

Women, the Press, and the Fiji Coups d'état

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Abstract

Coups d'état are major events that gain the attention of governments and citizens alike. As a result, the international media become saturated with stories surrounding them - and most of those stories are about men. This article examines how women were portrayed by the press in the aftermath of the Fijian coups and relates their stories as they appeared in the daily papers. By analysing the Fiji Times and the Fiji Sun for twelve days following three of the coups, evidence will show that Fiji's press has begun to recognise the role played by women as decision-makers and human rights activists and that, during these times of crisis, they moved from the periphery of the news in 1987 to play a more central role in 2000 and 2006.

Brief background to the coups

On 11 April 1987, a coalition consisting of the Fiji Labour Party and the National Federation Party won the election, in the process defeating the Alliance Party. Dr Timoci Bavadra became Prime Minister of a government that contained both Fijian-Indian and ethnic Fijian MPs. Fijian nationalist groups were outraged by the result, which they believed threatened Fijian sovereignty. Following weeks of unrest, Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka and a group of soldiers carried out Fiji's first military coup on 14 May 1987, incarcerating members of the government that had been sworn in just days before, first at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks and then at the Prime Minister's residence. On 21 May, the Great Council of Chiefs announced their support for the coup and Bavadra and his cabinet members were released from captivity. On 22 May, the Governor-General swore in a Council of Advisers, which consisted of members of the defeated Alliance Party and the military. Six months later, displeased with progress on power sharing, Rabuka carried out a second

coup on 25 September, declared Fiji a Republic, and announced a military-backed transitional government (Ramesh, 2008).

Fiji's third coup occurred when civilian George Speight entered Parliament on 19 May 2000, forcefully confining members of the People's Coalition Government in the parliamentary complex for 56 days. The coup followed an election on 19 May 1999, which was held under a new multiracial constitution. The Fiji Labour Party won the majority of seats and party leader, Mahendra Chaudhry, became the country's first Fijian-Indian Prime Minister, creating a cabinet comprising MPs from three parties (Ramesh, 2008). Following the Speight coup, the Fiji Military Forces established order and, on 3 July 2000, the military commander, Frank Bainimarama, named Laisenia Qarase as the head of a new interim government. Speight, who attracted the epithet 'failed businessman' (Field, Baba and Nabobo-Baba, 2005: 101), released the hostages gradually, the last ones leaving the parliamentary complex after the coup collapsed on 13 July. Trouble continued and, on 2 November 2000, a group of soldiers sympathetic to the Speight coup mutinied at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks. During the mutiny, the military commander narrowly escaped death (Ramesh, 2008).

On 5 December 2006, Fiji experienced its fourth coup. Following many months of dissension between the Qarase-led government and the military over a number of controversial bills, Bainimarama dismissed Parliament and assumed executive authority. Ratu Josefa Iloilo was retained as President and, on 4 January 2007, he appointed an interim government. One month after seizing control, Bainimarama was sworn into office as interim Prime Minister by President Iloilo. On 13 April 2007, Bainimarama suspended the Great Council of Chiefs. At the South Pacific Forum Leaders Conference held in Tonga on 18 October 2007, in the face of considerable international pressure, he agreed to hold democratic elections by March 2009 (Ramesh, 2008). Despite this assurance, the following year, while addressing the United Nations in New York, Bainimarama formally announced that elections would not be held in 2009 and did not suggest a future date for the return to democratic rule (Fiji One Television News, 27 September 2008).

The Global Media Monitoring Project

Women worldwide feature far less in the media than do men. Evidence to support this claim has been collected by the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in three separate reports carried out at five yearly intervals over a period of 10 years beginning in 1995. The project is an

international collective effort to monitor news content appearing in the press, radio and television on just one day in an attempt to provide a global picture of the representation of women and men in the media. Results from the 2005 project revealed that, internationally, women were just 21 percent of the news subjects; that is, the people who are interviewed or whom the news is about. The report noted that this was an increase on 1995, when 17 percent of news subjects were women. That percentage had risen just one percent to 18 percent in 2000 and there was a further increase of 3 percent in 2005: in other words, the increase in news stories featuring women rose just 4 percent point in 10 years.

Fiji first became involved in the project when the third GMMP was undertaken on 16 February 2005. The findings for Fiji revealed that, over all the media, only 20 percent of the people featured in the news were women but that newspapers, at 31 percent, showed a significantly higher female representation. The results also revealed that most of the stories depicting women placed them in the category of victims of crime and violence (Fiji Media Watch, 26 February 2006).

Methodology

Data collection

By using newspaper documentation of women's activities during the coups, it was hoped to paint a more optimistic picture of their lives than that recorded by the GMMP project and to show how they had participated in Fiji's political arena. The *Fiji Times* and *Fiji Sun* were chosen for analysis because only newspapers were available: radio broadcasts have been lost and television broadcasting had not begun at the time of the 1987 coups. The *Fiji Post*, Fiji's small third daily newspaper, was not included in the analysis as there was insufficient archival material to support the research.

Gaps in the material available were caused by censorship following the coups of 1987. After the first coup on 14 May, both the *Fiji Times* and *Fiji Sun* appeared as usual the following day, carrying stories and photographs covering the momentous events of the previous day. At that point, Rabuka, the coup leader, shut down the presses for six days and heavily censored radio broadcasts. Both papers resumed printing on 21 May 1987 (Dean and Ritova, 1988). The closure of the papers meant that there was no newspaper record of the events following the coup and, consequently, no material available for analysis.

After the second coup on 25 September 1987, Rabuka again closed

down the newspapers. The *Fiji Times* did not restart publishing until early November while the *Fiji Sun* did not resume publication until the following year (Dean and Ritova, 1988). By contrast, during the 2000 coup period there were no restrictions on the media and journalists flew in from around the world to cover the events (Field, Baba and Nabobo-Baba, 2005). Following the 2006 coup, intimidation by the military regime caused the *Fiji Times* to withhold publication for one day and *Television One* cancelled a news broadcast on the night of the coup (Singh, 2006).

Data were collected for a continuous period of 12 days following each coup. That length of time was chosen for analysis because there were so few stories about women in 1987 and 2000. The data showed that women were absent entirely from the pages of both the *Fiji Times* and *Fiji Sun* after the first seven days following the 14 May 1987 coup. Similarly, following the 2000 coup, the *Fiji Sun* ran no story featuring women after the seventh day although the *Fiji Times* published its final story mentioning women on day eleven. Considerable improvement was seen following the 2006 coup, with women featuring in news stories up until day twelve.

During the data collection process, significant stories about women were retained for later analysis. This section of research has not been completed and, consequently, this article does not contain detailed qualitative comparative analysis of the content or the use of language.

Quantitative analysis

The first quantitative task was to count every story relating to women who were either in decision-making roles or who were human rights or peace activists during the coup periods. The sample group included Members of Parliament (MPs) and Senators who had lost their positions in the coups, businesswomen, public servants, and representatives of local – not international - non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Where the same woman was mentioned several times, each individual story was counted. In addition, photographs with captions about women were recorded. A comparison was made between the *Fiji Times* and the *Fiji Sun* to see which paper carried the greater coverage of women's news and opinions regarding the coups. Secondly, the placement of these stories and photographs was recorded to ascertain where articles about women appeared in the newspapers. In this case, stories were divided between those appearing from page one to page seven - where the 'hard' news is published - and those that appeared further back in paper among the 'soft' news. Thirdly, data was analysed to reveal if the roles of chiefly

and non-chiefly women had changed between 1987 and 2006. It was anticipated that there would be an increase in the number of stories about non-chiefly women over the period.

The Findings

Number of stories

In May 1987, readers would have been hard pressed to find any information about women's activities following the coup as a total of just nine stories appeared in Fiji's newspapers. By 2000, the number had risen to 39 and, in 2006, the total rose steeply to 109. Much of the increase in coverage was due to the increasing importance of women's organisations which, in Fiji, are well-organised and strong institutions. Following the 1987 coup, not one woman's organisation was mentioned in the newspapers but, after the 2000 coup, five organisations received coverage. These were the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Fiji Muslim Women's League; National Council of Women Fiji, Women in Business; and the Young Women's Christian Association. By 2006, the number had increased to nine and included the Catholic Women's League; Cakaudrove Women's Council; femLINKPacific; Fiji Nurses Association; Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Fiji Women's Rights Movement; Fiji National Council of Women; Soqosoqo Vakamarama; and Women's Action for Change.

The increasing visibility of women was also aided by the growing number of women acting as spokespeople for various organisations. In 2000, the female spokesperson for the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre was mentioned in the press. In 2006, the Fiji Council of Social Services; Pacific Centre for Public Integrity; Partners in Community Development Fiji; and the Young People Concerned Network all had female spokespersons. Besides female Senators and MPs, the public service and other agencies were being headed by women. These included the chief executive officers for the Ministries of Information, Education and Women, the Fijian Affairs Board, the Fiji Human Rights Commission, the Great Council of Chiefs, and the acting chief executive officer of the Fiji National Provident Fund; the Vice-President of the Fiji Law Society; the Consumer Council of Fiji; the Commerce Commission; and the Police.

Table 1 gives the number of stories mentioning women over the 12 days following the coups and compares the coverage appearing in the two newspapers. The data shows that the *Fiji Times* consistently gave slightly greater coverage to women's activities than the *Fiji Sun*.

Coup	Fiji Times	Fiji Sun	Total
1987	6	3	9
2000	22	17	39
2006	57	52	109
Total:	85	72	157

Placement of stories

One indicator of the importance of a story is its placement. Depending on its size, the first seven pages of any newspaper contain the ‘hard’ news about politics and, in this case, stories about the coups. Table 2 shows how stories about women during the coup periods moved from the back of the papers to the first seven pages. In 1987, the *Fiji Times* placed every story (6 stories) relating to women and the coup on page eight or further back in the paper. This proportion changed in 2000, with almost half the female-related stories appearing in the front of the paper (7 out of 15 stories). By 2006, there had been an almost complete reversal, with nearly every story about women’s activity appearing at the front (48 out of 52 stories). The *Fiji Sun* consistently placed women’s stories towards the front, starting in 1987 (2 out of 3 stories), to 2000 (13 out of 17 stories) and 2006 (37 out of 52 stories). The migration of stories involving women from the back to the front of the papers was encouraging as it suggested that editors had recognised that women’s activities were valid, important and of interest to readers and deserved to be included in the hard news section of the papers.

Coup	Fiji Times			Fiji Sun		
	Pages 1-7	Pages 8-24	Total	Pages 1-7	Pages 8-24	Total
1987	0	6	6	2	1	3
2000	7	15	22	13	4	17
2006	48	4	52	37	14	51

Chiefly and Non-chiefly Women

It had been anticipated that women with high chiefly status would have received the bulk of press, especially following the 1987 coup, but

this was not borne out by the research. As Table 3 illustrates, three individual chiefly women received coverage in 1987. This increased to seven in 2000 and remained at seven in 2006. At the same time, the number of non-chiefly women engaged with post-coup activities rose from five in 1987 to 19 in 2000 and 32 in 2006. The sharp increase in non-chiefly women playing significant roles in post-coup activities reflected profound changes in Fijian society, where well educated women were achieving high status through their work in government agencies, civil society and NGOs.

Table 3: Chiefly and non-chiefly women named in the *Fiji Times* and *Fiji Sun* over 12 days following the May 1987 and the coups of 2000 and 2006.

Coup	Individual chiefly women named	Individual non-chiefly women named	Total women
1987	3	5	8
2000	7	19	26
2006	7	32	39

Stereotyping Women in the Media

The GMMP drew attention to the tendency of some journalists and media practitioners to produce stories that gave stereotyped images of women, placing these stories into two categories. First, stories that were blatantly stereotyped might ‘use language or visual images that denigrate women; that trivialise women’s achievements; or glorify or justify male violence’ ((2005b: 3). Second, stories that were more subtly stereotyped contained ‘unstated assumptions about the roles of women and men; conveyed stereotyped beliefs about women, such as that women were emotionally fragile; or stories whose range of sources was limited only to men, or only to women, conveying the idea to the audience that this topic was of relevance just to one half of the population’ (GMMP, 2005b: 3; White House Project, 2001).

Blatant stereotyping – the western experience

Feminists in the west have long accused the media of distorting images of women (van Zoonen, 1994) and being obsessed with their physical appearance. Numerous examples exist - and female decision-makers have not been exempted from scrutiny. In her book, *Media Tarts: How The Australian Press Frames Female Politicians*, Julia Baird related the experience of Senator Amanda Vanstone, who was nicknamed ‘Fatty’ by

the press and told she ‘couldn’t get a job as a road bump’ (2004: 128). New Zealand’s Prime Minister, Helen Clark, had to endure endless advice from the media about her wardrobe and what to wear on special occasions (Fountaine, 2002) and Hillary Clinton’s appearance has been examined by the media ever since she became the First Lady in 1990. Even the reputable broadsheet, the *Washington Post*, felt free to discuss her clothing choices. Written by a female journalist and headed ‘Hillary Clinton’s Tentative Dip Into New Neckline Territory’, the article began:

She was talking on the Senate floor about the burdensome cost of higher education. She was wearing a rose-colored blazer over a black top. The neckline sat low on her chest and had a subtle V-shape. The cleavage registered after only a quick glance. No scrunch-faced scrutiny was necessary. There wasn’t an unseemly amount of cleavage showing, but there it was. Undeniable (Givhan, 20 July 2007).

If their physical appearance was not the topic, elite women in the west often were belittled in the media through the use of cartoons and caricatures, many of them very cruel. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was lampooned frequently, often being drawn as a masculine Winston Churchill with a large cigar hovering near her lips. When British left-wing supporters were unhappy with the friendly relationship between the conservative Thatcher and the right-wing United States President, Ronald Reagan, she was portrayed as being in love with him. In a lurid political poster, Thatcher was pictured as Scarlett O’Hara being scooped into the arms of Reagan as Rhett Butler over the slogan ‘She promised to follow him to the ends of the earth: he said that could easily be arranged!’ (Burchill, 2005: 358).

Subtle Stereotyping: the Western Experience

The GMMP noted that women’s absence from the media overall conveys to the audience the idea that the topic under discussion is relevant only to men and that it is an insidious form of stereotyping (2005b). Baird found that ‘the average female politician struggles more with invisibility than with the excessive attention or curiosity shown by the press towards the novel political women of the 1970s’ (2004: 240). In the United States, the White House Project found more evidence of women’s exclusion from the news media when the project examined the sex of the participants invited to take part in weekend television talk shows. The talk shows featured a range of guests from the political spectrum and

were considered influential in setting the political agenda in the weeks and months ahead. Not only were the guests seen as important contributors to the political agenda, the White House Project argued that the talk shows also had an ‘authority-setting effect’ because the participants were granted the status of ‘experts, leaders and authorities in their fields’ (2001: 5). The project’s research found that only 11 percent of the guests invited onto the shows were women, and that female guests were invited back less frequently than male guests. By denying women a voice on the talk shows, the White House Project claimed that women leaders were being seriously disadvantaged in that they were being denied the opportunity to show the public their potential as leaders, debaters and authority figures (2001).

Besides their total absence from the media, women face other forms of subtle stereotyping. By using heroic rhetoric to paint women as uncorrupted and above the rough and tumble of the sordid business of politics, the media build up unrealistic expectations about their performance (Ross, 2004). When Michelle Bachelet was elected President of Chile in 2006, an important religious figure, Cardinal Francisco Javier Errazuriz, said of her:

The President-elect is a symbol of the reuniting of Chileans, of peace among us, of a reconciled country; someone was battered by hate, but preferred to overcome it through understanding, through tolerance, and as she has said, through love (Chile Reports, 2006: 2).

Going into office bearing such a heavy burden of exaggerated saintliness seemed unreasonable and should Bachelet fail to live up to such high expectations, the media may be quick to criticise her and her performance as leader.

Another form of subtle stereotyping occurs when women are the first of their sex to aspire to achieving a particular goal, resulting in some of them attracting considerable media space. Hillary Clinton received unprecedented coverage during her attempt to become the first female Presidential nominee for the United States Democratic Party in 2008. Similarly, an Australian politician, Natasha Stott Despoja, who was always described in terms of her youth and beauty, received years of close media attention. She became the youngest woman in Australia to lead a political party but, when she lost her position, the media launched a critical attack on her performance. By building up unreasonable expectations, this form of media attention can result in overexposure of the politician in the media and subsequent disillusionment by the public (Baird, 2004).

Protection for Women in Fiji

Women in the Fijian media have not received the kind of treatment meted out to their western sisters. In general, women have been reported objectively and without the overt sexism seen overseas. This could be because, historically, Fiji has experienced a number of influential women in leadership positions, which has meant that the public is used to seeing them as decision-makers and authority figures. Most of these women have, until recently, either been chiefs themselves or have come from chiefly families (Nicholl, 2007). In Fijian culture, it would be unthinkable to be rude to a chief, to satirise them, and to treat them in a less than respectful manner. This attitude was reflected in the press during the coup periods. This does not mean that women in Fiji were immune to stereotyping; rather, the form of stereotyping they endured was subtle rather than blatant. In particular, women tended to be invisible.

In addition to cultural norms, women in Fiji are protected from discrimination in the media by a number of conventions. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Fiji in 1995, gives women the protection of international law. Signatories to CEDAW 'have the obligation to ensure the equal rights of men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights' (United Nations, CEDAW, Article 1, 1979). Also in 1995, Fiji agreed to the principles contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. In particular, Strategic Objective J requires countries to 'increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication' (United Nations, 1995). Mass media and advertising organisations were encouraged to promote non-stereotyped images of women and to establish professional guidelines and codes of conduct that address violent, degrading or pornographic materials concerning women in the media, including advertising (United Nations, 1995). Besides these international commitments, women in Fiji remain protected by provisions in the Bill of Rights contained within the 1997 Constitution. The Bill of Rights promised that 'every person has the right to equality before the law' and that 'a person must not be unfairly discriminated against, directly or indirectly, on the ground of his or her actual or supposed personal characteristics or circumstances, including ... gender' (Constitution of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, Section 38 (1) and (2) (a), 1997).

The media industry also imposes expectations of fair and balanced journalism on its employees through adherence to the Media Council's Code of Ethics and Practice. Journalists are expected to take their part in

protecting women from discrimination. The Code requires them to ‘avoid discriminatory or denigratory references to people’s gender, race, colour, religion, sexual orientation or preference, physical or mental disability or illness, or age’. Also, journalists ‘should not refer to a person’s gender, race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, or physical or mental illness in a prejudicial or pejorative manner except where it is strictly relevant to the matter reported or adds significantly to readers’, viewers’, or listeners’ understanding of that matter’ (Media Council of Fiji, 2005: 5).

Commentary - Women in the Fiji coups

Missed opportunities

When providing a framework for qualitative news analysis, the GMMP drew attention to a number of tendencies in news coverage. One of those tendencies was described as ‘missed opportunities. Stories that could have been enriched and expanded by including a wider range of sources and viewpoints, or by shedding light on different implications of women and men’ (2005b: 4). The coverage of women in the Fiji press following the coups abounded with missed opportunities including stories about women that were half-told; the omission of information vital to the veracity of stories; the uncritical use of press releases, and the failure to accord women the courtesy of their own names.

Missed opportunities were most obvious following the May 1987 coup. A good example occurred when the *Fiji Times* carried a large photograph above a caption reading ‘Amelia Rokotuivuna, a strong Labour Party supporter, being arrested by police at Sukuna Park after leading a march from Veiuto to Sukuna Park on Sunday’ (21 May 1987: 11). No information was given about the march such as its purpose or the demands of the protestors. Equally importantly, the newspaper provided no background information about Rokotuivuna or about what happened to her following her arrest.

Frequently, instead of a news story, the coverage in 1987 took the form of large photographic essays with short captions. Often the women in the photographs were not named while men, even if they were without any particular status, were. A photographic essay, taken of the aftermath of widespread rioting in central Suva, carried captions revealing some information about the subjects. For instance, one was labelled ‘Mr Amzad Ali, also a victim of the rioting’ yet, when it came to an image of a female, she remained nameless, the caption reading ‘A woman peers out anxiously through a gaping hole’ (*Fiji Times*, 22 May 1987: 12).

In 1987, the newspapers also failed to provide information to their readers about initiatives to bring about peace. For example, a photograph captioned ‘Praying for Fiji . . . these women and children kept a vigil outside the Suva Civic Centre last week while the Great Council of Chiefs was meeting inside’ (*Fiji Times*, 28 May 1987: 8). The women and children in the photograph were not named and no one was interviewed to find out why the group had chosen to take part in the vigil, the purpose of the vigil, or what the (nameless) organisers were hoping to achieve.

Coup Leaders’ Wives

Coup leaders’ wives and partners were invisible in the Fijian press. As the deposed senators and MPS left the stage after the May 1987 coup, the coup leader, Rabuka, enjoyed enormous publicity. In a well-illustrated double-page spread in the *Fiji Times*, Rabuka appeared in photographs taken with Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Edward yet no photograph appeared of him with his family. In the accompanying article, his wife is mentioned just once as his ‘teacher wife Suluweti’ (1987: 8-9). Similarly, in 2000, the *Fiji Times* described George Speight’s partner as ‘22-year old Torika Rawlinson’ under the heading ‘Speight’s family safe in hiding’ (26 May 2000: 2). Absent entirely from the pages of the papers was the wife of the 2006 coup leader, Bainimarama: she did not receive one mention in the press during the 12-day research period.

Prime Ministers’ Wives

On average, prime ministers wives were more visible in the press than the wives of the coup leaders. The wife of the first deposed Prime Minister, Timoci Bavadra, was Adi Kuini Bavadra. On the day following the May 1987 coup, she was interviewed at her home about the previous day’s events: ‘She sat on the floor in the lounge of the Prime Minister’s residence at Veiuoto with a box of tissues in front of her, but no tears were shed . . . “I must not be overtaken by emotion”, she said’ (*Fiji Times*, 15 May 1987: 9).

The *Fiji Times* interviewed Adi Kuini again during the following week, after she had been held captive by the dissidents in her house” ‘Kuini Bavadra’s eyes are deep pools of anguish . . . reflecting the horror of her six days of captivity at gun point’ (*Fiji Times*, 21 May 1987: 8).

The *Fiji Times* depicted Adi Kuini as the quintessential emotional woman in 1987 yet she was made of stronger stuff than the articles suggested. Following the death of her husband on 3 November 1989, she remarried and, as Adi Kuini Speed, became leader of the Fiji Labour Party

and, in 1999, was the Deputy Prime Minister. Following the 2000 coup, she was interviewed by the *Fiji Times* in Canberra where she was ill and receiving treatment for cancer. On this occasion, she condemned the coup as ‘unFijian, unChristian and undemocratic’ (*Fiji Times*, 20 May 2000: 15) and said ‘she was suspicious of George Speight and his character’ (*Fiji Times*, 22 May 2000: 24). By allowing Adi Kuini to speak in her own words in calling Speight both ‘unFijian’ and ‘unChristian’, the *Fiji Times* conveyed her strong feelings to the readers about both the coup and its leader.

The wife of the second deposed Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, Virmati Chaudhry, was poorly treated by the press. Under the headline ‘Veermati willing to forgive captors’, Jone Dakuvula, described by the *Fiji Times* as a former Fiji Labour Party official, revealed details of a private conversation he had held with Mrs Chaudhry and described in intimate detail the Chaudhrys’ living arrangements. At the end of a lengthy story, in which Dakuvula described her house as ‘very clean’, the reader was informed that ‘Mrs Chaudhry had declined to talk to the media about her ordeal, saying it was not timely considering the situation the nation was in’ (*Fiji Times*, 30 May 2000: 7). This story appeared to break many journalistic conventions, most particularly Mrs Chaudhry’s request for privacy, which was ignored by the journalist, and also the patronising tone of the article.

During the 2006 coup period, the wife of the third deposed Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase, received no press attention and was referred to only as ‘Mr Qarase and his wife, Leba’ (*Fiji Times*, 7 December 2006: 3). This could have been an opportunity for journalists to examine the wider ramifications of the coup and, as suggested by the GMPP, Mrs Qarase could have been asked to shed some light on the different implications for the families of those affected by the military takeover (2005b).

Emotional Women

The media have been accused of stereotyping women as emotionally fragile and, consequently, incapable of taking on leadership roles. Examples of this bias have been mentioned previously in relation to Adi Kuini Bavadra but other examples were found during data collection. In 1987, a story appeared in the *Fiji Times*, which not only painted a picture of an emotional political wife but also identified her only by her husband’s name. As part of a longer story about the detention of MPs at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks, the *Fiji Times* wrote:

A group of people who got too close to the gate were asked to

leave immediately at gunpoint. Among them was the wife of Government Backbencher Mrs James Shankar Singh. She stood under an umbrella and watched. “When my husband saw me he came out and waved at me from the window”, Mrs Singh said. Just then, her eyes welled as tears started rolling down her cheeks. Quickly she pulled out a handkerchief and wiped eyes but did not move from her position (15 May 1987: 9).

After 1987, stories were written in a more objective journalistic style, women were accorded their own names, and their words were reported without editorial comment. After the 2000 coup, only a few emotional outbursts reached the printed page. In May 2000, the *Fiji Sun* reported that ‘Suva Open’s Ofa Swan broke down and cried in Parliament. She was joined by Assistant Minister in the Prime Minister’s office, Adi Ema Tagicakibau’ (20 May 2000: 7). Also in 2000, MP Marieta Rigamoto, who was held captive by the dissidents in the parliamentary complex, said that ‘if things worsened, she would be willing to sacrifice everything for Rotuma’ (Rotuma was her electorate) (*Fiji Times*, 21 May 2000: 5). Finally, following the 2006 coup, only one emotionally charged story about a deposed female MP appeared in press:

. . . State Minister for Housing, Adi Asenaca Caucau, said she would die for the truth, the people she served and those who voted her into office. She maintained she was still a State minister although she was exercising her duties from an undisclosed location. “The PM is still my boss. He hasn’t sacked me and I haven’t resigned. I had a landslide victory in the last general election and it’s the people that put me in Parliament, not the army. I do not support any illegal takeover”, Adi Asenaca said (*Fiji Times*, 7 December 2006: 3).

Hostages of Speight

By 2000, the teary-eyed stories of 1987 about passive women caught up in the coup had been replaced by portrayals of women taking incisive action under difficult circumstances. A number of these women were taken hostage by Speight, the coup leader, and held in the parliamentary complex. Besides the danger to their health and mental wellbeing, captives had to endure other indignities. Ben Padarath, the son of the Minister for Women and Culture, Lavinia Padarath, said that his mother was ‘okay, but depressed’. The story continued:

It is understood that some family members have been disturbed

about how the gunmen at the gates were ridiculing hostages' undergarments and private things (Fiji Sun, 20 May 2007: 7).

Hostage of Speight - Adi Koila Nailatikau

Adi Koila Nailatikau, the Minister for Tourism, was one of the women detained by the dissidents in the parliamentary complex along with the other MPs and Senators. The *Fiji Sun* reported that 'it is understood that the Minister for Tourism, Adi Koila argued with Ratu Timoci [Silatolu] in the parliamentary chamber last night. It is understood Adi Koila pointed out that the interim government did not have the support of the military' (21 May 2000: 1). The following day, another story about her appeared under the heading 'Koila appeals for peace'. The story read 'Ousted Tourism Minister and daughter of President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, has pleaded for calm and rational thinking' (*Fiji Times*, 22 May 2000: 5).¹

Other chiefly women joined in efforts to persuade Speight to release Adi Koila and the other hostages he was holding in the parliamentary complex. Headed 'Speight rejects chiefs' offer, the *Fiji Times* reported:

A committee formed by the chiefs arrived at the parliamentary complex at about 6 pm led by council [Great Council of Chiefs] deputy chairperson and Tailevu chief Adi Litia Cakobau. The delegation included Ro Teimumu Kepa. Ro Teimumu was escorted by Mr Speight to see her niece, Transport Minister Adi Koila Nailatikau. Chiefs had proposed that all hostages be released, Mr Speight and his group be given amnesty, the 1997 Constitution be amended and called for an interim government headed by the President (6 May 2000: 1)

Adi Koila was again newsworthy following the 2006 coup. Headed 'NGOs will challenge military rule', the story read:

Meanwhile, a senator and her husband were grilled by the military over their alleged involvement in signing up as interim Cabinet Ministers in the military government. Senator Adi Koila Nailatikau said senior military officers arrived at her home in Battery Road on Monday night to question her about media reports linking her to the military government's line up. She said her husband Ratu Epeli Nailatikau arrived in the coun-

¹ The story also recorded that the other women MPs held captive were Marieta Rigamoto, Adi Ema Tagicakibau, Lavenia Padarath and Akanisi Koroitamana.

try the same night. She categorically denied that her family including her husband and siblings had anything to do with the interim Military Cabinet line up. She said someone had deliberately put out a list of people to create mischief. 'I am aware my name was on that list, but I'm not sure whether my husband is part of that', she said. Adi Koila said she would not report the matter to police because she had a clear conscience (Fiji Times, 6 December 2006: 4).

Next day, Adi Koila condemned the military takeover, saying she blamed Speight's coup for killing her parents, Ratu Mara and Ro Lady Lala Mara (*Fiji Sun*, 7 December 2006: 11).

Hostage of Speight – Atu Emberson Bain

In a story entitled 'Step by Step through a Coup', Atu Emberson Bain was described taking an active role in the aftermath of the 2000 coup:

On the way along the footpath, somebody shouted "Senator McBain [sic], come back here". Atu McBain [sic] who is also a journalist, was called back to the gate. In the room, we were all seated as George Speight entered and made his historic speech . . . The door burst open and another armed man came in and called for Atu McBain [sic] to leave. She had joined the first press meeting after she was released. "Come out" the man ordered, opening the door. "I am also a journalist." McBain [sic] said. "You are a Senator, what are you fu . . . g doing here," the man said (Fiji Times, 20 May 2000: 9).

Hostage of Speight – Jokapeci Koroi

Jokapeci Koroi, who was both Vice-President of the Senate and Labour Party President, was also held captive in the parliamentary complex. When Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry was injured by the dissidents, Koroi was involved in the drama:

Senator Jokapeci Koroi ran to the back gates of Parliament pleading for a fully equipped ambulance. Senator Koroi, who is also vice-president of the Senate and Labour party nominee, approached the police officers and called out to members of the media to arrange another ambulance for Mr Chaudhry (Fiji Times, 21 May 2000: 1).

In the event, the ambulances were sent away and no medical personnel from outside the Parliamentary complex were permitted to treat Chaudhry (Field, Baba and Baba, 2005). Thirty-six hours after she had been detained, Koroi was released. Saying that she was 'fine', she would not comment 'on the situation of the other government members detained by dissidents in Parliament' (*Fiji Sun*, 22 May 2000: 3).

Casualty of Speight – Mary Chapman

Mary Chapman, Parliamentary Secretary General during the 2000 coup (Field, Baba and Baba, 2005), was not mentioned in the newspapers at that time, but that changed following the 2006 coup when a number of articles noted her dignified behaviour when she was removed by the military from a job that she clearly loved. After dealing with soldiers entering Parliament and forcing the early closure of the Senate (*Fiji Times*, 7 December 2006: 5), a story appeared the following day under the headline 'Military chucks Chapman out'. 'I think I must have stepped on the shoes of the military', she was reported as saying (*Fiji Times*, 8 December 2006: 3). Next day, the headline read 'I was fair', with Chapman saying that she 'did her job fairly and without bias' (*Fiji Sun*, 9 December 2006: 10). Again, by allowing Chapman to use her own voice, readers were given an insight into her thoughts and observations about the reasons for her dismissal.

Hot Bread Queen – Mere Samisoni

Another woman in the news in 2000 was Mere Samisoni. Founding owner of a chain of bakeries, she was known throughout Fiji as the 'Hot Bread Queen'. Politically ambitious, she had run as a candidate for Parliament in 1999 but had lost (Nicholl, 2007). In the 2000 coup, a story appeared headed 'Mere Samisoni denies being appointed':

'I respect the cause of the indigenous people and their self determination. The way Chaudhry is treating us, we don't like it. He should have changed his tactics long ago and his style of leadership should have been changed.' When asked what her reaction would be if Mr Speight did approach her to be an interim minister, Mrs Samisoni said 'I will tell you when we get to that (*Fiji Sun*, 21 May 2000: 4).

After a third attempt, Samisoni was elected to Parliament, became a

first-term MP in 2006 (Nicholl: 2007) and became caught up in the coup. In a story headed 'Colonel grills baker', it was reported that she had been questioned by the military at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks but she said that she 'believed in the principle of democracy' (*Fiji Sun*, 11 December 2006: 2). Three days later, she was pictured attending a prayer vigil and wearing a blue ribbon, which was the symbol of the women's campaign to bring about peace (*Fiji Sun*, 2006: 15 December: 9).

Adi Finau Tabakaucoro

Following the 2000 coup, a story under the heading 'Women ask chiefs to follow law' revealed how a delegation representing professional businesswomen and Fijian mothers, who were the wives of prominent public figures, presented a letter of support to the Great Council of Chiefs. The women were represented by Senator Adi Finau Tabakaucoro, who said the women wanted to 'assure council members of their support'. They believed 'the chiefs would continue to uphold the law and human rights when making decisions to solve the political crisis'. The report continued:

Adi Finau said although she did not agree with the coup, she was an ardent supporter of the cause to uphold indigenous rights. "What has happened is the result of his (Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry's) insensitivity to indigenous grievances", she said. "He should step down" (*Fiji Times*, 24 May 2000: 3).

The following day, the National Council of Women responded, saying it was 'frustrated at comments made against Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry'. Secretary Sharon Rolls was concerned that the statements would 'only serve to further instigate issues that divide the people of the Fiji Islands' (*Fiji Times*, 2000: 5). But Adi Finau remained unrepentant saying that, despite numerous objections, she maintained that 'only indigenous people should govern their own countries' (*Fiji Times*, 27 May 2000: 9).

Following the 2006 coup, Adi Finau again became embroiled with the issues, commenting publicly on the removal of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase:

Deposed Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase should have resigned at the start', said former minister and senator Adi Finau Tabakaucoro. 'Mr Qarase should have resigned because the military wanted to clean up but he insisted he was working within the law'. She said she was encouraged by the prayers of the

women before their meeting in Nabua. 'From their prayers, I could tell the women were quick to accept reality. They did not say for us to protest but how to deal with the situation and carry on with life' (*Fiji Times*, 8 December 2006: 4).

Women and Conflict Resolution

The Human Rights Activists

In 2000, the first stories about attempts at peace making by women's organisations appeared. The *Women in Business* group called 'on citizens to stand strong, combine efforts and support the democratic process' (*Fiji Times*, 20 May 2000: 14). Later in the week, *Women in Business* voiced its support for the President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, in his attempts to restore law and order in the country. The organisation's vice-president, Prue Rouse, said that 'overnight through the foolhardy, selfish and thoughtless actions of a few, the livelihoods and well being of many women and children in the country have been sabotaged' (*Fiji Sun*, 23 May 2000: 14). The Young Women's Christian Association asked 'young and indigenous women to dress in black and express their condemnation of the overthrow' and said they 'wanted their interests protected by the people they chose' (*Fiji Times*, 21 May 2000: 15).

The National Council of Women secretary, Sharon Rolls, 'called on women in Fiji to unite as one nation to restore democratic governance through peaceful means' and issued a list of actions that people could take that included faxing petition to George Speight that voiced disapproval of his actions; wearing black as a symbol of mourning; and lighting a candle as a symbol of hope (*Fiji Times*, 21 May 2000: 16; 22 May 2000: 8; *Fiji Sun*, 23 May 2000: 2).

Also in 2000, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and the National Council of Women revived the idea of a vigil that had been initiated following the May 1987 coup. The vigil was held daily at the Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral in Suva where people joined in 'reflection, prayer and silent vigil' and 'called for free and fair elections and a fully democratic Fiji' (*Fiji Times*, 22 May 2000: 8). The vigil was reinstated again after the 2006 coup and the Blue Ribbon campaign that was first used by the women's peace vigil in 2000 was revived. Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, now representing the Coalition for Democracy and Peace, articulated the demands of the women saying they were lobbying for:

A Presidential Commission of Truth, Justice and Resolution under the Commission of Inquiry Act, as a constitutional and legal

strategy towards a long-term and inclusive resolution to Fiji's history of conflict . . . For the women who came together in 2000, the Fiji blue ribbon (from the colour of our flag) continues to represent a unified stand for the promotion of peace, reconciliation and unity, based on the principles of human rights, democracy and the upholding of the 1997 Constitution (Fiji Times, 12 December 2006: 5).

Early in the 2006 coup, the women's organisations had ruled out organising protest marches because of a concern about the danger of increased violence (*Fiji Sun*, 9 December 2006: 10). Their concerns appeared to be verified as the newspapers carried numerous stories about the harassment of human rights and pro-democracy activists and organisations. Headlines revealed the level of intimidation to which they were being subjected – harassment that continued long after the twelve-day review period:

- Group defends democracy shrine (*Fiji Sun*, 9 December 2006: 2)
- Armed men trash democracy shrine (*Fiji Times*, 11 December 2006: 4)
- Young people restore shrine (*Fiji Times*, 12 December 2006: 12)
- Centre [Fiji Women's Crisis Centre] condemns threats on activists (*Fiji Times*, 12 December 2006: 2)
- Military threats wrong (*Fiji Times*, 12 December, 2006: 5)
- Soldiers 'harass' pro-democracy activist (*Fiji Times*, 13 December 2006: 5)
- Pro-democracy shrine remains (*Fiji Times*, 14 December 2006: 5)
- Threats to democracy shrine (*Fiji Sun*, 14 December 2006: 5)
- Women call for caution (*Fiji Sun*, 14 December 2006: 9)
- Army denies rape threats (*Fiji Sun*, 15 December 2006: 2)

Conclusion

This article has endeavoured to collect and disseminate data on three aspects of women's coverage in the *Fiji Times* and the *Fiji Sun* during the first twelve days following the first coup of 1987 and the 2000 and 2006 coups. Data collection centred on the number of stories that appeared about women following the coups; the placement of stories about women in the newspapers; and the changing roles of chiefly and non-chiefly women as viewed through the press. Detailed qualitative comparative analysis of the content of news stories regarding women and the examina-

tion of the use of language in those stories has not been completed.

The GMPP noted that women faced major challenges with regard to their coverage by the media and divided the obstacles into blatant and subtle stereotyping (GMPP, 2005b). Women in Fiji appeared to have escaped the forms of blatant stereotyping that are endemic in western news media. When the women documented in this article appeared in the press, they were treated with dignity and never made to look ridiculous. Cultural reasons may account for this deference as Fijian society, in particular, has a long history of female leadership (Nicholl, 2007).

It was expected that the results would show that women in Fiji, while not experiencing blatant stereotyping, would suffer from the more subtle forms of stereotyping, in particular, invisibility. The research confirmed that women were almost entirely absent from the press following the 1987 coup but their presence increased following the 2000 coup and increased still further following the 2006 coup. This increase could be attributed partly to a growing understanding by women's organisations of the value of submitting well-written press releases to the editors - these usually appeared verbatim in the newspapers. Further research on the topic would reveal whether or not this momentum continued after the first heady days following the 2006 coup.

The placement of stories gives credence to their importance. In this respect, the movement of stories about women's activities after the coups from the back of the newspapers to the front was significant. No longer were women's viewpoints hidden with the 'soft' news at the back of the paper but they now featured with other 'hard' and political news at the front. In this respect, by 2006, the *Fiji Times* was placing most of stories about women's activities in the front.

Stories about chiefly women compared to non-chiefly women were not as prominent in the newspapers as had been anticipated. Following the 1987 coup, three women of very high rank were reported in the newspapers but in 2000 and 2006 the number of individuals did not exceed seven. On the other hand, the numbers of non-chiefly women being mentioned in the media grew considerably, reflecting the changes in society for women as they moved out of the private sphere of home and into the public sphere of the workplace and politics.

When considering areas of future research, it must be stressed that literature on women activists and political women in the Pacific remains sparse. Researchers need to recover and record women's herstories and activities. This needs to happen so that a body of work will build up, capturing the lives of Pacific women for posterity.

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