

THE 2006 MILITARY TAKEOVER IN FIJI: A Coup to End All Coups?
Studies in State and Society in the Pacific, No. 4. Edited by *Jon Fraenkel, Stewart Firth and Brij V. Lal*. Canberra, ACT: ANU E Press, 2009. 1 electronic document (xiv, 472 pp.) Free, e-Book (http://epress.anu.edu.au/coup_coup_citation.html). ISBN 978-1-921536-5-19.

On December 5, 2006 Fiji witnessed its fourth coup d'état in less than two decades. Unlike the previous two coups of 1987 and the putsch of 2000, whose justificatory grounds were Fijian ethno-nationalism, intra-ethnic Fijian rivalries and class tensions, the military takeover of 2006 was staged in the name of good governance and envisaged as a clean-up campaign against racism, nepotism and corruption. However, the de facto politics of the Bainimarama regime which has been in power ever since challenges its earlier proclamations. *The 2006 Military Takeover in Fiji* brings together a number of scholars, local civil society activists, union leaders, journalists, lawyers, as well as politicians who address the multi-faceted political, social and economic developments in pre- and post-coup Fiji.

The 31 chapters of the book are organized into 9 sections. Section 1 (*introduction*) comprises Fraenkel and Firth's critical overview of the paradoxes and contradictions of Fiji's "good governance" coup. In the following section (*the Coup*), Lal maps Fiji's road to the coup (chapter 2) and its aftermath (chapter 4). His detailed discussion of several core issues, such as the connections between the military takeover and the putsch of 2000, the evolving tensions between the Qarase government and the military, and the roles played by key figures and institutions before, during and in the wake of December 2006, enriches our understanding of the broader context of Fiji's political instability. Fraenkel's analysis of the "who, what, where and why" of 2006 (chapter 3) tackles the same issues from the perspective of a political scientist.

In section 3 (*Themes*) Norton explores the changing role of Fiji's currently suspended Great Council of Chiefs from its establishment in the late nineteenth century until April 2008 (chapter 5). His analysis is followed by Firth and Fraenkel's discussion of the transformation of the Fiji Military Forces from a key instrument of Fijian ethno-nationalism into its "nemesis" (117) in 2006 (chapter 6). Chand's contribution focuses on the negative economic implications of the latest coup d'état (chapter 7) and Fraenkel offers an insightful explanation for the postponement of elections from 2009 to 2014 by reference to the regime's response to foreign political pressure and its limited popularity among the local population (chapter 8).

In section 4 (*Religion*) Newland outlines the close relationship between religion and politics in Fiji and the responses of the several Christian denominations to the coup (chapter 9). Her article helps readers understand the conflict-laden relationship between the regime and the Methodist Church of Fiji. Prasad lays bare the reactions of Indian religious groups to the coup

(chapter 10). He offers valuable insights into the internal frictions of the Indo-Fijian community and argues rightly against the perception of a general support of Indians in favour of the military takeover in 2006.

Sections 5 to 7 (*Labour, Media, Law and the Constitution*) consist of 8 articles on subjects as diverse as the role of the media after December 2006 (chapter 13), censorship and the freedom of the press, the negative impact of the coup on Fiji's judiciary (chapter 15) and the erosion of judicial independence (chapter 16). These contributions can be best understood with regard to the clampdown of media freedom through the Media Decree of 2010 and the abrogation of the constitution in April 2009.

Section 8 (*Perspectives*) contains 11 chapters on topics such as the People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, constitutionalism or Fijian ethno-nationalism, written by local scholars, politicians, civil servants and human rights activists. I would like to single out Tarte's "Reflections on Fiji's 'coup culture'" (chapter 27) which represents a good starting point for a sociological analysis of the factors that shape Fiji's political instability.

In section 9 (*Conclusions*), Lal reflects on the year 2007, which he describes as depressing and miasmatic (chapter 30). The clean-up campaign was stalled, numerous breaches of human rights were reported and the regime faced a number of internal difficulties which led to the reshuffle of the cabinet in 2008. In their final chapter (31) Fraenkel and Firth define the architects of the coup as "the radicals amongst the westernized elite" (449). Furthermore, they discuss three possible future outcomes of Fiji's last coup: 1) a "praetorian state," 2) a speedy restoration of a constitutional government, and 3) a continuing cycle of coups.

In summary, the contributors of *The 2006 Military Takeover in Fiji* offer a justified critical response to Fiji's contemporary politics and its "coup syndrome." Although parts of this easily accessible e-book have been published before—for example in *From Election to Coup in Fiji: The 2006 Campaign and Its Aftermath*, edited by Jon Fraenkel and Stewart Firth (Suva: IPS Publications, 2007)—the book is of great value to those interested in understanding the manifold forces behind Bainimarama's takeover in 2006 in particular and Fiji's long-lasting socio-political instability in general.

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