout the country with his mobile phone, the chiefs often spent half a day on procedures of respect, embeded in the traditional kava or *yaqona* ceremony, before touching the core of the important issues, which urged for prompt decisions. To understand the importance of this kava ceremony, I have to sketch the function of the kava ceremony which is an integral and core part of Fijian identity and orientation.

The Fijian word *yaqona* refers both to the plant and the drink which is made from it by steeping the pulped fresh root of the plant *piper methysticum* or its powdered and dried equivalent in an appropriate amount of water. It is through this medium of *yaqona* that direct communication with the spirit world can be achieved. In an highly formal chiefly ceremony, it is normal to present a whole fresh green plant of *yaqona* immediately in the so-called „welcoming ashore“-ceremony, which also often includes the traditional presenting of a *tabua*, a whale's tooth“, the most highly valued gift a chief can hand over to another chief. The presenting of a *tabua* and the *yaqona*-ceremony is the core part of the (*ai*) *sevusevu*, which may be considered as the symbolic offering of the first fruits of the land to the chief guest(s). The best and biggest plant available is normally used for this purpose. The *sevusevu* can establish new relationships, reaffirm existing ones, and act as credentials for offerer and receiver alike, particularly if they are interacting for the first time or in crucial and tensionburden relationships. *Yanqona* drinking in a chiefly environment is highly ritualized (see Ravuvu 1983:41; 1987:26).

Before the *yaqona* is mixed, the mixer announced that he is ready to make the drink with the words "*sa vakarau lose na yaqona vakaturaga*" thus honoring the event and the people involved. The mixer will clap with cupped hands three times and start mixing. It is customary for the one who is mixing and preparing the *yaqona* to announce when it is cleared and ready to serve. We will clap three times with cupped hands and then fill the *bilu*, the coconut-cup, held by the cup bearer who presents it to the first person to drink. The person who is being served should clap once before he receives with both hands his bowl of *yaqona*.

After draining his cup in one draught, he passes the cup back to the cup bearer and then again claps three times showing his thanks and appreciation. There has to be observed a strict rank order in which the cups are presented to the involved audience. The highest chief or the person of highest prestige receives the cup first. The second highest person receives the second cup and so on. The preparation of the *yaqona* as well as the refilling of the *tanoa*, the flat wooden bowl in which the *yaqona* is prepared, is accompanied by addressing the ancestors of the land and the gods with prayerlike announcements. The preparation of the *yaqona* is realized with putting the kavapowder into a cotton bag which is dipped into the water of the *tanoa*, until all the juice is extracted and the water in the bowl has obtained a light brown colour. A strict sitting order of all participating members of the ceremony is executed. If there are several chiefs of high rank, the sitting order has to be discussed, as it represents the importance and rank of the person visible to the participating audience. This might be tensious sometimes as discussions may evolve from the task to find the proper sitting order for such an event. The sitting order usually reflects the system of orientation of the whole society between the two poles “above“ (*i cake*) and “below“ (*i ra*) which is visible in the meeting/ceremonial house or assembly hall as transformed into a horizontal model in which one half of the room is regarded as „above“ – the sitting place of the most important persons – and the other half is „below“ thus including the attending people of less importance, rank and prestige.

The whole ceremony usually takes at least one hour, often much longer, if important persons are involved and the occasion is an extraordinary one. As could be observed during the coup period in the year 2000, the Great Council of Chiefs needed hours and hours to fulfill the traditional obligations linked with the *yaqona* ceremony, before being able to address and negotiate the serious topics where decisions had to be drawn, as each meeting was preceded by a *yaqona* ceremony. So the council was always in the situation to „react“ instead of being able to „act“ and so shaping the developments in its own interest. The kava ceremony which not only includes strict rules about the rank order on when and how one is allowed to participate in the negotiations, it also involves strict rules of behavior to prevent offending one another in a too direct way. The kava ceremony has a calming effect not only because of the sedative effect of the drug kava itself, which brings the consumer down and so helps him to prevent being too confrontative in discussions, but also includes a code of formal addressing the other discussants and phrases of recognition and worship the others rank, which have to be carefully observed in the communication. Possibilities to be inpolite and outraging manners are so reduced to a minimum. The *yaqona* ceremony so guarantees a platform and a body where opponents can talk in a modest atmosphere and settle confrontations without “losing the face“. Fijian politics so provides a suitable instrument for conflict settling in a traditional context, with the disadvantage, that fast running developments – as stating a coup, whose success or failing is at least in its initial phase a matter of hours – cannot be met by observing this traditions as they are linked to the time factor in a crucial way.

It were not only the procedures, linked to the kava ceremony which limited the Great Council of Chiefs’ ability to act fast and occasion-oriented: A gap also evolved between the younger generation of chiefs and the elders. A new generation of entrepreneurs who didn’t want to rely solely on traditional bindings favors the use of modern electronic communication facilities and are increasingly engaged in economic affairs. This new generation has a much better education, often from Australian, New Zealand and US-American universities, lives predominantly in urban areas and knows the outside world. Their greater flexibility and the use of modern forms of political representation for achieving personal goals, occasion-oriented acting – which can be summarized with the term “lobbying“ – and thus creating shortlived and fast changing alliances, brings the young chiefs

increasingly in opposition to the “old“ chiefs and representatives of the traditional ways of decision-finding.

This might be an approach for an explanation for the unsatisfactory acting of the Great Council of Chiefs in the weeks during the year 2000 coup, whose effects lasted and influenced the development of the political situation in Fiji since, especially the events in late 2006. One might compare the unsuccessful attempts to create a functioning united state in the mid nineteenth century with the somehow clumsy acting and lingering between the sides in the year 2000 and since. With the involvement of the same chiefly dynasties (the Maras and Cakobaus) in the middle of the conflict, and the long lasting rivalries and perpetuated fight for access to resources and power between chiefdoms and confederacies, nothing had significantly changed, except the instrumentalization of the ethnic conflict between the Indo-Fijians and the indigenous Fijians for Fijian interests in present times. So what can be really called “indigenous“ in a narrow sense of the word focusing on an evaluation of the political scene, might be the continuity in regional and mainly chiefly rivalries which span a bridge from the nineteenth century to present times with a long interlude in British colonial times and to some extent the first decades following independence. The involvement of the military might be seen as an indicator, that traditional affiliations and chiefly prerogatives are losing its monopoly for shaping the political developments alone. New forms of political organisation, forms of lobbying and the limited ability of traditional mechanisms to cope with complex conflicts and thus missing to provide proper instruments for conflict settlement, created a new situation. The acting of the political representatives of the ruling parties in the events of 2000 and 2006 showed clearly that – rooted in historical obligations – they were not able to handle this new challenges in a proper way. Fijis political elite is at present in a situation of lingering between sticking to old traditions (or what the present administration calls “traditional“), and adjusting with and enacting alternative ways of handling the long lasting existing conflicts. Commodore Bainimarama is at present (2007) the only guarantee for balancing the internal rivalries and keeping an eye on national interests instead of regional ones. The events of December 2006 and since only add another chapter to Fijis conflict burden history.

SUMMARY

The year 2006 was marked in Fiji by another coup d’etat. The Fiji military forces with its commander Frank Bainimarama ousted a corrupt and questionable government whose representatives coming into power after another coup in the year 2000 executed since a crucial politic of confrontation against Indo-Fijians, thus only covering long existing rivalries between different indigenous Fijian fractions. This article highlights similarities between political developments on the chiefly level in the mid nineteenth century and at present in Fiji. The coup of the year 2000, carried out by George Speight marked the open outbreak of conflicts between traditional influential chiefly families and chiefdoms as well as the three old confederacies. With a short overview of the historic conditions prior to the cession of Fiji to the British Empire in 1874, the bridge is drawn to the recent process of re-grouping interest-groups and power in Fiji, which is facing an unstable future.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Ende 2006 fand in Fidschi erneut ein Coup d’Etat statt. Das fidschianische Militär unter ihrem Kommandeur Frank Bainimarama stürzte dabei eine korrupte und auf einer fragwürdigen

selbstverordneten Verfassung agierenden Regierung. Diese setzte auf Konfrontation mit den Indo-Fidschianern, ein Konflikt, der jedoch nur die innerfidschianischen Konflikte überlagert. Der Beitrag beleuchtet Gemeinsamkeiten der politischen Situation in Fidschi zur Mitte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts und in der Gegenwart in Bezug auf die Rolle der Häuptlinge. Mit dem Putsch von George Speight und der Geiselnahme der gestürzten Regierung im Jahr 2000 wurden verdeckt geführte Machtkämpfe und Rivalitäten offenkundig. Mit einem Überblick über die historische Situation wird die Brücke in die Gegenwart gespannt und die wichtigsten Interessensgruppen, die Häuptlinge, Dynastien sowie die Rolle der traditionellen Konföderationen, vor dem Hintergrund traditioneller Konfliktlösungsmechanismen im Kampf um Macht und Einfluß beleuchtet.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Brewster, A.B.: *The Hill Tribes of Fiji*. London 1922: Seley, Service & Co.
- Brown, Sranley: *Men from Under the Sky. The Arrival of Westerners in Fiji*. Rutland/Tokyo 1973: Charles E. Tuttle.
- Burns, Sir Alan: *Fiji*. London 1963: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.
- Calvert, James: *Fiji and the Fijians, the islands and their inhabitants; Mission History*. Vol.2. London 1858: Heylin (Reprint: Suva 1985: Fiji Museum).
- Carneiro, Robert L.: Chieftdom-level warfare as exemplified in Fiji and the Cauca Valley. In: Haas, Jonathan (ed.): *The Anthropology of War*. Cambridge 1995: Cambridge Univ. Press, p. 190-211.
- Chand, Ganesh/ Naidu, Vijay (eds.): *Fiji: Coups, Crises, and Reconciliation, 1987-1997*. Suva 1997: Fiji Institute of Applied Studies.
- Derrick, R.A: *A History of Fiji*. Vol 1. Suva 1974: Government Press Fiji.
- Ewins, Rory: *Changing their minds. Tradition and Politics in Contemporary Fiji and Tonga*. Christchurch 1998: Macmillan Brown Centre, University of Canterbury.
- Ferguson, Brian: Explaining war. In: Haas, Jonathan (ed.): *The Anthropology of War*. Cambridge 1995: Cambridge Univ. Press, p. 26-55.
- Field, Michael/ Baba, Tupeni/ Nabobo-Baba, Unaisi: *Speight of violence. Inside Fiji's 2000 Coup*. Auckland 2005: Reed Publisher.
- Flannery, Kent: The cultural Evolution of Civilization. In: *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, No. 3. Palo Alto 1972, p. 399-426.
- Fraenkel, Jon: The Clash of Dynasties and Rise of Demagogues; Fiji's Tauri Vakaukauwa of May 2000. In: *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 35, No. 3. Canberra 2000, S. 295-308.
- France, Peter: *The Charter of the Land. Custom and Colonization in Fiji*. Melbourne 1969: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Fried, Morton: *The Evolution of Political Society: An Essay in Political Anthropology*. New York 1967: Random House.
- Halapua, Winston: *Tradition, Lotu and Militarism in Fiji*. Suva 2003: Fiji Institute for Applied Studies.
- Henderson, G.C.: *Fiji and the Fijians, 1835-1856*. Sydney 1931: Angus & Robertson.
- Howard, Michael: *Fiji; Race and Politics in an Island State*. Vancouver 1991: Univ. of British Columbia Press.
- Hunt, John: *Fiji Journal of John Hunt. 2 vols., 1839-47*. London 1845: Methodist Missionary Society Collection, SOAS (South Seas box 5B), unpublished document.

- Im Thurn, Sir Everard/ Wharton, Leonhard C. (eds.): *The Journal of William Lockerby, Sandalwood Trader in the Fijian Islands 1808-1809*. Issued by the Hakluyt Society, Second Series, No. LII. London 1925: The Hakluyt Society.
- Lal, Brij V.: *Broken Waves. A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century*. Pacific Islands Monograph Series, No. 11. Honolulu 1992: Univ. of Hawaii Press.
- Lawson, Stephanie: *The Failure of democratic politics in Fiji*. Oxford 1991: Clarendon Press.
- Legge, J.D.: *Britain in Fiji 1858-1880*. London 1958: Macmillan.
- Macnaught, T. J.: *The Fijian Colonial Experience: A Study of the Neotraditional Order under British Colonial Rule Prior to World War II*. Pacific Research Monograph No. 7. Canberra 1982.
- Mara, Ratu Kamisese: *The Pacific Way. A Memoir*. Honolulu 1997: Univ. of Hawaii Press.
- Mückler, Hermann: *Fidschi. Das Ende eines Südseeparadieses*. Vienna 2001: Promedia.
- Mückler, Hermann: Back to the chessboard: The coup and the re-emergence of pre-colonial rivalries in Fiji. In: Kolig, Erich/ Mückler, Hermann (eds.): *Politics of Indigeneity in the South Pacific. Recent Problems of Identity in Oceania*. Series Novara Beiträge zur Pazifikforschung Band 1 Hamburg 2002: Lit Verlag, p. 143-158.
- Mückler, Hermann: Fidschi. Vier Putsche in 20 Jahren. In: *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, Bd 3, Wien 2007: Bundesministerium f. Landesverteidigung, p. 281-290.
- Nayacakalou, Rusiate: *Tradition and Change in the Fijian Village*. Suva 1978: Univ. of the South Pacific/ Institute of Pacific Studies.
- Nayacakalou, Rusiate: *Leadership in Fiji*. Suva 1985: Univ. of the South Pacific/ Institute of Pacific Studies.
- Ravuvu, Asesela: *Vaka i Taukei. The Fijian Way of Life*. Suva 1983: Univ. of the South Pacific/Institute of Pacific Studies.
- Routledge, David: *Matanitu, The struggle for power in early Fiji*. Suva 1985: Institute of Pacific Studies/ Univ. of the South Pacific.
- Sahlins, Marshall: The Return of the event, again: with reflections on the beginnings of the great Fijian war of 1843 to 1855 between the kingdom of Bau and Rewa. In: Biersack, Aletta (ed.): *Clio in Oceania; Towards a Historical Anthropology*. Washington/London 1991: Smithsonian Institution Press, p. 37-99.
- Service, Elman: *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective*. New York 1962: Random House.
- Tarte, Sandra: *Turaga, The Life and Times and Chiefly Authority of Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau in Fiji*. Suva 1993: Fiji Times Ltd.
- Thomson, Basil: *The Fijians: A Study of the Decay of Custom*. London 1908: Heinemann.
- Waterhouse, Joseph: *The king and people of Fiji: being a life of Thakombau. Fijians, their manners, customs and superstitions*. London 1866: Wesley Conference Office.
- Wehler, Hans Ulrich: *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*. Köln/Berlin 1969: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.
- Williams, Thomas: *Fiji and the Fijians, the islands and their inhabitants*. Vol.1. London 1858: Heylin (Reprint: Suva 1985: Fiji Museum).

THE AUTHOR:

Mückler, Hermann; born 1964, is Professor at the Institute for Cultural and Social Anthropology/University of Vienna. Focusing on Oceania he did extensive field research in Fiji and other Pacific Island states which led to several publications. Among others: "Fidschi.

Zwischen Tradition und Transformation“ (Frankfurt/Main 1998); “Fidschi. Das Ende eines Südseeparadieses“ (Vienna 2001); „Politics of Indigeneity in the South Pacific“ (ed., with E. Kolig, Vienna 2002); “Das architektonische Erbe Samoas“ (ed., with E. Lehner & U. Herbig). Theoretical interest in ethnohistory, political anthropology and conflict management. President of the European Society for Oceanists (1999-2002); President of the Austrian South Pacific Society (1995-2010); Vice-President of the Anthropological Society in Vienna (since 2002); Vice-President of the Institute for Comparative Research in Architecture (since 2002).