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Stopover: a story of migration. Photographs, introduction and captions by Bruce Connew, with a story by Brij V. Lal. Wellington, Victoria University Press, 2007. Unpaginated, illus. ISBN 978-0-86473-5577. NZ\$40.00.

First impressions are important. *Stopover* is a small black book with no illustration on the front cover and neither does it contain a subtitle, table of contents, index, or page numbers. In other words there are no visual clues to either tempt or help the reader understand the book's organisation or the author's main ideas. Bruce Connew's preface tells us that 'Indians first came to Fiji as indentured labourers in 1879. Since the Rabuka coup d'état in 1987, and three subsequent Fiji coups, Indian Fijians have been emigrating from the country in earnest'. This preface is followed by a photograph of George Speight, leader of the 2000 coup, taken from a television image and dated 28 June 2000. There is no explanation for this, so from the beginning the 'story' is unclear. This puts the onus on the reader to try and locate the organisational strategy in order to understand the author's intent.

The book is arranged, rather than organised, in four or perhaps five sections or chapters. These begin with an overview by Connew, followed by a collection of black and white photographs, also by Connew, then some colour photographs by anonymous photographers, a story by Brij V. Lal, and finally Connew's black and white photographs are repeated with associated narratives. The informal design seems to encourage, or at least gives permission, to thumb through what appears to be a predominantly photographic book — rather as one would a photo album. Interestingly, this is how the book begins. Connew discovers a photograph of two Indian Fijians in a photo album. They were long since passed-on relatives of his host Aren Kumar — who is never formally introduced. This photograph is placed at the beginning of the book with no caption, just two men, holding hands and looking straight at the camera.

Connew's personal overview of the coup stems from his own family connections, and a clear sense of outrage at the lack of support for an elected administration headed by an Indian Fijian. His narrative is too short to be viewed as a comprehensive discussion about Fiji's troubled governance, but he does indicate how Indian Fijians have never been afforded the opportunity to establish a sense of being truly rooted in Fijian culture. The coups served to exacerbate this and the result has been the exodus of large numbers of Indian Fijians to other countries, leaving behind those who continue to work in the sugarcane fields.

The photography in this book documents the lives of the people of the village of Vatiyaka who continue to work in the sugarcane fields. These photographs were first displayed in an

exhibition and the transference to a smaller book format is not totally successful. The photographs themselves are extremely interesting, but the power of the imagery is interrupted by the reduced size and gutter of the book. They are not labelled, which means they are probably intended to be viewed intuitively or perhaps as art. It is tempting to think that Connew was consciously recording a way of life in and around this small village that he presumed would disappear. If so, are these photographs to be viewed as ethnography?

The author was a frequent visitor to the village, so there was probably some familiarity between him and the people he was photographing. Some images are taken from a distance showing the stages of harvesting of the sugar cane field. Some show domestic scenes around bathing and eating. Some show children at play and work. Some show aspects of ceremony, and many show evidence of such trappings of contemporary life as television and cars. Those being photographed, young or old, pay little attention to the camera, seemingly at ease with the photographer. Connew's photographs capture a commendable representation of life as it is still lived and, at the same time, documents the passing of traditional ways. When these photos are paired with the narratives, it becomes clear that they are organised chronologically, and the narratives take the form of a descriptive journal. The viewer is introduced to the people by name, their lives become three-dimensional. Names and events give shape and meaning to the photographs. The narrative confirms the familiarity already sensed in the photographs and further articulates how village life is situated both in the larger Fijian political scene and the ever looming probability that the young will leave and the elderly will stay. It is difficult to understand why the photographs were shown with and without narratives.

Photos of those who had emigrated are less successful. They are all in colour and show groups of smiling people accompanied with all the trappings of Western-style success, mainly cars and houses. Each photograph is labelled with the place where it was taken — Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA — but there is no narrative, so we do not know who these people are, and we do not know who they are related to in Fiji. They are kept in photo albums as symbols of success. The immediate family know who they are, but the reader does not. Will these share the same fate as the photo of the two indentured labourers encountered at the beginning of the book? Will their roots also wither?

Situated in the middle of the photographs in this book is the story 'Mr Arjun' by Brij V. Lal. This is a poignant and personal story about how the author revisits his own past when he arranges for an elderly man, Arjun Kaka, to visit his sons who had emigrated to Australia. The author successfully relays the journey as seen through Arjun's eyes; and records Arjun's stories about his own past; a past that involved fear of ghosts and devils, faith in healers and magic men, a past his migrant children want to ignore. His time in Australia was difficult; he had no sense of place; his place was in his own village. He could not communicate with his grandchildren, who did not speak Hindi. The one bright spot was his visit to Mr Tom, a retired overseer who used to work for the sugar manufacturer. Together, they basked in nostalgic memories of a simpler time when everybody knew their place, and life was prescriptive. Lal also remembers his past, but his memories are more critical than those shared by Arjun and Mr Tom. He remembers how

managed his life really was by those who ran the sugar industry. Arjun returned to his village and died within a few months. His grandchildren will probably not remember him and, over time, they will view Fiji as a foreign country.

Both authors foresee the demise of a way of life and a bleak future for those Indian Fijians who cannot leave Fiji. Connew and Lal approach this complex topic from personal viewpoints that are based on their own experiences within the Indian Fijian community. This invites a singularity of opinion, but also offers an opportunity to think about why this is a time of change, of loss and of new beginnings for a group of people who are caught up in the diaspora and continue to seek a place where they can put down roots that will not wither. It is a book that provides many insights, especially for those already versed in the recent and very complex political history of Fiji. However, the lack of structure is a formidable barrier to anybody but the most determined or curious of readers.

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