

editorialising at the same time. The story must reflect the sources, not the other way around.

The cultural context

What context?

I start from a basic proposition with "culture in politics" generally, which is that I will be sensitive to culture when someone is culturally sensitive about my taxes. I have yet to see a politician forgo a Western cultural imperialist four-wheel drive, regardless of what he/she is saying about the intrusive Western media culture of those who are questioning the cost of it. And no-one has ever suggested to me that there is some traditional gesture I can make, or seek — when it is time to collect my taxes, which pay for the four-wheel.

Of course, there is a cultural context. There is no need to be gratuitously insulting to anyone's culture. This is not intelligent, productive or well-behaved in any multicultural society (which in today's world, is just about everybody's).

What is fair?

However, a proper and fair questioning of some cultural norm in a political context — even if controversial — is fair. It is also fair, I think, to ask a person. There was, in my time as a journalist more than one chiefly politician who used to make much of the "insults" heaped on him by his political opponents — usually quite valid criticisms of the government — but that did not prevent those chiefs from attacking their opponents when it suited them.

Fortunately, it seems to me, the tactics I referred to above seem to be in decline. Perhaps the voters have seen through these tactics — maybe, more than ever, indigenous Fijian politics is no longer a chiefly game but a commoners' one.

But fair is fair. Election politics is all about Western-style leadership and Western-style accountability; because it is funded by Western-style taxes. Noone ought to make any apologies for holding to this point of view. And I'm sure that will give us something to discuss.

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Military exorcise ghosts

Fijians were at the polls in the final week of August, but with a court martial of rebel soldiers due, Fiji faced not just a divided society but a divided military.

By BEN BOHANE

"I THOUGHT the army was trained to kill, not murder," Anna Selesekino says quietly, taking a sip from her coffee mug. "Now all I want is justice and reconciliation. The young mother of four is still coming to terms with being a widow: one of eight widows left behind from a short but bloody mutiny within the Fijian military on 2 November 2000 that was put down after a day of gun battles. Five rebels and three "loyalists" were killed.

Her husband, Corporal Kalounivale was one of the rebels involved in the 19 May 2000 coup but appears to have had nothing to do with the November mutiny. "He was minding our children until 3.30pm on the day of the mutiny. It was only after he heard about it on the radio that he left the house to see what was going on. On the street he was picked up by the military police and taken to a police cell and then to Queen Elizabeth barracks. I got a phonecall at 1am to say he had been beaten to death."

Anna says the army has offered no explanation, no compensation, no pension or help with the burial arrangements, so she and some of the other widows have engaged a lawyer, Tevita Fa, to bring the issue to trial. "The police have now said they regard it as a murder case, but the army is relying on an immunity decree. I just hope the trial will bring the truth out. What am I going to tell our children?"

The unpalatable truth for the Fijian military — long admired for its discipline and commitments to United Nations and regional peacekeeping

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forces — is that it has divided loyalties. Whereas its rank and file largely supported the 1987 coup, the May 2000 coup has deeply divided it.

"In May 2000, elements within the military adopted an interventionist approach, some played both sides and others were neutral. The result was confusion and lack of resolve," Ratu Joni Madraiwiwa, a Fijian high chief and former High Court judge told a public forum at the University of the South Pacific. He said coup leader George Speight and his allies had miscalculated the support the military would provide.

The crux of the divide appears to be between the "professional" soldiers, typified by the present Commander, Commodore Bainimarama who believe the military should stay out of politics; and the "politicals" who want to ensure the supremacy of indigenous Fijian rights. Although Indians make up 45 percent of the population, the military is 98 percent indigenous, seen as the ultimate guarantee of indigenous control. But the "politicals" also want to have the Constitution amended so that only an indigenous Fijian can become Prime Minister or President and that there is greater control over the sensitive issue of land leases.

"It's hard to get a sense of how many soldiers support each faction because there are many sitting on the fence," says Dr Sitiveni Ratuva, a lecturer in sociology at the University of South Pacific who has studied the links between indigenous movements and the military. "But it is possible that at least 60 percent of the force could be regarded as 'politicals'." If true, this suggests that the current military command represents a potentially minority faction and will need to keep looking over its shoulder. The upcoming General Court Martial for up to sixty elite Fijian soldiers is adding to the tension surrounding the election.

"It's a tough situation because although many indigenous Fijians sympathise with the aims, if not the methods, of the coup, it has created real divisions in the society and the military. If the mutiny had succeeded, the government would have been dismissed and Speight and co would have been allowed to step in and run the country. But it would have been an extremist government which would have just established the conditions for another coup."

Dr Ratuva claims that while the army can feel somewhat justified in thinking it "saved the country" by crushing the mutiny, the brutal manner in which it was done and lack of any meaningful reconciliation since means that these divisions remain unhealed.

Complicating matters is that many rebel soldiers were themselves following orders and there is a growing belief that those orders had come from "the very



Photo: BEN BOHANE

Fiji military on parade in the Queen Elizabeth barracks: "Many of those watching hope it can keep playing the old anthems — rather than the *Last Post* for any more soldiers killed by their own."

top" of the military command. In confidential transcripts of an interview between an army investigation panel into the coup and Colonel Viliame Seruvakula, Commanding the 3rd Battalion, the frustrations of a loyalist ("professional") officer become apparent.

He claims that he immediately saw Speight and the rebels as "enemies of the State" and quickly mobilised his troops around the parliamentary compound to seal them off and prevent any weapons or supplies from reaching them. However, he was soon ordered by HQ to dismantle roadblocks he had established, while other officers thought to be sympathetic to the rebels were allowed to man entry and exits to the compound. Colonel Seruvakula has since left Fiji and is now a training instructor with the New Zealand army.

Some "political" soldiers have since moved into politics and are contesting seats in the election. The SAS trained leader of the now disbanded Counter Revolutionary Warfare (CRW) unit responsible for the coup, Ilisoni Ligairi is running as an Independent despite his remaining in prison on an island off Suva. His fellow prisoner George Speight is standing in his home electorate as a