Negotiating with Tradition or the Tabua Presentations at the Core of the Fijian Crisis (May 2000)

I will point at the ceremonies involving tabua (whale tooth) presentations that occurred after the May 19th civilian coup d’etat in Suva. Understood as strongly related to the chiefs despite their uncertain origin, tabua are also considered as the main Fijian value offered to the highest person. Tabua were involved in the Fijian crisis especially through ‘traditional ceremonies’, as Fijian themselves call them. They were mostly exchanged between the main groups trying to resolve the situation: army, rebels and chiefs. Through those traditional ceremonies – involving tabua brought from villages, districts and provinces- tradition was brought to national level as a way to resolve the internal crisis following the “Fijian way”. As a means to deal with the local and the global, the past and the present at the core of the crisis, traditional ceremonies were sometimes used to manipulate official negotiations between the parties. Hence tabua offerings conveyed during the coup redefine the means of tradition while performing new ways to deal with the latter so called.