

# **THE FIJI 2000 COUP: A MEDIA ANALYSIS**

**by**

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## **Statement of Sources**

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. It contains no material either in whole or part, submitted for a degree at this or any other University.

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**30 April, 2006**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the role of both the local and international media during the May 2000 coup, to determine whether the coverage was fair and to suggest solutions for the future. It will first discuss and compare literature that has been written on the Fiji coups, focusing on literature on the media and the coups in particular.

According to Fowler (1991) the role of a journalist is to collect facts, report them objectively and present them fairly and without bias in language which is designed to be unambiguous, undistorting and agreeable to readers. However, in most times this is not the case. A thematic content analysis will be done on news articles that appeared in *The Fiji Times*, *The New Zealand Herald* and *The Australian* to find common themes during the coverage of the crisis.

A lot of criticism of the both the local and international media's role during the May 2000 coup emerged after the crisis. Critics included editors and journalists of the local and international media and political and historical analysts who knew the 'real reasons' behind the coup and did not see this being reported. A summary of interviews with journalists and editors who covered the coup, both local and overseas, will give an insight into their thoughts and reactions during the coup. It will also determine whether the journalists suffered from the Stockholm syndrome.

The Stockholm syndrome describes the behaviour of kidnap victims or people who associate a lot with the captors, and who over time become sympathetic to their captors. The name is derived from a 1973 hostage siege in Stockholm, Sweden when at the end of six days of captivity at a bank; several kidnap victims actually resisted rescue attempts, and afterwards refused to testify against their captors. During the Fiji coup, apart from Speights supporters, journalists were the only ones who spent a lot of time with the coup leader either at press conferences or staying at Parliament to get good stories. As a result, some journalists began to 'sway' towards Speight or began to experience the Stockholm



syndrome which was reflected in their stories.

The thesis concludes that a few journalists in Fiji did suffer from the Stockholm syndrome. It also concludes that a crisis manual is needed for media organisations in Fiji to avoid the same mistakes being repeated as in the last three coups. The overseas media on the other hand need to attach themselves to the local media to avoid parachute journalism and inaccurate reporting. Overseas media organisations need to assign special reporters to Pacific Island affairs to understand the culture and other complex issues which would help in reporting their issues fairly and accurately.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

At 10.45am on the morning of Friday, 19 May 2000, after one year in government, the democratically elected government was taken hostage in a *coup d'état* led by a bald-headed man known only as George Speight and six gunmen. Before this George Speight was virtually unknown as a public figure, except for the fraudulent business cases he was involved in.

The news of another coup in Fiji shocked the world again, especially since things seemed to be going well since the election of a Labour government led by Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry. Headlines such as 'Take-over at Gunpoint' and 'Coup gunmen seize Fiji Govt' appeared in local and international newspapers. These headlines reminded most of similar headline in the 1987 coup like 'Paradise Lost' and 'Trouble in Paradise'.

For those who were too young to remember the 1987 coups, that day in 2000 will forever be remembered. For me, the memory of events that day is still vividly entrenched. I was studying at the University of the South Pacific then when a friend came to tell me that gunmen had taken over parliament. My first reaction was one of disbelief. Outside the library, for those who had already heard the news, running out of the University with fear on their faces was a scene I will never forget. Most of those rushing to get home were Indo-Fijian students. Within an hour the University was empty, no Indo-Fijian student in particular could be seen, and the place was deserted. Transportation had stopped; no buses or taxis could be seen.

Journalists have dubbed Fiji 'coup coup land' because of the three coups it has encountered within a span of 13 years. Fiji's population (of just over 800,000) is approximately 49% indigenous Fijians and 46% Fijian Indians<sup>2</sup> who descend from indentured labourers brought from the Indian subcontinent to work on sugar plantations in the nineteenth century.

The first coup took place on Thursday May 14, 1987 when the democratically elected government was overthrown after only one month in power. The longstanding racial tensions between the two major races were labelled as the reason for the coup. The first coup was covered mostly by the international media because the Fiji media were barred from reporting fairly due to threats by the Rabuka regiment as well as a lack of availability of necessary resources to back them up.

The second coup, 13 years later, took place in 2000 and was led by an Australian permanent resident who claimed to fight for indigenous rights, George Speight.

The 2000 coup came as a surprise for the media because it was a different type of coup. For the first time, perhaps in the history of coups all over the world, the hostage takers were accessible to the media and provided them with a lot of information through press conferences and personal interviews. However, even with this information overload, the press still made blunders and published inaccurate reports.

According to a PhD thesis<sup>1</sup> by prominent journalist and author of many Pacific publications, David Robie, the lack of training and education of editors and senior practitioners in the Fiji media industry, had a 'traumatic impact on the Fiji media' (Robie 2003). 'Although essentially it was a struggle for power within the indigenous Fijian community along with a conflict between tradition and modernity, the inevitable polarisation of races undermined notions of objectivity and professionalism' (Robie 2003).

At the time of the May 2000 coup, the Fiji media was as vibrant a community as ever even with a small economy with three daily newspapers in the English language: *The Fiji Sun*, *The Daily Post* and *The Fiji Times*. The *Fiji Times* was established in 1869 when George Littleton Griffith's founded it in Fiji's old capital of Levuka and is owned by media mogul Rupert Murdoch. *The Daily Post* was established in 1987 and one of its major shareholders is the Fiji Government. The *Fiji Sun* was established in 1999 and is

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<sup>1</sup> *Journalism Education in the South Pacific, 1975-2003: Politics, Policy and Practice*

owned by a consortium of local businesses. The three newspapers collectively have a daily circulation of 74,000. The *Fiji Times* has the highest circulation of 38,000 with the *Fiji Sun* following at 20,000 and then *The Daily Post* at 16,000. In addition to these there are three other fortnightly newspapers, one in the *Hindi* language and the other two in *Fijian* (Fiji Today: 2002:70). There are also magazines published in Fiji but the two major ones are *The Review* and *Island Business* magazines. There are two major radio stations — *Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited* and *Communications Fiji Limited*. These two radio stations have channels that broadcast in three languages: English, Hindi and Fijian.

Fiji has only one television station - *Fiji Television Limited*. The Internet now also forms part of Fiji's media with *fijilive.com* a popular site for locals and overseas people as a source of instant news in Fiji. *The Fiji Times* also recently launched its own website of the online version of the paper and this is becoming fast popular with overseas readers.

### **May 19, 2000**

After the May 2000 coup a lot of discussion centred on whether the media did a good job during the May 2000 coup or whether it was 'swept away by the euphoria of the moment' (Moala 2001). So far no research has been done to verify if the numerous criticisms against the media are valid, until now. However, this research is just one block of the whole picture by concentrating only on the major print media in three countries: Fiji, New Zealand and Australia.

Following the Introduction, CHAPTER TWO discusses the literature available on the coups in Fiji and the media's role during the crisis.

Using thematic content analysis, CHAPTER THREE will analyse the coverage of the crisis during the first 10 days in *The Fiji Times*, *The New Zealand Herald* and *The Australian*.

CHAPTER FOUR records the thoughts and reactions of journalists and editors who covered the coup. It discusses the main issues they felt which contributed to the way they covered the crisis. The journalists interviewed were from the print, radio and television media. The full text of the verbatim interviews can be found in the appendix. While some agreed that they suffered from the Stockholm syndrome during the May 2000 crisis, others thought the criticisms made against them was not fair, as they had tried their best to do their job well. Many local journalists from Fiji said ‘parachute journalism’ was prevalent among overseas journalists even though some wrote good analytical pieces. Parachute journalism is when journalists fly in to write stories with an end of day deadline and don’t understand the culture and history behind the event.

The conclusion sums up the findings of the research and makes suggestions for improvement in the future.

## CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

The May 2000 coup in Fiji was extensively covered by both the local and international media. However, little research is available on the role and response of the media during the coup. This literature review focuses on authors who have addressed this topic including Field (2005), Lal (2001), Mason (2005), Moala (2001) and Robie (2001, 2004). This research generally argues that while many overseas journalists failed to understand and analyse the crucial deeper issues behind the coup, the local media lacked general analysis and in-depth reporting. Books, magazines and news articles on the coup itself were also surveyed, to assess the presentation of information on the coup, and discern any patterns in media coverage.

According to Professor Brij Lal, historian and an architect of Fiji's 1997 constitution, the 1987 coup was about protecting the foundations of the Fijian establishment (Lal 2000). Lal focused on the historical background of how Indians came to be in Fiji and how race came to be an issue in Fijian politics in his book *Fiji before the storm*. Lal's work does not discuss the role of the media during both the 1987 and 2000 coups. Even though Lal quoted part of the local media: *The Fiji Times*; *Review*; *Islands Business* and *FM96* - his work did not critically consider their role during the crisis. Rather his work focused on the historical reasons behind the coup, how Indians came to be in Fiji and the land issue, which is a sensitive topic to Fijians. He explained how chiefs from the West of Fiji with the fourth confederacy, the Yasayasa Vaka Ra, were unhappy that they were not fairly represented in the national centre of power (Lal 2000). They argued that the West drove the national economy with sugar, pine, gold and tourism and demanded representation in national councils proportionate to contribution to the economy. This created a divide between the East and West, which has been reflected by political leaders like Apisai Tora, Ratu Osea Gavidi and other chiefs in the 1960s (Lal 2000).

Thirteen years and five days after the 1987 coup, George Speight and six gunmen once again interrupted democracy by hijacking Parliament (Lal 2000). According to Lal, the May 2000 coup, would re-shape Fijian social and political life and re-structure traditional

power relations. The crisis became more about intra-Fijian rivalries than about race (Lal 2000). Lal wrote that even Speight admitted that the race issue between Fijians and Indians was just one piece of the jigsaw puzzle. Disparities between the Fijian and Indian population were said to be reasons behind the coup and even the media reported it as such.

However, the 1987 and 2000 coups as most writers found, was not at all about race. Rather it was a power struggle within the Fijian hierarchy itself as Lal indicated (Lal 2000).

Satendra Nandan edited a collection of essays by 14 authors on their perspectives during the 1987 coup in *Coup and Crisis: Fiji A Year Later*. This work focused on social issues during the coup and there is no mention of the media's role during the 1987 or 2000 coups (Nandan 1988).

More personal accounts and feelings are revealed by one of the first editors of *The Fiji Times*, Sir Len Usher in two separate publications. The first work, *Letters from Fiji 1987-1990*, gave an on-the-spot record of what happened before, between and after the two military coups. The chronology of events from 1987-1990 and a summary of events in the five years following the 1987 election act as a guide to better understand the 1987 coup. The author's second work, *More Letters From Fiji 1990-1994*, is more comprehensive than the first. Apart from a chronology of events that led to the 1990 Constitution various events like the resistance of the new constitution, election preparations, Rabuka leaving the army, budget debate, fall of the government, change of president and after the election, are discussed. Part VI of the appendix is noteworthy for this thesis because press freedom and responsibilities during the 1987 coup are discussed in this section.

According to Usher (1994), even though local news media offices were occupied by armed soldiers, the nation and the world were told what was happening through the international media. However, even though the standard of reporting was high, Usher wrote there were also examples of one-sidedness and dishonesty such as reports that gave the impression that all events in Fiji centred round the inconveniences and harassment to which some



overseas journalists were personally subjected. He claimed that even when there was nothing happening, there was a tendency of the media to accept and report on rumours circulating (Usher 1994).

Usher commended the overseas media for being true professionals even though they were harassed and kept under constant surveillance by the military. He also commended the overseas media for their perceptive and informed analytical reports. Usher proposed that the lesson to be learnt here was that the essential qualities of a truly professional journalist was to record events exactly as they occurred, a lesson that should be taught at any journalism training programme. His work also proposed the importance of journalism training in accuracy and balance in news gathering (Usher 1994). Usher's second work is more relevant to the theme of this thesis as it discussed the media's role during the 1987 crisis. His recommendation on the importance of journalism training and education was re-emphasised six years later after the May 2000 coup by journalist and author David Robie. Robie had also written about how the media was manipulated by the Rabuka regime during the 1987 coup in *Blood on their Banner*. According to Robie, the Fijian news media, particularly Radio Fiji and the vernacular newspaper *Nai Lalakai* supported Rabuka by justifying what the military was doing as 'a measure to counter supposed internal and external threats' (Robie 1989).

Shameem also disagreed with Usher that the overseas media did an exceptional job in 1987. She felt the New Zealand media presented Fiji's problems as race problems and allowed Rabuka to manipulate the media in 1987 (Shameem 1989). Shameem criticised former Television New Zealand reporter Derek Fox and a Maori crew for presenting a glorified image of Rabuka as saviour of the Fijian race (Shameem 1989). Her study was a detailed examination of news items, features and editorials on Fiji in four metropolitan dailies in New Zealand, *The Dominion*, *The Press*, *New Zealand Herald* and the *Evening Post*. She also examined 14 hours of taped news reports and special features on Fiji that aired on Television New Zealand from May 14 1987 to June 1988. Shameem concluded that the New Zealand media reporting in the 1987 events revealed a 'genuine misunderstanding of the crisis and newspaper politics' (Shameem 1989). Shameem's

analysis of the New Zealand media's role during the 1987 coup is a useful comparison to how the same media reported in the May 2000 coup.

Meanwhile, in an interview with Australian National University doctoral candidate Anthony Mason, 1987 coup maker Sitiveni Rabuka admitted he didn't handle the media well during the coup. Mason interviewed Rabuka on his relationship with the media in 1987 as part of his PhD research(2005a) and these interviews were published in *Pacific Journalism Review*, found that Rabuka was very open to the media during the first few hours of his coup even though he admitted he had never had media training (Mason 2005a). Rabuka also told Mason that he shut down the media in 1987 because people in the military told him to do so. Rabuka shared similar views with Shameem in that he felt the Australian and New Zealand media were hostile and had a subjective view of the events in Fiji (Mason 2005a). Media coverage of his 1987 coup was important to Rabuka but he felt that 'there was not enough coverage given to why he did it'. Why he should not have done it was covered more in the media. He told Mason he felt Fiji was subjected to the same kind of prejudice in the media suffered by the Aboriginal people and the Maori (Mason 2005a). Rabuka also regretted his behaviour towards the media in 1987 and told Mason he would have been friendlier to them if he knew how to deal with them. Rabuka praised Speight for knowing how to handle the media and be successful in putting his views across to them. Rabuka also claimed there were also some 'blatant and fraudulent reports' from the international media like those about tanks being used in Fiji (Mason 2005a).

In the interview, Rabuka told Mason he was surprised at how quickly some journalists left Fiji because something more interesting was happening somewhere else. Rabuka observed that after they had left, they used their old footage on Fiji over and over again even though the situation might have moved on. While comparing the coverage by the overseas media in the 2000 coup, Rabuka admitted that the Australian media's coverage was better and their reports revealed that they understood what was going on during the coup. Mason's verbatim interview with Rabuka is excellent as a source of information from the 1987 coup maker himself on his view of the media during his coup. Mason's verbatim questions are specific and relate to Rabuka's relationship with the media and his regrets with his behaviour towards the media. His interview with Rabuka is only related to the overseas

media close to Fiji, the Australian and New Zealand media. It does not focus on the local media. However, Mason's interviews are useful as a point of comparison with this thesis which analyses the coup coverage by the local and overseas media.

Mason's second interview with the former editor of *The Fiji Times*, Vijendra Kumar is more relevant to this thesis (Mason 2005b). Kumar revealed to Mason that while they were able to produce an edition the next day after the 1987 coup, they were shut down for two to three weeks after that. However, according to Kumar even though the journalists were barred from their newsroom and locked out of the premises, they still met every day and kept track of what was happening (Mason 2005b). Mason's interview revealed that the local media were helpless during the 1987 coup after being shut down by the army and ended up becoming conduits of information for the foreign journalists. Kumar agreed with Shameem and Rabuka that in 1987, the international media had little knowledge of Fiji and it was a big learning experience for the Australian and New Zealand journalists (Mason 2005b). He observed that the overseas media expected to see violent demonstrations and upheavals and bloodshed which did not happen. He felt that if the overseas journalists had a little more knowledge of Fiji's complex political situation, it might have had a different impact on the world's opinion of Fiji (Mason 2005b). According to Mason, without the assistance of the local media, the overseas media would have been lost. Mason's second interview gave a glimpse of the local media's view of the 1987 coup and is again useful information for comparison and background to this thesis.

Field (Baba, Nabobo-Baba & Field 2005) found that many of the international media reported the whole saga as a 'Fijian vs. Indian' problem during the May 2000 crisis, when it was by this point an issue of power between two of Fiji's leaders, Cakobau and Mara. He observed that the overseas journalists knew little about Fiji and he gave an example of a *New Zealand Herald* reporter who was shocked it would take three hours to drive from Nadi to Suva and another who had read stories about the unrest in the Solomon Islands on his way to the Fiji coup. This gave him no insight into the cultural systems in Fiji which are intertwined into the political system. Unless you know the cultural system it would be hard to understand what was going on (Baba, Nabobo-Baba & Field 2005). Field criticised the New Zealand media for not taking any interest in Fiji before the coup, as covering the

Pacific successfully needed 'long-time commitment, anything other than that would be patronising' (Baba, Nabobo-Baba & Field 2005).

A lot of journalists stayed over at Parliament because according to Field, that was where the stories were. He dismissed criticisms that this was unethical as journalists are known to go as close to a story as they can and this is why they are often killed (Field 2005).

However, he agreed that after many of the reporters 'moved in' with the hostage-takers by eating and sleeping at Parliament, they started experiencing the Stockholm syndrome.

A New Zealand reporter displayed extreme signs of the Stockholm syndrome when he stole bullets from the hostage-takers guns. Other reporters who suffered from the Stockholm syndrome established a first-name tie with Speight like they were good buddies and others laughed with Speight after hearing his jokes. The worst of the foreign media came from New Zealand. They did not know basic names of the place and very few of them had reported in the Pacific. The Australian media on the other hand were better with their talent and experience and were also well known locally. There was a lack of commitment to the Pacific from the overseas media, especially the New Zealand news media (except for Radio New Zealand). This lack of commitment formed an inexperienced media who reported on issues in the Pacific inaccurately and moulded public opinion. The world depended on the reporters to understand the Fiji coup and they were put under pressure which was reflected in their news stories (Field 2001).

Most of the overseas media stayed at the Centra hotel during the coup and met regularly in the 'bure newsroom', as Field called it, to tell war stories, keep their eye on the competition and reinforce rumours and inaccuracies (Field 2001). An example of this was when there were rumours that Mahendra Chaudhry had a guerrilla army in the mountains of Viti Levu who would come down to Suva and liberate the Government. This rumour was broadcast on New Zealand television as a news item the next day. Overseas reporters, Field emphasised, ought to socialise with the locals instead of restricting themselves to their own overseas colleagues. This could help them better understand what was going on

(Field 2002). Field's observations about the media in *Speight of Violence* make it an interesting book. However, he does not go in-depth with his analysis and criticisms of the media's role during the coup. Rather, he explores the deeper issues behind the May 2000 coup which were analysed more comprehensively in a paper by Victoria University of Wellington Lecturer in Pacific Studies and former History/Politics lecturer Teresia Teaiwa (Teaiwa 2000). According to Teaiwa, even though there are Fijian provinces and traditional Fijian confederacies, the two coups of 1987 and the 2000 crisis illustrate with disturbing insistence the erosion of indigenous Fijian social order and fragmentation of indigenous Fijian leadership. She condemned how the race issue was being blamed for the coups' (Teaiwa 2000).

At a conference in Budapest, Hungary, University of the South Pacific academic, Professor Konai Helu Thaman claimed that both local and foreign reporters did not understand that 'notions of democracy, human rights, freedom of expression or even the law itself, remain empty words among people whose world views were and continue to be framed by a different theory of personhood' (Thaman 2001).

The Australian media was also criticised for inaccurate reporting on the coup by a historian and one of the three architects of Fiji's 1997 Constitution, Professor Brij Lal, who lives in Australia. According to Lal, the Australian media called him several times and at odd hours seeking answers to probing questions and highlighted the dramatic events during the coup "seeing Fiji through the prism of their own prejudices or understanding of indigenous and other such issues" (Lal 2001). During interviews with Lal, presenters asked questions but put their own 'spin' on his answers. Lal also criticised the television media for presenting a distorted picture about what was actually happening in the country at large. However he also praised the Australian newspaper reporters for going beyond Suva to the country side to focus on people terrorised by Speight's supporters and writing about people 'weeping as they picked up the pieces, frightened shopkeepers seeking shelter behind shuttered windows, and menacing young men armed with knives and sticks ready to go on a rampage' (Lal 2001).

Australia's ignorance of the Pacific comes through in their stories, according to Australian journalist Mary-Louise O'Callaghan. O'Callaghan was interviewed by Terry Lane of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on her views on the coverage of the 1987 coup. She said that with pressure to meet deadlines, parachute journalists tended to send inaccurate reports back to their offices overseas. O'Callaghan agreed that Speight was given credibility through the coverage he was getting and reported as though he had some credible claim to being an alternative government rather than a terrorist who had taken hostages. While the print media could inject some criticism in its stories, the electronic media was disadvantaged as it was not able to put much in its short grabs. She suspected the media gave a lot of prominence to Speight because it was not normal to get access to the person holding the hostages to the extent that he was prepared to make himself available. She suggested getting help from the local media and listening to the radio and television news in Fiji could solve the problem of parachute journalism (ABC interview, June 4, 2000).

Pacific Islands News Association President William Parkinson's opinion of the international coverage of the coup varied from 'excellent to abysmal'. Parkinson was interviewed on his thoughts regarding the role of the media during the May 2000 coup by *Fiji Times* journalist Serafina Silaitoga (*Fiji Times*, July 10 2000). According to Parkinson the challenge for the media was not access to the coup makers but being able to assess whether the media was being used as a propaganda tool. He admitted it wasn't easy for the overseas media in 2000 as it was a very confusing time, introducing new players with different agendas as the crisis unfolded. He commended some of the overseas media who overcame this by turning to the local media for advice (Silaitoga, *Fiji Times*, July 10, 2000).

However, Parkinson felt the local media lacked analysis, unlike the overseas media. Background on the various players and their political history for example were not provided by the local media (Silaitoga, *Fiji Times*, July 10, 2000). Nevertheless Parkinson thought it was also important to note the extra challenges faced by the local media before judging their coverage of the crisis. According to Parkinson, a huge strain was placed on

staff who had pay cuts and presented local journalists with 'real moral and ethical dilemmas' as every journalist had their own personal views on the coup. Parkinson admitted the crisis was a confusing time for young journalists especially as they juggled between their personal lives and work, with some of their relatives being involved in the crisis and their efforts to remain impartial under these circumstances. Parkinson's views were published in July 2000 and are comparable to the controversial so-called "Mooloolaba paper" (Robie, 2000a) critiquing media coverage of the coup and presented at the annual Journalism Education Association (JEA) of Australia, NZ and the Pacific conference and an earlier paper on the "media anatomy" of the coup (Robie, 2000b) presented at the Communication Association of Australia and New Zealand conference at Byron Bay, NSW, in July 2000. However, Parkinson's views did not receive the hostile reception and the amount of criticism from the Fiji media that Robie's Mooloolaba paper did. The controversy sparked by Robie's paper led to bitter personal attacks against the author on the JEANet and Penang Commonwealth editors e-mail list-servers for two weeks. A two-page article without Robie's comments or comments from other media commentators appeared in Pacific magazine. Interestingly, Robie's main arguments and those of the writers' he drew on were never published in the Fiji media. Robie analysed media issues over the coverage of the 2000 coup and critiqued the media's close relationship with Speight and the hostage-takers in the early weeks of the crisis which raised ethical questions.

After putschist Speight and his gunmen kidnapped the Coalition Government, it was astonishing how captive the journalists were to Speight. In a sense they were hostages too, even providing a human shield at times of confrontation between the rebel group and the military checkpoints (Robie 2001).

Robie drew on several writers' work to support his argument. One was a researcher at the University of the South Pacific's Development Studies, Nwome Obini who conducted a content analysis of *The Fiji Times* coverage on the Chaudhry Government's year in office. Obini concluded that *The Fiji Times* bombarded the prime minister with problems in editorials and news reports, a contrast to its treatment of previous governments (Obini, as



cited in Robie 2001).

Robie also interviewed political commentator and civil rights advocate Jone Dakuvula, who claimed that it was the agenda of *The Fiji Times* to delegitimise the elected government by creating a climate of scandal, loathing and fear so the Fiji Labour Party would not be able to effectively implement its manifesto. Obini's research and Dakuvula's views were similar in their conclusions.

The problem of bias in *The Fiji Times* and *Daily Post* existed a decade earlier in 1992 according to media analyst Pramila Devi. Her research report into the print media in Fiji analysed the 1992 general election campaign in *The Fiji Times* and *Daily Post* and found both practiced self-censorship with a bias towards a certain ideology, the same racist ideology shared by most of Fiji's ethnic Fijian population (Devi 1992).

A government official and USP journalism scholar Susan Kiran revealed in her MA thesis that *The Fiji Times* was biased in its reporting of the May 2000 coup. Kiran agreed with Obini, Dakuvula and Devi that *The Fiji Times* was undoubtedly biased towards the rebel cause in its reportage of the crisis, 'thus promoting the political and economic agenda of a group of elites, under the cover of ethnic conflict' (Kiran 2004). According to Kiran *the Fiji Times* presented the crisis as an ethnic conflict myth and 'masked the entire social, economic and political struggle under ethnic conflict, thus helping Speight' (Kiran 2004). Kiran analysed news stories in *The Fiji Times* during the 56 days of the crisis to gauge the extent to which the coverage was biased in *The Fiji Times*. She used a combination of semiotic and rhetorical analysis to reveal the various biases present in the newspaper. Examples of this bias according to Kiran were words used in news articles that gave Speight legitimacy. Words such as 'self-proclaimed Prime Minister' 'self-proclaimed head of state', 'Speights Interim Prime Minister' and 'Taukei Civilian Government' gave positive connotations to the coup rebels. *The Fiji Times* also used phrases like 'deposed Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry' to describe Chaudhry and this also gave legitimacy to Speight's coup (Kiran 2004).

Less than a year before the May 2000 coup, Chaudhry attacked the media at the launch of



the Fiji Media Council Code of Ethics and Practice on 26 October, 1999. Chaudhry criticised the media and singled out three media organisations and prominent individual journalists during the launch. He threatened to establish a media tribunal and license foreign-owned media with an annual fee of \$20,000 (Chador 2000). The media did not cover this speech of Chaudhry's and the government responded with eight page advertisements including the speech in the *Fiji Sun* and *The Daily Post*. According to Robie, *The Fiji Times* followed four days later with a two-page editorial describing Chaudhry's speech as a 'rambling diatribe riddled with contradictions, half truths and untruths' (Robie 2001). Robie saw the 2000 coup as a steep learning curve for Fiji's journalists and while many showed remarkable courage and commitment, he felt it was also a time when professionalism needed to rise another notch (Robie 2001).

A former *Daily Post* editor Jale Moala also commented on journalistic integrity and impartiality as an important factor in coverage. He thought reporters stayed too long in the Parliamentary complex thus making the outside world believe they were enjoying the hospitality of the terrorists (Moala 2001). However, Moala decided his newspaper at the time, *The Daily Post*, would draft a policy to cope with the crisis and to prevent sympathy for the terrorists from reporters. The guidelines sought greater emphasis on the effects of the crisis on the people and economy and were not formally written in case they got into the hands of the rebels (Moala 2001).

The guidelines Moala used in his paper were:

1. Not use the word coup in its coverage, and it would report the event of May 19 as a kidnapping and hostage situation. The newspaper believed that reporting George Speight's action as a coup would give it some justification in the minds of indigenous Fijians;
2. Report Speight as either the 'leader of the kidnappers' or as the 'leader of gunmen', or as 'leader of the hostage takers' and never as coup leader;
3. Report Speight's group as 'gunmen', 'terrorists' and 'kidnappers';

4. Restrict the use of photos taken of Speight and his supporters in the Parliamentary complex to stop them getting too much publicity;
5. Not refer to Speight as a nationalist working for indigenous Fijian interests, but as Suva businessman George Speight, leader of the kidnappers or the terrorists;
6. *The Daily Post* regularly switched reporters covering the events at the Parliamentary complex to prevent them getting too close to the terrorists.

Other media organisations however failed to do the same. According to Robie, even though some media organisations rotated reporters inside Parliament to prevent them getting too close to the rebels, FM96 ran an editorial policy on air saying ‘trust us’ and this in itself raised questions of news media credibility (Robie 2001). Another example of media credibility given was when a senior executive and two reporters of Radio Fiji were detained by the military on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, following a story they broadcast which predicted there would be a mutiny in the military in the weeks following. The military wanted to know who the source was. Even though the story was well sourced, Robie found it lacked balance as it did not have a comment from the military on their reaction to this leaked news (Robie 2001).

In another article published in *Australian Journalism Review*, Robie surveyed the media coverage by most of the local media and a random selection of international media coverage by the *New Zealand Herald*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), *Australian Television* and *BBC World* television news (Robie 2000b). He found that the local media lacked in-depth analytical articles like the one written in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by Marian Wilkinson on the mahogany forests in Fiji which exposed how Speight was about to gain from a deal with Timber Resource Management, an American company, until the Chaudhry government trashed the deal when it came to power (*Sydney Morning Herald*, May 29, 2000). Robie’s *Taukei takeover: the media anatomy of a coup* paper found that on Day 7 of the coup, the *Fiji Sun* was already calling the rebels the ‘Taukei civilian government’ and this was when ethical questions about the

media's relationship with the terrorists began to emerge. Robie found his survey raised a lot of unanswered questions like whether the media should have stayed at Parliament and whether was it right to give Speight a media platform and turn him into a celebrity (Robie 2000b).

Robie concluded the media had fuelled the crisis and gave Speight a false idea about his importance and support. The foreign media had not understood the real reasons behind the coup and reported it in terms of racial stereotyping. Local journalists learnt words like 'coup', 'insurrection', 'rebellion' and 'terrorism' from the overseas media (Robie 2001). Again in this paper the problems in the Fiji media are revealed. Even on the anniversary of the Fiji 2000 coup, the Fiji newspapers were reluctant to debate the shortcomings of the crisis coverage, except for one article by the Sun's Samisoni Pareti, who cited two diplomats' thoughts that coverage was not bad (Robie 2001). Journalist with *The Australian*, Mary-Louise O'Callaghan had questioned in her article in the newspaper, whether the local press should bear some of the responsibility for the political turmoil (O'Callaghan as cited in Robie 2001). While the news media was fairly diligent and at times courageous when reporting hard news, Fiji lacked sufficient numbers of critically thinking journalists who could provide 'in-depth, perceptive and balanced articles and commentaries' as this was provided mostly by non-journalists during the crisis (Robie 2001). This lack of critically thinking journalists could have had something to do with the average age of journalists in the media as Robie found in earlier research in 1999 *Pacific newsrooms and the campus: some comparisons between Fiji and Papua New Guinea*. Robie found that the median age of journalists in the Pacific was 22 and almost half of them had no professional or educational qualifications at all and the median experience was 2.5 years (Robie 1999).

Radio Australia journalist Graeme Dobell praised the professionalism of Fiji's journalists during the 56 days of the coup and the pressure they were under. Unlike the 1987 coup where there was censorship of the media, Dobell said this time all three Fiji newspapers, two radio networks and one television service together with the Internet kept working during the 56 days of the crisis. According to Dobell, the international reporters did a

better job too because they were working from a solid basis of information provided by Fiji's media (Lal 2001).

Robertson and Sutherland revealed the underlying causes and lessons of the Fiji 2000 coup in *Government by the Gun*. The story of the coup is given from day one till the general elections in 2001. In summary, both concluded that the reason behind the coup was the ignorance of the aspirations of the majority of the Fijian people. The work focused on the indigenous question and how it could be resolved. It delved into the history of Fijian paramountcy to answer this question. The work suggested that the solution to Fiji's problems 'has to come from Fijians themselves' (Robertson & Sutherland 2001). *Government by the Gun* is more of a historical book into Fijian paramountcy and does not deal with the media.

While the professional journalists from media organisations covered the coup, student journalists from the University of the South Pacific used the opportunity to practise their skills in a real life situation. Philip Cass (2002) a former University of the South Pacific journalism lecturer, explained how journalism students from USP covered the May 2000 coup. According to Cass accurate information about what was happening during the crisis was restricted to a few websites and the journalism students website was one of them (*Pacific Journalism Online* [www.usp.ac.fj/journ/](http://www.usp.ac.fj/journ/)). The news of the coup was broken at 10am on May 19 by Tamani Nair, a USP journalism student who was on attachment with Radio Fiji at the time. About 20 students volunteered to cover the coup and saw it as a 'great opportunity' (Cass 2002). They worked around the clock just like any media organisation and put up digital pictures, audio clips, stories and summaries of news items on their own website and also prepared to produce a special print edition of their student newspaper *Wansolwara*.

To give a glimpse of what it was like during the crisis, Cass quoted the student journalists day-to-day personal accounts of the coup from May 19 to May 30. By the time martial law was declared on May 29, the students had posted a total of 109 stories and dozens of audio reports and many digital photos on the *Pacific Journalism Online* website. Cass found that

as the situation developed, the students views were often the only perspective available to people outside Fiji. However the website had to be shut down after a directive from the USP vice-chancellor Esekia Solofa who was concerned that the violence committed against journalists in the mainstream media would spill onto campus (cited in *Commonwealth Press Union News*, August 2000).

Cass found the journalism students took pride in the risks they had taken and their success in overcoming them. He quoted student online editor for *Pacific Journalism Online* during the coup, Christine Gounder, who in a coup post mortem report, wrote that even though they were threatened and despite bureaucratic attempts to gag their website and newspaper, they survived. According to Gounder, the students in 2000, grabbed the opportunity to hone their skills during the coup and 'the young journalists didn't waste any time rushing to be on the spot at Parliament on May 19 and the looting and arson sites around the capital of Suva' (*Commonwealth Press Union News*, August 2000).

As criticisms against the media increased, the government threatened to turn the self-regulating Fiji Media Council into a statutory body (Robie & Singh 2004). Qarase accused Fiji journalists of being 'uncertain interviewers, poor verbal communicators, having problems with accuracy and short on knowledge of current affairs' (Robie & Singh 2004). Local journalists who covered the coup did not agree with these criticisms. In *Mekim Nius*, former Islands Business writer and former Radio Fiji journalist (now host for *Close-Up* programme on *Fiji Television*) Samisoni Pareti, former *Daily Post* reporter Josephine Prasad, former *Fiji Times* reporter Matelita Ragogo and *Fiji Sun* reporter John Kamea, told Robie they did their best at reporting during the May 2000 coup (Robie 2004). However, there was an incident where Pareti praised Speight's friendliness to the media and admitted at a late press conference 'Speight asked for my dinner of curry chicken and ate it while taking questions' (Pareti 2001). When he wrote a story on this, he was accused by Speight's supporters of implying that there was a shortage of food inside Parliament. Pareti did not seem to be concerned about how his sharing food with Speight might have looked to the public, raising questions about the credibility of not only his stories but those of the media organisation he represented, in this case, Radio Fiji. Chief executive officer Francis

Herman admitted in an audio taped interview for this thesis, that Radio Fiji received a lot of criticism for Pareti's story (Herman, audio taped interview, August 15).

## **Conclusion**

While there is substantial literature available on the history and socio-political conditions leading up to the coup and the relationship between politics and the military, very little focused on the media and how it covered the crisis. The literature review showed the role of the media during the coup was touched on lightly by various authors. The overseas media largely made the same mistakes as in 1987 by not understanding the complexities of Fiji's political situation and using the 'race-card' as the reason behind the coup. Because of a lack of staff with the local media, pressure was put on those who were there and this contributed to the inaccuracies in their stories.

Culture will always be part of society but information is what makes a difference in the end and this is where a journalist comes to play an important role (Robie 2004). According to Robie, informed and critically reflective journalists can make sense of the changes and processes needed to improve Pacific people's lives in a globalised world. The literature review showed that Fiji reporters found it hard to put aside their customary obligations and be neutral while reporting on the coup because of their culture.

This thesis aims to test the claims of the writers discussed in this chapter on the media coverage during the May 2000 crisis. The next chapter looks at the views of the journalists who covered the crisis.

### **CHAPTER THREE: Thematic Content Analysis**

This chapter analyses media coverage of the first 10 days of the coup in 2000. The previous chapter surveyed commentary and opinion in the literature on the coup. This content analysis aims to identify the broad themes of coverage and in the conclusion of the chapter, compare them with the main themes in the literature reviewed.

Fiji has had three coups in the last 13 years. The first two coups took place in 1987 when the democratically elected government was overthrown by the military after only one month in power. The third coup happened 13 years later, on May 19, 2000, by civilians and some members of the military. The role the Fiji media played in the 1987 coup was not questioned as much as their role in the May 2000 coup. This may have been because during the 1987 coup, the Fiji media were suppressed and were not free to publish. Information was also not freely available as in May 2000. Sitiveni Rabuka, who led the military takeover in 1987, did not hold press conferences like Speight did. The media were restricted on what they published and were threatened if they did. The media was helpless in 1987 and could not print or broadcast freely as in 2000.

The May 2000 coup was interesting because it was a very different kind of coup compared to 1987 and other coups around the world. During the 1987 military coup, Sitiveni Rabuka closed down the media and controlled the news broadcast over the government owned radio station, Radio Fiji. In 2000, instead of being harsh and refusing to speak to the media, George Speight was available without delay and loved the media just like they loved him. He held numerous press conferences for instance and allowed the media to freely walk in and out at Parliament. When the military set up a roadblock outside Parliament and did not allow anyone to go in, George Speight walked down the road and told them to allow the journalists in. The Internet also played a role in influencing how information was communicated to the rest of the world. Speight was a character that treated the media as his friends and in the race to get the best story first, the media often became his propaganda arm.

With a population of more than 893,000<sup>2</sup>, Fiji has a vibrant media community with three daily newspapers (*The Fiji Times*, *Fiji Sun* and *Daily Post*) and two vernacular newspapers (*Shanti Dut* and *Nai Lalakai*); two major magazines (*The Review* and *Islands Business International*) and two radio networks which have an average of three different language channels (Communications Fiji Limited and Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited).

## Methodology

For this chapter, 90 news articles in total from three different print media from three countries were analysed using content analysis. As a scientific approach to textual analysis content analysis can involve the qualitative or quantitative analysis of the content of texts, graphics and other forms of verbal, visual or written communication. According to Sarantakos (1998), as a quantitative method it may be used to determine the time, frequency or duration of an event. As a qualitative technique, content analysis may be directed toward more subjective information, such as motives, attitudes or values which may emerge from identifying themes.

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was used to study the content of news articles in the media during the first 10 ten days of the coup. Stories were taken from Fiji's major newspaper, *The Fiji Times*; New Zealand's widely read daily newspaper, *The New Zealand Herald* and Australia's national paper, *The Australian*. These newspapers were chosen because they are the leading newspapers in their respective countries.

The first 10 days (May 20 - May 30, 2000) before martial law was chosen because this was a defining time for the media and a challenge to report it accurately and to present a true picture of what was happening in Fiji. The first 10 days would also have been the best time to judge how the local and overseas media handled the pressure and the different kinds of articles they produced - were they able to write different angled stories, straight news reporting from the press conferences or in-depth analytical pieces to explain what was happening to its readers. Stories were coded according to the days they appeared and themes discussed within the day printed.

Language plays an important role in news and even though modern research suggests that people



do not depend on language for thought, it is still a powerful tool especially when presenting the world to an audience (Reah: 2002: 54). The language used in newspaper articles is important as it contributes to meaning. Even though it is easy to resist a particular viewpoint presented to readers, it 'is not easy to resist when the viewpoint or ideology is concealed' (Reah: 2002:54). According to Media studies author Roger Fowler, the role of linguistic structure in the construction of ideas in the Press shows that language is not neutral 'but a highly constructive mediator' (Fowler: 1991:p 1).

The local and overseas media have been criticised for their coverage during the May 2000 coup. Criticisms have ranged from being "too cosy" with George Speight during the coup, sleeping over at Parliament, eating food provided by the rebels, giving too much coverage to Speight and allowing supporters to make inflammatory statements live on radio.

In view of these accusations and criticisms, it has become necessary to analyse the articles written during the May 2000 coup and to identify any examples of bias by the journalists.

## **Thematic Content Analysis**

### **DAY 1 AND 2: May 20 -21**

#### **Coup d'etat**

A common theme ran across all three newspapers on the first day of the crisis to inform readers that a coup had taken place in Fiji. A lot of general details like who the coup leader was, the President's speech to the nation, a bit of background on George Speight and activities leading up to the coup were discussed.

#### ***The Fiji Times***

*The Fiji Times* front page 'Takeover at Gunpoint' had detailed reports and used large pictures. However, biased words were used in stories which gave legitimacy to Speight and his rebels. For example, the lead story on page three described George Speight as a 'businessman' instead of a

‘failed businessman’. The ‘businessman’ title added to Speights stature and gave him credibility. Stories on that day also referred to the Chaudhry government as ‘the overthrown Chaudhry government’ and implied that Speights coup was successful.

*The Fiji Times* on May 21, 2000 ran a front-page headline ‘Terrorists’. A six -column photo with George Speight on the far left, deposed Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry in the middle and deposed Deputy Prime Minister Tupeni Baba on the far right all looked into a document held by Mr Baba. Coup supporter Timoci Silatolu<sup>3</sup> was seen trying to get a peek at the document while standing behind the three men. A subtitle below the photo caption read ‘Ratu Mara says he won't bow down to threats’. The rest of the story focused on President Ratu Mara’s speech who called on Fijians to respect the law and stop damaging properties. Ratu Mara told the nation “what happened today will be remembered as a day of shame”. He asked the nation to join with him and pray for Fiji. This article on the President filled half a page and the photo the other half.

### ***The New Zealand Herald***

Also ran a front-page story in its May 20-21 edition with a headline across five columns ‘Coup gunmen seize Fiji Govt’. A photo of a looter stealing a TV set and riding a truck smiling was splashed on the front page across five columns. The photo was a still taken from Fiji Television news. The sub heading read ‘Thousands dance and cheer as President declares a state of emergency’. Below this was a head and shoulders photo of George Speight. There was no by-line.

### ***The New Zealand Herald vs. The Fiji Times***

Unlike *The Fiji Times* which chose to run with a reassurance speech to the nation from the President, *The New Zealand Herald* described the dancing and cheering outside Parliament as “coup leader George Speight and his squad of nationalist gunmen continued to hold the country’s first Fiji Indian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry and his cabinet prisoners” (*The New Zealand Herald*, May 20-21, 2000, p1). This may have been because the issue was more sensitive to *The Fiji Times* and therefore it chose to run with Ratu Mara’s speech. *The New Zealand Herald* on the other hand chose the sensational angle because it did not have to worry much about sensitivity to its readers who were unlikely to be in Fiji at the time.

The choice of words also differentiated across the two newspapers and reflected how words changed meaning in stories. While *The Fiji Times* called Speight ‘the leader of the coup’ and referred to his group as ‘terrorists’ and ‘the attackers’, *The New Zealand Herald* on the other hand called Speight ‘coup leader’ but his supporters were labelled ‘his squad of nationalist gunmen’. A list of Speights illegal ministers with their portfolios appeared in *The Fiji Times*, a contradiction to its front-page story of the President Ratu Mara labelling the takeover as illegal. This ‘swearing-in’ ceremony implied that this was something official and Speight was in control.

George Speights background first appeared on the second day of the crisis on page 16 of *The Fiji Times* with the headline ‘A case for the natives’.

Mr Speight, a descendant of a fourth generation white colonist, is the son of Opposition Parliamentarian Savenaca Tokainavo. His father's mother is from Naivacula Village in Wainibuka, about 10 kilometres from Korovou Town. Speights mother is from Ra. Mr Tokainavo owns a dairy farm in Naivacula and the family has supported development in the area. The presence of Tailevu people at Veiuto showed his popularity. During the last general election, Mr Speight stood as a dummy candidate for his father on an SVT ticket. One of Mr Speights cousins who was at Veiuto yesterday said the family supported village developments in the past (*The Fiji Times*, May 21, p16).

*The New Zealand Herald* had more background information on George Speight on that day compared to *The Fiji Times*. On page A17, with the headline ‘Coup’s front man has clouded past’, Francesca Mold reported that George Speight was under investigation by his previous employer and the Government.

Mr Speight was believed to be bitter after Agriculture Minister Poseci Bune sacked him as Chairman of Fiji Pine last June along with his entire board. He was also sacked in April last year from the British insurance company Heath Group that had employed him at his Suva office for three years but had doubts about him. Mr Speight, a business graduate with degrees in marketing, management and finance from Andrews University in the US state of Michigan, worked in Australia for eight years as a financial, insurance and banking broker before joining Heath Group (*New Zealand Herald*, May 20-21, 2000, pA17).

The lack of research information on George Speights background in *The Fiji Times* could have been due to limited resources and a lack of experienced journalists to carry out in-depth analysis and research. Even though *The New Zealand Herald* was based outside Fiji, it compiled a better researched article on George Speight. This could have been due to the availability of skilled journalists and resources to carry out research.

Also, compared to *The Fiji Times* front-page story, the *New Zealand Herald* had more information on the coup on its front page, including information on who George Speight was, descriptions of what the ‘gunmen’ were wearing when they took over Parliament, dialogue between the coup makers and the Speaker of Parliament, quotes from Sitiveni Rabuka’s meeting with Speight and the announcement of a new ‘government’ by Speight. This again, showed that the *New Zealand Herald* article was well researched compared to *The Fiji Times*.

Sitiveni Rabuka was the man responsible for carrying out the 1987 military coup 13 years ago. He was a Lieutenant Colonel then and together with ten soldiers, took control of the nation from a multiracial government with a Fijian prime minister. After realising the damage he had caused to Fiji because of his 1987 coup, he joined forces with one, out of the two Indian political parties, the National Federation Party, to bring about the 1997 Constitution, which was fair for all races in Fiji and was best for Fiji.

All the news stories in *The New Zealand Herald* that day were balanced and informative. The last paragraph of a story on page A17, ‘Coup’s front man has clouded past’, gave new information on Speight: “...father is a close friend of Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka, who led the May 1987 coups”. This article inferred that Rabuka could have been involved in the planning of the coup with Speight.

Half of *The Fiji Times* coverage on May 20<sup>th</sup> was devoted to covering different angles of the coup. A small news item and a picture of the looting appeared on page nine of *The Fiji Times* although on page four, a picture of a shop owner picking up broken glass pieces to his shop ran parallel to a ‘Chief backs Speight, wants Mara to quit’ headline. There was no relationship of the picture to the story.

It was clear that both papers didn't know what was actually going on, who was in power and whether the military and police supported the coup makers on the first two days of the crisis. There was no reaction from the military on their stand on the coup, military commander Commodore Frank Bainimarama remained quiet until after a week when the 'coup spills blood'. Police Commissioner Isikia Savua on the other hand told *The Fiji Times* he warned the government that something was going to happen on May 19. He is reported saying that the police at Parliament could not do much to stop the May 19 takeover because they were not armed, unlike the rebels (As the crisis developed, it was revealed that Savua was one of those under suspicion of being linked to the coup. His brother, who was in the military, was one of Speight's key men and showed his support openly. Even though the Police Commissioner was cleared by a suspect inquiry, the suspicion still lingers).

### ***The Australian***

*The Australian* on the other hand led with the headline 'One man's revolution' and a blown up picture of George Speight, the same photo used in *The New Zealand Herald*.

Fiji was under a state of emergency, with troops patrolling the streets last night, after an Australian resident, the son of a Fijian opposition MP, tried to overthrow the Government" (*The Australian*, May 20-21, 2000, p1).

The article quoted President Ratu Kamisese Mara and Assistant Police Commissioner Jahir Khan. It is reported that a curfew was not being observed and looting continued.

Parties of unarmed police and soldiers moved around the streets but did little or nothing to restore order (*The Australian*, May 20-21, 2000, p1).

Also on the front-page was an article by Russell Hunter, who was editor in chief of *The Fiji Times* until the Government, refused to renew his work permit in April 2000, one month before the coup took place. Out of the three newspapers, *The Australian* had the most informative article on Speight's background. It contained historical information on Speight in terms of his business background and was written by Russell Hunter. The article was well written and well researched.

George Speight is an unlikely coup leader. Although he is an ambitious man, he is a

businessman with no military background. With his trademark shaven head and a love of golf he shares with former coup leader Sitiveni Rabuka. Speight, who is in his 30s, is well known in Fiji's business circles. He was a rising corporate star in Fiji until the fall of the last government, in which his father Sam was a member. George Speight, who has Australian residency and used to live in Brisbane, was a former head of Fiji Pine Ltd and Fiji Hardwood Corporation Ltd - companies with interests in the nation's valuable remaining forests. He is reported to have lost a mahogany hardwood contract and blamed the government (*The Australian*, May 20-21, 2000, p1).

*The Australian* had more reports on pages 2, 3, 4, 20, 21 and 24. There was wide coverage of interviews with Speight's ex-wife, an interesting graphic of 'The Players' (photos of Speight with his wife and baby) and an interesting picture of Speight with hair!

Another detailed article 'Conspirators learn the lessons of laid-back 87' told of how Speight pulled the plug on all international satellite and cable telephone links unlike Rabuka who took one week to do this. 'A day in the eye of the storm' gave a timeline of events that led to the takeover.

*Fijilive.com* is quoted as it was according to *The Australian* 'the only website in Fiji' to become 'the worlds main window on the coup attempt'. However this was not correct as the University of the South Pacific's journalism programme also ran reports on its website *Pacific Journalism Online* (<http://www.usp.ac.fj/journ>).

*The Australian* also ran an editorial on the Fiji coup in its May 20-21 edition 'Coup splinters Fiji's veneer of harmony', with a summary of the events to date. According to the article Australia had 'the task of reinforcing the importance of democratic values against those who view the region with self-interest and opportunism'.

This newspaper described Speight as 'an Australian resident' and inferred that here was a man claiming he carried out the coup for the Fijians when he was a resident of Australia. In later articles, it was reported that George Speight could not speak the native Fijian language which

was correct.

### ***The Australian vs. The Fiji Times vs. The New Zealand Herald***

While *The Australian* used the words ‘tried to overthrow’ the government, telling readers that George Speight had not been successful in carrying out the coup, the *New Zealand Herald* used ‘were holding Fiji’s political leaders hostage’ and *The Fiji Times* used ‘deplored the actions of terrorists holding Parliamentarians hostage’.

Unlike *The Fiji Times* and *The Australian*, *The New Zealand Herald* had a better description of what went on in Parliament during the takeover, like the words exchanged between Speight and the Speaker of the House and how the rebels were dressed.

## **DAY 2: May 22**

### **Shots fired!**

#### ***The Fiji Times***

*The Fiji Times* took a stronger angle on Day 2 of the crisis with the headline ‘Gunmen fire warning shots’ and a half page picture across 6 columns of one of the rebels wearing a balaclava and holding a gun. The stronger angle could also have been because journalists were under attack. The use of a big picture suggested how dramatic the event was.

Journalists had to ‘duck for cover’ to protect themselves from shots at the Parliamentary complex. A one-column story ran beside this ‘Schools to stay shut’, with a message from the Education ministry. A list of MP’s who were released in the morning of May 21 was given and an interview with one of those released gave the first inside story.

A report on Page 3 is a new development ‘Chiefs plan talks boycott’ and ‘members of the Great Council of Chiefs who sympathised with George Speight may boycott tomorrow's meeting’. *The Fiji Times* played its role as information disseminator to the nation successfully with informational articles such as these. A one column story on the bottom of page three in bold

though had no reason to be there. With the headline 'Coup plan hatches', the story was an opinion by 'somebody' about how and where plans for the coup started.

Long after the golfers had returned to the clubhouse at Suva's Fiji Golf Club, the discussion would continue around the *tanoa* and over the beer bottle. And the subject was always the same - Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, the Prime Minister who it seemed, everyone loved to hate (*The Fiji Times*, May 22, p3).

The story continued that ethnic Indians had joined with the Fijians to condemn Chaudhry.

These were rich men talking. Membership isn't cheap by Fiji standards and consists of professionals, business people, diplomats, senior civil servants - with a sprinkling of journalists and politicians" (*The Fiji Times*, May 22, p3).

While this story was probably the first to move away from the 'race issue' and was the first revelation that a lot of businessmen did not like Chaudhry, it was an opinion piece and no facts were given to support these claims. It was also on the wrong page. Page three is considered an important news page in newspapers and to put an opinion by an unidentified 'someone' at the bottom is malicious in that it could be construed as news.

The article inferred that people were upset with Chaudhry and hated him, especially the rich. Even though this might have been true, the way it was written was not fair on the subject of the story and was not balanced as news reports are supposed to be. The source of the story was unknown and gave an impression of a hidden agenda on the part of the newspaper.

### ***The New Zealand Herald***

*The New Zealand Herald* led with another front-page story on the coup 'Shots raise coup tension' and a five-column picture. The story told of how international journalists had to 'duck for cover' when shots were fired around Parliament and how they were kept inside and not allowed to go out. As reported in *The New Zealand Herald*, Speight talked of apprehending journalists who had 'deliberately filed emotional reports' aimed at 'stirring up confrontation'.

At his first meeting with journalists Speight denied he was threatening the media. It is clear he wants them close by so he can send his messages to the world. He was furious



that the police had ordered reporters and photographers to move about 1km from their established position outside Parliament (*The New Zealand Herald*, May 22, p1).

According to the report, the President also ordered Fiji Television to stop broadcasting statements from the rebels. This was another example of how the Fiji media gave credibility to the attempted coup and made matters worse by broadcasting statements from the rebels.

### **Who is George Speight?**

*The New Zealand Herald's* Tony Wall interviewed the stepmother of George Speight, Lani Speight. She scorned her son and described him as 'he and his band of thugs'. There is more background on Speight's personal life, information on his father, his wife and three children in Brisbane and a girlfriend and fourth child in Suva. His stepmother commented 'George is doing this with a gang of thugs. I fear for the safety of the nation and all the people. I support Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara - whatever is happening now is a criminal act by George Speight'.

This followed an in-depth background story that had run in *The Australian*. A whole page feature headlined 'Three days of drama as guns bring Fiji to a halt' appeared on page 15 of the May 22 *New Zealand Herald*. Naomi Larkin wrote a summary of events that had happened so far like how many shops were looted, roadblocks, curfews and the ministers named in Speights illegal 'government'.

### **Failed coup**

*The New Zealand Herald* ran an editorial on the Fiji coup on page A16 of the May 22 issue with the headline 'Telling absence of support for coup'.

A putsch can succeed only when the military, the police and Government administration have lost confidence in officially elected leaders and are happy to accept outsiders as replacements. Amid the confusion and contradictory reports emerging from Fiji, it is clear that George Speight, the leader of an attempted putsch, has failed to gain such acceptance police have remained on the sidelines, and few indigenous Fijians have flocked to his cause (*The New Zealand Herald*, May 22, pA16).

The main theme in the editorial was that Speight had not been successful and was wrong to have

carried out the coup against a multiracial government that pointed the way forward. However, day two of the coup may have been a difficult time to question whether Speight had been successful or not in carrying out the coup. The general theme for *The New Zealand Herald* on May 22 was a summary of observations of what was happening in Fiji as seen by *The New Zealand Herald* reporters present there.

## **Army backs Speight**

### ***The Australian***

The coup appeared on its front-page as ‘Army elite backs Speight’. The first paragraph was misleading and suggested the whole military was behind Speight. This could have been corrected to ‘some members’.

Members of Fiji’s military have thrown their weight behind coup leader George Speight. President Ratu Kamisese Mara admitted yesterday as he defiantly vowed to maintain the integrity of the state, despite his daughter being one of up to 25 hostages in the Parliament (*The Australian*, May 22, 2000, p1).

There was no new information except the mention of former British SAS Ilisoni Ligairi, who had trained Speight’s men. This information was taken from a report on [fijilive.com](http://fijilive.com). One of the architects of Fiji’s 1990 constitution Brij Lal told *The Australian* that Fiji needed to hold fresh elections to clear the air. There was speculation about whether Australia would let Speight enter the country since he had Australian permanent residency status. A story on the ‘elected members of Parliament told to resign or be killed’ followed.

The prominence of coup coverage in the paper was reflected by the editorial which was also on the Fiji crisis. The editorial headlined ‘Coups remind us of limits to influence’ agreed with Foreign Minister Alexander Downer that Australia should take more interest in what was going on in the Pacific not only Fiji but Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands too. Interestingly its cartoon was also based on the coup.

**DAY 3: May 23**

**Gun put to Chaudhry's head**

***The Fiji Times***

Led with a story of rebels putting a gun to Chaudhry's head.

Security officers held a gun to deposed Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry's head following a security breach at the complex yesterday, coup leader George Speight confirmed (*The Fiji Times*, May 23, 2000, p1).

The use of the word 'security officers' legitimised the rebels as 'security officers' and gave them authority and respect. This newspaper also reported that a rebel gunman was thrown out of Parliament after he started shouting and yelling and abusing chiefs. The story further called the rebels 'senior security officials' and implied that they must be listened to and that they had authority.

There were more updates of the coup. A feature on page five by James McCullough of News Limited headlined 'George headed Brisbane Bank' gave a history of Speight's work and deals in Fiji and Australia.

George Speight, the businessman who masterminded Friday's takeover of Parliament, forged out the bulk of his financial career in Brisbane in the management offices of some of the city's finest corporations. Mr Speight was responsible for negotiating the sale of government shares in the Hardwood Corporation with the Government being advised at the time by PricewaterhouseCoopers in Brisbane (*The Fiji Times*, May 23, 2000, p1).

Businessman and Parliamentarian Jim Ah Koy was quoted in a story on page five saying that while he had close ties with George Speight's family, he was not behind his forceful takeover over Parliament. The headline for that story 'Close family ties with Ah Koy' was misleading.

The President's emergency powers were defined on page seven and gave a breakdown of what the President was able to do under emergency powers. This was a commendable story that acted

as an educational tool for a lot of people.

However, a story by Serafina Silaitoga on page 11 'Tearful supporters gather' showed Speight in a half page six-column picture wiping his tears and was extremely emotive. This headline appeared to be calculated to make readers sympathise with Speight and his followers. Some paragraphs in the story below are examples that added to this bias:

- a. But behind the still and quiet atmosphere, drowned the silent hurting hearts of George Speight's supporters. Their hurt was visible in their teary eyes.
- b. And tears continued to fill their eyes as they shook the hands of their master and leader. "Thank you, thank you very much, my son," were the words spoken in Fijian by a bunch of Fijian women who have been around the Parliament complex since Friday.
- c. They couldn't hold back their tears and this brought tears to Mr Speight's eyes. It was a silent and touching moment for the indigenous supporters. "Give Fiji back to the Fijians to rule, that's what we want and give us a Fijian government," cried a Fijian woman.

*(The Fiji Times, May 23, 2000, p11)*

This article was an example of extreme bias. The use of words like 'couldn't hold back tears', 'their hurt', 'their teary eyes', 'tears continued to fill' and 'it was a silent and touching moment for the indigenous supporters' were emotive words intended to generate sympathy. This article not only glorified Speight but also gave him credibility and made him the hero.

It was evident that the journalist who wrote this article had swayed or allowed her personal opinions to influence her story. In either case, the sub-editor should have picked this up.

A famous line by Rabuka which has been used over and over again by the media and other people who agree with Rabuka appeared on page 18. The story by Agence France Presse reporter

Michael Field, with the headline 'Rabuka sympathises with gunmen' quoted Rabuka 'I sympathise with your cause. I do not agree with your methods'.

Another AFP story appeared on page 19 'Special forces behind takeover' and Downer condemned the coup on page 22.

### ***The New Zealand Herald***

Fiji was front-page again for *The New Zealand Herald* with the headline 'Captive PM dragged in front of Parliament by gun-toting rebel'. It is the same front-page story as *The Fiji Times* of a gun being held to Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry's head. However, unlike *The Fiji Times* story, *The New Zealand Herald* also listed Speight's demands before letting the hostages free. An interesting paragraph appears towards the end of the story:

Speight said he had sacked Rabuka [chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs] and would announce a new chairman today. Doubts were cast on the role of the military and the police in the crisis yesterday when Speight took a police-escorted drive around central Suva (*The New Zealand Herald*, May 23, 2000, p1).

Instead of beginning the article with the words 'coup leader George Speight' the story just began with 'Speight' which could confuse readers and lead them to believe that he had authority and was able to sack Rabuka. The fact that he was seen with police on the 'police-escorted drive' also gave an impression of the police being part of Speight and his group and taking orders from him.

An incisive analytical feature by Geoff Cumming and news agencies appeared on page 13 with the headline 'Race issues only part of story in Fijian crisis'. The story asked 'If the attempted overthrow of Fiji's first Indian-led Government was only a matter of time, why did it take so long?'

A Victoria University lecturer in Pacific studies, Teresia Teaiwa said the conflict in Fiji was not between indigenous Fijians and ethnic Indians. "The race card is misleading and mischievous and, unfortunately, Mahendra Chaudhry played right into it with his abrasive leadership style," said Teaiwa, who formerly taught at the Suva campus of the

University of the South Pacific. “The current hostage crisis illustrates the erosion of indigenous Fijian social order and the fragmentation of indigenous Fijian leadership (*The New Zealand Herald*, May 23, 2000, p13).

### ***The Australian***

Also led with the coup on page 1 and the headline ‘Rebel victory in sight’. A picture of Speight with a huge grin and uniformed police standing at attention behind him accompanied the story. Meanwhile Ratu Mara announced that the Chaudhry government would not be reinstated.

Fiji faces a change of government in the next 48 hours as coup leaders stare at the likelihood of victory in their quest to lock Indians out of the nation's power structure (*The Australian*, May 23, 2000, p1).

## **DAY 5: May 24**

### ***The Fiji Times***

The front-page reported that chiefs supported the President Ratu Mara and did not approve of what Speight had done ‘although there is a lot of sympathy towards those views’. Speight accused the international media for biased reporting on page two and for ‘being insensitive of indigenous rights’.

How come you guys weren't here during the last 12 months when the Fijian people were crying out for their rights,” he said. We lock up one Indian for four days and then all of you come here. Isn't there some hypocrisy in that,” said Mr Speight (*The Fiji Times*, May 24, 2000, p2).

### ***The New Zealand Herald***

Led with ‘Speight’s hostages weep’ when the international envoys came to meet them. Tony Wall described the atmosphere and ‘extraordinary scenes’ when the Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon and a United Nations special envoy visited the hostages in Parliament.

Although they had come to deliver a strong message of disapproval to Speight and to

plead with him to release his captives, the pair were treated like heroes and Speight was clearly using their visit as a photo opportunity (*The New Zealand Herald*, May 24, 2000, p1).

Naomi Larkin wrote a colour piece of what it was like inside the Parliamentary complex on page two.

Speight had allocated a no-walled bure next to the kitchen as the media's home and the place where he held his many press conferences. Around the compound there was the constant sound of kava crushing. The thudding was reminiscent of the sound of a grave being dug (*The New Zealand Herald*, May 24, 2000, p2).

*The New Zealand Herald* also ran an editorial 'Echoes of Uganda in Fijian horrors' on page 14. This editorial compared the coup in Fiji to the problems in Kosovo and Bosnia.

There is a chilling familiarity about the plight of ethnic Indians in the Fijian village of Vunikasi. The looting and torching of homes and robbery at knifepoint evoke horrific images seen all too recently in Bosnia and Kosovo...If Fiji's terror rekindles images of Kosovo, a potentially closer parallel may lie with Idi Amin's expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972 (*The New Zealand Herald*, May 24, 2000, p14).

While this editorial gave an accurate summary of the coup events to date, it was an unfair comparison of the Fiji coup with the Kosovo and Bosnia troubles. The troubles in Kosovo were far bigger and different from the Fiji crisis. The Kosovo troubles had to do with Kosovo Albanians wanting independence from the Serbian state. Serbia on the other hand didn't want to give Kosovo independence as they consider Kosovo to be the cradle of their nation<sup>4</sup>

The Kosovo Albanians did not want to live under Serb rule and refused to participate in the political systems of Serbia and the FRY. Most Kosovo Albanians strive for independence and international recognition of the "Republic of Kosova."<sup>5</sup>

How then can the Fiji crisis be compared to Kosovo? While the problems in Kosovo were to do with independence, the Fiji crisis was really a power struggle within the indigenous Fijian

hierarchy itself. The violence in Kosovo was also far bigger and worse than any Fiji coup has ever been.

Many claim that the 'race card' was just the pawn used by the Fijian politicians and chiefs to gain support from the villagers and Fijian population. Authors of articles and books on the May 2000 coup like Brij Lal (2000), Tupeni Baba (2005), Mike Field (2005) and Teresia Teiawa (2000) had mentioned in one way or another that the coup was never about race. No Indian died as a result of the coup, the only deaths or injured were of Fijians caught in the crossfire.

A comparison of the violence in Fiji being similar to that in Kosovo was given in the editorial. This was an unfair sensationalised comparison as the violence in Kosovo was far worse than that in Fiji. While there were violent attacks by Fijians against Indian families in different parts of Fiji, there were also a lot of Fijian families protecting Indian families against unruly behaviour by 'unruly Fijians' who were mostly youths taking advantage of the situation. Unlike Kosovo, there were no bomb attacks in Fiji and the only people who had guns and ammunition were the rebel soldiers in Parliament and the military.

This editorial was sensationalised and suggested that the Fiji crisis could escalate to be like Kosovo and Bosnia. The editorial suggested that the Fiji coup was as bad as in Kosovo and Bosnia.

### ***The Australian***

*The Australian* front-page that day was 'Chiefs' order: Let PM go'. Unlike *The Fiji Times* which only focused on the GCC drafting a resolution which included a change in government, *The Australian* reported that the GCC 'demanded that coup leader George Speight release Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and endorsed President Ratu Kamisese Mara's blueprint for political reform'.

The angle taken by *The Australian* was stronger than *The Fiji Times*. The story quoted Rabuka that the GCC had opted to solve the crisis constitutionally. The report was a commentary by Mary-Louise O'Callaghan who based her predictions of outcomes from the Great Council of



Chiefs meeting regarding Speight's demands. A history of how the Great Council of Chiefs institution came about was also given again with predictions of what issues were likely to be discussed. O'Callaghan had good analysis in her commentary and reflected that she understood the issues and culture well to be able to write so in-depth.

The other story 'Boxers seek neutral corner in rebellion' was about Fijian boxers in Australia for an Olympic selection, who asked *The Australian* Government for permission to stay in Australia until stability had returned to Suva. O'Callaghan gave another commentary at the bottom of page five 'Blowing the lid on a political can of worms' again reflecting her knowledge and experience of Pacific island affairs. A cartoon on page 14 showed coconut palms and men sleeping at the bottom of the trees. Written at the top 'Meanwhile urgent preparations get under way for the meeting of the Great Council of Chiefs on the future of Fijian democracy'. A column by Dr Stewart Woodman, a senior fellow at *The Australian* Defence Force Academy who worked closely on strategic planning with several South Pacific nations, appeared on page 15. Dr Woodman's column focused on how Australia should pay more attention to the South Pacific as it reviewed its strategic priorities and defence spending.

There was also a warning from Speight to the overseas community against international intervention.

I know you are all standing ready with all the theories about what to do with Fiji, but please give us the privilege of asking for it, rather than imposing (*The Australian*, May 24, 2000, p15).

A picture of 'Commander Bill', one of Speight's gunmen, holding a gun and smiling appeared on page 4.

### ***The Australian vs. The New Zealand Herald vs. The Fiji Times***

*The Australian* and *The New Zealand Herald* ran a lot of analytical pieces on the coup. Their articles included a lot of background information and analysis. *The Australian* in particular did a lot of investigative stories compared to *The New Zealand Herald*. On the other hand, *The Fiji*

*Times* did not do any investigative stories on its own possibly because of a lack of resources.

**DAY 6: May 25**

**Chiefs support President**

***The Fiji Times***

Results of the Great Council of Chiefs meeting appeared on the front-page with a draft resolution made by the chiefs. In their resolution the chiefs reaffirmed their support for the President, asked the President to form an interim government, called on a group of Fijian lawyers to look at the legality and demands of George Speight's group and looked at the welfare of the hostages.

The second lead on the front-page 'Fear drives families out' was the first report of the extent of the violence happening around the country. Another biased article appeared on page two by Serafina Silaitoga. With the headline 'Rain fails to dampen spirits' the story described what went on in Parliament according to the reporter's observations.

Hearts full of confidence, indigenous Fijians flocked to the Parliament complex yesterday to fight for justice" (*The Fiji Times*, May 25, 2000, p1).

Emotive words were again used. The words gave the impression that the indigenous Fijians were the victims and they were right in fighting for what was theirs. It was also clear that this reporter had allowed her personal opinions to affect the way she wrote that story.

Journalists also took time off to joke with the armed men. They laughed, joked and spent time chatting. The men were also concerned for the well being of the crowd (*The Fiji Times*, May 25, 2000, p1).

She finished the story with a quote from one of Speight's supporters:

We're not worried because we know that we are with our own people and that we trust each other," said Arieta Gulevu, one of Speight's supporters (*The Fiji Times*, May 25, 2000, p1).

The use of the words 'own people' again incited feelings of sympathy towards the supporters and suggested Speight represented indigenous people although only quoting only one supporter. The story again showed the reporter's bias.

Another story on page three also favoured Speight and the rebels. The headline itself is a perfect example 'Rebel leader pleads for prayers'. The article indicated that readers must pray for Speight and the rebels. Instead of condoning their actions, the article asked for prayers for the rebels.

### ***The Australian***

Led with a personal commentary by journalist Christopher Dore who described what happened when the United Nations official and New Zealand's Foreign Minister Don McKinnon visited Speight. Before the meeting, Speight met with the media and according to Dore, had a lot of nasty things to say about the international community.

We don't care about what you people overseas think right now. We don't and it's about time you accepted that I don't care if the world's media and if all the governments in the world think we are treating the hostages in an inhumane way - I couldn't give a rip (*The Australian*, May 25, 2000, p1).

**DAY 7:                      May 26**

**Speight not happy**

### ***The Fiji Times***

Speight rejected the GCC's proposals and said he wanted the President removed, the 1990 constitution removed and pardon for their illegal actions.

In a page three story headlined 'It was blackmail: Rabuka', the former military commander and 1987 coup leader, said the GCC were blackmailed into agreeing with most of Speight's demands.

This important revelation was not mentioned in the day six article on the resolutions made by the GCC, unless the paper chose to run this as a separate story in the next day's paper. Nevertheless it should have still been mentioned on day six.

### ***The New Zealand Herald***

Led with a warning from Speight that violence could erupt, as he was unhappy with the GCC's decisions. *The New Zealand Herald* quoted Speights 'information officer' Simone Kaitani that they were not happy with the amnesty offered which amounted to a prerogative of mercy (which could still put the rebels in jail). The New Zealand Government warned of sports sanctions and expulsion from the Commonwealth if Fiji installed a constitutionally unlawful interim government.

### ***The Australian***

Led with 'Death of a Democracy' and a picture of Speight holding a microphone and his hands covering his eyes as he cried. The report mentioned the blackmail by Speight to the GCC.

An opinion piece by Mary-Louise O'Callaghan also ran on page 1 which criticised the decision of the GCC. Other articles on page four continued with the theme that it was a sad day for Fiji and that Fiji had a bleak future.

A commentary by Doug Conway on page four 'Speight summons biblical man for 5am guidance' described how Speight summoned a pastor to come and pray with him at 5am in the morning. The writer asked the rhetorical questions in his commentary 'How much control does Speight have over himself?' and 'How much control does he have over his men?' More reports condoned the GCC's decisions with warnings of strikes by unions and opinions by political and foreign reporters who called on the Commonwealth to throw Fiji out.

**DAY 8: May 27**

**Crossfire**

***The Fiji Times***

Violence erupted between armed soldiers at the military checkpoint and the rebels when the soldiers stopped people from going into Parliament. But Speight, who was accompanied by 10 of his armed bodyguards including supporters and journalists, walked to the checkpoint and ordered the military to remove the barricades. They listened to him when they saw the human shield he had formed and removed the barricade.

Meanwhile, according to the Fiji Commissioner of Police, security operations over one week had cost them \$840,000. Indian families in Baulevu were threatened and temples and shops were burnt down in Naitasiri.

The Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) called on local journalists to help foreign journalists in their reports to avoid inaccurate reporting. This statement from PINA is confirmation that foreign reports were inaccurate – rather sweeping and inaccurate. PINA offered no evidence, only an opinion.

***The New Zealand Herald***

The scuffle with the armed soldiers outside Parliament is reported on page one. Speight and the soldiers are quoted in the story. In its Weekend Review, a summary of events from when the coup began till May 27 occupied half a page. A re-enactment of what happened on May 19 was also given.

***The Australian***

The rebel's victory over the army barricade was important enough to be front page for *The Australian*.

Fears that Fiji's coup crisis could erupt into a bloody civil conflict were heightened yesterday after coup leader George Speight faced down the country's military (*The Australian*, May 27, 2000, p1).

A page six story took a different turn and focused on Chaudhry instead of the coup makers 'PM quick to lead but slow to listen'.

Mahendra Chaudhry's 365-day prime ministership reveals a man thoroughly committed to achieving the socialist goals espoused through 25 years of public life, but fatally oblivious to the trouble stirred up by his arrogant public persona and especially by his land development policies (*The Australian*, May 26, 2000, p6).

## **DAY 9:                      May 27**

### **President sacks government**

#### ***The Fiji Times***

The President sacked the Prime Minister and his cabinet and took over the running of the country on day nine of the crisis. A photo of a foreign journalist with his head resting on his hand and crying appeared on page three with the headline 'Such a crying shame'. This article followed after the overseas journalists boycotted a press conference after one of their colleagues was shot during a 'skirmish' between Speights gunmen and the military. Speight left the press conference when he realised that the overseas press were not coming.

The headline on page six revealed that Speight was always in trouble. Taken from the *Daily Telegraph*, this story quoted George Speights friends in Brisbane and their comments of what they thought of him. A former schoolmate, Bert Wong, said that Speight had always been capable. "He could sell you your own house" (*The Fiji Times*, May 27, 2000, p6). Background information of Speights pyramid schemes in Brisbane was exposed. Speight's pending court cases was mentioned and it is revealed that he was due to go to court the following week for one of his fraudulent activities.

***The New Zealand Herald***

Ran only one report on the Fiji coup of how a Fijian and Indian living in New Zealand became friends and their thoughts on the coup.

***The Australian***

Brian Woodley on page 6, reported on how Mahendra Chaudhry has always beat the odds.

**DAY 10: May 28**

**Violence - Speight and the media**

***The Fiji Times***

Fiji Television was trashed after a Close-Up programme criticised George Speight and his supporters, a policeman was also wounded in the shoot-out. Journalists fled for cover to hide from the mob. Speight told the media to back off. According to Speight, if they were indigenous people of Fiji, they would understand what the Fijians were going through. On page three, Speight also told the media that he had drawn up six decrees that 'will be considered in the new constitution'. Authoritative words that suggested Speight was successful in carrying out the coup were used in the article.

Speaking at a media conference after a church service yesterday, Mr Speight said they have drawn up some six decrees that will be considered in the new constitution (*The Fiji Times*, May 28, 2000, p3).

Another report on the same page by the same reporter, Reijeli Kikau, described a church service inside Parliament. Again a lot of emotive words were used to describe the supporters.

It was a Festival of Praise for all denominations at the Parliamentary Complex at Veiuto yesterday. Tears flowed freely as those that had gathered outside in the scorching sun, sang and realised that they had tough time ahead of them. It was a sight to see with people praising from every corner of the complex. Even the torrid rain did not dampen

their spirits as they listened attentively to his sermon (*The Fiji Times*, May 28, 2000, p3).

Although the reporter may not have intended the story to be 'pro-Speight', by using emotive words in the wrong places, the article came across as a free public relations exercise for Speight.

The rebels tried to secure support inside Parliament by 'actively attempting to recruit more soldiers to their cause' in an article 'Rebels seek support' on page 4. This was another report that could act as a call to those who supported Speight to go to Parliament and help out. By this time it was clear that the military and the people were getting tired of the violence by Speight and his mob.

A report on page 7 by Michael Field from the news agency, Agence France Presse (AFP) 'Safety in numbers' reported how Speight used the media to help sustain him.

While he knows the media are helping sustain him in his now nine-day occupation of Parliament, he is good at kicking them around too. The hostage crisis he initiated seems set to kill off two of Fiji's three dailies as advertisers stay away (*The Fiji Times*, May 28, 2000, p7).

Field described how the shooting wounded two soldiers and a cameraman and how Speight abused and accused the media of 'stampeding and simply acting for a big pay rise'. Field reported how the overseas boycotted his press conference which made Speight angry and made him storm off.

A feature on page 12 and 13 by the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Marian Wilkinson gave a history of Speight's deals in the battle for the mahogany plantations. This article contained important information that could only have been gathered through investigative reporting.

Three days before he launched his coup, George Speight placed an extraordinary statement in *The Fiji Sun*, denying he had been 'on the take' over a lucrative, highly controversial timber deal that was seriously destabilising the government of Mahendra Chaudhry. Few outside Fiji have followed the saga of the multi-million dollar mahogany bid, but had it gone another way, Speight might never have contemplated his desperate



actions that have killed Fiji's democracy (*The Fiji Times*, May 28, 2000, p12 and 13).

### ***The New Zealand Herald***

Also led with the mob story 'Mob on rampage through Suva'. The *New Zealand Herald's* reporter and a *Radio NZ* reporter were 'rescued by their colleagues after being held in the Parliamentary complex against their will'. The reporters were covering talks between Speight and the GCC when the mob walked out and headed for the streets. There was no description of the mob in the story. *The Fiji Times* on the other hand described what the mob got up to from the time they entered the streets. On page 2 the *New Zealand Herald* spoke to the son of one of the hostages and to Gaffar Ahmed, the assistant home affairs minister who was released after two days.

In another article headlined 'Sympathy for Fijian coup in Maoridom', the Maori leader from Northland showed that he supported the coup.

A Northland Maori leader has spoken out in support of Fijian coup leader George Speight and his armed hostage-takers. A spokesman for Ngapuhi, Kingi Taurua, said yesterday that he had received many calls from some factions of the Northland *iwi* who disagreed with the Zealand Government's stance on the political crisis in Fiji. "We support any indigenous people who are fighting for their independence. "Helen Clark talks about a constitution - we had a constitution in New Zealand in terms of Maori and that was what taken away from us by the point of a gun." Other Maori leaders were also sympathetic to the plight of the native Fijians but wanted the Pacific state to peacefully resolve the conflict without outside interference (*The New Zealand Herald*, May 28, 2000, p2).

Another report on page 2 showed the *New Zealand Herald* reporters leaving Fiji and they are quoted saying they were concerned about "the country they left behind in chaos".

### **DAY 11: May 30**

The army take over the state.

## Conclusion

Prominence of the coup in newspapers was an important aspect of this content analysis. In terms of the quantitative aspect of the content analysis, *The Fiji Times* and *The Australian* gave the coup prominence on its front page from Day 1 to Day 10. The *New Zealand Herald* gave the coup prominence on the front page till Day 9 of the crisis. All three newspapers also ran editorials on the Fiji coup on most days of the crisis.

There was a frequency of appearance of large headlines running across six columns on the coup and this was common in all three newspapers. Large photos were also common and this added effect to the stories and supported the themes. Comparatively, *The Fiji Times* used more pictures than the other two newspapers. *The New Zealand Herald* and *The Australian* used the same pictures on some days.

The frequency of words that legitimised Speight's position emerged as a prominent theme around credibility and legitimacy. A lot of the stories that appeared in the three newspapers used words that gave credibility and legitimacy to Speight and his group. Words used to describe Speight like 'self-proclaimed Prime Minister' and 'self-proclaimed Head of State' were used from Day 1 to Day 10 of the crisis. Similarly words used to describe the Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry like 'deposed Prime Minister' was also used on most days. All these phrases contributed to legitimising Speight and his rebel's actions.

Another theme emerged in the news stories commenting on economics, law and order and other matters in the national interest, particularly in *The Fiji Times*. Speight was quoted a lot commenting on these issues and these quotations gave him undue authority and gave readers the impression that he was an important person to be respected and listened to. He was even quoted in *The Fiji Times* about his views on the Lome Convention that was due to be held in Suva in June that year.

I think the ACP and all those countries will understand exactly why this action has taken place (*The Fiji Times*, May 20, 2000, p10).

Emotive headlines were a common theme confined to *The Fiji Times*. Over the 10 days, this newspaper had three emotive headlines ‘Tearful supporters gather’; ‘Rain fails to dampen spirits’ and ‘Rebel leader pleads for prayer’. These were examples of bias and contributed to gaining sympathy and support from readers. The first 10 days of coverage in *The Fiji Times* seemed to glorify George Speight but changed its tune temporarily after the shooting at Parliament when a cameraman was shot. While there were some careful reports, a majority of the first 10 days of coverage lacked balance of sources and analysis.

The significance of analytical and investigative stories was another theme identified. These started appearing in *The New Zealand Herald* and *The Australian* from Day 1 on May 20-21. This was not prominent in *The Fiji Times* until Day 3 when it republished a feature by James McCullough of News Limited of Speight’s work and deals in Fiji and Australia. The article was first published in *The Australian*. *The Fiji Times* did not have any analytical or investigative stories by its own journalists during the first 10 days.

*The New Zealand Herald* on the other hand had a little more analysis compared to *The Fiji Times* but tended to sensationalise events during the coup to give an impression that Fiji was a dangerous place to be in during the coup. While it was true that it was unsafe, it was not fair to compare the violence in the Kosovo and Bosnia troubles to the violence in Fiji. The violence during the Fiji coup was not as bad as the one in Kosovo. Another story on May 28 after the trashing of Fiji Television ‘Mob on rampage through Suva’ told of how a reporter from *The New Zealand Herald* and a *Radio NZ* reporter were ‘rescued by their colleagues after being held in the Parliamentary complex against their will’. This story implied that the reporters were taken hostage, another example of sensationalism. While it was true that the journalists were told to remain inside Parliament for their own safety because of the mob outside, they chose to describe this as a hostage situation.

This thematic analysis revealed that between the two overseas newspapers, *The Australian* did not sensationalise news but published investigative stories that were strongly analytical. Having a South Pacific correspondent helped *The Australian* greatly as the reporter had knowledge of the Fijian culture and its history. *The Australian* was the first to reveal a lot of background from

where Speight studied, his family background, his shady business deals and corrupt practices and his pending court cases. The other two newspapers followed suit after *The Australian* published this.

This thematic analysis revealed prominent themes in the content of the newspapers during the first 10 days of coverage. Despite differences such as time of coverage and papers reviewed some of the themes found in this content analysis are similar to those asserted by a few authors like Field (2001), Lal (2001), Kiran (2004), Moala (2001) and Robie (2000) in the literature review chapter. Common themes included biased reporting by *The Fiji Times*, inaccurate reporting by the overseas media and reporters suffering from the Stockholm syndrome. The next chapter will focus on what the journalists and editors who covered the coup felt while covering the coup.

#### ***4: Interviews with journalists and editors who covered the coup***

### **CHAPTER FOUR: Interviews with journalists and editors who covered the coup**

#### **Introduction**

Forty questionnaires were sent out to local and overseas journalists who covered the Fiji 2000 coup but only 17 replied with their experiences. Thirteen were from the Fiji media and four from the overseas media. The aim of the interviews was to determine if the journalists suffered the Stockholm syndrome, whether they were ready for the coup, whether they were harassed or threatened and any difficulties they encountered while trying to get stories.

#### **May 19, 2000 Preparedness for Coup**

##### **Day 1 impressions**

All the local media were covering the march and did not expect the takeover at Parliament even though they had heard rumours that a coup attempt was bound to happen. However, as soon as news of the coup broke out, journalists rushed to Parliament to get a first hand account of what was going on. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) was probably the first to break the news of the coup as they have a live feed from Parliament in their studios and would have heard the commotion and conversation between the rebels and the Speaker of the House.

Tamani Nair, who was doing his journalism attachment at the FBC in Suva, was sitting in the newsroom when he heard commotion on the live feed the radio station has from Parliament. As soon as he heard the Speaker of the House saying to Speight, 'what's going on', he knew that something was wrong.

Meanwhile at the FM96 newsroom, May 19 was supposed to be the last day at work for Virisila Buadromo who was then news editor for FM96. However, plans changed when the coup happened and she is thankful that she didn't leave any earlier or she would have missed 'a highlight in my career'. On that day, FM96 was planning to launch its new website, [fijivillage.com](http://fijivillage.com). Buadromo thought the biggest story of the day was going to be the march so she was constantly updating the website with pictures of the march and stories. This was the protest

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march led by the Taukei movement against the Labour led coalition government. Protestors were to hand over a petition to the President outside his premises. Little did Buadromo know that the biggest story of the day was going to be the takeover at Parliament. There were no FM96 reporters sent to Parliament because they were covering the 'biggest story' at the march and not Parliament.

Buadromo was warned by her sources that something was going to happen that Friday and so she held a special staff meeting on the Thursday before the march. However, no one believed her and thought she was overreacting. Nevertheless she prepared her newsroom just in case something did happen. All the Indo-Fijian reporters were pulled off the roster and only Fijian male reporters were rostered to cover the march. At 10.45am on the day of the march, one of the government ministers called Buadromo's source and said some people had walked in and stormed Parliament. By the time the FM96 reporters rushed to Parliament, the gates had been shut and people with guns were seen walking around.

Reporter for FM96, Malakai Veisamasama was following the march when he got the 'phone call'. He rushed to Parliament after that but by the time he got there the gates were shut.

Tukini Cama, who was a radio personality with FM96, was also one of those sent by Buadromo to cover the march. As the march approached the President's house, another journalist whispered what had happened at Parliament to Tukini. However, they kept this news to themselves and only told the Assistant Police Commissioner, Romano Tikotikoca, who was also keeping an eye on the march. Cama ran back into the city to try and get transport to take him to Parliament where all the action was but no vehicles were in sight. Fortunately he managed to get a ride with friends he saw at Holiday Inn. When he reached Parliament, he saw weeping women and distraught students who were inside Parliament during the takeover standing outside and a balaclava clad man dressed in black holding an M16 guarding the gates.

Fiji Television reporter and Close-Up programme host Riyaz Sayed-Kaiyum was also following the march on May 19. He too had heard rumours that there was going to be some sort of 'unrest' but didn't expect anything like what happened. When people back at the television station advised him of what had happened, he too rushed to Parliament and tried to talk to the hostage

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takers through the fence but was told to 'piss off'. He managed to get an interview with Speight that night but something told him not to go back.

While sitting at a funeral at the Methodist Church in the middle of the city, Francis Herman, the general manager of the FBC had to leave abruptly when the police came in to tell him about the take over at Parliament. Fortunately for Herman, his team of 22 journalists were prepared for the coup and had been planning how they would cover it for months. Herman who had experienced the 1987 coup wasn't sure if a coup would take place, but given the experience from the last coup, he would rather 'have his team prepared even if nothing did happen'.

Josephine Prasad was covering Parliament for the *Daily Post* on May 19 and was present during the takeover by Speight and his six gunmen. It was a traumatic experience for her. Her cell phone was taken away by one of the gunmen. According to Prasad, he called the numbers in her directory and threatened them. When her mother heard the news over the radio and called Prasad's cell phone, the gunmen told her he was going to kill Prasad. The rebels also took her jewellery, tape recorder, wallet and 'emptied' her handbag.

*Fiji Times* chief-of-staff Akanisi Motufaga rushed back to the office from the march before going to Parliament when she got the news. When she arrived at Parliament, the gates were shut and no one was allowed in. Looting had started in Suva city and a few shops were burnt down. By evening the city was deserted.

Meanwhile then assistant editor of the *Daily Post* Mesake Koro'i wasn't surprised that the coup happened. He had even warned government on many occasions that a coup was going to take place. The only thing he didn't know was when.

#### **Sad Day**

It was a sad day. For most of the local journalists it was a contradictory experience to see their country at the brink of disaster, yet for most the coup was a 'highlight in their career' and an 'exciting adventure' as journalists. It was also a time of confusion over who the leader of the coup really was. According to Veisamasama, no one had heard of George Speight except in

#### ***4: Interviews with journalists and editors who covered the coup***

relation to the timber saga and most did not believe that the same Speight was the leader of the coup.

The overseas media had started arriving and the local media were afraid that they would miss a story. According to Sayed-Kaiyum, a race to get the story turned into a race talking to the hostage takers even if it became obvious that the media was being used. For other local journalists, a feeling of disbelief and disgust dawned as the news of the coup settled in their minds.

At the back of their minds, the local journalists feared for their families and the uncertainty that had hit their country. However, the fear had to be put aside and the journalists had to do their jobs and report on the crisis.

#### **Staying over at Parliament**

While some of the local and overseas journalists interviewed didn't think it was wrong to stay over at Parliament nor that this could jeopardise their stories, others disagreed.

Because Speight held press conferences in the middle of the night, most of the journalists didn't want to be left out and just stayed over at Parliament, according to Nair. He described the atmosphere inside as 'tense'. Staying over at Parliament then was the 'in-thing' to do, to be where the action was. Nair regretted staying over and being fed by the rebels when he later realised that the media was being used as propaganda to get supporters into Parliament.

Veisamasama and Cama also stayed over at Parliament. Veisamasama who is of chiefly status had a lot of relatives supporting Speight and staying over at Parliament and he didn't have any problems with access into and out of Parliament and with accommodation and food. Cama and Veisamasama was seen drinking kava with Speight by their own news editor Buadromo. Cama admitted because he was being treated as 'one of them' by the rebels at times they forgot that he was from the media.

Former FBC reporter Samisoni Pareti shared his lunch with George Speight and went on air to say 'the coup leader had a taste of food cooked by FBC' (Herman, audio taped interview, August



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18, 2005). General manager Francis Herman admitted this was a huge mistake as it questioned the credibility of the radio station and suggested that FBC was providing food to the rebels. The rebels on the other hand were offended by this comment because their interpretation was that there was no food inside Parliament. The comment by Pareti had to be clarified on air in three languages.

Motufaga did not see a problem with herself and her reporters staying over at Parliament but eating food provided by the rebels was seen as a problem. According to Motufaga they took their own food, drinks and phones and did not rely on anyone to give them anything.

Only one out of the five overseas journalists interviewed stayed over at Parliament. Senior journalist at *The New Zealand Herald* Phil Taylor stayed over for only one day to get ‘insight into what was going on’ and this enabled him to ‘observe Speight’. Taylor disagreed that this caused him to favour Speight as he was there only for a day (Taylor, audio taped interview, September 20, 2005).

Australian Broadcasting Corporation journalist Sean Dorney reported on the coup from Australia and would have stayed over in Parliament had he been in Fiji because ‘that was where the story was’.

Parliament was definitely a place where ‘the story was’. However, interviews with journalists (see appendix) showed that staying over at Parliament for more than a day was probably not a good idea. Some admitted suffering from the Stockholm syndrome and began to support the rebels and others would have undergone the same had they stayed longer inside.

#### **Difficulty getting stories**

Most of the local and overseas journalists did not find it difficult to find sources to base stories on. There was a continuous flood of information from Speight’s numerous press conferences and a lot of people wanted to give their opinion of the coup.

Nair found it difficult because he was just two weeks into the job, fresh out of university and the

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coup was no ordinary story. But the more the rebels saw of him inside Parliament, the more they felt comfortable and confident to speak to him about what was going on. According to Nair, one of the things that stood out was when one of the local journalists, Tukini Cama, was appointed as Speight's media liaison officer which not only raised ethical issues but accountability and transparency of his role as a journalist.

#### **Stockholm syndrome**

Cama, who was host of a popular FM96 radio programme, was trained along with others in an hour to report on the coup by news editor Virisila Buadromo. He was one of the journalists accused of supporting Speight, a statement he denied when interviewed (Cama, audio taped interview, August 16, 2000). According to Cama, it all started when Speight announced at a press conference that Cama was his media liaison officer. This he said was done maliciously by Speight to embarrass Cama. However, Buadromo, noticed that Cama ran long reports on Speight from Parliament and she saw that he had started to support Speight in his stories. She stopped him from going live and had his news recorded half an hour before going to air so that she could edit his news. The same was done to every reporter after she realised that they could also be suffering from the Stockholm syndrome.

Unlike Cama, Veisamasama, who had a stepbrother and half of his relatives inside Parliament supporting Speight, admitted that he had suffered from the Stockholm syndrome. According to Veisamasama the close family ties meant he was in constant conversation with his relatives and they kept saying that Speight was right and it started to sink into his mind that they might be correct. "It was like walking in a straight line for 10 days and losing one's balance after a while" (Veisamasama, audio taped interview, August 8, 2000). Veisamasama was in Parliament on and off during the 56 days of the coup and stayed over for 20 days. He slept wherever he could sleep and 'Speight didn't mind the media staying'. Veisamasama didn't feel scared because he 'had his relatives around him'. Communications Fiji Limited general manager Ian Jackson said when they noticed Veisamasama swaying, they pulled him out to take regular breaks out of Parliament. The different atmosphere helped Veisamasama begin to think clearly.

Josua Tuwere, who was a reporter for *The Fiji Times* during the coup, found himself being more

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sympathetic towards Speight near the end of the hostage crisis. While staying over at Parliament he remembered thinking how great it would be to have a gun in his hand. Chief-of-staff Akanisi Motufaga also stayed over at Parliament with some of her reporters; however to avoid the problem of bias, no one *Fiji Times* reporter stayed two consecutive nights at Parliament.

#### **Journalists harassed and threatened?**

Most of the journalists interviewed did feel scared or were harassed and threatened during the 56 days of the crisis.

Buadromo got scared when she went to Parliament and Speight wouldn't let her go after she interviewed him. Apparently there had been a lockdown and there was talk that the military was going to raid. Buadromo who was very nervous by this time, because she didn't want to get caught in a crossfire between the military and the rebels, told Veisamasama (who was drinking kava with Cama and the rebels) to tell the rebels if they let her out she would buy them a 'whole lot of kava'. Speight and Jo Nata, Speights official Public Relations man who is a former journalist, told Buadromo to relax and assured her she would get out soon. She and the other reporters were released an hour and a half later.

Sayed-Kaiyum thought he should never have gone to Parliament from the first day as advised by the President of Fiji, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. However because the local media didn't want to miss the story and the overseas media had ignored the President's advice, it was a race to get the story at any cost even if it meant talking to the hostage takers. Sayed-Kaiyum felt threatened the first day he interviewed Speight. Two weeks later he was also verbally threatened in the middle of the night and objects were thrown at the house he stayed at. Even though the police were called in, it was a very frightening time for Sayed-Kaiyum and his family, which included a newborn baby. Sayed-Kaiyum was also threatened the night after Fiji Television was trashed on May 28 and he fled to the Western side of Fiji with only twenty cents in his pocket. He made his way back home a few days later when he thought it was safe.

*Fiji Times* reporter Raijeli Kikau felt threatened on the third week of the crisis when the local media were taken hostage on a Wednesday evening after a press conference. They were told that

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there was a bomb threat in the Parliamentary complex and no one was allowed to leave until it was safe. They were provided dinner and told to wait in one of the rooms, in the same complex where the labour Parliamentarians were held hostage. However, Kikau was confident that if the media were taken hostage, they would survive by encouraging each other as they had formed a small media family inside the complex who looked out for each other.

According to Cama, he was harassed twice by Speight's supporters who felt that he was a spy for the outside world. This stopped when he told Speight and they were told to leave the media alone.

*Fiji Sun* reporter Jone Kalouniviti felt threatened from the first time he entered Parliament. Kalouniviti realised there was no law and order and everyone was at the mercy of the rebels. The atmosphere inside Parliament was tense and he remembered the 'hair on the back of his neck' standing during the first press conference. However, as the days rolled on, he took comfort in the presence of his 'grandfather', one of the supporters inside Parliament. Everyone came to know him as his grandson and left him alone.

Veisamasama got beaten the night Fiji Television was trashed on May 28. Veisamasama was locked up in a room with the other journalists while a security camera watched what they were doing. He covered the security camera with a cloth and got hit for doing that. He then pleaded with one of the rebels to pass a message to his stepbrother and to George asking them to release the overseas and female journalists who were locked up. When the message got to Speight, he released the overseas media first.

Koroi still remembers the day his life was threatened. As armed thugs marched from Parliament down Nasese Road to the military checkpoint, Koroi and his reporters stood shocked and dazed as they tried to think of a quick action to save themselves from the crossfire as they were standing under a tree in between the checkpoint and the rebels. In the bushes behind them were about 500 soldiers camouflaged and ready to shoot at the rebels if they tried to force their way past the checkpoint. In his fright, Koroi climbed to the top of the nearest tree to hide. Luckily, there was no shooting because the rebels resisted.

#### ***4: Interviews with journalists and editors who covered the coup***

Motufaga felt threatened when a photographer was beaten because he was mistaken for a policeman. The mood of the mob was 'fickle and quick to anger' and she feared for herself and the safety of her reporters.

Phil Taylor of *The New Zealand Herald* had to use his own discretion as to whether he should go certain places at the Parliamentary complex to gather information and found himself constantly evaluating whether it was safe. Even though he wasn't threatened directly, he was aware of the volatility of the situation and was present during the shoot-out between the rebels and the military which left one soldier and a cameraman shot.

TVNZ's Ewart Bansley felt threatened every time he went to Parliament and especially when the policeman was murdered on the night Fiji Television (May 28) was trashed. He left Suva along with many other journalists on May 29 but returned the next day when the military took control.

Similarly Michael Field from AFP was upset with the Fiji Television trashing and was upset for close friends who lived in Fiji. Field got seriously ill at one stage during the coup and felt he could have been hurt at any time.

#### **Race and Risk**

Indo-Fijian reporters seemed to be put under more pressure compared to Fijian reporters. This many have been because they were Indian and the coup was supposedly against Indians, people were harsh and uncooperative to them.

Nair was afraid that he was part Indian while he was inside Parliament.

...I did not want to be identified as Indian because there were a lot of racial tension and anti-Indian sentiments floated around and you wouldn't want to be caught in that because anything could have happened. (Nair, audio taped interview, August 11, 2005).

Nair never gave his surname whenever he was asked for his name as they would have identified that he was an Indian through his surname.

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Similarly Buadromo didn't allow any of her Indo-Fijian reporters to go to Parliament, they were all based in the office.

I re-jigged our roster, I pulled all the indo-Fijian reporters off, I really didn't know what to expect, put only male reporters to cover the march and only Fijian reporters (Buadromo, audio taped interview, August 10, 2005).

According to Buadromo, a lot of Indian members of the community started calling up the Indian radio station because they heard that the coup was a race issue. She admitted that she was confused during the first week whether the coup was really race-based or was motivated by something else.

Sayed-Kaiyum didn't want to go back to Parliament the first day after he interviewed Speight. Something told him not to go back there and he felt threatened after the interview with Speight.

Also about two weeks later I was verbally threatened in the middle of the night and objects were thrown at the house I was staying at. The police were called and it was a very frightening time for my family which now included a new born baby (Sayed-Kaiyum, emailed interview, November 25).

Prasad was worried about her safety when Speight and his men stormed Parliament. She was in the media chambers when the incident took place.

The media had their war with the Peoples Coalition Government – but democracy is what every journalist should uphold and it being raped before my naked eyes was a traumatic experience and challenging as a journalist (Prasad, emailed interview, September 20, 2005).

According to Prasad, a gun was shoved up her spine and she could not sleep on her back for weeks and 'every time I tried to sleep I could see Mr Chaudhry being kicked or a warrior cry if my phone would ring' (Prasad).

Prasad who was a State witness for court cases to identify the men that accompanied Speight on May 19 has suffered abuse since.

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My life has since been threatened. I remember Speight (or someone pretending to be him) calling me on several occasions not happy with what I had written during the coup period (Prasad, emailed interview, September 20, 2005).

Prasad's abuse is being monitored by Amnesty International.

Weisamasama agreed that it was too risky for the Indo-Fijian reporters to go to Parliament or be seen around there.

They were targeting the Indian journalists inside and when they pulled out Asha Lakhan (AFP) I got worried for my two Indian colleagues with me and for myself as well (Veisamama, audio taped interview, August 8, 2005).

According to Veisamasama as a result of the risk, a decision was made that 'the Indian reporters would not go out into the streets and would stay within the building'.

Koroi knew that the Indian community were being targeted after Suva city was trashed. So he sent his entire Indian staff home and did not allow them to work.

#### **Training/Education of journalists**

Most of the local journalists interviewed did not have any formal journalism qualification when they were hired.

Motufaga did not study journalism because there was no journalism course in 1994. However, she was trained on the job for the first three years and also attended workshops conducted by the Fiji Islands Media Association (which does not exist anymore) every three months.

Kalouniviti came straight out of high school and was also trained on the job when he joined the *Daily Post* in 1999. Like Motufaga, he also attended workshops but conducted by an expatriate training manager hired by his newspaper. However, after six years, he is now enrolled at the journalism programme at the University of the South Pacific.

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Prasad began her journalism career as a supplements writer for the *Daily Post* on a casual basis earning \$60 a week. She was also trained on the job and doesn't have any formal qualification in journalism.

Tuwere was an English and History teacher at Marist Brothers High School in Suva in 1994 before he joined FM96 radio station's news department. He was trained in-house with a Canadian consultant who focused on voice modulation, script writing and on-the-scene reporting. Tuwere later joined the *Fiji Times* and was trained again on the various aspects of writing for newspapers.

Koroi was trained to be an agriculturalist and not a journalist. While looking for a job there was an opening in the ethnic Fijian newspaper, *Nai Lalakai*, which he applied for and got. He enjoyed it so much he decided to stay and has been in journalism for 35 years now.

Kikau never thought she would 'end up writing'. Kikau was more interested in the economics and accounting field. She was studying History/Politics at the University of the South Pacific when she heard an advertisement on Radio Fiji looking for a reporter. She applied and was accepted. Kikau was also trained 'in-house' but recently enrolled into the Diploma for Pacific Journalism programme at the University of the South Pacific.

Sayed-Kaiyum also fell into journalism by accident. He always had an interest in writing and telling stories and journalism seemed like the only thing 'I could fall into after giving up studies in accounting'. Sayed-Kaiyum started as a disc jockey for FM96 in 1993 before joining Fiji Television. He too was trained in-house and attended courses conducted by the Fiji Islands Media Association.

Nair studied technology at USP for a year before he was able to convince his father that he wanted to do journalism. He studied journalism at university for three years before he was offered a job with the FBC.

Cama was still in high school when the 1987 coup happened. He saw how important journalism was during the coup and decided to go into journalism. At university, he studied communications



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as a minor as ‘journalism wasn’t even a School back then’. He joined the programme department of FM96 in 1990 and was a popular host of the Breakfast Show. According to Cama, he was called now and then by the news department to report on news events whenever there was ‘pressure on reporters’.

Buadromo never considered herself as a journalist but as a reporter because ‘I thought I was reporting what was going on’ and because there ‘was very little analysis at the time’. After studying at university she wanted to do something that ‘would come naturally to me like talking to people’. So she got involved in radio broadcasting and worked for FM96 for nine years starting off as a cadet reporter.

All of the overseas journalists interviewed had undergone journalism training at a tertiary institution.

The interviews reflected that journalists who had undergone professional journalism training and education performed better in their role. They not only had the ability to write balanced, analytical and investigative stories but also seemed to understand issues better and were intact with the rules and laws of journalism.

#### **Journalistic Professionalism during coup/Regrets writing stories?**

Most of the journalists, both local Fijian and overseas, thought they were professional in their jobs during the coup and few regretted their actions or stories they wrote during the coup.

Motufaga tried hard not to show favour or disgust in her stories and in her view, always presented balanced stories. She left all commentary to the editorial comment section.

I always evaluated the position, angle of stories (to ensure it wasn’t slanted). Reported the facts and left it to the readers to make up their minds. I never fraternized with Speight and company (Motufaga, emailed interview, September 6, 2005).

Even though she did not regret writing any story during the coup, if given another opportunity, she would not spend too much time focusing on what was happening in Parliament and in the

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city.

*The New Zealand Herald*'s Eugene Bingham thought the same but said that 'ultimately that is for others to decide'.

I attempted to write stories which were fair, accurate and balanced and written with context (Bingham, emailed interview, September 13, 2005).

Bansley believed he acted professionally by 'not taking sides....keeping a personal difference from all sides...and making sure my stories were balanced' (Bansley, emailed interview, September 7, 2005).

Bansley does not regret writing anything he reported on even though one prominent businessman close to Speight objected to something he said and sued him for libel. However, according to Bansley, his work during the coup was acknowledged when he won New Zealand's TV reporting prize that year.

Kalouniviti, trying to act professional during the coup was proved harder as he had relatives inside Parliament.

I had relatives inside who wanted to use our newspaper to air their views and predictions of the situation. At times I was called up to put in certain stories but refused, I was sworn at by uncles and grandfathers who greatly supported the cause and had to stay put at home on certain occasions (Kalouniviti, September 14, 2005).

According to Kalouniviti, he lacked confidence and learning to read between the lines, something he would change if given another opportunity.

Tuware believed he remained professional as a journalist during the coup by following four simple rules.

1. I didn't sleep with any of the rebels to get my stories!

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2. I was particular about the language I used in my reports, avoiding hyperbole.
3. I tried to provide regular updates, three or four a day.
4. I made a conscious decision to avoid interviewing Ilisoni Ligairi, a relative, to avoid a perception of bias/prejudice.

(Tuwere, emailed interview, November 15, 2005)

Tuwere would also spend less time in Parliament and try to cover stories around the country like the damage in Naitasiri and Suva and sports stories.

Jackson thought his team of reporters during the coup did a good job ‘considering everything’ but could have done better. For one he would not let his reporters stay for a long period of time in Parliament if the coup had to happen again and blames a lack of manpower for this.

Koroi was tempted in many ways to let his personal opinion influence his role as editor during the coup.

...and no matter how high your position in the newsroom your political affiliation will show sometime but it’s up to you to get back on track (Koroi, audio taped interview, August 8, 2005).

According to Koroi, talking to friends overseas and consulting other people’s opinions regularly helped him to stay on track. Koroi would like to see more analytical reporting done if another national crisis had to happen.

I think the biggest problem we had was straight news reporting. We didn’t have much analysis and I would have liked to see more analysis done instead of just straight news reporting (Koroi, audio taped interview, August 8, 2005).

Former AFP South Pacific Correspondent Michael Field did his best to remain professional but admitted that at the end of the day, everyone is human.

I am pretty human too; never compromised myself but had to accommodate myself to

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all the various local difficulties and complications. It was why I was pretty well paid — you spend your entire time in various balancing acts (Field, emailed interview, June 20, 2005).

His biggest regret was writing numerous stories that suggested resolution was near.

I never believed it would last long. I am always conscious that news stories are written on the trot, under pressure and sometimes with only an outline of the facts — and often (certainly in Fiji) without any way of checking (Field, emailed interview, June 20, 2005).

If there was anything he would change about how he went about reporting the coup, it would be taking more time out ‘because at various points I found myself physically tired and mentally exhausted’ (Field, emailed interview, June 20, 2005).

Kikau admitted that it was hard for her to remain professional because it was the first time for her to see men holding guns and wearing balaclavas.

But it never dictated how I had to write what was happening inside and I kept to that stand even though some days they took my mobile phone, bag and tape recorder and told me to sit outside the complex for an hour before being allowed in if I wrote something they thought was against the cause (Kikau, emailed interview, September 7, 2005).

Kikau believed she remained professional by writing her stories without being influenced by the people in the complex. When she got used to the ‘sight of men and young children’ (especially shoe shine boys), Kikau got more aggressive with her reporting.

This led to my interview with coup military man Ilisoni Ligairi but it was purely through phone calls to some people who had become my contacts inside the complex. Mr Ligairi was a bit hesitant when I called him but I told him it was his call, if he did not want the interview it was all right, but he later agreed but later told me it took him a day to decide on the interview because that was the first interview he had given since May 19 (Kikau, emailed interview, September 7, 2005).

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She regretted a story she wrote after the amnesty period when the military asked all civilians to return any weapons they might have. She was told in confidence that there were four weapons still missing by Lt Filippo Tarakinini and was told not to publish this. However, her chief-of-staff instructed that she include this in her story.

Lt Tarakinini called the next day fuming...he said the damage was done but his reasons were that it would cause more instability and fear for the settlements whose lives, crops and animals were threatened and stolen at gunpoint by the civilians. So they would not have a good nights sleep because the arms were still out there. I just wanted to kick myself after that because the country was on its way to trying to restore democracy and justice, but this was not the way forward (Kikau, emailed interview, September 7, 2005).

If given another opportunity, Kikau believed there was nothing wrong with the media covering Parliament.

Sayed-Kaiyum avoided being the mouthpiece for those who had committed a serious offence to help him act professionally and not to let his emotions influence his job during the coup.

I had reservations about some things that we were doing at the time...but there wasn't much I could do myself. Also there wasn't much to argue to make a case...we were working 24 hours a day. My conscience is clear (Sayed-Kaiyum, emailed interview, November 25, 2005).

Sayed-Kaiyum suggested that if there was to be another national crisis, media organisations should set rules to follow before going out to cover the event.

Who had a vested interest to talk to us? We should have attempted to analyse all this. Also strict rules and guidelines should have been followed viz a viz the president's request at the time (Sayed-Kaiyum, emailed interview, November 25, 2005).

Buadromo thought her team did very well while reporting on the 56 day crisis and had a lot of support from other staff, management, public and their own families.

If there were some stories we shouldn't have run, I don't know. I think we handled a lot of stories quite well (Buadromo, audio taped interview, August 10, 2005).

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However, she admitted there was some stories they didn't handle well and which contributed to making the situation worse like on the first day of the looting.

We initially started out by saying there is looting going on in town and started describing the situation. And then we realised that this was inciting people to come down and come and loot. So we stopped doing that. We stopped referring to shops, we stopped referring to people taking things. We just said there was a situation etc. We tried to describe what was going on without trying to be specific (Buadromo, audio taped interview, August 10, 2005).

According to Buadromo, they were not only providing the news but also providing a community service as well by telling people not to come to the city for example. Buadromo also admitted her reporters started developing the Stockholm syndrome.

I'm sure all of them were developing Stockholm syndrome. Because of the lack of people we had, if I had to do it again, I would rotate people going in and out of there more regularly than the period we had them in for because people started swaying. When I saw that they started swaying and seemed to be sympathising with the people in there, we pulled them out (Buadromo, audio taped interview, August 10, 2005).

#### **Parachute Journalism**

While some journalists and editors interviewed said the local and overseas media complemented each other during the coup, others said the overseas media did a bad job at reporting and made matters worse by not understanding the main issues and sensationalising events.

Bingham said the international coverage of the coup was important in bringing foreign attention to the crisis and because overseas media organisations had to 'scramble staff' to send to Fiji, it was natural that they were unprepared.

I'm sure there are many examples of shoddy journalism practice by those who may be termed 'parachute journalists' but I also think that there was some fine reporting of the coup by overseas journalists (Bingham, emailed interview, September 13, 2005).

#### ***4: Interviews with journalists and editors who covered the coup***

According to Bingham, in the end it is up to media organisations to improve their knowledge of the Pacific and some have already started assigning special reporters to look after Pacific affairs.

But at the same time I think it is sad that some of those who criticise media coverage of the Pacific are people who could instead be using their energy actually reporting on the Pacific (Bingham, emailed interview, September 13, 2005).

Bansley said the local Fijian media seemed to do a pretty good job ‘although given Fiji’s size and family ties some appeared too close to Speight and his cronies to be objective’.

I think the journalists and other staff at Fiji TV are among the bravest people I have ever met (Bansley, emailed interview, September 7, 2005).

Jone Kalouniviti criticised the overseas media for ‘sensationalism and exaggeration’.

The local media did a better job because they printed the real picture.

However, Prasad believed every journalist did what was required of them and international journalists like Michael Field and Sean Dorney were well versed with Fiji politics and were helpful to the local media and vice versa. She agreed that there were some overseas journalists who sensationalised the whole issue.

I remember while at the Centra, how one international journalist spun the windmills of gossip and the whole bang lot of them went into frenzy trying to pack up and leave as they were told there was a group of rebels on the way from Parliament to mob the hotel just days after Fiji One was mobbed (Prasad, emailed interview, September 20, 2005).

Tuwere remembered how the local journalists were amazed at the equipment the overseas journalists had — satellite phones, expensive laptops, zoom lens cameras, TV cameras and booms.

That captured some real memorable moments and the overseas media probably brought a whole new dimension to efficiency and getting the news to the people (Tuwere, emailed interview, November 15, 2005).

According to Tuwere, even though the local Fijian media provided a lot of details about the major players and the complexities of inter-tribal and *vanua* (land) relationships, there was a

#### ***4: Interviews with journalists and editors who covered the coup***

definite lack of analysis on the part of local journalists.

The foreign commentators played into the 'Fijian versus Indian' paradigm but the crisis was much more complicated than that. Both the local media and the overseas media had their weaknesses and both had their strengths (Tuwere, emailed interview, November 15, 2005).

Koroi thought the overseas journalists were as guilty as the local ones.

They were worse in the sense that they were looking for any little thing to spark anything and expose more. I must say I was disappointed with some of the coverage given by the overseas media on the coup because quite a lot of it was exaggerated and was not really what happened (Koroi, audio taped interview, August 8, 2005).

According to Koroi, the overseas journalists were looking for lootings, fights and mass killings 'like those in South Africa'.

They were trying to pick on small things. But when it didn't happen that way they started to pick on little instances like that. They know nothing about the culture, they know nothing about the cosmopolitan society that we have. They just thought that this is just one great big disaster (Koroi, audio taped interview, August 8, 2005).

Koroi thought the local media did a better job and gave a better perspective of what was happening but the overseas media couldn't be blamed as 'they don't know the place and country and reported whatever they saw'. In future, Koroi suggested the issue of parachute journalism could be solved through preparation and research on the part of the journalist.

It boils down to a journalist's preparation. A lot of information is available through the internet now and journalists can do research and study a country before they go in (Koroi, audio taped interview, August 8, 2005).

Koroi's view of the media in Fiji is that it is 'over exposed' with three daily newspapers published in the capital of Suva, three weekly newspapers in three vernaculars, 14 radio stations



#### ***4: Interviews with journalists and editors who covered the coup***

and one TV channel.

But it also shows the ingenuity of the Fiji people. It shows that they can sustain and maintain all these information outlets and it is great for a small country like Fiji (Koroi, audio taped interview, August 8, 2005).

Field thought it was not fair to compare the local and overseas media as both had different audiences to serve.

Kikau was not happy with the overseas media and had a lot to criticise about them.

They were very pushy, demanding, aggressive and some of their actions affected the way locals viewed the media inside the complex. They did not understand the tradition and customs of Fijians and took pictures of chiefs gathering standing up, with hands on their hips. They stormed into a Fijian traditional ceremony without asking for permission from the guards (Kikau, emailed interview, September 7, 2005).

She criticised the overseas media for not giving a chance to ask questions. However, she thought the local media were still able to get the breaking news every day.

Sayed-Kaiyum believed both the local and overseas media had their advantages and disadvantages, 'although at the end the balance was tipped in favour of locals and they grinded it out till the end...they felt more for the story'.

Dorney said that maintaining an office in Fiji could be a solution for overseas media to avoid the issue of parachute journalism. However, the costs of maintaining the office and correspondents were too high.

The Australian media as a whole takes very limited interest in the Pacific so almost nobody has a local stringer. That is a problem because when crises like this happen they send people who know nothing. The big advantage for the parachute journalists who know nothing is having bosses and sub-editors who know less and so there is no quality evaluation of copy (Dorney, emailed interview, September 7, 2005).

Dorney admitted he is the only working journalist left in Australia who visits the Pacific

#### ***4: Interviews with journalists and editors who covered the coup***

regularly as the Australian media remain ‘ woefully ignorant’.

Cama was shocked and appalled by the coverage by the overseas journalists.

They thought it was just a storm in a teacup, enough to fill a couple of headlines for them and they are off to another troublesome spot in the world.

According to Cama, the overseas journalists got angry and frustrated when the coup dragged on and when the GCC was supposed to settle everything in three days but didn’t.

When it wasn’t over the journalists were disgusted because they thought that it would be over in three days and booked their flight out the next day. I told them ‘Oh I’m sorry, next time please send your itinerary first and we will organise our national crisis around your itinerary’. They said it was totally inconvenient for them that the GCC hadn’t come to a resolution quickly (Cama, audio taped interview, August 16, 2005).

Cama said there were some overseas journalists who deserved respect but others just became ‘a nuisance’.

They knew nothing about the politics of this country. They come in today and expect the coup makers themselves to hold everything back and explain things to them (Cama, audio taped interview, August 16, 2005).

#### ***4: Interviews with journalists and editors who covered the coup***

### **Conclusion**

Much has been said about how the media covered the May 2000 coup. Most of the comments have been negative. These interviews gave an insight into the thoughts and reactions of journalists and editors who covered the coup. It revealed that while some of the local media were ready for the takeover at Parliament, it came as a surprise for others who thought that the biggest story of the day was the protest march. The coup was a 'highlight' for most of their careers and 'an exciting adventure' as journalists. It revealed that while some journalists didn't think it was wrong to stay over at Parliament, others admitted suffering from the Stockholm syndrome. The journalists, both local and overseas were threatened in different ways during the coup. Except for a few overseas journalists who returned home after the trashing of Fiji Television, others continued to cover the crisis despite being threatened and harassed. Most of the journalists who were professionally trained wrote better news stories compared to those who were trained on the job.

Many of the Fijian journalists admitted it was hard to remain professional in their jobs because some had relatives inside Parliament and spending too much time inside Parliament clouded their judgment and influenced their personal opinion. If given another opportunity, most decided they would not spend as much time inside Parliament or would take regular breaks to come out and clear their minds. A lot of local journalists were not happy with some of the stories by the overseas media and called them 'parachute journalists'. Others thought the overseas media did an exceptional job especially with their analytical and investigative stories, which the local media lacked. Many Indo-Fijian reporters seemed to be under more pressure compared to their Fijian colleagues. The editors pulled back all their Indo-Fijian staff to solve this problem. Except for staff of FM 96 and *The Fiji Times*, none of the local media underwent trauma counselling after the coup. Only a few of the overseas journalists admitted going through counselling provided by their news organisations after the May 2000 coup.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion

This thesis has reviewed the coverage by the local and overseas media during the May 2000 coup.

The literature review revealed that not a lot of literature that focused on the role of the media and how it covered the crisis was available. A lot of authors concentrated on the socio-political conditions leading up to the coup and the relationship between politics and the military. Mistakes that were made by the overseas media were repeated in 2000. The overseas media did not seem to understand the complexities of Fiji's political situation and in many of its published news, blamed the continuing rivalry between the Indians and the Fijians as the reason for the coups (Field 2005, Lal 2001). However, the overseas media, *The Australian* in particular, published some commendable investigative and analytical stories that looked at the real reasons behind the coup. The local media on the other hand were free to publish during the 2000 coup and with so much information available to it, didn't know how to handle this information and made blunders in the process. Kiran (2005) found that *The Fiji Times* was biased in its reporting of the May 2000 coup. Other criticisms made against the media during the May 2000 coup included:

### ✓ **Former Daily Post editor Jale Moala:**

Reporters found it difficult to focus on the issues from a totally impartial point of view. They were swept away by the euphoria of the moment and the tension and the emotion that charged the event.

Fear played a role and some argued that the situation might not have deteriorated as quickly if the media had played a more responsible role. But the tribal and chiefly system and customary obligations may blur the view of the journalist, especially if he or she is indigenous.

Reporters could not function properly because of pressure from the crisis and a lack of leadership in newsrooms.

Radio Fiji seemed to suffer from confusion over who was in power or who was going to end up in power. He said the station allowed supporters of George Speight to make inflammatory statements live on radio, first to legitimise the events that had taken place and later to call for support to move into the parliamentary complex to bolster Speights forces.

Reporters who stayed over at Parliament made the outside world believe they were enjoying the hospitality of the terrorists and gave Speight the publicity he craved, effectively glorifying him and his cause.

(Moala 2001).

v **Former South Pacific Correspondent for Agence France-Presse Michael Field:**

The credibility of the local journalists faded because reporters were perceived to be too close to the terrorists and became participants and not spectators. The real problem was reporters who stayed over at parliament and suffered the Stockholm syndrome. One started engaging Speight like a long lost friend. When the reporter began stealing rounds from rebel pistols he was pulled out by his family employers.

The worst of the foreign media came from New Zealand and did not know basic names of the place. One was reading his newspaper library files on the Solomon Islands.

Journalists were not covering the story; they were the story, the tools of Speight's tactical skills.

After Fiji Television was trashed, some foreign journalists panicked and ran right out of the country. One largish media team celebrated their return home by running a story on how they had survived Speight's coup instead of saying they had run out on the story.

(Field 2001)

v **University of the South Pacific School of Humanities Professor Konai Helu Thaman:**

Most foreign reporters and a few local ones did not realise, let alone understand, that notions of democracy, human rights, freedom of expression or even the law itself, remain empty words among people whose worldviews were and continue to be framed by a different theory of personhood.

The selective way in which both foreign and local media organizations dealt with issues which they considered important under the guise of 'media freedom' was a cause of frustration of us who live in Fiji and who understood the complexity of the situation.

(Thaman 2001)

v **Deposed Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry:**

*The Fiji Times* wrote nothing but anti-government stories with facts manipulated and distorted to discredit and embarrass the government.

At least one television reporter has been guilty of manipulation of news and distortion of facts although not as blatantly as *The Fiji Times*

(Chaudhry 2000)

*Daily Post* editor Jale Moala made guidelines for his reporters on how they should cover the coup. His guidelines included not using the word 'coup' in its coverage for example. He believed that reporting Speights action as a coup would give it some justification in the minds of indigenous Fijians. So instead, it should be reported as a 'hostage situation' (Moala 2001). Robie (2001) concluded that the media, both local and overseas, had fueled the crisis and gave Speight a false idea about his importance and support.

Apart from *The Daily Post* no other media organization had written guidelines on how the coup should be covered. Moala decided to draft a policy to cope with the crisis and to prevent reporters suffering from the Stockholm syndrome because he was around during the 1987 coup and knew the mistakes that were made then. The Fiji Broadcasting Corporation had also prepared itself for the coup by working on possible scenarios that could happen and resolving how they would report it. Led by chief executive Francis Herman, the news team devised strategies they would use for the different scenarios they expected. However, according to Herman, the team slipped during its coverage and made mistakes that led to Speight gaining more support. Herman was around for all the three coups and revealed that each was different. In his view his experience of the past coups was what he used to prepare his team for the 2000 coup. Without this experience Herman

would not have gained the knowledge of the basic rules to follow in preparations for a coup.

The second chapter analysed the thematic content of news articles that appeared during the first 10 days of the crisis in *The Fiji Times*, *The New Zealand Herald* and *The Australian*. The coup was given prominence by all three newspapers during the first 10 days of the crisis. The content analysis found that the local media lacked the analytical and investigative stories which the overseas media provided. This may have been due to a number of reasons like a lack of staff and lack of resources but especially a lack of trained and experienced journalists in Fiji. Most of the journalists in the Fiji newsrooms were found to have an average age of 22 (Robie 2001) and lacked the experience and institutional knowledge to be able to write analytical in-depth stories and make predictions of what could happen next. This was provided by non-journalists in the local media instead (Robie 2001).

The content analyses also revealed that in all three newspapers, many stories gave credibility and legitimacy to Speight. This was a key theme. Other important themes in stories were emotionalism and sensationalism. *The Fiji Times* ran a few emotive headlines with biased stories that sympathised with the coup makers. *The New Zealand Herald* on the other hand, sensationalised the crisis especially in one of its editorials when it compared the Fiji coup to the troubles in Kosovo and Bosnia. The two New Zealand and Australian based newspapers also sensationalised a few events now and then, like when journalists were not allowed to leave Parliament at one stage for their own safety because of a mob outside. The overseas journalists reported that they were taken hostage and sensationalised the whole event. However, according to the local journalists who were also present, it was not a hostage situation as it was for their own safety which lasted for less than an hour.

The third chapter summarised the main themes in the verbatim interviews (See appendix) with local and overseas journalists and editors who covered the May 2000 coup. The interviews were carried out to record the thoughts of the journalists and their reactions to

some of the media criticisms they received. This was done to provide context for some of the blunders seen in news articles in the content analyses. Most of the journalists interviewed felt they did their best at reporting the crisis. It was a 'first-time' to cover the coup for most of the journalists and was a defining time for their careers. Some admitted that they did suffer from the Stockholm syndrome because of the long periods of time they spent inside Parliament. Most of the local journalists interviewed did not have any formal journalism qualification and were trained 'on-the-job'. A few had enrolled at the local university to take journalism courses. The journalists felt they had learnt a lot while covering the crisis and would definitely change the way they reported if given another opportunity. Most of the local journalists thought there were a lot of parachute journalists in the overseas media who didn't understand what was going on and made matters worse, even though a few were commended for their exceptional stories. However, according to a few of the overseas journalists interviewed, parachute journalism is an issue that could not be avoided and it was up to the media organizations to improve their knowledge of the Pacific by assigning special reporters to look at Pacific affairs.

While it is hard to suggest solutions to the mistakes made during the May 2000 coup so that it would not be repeated should another national crisis occur, basic guidelines to how media organisations should behave should be recorded for future reference. My observation is that at present a high number of experienced Fiji journalists are leaving the profession to work in other fields because of low pay and pressure they are put under. Others migrate to greener pastures to continue their passion and be appreciated for the work they do. With them goes the institutional knowledge and experience of reporting various affairs in Fiji especially the coups. What is left is a young newsroom, sometimes led by only one older and experienced journalist with 'institutional knowledge' for the young journalists to look up to as a role model. Some Fiji newsrooms are lucky to have even one of this 'institutional knowledge'. It is a lack of this 'institutional knowledge' that causes media organisations to repeat the same common, basic mistakes.

A crisis manual that records basic guidelines for journalists to follow in crisis situations could perhaps help. The Fiji Media Council could take up this initiative and record



common mistakes made in the past from different media organisations with suggested guidelines to avoid repeating the same mistakes. Even though no crisis situation would be the same, the guidelines would be basic and could be recorded as case studies by different journalists from different media organisations with the mistakes they made and how this could be avoided in future. Guidelines such as not staying over in Parliament for too long but taking regular breaks, avoiding words that would give credibility and legitimacy to the hostage-takers and not giving supporters or anyone connected to the rebels a voice on radio.

The overseas media on the other hand could avoid issues of parachute journalism and inaccurate reporting (due to a failure to understand the culture and complex political systems) by attaching themselves to local media outlets. They would be able to verify facts and any misconceptions or misunderstandings of the culture with local journalists through this attachment.

For the local media, a crisis manual seems to be the best solution at the moment in keeping the 'institutional knowledge' and sharing this with future journalists who come into the newsroom. Because Fiji is so 'crisis-prone' it will be a good idea for media organisations to start thinking about such a manual, either making one themselves or approaching the Fiji Media Council to take up this project.

## **APPENDIX 1**

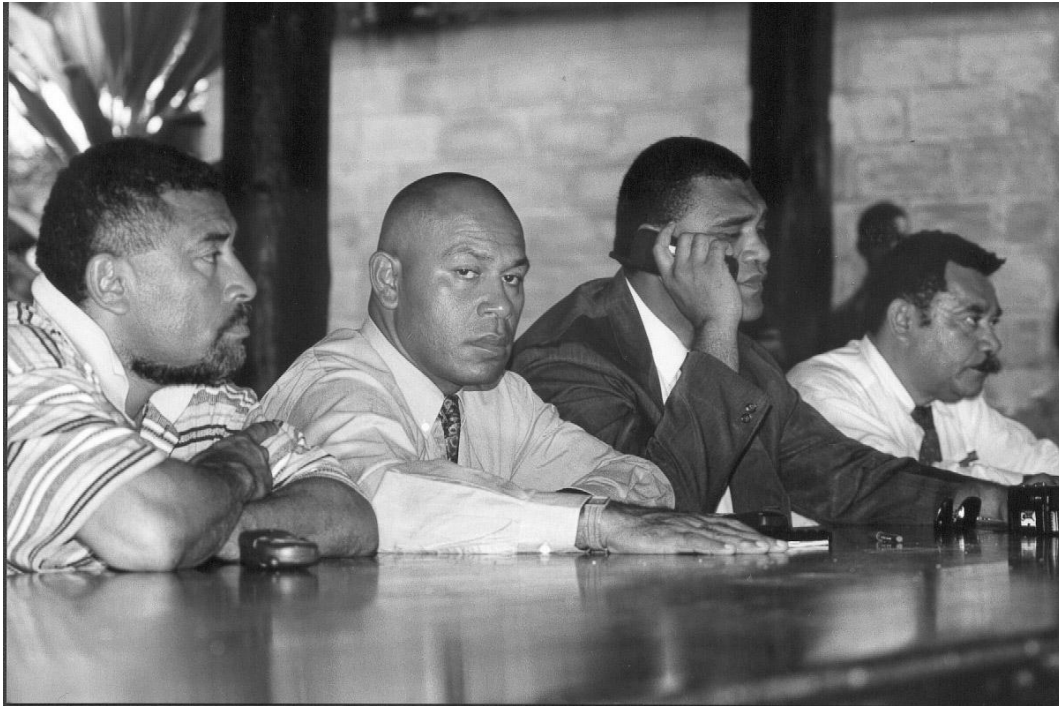


**Fiji's Parliament...where it all started**

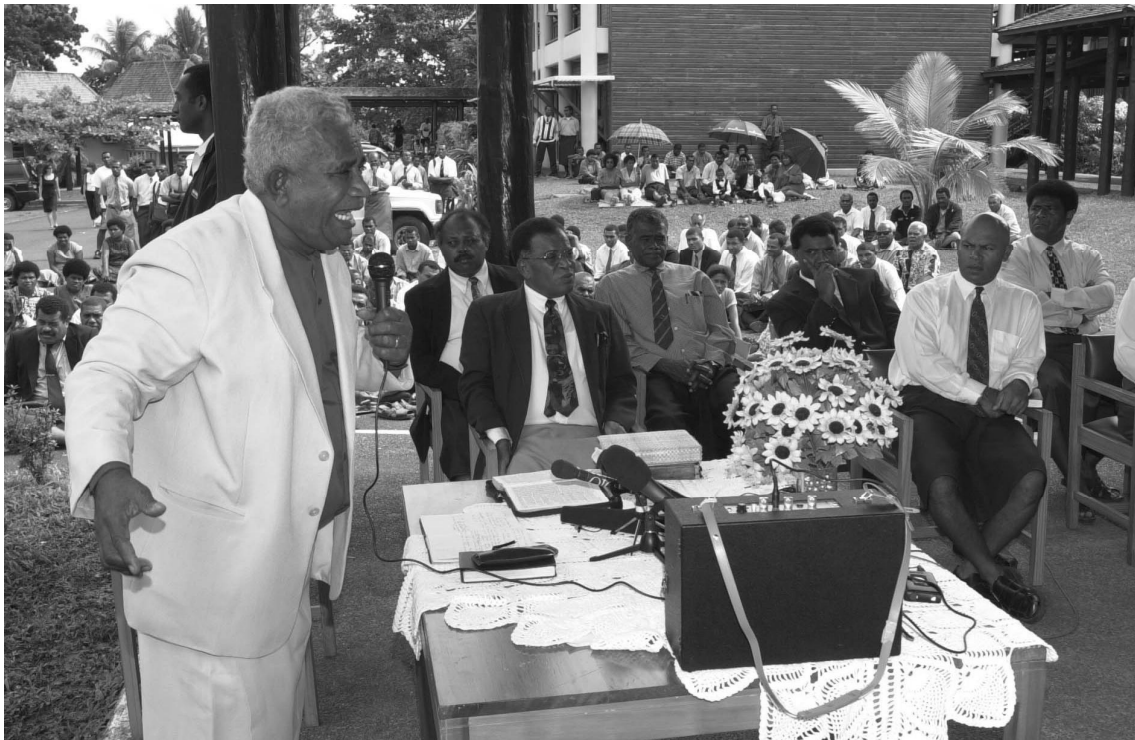


**What a typical Cabinet sitting looks like inside Parliament**

Appendix 1: Photos taken during the May 2000 coup



**George Speight (2<sup>nd</sup> left) with his illegal cabinet ministers**



**A church service inside Parliament during the May 2000 coup**



Appendix 1: Photos taken during the May 2000 coup



**One of Speights famous late night press conferences**



**The brother (in uniform) of former Police Commissioner Isikia Savua with a rebel gunman**

Appendix 1: Photos taken during the May 2000 coup



**Man of the moment...Speight loved talking to the media**



Appendix 1: Photos taken during the May 2000 coup



**Speight and his many faces...**





Appendix 1: Photos taken during the May 2000 coup



**He loved posing for the media**



## Appendix 1: Photos taken during the May 2000 coup

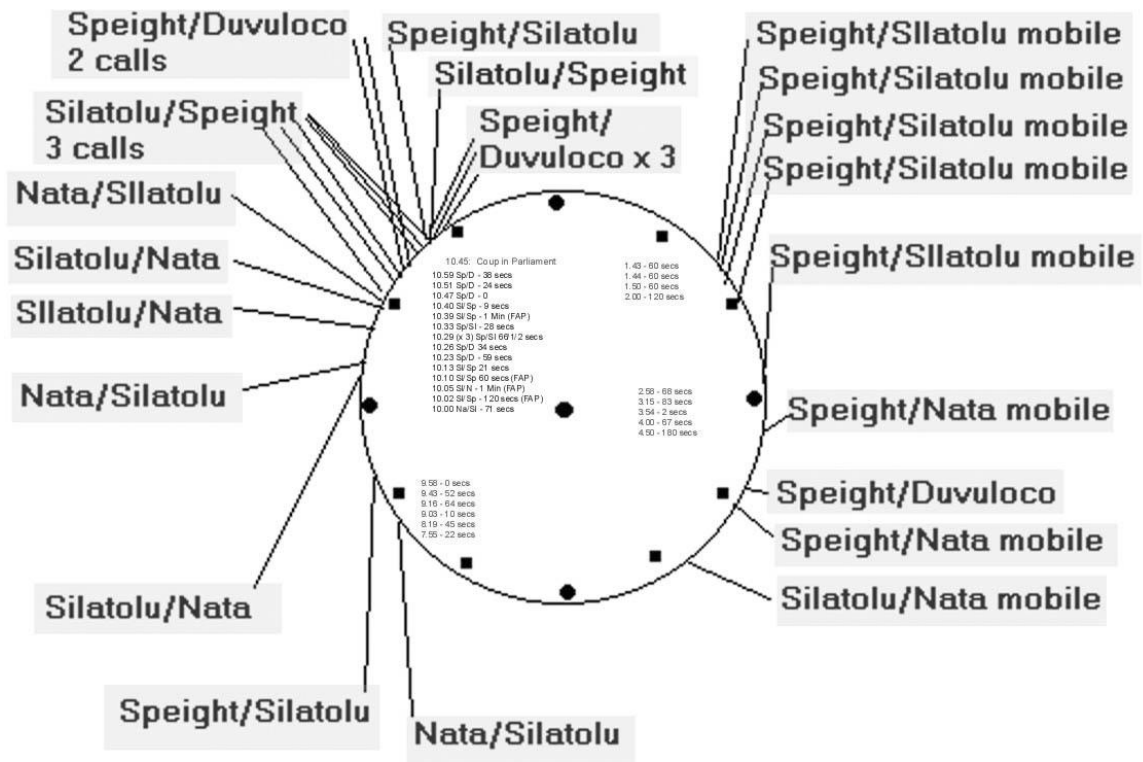
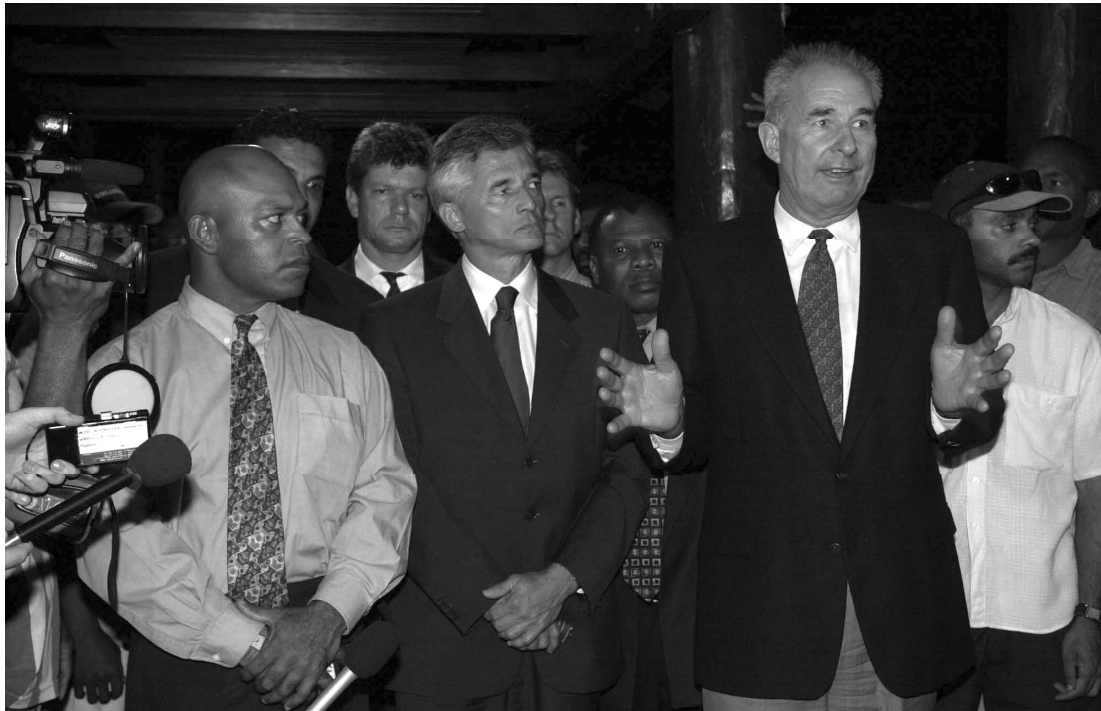


Diagram of rebels and their positions during the takeover in Parliament on May 19, 2000



Commonwealth team visit Speight



Appendix 1: Photos taken during the May 2000 coup



**The scuffle between rebels and military outside Parliament**

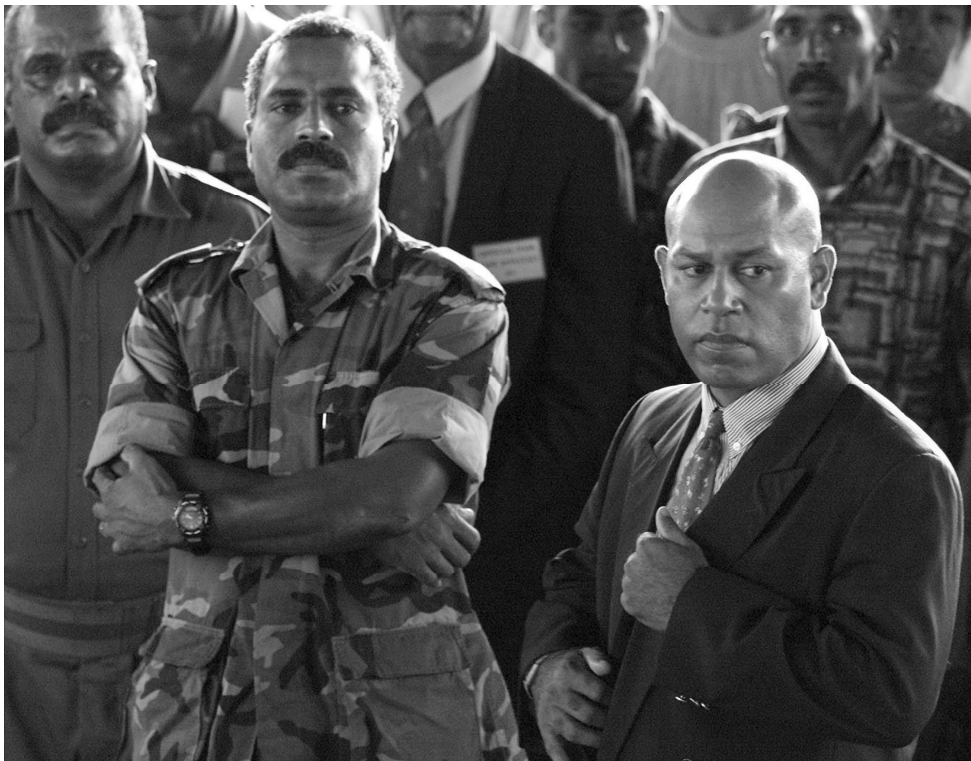


**Hostages embrace inside Parliament**

Appendix 1: Photos taken during the May 2000 coup



**The media loved Speight because he was so accessible**



**Lft Filippo Tarakinini and Speight during negotiations**



Appendix 1: Photos taken during the May 2000 coup



**Entrance to the court room where Speight was sentenced to death**



**Police wait outside court house at Government Buildings  
where the treason case was being heard**

Appendix 1: Photos taken during the May 2000 coup



**Speight is led away after being found guilty of treason and sentenced to death**

**Island jail...Speight poses for camera outside his 'island jail' on Nukulau**





## APPENDIX 2

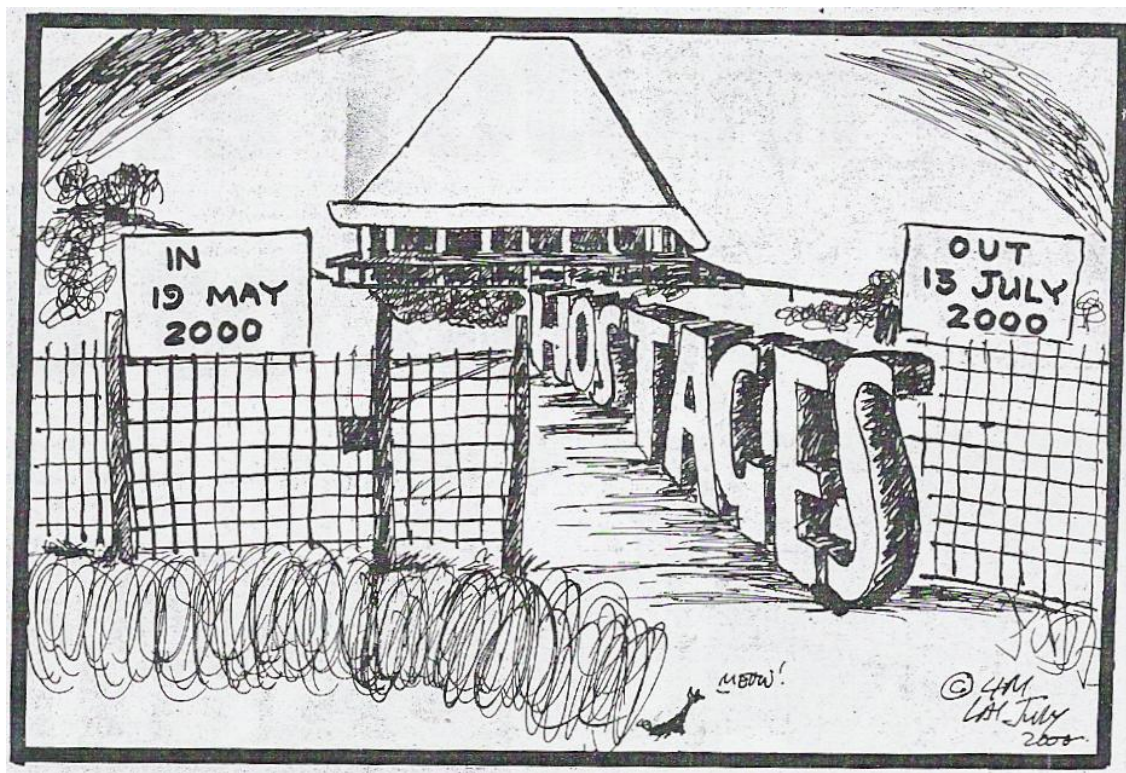
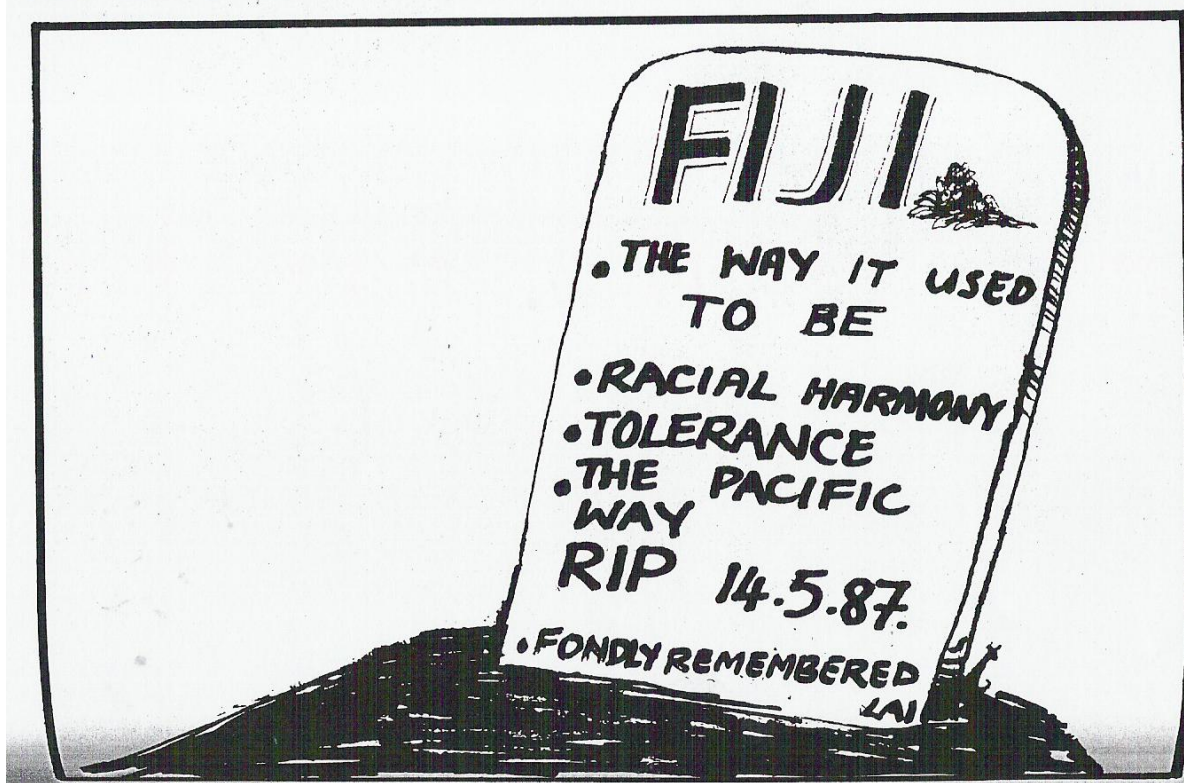
# Order and safety

**IN the interests of public order and safety this issue of the *Fiji SUN* has been produced under self-imposed restrictions on news and editorial content.**

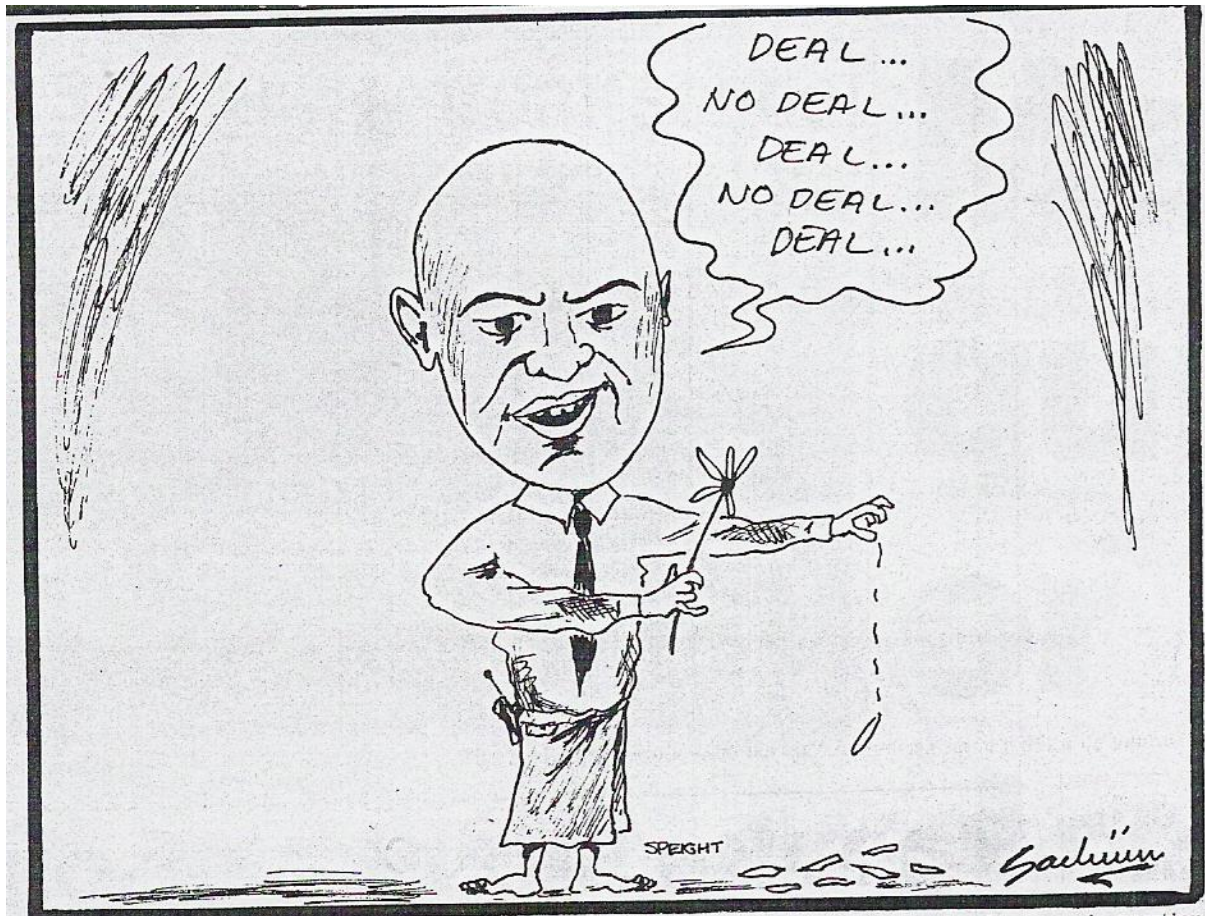
**The *SUN* has access to a considerable file of news stories and graphic pictures taken during the past week but because publication could possibly create further unrest throughout the nation we have decided not to publish this material in the meantime.**

**Jim Carney  
Deputy Publisher**

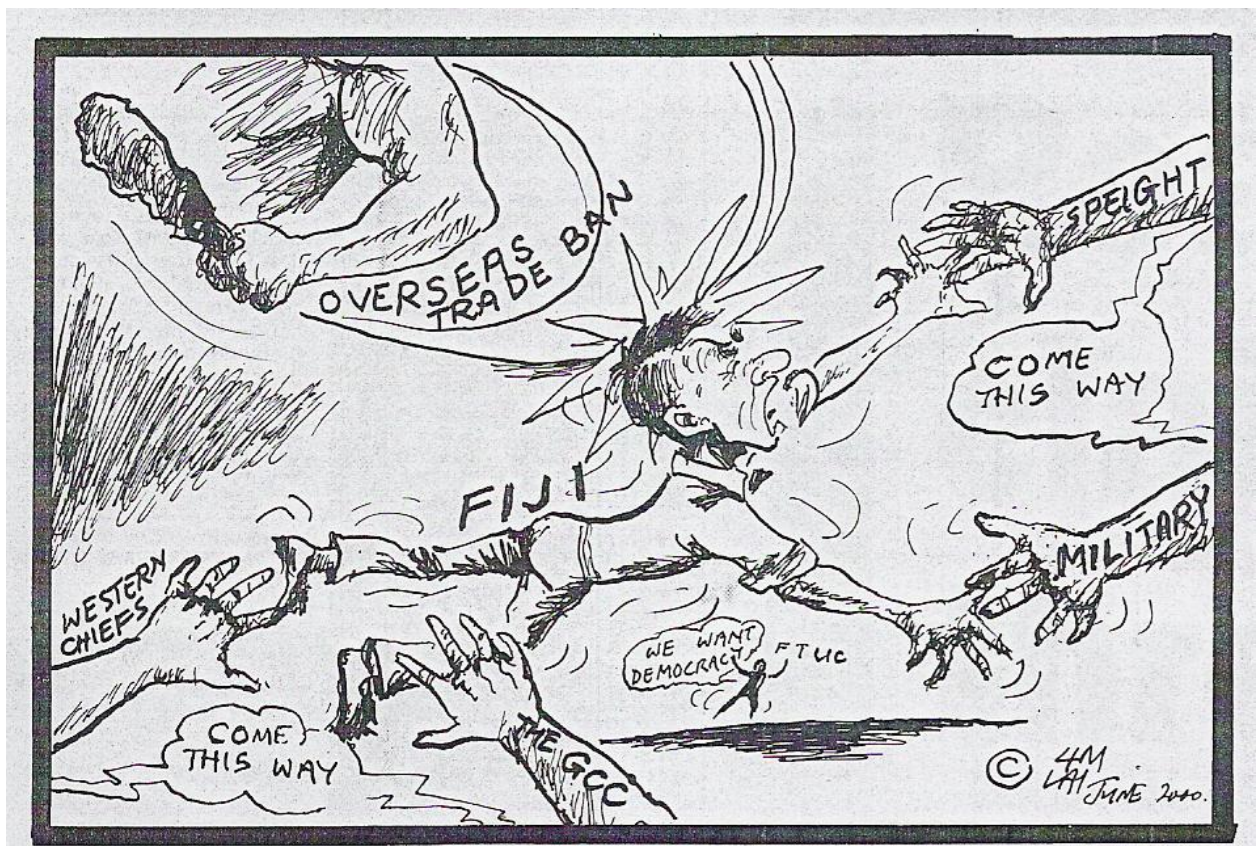
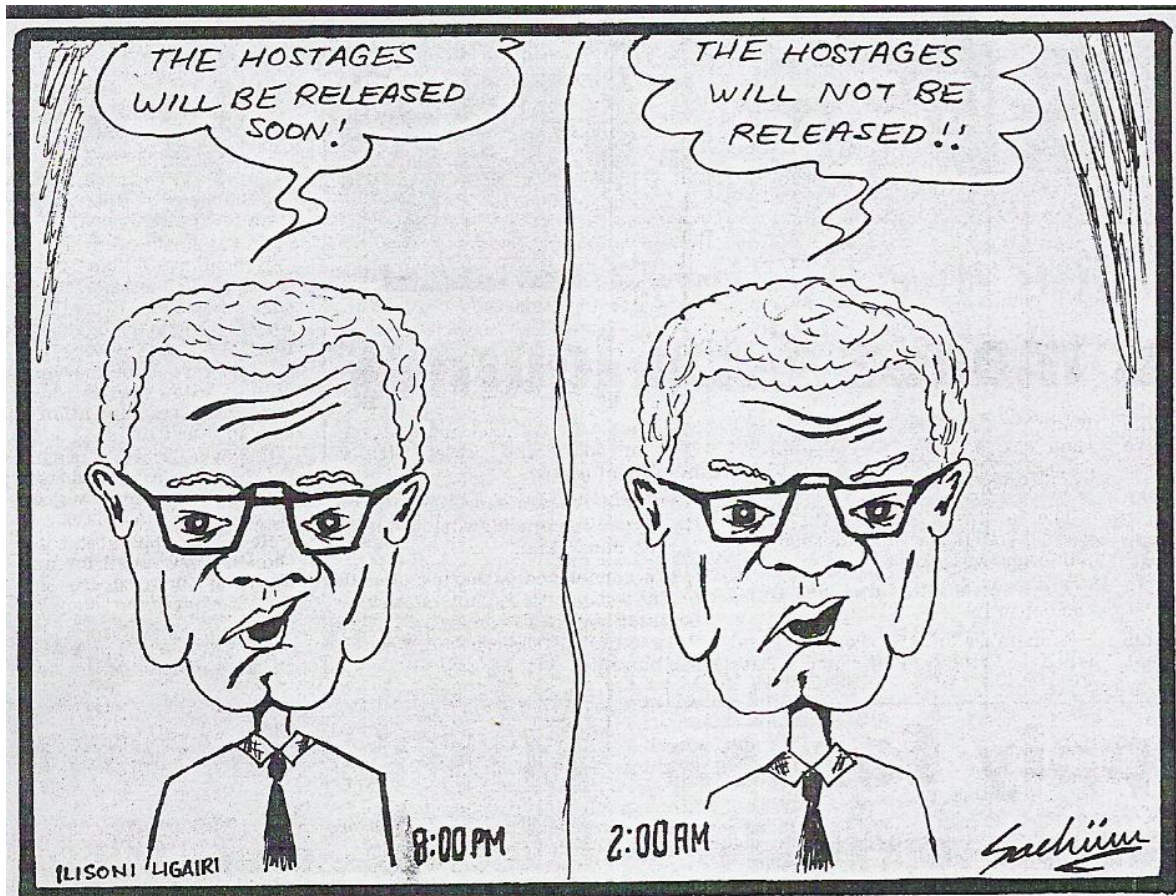
## Lai's Lament...













**THE Fiji Times**  
THE FIRST NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED IN THE WORLD TODAY  
FRIDAY, JULY 14, 2000 32 PAGES + 8-PAGES INSERT 60¢ inc VAT 131st YEAR No.168

**CRISIS!** Roadblocks stop cane harvest **Page 5**  
**Inside** **Fijian EDUCATION** **WHAT NEXT?** **Page 7**  
**Tomorrow DAYS OF DARKNESS**

**FREE AT LAST**



He's home ... deposed prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry (with granddaughter Sonia) and wife Virmati. Picture: RAMA

**INSIDE TODAY** Letters: Page 6. Business: Page 18. TV Guide, Diary, Weather: Page 21. Crime Stoppers 306000 / 650555



## Tamani Nair



*Tamani Nair is a journalist with PacNews in Suva Fiji. He was on attachment at Radio Fiji when the coup happened in May 2000.*

### **1. What motivated you to become a journalist?**

I always wanted to become a journalist when in high school. When I made it to university I did one year of technology before I managed to convince my father that I wanted to do journalism.

### **2. Can you give me a brief work history?**

Previous to doing journalism, I did a lot of voluntary work for CTV in Nadi. I started with Fiji Broadcasting Corporation till July 2004. Then I joined Live and Learn Environmental Education as Communications person. After 8 months I got offered a job with *PacNews* as a journalist and here I am.

### **3. Where were you when the coup happened?**

I was with FBC in the newsroom. They have a live feed from Parliament at FBC where we sit and can listen to whatever is going on at Parliament. It was a normal May 19 until we heard the commotion and shot down to Parliament.

### **4. Can you give a brief account of what happened that day?**

We were sitting in the newsroom. Someone else was covering Parliament but everybody gets to hear it. Then there was commotion over the air and we heard the Speaker of the House saying to George Speight and his group 'what are you doing'. I didn't cover the first coup so I didn't know what was happening. I was just two weeks old in the organization and they were a bit hesitant about sending me to Parliament but I told them it was ok. So we went over to Parliament and we were told to stay outside. There were some journalists stuck inside. We broke the news at about 10.45am and this was also the first news to go out to Fiji, that there was a coup happening in Parliament and members of the house had been taken hostage.

### **5. What went through your mind?**

Honestly, it was something exciting happening, an adventure being a university journalism student. Then the extent of what actually happened dawned on me later.

**6. Did you report for the 56 days?**

I was but there were times I needed to take a break because it was too overwhelmingly the whole situation. There was a time I actually stayed over at Parliament with the other overseas and local journalists.

**7. What was it like inside Parliament?**

It was very tense.

**8. Did you sleep at all?**

Yes we did but we had turns, there was always someone watching while the rest slept.

**9. Why did you stay over at Parliament?**

At that point in time it was the 'in-thing' to do. Be where the action is. Because Speight would have press conferences in the middle of the night. We didn't want to be left out. Of course later on we found out that it was used as propaganda to get supporters into Parliament.

**10. Were you fed by the rebels?**

Yes I was. I was more afraid with the fact that I was part Indian and I did not want to be identified as Indian because there were a lot of racial tension and anti-Indian sentiments floated around and you wouldn't want to be caught in that because anything could have happened. So the first thing I did was cut my hair really short. My Fijian is not that good but I could carry out a decent conversation with a Fijian so that helped the situation.

**11. Did they know what your full name was?**

No, I would always say Tamani. If I said my surname, that would give me away.

**12. When you were doing stories, was it difficult to get information or talk to sources?**

Yes. I was with a couple of senior journalists who had established themselves with the community and the people around Parliament. So they were able to get people readily to talk to them. I had a difficult time because I was just two weeks old when I joined the media. But the more they saw of you, they would feel comfortable to come and talk. When you are in Parliament, obviously you will get only one side of the story and that is from George Speight. One of the things that stood out was when Tukini Cama from Communications Fiji Limited was appointed by Speight as his media liaison officer.

**13. Did he announce that Tukini Cama was his media officer?**

No, but it was pretty obvious. Tukini would go around rounding up people for him and at press conferences he would say 'ok last question'. He had a special room in Parliament and he was there twenty four seven.

**14. Do you think Speight manipulated the media?**

Oh yes he did. Of course he couldn't call everyone to Parliament but whatever his aspirations were, he was able to convey through the media. At certain times call people to

the Parliament complex through the media. But he tricked the media so many times. Like he would call them and say 'we've got a press conference, I have to tell you about this'. This happened to Radio Fiji once or twice when he would tell them to do a live feed. And as soon as we got the live feed going he would say things like 'come to Parliament' and 'why don't you come to Parliament'.

**15. FBC was criticised for doing this?**

Yes but it wasn't done on purpose. It was how he manipulated us. The news we ran after that was balanced and we said it like it was.

**16. And this was not done to the other radio station?**

No, because FBC was able to get our live feed over at Parliament. Communications Fiji Limited was using mobiles. We were trying to get quality and so we had the whole portable studio type thing set-up at Parliament. Then we realised that he was using it for his own gain.

**17. Do you think Speight was given too much publicity?**

Yes he was but that's because he was the man of the hour. He was news and we were publicising the news.

**18. So there was a story for every press conference he had?**

Yes, pretty much.

**19. If there was something you would change about the way you reported in the May 2000 coup, what would it be?**

A lot more analysis to be done. But there was also no time for analysis. It was a chaotic situation where people did not have time to say, we should not put this on air. The whole Fiji media were caught off guard.

**20. Would the Fiji media be prepared if there is another crisis situation?**

Definitely.

**21. What should the Fiji media to better prepare themselves?**

Maybe a book on how to report in a crisis situation. I don't think there is something like that in Fiji. If I remember correctly, the Fiji Islands News Association had done some training on how to handle a crisis situation for the media.

**22. So when you stayed over at Parliament, do you think you suffered from the Stockholm syndrome?**

No I didn't because I took regular breaks.

**23. Was there any kind of censorship placed by your editors on you?**

No. Our editor trusted the way we reported and she knew that at the end of the day she we would just report the facts and not make up something.

**24. What did you think of coverage by the overseas media?**

First of all they don't do research on what is happening, the whole political situation which is so complex even the local journalists have a hard time understanding. They come in overnight and try to summarise everything. And it's obvious with the overseas reports; a bulk of what they report on is inaccurate and very insensitive to the situation. Some of their reports could have ignited the situation and made it worse. For example they said the reason for the coup was a racial issue, which was not true.

**25. Who did a better job, the local media or the overseas media?**

I think the local media did a way better job. But the overseas media did a better job when it came to analysis. Some of the overseas journalists knew what they were doing and did great stories.

**26. Reporters couldn't function properly because of pressure from the crisis.**

**Was this a case for you?**

Yes there was a lot of pressure, long hours, skeleton staff in the newsroom and all these things happening around the country. Everything was thrown into chaos. Better organization in the newsroom could solve this in future because a lot of times there was just a total burn out of journalists and it affects your work no matter what field you are in.

**27. After the May 2000 coup, did FBC provide any kind of counselling support for the journalists?**

No.

## Eugene Bingham



*Eugene Bingham is a journalist with the NZ Herald and covered the May 2000 coup for the Herald.*

### **1. What motivated you to become a journalist?**

It was something I wanted to do for as long as I can remember.

### **2. Can you give me a brief work history?**

AIT journalism school in 1991, started at the NZ Herald as an editorial assistant after course, began as a junior reporter in August 91. Since then I've worked at the Herald in various roles, including in branch offices and the Parliamentary press gallery.

### **3. How long were you in Fiji to report on the May 2000 coup?**

About a week. I was sent up about 10 days after the storming of Parliament.

### **4. How did you prepare yourself for Fiji? Had you been to Fiji before?**

Yes, I had been to Fiji before (1997). I had advance notice I was going to cover the coup and so was able to read up/prepare/research before going.

### **5. Did you know about the 1987 coup in Fiji?**

Yes.

### **6. Did you know about the Fiji culture prior to going over?**

From what I had read and from what I had seen on my previous trip, yes, some.

### **7. Did you know Fiji's history prior to going over?**

From what I had read and seen, yes, some.

### **8. Why did you come back early? Did someone replace you?**

The newspaper decided the coverage coming from the NZPA reporter there, Helen Tunnah, (now working at the Herald) was of such an excellent standard, there was no need to have me there too.

**9. Where were you when the coup happened?**

In Wellington.

**10. What went through your mind? Was there anytime that you felt your life was threatened? When was this?**

No.

**11. What was your first story? What difficulties did you have? (Sources, pressures?)**

My first story was about the declaration of martial law. I did not find it too difficult an environment to work in.

**12. Do you think you acted professionally in your role as a journalist during the coup? In what way did you act professionally?**

I think so, but ultimately that is for others to decide. I attempted to write stories which were fair, accurate and balanced, and written with context.

**13. Do you regret writing any story during the coup? Which story was this?**

No.

**14. Do you think Speight manipulated the media? Why?**

He attempted to. Without having seen everything that everyone published, I'm not really able to say whether he succeeded. You're probably in a better position to judge this.

**15. Do you think some journalists got preferential treatment from Speight? How was this?**

Not in my experience.

**16. Do you think Speight was given too much publicity or prominence? Why?**

Perhaps sometimes, but I think that in the context of how the story unfolded it was natural that he would be the focus of attention, at least initially.

**17. What do you think of the local journalists who covered the coup – Do you think they did a good job; do you think they understood what was going on and reported it accurately?**

My memory is that generally, yes, they worked hard, but I'd have to look back through their coverage to answer this question properly. Once again, I think you're in a better position to answer this question.

**18. Did you stay over at Parliament during the coup?**

No I didn't stay at the Parliament.

**19. Was there any kind of censorship placed by your editors to the way you reported or your reports?**

No.

**20. Customary obligations of tribal and chiefly system may blur the view of a journalist, especially if he/she is indigenous. Did you see this as a problem for the Fiji journalists?**

Not from what I saw, but then again I wasn't there to observe the local media.

**21. The overseas media have been criticised for parachute journalism? What is your response to this?**

I think it is a term that is used as an insult, sometimes fairly, sometimes unfairly. I think that in the context of what happened, it was inevitable that overseas media organisations were going to scramble staff and send them to Fiji. Some of those journalists were, of course, unprepared. That is not an ideal situation, but with a major breaking story, it is inevitable. I think that international coverage of the coup was important in bringing foreign attention to the crisis.

I'm sure there are many examples of shoddy journalism practise by those who may be termed "parachute journalists" but I also think that there was some very fine reporting of the coup by overseas journalists.

If you mean parachute journalism in respect of Fiji/the Pacific, then, in the end, it is a question for media organisations. I think there are some efforts being made to improve knowledge of the Pacific (for example the (re)appointment of a Pacific affairs reporter by the Herald - Angela Gregory). But at the same time I think it is sad that some of those who criticise media coverage of the Pacific are people who could instead be using their energy actually reporting on the Pacific.

**22. Did you suffer confusion during the coverage of the coup? When was this and how did you rectify it?**

Often. I rectified it by asking questions. Confusion surrounding a story is inevitable in stories of the scale and complexity as the coup.

**23. Were you provided any kind of support after covering the coup? E.g. trauma counselling etc.**

No.



## Virisila Buadromo



*Virisila Buadromo is a former news editor of Communications Fiji Limited. She is now Co-ordinator of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement.*

### **1. What motivate you to become a journalist?**

Well I actually never considered myself as a journalist but as a reporter because I thought I was reporting what was going on. There was very little analysis at the time when I first started in regards to the news. I just go out of uni and was looking for something to do. I wanted to do something that would come naturally to me like talking to people. So in a way I just fell into it. So I got involved into radio broadcasting and became a reporter then.

### **2. Were you only with FM96?**

Yes. I was at Communications Fiji Limited for nine years. I started off there as a cadet reporter basically covering court, parliament. And then I did that for about 3 or 4 years. Then I started anchoring the breakfast news show, and then I became editor and then news director.

### **3. Were you news director during the coup?**

Actually the day of the coup was supposed to be my last day as news director. So the coup happened and I got stuck in that position for another year and a half.

### **4. Were you glad that you didn't leave before that?**

I have to say it was the highlight of my career until now. Because it was an extremely adrenalin filled period. Like the whole time you're just running on adrenalin. News is happening around you and in some aspects our reporters became part of the news. So it was a really exciting time, an interesting time and also a very scary time. But I wouldn't trade that experience for anything else.

### **5. What training/education have you done as a journalist?**

I was one of the first lots of people who started journalism at the University of the South Pacific. I did journalism for two and a half years and then I dropped out.

## **6. Where were you when the coup happened?**

On the day of the coup I was sitting in the newsroom, we were about to launch our new website *fijivillage.com*. I had been involved in that. So I was sitting in the newsroom updating because we knew that the biggest story of the day was going to be that march. So I had one of the girls who was working with me putting up stuff on the actual website down at the march taking pictures. And she was just telling me what was going happening on the telephone and I was updating it as it was happening.

During the week we had heard about what was going to happen, that something was going to happen on that Friday. Nobody really took it seriously. And about Wednesday one of the senior reporters came to me and said look I just had a conversation with someone and they told me that something was going to happen on Friday. So I told him to ask some of the Labour ministers if they knew anything about this. He spoke to one of the Labour backbenchers who told him that he had heard the same thing and he wasn't planning to come to Parliament on that day. When that senior reporter came and told me that, it started to get me nervous. So on Thursday we had a staff meeting and everyone thought I was overreacting. I re-jigged our roster, I pulled all the indo-Fijian reporters off, I really didn't know what to expect, put only male reporters to cover the march and only Fijian reporters.

I pulled one of our drivers off who was indo-Fijian and replaced him with one of our reporters who could drive as well as write the story. The girl who was going to cover the march for me for *fijivillage*, her father was then the permanent secretary of foreign affairs and is now the minister for foreign affairs. I told her to stay in the van, wear jeans, and wear a pair of running shoes in case something happened. When she came to work that morning she said 'my father says you're overreacting' and I said whatever. Even if nothing happened I would have still felt better about it. So they all went down there, the newsrooms were full of indo-Fijian reporters and females that day because we had all the males and Fijians covering the march. Then at 10.30-10.45 Ofa Duncan rang our GM's sister-in-law who said that some people have walked in and stormed parliament. They called us. By this time the march had just gone past Holiday Inn. We tried calling parliament but couldn't get through. So we called her phone but she didn't answer. So I told one of the reporters covering the march to go and check what was going on at Parliament. They checked and told me that the gates were all shut and they could see people with guns walking around.

## **7. You didn't have any reporters inside Parliament?**

No, because we didn't think that anything would happen at Parliament. The biggest story of the day was the march, it wasn't Parliament. And the march was at nine o'clock and parliament generally started at 10. We knew that they were going to march till president's house, it would take about an hour and the people who covered the march were going to go to Parliament straight from there. So when they got there, that's what they told us and they broke the story at the time at about 11am. When they broke the story, the march had reached somewhere near Government house and somebody had the radio on and realised something was going on in Parliament and everybody just took off that end.

**8. So during the 56 days how did you assign stories to your reporters?**

Previous to the 2000 coup we had the Air Fiji crash and that was the first sort of situation, I being head of the newsroom had to deal with the crash. And we did a very bad job of it I must say; there were a lot of ethical issues.

**9. Why do you say you did a bad job reporting the Air Fiji PC121 crash?**

In terms of human resource management of staff we did very well in that aspect. In terms of what was news and what was not news, I don't think we did that very well. I think at the time I was actually quite nervous about releasing some information. I just felt that if the families were not involved yet, because at the time we really didn't know who was on the plane and all that kind of stuff. I was a bit hesitant in releasing it. At the time, FBC our competitor was releasing all that information. And because in broadcast journalism it's always about getting that story out as accurately as possible and to be the first one to release it, so we were really quite slow in that aspect. As a result of that we had a post mortem meeting, not just the newsroom but everybody in the organisation. And we just critiqued what we did wrong. That's when I wrote this manual on how to deal with news when it happens and as it happens.

**10. Did your reporters go through counselling?**

Yes they did. We told them to go on leave for at least three weeks. Some of them didn't even show symptoms but our counsellor told us that it would hit them later.

So that manual I wrote, it was really quite good in terms of helping us in 2000. By midday on the day of the coup, we had realised that this was a serious situation. And so according to the manual, the news director is right after the GM. Everybody else reports under you because you are the person in charge. You are in charge of DJ's, programming people etc.

At lunch time on May 19 we called a staff meeting, whole organisation staff meeting. We pointed out what the situation was and that it was a crisis situation. We could be looking at working 24 hours, this is the amount of staff we have and we will need these many reporters. Then we started plotting these things out and designating where people were going. We were running out of reporters so we had to start using some DJ's to start covering things for us for example Tukini Cama. We had to train them in an hour. We told them to say what they saw without putting their own interpretation into it. It wasn't working out at first. And then we realised the only way to cover that situation in terms of ensuring that was to send the DJ's with a reporter and always have the most senior journalist who would do the anchoring and that way you could steer how the information coming to you should go.

Another issue was people calling up the Indian radio station panicking because they heard it was a race issue. And during the first week we didn't know whether it was the race issue or what was the issue that was motivating this whole thing. And so the reporters, even the most senior journos who were anchoring were becoming emotional and were not neutral anymore. It's hard to remain neutral in a situation like that.

And then you had the Fijian reporters covering on the Fijian radio station, some of them were becoming racist. So to deal with that situation, it was decided that we would link all three radio stations. And that I would lead and everybody else would translate what I said. Otherwise we were getting three different versions of the news.

This coup was different from 1987 in the sense that when Rabuka came in, he just shut down the whole media, only the Government radio station was going and he basically controlled everything that was going out. With the 2000 coup, it was open free media. Speight loved the media and basically everybody was putting out press releases at the time. Our fax machine was inundated with faxes from people either supporting or condemning the situation. So it was an influx of information and for us, for one we had to deal with the crisis and deal with the staff and then deal we had to decipher through all this information and decide what was true and what was not and what we could verify.

So we set up these other rules, normally we would verify a story by two sources, now everyone had to get three sources for story. Because you never knew what they were saying. So we put all these rules on the board. Every story had to have 3 sources, if it was coming from an organisation, that org had to have more than seven people on it. This was because at the time there were all these groups starting up, they had to have a constitution mandate. Rumours were really rife at the time.

And so people were calling up, they were nervous. Town would be full at one time, and then once a rumour was spread it would be empty within minutes. So we started to put out a community message to tell our listeners whether a rumour was true or not. In a way we did it to plug ourselves and also at the same time deal with the situation of rumours. Because we had so many rumours and there was only a certain amount of reporters to go and check and verify these rumours. We wanted to stop the rumours coming to us as well and said this in the community message. We wanted our reporters to cover the real story instead of chasing these rumours. We ran them before and after every news bulletin.

#### **11. Did you go to Parliament?**

I was banned from going there. My Managing director didn't want me to go there. I really wanted to go because all the action was going on there and I was stuck. He didn't want me to go because of all these stories of alleged rape and whatever else was going on. It really pissed me off that I couldn't go.

And then one day I was getting dropped off home and was going with one of the reporters who was going to Parliament. So he was going to drop me home and then go off to Parliament. And then on the way home, on the RT from the newsroom, they said that George was calling one of his famous press conferences. So I told him that I would go with him. I went there and it was a big mistake. I was wearing a red skirt, not mini but above the knee and a sleeveless top and then I realised that I was not dressed appropriately. When we drove in and I got off there were all these people making these comments. Malakai Veisamasama organised for me to meet with George. So I went upstairs and while I was up there, George was trying to play drama king, trying to make it

look like he was a star and you just wait for me kind of thing. So he was talking on the phone and I just sat there and waited patiently. Finally he finished and sat down and we had a conversation and I sort of interviewed him, which really wasn't anything. I really wanted to know what was the big deal about him because I had met him prior to the crisis and at the time I thought he was just a big conman because he was just so smooth.

#### **12. How did you come to meet him before that?**

He was the head of Hardcorp Corporation and we were doing the story about allegations of mismanagement of funds. And then all these stories started coming out about his shady deals in Brisbane. He didn't particularly like me because he thought I just ran negative stories about him.

#### **13. Were you scared in there?**

No I wasn't really scared. I got scared after the interview, when he wouldn't let me go. I asked what was happening and he just said there's something going on. I was with him in the room, there was a little girl running around, and there were people drinking grog (kava) on the balcony. I remember Jo Nata coming to me and talking to me. But they wouldn't let me out and I was becoming quiet nervous. So I went to the door and asked Malakai who was sitting there and asked "what's happening". And he said that apparently there's been a lockdown.

#### **14. Malakai was drinking grog there?**

Yes Malakai was basically living in there. He and Tukini Cama. So they were drinking grog and it was about that time that the military cleared out everybody living within 5km of Parliament and made it military zones. And there was talk that the military were going to raid. And when they told me that I was like "what". I didn't want to get caught in the crossfire. I was really nervous.

Then Malakai came and he could tell that I was really nervous. I told him to call somebody and get me out of there and to tell them I didn't care; I would buy them a whole lot of kava if they let me out of there. And he said to me, what if the military started shooting. I said they wouldn't shoot if we went out there. I was really getting quiet angry. I remember George Speight and Jo Nata telling me to relax and that I would get out soon and I was thinking "oh my God I was going to become a hostage too". I was thinking all sorts of thoughts, my mind was just running. So I was stuck there for an hour and a half. By this stage I just wanted to kill, somebody, anybody!

And then they took the phone off Malakai and that's when I got more nervous and started thinking "oh my God how are we going to call people to get us out of here". After an hour and a half they let us out and I went straight to the radio station. I should have gone straight home because I got a good blasting because one of the international reporters called up London and told London that they were being held hostage. So the time I was up there, all those reporters were also not allowed to go out. It was on BBC news and none of the local media knew that we were in there because they took all their phones off everybody except for this BBC reporter. I was scared about seeing somebody getting shot because I hate blood.

**15. So you worried about somebody else getting shot, not you getting shot?**

Yeah forget me getting shot; I was more worried about someone else getting shot and me dealing with the blood.

**16. Do you think you acted professionally in your role as news editor at the time? Do you regret running any story?**

**Would you change the way you covered stories if you were still there?**

I think that our team did really well. We had a lot support in terms of other staff members, management and the public, our families. In a lot of ways I think we did really well considering the situation. If there were some stories we shouldn't have run, I don't know, I think we handled a lot of stories quiet well.

Like for example the first day when they had the looting. We initially started out by saying there is looting going on in town and started describing the situation. And then we realised that this was inciting people to come down and come and loot. So we stopped doing that, we stopped referring to shops, we stopped referring to people taking things, we just said there was a situation etc. We tried to describe what was going on without trying to be specific.

So in a way it was about covering the news and providing community service as well like telling people not to come into the city. We did that really well.

There was a situation with the reporters we had in Parliament, they were developing Stockholm syndrome, I'm sure all of them were developing Stockholm syndrome. Because of the lack of people we had, if I had to do it again, I would rotate people going in and out of there more regularly than the period we had them in for. Because people started swaying. When I saw that they started swaying that seemed to be sympathising with the people in there we pulled them out.

**17. What about Malakai's situation, he had a step-brother and relatives in there. Did you know this before you sent him into Parliament?**

Yes we all knew that. For every Fijian reporter covering the coup, you had relatives in there, and you had relatives outside, and we knew that. Him knowing people in there actually saved his butt a lot of times because he was related to people and they knew who he was, when he got into sticky situations, he was able to get out. But we spoke to them. On the third day we called them in when we realised how we were going to deal with the situation of people knowing people in there. So when we talked to him about it, he didn't really have an issue. And I think that out of all of them, he was able to go in and out compared to the other journalists, who once out couldn't go back in. So because he was able to go in and out that helped him.

**18. There have been criticisms made against Malakai that he was able to get access to places they couldn't and he was Speight's favourite. Do you agree?**



No. If it was anybody, who was bordering on favouring the people in there a little bit, it would have been Tukini Cama. For example he would run these long interviews from Parliament or he would be telling me what was going on in there and I saw how he had started to sway towards George Speight. He wanted to go live but I told him to call me half an hour before I went on air for the news, I would record him and take snippets of what I wanted from his recording. Then we started doing this to every single reporter, we decided we would pre-record everything before we went on air and in that way I could also write the script.

**19. How many days was it after that you started recording the reporters instead of putting them on live?**

By Wednesday the following week, I think it was the 5<sup>th</sup> day that we realised Speight was back to his PR tricks. He was so smooth he could sell ice to the Eskimos.

**20. Do you think the media in Fiji was ready for the May 2000 coup in terms of reporting?**

Well you can never be ready for a thing like that. In terms of reporting, we lost a lot of our experienced journalists in the 1987 coup and for a lot of the journalists who were covering the coup, eg my newsroom, the average age of reporters in my newsroom at the time was 24. So in 1987, half of them were like 6 year's old. For me I was 14 during the 1987 coup and what would you remember at that age.

**21. Because Fiji is so "crisis-prone" do you think there should be guidelines or a manual to help each media if it should happen again?**

Yes I think there should be a manual. No situation is not going to be the same I believe but in terms of knowing how to manage human resources, managing your time, knowing when people are at their breakpoint, how to pull them out and put new people in, not broadcasting live, all those things are really important. Like watching television news, I think some of the things they were running were irresponsible and it made people even more scared.

**22. Do you know if such a manual exists?**

I don't think so. There should be. Also all reporters should know how to deal with trauma.

**23. Do you think Speight manipulated the media?**

Yes he manipulated the media for the first week with his many press conferences and the media fell for it in terms of making them run around in circles. He had so many press conferences and we got tired of it because he kept repeating himself and kept lying. It went worse during the Muanikau accord when he started calling 48 hour press conferences.

**24. Do you think he was given too much publicity or prominence?**

I think that because he was so accessible. In a normal kidnap situation, the kidnapper tries to refrain from talking to the media. They just come out once to give their demands and

they go back in there and say if you don't give it within so many hours we will kill someone. And they don't talk to the media. So there is a lot of speculation that goes on.

This guy on the other hand was just so accessible to the media. And everybody wanted to know who he was, what he was doing, what was his next action. And from a radio perspective he had a great radio voice and he was really smooth, so he could charm anybody just listening to him. Maybe we did give him too much prominence but at the end of the day he was the news and that was the news. You can't do anything else about it. And it was quiet interesting that people like the military and government caught up too late. They put up Tarakinini to counter George Speight. So when you have two marvellous speakers like that then they share the limelight.

**25. Customary obligations of tribal and chiefly system may blur the view of a journalist, especially if he/she is indigenous. Was this a problem for you? How did you deal with this?**

I think it wasn't a problem for me but it was for Fijian journalists. The reason I say it wasn't a problem for me is because I have been a city girl and have always been a city girl. I have very little to do with my village and stuff like that. I know who I am related to but it was never drummed into my head and so it's never been an issue, it's still not an issue.

Whereas for the others, it was definitely an issue. For someone like Malakai who is a chief from where he comes from, his province was involved in the taking over of Queen Elizabeth barracks, so he was in a difficult situation. But yes I agree it did in some ways blur the way the story was covered.

**26. It has been said that reporters couldn't function properly because of pressure from the crisis. Do you agree?**

I think we started to feel that right at the tail end, around the last two weeks because people getting burnt out and it just seemed to just go on and on.

**27. What is your view of the media in Fiji?**

I still think that there needs to be some analysis, there is very little analysis. In situations like the crisis situations, I think we do really well, but that's because its news as it happens. I'm talking about all media. We could do with more investigative journalism. There is very little analysis going on.

**28. Why do you think there is very little analysis?**

I think because they are not experienced enough. They don't have the kind of training to do that. And they are not paid well enough so why bother. And I don't think they are proactive enough, they are more reactive.

**29. Do you think the overseas journalists did a better job than the local journalists?**

No. The international journalists, some were good. But for some the term parachute journalism comes to mind. They just fly in, don't know the context, and don't know the



situation and they just report. And in a lot of ways it makes Fiji look really bad. There were so many issues happening at once at the time, that if you didn't know Fiji well, you would have been confused. They don't realise how small Fiji is, how closely related people are, the whole political issue, the race issue, the culture.

**30. How do you think the issue of parachute journalism can be solved?**

Some of them are experienced or smart enough to attach themselves to local journalists. They didn't operate from outside. I think the best way to solve this would be for them to attach themselves to a credible media organisation here who then will be able to give them some direction.

While they are covering a story they can come back and bounce ideas off local journalists. Some of the international journalists I remember, because they were not running around with the newsroom, they were hiring out taxi drivers who were driving them around and these taxi drivers would be giving their ten cents worth. Just because they are local doesn't necessarily mean they know what's happening.

## Phil Taylor



*Phil Taylor is a senior journalist with the New Zealand Herald.*

### **1. What motivated you to become a journalist?**

. Strong interest in state of world/human condition, in telling stories, and belief that knowledge is basis of making sense of whatever the subject may be, and therefore, also the basis of sound decisions.

### **2. Can you give a brief work history?**

Been a journalist for more than 20 years, including working in Sydney and London. In New Zealand have worked for the Dominion, Sunday Star-Times and, currently, NZ Herald.

### **3. What training/education have you had as a journalist?**

BA in Political Science, post graduate Diploma in Journalism, both Canterbury University. One-term fellowships at Oxford and Cambridge universities.

### **4. How long were you in Fiji to report on the May 2000 coup?**

Six weeks.

### **5. How did you prepare yourself for Fiji? Had you been to Fiji before?**

Had been to Fiji before only on holiday. I was on a plane within hours of news of the coup/rioting in Suva. In that time I accessed academic reports on the previous coup and on recent politics in Fiji. I read these on the plane.

### **6. Did you know about the 1987 coup in Fiji?**

Yes.

### **7. Did you know about the Fiji culture prior to going over?**

No. Only from what I could glean from the reports mentioned above. Very basic knowledge.

**8. Were you there for the 56 days? If no, why? And was someone else sent instead? Did your media cover the coup for the whole 56 days?**

My six weeks was roughly broken into three trips of two weeks each. I was there at the beginning - arrived in Suva when fires still burning and some rioters still in streets, was there when hostages were released. I also went back for the post-coup election. The SST did not have a staffer there the whole time but did have access to stringers and wire service reports.

**9. Where were you when the coup happened?**

On my way to an interview in Pukekohe. I turned the car around, went home packed, went to work to get lap top, money etc and went to the airport.

**10. Can you give a brief account of what happened that day?**

Suva airport closed due to chaos. Got first flight to Nadi. Hired driver, sharing with other journalists on the flight, drove to Suva. Got through road blocks, toured central Suva until ordered by army/police to go to hotel, where I arrived about 1am Saturday. My deadline was about 6pm Saturday (I was working for SST). At first light began working. Filed several stories including what happening in Parliament, the impact on the CBD etc.

**11. What went through your mind? Was there anytime that you felt your life was threatened? When was this?**

During my time there I tried to make measured decisions, balancing the need to go to certain places (i.e. parliament grounds) to gather information against evaluation of personal safety). Didn't directly feel my life was threatened but was very aware of volatility of the situation. I was present at a stand-off between Speight's group and government soldiers which very nearly erupted. The next day at the same spot it did erupt with a soldier and cameraman shot.

**12. What was your first story? What difficulties did you have? (Sources, pressures?)**

From memory filed stories which filled front two or three pages of SST. This was predominantly spot news rather than any analysis. During first week developed some very good contacts in indigenous Fijian, Indian and expatriate communities, including a former cabinet minister, which I thought were enormously helpful to my understanding local politics, history, frictions and therefore the background to the coup and some of the people involved. At the end of the second week I produced a feature which tried to make sense of what was going on. I went back regularly to these sources as my questions arose.

**13. Do you think you acted professionally in your role as a journalist during the coup? In what way did you act professionally?**

Yes. I applied the same ethics and standards I always try to do.

**14. Do you regret writing any story during the coup? Which story was this?**

No. But I do regret that a source for one story was identified and that put him in a difficult position although no harm came to him. With hindsight, I may have tried to write the story in a way to avoid that.

**15. If there was something you would change about how you went about reporting the coup, what would it be? How would you change it?**

No. I may have been fortunate in that I was working for a weekly and, so, had more time to develop sources, as per 2F.

**16. Do you think Speight manipulated the media? Why? Do you think Speight was given too much publicity or prominence? Why?**

Yes Speight manipulated the media, by restricting some within parliament grounds but they allowed themselves to be so manipulated. Though Speight was a mouthpiece for the architects of the coup, it was important readers know what he was saying and doing, but not to the detriment of other avenues of inquiry. The media who spent their time hanging around him exclusively would have got a very narrow view.

I made the decision I needed to spend sometime in parliament to get an idea of what it was like in there, but tried to choose my time to minimise the risk of being detained in there. If that had occurred I wouldn't have been much use to my paper (particularly as I was its only reporter on the ground there). As it was, I spent a day in parliament and did not go back in. I had Speight's mobile number and so was able to speak to him.

**17. Do you think some journalists got preferential treatment from Speight? How was this?**

I felt a section of the media were captured (voluntarily by him) and allowed themselves to be manipulated and used by him, thus becoming players in what was going on rather than the observers they should be. An example is when Speight and a group of gunmen came out of parliament to tear down a road block set up by the army to restrict inward flow of public and supplies. Speight's group was surrounded by a ring of media as they moved down the road to confront the soldiers, thus reducing the options available to the soldiers. i.e. Speight was able to use them almost as a human shield.

**18. What do you think of the local journalists who covered the coup – Do you think they did a good job; do you think they understood what was going on and reported it accurately?**

Did a good job.

**19. Comparing the local and the overseas media, who do you think did a better job? Why?**

Didn't see most of international coverage, so can't compare.

**20. Did you stay over at Parliament during the coup? If yes, do you think you were you still able to report objectively without bias or favouring Speight, as it has been**

**said that if you're in a certain situation, under a certain environment, you may get swayed to believe a certain cause. (Stockholm syndrome)**

As above. Stayed only one day which gave insight into what going on within grounds but also enabled me to observe Speight but certainly did not cause me to favour him. I saw Speight, the person and his argument, as very flawed.

**21. Was there any kind of censorship placed by your editors to the way you reported or your reports?**

No.

**22. Were you harassed in any way during the coup? If yes, how and what did you do about it?**

Nothing overt.

**23. Customary obligations of tribal and chiefly system may blur the view of a journalist, especially if he/she is indigenous. Did you see this as a problem for the Fiji journalists?**

In my experience the local journalists were professional in their work.

**24. The overseas media have been criticised for parachute journalism? What is your response to this?**

Weak criticism, in that for any major event anywhere there are insufficient journalist's expert in the field that can get there at short notice. General journalists are as capable of covering events on the ground. This can be backed up by so-called "expert commentators".

I term the weaknesses in reporting not so much as parachute journalism but the sort of things that are weaknesses anywhere. i.e. publishing rumours as fact, lack of effort in attempting to verify information, etc

**25. The overseas media have also been criticised for inaccurate reporting, not understanding the political situation in Fiji, not understanding the culture and insensitive reporting. What is your response to this?**

The best reporting is always from those who approach it objectively and have a good feel for the subject - in Fiji's case the country's history, politics, tribal and cultural mix. This is obviously harder to achieve with "parachute journalism", particularly with media on tight deadlines and driven by a need to get the best pictures, and file regular, shallow, stories. However, this is certainly not restricted to coverage of Fiji's coup.

A fresh eye can sometimes give a clearer/more impartial view. A local journalist may bring to their work the prejudices to the story.

## Riyaz Sayed Kaiyum



*Riyaz Sayed Kaiyum was a journalist for Fiji Television during the May 2000 coup. He was also the host for the controversial Close-up programme on Fiji TV. He now works in Auckland, New Zealand, for Asia Down-Under.*

### **1. What motivated you to become a journalist?**

I always had an interest in writing, telling stories and it seemed to be the only thing I could fall into after giving up studies in accounting...it was either taking a job in the media or being a pen pusher in the civil service...yuck!

### **2. Can you give me a brief work history?**

I held all sorts of odd jobs ranging from kitchen hand to bed installer, hospital ward assistant to driver...before taking up my first full time job after giving studies...as a radio disc jockey on fm96 in 1993.

### **3. What training/education have you had as a journalist?**

Lots of in house training (radio and T.V) and a couple of FIMA (Fiji Islands Media Association) short courses on investigative journalism etc.

### **4. Where were you when the coup happened?**

I was covering the march when I heard about some sort of "takeover" at parliament. Rushed to parliament and saw that it was all on.

### **5. Can you give a brief account of what happened that day?**

I had breakfast with my wife and we joked about everyone was getting paranoid about some sort of "unrest". I had to laughingly re-assure my grandmother that nothing was going to happen.

As usual I arrived at work late and almost wasn't assigned to cover the much anticipated march. Finally weaselled my way into covering one section of the march, most it from the roof of the Dominion Insurance building. I realised through it that it was bigger than anticipated and had potential to get out of hand 'viz a viz' the jokers who were taking part in it.

I interviewed people on the street for their reaction and ironically a former soldier was in tears explaining the hardship of the fall out of political turmoil ...something he had gone through during Rabuka's coup. Then went to parliament to try and talk to hostage takers through the fence but was told to piss off. I managed to get lots of shots of marchers as they came to parliament and interviewed people around the complex including church officials, former politicians and E.U reps etc.

I then went home and got my pregnant wife to the office and then arranged to move homes. Then everything after that was a bit of blur...but it involved a lot of going out and writing and more of the same. That evening I ventured again to parliament and managed to speak to George Speight...for the first and last time during the coup. Something told me not to go back there. It was obvious George was using the media.

**6. What went through your mind? Was there anytime that you felt your life was threatened? When was this?**

There were a lot of things I believed we should have done differently. I thought that we should have observed the Presidents orders not to go anywhere close to parliament...but no one heeded this.

The local media was afraid they would miss the story because the overseas media had definitely ignored the request. So it was a race to get the story at any cost and that manifested into a race into talking to the hostage takers....even after it became bleatingly obvious that the media was being used.

I felt I was threatened the first night I interviewed George. Also about two weeks later I was verbally threatened in the middle of the night and objects were thrown at the house I was staying at. The police were called and it was a very frightening time for my family which now included a new born baby. We were also threatened the night after Fiji TV was trashed....in retrospect quite comical...with Fiji TV staff and all media in Suva succumbing to various rumours and fleeing in all directions. I and a few others ended up in the West. I had twenty cents in my pocket and made my way back home after a few days.

**7. What was your first story? What difficulties did you have? (Sources, pressures?)**

My first story was about the march and then the takeover....no pressure, except for adrenalin and a bit of fear.

**8. Do you think you acted professionally in your role as a journalist during the coup? In what way did you act professionally?**

I think I did, by doing the stories as needed and avoiding being the mouthpiece of people who had committed a major offence. I had reservations about some things that we were doing at the time, as stated earlier, but there wasn't much I could do by myself. Also there wasn't much time to argue to make a case...we were working 24 hours a day. My conscience is clear.

**9. Do you regret writing any story during the coup? Which story was this?**

No. although I had strong misgivings about some interviews granting interviews or rather air time to certain individuals to allowing them to distance themselves from the coup. Many people used the opportunity to say a lot of things....most of it never substantiated.



**10. If there was something you would change about how you went about reporting the coup, what would it be? How would you change it?**

It was all very haphazard. We should have had a set of rules to follow or at least to formulate before going out to cover the events in full force. Who had a vested interest to talk to us? We should have attempted to analyse all this. Also strict rules and guidelines should have been followed 'viz a viz' the presidents request at the time.

**11. Do you think Speight manipulated the media? Why?**

It's quite obvious he manipulated the media. It was in his interest to do so. He needed support and that's why he was calling for press conferences at short intervals. It worked.

**12. Do you think some journalists got preferential treatment from Speight? How was this?**

Some who allowed him to have complete excess of their medium got preferential treatment. These journalists were made to feel special, that they were in the know as to when the next press conference would take place and also private one on one interviews were given. The journalist felt special and Speight was able to get his propaganda out to the nation once again. A win-win situation.

**13. Do you think Speight was given too much publicity or prominence? Why?**

Absolutely...everyone wanted the story...there was no one to critically analyse the situation. The military and police were in shambles. The president didn't know what to do. The judiciary was somewhat divided....everyone needed a story, someone to talk to....so we all fell into the temptation of talking to people who were willing to talk....enter Speight and every other sympathising opportunist.

**14. What do you think of the overseas journalists who covered the coup – Do you think they did a good job; do you think they understood what was going on and reported it accurately?**

Some tried to understand it...and made an effort. Most didn't know what was going on and got their stories and information from locals. I personally experienced these situations where stories were gleaned from locals.

Other overseas journalists completely twisted and misunderstood the situation...gave it a racial perspective. They didn't understand the dynamics of Fijian politics. It couldn't be taught to them overnight. The only advantage the overseas media had over the locals was just that fact, they were from overseas (white). So they were given a lot of leeway by the locals....from journalists and officials and of course Speight's group. Our country has had this and continues to have this mysterious fascination with everything overseas...preferably white thank you very much.

Also these overseas journalists had better equipment and had the advantage of being better trained/ experienced and reporting in their mother tongue....an obvious advantage when their final story which was full of discrepancies was compared with a lacking in quality but much more accurate and informative local story.



**15. Compared the local media and the overseas media, who do you think did a better job? Why?**

Both had their advantages and disadvantages...although at the end the balance was tipped in favour of locals....and they grinded it out till the end...they felt more for the story.

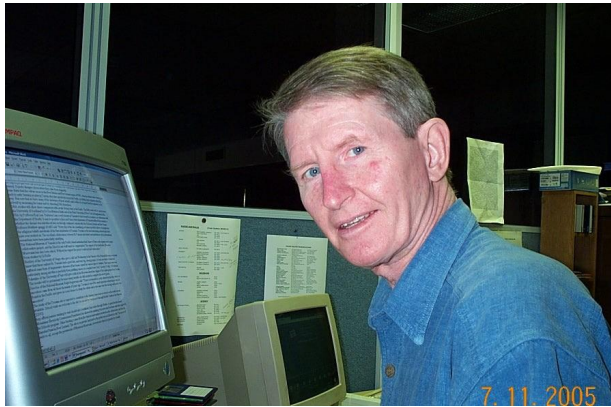
**16. Did you stay over at Parliament during the coup? If yes, do you think you were you still able to report objectively without bias or favouring Speight, as it has been said that if you're in a certain situation, under a certain environment, you may get swayed to believe a certain cause (Stockholm syndrome).**

I didn't stay but it was obvious certain local and overseas reporters were affected by the Stockholm syndrome.

**17. Was there any kind of censorship placed by your editors to the way you reported or your reports?**

I don't recall anything as such. But I think we could have been encouraged to be more gung-ho and brave about getting stories. However there was an element of fear that pervaded Fiji at the time and journalists are not immune to it.

## Sean Dorney



*Sean Dorney is a journalist with ABC*

### **1. How long were you in Fiji to report on the May 2000 coup?**

I did not get to Fiji until after Speight was arrested. I was on leave when the coup happened and offered to come back to work and go. However, other reporters were already on their way. A number of ABC and Radio Australia journalists covered that early part of the Fiji coup including Graeme Dobell and Kevin McQuillan. When I did end my leave in early June I went straight to Honiara where another coup had just happened. So I spent most of the first two months of the Fiji coup in Solomon Islands covering the coup there (which in many ways was a far more damaging affair for the Solomon's than Speight's coup was for Fiji).

### **2. Do you regret writing any story during the coup? Which story was this?**

No.

### **3. If there was something you would change about how you went about reporting the coup, what would it be? How would you change it?**

By the time I arrived in Fiji the story had moved on to the swearing in of the Qarase administration and a whole swag of court appearances by Speight and his colleagues. Later in the year, I was in Fiji when the military revolt happened at the Queen Elizabeth barracks. I don't know if there is much I would change about my reporting. One of the real advantages I had, as I saw it, was that I had covered Fiji before. I had been in Fiji in 1999 to cover the election of the Chaudhry Government and I had also covered an earlier election in the 1980s. I know quite a few of the local media which is always a huge bonus for any visiting correspondent.

### **4. Do you think Speight manipulated the media? Why?**

Of course he manipulated the media. The reasons are fairly obvious. He knew that he was the centre of the story and by having a huge collection of media people around him he was, amongst other things, cutting down the possibility of any forced attempt to end the crisis.

**5. Comparing the local and the overseas media, who do you think did a better job? Why?**

From what I could observe, arriving as I did fairly late after covering the Solomon's coup, the local media did a much superior job to most of the foreign media. However, I do not think you can lump all the foreign media into one block. For instance, Rowan Callick from the Australian Financial Review (who knew Fiji fairly well) wrote some terrific and lengthy pieces on aspects of the coup that others were not touching. The real advantage the local media had was in knowing the characters and the background to what was going on.

**6. Did you stay over at Parliament during the coup? If yes, do you think you were you still able to report objectively without bias or favouring Speight?**

No. But if I had been in Fiji I am sure that I would have had to spend quite a bit of time there because that was where the story was.

**7. Were you harassed in any way during the coup? If yes, how and what did you do about it?**

Only by my innumerable bosses in ABC Radio and Television wanting more stories. I filed.

**8. The overseas media have been criticised for parachute journalism? What is your response to this?**

By parachute journalism I assume you mean journalists dropping into where the latest crisis is and getting out when it starts to die down or when the bosses start to lose interest. What is the alternative? The costs of maintaining an office in Fiji put the possibility of covering issues such as this with your own Fiji based correspondent out of the question. The Australian media as a whole takes very limited interest in the Pacific so almost nobody has a local stringer. That is a problem because when crises like this happen they send people who know nothing. The big advantage for the parachute journalists who know nothing is having bosses and sub-editors who know less and so there is no quality evaluation of copy. I am about the only working journalist left in Australia who regularly visits the Pacific. The Australian has closed its Pacific Bureau. We have a correspondent in Port Moresby. So does AAP. But the rest of the Australian media remains woefully ignorant.

## **Raijeli Kikau**



*Raijeli Kikau is a journalist with The Fiji Times.*

### **1. What motivated you to become a journalist?**

Actually, I never knew that I would end up writing. I was more into the economics and accounting field. But I did a semester at USP studying History/ Politics. I heard an ad on Radio Fiji for a reporter/broadcaster and I applied and the next thing I knew I was accepted and worked there for a year before moving to the Fiji Times.

### **2. What was your first job as a journalist?**

Like always, I started doing the diary, Bula box and rewriting the press releases and I cannot remember what was my first “real hard news” assignment.

### **3. Can you give me a brief work history?**

Started work at FBC in 1998, came to Fiji Times in 1999 and have been here since then.

### **4. What training/education have you had as a journalist?**

The only training I had was the in- house training by the company, on- line training from head office in Australia and am on my 2nd semester for a Diploma in Pacific Journalism from USP.

### **5. Where were you when the coup happened?**

I was on a day off (on that Friday) but I started reporting from Parliament on the second week of the coup because we had a 24 hr roster and there were about two to three reporters reporting from parliament during the 24 hrs roster.

### **6. Can you give a brief account of what happened that day?**

Actually, I was having lunch at my cousin's house when one of my cousin's came running into the kitchen and told us to turn on the radio because we were listening to a CD and that was when I heard the coup perpetrators has taken over parliament and there was chaos in the city of Suva.

**7. What went through your mind? Was there anytime that you felt your life was threatened? When was this?**

The only thought that came to my mind was what was happening to those that had covered Parliament that fateful morning and what was happening at the office. The only time that I felt threatened was the third or 4th week when we (local media) were taken hostage on a Wednesday evening after a press conference. We were told there was a bomb threat in the parliament complex and we were not allowed to leave the premises until they have checked it was safe. We were provided dinner (it was fish and dalo) and told to wait in one of the rooms, on the same complex of where the labour parliamentarians were held hostage. I remember that on the previous day, the women parliamentarians were released and I thought we would be taken in as hostages because talks by the coup perpetrators and the military were not going according to plan. I never felt frightened because there were other media personnel who were with me and we had this bond that even if they took us hostage we could survive by encouraging each other. We had made a small media family inside the complex during the crisis, looking out for each other.

**8. What was your first story? What difficulties did you have? (Sources, pressures?)**

My first story was covering the Sunday sermon on the 2nd week and I did not have a lot of difficulties because I only had to write what was happening in the complex and press conferences on the progress of talks by the coup perpetrators was on going. So stories were filed on the press conference with George Speight.

**9. Do you think you acted professionally in your role as a journalist during the coup? In what way did you act professionally?**

Yes, I believe I acted professionally because even though for the first few days that for the first few days that I was assigned to the Parliament. I always had this tight knot in the stomach because it was the first time I saw men holding guns and to make it worse they were wearing balaclavas and it was hard to identify them (it was something we see in movies but reality was another experience). But it never dictated how I had to write what was happening inside and I kept to that stand even though some days that took my mobile phone, bag, told to sit outside the complex for an hour before being allowed in or took my tape recorder before entering the complex if I wrote something they thought was against the cause. I always told them my report was balanced and if anyone was to question my story it should be Mr Speight and not civilian securities at the gate. That gave them something to think about but they continued with the harassment.

- I managed to compile my stories without being influenced by the people that I knew in the complex and got other sides of the story or comments from people that were mentioned during the press conference with Mr Speight. on certain occasions, he would call some prominent people names made some allegations once their talks with the military was not going according to his plan and I had to get comments from these officers to balance the story.

- After a while I got used to the sight of men and young children (especially shoe shine boys) and I became more aggressive with my reporting by trying to get interviews with officers inside Speight's office who were not talking and we knew they knew something about the real cause of the coup. This led to my interview with coup military men Ilisoni Ligairi but it was purely through phone calls to some people who had become my contact inside the complex. Mr Ligairi was a bit hesitant when I called him but I told him it was his call, if he did not want the interview it was alright, but he later agreed but later told me it took him a day to decide on the interview because that was the 1st interview he had given since May 19.

**10. Do you regret writing any story during the coup? Which story was this?**

Yes, there was a story that our chief of staff had asked me to write after the amnesty period and the civilians had moved to Kalabu, there were four firearms still at large as said in confidence and off the cuff by then military spokesman Lt Filipo Tarakinikini and he told me that was for my general knowledge. But, maybe because of the pressure that day after a long day at Muanikau (while talks continued for the Muanikau Accord), I mentioned it while explaining to our chief of staff on the progress of my story and she said to include it in then story. Lt Tarakinikini called the next day fuming, because it was a front-page story and after explaining my side of the story. He said the damage was done but his reasons were that it would cause more instability and fear for the settlements whose lives; crop crops and animals were threatened and stolen at gunpoint by the civilians. So they could now never have a good night sleep because the arms were still out there. I just wanted to kick myself after that because the country was on its way to trying to restore democracy and justice, but this was not the way forward.

**11. If there was something you would change about how you went about reporting the coup, what would it be? How would you change it?**

I believe, there was nothing wrong with the media covering from parliament but;

1. We should have our own ration of food
  2. No sleeping at the complex- coup vicinity
  3. Professional dressing by the women journalists because sometimes it played a great role on the image of the media (short dresses, skirts and tops were not the right clothes because it was not the right place to wear the).
- I believe covering from the parliament complex, even though it was dangerous, allowed the journalists to get first hand experience on what was happening without having to get comments from sources. A good example was during the shoot out between the civilians and the military. We had just finished attending a press conference with Mr Speight (2 civilians were killed by the military who were camped outside the parliament fence). When I wrote the story I had to get a comment from the military and they said a totally different thing from what they did that afternoon, that was when I realised, never to get stories from sources who claimed to know what was happening. Because it was better to endure hours of waiting for the press conferences and come back and write what you saw with balance instead of sitting out and getting second opinions for your story.

But we were taken hostage (which could happen at any time)

**12. Do you think Speight manipulated the media? Why?**

In some ways he did, that was when he wanted to get his message across and (by making statements that would keep his plans on their new move known to his supporters who were the general public).

-He made sure he said the right things and when the talks were not going according to planned and he made sure that whatever he said would be supported by the people.

- He knew what to say to the media and the end result was having the stories on front page everyday.

**13. Do you think some journalists got preferential treatment from Speight? How was this?**

I never knew because we always had group interviews but what happened after that, if other media personnel wanted exclusive interviews they went to him for one and one interviews. But those that had stayed there from day one had most of the confidence of Mr Speight because they in a way helped us who came in later to get interviews and officers on certain issues.

**14. Do you think Speight was given too much publicity or prominence? Why?**

Of course he was given much publicity because he had led the coup and everyone wanted to know what was his plan for destabilising the Chaudhry government, what was the cause of the coup- these are some of the questions that needed answering by the people and the media are the only ones to ask that question inside the complex.

**15. What do you think of the overseas journalists who covered the coup - Do you think they did a good job; do you think they understood what was going on and reported it accurately?**

They were very pushy, demanding, aggressive and some of their actions affected the way the locals viewed the media inside the complex. They did not understand the tradition and customs of Fijians and took pictures of chiefs gathering standing up, with hands on their hips and storming into a Fijian traditional ceremony without asking for permission from the guards. They made sure they took the first row during the conference and their answers to be asked first. They never gave the local media any chance. They understood what they were doing because most of them had covered similar impasse overseas. I believe most of them had a ball of a time because most of what they reported was what appeared in the local newspaper. I remember my interview with Mr Ligairi that was broadcasted and quotes of the face to face used by the reporters while filming their stories. So they never missed out on anything because the local media even though without the technology and equipments, they managed to get the breaking stories.



**16. Compared the local media and the overseas media, who do you think did a better job? Why?**

The local they got the breaking news every day, they liaised with the officers and language barrier with the overseas media made it hard for them to conduct interviews with villagers and they ended up hiring locals to accompany them during interviews.

**17. Did you stay over at Parliament during the coup?**

I did not stay over at the Parliament complex.

**18. Was there any kind of censorship placed by your editors to the way you reported or your reports?**

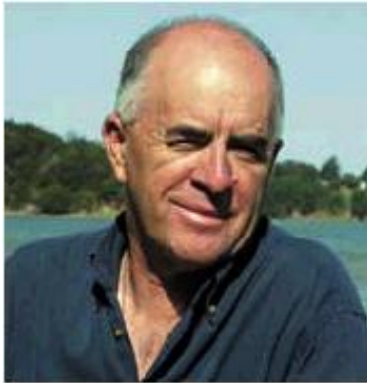
No, we got in everything that was said and other stories they wanted from inside and they decided on what should go and what should not go. But it was after the first time that we were held hostage that the editor wanted us to only attend the press conferences because anything could happen; we were not allowed to spend the whole day inside the complex. But since happenings inside were unpredictable, we attended a press conference and ended up staying inside during the shout out between the military and the civilians.

**19. Were you harassed in any way during the coup? If yes, how and what did you do about it?**

No, but it was when Fiji Sun photographer Sitiveni Moce was bashed up in Parliament and when one of the men who touched me on the shoulders while I stood crying helplessly, that I thought they were going to attack us. The civilian had wanted to ask me what was wrong, even though he knew what had happened. I turned and pushed him and he told me he understood what I was going through, but through my anger I never replied or spoke to him.

There was another incident when the civilian security officers threw my bag and when they told me to sit outside for one hour because I had written a story against the cause of the coup and I felt frustrated, angry and depressed but I could not do anything. As much as I wanted to tell them off for pulling my bag and pushing me out, I had to keep my cool because there was no law inside the complex.

## Michael Field



*Mike Field was the Pacific correspondent with the AFP during the May 2000 coup. He now works for Fairfax in New Zealand.*

### **1. What motivated you to become a journalist?**

Was something of a socialist way back then and journalism seemed the way to change the world. Was never motivated by money and was poorly paid, or not paid at all, in my early years.

### **2. Can you give me a brief work history?**

Started at the New Zealand Press Association, then left to do voluntary journalism work in Botswana and Samoa. Was press secretary to the Prime Minister of Western Samoa for three years; worked in the Ministry of Agriculture in Botswana for one. Working in newspapers in NZ in various roles. Attended Harvard for a year, worked in the US Congress and worked for 15 years for Agence France-Presse. Written several books, Cook's Wild Strait, Mau and Speight of Violence.

### **3. What training/education have you had as a journalist?**

One year at Wellington Polytechnic, and a year at Harvard.

### **4. How long were you in Fiji to report on the May 2000 coup?**

Four months following the coup and many months in the three years following, covering court cases and all that.

### **5. How did you prepare yourself for Fiji? Had you been to Fiji before?**

Had been to Fiji many times before, and did not do anything special for the coup.

### **6. Did you know about the 1987 coup in Fiji?**

Yes, although I was living in the US at the time.

### **7. Did you know about the Fiji culture prior to going over?**

Pretty solid knowledge of Fiji culture and other Pacific cultures.

### **8. Did you know Fiji's history prior to going over?**

Written many times on it.

**9. Were you there for the 56 days?**

Did the whole 56 days.

**10. Where were you when the coup happened?**

Auckland

**11. Can you give a brief account of what happened that day?**

I was in Auckland and heard a rumour that something had happened. Filed an alert to AFP and tried to make contact with stringers, friends – anybody to confirm events. Eventually a key diplomatic source with satellite contact confirmed details and I wrote several stories. Then raced to the airport and flew to Fiji – expecting only to be there a week.

**12. What went through your mind? Was there anytime that you felt your life was threatened? When was this?**

I was upset for close friends because I knew what they would be suffering. I was concerned for the safety of a number of people I had close association with. I did not feel my own life was personally threatened, but felt that I could have been hurt at any time and certainly I got seriously ill at one stage of events.

**13. What was your first story? What difficulties did you have? (Sources, pressures?)**

The first story was out of Auckland and as mentioned above I was troubled by lack of contact. Was able to confirm something was happening and filed the first story internationally on it. The pressure of being first and accurate was always present. As I was on the plane in the evening I could not file, but as soon as I got to Nadi I started filing to Hong Kong (my base) and pretty kept filing all day and every day for the next three months.

**14. Do you think you acted professionally in your role as a journalist during the coup? In what way did you act professionally?**

Yes, but I am pretty human too; never compromised myself, but had to accommodate myself to all the various local difficulties and complications. It was why I was pretty well paid – you spent your entire time in various balancing acts.

**15. Do you regret writing any story during the coup? Which story was this?**

I regret the numerous stories written during the course of events that suggested resolution was near. I never believed it would last so long. I am always conscious that news stories are written on the trot, under pressure and sometimes with only an outline of the facts – and often (certainly in Fiji) without any way of checking.

**16. If there was something you would change about how you went about reporting the coup, what would it be? How would you change it?**

I should have taken more time out because at various points I found myself physically tired and mentally exhausted. It had a long term effect on me as well.

**17. Do you think Speight manipulated the media? Why?**

Yes – and I wrote about it in my book.

**18. Do you think some journalists got preferential treatment from Speight? How was this?**

Speight knew the value of the media in carrying his message out, and he used the media as a shield. He found that his favoured reporters were much easier to manipulate. He also realized that most reporters could not be manipulated.

**19. Do you think Speight was given too much publicity or prominence? Why?**

No – he was an armed and crazed madman holding the Prime Minister and his government hostage. It was pretty hard to ignore that single fact. And by keeping the spotlight on him at least he could not escape the consequences of his actions.

**20. What do you think of the local journalists who covered the coup – Do you think they did a good job; do you think they understood what was going on and reported it accurately?**

I had local journalists working for me and they did a fine job. Other reporters in general did very well too.

**21. Comparing the local and the overseas media, who do you think did a better job? Why?**

We all had vastly different audiences to serve. Comparing a Fiji Times reporter with one from say Sydney is not really fair because the perspective on the story was always going to be different.

**22. Did you stay over at Parliament during the coup?**

I did not stay.

**23. Was there any kind of censorship placed by your editors to the way you reported or your reports?**

Not that I am aware of.

**24. Were you harassed in any way during the coup? If yes, how and what did you do about it?**

Frequently and by all sides. I just put up with it.

**25. Customary obligations of tribal and chiefly system may blur the view of a journalist, especially if he/she is indigenous. Did you see this as a problem for the Fiji journalists?**

It seems to – but then we all come to stories with our particular perspectives.

**26. The overseas media have been criticised for parachute journalism? What is your response to this?**

I think it is a trite criticism that comes from particular journalists in Fiji who just as frequently take freebees in other countries too and are just as guilty of the practice as those they criticize. It is a simple economic and practical reality that most foreign news organizations are unable to permanently staff a place like Fiji – most Australian news organizations don't even staff New Zealand! It seems an odd piece of Fijian paranoia that the term is used; New Zealanders, for example, seem flattered to host passing journalists from other countries. The only valid criticism should be that aimed at ignorant reporters who arrive at the scene without backgrounding themselves on the issues involved.

**27. The overseas media have also been criticised for inaccurate reporting, not understanding the political situation in Fiji, not understanding the culture and insensitive reporting. What is your response to this?**

If the overseas media are guilty of it – then so too is the Fijian media. I have seen a great deal of silliness and inaccurate reporting in Fiji too and as for insensitivity – Fiji media specializes in it (photos of grieving families, dead bodies, sleeping MPs... et al)

**28. Reporters couldn't function properly because of pressure from the crisis. Do you agree? Why?**

Some could not - experience and knowledge comes into play here. Some had neither.

**29. Did you suffer confusion during the coverage of the coup? When was this and how did you rectify it?**

Constant confusion and I just worked the contacts hard until I got something of a picture. Most reporters in most situations arrive to find confusion – most news stories begin in confusion.

**30. Were you provided any kind of support after covering the coup? E.g. trauma counselling etc.**

No.

**31. What will you do differently you had to cover another crisis in Fiji? How would you prepare yourself?**

Just technical things – take two laptops, a better satellite phone, two mobiles... and get some real sleep more often.

*Tukini Cama was a radio personality with Communications Fiji Limited when the May 2000 coup happened. He is now a radio personality with Fiji Broadcasting Corporation. He was co-opted to help report on the May 2000 coup by CFL.*

**1. What motivated you to become involved in the media?**

I was interested in journalism since I was in High School. Right now I am doing programmes, the entertainment side of it. When the 1987 coup happened, I was in Form 6. We were all affected by the 1987 coup and a lot of my friends were harassed. That's when I realised how important journalism was.

**2. So was FM96 your first media job?**

Yes. I joined back in 1990. I had just come out of university, I did communications at the University of the South Pacific. It was a minor. Journalism wasn't even a school back then. I haven't actually finished my degree because I left because of pressures to get a job. I went into programmes at FM96 and they used me in the news stories when there was pressure on the reporters. Then I started the talkback on radio in 1991 where we talked to the different parties. It was very political back then. We had a vibrant Fiji then.

**3. Where were you when the coup happened?**

I was covering the march with my fellow journalists. We were in the front of the march. Only the Fijian reporters were covering the march so that we could blend in with the protestors and plus they were very passionate. The town was full, there were thousands of them. Businesses had shut down for the day because people were nervous and it was one year of the Labour party being in power.

I remember we were walking next to Sera Bernard, the police spokesperson and I asked Sera where the cops were because the crowd was big and there was a lot of chanting going on. I asked her if the crowd could be controlled if things got out of hand. And she said 'everything is under control'. She said police were on standby and they were on alert should anything happen.

**4. Were you scared?**

No, I was very excited! It was my friend who was nervous. When we reached the Presidents house, Mr Brown came down and they handed him the petition. This petition was supposed to be handed at Albert Park where the President was supposed to come. When we reached Albert Park they were told that he was not there so someone said 'let's march on to the President's home'. That's when I started feeling that the cops were getting nervous. Because I heard Tikotikoca<sup>1</sup> saying 'no you can't march, according to our deal you only come here, you only reach the park'. Then some of the leaders of the march said 'Onward onward to the president's house'.

I could see some of the old women were disappointed because they had to walk further now.

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<sup>1</sup> Romano Tikotikoca was then Assistant :Police Commissioner



We were coming close to the end of the march and it was almost 10am and I understand this was when the armed men took over Parliament. One of the TV journalists who was beside me told me in my ear that Parliament had just been taken over. We knew this when we went past Holiday Inn. I asked him who had told him and he said their reporter from Parliament. I told him not to let anybody in the march know this. We went to tell Tikotikoca quietly. We continued to walk with the protestors till the President's house.

At the President's house the protestors asked why the President hadn't come down to take the petition and were told that there was a development in Parliament and that's when they got to know of news of the coup. Everyone cheered when they heard this and said 'onward to Parliament' which was another 400-500m uphill.

From the President's house I ran back into town to try and get transport to take me to Parliament. I was passing the Holiday Inn when I saw some of my friends and they gave me a ride up to Parliament. When we reached there a group of people were just gathering. The marchers had not reached yet. And I saw the staff of Parliament outside. I saw some distraught people, some weeping women, distraught students who were inside Parliament when it happened. Then I saw a guy in a balaclava and dressed in black with an M16, that's when it really hit me, that yes Parliament had been taken over.

**5. What went through your mind?**

I was half believing it. The first thought that crossed my mind was of disbelief and disgust.

**6. So you reported on the coup for FM96 for the 56 days?**

No I was in there for most of it but after that Malakai took over. I left after one week. I wasn't on air too because we couldn't do normal programming. So I took a break.

**7. So you slept in Parliament and ate there?**

Oh yes, they looked after us which was good. There was no other place you wanted to be but where the action was. They get used to seeing you in there and start treating you like one of them. Sometimes forgetting that you are not one of them, that you are the media.

**8. Weren't you scared?**

No, by then it was normal. You got used to it.

**9. Were there times when you forgot that you were from the media?**

No. Our boss had told us to tell the story like it was and the moment we felt that our life was threatened, you have to make your call.

**10. Was it easy to get information for your stories?**

I'm pretty much well known so it was easy because they know me. It was difficult at first but after the first press conference they knew who was who.

**11. Did you have access going in and out of Parliament?**

They gave us media freedom to move in and out. I got to know the people who were cooking the food because they were parliamentary staff. They didn't have to feed us but they fed us and the international journalists who were there.

### **11. What did you think of the coverage by the international media?**

Well you have the respectable types and the others who just became a nuisance because they did no background work on it. They knew nothing about the politics of this country. They come in today and expect the coup makers themselves to hold everything back and explain things to them. I mean, who do they think they are. We ended up having arguments with them and I told them that they were taking up our important time because we were up for hours.

I was appalled and shocked by the coverage by the overseas journalists. You had ones who just came in, gave their piece on what they saw without any research or groundwork, it was just another headline for them and they'd fly out. There were a lot of those. They thought it was just a storm in a teacup enough to fill a couple of headlines for them and then they are off to another troublesome spot in the world. And we had a lot of those from New Zealand and Australia and England. Some of them were getting angry because when the Great Council of Chiefs were supposed to settle everything and the overseas journalists expected that it would be over in three days. When it wasn't over the journalists were disgusted because they thought it would be over and they had booked their flight out the next day. I told them 'Oh I'm sorry, next time send your itinerary first and we will organise our national crisis around your itinerary'. They said it was totally inconvenient for them that the GCC hadn't come to a resolution quickly. There was a journalist from New Zealand who was just crying right through. She was just crying and crying and crying. On the night the police man was shot she was crying and I went up to her and asked if she was all right. She said it was too much for her. I told her she needed to get out of there. I said her newsroom should send someone stronger. I told her that her stories might not be as accurate because she was too emotional about it. In future, please send someone who has their head screwed on right.

Some of them were so arrogant too. They never joined us and went about doing their own stories. Some of them asked us questions which was good.<sup>2</sup> Some of them were good.

### **12. How were you filing stories?**

By mobile phone and we did a very fancy trick. We gave one of our company mobiles<sup>3</sup> to George Speight to use. The reason for this was so we could call him anytime because we knew our number. That put us ahead of the competition.

### **13. Do you think Speight manipulated the media?**

I think everyone manipulates the media.

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<sup>2</sup> Tukini was really against the way the overseas media covered the coup.

<sup>3</sup> According to the General Manager for FM96 the bill for the FM96 phone Speight was using came to about \$10,000.

**14. Did you suffer from the Stockholm syndrome?**

I could see from their point of view but kept myself removed from it. I was very happy to have the newsroom back at base who saw when I was swaying. Yes you were close to George Speight and the people because you were in constant contact with them.

**15. So did it affect your stories?**

No I don't think it did.

**16. Did you feel that your life was threatened inside Parliament?**

Yes there were a couple of times and I was harassed twice by the supporters once who felt that as a journalist I was a spy for the outside world. I told George Speight that his supporters were harassing us and he told them to leave us alone.

**17. You have been criticised as being Speight's PR man. What is your response to that?**

That name came about when one day in the middle of a press conference, Speight addressed me as his PR man and he was making a fool of me. He said it jokingly of course. I cornered him later on and asked him why he called me his PR man. I wasn't his PR man. His PR man was Jo Nata.

**18. If there was another coup in Fiji, what would you do differently?**

I think I have learnt a lot from the last coup. One thing, I will be very very careful that I do not give the newsmakers themselves an impression that I'm actually with them and part of them. A lot of people from the outside thought that I was with Speight.

**19. Why do you think they would think something like that?**

Probably because I was filing stories from in there and going in and out. And then there were a lot of people on the inside who thought I was a spy for the people outside. I had my life threatened about three times by the supporters. I know that I was only looking after myself. I mean who you rather be drinking grog with the people lower down in the food chain or with those from whom the news is coming from. As a journalist, I would rather be drinking grog with Speight.<sup>4</sup>

I always made it clear to them that I was a journalist. But yea that's what I would do differently. I wouldn't give them any grounds to start thinking I was on their side. I would take a lot of breaks. I would stay close to the newsmakers.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Tukini, a lot of discussion happened around the grog bowl and here one could express their personal views. Tukini admitted that because he was always around the grog bowl, "too close for comfort" that the coup makers started to misunderstand him and thought he was on their side. He said there was an incident when while drinking kava, Duvuloco told Tukini that he should tell the listeners that they wanted them to see things there way. to which Tukini said "I'm sorry this is where you have got me wrong". He said this is when it dawned on him that they had assumed he was with them.

**20. So you wouldn't drink kava with them again?**

Yes maybe that would have to go.

**21. Do you feel angry with Speight that he sort of tarnished your reputation as a journalist by saying you were his PR man?**

No I'm not at all. I felt upset before. You know Speight himself needed someone to bounce things off and one day he called me and started sharing things with me. Like when Rabuka visited him, he called me and said "guess what, I had Rabuka in here to visit me". He seemed to be telling me as a friend. I felt he was caught in the middle of something.

**22. How did you feel when he chose you as a 'friend' to share with?**

I said oh my goodness.

*Francis Herman is General Manager of the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation.*

**1. Where were you during the coup?**

I was at the Methodist church in the middle of the city.

**2. So how did you hear that there was a coup that day?**

I was sitting in there when the cops came in and told me about the coup and said I needed to get things running. It was funny because my whole team just stood up and walked out when we got the news. And we were all occupying the seats in front. About nine people rode in my sedan. How we all fitted I don't know.

**3. How many journalists did you put on duty?**

We have about 22 journalists but what we did given the nature of the coverage, we had pre-empted there could be some disturbances so what we had been planning our coverage for months. Particularly for those of us who went through 1987. I was in Parliament in the 1987 coup. We knew what it was like in 1987. The May 2000 coup was totally different.

**4. How did you know there was going to be a coup?**

Well we didn't know there was going to be coup but given the mood swings we knew there was going to be some sort of disturbance, not necessarily a coup. So we looked at scenarios, what if this happened, what if that happened, this is how we'd react, this is how we'd cover. So we had been doing brainstorming for a while and knew basically what we had to do. At the back of our mind was to retain stability, to use our network of stations to maintain stability. To keep the people informed as much as possible but keep calm. We had to keep in mind about what we do if the military came in and told us what should put on air like in 1987 and what would our position be. There could be change in Government and if they did then what would our position be. So we looked into all those scenarios. Our minds were very clear on how we would approach it.

But the 2000 coup kept changing everyday and we were strategising on a daily basis. We brought in some of our seasoned program announcers who had some idea of journalism but because of the province they came from or their influence in the Fijian community, because we were not going to send an Indian journalist into Parliament because tensions and feelings were high. We would send X Y Z. We would not send a woman in because we didn't know what the situation was. But we did send a woman in, we did send an Indian in, Tamani Nair, who went right into Parliament. Some of us went into Parliament to see what was happening. We ended up settling on a permanent team. We changed the team almost three teams because their lives were being threatened if the coup perpetrators didn't like a particular report. There was a particular incident for example when Samisoni Pareti had his meal sent across and George Speight had a taste of the food and Samisoni went on air and very light heartedly said "the coup leader had a taste of food cooked by FBC" and that little comment was misinterpreted by many. And all those people in Parliament who heard it thought we were trying to say that there was no food in Parliament. It was a lose-lose situation.

**5. So how did you counter that comment made by Samisoni Pareti?**

We just clarified it on air and explained what exactly happened, in three languages. And we left it to them, at the end of the day we couldn't change their minds.

**6. Then what happened?**

We were never allowed to question those in captivity. We could see them and described them on air. No one had close access to them.

I think every journalist both local and overseas who covered the coup, did so at a huge risk. Particularly those in Parliament because emotions were high, it was a challenge.

**7. How did you deal with rumours, there were a lot of rumours floating around at that time? Your radio station has been criticised for broadcasting a lot of rumours.**

No that's not true. What we did we had an editorial board in-house comprised of Fijian, Indian and others. What we did was analyse everything that was reported back to us by our teams. And in most of the cases we didn't go live. Or if we did go live we talked to our team first before we went live. There was one slip-up we did and we admit it. There was one particular person who came in, Iliesa Duvuloco, who has now been charged for his part in the coup, he went on air and said "to all you people there in Naitasiri come down to Parliament. Come down and join us". It was on the Fijian radio. That was the only slip-up we made. But it had a lot of impact because Fijian people especially in the villages are glued to Fijian radio. And they heard that and we knew they were sending messages from Parliament all over Fiji calling people. We questioned a lot of things.



## Jone Kalouniviti



*Jone Kalouniviti was a journalist with The Daily Post in Fiji during the May 2000 coup. He now works for The Fiji Sun.*

### 1. What motivated you to become a journalist?

To begin with I just needed a job straight out of high school, needed some experience in the working world, the offer came and I used to score straight A's in English and the Social sciences so I applied and got a job at the Daily Post in 1999. I guess there came a time when my responsibility as a journalist finally sunk in, I felt the need to go out there and get news for our readers, and it's what gets me up every morning still. There is also the associated buzz, pressure and fast life which one gets used to.

### 2. What was your first job as a journalist?

Worked as proof reader for three months before being thrown out dry to cover a four day soccer tournament with totally no idea of logistics, timing and having the nose for what was a worthy sports story or not. It was tough but getting through it according to my Sports Editor then proved I had what it took.

### 3. Can you give me a brief work history?

Started as a proof reader at Daily Post before joining sports desk as a sports reporter. Also did some news articles but because of my writing skills was encouraged to write more personal sports features. Had to join news team/photography during 2000 Coup as our Indian reporters and photographers were at great risk to work considering the circumstances. Joined the Sun after the Coup after Daily Post had 50% pay cut for all staff, good offer came from Fiji Sun. Left Fiji Sun in 2001 as assistant sports editor to join Fiji Times sports department. At the Times I also contributed to the South Pacific Games website in the lead up the Games.

### 4. What training/education have you had as a journalist?

Mostly on the job training, online training at the Fiji Times and weekly classes at Fiji Times by an expatriate training manager.

Finally doing the formal stuff now, enrolled in University of the South Pacific Journalism Programme in 2005.

**5. Where were you when the coup happened?**

I was in Kadavu for a funeral, but got back into the mainland on May 21st after the army stabilised the situation.

**6. Can you give a brief account of what happened that day?**

Nope I was not there to actually witness it, came in the aftermath.

**7. What went through your mind?**

Well for me at first it was almost a joyride, with almost no serious thought of the seriousness of the events until I walked into Suva City after being recalled to work on May 22. I was quite distraught to see the state of my home town, buildings burnt, shopping centres trashed and streets were filled with debris. It was an indescribable scene, like a lift out from those movies set in those war torn African countries or Banana Republics in South America.

**9. Was there anytime that you felt your life was threatened?**

But entering parliament for the first time in first week of the hostage taking made me realise that there was no law in the land, we were at their mercy, if we did anything we would have been attacked in there. We were at their whim (the people whom had gathered there). Anyone entering parliament suddenly feels a tense but united atmosphere. I remember feeling the hair on the back of neck standing knowing all eyes were on us media people as we filed in for interviews with George Speight. I took comfort in the presence of a grandfather who was among the leading figures in there, and in time those in parliament came to know me as he's grandson and never bothered me.

**10. What was your first story?**

As a sports reporter I played more of a supporting role, accompanying the news teams to locations and handling the camera when it became risky for our Indo-Fijian photographers and also asking questions when it mattered or translating.

The circumstances we had to work as a team and look out for each other, this became all the more important when Fiji Sun photographer Sitiveni Moce was assaulted by thugs at the parliament gates with his equipment all smashed up.

**11. What difficulties did you have?(sources, pressures?)**

The difficulty is not knowing what kind of reaction to expect when taking pictures. There was a case where a Fiji Sun reporter was chased by about ten gun totting man for taking pictures of them from a tree outside the perimeter of Parliament. Sources were abundant during the coup but we found people were scared to speak on the record.

**11. Do you think you acted professionally in your role as a journalist during the coup? In what way did you act professionally?**

Well I believe I did things objectively even though I had relatives inside who wanted to use our newspaper to air their views and predictions of the situation. At times I was called up to put in certain stories but refused, I was sworn at by uncles and grandfathers who greatly supported the cause and had to stay put at home on certain occasions.

**12. If there was something you would change about how you went about reporting the coup, what would it be? How would you change it?**

Probably confidence and learning to read between the lines was something we hoped we all had, but alas no one had really experienced an event first hand.

**13. Do you think Speight manipulated the media? Why?**

Yes. And the media were so gullible at times I felt this was due to the fact that everyone was new to the situation. Speight did because he had to make a statement to the world and it was important that everyone knew what he was standing for, that was why he had many interviews and scheduled press conferences on a daily basis.

**14. Do you think some journalists got preferential treatment from Speight? How was this?**

In some cases yes, it went with the paper of the day that printed articles in his favour or those reporters who had built a repertoire stayed on parliament and whose faces were familiar because of the frequent visits there. Radio journalists got the most because surprisingly, they used this medium to rally support from the rural communities who moved into parliament in big numbers over the next 50 days after May 19.

Some developed the Stockholm syndrome especially radio journalists more or less were used as campaign mouth pieces by the Coup perpetrators. For others the long waits at parliament day in and day out for 50 straight days proved stressful.

**15. Do you think Speight was given too much publicity or prominence? Why?**

Competition between local media groups and overseas journalists. Speight was popular for his smart, witty and confident responses to questions from the media. The demand for breaking news also meant Speight was in the limelight often, questions were also forever pouring in from overseas and the Fiji media had an obligation to provide. Came to a point that some radio journalists were lied or fabricated stories during dry spells because they were under pressure, the same happened with print journalists.

**16. What do you think of the overseas journalists who covered the coup ^ Do you think they did a good job; do you think they understood what was going on and reported it accurately?**

I feel that local journalists did a good job considering their circumstances, and I also believe they did it to the best of their ability based on knowledge and experience.

Overseas journalists was another matter, I remember being approached by Greenpeace activists passing through Fiji to protest against American nuclear testing in the Marshalls,

they were surprised that the Fiji they saw in front of them was very different from the ones they read and saw on the news back in New Zealand and Australia

**17. Compared the local media and the overseas media, who do you think did a better job? Why?**

Local media did a better job because they printed the real picture. Overseas reports were over-sensationalised and exaggerated.

**18. Did you stay over at Parliament during the coup? If yes, do you think you were you still able to report objectively without bias or favouring Speight, as it has been said that if you, re in a certain situation, under a certain environment, you may get swayed to believe a certain cause. (Stockholm syndrome).**

No, I made it a point not to stay over, it would have meant getting sacked. But some returned to parliament when they knocked off work to grog with Coup supporters.

**19. Was there any kind of censorship placed by your editors to the way you reported or your reports?**

Yes for the reporters, this was after the Post starting getting threatening calls and the Army was alerted. They provided us with two full-time and fully armed body guards at head quarters on Waimanu Rd.

**20. Were you harassed in any way during the coup? If yes, how and what did you do about it?**

Yes basically, mostly verbal abuse was hurled at journalists. But I was never physically harassed in any way, I also had a bad experience with soldiers who threatened to shoot me at one stage or give me a good beating after they almost hit me while speeding past me on that road. I passed off the incident as one of stressed out soldiers who could not even trust their own, I knew this because my Uncles were soldiers and at instances went without sleep for 24-28 hours straight for fears of rebellion within their ranks. Rumours were strong they were threatened from the inside as well as the outside with the CRW forces in parliament.

*Josephine Prasad is a former journalist of the Fiji Daily Post. She was state witness for a court case. She now works for Greenpeace in Fiji*

**1. What motivated you to become a journalist?**

As a young child, I was somewhat intrigued into reading. Being mediocre was out of the question; being ornery was part of the everyday plan. I tried reading everything and anything much to the annoyance of my parents and elder siblings I wanted to pronounce and understand the meaning of very difficult words.

During a form five in 1996 work study I chose the closest thing to a newsroom, I did a work attachment at FM96 which was then housed at Stewart Street that's when they were still the underdogs compared to the fast rising Fiji Broadcasting Commission but had radio presenters like Lenora Qereqeretabua and Ravi Sharma .

Hence I then wanted to be a radio presenter - not only my love for music was going to pepper my tastebuds in a radio station but I could talk all behind closed doors and yet the whole of Fiji would not know it was me.

**2 What was your first job as a journalist?**

My first job as a journalist was a Supplements writer; I was employed as a casual, paid \$60 a week at the Daily Post's advertising department.

**3. What training/education have you had as a journalist?**

I have attended various workshops both on an international and national level, which have included the Reconstructing Race Relations workshop at the Forum Secretariat, Fiji Islands; Young Peoples Workshop on HIV/AIDS Conference Manesar-India, Reporting on Sensitive Issues at the Southern Cross Hotel.

Apart from the on the job experience I have a Certificate in Business and Public Administration from the South Pacific Education College. I am currently studying at postgraduate level for a Masters in International Communication.

**3. You were in Parliament on May 19 when George Speight stormed in with the rebels to overthrow the Government. Can you tell me what happened after that?**

I was emotional, worried about my safety. The media had their war with the Peoples Coalition Government – but democracy is what every journalist should uphold and it being raped before my naked eyes was a traumatic experience, and challenging as a journalist.

I did not stay at home for a month or so – the rebels in Parliament had taken my cell phone and were calling various numbers and threatening people including the landline at home. My dad was away in Kadavu and my mum was at home alone when she heard my

name being mentioned on one of the radio stations her first instinct was to pick up the landline (which was still working before being disconnected) and call my cell phone. The guy who had taken my cell phone (I didn't know who he was talking to at that time) told her he would kill me. I had also taken a colleagues tape recorder (Ricardo Morris I know he still curses me until this day) the rebels took that as well, my wallet and all the contents in it - which included my FNPF cards etc. They emptied my whole bag on the table and just decided who was to take what - I was fuming and flabbergasted but at that time seeing the armed man around me I just decided to keep shut. (Man I tell you it was so difficult) I remember when they had asked me to give them my jewellery I had taken most of them off but I had forgotten about my watch. One rebel who happened to be very observant quickly pointed it out. Two of them immediately wore the chain, the bracelet, and whatever of the rings looked masculine and could fit them while they pocketed the rest.

You will note that in my police statement I talk about the gun shoved up my spine. I could not sleep on my back for weeks and every time I tried to sleep I could see Mr Chaudhry being kicked or a warrior cry if my phone would ring.

My life has since been threatened I remember Speight (or someone pretending to be him) called me on several occasions not happy with what I had written during the coup period. We had the military guarding the premises as well. Our editor Jale Moala had written an excellent editorial in form of an open letter to George Speight in Parliament – boy was he mad. Asha Lakhan who was then working with AFP and I seemed to be the only two Indo-Fijian journalist out on the field.

I remember while being also been told to sit on the stairs that led to the main Parliament Chamber a rebel came holding a wastepaper bag made from *voivoi* – inside it were cell phones. He turned around and said to me how can I call my home? I attempted to operate one phone and then I told him that I did not know much about cell phones. I had no choice but to show them how to use my phone.

#### **4. What was your first story? What difficulties did you have?(sources, pressures?)**

We could not take out a paper for a couple of days as we located in Toorak which is in Central Suva. However when we did we wrote a much toned down story about what I had experienced on May 19. My Publisher Ranjit Singh and Editor Jale Moala had agreed that we were going to be a responsible medium and exercise extreme caution in not riling up emotions.

Subsequently the military Commander Commodore Frank Bainimarama had also had a meeting with media bosses emphasising the need of not overly dramatising issues.

However it must be said that after being initially left out on Parliament (before they two press conferences) Speight had specifically told me not to “get ideas in my head” about writing what I had observed as it was all for the indigenous cause. I had interpreted this as a threat.



### **5. Do you think Speight manipulated the media?**

No doubt about it. George Speight had the gift of the gab and was an excellent actor when the media was around him – especially the international media. I don't know whether other journalist's realised this but Speight was making the same statements over and over again but rearranging the vocabulary. It was like writing the same story with different introductions but the body of the story was basically same. More or less a broken record.

### **6. Do you think some journalists were given preferential treatment?**

There were some local journalists during the first day of the coup and I am told later who were known in the media circles as George Speight's PRO's they just hung around him like smaller fish hang on to a large fish to feed.

Another senior journalist much to my annoyance congratulated self styled Prime Minister Timoci Silatolu at the second press conference on May 19. The conversation went like this:

*Journalist: "Mr Prime Minister, first of all let me congratulate you on your appointment...". And I sat there and thought to my self has the principles of democracy gone out of the window?*

Even after the press conferences a majority of the journalist's were shaking hands, kissing, patting backs of these very coup makers.

This particular congratulatory message became quite embarrassing last year when it was shown in court during the trial of jailed Vice President Ratu Jope Seniloli, jailed deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives and three others in 2004 where I was a state witness asked to confirm the name of the particular journalist when the press conference footage was shown as evidence in court.

After a couple of days most local media mediums stopped giving the rebels in Parliament prominence.

At the Daily Post we had been instructed by Mr Moala that no office staff were to go to Parliament as some local journalists were assaulted. Mrs Bogidrau's brother (a police officer) a Fijian was assaulted really badly by the rebels in Parliament whilst on duty.

Mr Tandulala who was a Research Officer in Parliament then I think had gone to get his things from Parliament but the rebels turned on him after one of them told the crowd that he was the one who had introduced the foreign policies of VAT. Bleeding and badly bruised Mr Tandulala was picked up by our photographers and reporters and taken to the nearest police station.

### **7. Do you think Speight was given too much publicity by the media?**

To answer your question yes, the media gave Speight a lot of publicity even little kids knew Speight; his bald head was in fashion. I know that an advertisement in New Zealand attracting tourists said there was no need to fear as the only Speight New Zealand had was behind the bar. (A name of a beer is Speight's).

I don't think it was just the international media that erred the local journalists all erred some glaringly obvious whereas others minor mistakes. We at the Daily Post like I said earlier were privileged to have Mrs Bogidrau, Mr Moala and Mr Singh who kept a close tab on what was being churned out from the engine room.

**8. Compared the local media and the overseas media, who do you think did a better job? Why?**

I don't think it would be fair to be comparative. Every journalist did what was required of them or what they thought was required of them. International journalists like Michael Filed and Sean Dorney were very well versed with Fiji politics and were very helpful to the local media and vice versa. Just like there were some wannabe's in the international foray so were there in the local ones. I remember while at the Centra (which was the only watering hole, eatery open and was the place for the media) how one international journalist spun the windmills of gossip and the whole bang lot of them went into frenzy trying to pack up and leave as they were told there was a group of rebels on the way from Parliament to mob the hotel just days after Fiji One was mobbed.

There was a slight animosity between all media groups because there were some journalists who kept on asking questions whose answers everyone knew and would take centre stage during press conferences. It was becoming irritating but we had to be understanding as these international journalists were arriving by the day and were not aware of all developments fully.

Another incident that left most local journalist annoyed was when the late President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara called a press conference and some international journalists refused to sit down or take their caps off.

## **Ian Jackson & Malakai Veisamasama**



*Communications Fiji Ltd  
General Manager, Ian  
Jackson.*

*Malakai Veisamasama is a reporter for Communications Fiji Limited.  
Ian Jackson is general manager of Communications Fiji Limited.  
They preferred to be interviewed together.*

### **1. Malakai what was your first story when you entered journalism?**

My first story was the Suva Zone 1, that's how I got in. The 2 journalists were busy and they sent me just to get the results. While I was getting the results they said to me why don't you just write a report and that was a start.

### **2. Have you always been with FM96?**

Yes, 12 years now.

### **3. Where were you both when the coup happened?**

**IAN JACKSON:** Well specifically we were on station that morning. We actually got a phone call from Ofa Swann who was in parliament and she called one of our staff on her mobile and said "there's a coup" and our journalist asked who and she said "Speight" and she kept saying "Speight". We thought it was Sam Speight senior because George didn't even exist in those days. So we sent people down there straightaway and our journalists were pretty much the first lot going down to Parliament.



*FM96 reporter Malakai  
Veisamasama*

**MALAKAI VEISAMASAMA:** I was with the team that was following the march along with Vijay Narayan and Vijay Verma, who is one of the Hindi program announcers but was on news duty that day. It was a bit tense at the start of the march; we were filing along and kept filing reports through the march. And then we got a phone call.

**IAN JACKSON:** So when we received that phone call here then we contacted them. The coup had taken over in parliament while the march was still going on. These guys left the march and went straight to parliament.

**MALAKAI VEISAMASAMA:** We shot straight to Parliament but by the time we got there the gates had closed. So we stayed outside and got some information from the people who were coming out. They were the staff of parliament. Meanwhile I was worried first about my kids in Veiuto. Then we got news that there was going to be a press conf for the media later on.

**What went through your mind Malakai?**

Well when we got there I thought it was like a big circus because they said Speight but we were still trying to confirm which Speight. We had heard about George Speight in the timber saga but I didn't realise it was George; I thought it was Sam Speight, the old man. We were still working out how could Sam Speight take over; we were still discussing when Rabuka's car drove by. He had just finished visiting the President Ratu Mara and he told us it was not Sam Speight but George Speight. It was a shock to us.

**Were you there for the 1987 coup Malakai?**

No, this was my first time covering a coup.

**Did you feel scared or threatened?**

**MALAKAI VEISAMASAMA:** When we started going in for the first press conference, our chief engineer and Vijay Verma went in with me. They were targeting the Indian

journalists inside and when they pulled out Asha Lakhan I got worried for my two Indian colleagues with me and for myself as well. That was probably the first time I felt fear. And then when we went in to the press conference it was a different atmosphere altogether; people standing with guns and everyone serious, it was very intimidating.

**IAN JACKSON:** I think at that stage it was very confusing, no one really knew what was happening. In 1987 we knew it was race oriented. I suppose that was the only memory we had. At the time of takeover we were not sure if it was a repeat of 1987. And then the supporters who came in also had the same confusion. We were confused about the famous “cause” they were talking about because the Government already had a lot of Fijian MPs.

**MALAKAI VEISAMASAMA:** And plus when you are down there, you are getting information from the rebels about who they belonged to and our editorial team back here were getting some other information. For example the rebel soldiers said they were part of the military and when we reported this to our editorial team they would check with the military and the military would say “no, they are not part of us”. So we were getting more confused and asked, “Who were these guys”. They looked like professionals in the way they carried the guns, they were serious, they had their face painted, and it was confusing.

**IAN JACKSON:** Coming back to your first question, when we get into a crisis situation like that, we form a sort of editorial team because we know that the news will become really messy and things are unfolding very quickly, so it’s not a normal situation. I could not think of anything more abnormal, the overthrow of a government. So William<sup>5</sup> and I then take an active role in the newsroom; on a day-to-day basis we don’t interfere. We don’t dictate the news but form a committee and give directions to the journalists because it is a national crisis. I do not have a formal journalist background but I have been in this business for so many years, you could say that I do have some background. We work on a neutral basis, unbiased right down the middle and our job is purely to get our message to the people, whatever the message is, good bad or otherwise.

**So you had a special team covering the coup?**

Yes. We made a decision that the Indian reporters would not go out into the streets and would stay within the building. Therefore we co-opted the Fijian journalists to do the street work, so some of the programs people got involved. One program person in particular shouldn’t have got involved and became loose cannon. We told all our reporters that if they did not feel comfortable then they could go home and if they did not feel safe at home they could come to work and use it as a sanctuary and just hang around.

**Was there any Indian journo who insisted that they wanted to go out into the streets or to parliament to report?**

**MALAKAI VEISAMASAMA:** No, we had one by accident. The incident happened on the first day of the coup. Ashwin Nand, our engineer was driving us that day of the march

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<sup>5</sup> William Parkinson is Communications Fiji Limited Managing Director

and was harassed at parliament. After that we thought it would be dangerous for them since it was already dangerous for us.

**Malakai did you stay over at Parliament?**

Yes. On the first Friday and Saturday it was total confusion. Not only that there was the fear factor, George was the only one speaking. The rest had a stubborn face. Sunday made it worse coz that was the day they trashed TV 1 and it was a shock.

**There have been criticisms made that some radio stations were reporting Speight etc live?**

**IAN JACKSON:** We didn't run anything live from the journalist's reports. A lot of people called us and asked why we were putting George on air and why couldn't we just ignore him. But we said he was the coup leader and you needed to know what he was saying. But he started repeating himself and there was a lot of waffling. The only thing we ran live was when he threatened to shoot Chaudhry unless he resigned. Malakai ran that piece live in English on all 3 stations.

**So Malakai do you agree that you suffered from the Stockholm syndrome?**

Yes. Fiji is a small community. I had a half brother that was in there and I had relatives who were in there and after a while they keep saying the same thing and it starts to sink in. So you needed the break to come out otherwise you become impartial.

**IAN JACKSON:** The other thing was Mala is a high chief from his own village. His father had some implications in 1987. So he is in there listening to all this Fijian cause etc together with the other journalists. And there is got to be some kind of empathy. So we started listened carefully to their reports and started noticing that they were starting to lose the plot, Stockholm syndrome to a certain degree. So what we would do was pull them out.

Speaking on the other side of the coin, when we pulled him out once we could see the signs. We told him to go home to his family, his wife and children and 'reacquaint yourself'. Because all of a sudden being inside Parliament you are living the story. So he went and came back refreshed.

**So Ian you noticed that his stories were swaying more towards George Speight?**

Yes. Not so much supporting George but losing the plot. That's another reason why we didn't go live and wanted to edit the stories from Parliament.

**MALAKAI VEISAMASAMA:** I liken it to walking a straight line for 10 days and after a while you lose your balance a bit and start to sway and need to have a break.

**How many days in total did you spend in Parliament Malakai?**

Well on and off I was there for the 56 days.



**How many of these days did you stay over in Parliament?**

About 20 days.

**Where did you sleep?**

You slept anywhere you could sleep. The times that I slept over were the tense times.

**And George Speight didn't mind you sleeping over?**

Well George enjoyed the media. He loved the attention plus the overseas journalists.

**Did you feel safe?**

It comes down to a fact that the group there start to know you, your distant relatives are there. And you see them around and start to feel safe. You don't get scared.

**While filing your stories was it hard to get info from sources etc apart from the press conference. Did you feel pressure?**

That was the advantage of the set-up we had. If we felt there was an inch of doubt, we would send the story back to our team to check on the facts and they would come back to us to verify.

**IAN JACKSON:** The rebels were using radio heavily to keep in touch. At one stage they threatened us. They didn't like our stories and threatened to burn the building up or blow it up, all those kind of stuff.

**How did you handle that Ian?**

Well when that was done we called George and told him that unless that stops, no more stories, we would cut off completely. And we stopped. We pulled our entire team out of Parliament and no more coup stories. He called us the next day and said he had spoken to the people and said, "I assure you the safety of your journalists". The threats made to us didn't come from him, you could tell, he wasn't in control of the crowd.

**Do you think Speight manipulated the media?**

**IAN JACKSON:** Overseas media definitely. He was very good. In Fiji we know those sorts of people. We know a lot about what he was talking about, the so-called cause and the rest of it. We felt that argument from 1987, it is still going on today. We grow up with that argument. So for him to say to be standing on his little hill there saying the Fijians are down-trodden and the Indians this and the Indians that; the overseas media lapped it up. But for us we were trying to look for something else.

**MALAKAI VEISAMASAMA:** He used the race card and the overseas media took that hook, line and sinker.

**Do you think it was ethical and tight to give Speight a voice on radio? Was he given a voice on radio all the time?**

**IAN JACKSON:** Not all the time. We used actual voices if it's going to add credence to what's being said. Most of the time we would not use his voice. We would just report his statements. On occasion we would actually use his voice, just so everybody else, whatever agenda he had, they would hear it from the horse's mouth. I think it's very important to give him a voice, it's the real person talking. As long as you are very careful about what you are using. We didn't give him an open line to use.

**MALAKAI VEISAMASAMA:** For us down there it was very difficult because he would expect us to run it and we would have to explain to him why it wasn't run. That's what caused the anger.

**IAN JACKSON:** For example, we had an interview with him and he rambled on. He listened in and nothing was used and that made him really angry.

**MALAKAI VEISAMASAMA:** The night they trashed Fiji TV, I was really scared for the overseas journalists because we were locked up in one room, in the Labour party conference room. They locked us up because that was the night the Fiji TV close-up programme ran and they wanted to make a speech without the media present. That's the night as mentioned in *Speight of Violence*, I covered the security camera they had on us in the locked room. They were watching us in the room in their monitors and I went in and covered the security camera. They were taking me to be locked up when I covered the camera. What they omitted in that book was that they came and bashed me up for doing that. I was taken out and bashed up outside. Then I came back inside and had to go back and ask one of the CRW's<sup>6</sup> to pass a message to my step-brother, to pass a message to George, as there was a Japanese crew that was locked up inside as well, and they were terrified. There were also female journalists and they were scared too. So I tried to get a message to George to release the overseas media and just keep the local media, as they were really scared. So they released the overseas media first.

**That was brave of you Malakai?**

I don't know if it was brave or stupid!

**So what happened after you got bashed up? How did you feel?**

Well I didn't go home the next day (10 days after the coup) as well because the next day was when they trashed Fiji TV and one man died. I was bruised but I stayed on because we heard that a police had died/

I was actually bashed up twice. The second one was coming back from a press conference in Parliament when I got shoved because they mistook me for another journalist.

**The bashing didn't discourage you from continuing to report on the coup?**

No. After a while the adrenalin was what kept me going.

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<sup>6</sup> Counter Revolutionary Unit

I felt sorry for the overseas journalists. Most of them couldn't understand what was going on and you had to help them. I started putting myself in their situation.

**Do you think Speight was given too much publicity or prominence by the media?**

**IAN JACKSON:** We recorded hours of stuff for our journalist's sake but Speight kept repeating himself over and over and we had to give the impression that we were going to use it. When he said I need to make a statement we gave him our phone and just recorded and let him talk. We played this game with him.

**Do you regret running any story?**

**IAN JACKSON:** Maybe the military mutiny. It was a learning experience, not so much as regret. There was so much going on. There were a lot of rumours like the mob is coming etc. So what we said was if you need to know the fact, listen in to us or call us. So we started playing like a community service and they started calling in to verify rumours, they started to trust our stories and us. Even from their queries we were able to get news items, some of our news came from these community messages. Especially the Indian market, Navtarang has a huge market and people would wait until they heard it on radio then would believe it. Our news was dictated by the community concerns.

**Ian, how many reporters did you have in total covering the coup?**  
Probably about 15.

**Did you place any kind of censorship?**

No. Just content like whether it had any relevance or not.

Customary obligations of tribal and chiefly system may blur the view of a journalist, especially if he/she is indigenous. Was this a problem for you? How did you deal with this?

**MALAKAI VEISAMASAMA:** Yes was a problem for me. Good question.. I think it comes down to your own principles.

**Was it hard for you Malakai especially with a stepbrother and relatives in there?**

Yes it really hard to try and think outside their box and to try and convince them that what they were thinking is wrong. Because all of a sudden you are seen as the enemy. And you have to do it in the quiet, you have to pull them aside and talk to them. Because I had a namesake who marched in with the army. So I had to pull him aside and talk to him. And gently and subtly try and get the message across. Because my namesake is on the black list, my visa to visit countries gets rejected. It has been really difficult for me and has affected my reputation as a journalist.

My namesake got sentenced for seven years for his involvement. Just recently an aunt of mine wanted to visit the United States and they asked her, are you related to the journalist

who got sentenced to seven years in prison. She tried to clarify that it wasn't me who was in jail.

**IAN JACKSON:** So we had to go through the embassy to clear his name. All of a sudden his name is confused with the one in jail and people start thinking that the journalist is in jail.

Mala has worked in that environment for along time. He knows that in this environment I am the chief, he leaves his chiefly status at home. So I think in his case why he has been able to balance it is because of his attitude. Obviously there is some personal things going on in Parliament, but it goes against your values, in this case he disagreed with what they were doing.

**MALAKAI VEISAMASAMA:** I was in an interesting scenario because I belong to the chiefly family of a great chief and here is my grandfather, and my uncle and the Tui Macuata going to the army camp to ask them to leave. And it's in the papers the next day. They mention the families name with it and I am sitting in Parliament and the people there start looking at me. So these were some of the challenges I had to go through

**IAN JACKSON:**I think this was his strength and his weakness. Strength because he was able to get stories and weakness in the sense because of all the baggage around you.

**If there was another coup, do you think you would be better prepared?**

**IAN JACKSON:** Oh yes, definitely. We learnt a lot. I think we did a very good job of it considering everything. In hindsight we could possibly do it a lot better. Things change everyday, new characters pop up.

**Do you know what you would you do differently if there was another coup?**

**Not really. It's something to see. We know the pitfalls. Maybe something we might do differently, even though it's hard to imagine that something like that would occur again, but with the Stockholm thing, it s important to manage it.**

**Ian would you still let your reporters stay over?**

Not as long. We didn't have much choice at that time because of manpower.

## Mesake Koroi



*Mesake Koroi is the editor of the Fiji Daily Post.*

### **1. What motivated you to become a journalist?**

I was not trained to be a journalist. I was trained to become an agriculturalist but circumstances were such then that while I was looking for a job, there was an opening in *Nai Lalakai* which I took. I thought it was fun and have been a journalist for 35 years now.

### **2. Can you give me a brief work history?**

First worked with Fiji Times then went to work for a political newspaper, the *Nation Tovata*, owned by the Alliance party. My interest in politics started from there. The editor was a British guy; it was a monthly political newspaper in the early 70s. I went back to the Fiji Times then joined Radio Fiji where I stayed for 13 years.

Then joined the Fiji Development Bank for four years as public relations officer and then joined Daily Post. I left Daily Post at the height of 2001 when I started having all problems with the new management.

I stayed home for two weeks and the police came to see me and told me they wanted someone to help build their image (as their image had become tainted after the 2000 coup) and the South Pacific games were coming up so they needed a PR officer. So I signed a contract with them for 3 months and ended up staying 3 years. I left when the work was done and then did a stint as PR officer for the SDL party for 3 months and then resigned to join the DP as editor and here I am.

### **3. So you have worked in both extremes; PR and journalism. What did you find different and which do you like better?**

They are both the same in terms of responsibility and after working on both sides I can fit in any shoes I suppose.

### **4. Moving to the Fiji 2000 coup. Where were you when the coup happened?**

At the time Jale Moala was editor of the Daily Post. Maika Bolatiki and I were having a hefty meal in a restaurant down in central Suva. The phone rang and we were told there was a coup. Josephine Prasad was covering parliament for us. From there we shot straight down to parliament.

I wasn't surprised that there was going to be a coup, the writing was on the wall a long time ago<sup>7</sup>. I had pre warned govt on a lot of occasions that a coup was going to take place. The only thing I didn't know was when it was going to happen. But when the Nationalist Takolavo party decided to join in the march, I knew that something was going to happen. The then minister for home affairs Joji Uluinakauvadra took heed of the warning and cancelled the permit for that march. But the former Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry in his own way thought that it would be democratic if people expressed their views and he overruled Joji. When that happened I knew that was the last nail on the coffin. I thought that when Chaudhry played the democracy card, that was the worst decision he ever made in his political career.

#### **5. What went through your mind that day?**

I was sad in many ways and of course as journalists you do excited too at the same time as there is something to write about but when you look at the national picture then it becomes sad to see a country that was becoming a progressive nation now at the brink of disaster. When I left parliament to come to the office I saw what was happening in Suva city and felt really sad. We knew that the Indian community was being targeted so we put all the Indian staff and sent them home.

Another sad part in my life in that coup was the decision of the editor to stop publishing after 2 weeks. I thought we missed a good opportunity to record history in the making. We were closed down for about 2 weeks. I can see the rationale in his closing the paper; he was worried about the safety of the staff but to me that was one of the wrong decisions that he made. When we reopened he resigned to move to New Zealand so I took over until the shareholders decided they would bring in new management team and that was when I didn't see eye-to-eye and left.

#### **6. How did you assign stories to your reporters and what difficulties did you encounter?**

I have my own sources of information. It was quiet east to get information on what was happening in Parliament. There was a lot of information being churned up but of course we wanted to go behind the scenes and get our own story too and we did.

#### **7. Was there any time that you or your reporters felt that your life was threatened?**

Yes I remember the day I felt my life was really threatened and I was at the wrong place at the wrong time or maybe the right place at the wrong time. This was when a group of armed thugs from Parliament was marching down that Nasese road to the military checkpoint. The military was stopping them and I happened to be standing on the side when there was a confrontation. I was wondering why the lone soldier was stopping such a big-armed crowd from going through. He told the crowd that his orders were not to let them pass through and I thought he was being stupid. I started thinking of a place to hide if the shooting started and decided to climb the big mango tree. How I got on top of that

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<sup>7</sup> Mesake also had a column in the DP at the time called Daucina and he had predicted that there was going to be a coup.



mango tree I don't know, it was a life-threatening situation where I could have been caught in the crossfire. It was until I got on top of that mango tree that I saw under the bushes about 500 soldiers camouflaged and understood why that lone soldier was acting brave. But lucky nothing happened. It was good that good sense prevailed and Speight came down and talked to the crowd.

**8. Do you regret running any story during the coup?**

Not during the coup. The only regret I have is that Chaudhry didn't take heed of my warnings that a coup would happen.

Also a photo taken by our photographer was published in the paper and showed a police officer in civilian being punched up by the rebels. Another photo showed Malakai Tadulala, an officer of the Fijian Association Office, who went in there to get his car out and he got bashed up. We were there when he got bashed and took a picture of that. They threatened us and told us not to write such stories or run the pics but we continued.

One of the rebels also came to the office one Saturday and said he came to burn the office because he was unhappy with the stories we were writing. Luckily I was there and managed to calm him down and I told him that I would run his side of the story in return. He was a former parliamentarian.

**9. Did you ever think that the rebels might come in and were you scared?**

Well we run that risk but we got a job to do. I wasn't really scared. I was pretty confident because I went to school with one of the leaders of the rebel groups.

**10. Did this affect the way your paper ran stories?**

Oh no. They knew I had a job to do and they respected that. I remember we did a story and I spoke about how the planning for the coup was going on in the union club. And the next day when I went to the club one of them jokingly said to me, 'hey you almost exposed us'. I think in the end when you really come to think about it, all it needed was some kind of Public relations work with Chaudhry and these people would have sorted these things out.

**11. Do you think you acted professionally in your role as editor to your team during the coup? How did you do this?**

You are tempted in many ways to let in your personal opinion and no matter how high your position in the newsroom your political affiliation will show sometime but it's up to you get back on track.

**12. Did you go to someone for guidance?**

Oh yes. I consulted a lot and asked them what they thought of a particular angle and if I was on the right track. My friends from overseas called me on a daily basis and provided an outlet for me to see things from their point of view.

**13. If there was something you would change about how your paper went about reporting the coup what would it be and how would you change it?**

I think the biggest problem we had was straight news reporting. We didn't have much analysis and I would have liked to see more analysis done instead of just straight news reporting.

**14. Did you have the resources and staff to do more analytical stories?**

No I didn't. At the time our reporters were still coming to terms with what had happened and it took a lot of persuasion to come back. Also because we know the risks they had they were just told to go in and report on whatever they saw.

**15. Do you think Speight manipulated the media?**

He did in a lot of ways. You probably remember that a lot of the radio journalists stationed at parliament were George Speight's 'right-hand cherries'. They had easy access to him. And that was exactly what he wanted, he wanted to let the whole world know what he was doing and the journalists fell for that, particularly radio. For us we treated whatever that was coming out of parliament with great caution.

**16. Did any of your journalists stay over at that time?**

No. We told them not to.

**17. With radio, do you think it was ethical and right to give Speight a voice?**

No it was wrong. I think in future if we have learnt any lesson from May 2000, is that we should really just shut them out.

**18. What about the print media with the many press conferences he had, did you report on all of it?**

No we didn't. We just reported what we felt or believed was right to inform the people of what was happening. Like I said earlier the regret I have is no analysis was done and could have done more of that.

**19. Do you think some journalists or media got preferential treatment from Speight?**

Oh yes there was no doubt about that. It was obvious that some journalists were his darling boys.

**20. Which media do you think were given preferential treatment?**

I know for a fact that Radio Fiji and FM96 and Fiji Sun were given preference by Speight and ran Speight's propaganda.

**21. Do you think Speight was given too much publicity or prominence?**

I think he was. This is the unfortunate thing in Fiji, just because you have done something like that, then whatever you say goes to print without any in-depth analysis. I mean whatever Qarase says is not the gospel truth or whatever Speight says is truth. Everything Speight did was being reported. The only thing that was not reported was when Speight decided to go to the toilet!

**22. Do you think the Fiji media were ready for the May 2000 coup?**

I don't know.

**23. What do you think of the overseas media who covered the coup?**

I think they are as guilty as the local journalists. They were worse in the sense that they were looking for any little thing to spark anything and expose more. For example if 2 people are arguing they make it a big story.

I must say I was disappointed with some of the coverage given by the overseas media on the coup because quite a lot of it was exaggerated and was not really what happened.

**24. Do you think they understood what was actually going on and reported it accurately?**

No. They were looking for lootings, fighting's, mass killing like those in South Africa. They were trying to pick on small things. But when it didn't happen that way they started to pick on little instances like that. They know nothing about the culture, they know nothing about the cosmopolitan society that we have, and they just thought that this is just one great big disaster.

**25. Who do you think did a better job?**

I think the local media did a better job and gave a better perspective of what was happening. Well you really can't blame the overseas media, they don't know the place, don't know the country. Whatever they saw they reported.

**26. How can this be solved in the future?**

It boils down to a journalist's preparation. A lot of information is available through the Internet now and journalists can do research and study a country before they go in.

**27. Was there any kind of censorship placed by you on your reporters?**

The only censorship I placed on them was not to write anything that might jeopardise their own life. When the rebels trashed Fiji TV we were frightened and told our journalists that it was not worth risking their lives.

**28. Customary obligations of tribal and chiefly system may blur the view of a journalist, especially if he/she is indigenous. Was this a problem for you? How did you deal with this?**

I don't think that was a problem. I could see through a story and if I saw that it could create more ill feelings, then I would change that story and rewrite it. And if I came across propaganda then I would just disregard it.

**29. Did your paper suffer confusion during the coup?**

Yes. When a crisis like that happens you see different people standing up. Some support the coup, some don't and it becomes confusing what to report on.

**30. Did you provide any kind of support to your staff after the coup?**

Yes we had that a 2-week cooling down period when the paper was shut down. I suppose in that sense it was perhaps right. And when we came back on we came back as a team and were used to the situation.

**31. What is your view of the media generally in Fiji and what is its future?**

I think the media in Fiji is over exposed. We have 3 daily newspapers, 3 weekly newspapers in three vernaculars, 14 radio stations and 1 TV channel. But it also shows the ingenuity of the Fiji people. It shows that they can sustain and maintain all these information outlets and it is great for a small country like Fiji. The only problem we have is in television as there is no competition.

## Josua Tuwere



*Josua Tuwere was a journalist with the Fiji Times during the May 2000 coup. He now works for the University of the South Pacific.*

### **1. What motivated you to become a journalist?**

I've been interested in writing as far back as I can remember. My first job at FM96 in 1997 was motivated by own fascination with the medium and with the whole brand thing, "FM96", with Tukini Cama, Lenora... who didn't want to work with these guys? I'm just being honest here, won't give you too many political correct answers. Celebrity and being a "personality" was encouraged even in the newsroom.

### **2. Can you give a brief work history?**

94-95: Senior English/History teacher Marist Brothers High School, Suva  
96: Course Development Assistant, University Extension, USP (publishing)  
97-99: FM96 News  
2000-2001: Fiji Times

### **3. What training/education have you had as a journalist?**

In-house training at FM96 with Canadian consultant Peter May focusing on voice modulation, script writing and "on-the-scene reporting".

At Fiji Times, just a few sessions with Russell Hunter, on the various aspects of writing for newspaper. I got a sense that most of the reporters didn't think much of it because of the boring presentation and most of the stuff Russell taught we already knew.

### **4. Where were you when the coup happened?**

At home, Samabula, on leave after returning from covering Ratu Mara's 80th birthday celebrations in Lakeba and Vanuabalavu.

### **5. Can you give a brief account of what happened that day?**

I was asleep when I got this jarring phone call from a friend saying that there was a coup. The office called about half an hour later saying I needed to be at work, pronto! The Fiji Times van came and picked me up. Got to the office, there was a short briefing from

Akanisi Motufaga on what had transpired. I was sent to cover one of Speight's infamous press conferences later that day.

**6. What went through your mind? Was there anytime that you felt your life was threatened? When was this?**

I first felt threatened when I turned up at the parliamentary gate and saw the men in balaclavas and the guns they carried.

**7. What was your first story? What difficulties did you have? (Sources, pressures?)**

I can't remember all the details but I think the press conference that day was the first story I covered with Speight going on about the "cause" blah blah blah.

I remember making a decision mentally to dress as informally as possible, turn off my mobile, hide my notebook and to "drift into the crowd" so I could get a sense of what really was happening.

**8. Do you think you acted professionally in your role as a journalist during the coup? In what way did you act professionally?**

1. I didn't sleep with any of the rebels to get my stories!
2. I was particular about the language I used in my reports, avoiding hyperbole
3. I tried to provide regular updates, three or four a day
4. I made a conscious decision to avoid interviewing Ilisoni Ligairi, a relative, to avoid a perception of bias/prejudice

**9. Do you regret writing any story during the coup? Which story was this?**

Can't think of any, No

**10. If there was something you would change about how you went about reporting the coup, what would it be? How would you change it?**

I would spend less time in parliament and try and cover other stories, international angles, damage in Naitasiri, Suva, even sports. That's just personal because of Stockholm syndrome.

**11. Do you think Speight manipulated the media? Why?**

Yes, but that's because he was given the licence to do so... did anyone ask him straight in the face about why he had the right to speak on behalf of indigenous Fijians when his personal history suggested he had no inclinations at all towards this...he was given free reign.

**12. Do you think it was ethical and right to give Speight a voice on radio or TV, i.e. he was allowed to speak on radio?**

I think it really depends on the nature of what he's talking about...If there's a weak broadcaster who won't challenge Speight on different issues then you might as well not put Speight on. It's unethical when Speight is allowed to parade the "cause" on air especially when it's reaching villages that are supportive of it, wholeheartedly.



**13. Do you think some journalists got preferential treatment from Speight? How was this?**

I know some of the overseas journalist got "exclusives" from Speight. I was brushed off once by an Australian TV reporter and his crew when I tried to join their session with Speight. It's hard to say, though. On most days, the journalists and Speight and his "gang" would all get together for a grog session and we were free to ask anything we wanted.

**16. Compared the local media and the overseas media, who do you think did a better job? Why?**

I remember some of the local photographers standing in awe at the equipment the overseas journalists had brought with them, satellite phones, expensive laptops, zoom lens, TV cameras, booms etc. That captured some real memorable moments and the overseas media probably brought a whole new dimension to efficiency and getting the news to the people (we're talking global here!)

The local media provided a lot of the details about the major players, Speight, Ligairi, Mua and the complexities of inter-tribal/vanua relationships. There was in my view, a definite lack of analysis on the part of local journalists. The foreign commentators played into the "Fijian versus Indian" paradigm but the crisis was much more complicated than that. It's hard to say, both camps had their weaknesses and both had their strengths.

**17. Did you stay over at Parliament during the coup? If yes, do you think you were you still able to report objectively without bias or favouring Speight, as it has been said that if you're in a certain situation, under a certain environment, you may get swayed to believe a certain cause (Stockholm syndrome) .**

Yes, I remember towards the end of the hostage crisis catching myself being more sympathetic to what Speight was saying in his press conferences. I spent most nights there. I don't remember this actually affecting the way I wrote but my imagination was beginning to get the better of me. Wouldn't it be great to have a gun my hand, I remember thinking.

**18. Was there any kind of censorship placed by your editors to the way you reported or your reports?**

No. Not that I can remember.

**19. Customary obligations of tribal and chiefly system may blur the view of a journalist, especially if he/she is indigenous. Was this a problem for you? How did you deal with this?**

I didn't grow up in a "traditional" Fijian environment having grown up in Australia and amongst Pacific Islanders at the Pacific Theological College, Nasese, Suva so I don't recall this being much of an issue with me.

**20. A lack of leadership in newsrooms led to inability of reporters to function objectively under pressure of the crisis. Was this the case in your newsroom? Who was leader and do you think they did their job effectively? Why?**

Akanisi Motufaga ran much of the "show" during the crisis. She has a very strong personality and can be perceived as dominating at times. She tried rotating the journalists to cover different venues and stories. I don't think her brief was to provide analysis, just to get "the facts". Given how "green" her team was, and the circumstances, I think she provided able leadership and we were able to keep the paper and the news team running despite the temporary close of our competitors.

**21 Reporters couldn't function properly because of pressure from the crisis. Do you agree? Why?**

I think I was getting quite depressed after being in parliament so long. If my memory serves me correct I don't recall any Indo-Fijian reporter ever appearing in parliament. Fear of antagonising the masses gathered there? One New Zealand radio journalist started complaining about being stalked, the others thought she was just being paranoid. Another Fijian reporter from a rival daily went "walkabout" in parliament refusing to send stories and she was consequently suspended from duties. Two other Fiji TV reporters were suspended for faking a kidnapping when they were actually drinking beer. Stress relief?

**22. The media was criticised for suffering confusion over who was in power or was going to end up in power during the coup. Do you agree? Why?**

Maybe it was the perception created by the media but a lot of other non-media people were asking the same question. Who's running the country? It didn't help that there was so many people trying to fill the power vacuum...army, GCC, Commander Bill, Nationalists

**23. Some stations allowed George Speight supporters to make inflammatory statements live on radio; first to legitimise the events that had taken place and later to call for support to move into the parliamentary complex to boost Speight's forces**

Yes, I think in the early days, Commander Bill was allowed a lot of air time! Calling on all the nationalist sympathisers to rally to the cause.....Stuck in parliament in the evenings I actually didn't follow the TV news so I'm not qualified to comment. However, I was in parliament the evening Jone Dakuva was being interviewed on Fiji TV's Sunday evening talk show. I was allowed into a parliamentary room to watch. His comments got the supporters all agitated and they started taking their frustrations on reporters. In a strange twist of irony, our rescuers were the CRW guys who stuck in a room. There was me, Malakai Veisamasama, Tukini Cama and a crew from New Zealand. In their words, they said to me in Fijian, "we can't control their attitudes tonight so you just come and be with us. they won't come past us".

**Akanisi Motufaga was chief-of-staff during the May 2000 coup. She is now Sunday Times editor.**

**1. What motivated you to become a journalist?**

I went into the profession by accident.

**2. Can you give me a brief work history?**

Joined Fiji Times in June 1990. Between June 1994-June 1997 worked at the Daily Post and Island Business. Came back to Fiji Times as senior reporter in July 1997 and have been here since. Was Chief of Staff between Dec 1997 and September 2001. Spent two years on the subs desk. Was Deputy Editor June 2003 to July 2005. Now Sunday Times editor.

**3. What training/education have you had as a journalist?**

No university journalism training (there was no course then).

First three years on the job was very training-intense. At that time, FIMA (Fiji Islands Media Association) conducted workshops almost every three months for cadets. Attended all of them. This doesn't happen anymore.

**4. Where were you when the coup happened?**

Watching the protesters.

**5. Can you give a brief account of what happened that day?**

The protest march began at about 10am from the Flea Market. I left the protesters at the Botanical Gardens at about 11am and went back to the office. I knew then of the coup and went to Parliament to check on stories and our reporter.

Parliament was guarded. No one was allowed in or out. I attended Speight's second press conference in Parliament.

Chaudhry, his Cabinet ministers and MPs were held hostage. Looting had started in Suva city. By the evening, Yatu Lau building was torched. The city was deserted.

**6. What went through your mind? Was there anytime that you felt your life was threatened? When was this?**

I was concerned for the safety of my reporters. The situation was volatile so anything could happen. Also wanted to get the stories and meet the deadline. I felt sad while driving through the city.

I felt very threatened twice. First was on the second day when reporters were allowed to enter Parliament to attend the press conference. Shots were fired. We all thought we were under attack. In hindsight, it was the rebels who fired at nothing and were trying to get into our heads.

The second time was when I went to Parliament at night to pick up a reporter who had been held against her will in Parliament. It was pitch black and I didn't feel good at all about the situation. Thankfully, nothing happened.

I was always very cautious about the mob at Parliament when people were allowed in. One photographer had been bashed because he was mistaken for a policeman. The mood of the mob was very fickle and quick to anger.

**7. What was your first story? What difficulties did you have? (Sources, pressures?)**

The takeover. No difficulties with this story. People were willing to talk on the record.

**8. Do you think you acted professionally in your role as a journalist during the coup? In what way did you act professionally?**

Yes. I always presented balanced stories. I tried very hard not to show favour or disgust in the stories. I left all commentary to the editorial comment section.

I always evaluated the position, angle of stories (to ensure it wasn't slanted). Reported the facts and left it to the readers to make up their minds. I never fraternized with Speight & company.

**9. Do you regret writing any story during the coup? Which story was this?**

No

**10. If there was something you would change about how you went about reporting the coup, what would it be? How would you change it?**

On the first day, spent too much time focusing on what was happening in Parliament. Instead of what was happening in the city. Rectified that later.

**11. Do you think Speight manipulated the media? Why?**

He certainly tried to but the media got wise to his tactics.

**12. Do you think some journalists got preferential treatment from Speight? How was this?**

Yes. I think they drank grog with Speight & co. and were granted special access and inside information. For example, when the hostages were freed, they were told beforehand.

**13. Do you think Speight was given too much publicity or prominence? Why?**

No. Speight had taken over the country. For 50-something days he called the shots. He wasn't given too much prominence or publicity.

**14. What do you think of the overseas journalists who covered the coup? Do you think they did a good job? Do you think they understood what was going on and reported it accurately?**

The journalists I befriended were great. They knew Fijian history. If they weren't sure, they asked. They weren't afraid to ask Speight tough questions and from what I read of their reports, they were accurate.

Of course, there were some overseas journalists who lost the plot and reported wrongly. These are the ones William Parkinson rightly called "parachute journalists".

**15. Compared the local media and the overseas media, who do you think did a better job? Why?**

They complemented each other.

**16. Did you stay over at Parliament during the coup? If yes, do you think you were still able to report objectively without bias or favouring Speight, as it has been said that if you're in a certain situation, under a certain environment, you may get swayed to believe a certain cause (Stockholm syndrome).**

Yes, I stayed over at Parliament. So did a few of my reporters. In Parliament, we provided our own food, drink and phone line. We did not rely on anyone to give us anything. The reason for staying in Parliament was to ensure that we did not miss a story.

To avoid the problem of bias, we ensured that no one reporter stayed two consecutive nights at Parliament. We had a roster. I think we did this for about two weeks before we changed it to having one person stay very late but not sleep over.

Thankfully, we didn't have the problem of reporters taking sides.

**17. Was there any kind of censorship placed by your editors to the way you reported or your reports?**

No.

**18. Were you harassed in any way during the coup? If yes, how and what did you do about it?**

No.

*Ewart Bansley is a journalist for TVNZ.*

**1. What motivated you to become a journalist?**

I was doing the wrong course at secondary school, engineering, and my English teacher steered me towards journalism by mentioning my writing abilities to two papers in the small NZ country town where I lived. Both papers offered me jobs and I accepted the one from the daily paper over the one published weekly.

**2. Can you give a brief work history?**

I worked on the country newspaper for about 3 years in the mid-1960s before any sort of journalism school had opened in NZ. I then worked on a paper in Wellington as a general and sports reporter before going on to papers in Rotorua and Hastings. I spent 5 years in Britain working for the British Press Association and the BBC as well as working in pubs, hotels, factories and offices. On my return to NZ I joined Radio New Zealand as a sub-editor then went reporting, which included time in Parliament. I joined TVNZ about 23 years ago doing sports and economic reporting, spending a couple of years in Sydney as TVNZ's Australia Correspondent, and am now the Pacific Correspondent for One News.

**3. Where were you when the coup happened?**

I was in Wellington when I first heard about the coup and arrived in Fiji later that day on the last flight to leave NZ. It was a scramble to get back to Auckland, pack, get to Auckland airport, doing a live report into TVNZ's 6pm news, and catch the plane [which was delayed because of the coup]. There were no rental cars in Nadi and we had to hire a small van to take us to Suva. It was a tight squeeze: 5 people plus the driver plus all our equipment. The drive took about 5/6 hours.

**4. Was there anytime that you felt your life was threatened? When was this?**

I felt our life was being threatened every time we went to Parliament and especially when the policeman was murdered in the back by Speight's thugs and Fiji's TV station was ransacked. Many journalists left Suva after that ... we came back the next day when the military took control.

**5. What was your first story? What difficulties did you have? (Sources, pressures?)**

My first story was filed on the Saturday after the coup. We had no trouble getting information or interviews, apart from one army officer angry about the looting in Suva and the coverage it was getting. Our biggest problem was making sure we had access to the satellite when we booked it because of the demands from other foreign journalists wanting to use it too. Our other pressure, was time, and meeting our deadlines.

**6. Do you think you acted professionally in your role as a journalist during the coup? In what way did you act professionally?**

I believe I did act professionally by not taking sides ... keeping a personal difference from all sides ... and making sure my stories were balanced. Basic journalism.



**7. Do you regret writing any story during the coup? Which story was this?**

I do not regret one single thing I reported. Although one person close to Speight objected to something I said and sued me for libel.

**8. If there was something you would change about how you went about reporting the coup, what would it be? How would you change it?**

There was nothing I would change. The quality of my work was acknowledged by my fellow journalists and I won NZ's premier TV reporting prize that year for my work in Fiji.

**9. Do you think Speight manipulated the media? Why?**

I'm not aware that he manipulated anyone. Certainly not me. In fact, he gave TVNZ an international scoop by calling us to parliament at midnight for his first interview with the international media. I do think some journalists spent a lot more time than was necessary at parliament and even put their personal safety at risk.

**10. Do you think some journalists got preferential treatment from Speight? How was this?**

I'm not aware of anyone, apart from the incident involving us, getting any preferential treatment. Speight would talk to anyone.

**11. Do you think Speight was given too much publicity or prominence? Why?**

I don't think he was given too much publicity. He had seized a democratically elected parliament at gunpoint and was threatening to kill his hostages.

**12. What do you think of the local journalists who covered the coup – Do you think they did a good job; do you think they understood what was going on and reported it accurately?**

They seemed to do a pretty good job - although given Fiji's size and family ties some appeared too close to Speight and his cronies to be objective. I think the journalists and other staff at Fiji TV are among the bravest people I have ever met.

**13. Comparing the local and the overseas media, who do you think did a better job? Why?**

I can't answer this because I never saw the work of any foreign journalists. I made more than a dozen trips to Fiji that year alone to cover the coup and its aftermath. When I wasn't TVNZ sent someone to replace me. I thought that was outstanding commitment by TVNZ when just about every other overseas news organisation had deserted the place very quickly.

**14. Did you stay over at Parliament during the coup? If yes, do you think you were you still able to report objectively without bias or favouring Speight, as it has been said that if you're in a certain situation, under a certain environment, you may get swayed to believe a certain cause. (Stockholm syndrome)**

I refused to stay over at parliament, though I did have to "rescue" two journalists who did.

**15. Were you harassed in any way during the coup? If yes, how and what did you do about it?**

Not really. Except after the ransacking on the TV station when most foreign and local journalists left Suva when we were told Speight's mob were coming down to wreck our hotel. I wish we hadn't left on hindsight. We came back the next day. I did get a bit twitchy at night driving alone to Nadi airport

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