

Colonial and Post-Colonial Ethnocracy in Fiji

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Abstract

This paper analyses colonial ethnocracy, post-colonial ethnocracy, inter-ethnic alliances and new forms of ethnocratic ethnocracy in Fiji as historical sociology. Utilising Oren Yiftachel's theorisation of ethnocracy and location of ethnicity and race in historical structures, I intent to problematise ethnocracy in Fiji as socio-historical moments, comprising of the hegemony of the ethnocratic colonial regime, post-colonial political discourse between Indo-Fijian and indigenous Fijians within post-colonial ethnocracy and inter-ethnic collaboration and alliances that led to the political reconfiguration of the ethnocratic polity, ethnoclass and supposedly non-ethnocracy from 2006.

Introduction

Fiji has a history of ethnic tensions where Europeans, indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians competed for ethnocratic hegemony. The British colonial authorities established colonial ethnocracy based on the concept of harmony of indigenous and European interests where indigenous Fijian chiefs supervised indigenous cultural discourses and the Europeans controlled the economy and the state. Nevertheless, the colonial regime introduced ethnic complexity and brought Indian indentured labourers to Fiji to protect indigenous Fijians from the destructive forces of plantation capitalism, based on cultivation of sugar on European alienated indigenous Fijian land. By 1945, the Indo-Fijian population had overtaken that of indigenous Fijians and Europeans and by the 1960s, Indo-Fijian leaders pushed for independence of the Colony of Fiji, raising fears in the indigenous community that Indo-Fijians wanted political control to re-design indigenous land ownership. As a result, ethnic tensions increased with Indo-Fijian leaders giving up their quest for political control and

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ISSN: 1837-5391; <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/mcs>

CCS Journal is published under the auspices of UTSePress, Sydney, Australia

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Citation: *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* 2016, 8(3): 5185. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v8i3.5185>

accepting the vision of indigenous Fijian leader Ratu Mara, who engineered a political compromise in post-colonial Fiji where indigenous Fijians established political control in partnership with the Europeans and Indo-Fijians stayed in opposition. This vision unravelled in 1987 when inter-ethnic collaboration between the two communities resulted in the loss of indigenous political control, triggering military intervention in May 1987. The military coup was followed by the racially-weighted 1990 Constitution but by 1993, deep divisions among the indigenous Fijian elite forced Prime Minister Rabuka to undertake a constitutional review, resulting in the 1997 Constitution. However, this constitution could not resolve underlying ethnic tensions and in 2000, there was a military coup and mutiny led by indigenous Fijians at the military barracks in Suva. Following the mutiny, military commander, Voreqe Bainimarama, criticised the nationalist government of Laisenia Qarase and overthrew his government in December 2006. The military implemented de-ethnicisation strategies but the underlying ethnic tensions continued following the promulgation of the 2013 Constitution and democratic elections in September 2014. Post-independence Fiji is characterised by these conflicts over ethnocracy.

Ethnocracy: Theoretical Consideration

Ethnocracy is a type of political regime that ‘facilitates the expansion, ethnicisation and control of a dominant ethnic nation’ (Yiftachel 2006, p. 11). In such regimes, ethnicity is the key driver of the polity, including economic resource allocation, public policy, political rights, social engagements, religious constellations and social discourse. Oren Yiftachel (2006, p. 12) identified three major political and historical engines of ethnocracy: ‘the formation of the colonial settler society, mobilisation of power of ethnonationalism and ethnic logic of capital’. As identified, many parts of the world have settler communities which were planted by hegemonic European powers including Spain, Portugal, Great Britain, France, Dutch and Italy. Most important and relevant of the hegemonic powers to this article was Great Britain which established indirect rule in Fiji from 1874 to 1970 and the white settler community controlled the state and the economy.

At independence, the colonial ethnocracy took a post-colonial form with ‘constant democratic and ethnocratic tensions, (Yiftachel 2006, pp. 16-18). These tensions led to further ethnic segregation ‘diffused into social and political system, enhancing multidirectional processes of essentialising political ethnicisation’. In fact many post-colonial societies became

ethnonations led by the ethnoclass but these nations quickly descended into ethnic violence and prolonged ethnic conflict where ethnic armies executed ethnic coups and participated in ethnic cleansing. The civil society in an ethnonation becomes dysfunctional because of national social and cultural programming along ethnic lines with Non Government Organisations caught in the middle as ineffective referees. The ethnicisation dictates and manipulates constitutional, legislative and committee systems to ensure that the ethnoclass continues its grip on political power.

According to Yiftachel (2006, p. 16), the ethnic state has a dominant 'charter' where the 'ethnoclass appropriates the state apparatus and determines the outcomes of most public policies'. These appropriations are a conscious assembly of the state apparatus along ethnic lines and political discourses are controlled from above with ethnic identities the mainstay of social discourse. Over time, the ethnoclass and ethnonation become synonymous and those outside the ethnic in-group face structural and systemic marginalisation, resulting in counter cultures, disruptions, protests and boycotts and eventually ethnic violence.

Oren Yiftachel's analysis was primarily focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conundrum and his analysis of the ethnoclass and the ethnonation was aimed at demonstrating the rigidities of ethnic hegemony where all aspects of social life of the community revolve around ethnic identity and ethnic considerations. The ethnonation gets trapped in its own systems and structures as inflexibility sets in and ethnic out groups find it difficult to have any meaningful engagement. While Yiftachel focused on ethnoclass and ethnonation, Randolph Persaud (1997) located ethnocracy in a wider political discourse. For Persaud (1992, p. 173), 'colonial domination was much broader than economic exploitation. It was a form of domination which was civilisational in content and in which race played a key role'.

What transpired after the colonialists left in many of the former British periphery was continued ethnic conflict and race politics. In Fiji in particular, the ethnoclass remained largely indigenous Fijian chiefs, indigenous commoner nationalists and Europeans. The colonial-inspired constitutional structure at independence ensured that the mutated ethnoclass maintained its grip on power by invoking ethnic solidarity, thus continuing with the ethnonation and the inherited colonial systems and structures (Naidu 1992, pp. 81-102). The other distinct feature of the Fijian state was the military which was entirely indigenous Fijian and guarantor of the hegemony of the ethnoclass. In 1987, and again in 2000, the ethnic

military intervened in politics to restore ethnic hegemony but found the ethnoclass divided and fragmented.

The whole concept of ethnonation and ethnoclass was re-examined by the military hierarchy from 2003, resulting in the restructure of the Fijian ethnonation from 2006 to 2014. The ethnic history of Fiji provides insights into the historical moments that shaped Fiji's ethnocracy and the tensions between those in power and those on the periphery as inter-ethnic alliances led to new political configurations and social outcomes in 1987, 1999 and 2014.

Colonial Ethnocracy

Colonial ethnocracy was established when indigenous Fijian chiefs ceded the islands of Fiji to Great Britain and accepted the formal arrangement whereby the British colonial rulers controlled the politics and the economy of the colony and the chiefs continued with their cultural hegemony of indigenous Fijians. The colonial ethnoclass consisted of the British political administrators, the Great Council of Chiefs influenced by later by Ratu Sukuna, and the European settlers. On October 10 1874, the chiefs of eastern Fiji – Vunivalu Cakobau, Ma'afu, Ratu Epeli, Tui Bua, Savenaca, Esekeli, Tui Dreketi, Ritova, Katonivere, Ratu Kini, Matanitobua and Nacagilevu ceded Fiji to Britain. The Cession was inevitable, because the Cakobau government (1871-1874) was bankrupt and the European community wanted a stable political authority to protect their economic interests. The provisional Governor of Fiji, Sir Hercules Robinson, inherited the task of administering Fijians. Borrowing from the political and social organisations of eastern Fiji, he grouped the islands of the colony into provinces, based on boundaries of the old Fijian state, and within the province a number of divisions were created, each comprising a group of villages related by kinship. Each of these administrative units – the village, the district, and the Province-was placed in charge of a Fijian, and here was a chain of responsibility from the lowest level to the highest (Roth 1951, p. 135).

The British colonial authorities at once restructured the native administrative system by giving exclusive jurisdiction on native affairs to the Council of Chiefs. The Boselevu Vakaturaga, the Great Council of Chiefs, was a new institution, based on the collective experience of the chiefs in the failed Cakobau Government. Despite being dominated by the chiefs from the maritime provinces, the Great Council became the official custodian of Fijian

land, culture, tradition, customary rights and social relations. Besides that, the Council helped to entrench colonial ethnocratic rule in Fiji by ensuring least resistance to the new political order from the indigenous masses.

The Great Council of Chiefs was also an agent of colonial propaganda. The Deed of Cession was interpreted in a way that created the popular myth of a protective colonial policy towards the natives. According to Macnaught, 'in the Fijian popular mind the lands had been given by the chiefs to the Queen Vakaturaga, that is, by way of a chiefly presentation which entitled them to expect that the Queen in her reciprocal generosity would return the lands to be shared and used by the people' (Macnaught 1982, p. 30). The first Governor to Fiji, Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon, cemented the protective colonial policy by strengthening the social and cultural foundations of the Great Council of Chiefs. Gordon was a conservative at heart and campaigned against self-government in the North American Colony of New Brunswick. His apparent lack of success in British North America left him bitter and disillusioned. However, he was very well read and had intimate knowledge of the cultural destruction of the indigenous peoples of North America, West Indies and Australia. As a convert to preserving indigenous way of life, Gordon was determined to safeguard indigenous Fijian culture. But according to historian Peter France, Gordon's understanding of indigenous Fijian affairs was fundamentally flawed. To begin with, Gordon did not speak or write Fijian and was further estranged by his adoption of the position of a high chief (France 1969, pp. 104-105).

Gordon was an avid anglophile and mistakenly claimed that the Provincial, District and Village system was deeply rooted in indigenous Fijian tradition. But this was not the case for all of Fiji. In Western Viti Levu, different forms of social organisation and hierarchies existed, particularly in the interior of Ra and Nadroga where matrilineal descent groups prevailed. Nevertheless, Gordon saw Roko Tui (the Provincial chief), Buli (District Chief) and Turanganikoro (the village head) as synonymous with the colonial administration and as a result, Fijian Administration, modelled by the colonial masters, was imposed on the rest of the Fiji islands. Indigenous Fijian labour was regulated by a paternalistic tax-in-kind policy, which stipulated that every male Fijian between the ages of sixteen and sixty would be liable to contribute twenty days labour on public works in his province, including road works, improving provincial offices, hospitals and gardens and these provisions were enforced by the village administrators who kept detailed account of who did what, where and how. By this arrangement, Sir Arthur Gordon ensured that Fijians worked on their land and were not

directly involved with the colonial capitalist economy, where more intensive labour was required under exploitative conditions. The Deed of Cession allowed the indigenous Fijian chiefs, together with the Colonial Government, to oversee and regulate Fijian land. However, by the virtue of the Deed, the Colonial Government had absolute authority on the economic development of the Colony and, as such, Sir Arthur Gordon tapped into the existing indentured labour system operating in British Colonies since 1835 and imported Indian labourers to Fiji from 1879 to 1916. Indian labour proved quite successful in developing and extending the sugar economy. For the Colonial Government, Indian labour gave the Fijians the time needed to absorb the impact of colonial rule and embed colonial ethnocracy, thus arresting the steady decline in indigenous Fijian population numbers, and enabled Fijians to enjoy the unusual institutions that had given them a powerful voice in colonial policy (Macnaught 1982, p. 2).

The Chief-Gordon viewpoint was founded on two important pillars: colonial ethnocracy where Europeans controlled the state and the Great Council of Chiefs provided guidance to the colonialists on indigenous culture and land. The colonial ethnocratic state was built not only on protective native policy but on an ethnic exclusive political agenda where indigenous Fijians were disbarred from developing any meaningful social contact with Indo-Fijians. Village Turaga ni Koros were informed to keep an eye on any Indo-Fijian who may find their way into a village and if Indo-Fijians were detected, they were to be arrested and brought back to the coolie barracks that housed indentured labourers. William Sutherland states that the ideology and the practice of racialism perpetrated by the ruling class made a large section of the Fijian population see themselves primarily as Fijians rather than exploited people (Sutherland 1992, p. 32). By the early twentieth century, the colonial-chief alliance embedded the colonial ethnoclass that dictated social and political discourses in the colonial ethnocracy of Fiji.

One of the most avid defenders of the colonial ethnocracy was Ratu Sukuna, one of the first Fijian chiefs to receive western education. Ratu Sukuna was the District Commissioner of Lau and a son of a Bauan chief. As the most gifted of the young Fijian chiefs, he was selected to be educated in New Zealand and England at the expense of the Fijian people. Ratu Sukuna was the impetus behind the formation of the Fijian Affairs Board and the Native Land Trust Board in the 1940s. He was dedicated and wanted to strengthen the existing colonial ethnocracy via Fijian Administration. Ratu Sukuna focused his energy on protecting and

preserving indigenous Fijian land and chiefly privilege and forged alliances with the Europeans to ensure legislative provisions. As a result, the Native Land Trust Ordinance of 1940 was formulated to shield the colonial ethnocracy from the demands of Indo-Fijians and their leaders who demanded political equality from 1920 to 1970 through series of boycotts, disruptions and strike. According to Robert Norton (2002, p. 136), Ratu Sukuna and the Great Council of Chiefs was major obstacle to change on 'proposals to extend franchise to Fijians' because the official view was that indigenous Fijians were not ready to participate in politics.

The ethnic hegemony of the chiefs was established in the 1960s when indigenous Fijian leader and the paramount chief of Lau, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, created a three-tier party structure to manage Fiji's ethnic politics and formed the Alliance Party of Fiji which had three distinct arms - the Fijian Association, the Indian Alliance and the General Voters (Newton 1970, p. 33). The Fijian Association was active in promoting indigenous Fijian political paramountcy since the 1950s when indigenous Fijian chiefs rose within the ranks of the colonial bureaucracy, providing political leadership to their community. For example, the Fijian Association was behind the Wakaya Letters of 1956 wherein the chiefs affirmed ethnic hegemony of the chiefs by invoking the Deed of Cession of 1874, arguing that transfer of political power after independence must be from the Crown to the indigenous chiefs. According to Robert Norton (2012, p. 522), 'the post war Fijian political bureaucratic elite was formed in rapid period of economic, social and political change' where 'several chiefs and some commoners acquired great official status'.

In 1959 Fiji witnessed challenges to the colonial authority by the multiracial Fiji Retail and Wholesale Workers Union. The protest by the union ended up in riots where European properties were damaged by Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijian activists (Howard 1991, p. 53). However, with the intervention by indigenous chiefs, Ratu Edward Cakobau and Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the short lived rebellion against the colonial authority and the European business monopoly was defeated. The chiefs argued that indigenous Fijians were manipulated by Indo-Fijian political activists to facilitate their own anti-colonial political agendas (Bain 1989, p. 15). As a result, the temporary inter-ethnic alliance was broken and the two communities retreated to their ethnic and communal camps. Francis West (1960, p. 49) observed that 'the European tendency, and that of the Fijian chiefs, has been to imply that if the Fijians rioted, they must have been incited and egged on by alien anti-European provocateurs and by hooligans; by implication Indians or outsiders'. Furthermore, West

(1960, p. 53) analysed the ethnic contours that prevailed in Fiji at that time: 'there are professional Indians, doctors, and lawyers independent of the government and this is one of the political strengths of the Indian community. The Fijians, lacking them, may find an already complex situation further complicated by the rift in political and economic consciousness which the riots already seem to show between the town and the countryside'. In fact, the Indo-Fijian population had quadrupled between 1921 and 1966. According to Christian Leuprecht (2012, p. 89), by the '1950s, not only the Indians became an absolute majority, they had fairly young age structure'. The ideological position of Indo-Fijian leaders and their activism against the colonial ethnoclass were blamed for the 1959 inter-ethnic disturbances against the colonial authorities. Indigenous Fijian chiefs were reminded that the 'heathen' Indo-Fijian leaders were attempting to drive a wedge between the indigenous chiefly hierarchy and the commoner indigenous Fijians by spreading anti-colonial and anti-chief propaganda.

Following a series of activism against the Colonial Sugar Refining Company and the colonial government for the rights of Indo-Fijian sugar cane farmers, Indo-Fijian political leaders formed the Federation Party following disturbances in the sugar belt of Fiji. The Federation Party was led by Indo-Fijian leader A.D. Patel (Lal 2011) who called for land reforms so that farmers could get easy access to indigenous land on generous lease arrangements. Patel was also motivated by the decolonisation movement following the Second World War and advocated independence for the Colony of Fiji. The Federation Party was an extension of Maha Sangh (Kaplan & Kelly 2001), which was formed in the 1940s to fight for the rights of Indo-Fijian sugar cane farmers. After initially focusing on Indo-Fijian issues, the party formed a partnership with the indigenous Fijian National Party in 1969 and attempted to promote inter-ethnic cooperation but this effort was short lived as political parties fractured along ethnic lines. Also, in the lead up to Fiji's independence, indigenous Fijian chiefs remained suspicious of Indo-Fijian leaders and increasing Indo-Fijian population that has surpassed indigenous Fijians (Premdas 1978, p. 35). However, with the formation of the UN Decolonisation Committee, the international stage was set for Fiji to move towards independence (Alley 1970, p. 150) despite the domestic political condition in Fiji despite ethnocracy firmly entrenched in the party system. Eight decades of colonial rule ensured that indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians had minimum social interaction and, at all times, the colonial administration reinforced ethnic and communal identities. Also, demographic changes played a key role in ethnic tensions. A majority of indigenous Fijians in the 1960s

were living in rural areas and only a handful of indigenous chiefs and indigenous commoners had emerged with any significant leadership experience and education, and this group was committed to indigenous political hegemony in the new post-colonial political order. The colonial Fijian Administration, entrenched after the cession of Fiji to Great Britain, allowed for social hierarchy to be cemented in villages, districts and provinces and most indigenous Fijians were entirely removed from commerce or any form of social engagement with the Indo-Fijians. Church, chiefs, customary obligations and subsistence agriculture were central to the indigenous Fijian village life while politics and governance was the sole domain of hereditary indigenous chiefs and the privileged few indigenous commoners. Indo-Fijians had little access to land ownership and largely worked on sugar plantations and in urban factories. The Indo-Fijian elite had chosen non-agrarian careers and lifestyles and were predominantly middle class doctors, engineers, lawyers, accountants and public servants and some taking over from Europeans in business (Mamak 1978). One problem was that the Indo-Fijian leaders lacked a political strategy aimed at bridging the divide between the two communities and aggressively pushed for independence with the hope of working with progressively minded indigenous Fijian leaders. However, the indigenous Fijian leaders saw independence as a chance to reclaim the state from the Crown and were united in their view that the only protection for indigenous land ownership was indigenous Fijian political hegemony. Despite strong nationalist views, indigenous chief Ratu Mara developed some working relationship with Indo-Fijian leader A.D. Patel, but as discussed this was hardly the case at the grassroots level, where racial bias and prejudices were prevalent (Brookfield 1972). Before independence, the Ratu Mara-led Alliance Party of Fiji won the election of 1966, but the Indo-Fijian leaders refused to work with indigenous Fijian leaders and resigned from the parliament, forcing by-elections in 1968. Indigenous Fijians interpreted the behaviour of Indo-Fijian leaders as disrespectful and as a consequence the first significant racial tensions flared up (Newton 1970, p. 34). Robert Norton (2002, pp. 134-137) noted that 'the terms of decolonisation, most specifically the electoral system, became the point of acrimonious struggles between the Fijian and the European leaders on the one hand, and the principal Indian leaders on the other'. Norton further determined that the 'privileged position of chiefs in the colonial state contrasted starkly with government's weak links with Indians' and, as a result, Indo-Fijians were looked upon with suspicion because they continuously challenged the European dominated ethnocracy and called for equality between Europeans and Indo-Fijians which attacked the heart of European political and economic hegemony in Fiji. Also of concern was the future state of the country after political authority transferred from the

colonial authorities to indigenous Fijians who saw Indo-Fijian leaders as agitators, continually pushing for better terms of land lease, and political equality. As a consequence, ethnic tensions increased in the lead up to independence.

Indo-Fijian leader A.D. Patel, as a result of ethnic tensions, softened some of his positions on land. Ratu Mara continued holding discussions with A.D. Patel and was responsible for achieving consensus with the Indo-Fijian leadership from 1970-1972 on the future of the new independent nation. In 1969, A.D. Patel passed away and Siddiq Koya assumed the leadership of the National Federation Party. Koya at first adopted a more conciliatory approach towards indigenous Fijians but maintained the push for 'common roll' (a common electoral franchise), which was supposed to enhance political equality (Vasil 1972, p. 25). According to Henry Rutz (1995, p. 74), both communities in Fiji embraced independence for vastly different reasons. 'Indians imagined a newly created "citizen" living in a civil society that subordinated the status of religion race and a particularist culture to national solidarity' whereas indigenous Fijian rhetoric was embedded in the paramountcy of Fijian interest informed by ethnic or communal voting system, hegemony of the chiefs and protection of indigenous land.

Establishing Post-Colonial Ethnocracy

Indigenous Fijian leaders quietly opposed common roll and were concerned that one person one vote would ultimately lead to Indo-Fijian political domination. Under the 1970 Constitution, the Senate had 8 Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) nominees who had powers of veto over legislation affecting indigenous Fijian interests. This provision of the constitution was never properly explained to indigenous Fijians, who were extended voting rights from 1962 whilst Indo-Fijians had been electing their representatives since 1929. Also under the 1970 Constitution, there was a 52 member House of Representatives with 22 seats (12 elected on communal roll and 10 on national roll) each for indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians and 8 seats for General Voters. The constitutional set up ensured that indigenous Fijians and Europeans would bloc vote to ensure paramountcy of indigenous Fijian interest in government.

Following the promulgation of the 1970 Constitution, the Alliance Party and the National Federation Party postponed national elections until 1972 and agreed in principle to work

towards a non-ethnic model, embracing an agreed version of the common roll electoral system. However, Ratu Mara did not support common roll after the 1972 election because indigenous Fijians in his government equated common roll to Indo-Fijian political domination and, as a result, the relationship between the two parties soured in 1975 after the Street Commission recommendation that Fiji was ready for a common roll electoral system. Ratu Mara remained unconvinced following strong indigenous Fijian polling for the Alliance Party in the 1972 election against common roll. Koya and Mara had a falling-out and the so-called 'Fiji's honeymoon period' premised on cooperation between two communal leaders was over (Lal 1986, p. 78). Also, in 1975, an Alliance Member of Parliament caused uproar within the Indo-Fijian community when he called for the expulsion of Indo-Fijians from Fiji to India, sparking accusations from Indo-Fijian leaders that the Alliance Party was actively promoting ethnocentrism. Sakeasi Butadroka, in fact, highlighted the views and concerns of many indigenous Fijians that Indo-Fijians were taking over the country since Indo-Fijian business had all but taken over from the Europeans after independence. Butadroka who was from the indigenous Fijian province of Rewa was able to successfully tap into indigenous fears and concerns caused by continued lack of interaction between the two communities (Lal 1986, pp. 96-97).

With the formation of the Fijian Nationalist Party, racial politics entered a new phase in Fiji as the illusion of multiracial harmony created by Ratu Mara's 'Pacific Way', premised upon the concept of a happy and a peaceful multiracial society, faded. According to Mara (1997, p. 282), 'the phrase inspired his 1970 partnership with the Indian opposition leader to produce a constitution whereby people of different races, opinion and cultures can live and work together for the good of all'. However, Fiji was a racially stratified society where cultural isolation of the two communities reinforced prejudices and biases, which were exploited by the ethnic leaders for their personal political ends. Ratu Mara did not want to compromise on any form of electoral solution that compromised indigenous Fijian political hegemony while Koya continued to campaign for common roll. The post-colonial ethnoclass in Fiji comprising indigenous Fijian chiefs, indigenous Fijian commoner nationalists and Europeans and the ethnocracy that was established through the 1970 Constitution ensured indigenous Fijian political control via ethnic bloc voting with the support of Europeans. In the April 1977 elections, Indo-Fijians who supported the Alliance Party were unimpressed with the political position of Ratu Mara and so their support moved to the National Federation Party. Also, the Fijian Nationalist Party split the Alliance Party's indigenous Fijian vote allowing the National

Federation Party (NFP) to win power and challenge the post-colonial ethnic class. However, the split within the NFP ranks and the indecision on the part of the NFP leadership forced the intervention of the Governor General Ratu Sir George Cakobau, who appointed Ratu Mara as a care-taker Prime Minister (Murray 1978, pp. 230-238). Seeing the prospect of the repeat of the April 1977 results, indigenous Fijian voters came back to the Alliance fold. Race played an important part in the second general elections of 1977 and showed that division amongst indigenous Fijians could compromise the political position of their leaders. Race continued to dominate Fiji politics until the April elections of 1987 when the Fiji Labour Party and the NFP coalition put forward a new multiracial vision for Fiji and successfully convinced urban indigenous Fijians to change their voting behaviour. Another important factor besides race was that indigenous Fijians were a minority by 1987, and as a minority community were concerned by the economically dominant position of the majority Indo-Fijian community. The minority-majority dynamics caused suspicion among indigenous Fijian nationalists of Indo-Fijian political designs and furthermore the ethnoclass that governed Fiji became increasingly concerned about losing power due to slight shifts in ethnic voting patterns. As stated before, indigenous Fijian political hegemony could only be realised if the community voted as a bloc for the Alliance Party led by Ratu Mara. Robbie Robertson (2012, p. 511) noted that by the early 1980s, there was a 'significant challenge to post-colonial racial divisions' and the 'irruption of the Fiji Labour Party very quickly precipitated Fiji's first military coup in 1987'.

Militarising the Ethnonation

In 1987, a third-ranking Colonel in the Royal Fiji Military Forces ousted the democratically elected multiracial government of late Dr. Timoci Bavadra (Lawson 1991; Robertson & Tamanisau 1988; Lal 1988; Ramesh 2007). Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka within months was promoted to the Commander of the Fiji military by the late Governor General Ratu Penaia Ganilau. A Military Council was established with the participation of defeated politicians from the Alliance Government (1970 – 1987). The Great Council of Chiefs (GCC), the Methodist Church and the indigenous nationalist Taukei Movement became the 'traditional' voice in support of the military takeover. Moderate indigenous views on multiracial democracy were quickly expunged and prisoners were released to protest in Suva against a writ filed in the Fiji High Court by Dr. Bavadra, challenging the dissolution of parliament by the Governor General (Kaplan 1988, p. 98). Moreover, Indo-Fijians were attacked and

harassed by the Taukei Movement members, who became increasingly violent after a political solution, in the form of a Government of National Unity (GNU), was reached at Deuba in September 1987. Coup leader Rabuka remained unhappy with the turn of events since May and after stating publicly that ‘the objectives of the coup had not been met’ executed his second coup on 25 September of that year. Following the second coup, there were reports of gross human rights violations. According to Kenneth Bain (1988, p. 211), Indo-Fijians were forced to: ‘walk naked in the street, stand for up to twenty four hours in an iron water tank, swim in sewerage ponds filled with human excrements, sit naked for hours at a time on hot tar sealed road, submit to sexual assault by soldiers often in uniform and at army check points, and walk long distances carrying heavy loads while watched by soldiers’. Meanwhile, union members were harassed, detained and tortured for anti-government protests. These actions of the military led the Australian and New Zealand trade unions to call for an immediate economic boycott of Fiji. In response to the actions from the regional trade union movement, Rabuka handed authority to Ratu Mara and to Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau.

From 1987 to 1992 the ethnoclass in Fiji evolved into a new three tier social structure with indigenous Fijian chiefs, indigenous Fijian commoner nationalists and the Fiji military. Indigenous Fijian chiefs Ratu Mara and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau led the nation as Prime Minister and President, indigenous nationalist commoner Fijians remained active and continued with their campaign for a Christian State and a ban on all work on Sundays via the Sunday Observance Decree, and the Fiji military under the control of Rabuka continued harassing and intimidating the mostly Indo-Fijian political activists.

In 1988, the constitution review process started, following the abrogation of the 1970 Constitution in 1987. The post-coup ethnoclass ensured that the new constitution would maintain permanent Indigenous Fijian political control in spite of any factionalisation. To this end, Ratu Penaia appointed the Fiji Constitution Inquiry and Review Committee (CIRC) led by Colonel Paul Manueli. The Committee was given four terms of reference: ‘to scrutinise and consider the extent to which the draft constitution submitted to the cabinet meets the present and future needs of the people, to facilitate the widest possible debate throughout Fiji, to invite and receive representations from the people, and report to the cabinet’ (Premdas & Steeves 1991, pp. 158-159). In fact the CIRC was dominated by individuals sympathetic to the 1987 coup and the purpose of the draft was to ensure indigenous Fijian political hegemony. The Fiji Law Society explicitly rejected the draft and argued that ‘international

law recognises the principle of self-determination and the legitimate rights of indigenous races. However, it does not recognise or condone or encourage the subjugation of any race irrespective of its origin (The Fiji Times, 31 May 1989). Joining in the condemnation of the draft constitution were academics at the University of the South Pacific, unions, women's groups, and human rights organisations.

On 23 September 1989, the CIRC made its recommendation to the interim government, calling for '69 member House of Representatives comprising of 37 Fijians out of whom 30 to be elected by Fijian provinces and 7 by Fijian residents in urban and peri-urban areas; 27 Indians to be elected by communal roll, 4 General Electors (European descent) and 1 Rotuman' (The Fiji Times, 23 September 1989). Despite massive protests by Indo-Fijians against the CIRC recommendation the new racially weighted constitution was promulgated by the coup makers in July 1990. The Australian section of the International Commission of Jurists 'criticised special powers against subversion, stating that it is a recipe for continued military intervention in the life of the community' (The Fiji Times, 9 October 1990). Not long after the promulgation of the constitution, four University of the South Pacific lecturers, a doctor and a retired school teacher were detained for burning the constitution and one of the lecturers, Dr. Anuridh Singh was abducted and tortured for eleven hours by members of the military. At the trial of those accused of torture, 'the defence counsel referred to Section 100 of the 1990 Constitution as the accused persons were provoked in doing what they did to the complainant whom they have considered to have insulted the President, the Prime Minister and members of the Great Council of Chiefs and Fijian people generally' (Singh 1991, p. 53).

International criticisms of the 1990 Constitution were ignored by the interim government which modified public order decrees to suppress freedom of expression. In 1990, three journalists were charged for reporting the burning of the 1990 Constitution, with harassments of journalists continuing well into 1991. The interim government was not only facing protests from political activists and journalists but new battlelines were drawn with the enactment of the Sugar Master's Award, which imposed an unreasonable tax on farmers and reduced the rate paid for burnt sugar cane. The National Farmers Union (NFU), led by Mahendra Chaudhry, went into action and organised series of harvest boycotts, forcing the interim government to withdraw the award. Humiliated but not out, the government continued its onslaught on the NFU and threatened to hold cane payment and enacted labour decrees, to

outlaw protests and to strip Mahendra Chaudhry of his influence by outlawing union officials from holding two union positions (Ramesh 2015, p. 113).

By 1992, Indo-Fijians were divided between the National Federation Party (NFP) and the FLP with the FLP refusing to contest the 1992 elections. Indigenous Fijian members of the FLP split from the party and formed the New Labour Party (NLP) but failed to win any indigenous communal seats in the 1992 general election. The NFP on the other hand argued that by not contesting the elections, Indo-Fijians would be further alienated from the political process. Led by Jai Ram Reddy, the NFP made a come-back from the political wilderness of the late 1980s in the 1992 general elections.

The 1992 election was won by the Soqosoqo ni Vakevulewa ni Taukei (SVT) Party which secured 30 of the 37 communal seats. The NFP won 14 and the FLP 13, effectively splitting the Indo-Fijian votes in half. The Fijian Nationalist United Front won 5 seats with 2 independents. After the election, it was clear that none of the political parties had an outright majority of more than 35 seats (The Fiji Times, 2 June 1992). To the surprise of many, FLP lent its support to Rabuka, following an agreement to 'review the 1990 Constitution, revoke labour reform decrees, scrap the Value Added Tax, and put in place mechanisms to discuss land tenure' (The Fiji Times, 3 June 1992). However, FLP support for Rabuka did not last and soon after the election, FLP staged a lightning walkout of parliament, accusing Rabuka of breaching the pre-election agreement. However, NFP saw the tensions between the FLP and the SVT as an opportunity and embraced Rabuka much to the peril of the party.

The 1992 election once again highlighted that the ethnoclass established via the 1990 Constitution continued to suffer from the problems that afflicted the 1970 constitutional order: indigenous Fijian disunity. From 1992 to 1999, Fiji went through a series of political transformations. The SVT split in 1993 after members of the SVT party defeated the 1994 Budget. No longer with the SVT, rebel members formed the Fijian Association Party (FAP) under the leadership of late Josevata Kamikamica. Fiji went to the polls in 1994 and the SVT was once again returned to office. Despite the SVT win, divisions within the indigenous Fijians became apparent as Prime Minister Rabuka sought to improve his failing political fortunes by seeking assistance for constitutional reforms from the NFP leader Jai Ram Reddy. In 1995, a Constitution Review Commission (CRC) was established to review the 1990 Constitution. The CRC recommended drastic changes to Fiji's constitutional make up. Some

of the changes were so far reaching that the indigenous Fijian leadership used the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee to 'soften' the impact of the CRC Report. In the end, indigenous Fijians were unhappy with the new constitutional arrangement whereas Indo-Fijians saw constitutional reforms as the only way of safeguarding minority rights in the country. The consequence of Rabuka's constitutional reforms was two-fold. Firstly, a number of Fijian provinces withdrew support for the GCC-backed SVT party and secondly, there was an upsurge in indigenous nationalism, which led to the formation of the Christian Democratic Alliance party or Veitokani ni Lewenivanua Vakarisito (VLV). Both these developments spelt disaster for Rabuka and the SVT in the 1999 elections as the party was abandoned by a majority of the indigenous Fijians. On the Indo-Fijian front, Jai Ram Reddy's cordial relationship with Rabuka ended the political hopes of the NFP party. Many Indo-Fijians saw the NFP as a 'weak' party unable to champion the rights of the Indo-Fijians. As a result, the NFP was wiped out of the Fiji's political landscape as Fiji's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry formed the Peoples' Coalition Government with the indigenous Fijian FAP, VLV and the Party of National Unity (PANU) parties.

The divisions within indigenous Fijians were far reaching and as Alumita Durutalo (2000, p. 79) concluded, these divisions were played out at different levels within the indigenous community: 'within each province there are subtle forms of competition based on pre-colonial vanua. In each province, for example, there are certain vanua which receive more from government than others. In the province of Nadroga and Navosa, the coastal Nadroga people have always been favoured over the inland Navosa people in terms of state resources for any development in the province'. Also there existed tensions between the maritime provinces and provinces on the main land of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. In the 1990s, Ratu Mara, the paramount chief of Lau favoured Josevata Kamikamica to take over as Prime Minister from 1992. Other chiefs particularly from Cakaudrove supported Rabuka. These tensions within the indigenous Fijians created a weak ethnoclass.

In addition, the 1997 Constitution, based on preferential voting exacerbated divisions by allowing ethnically exclusive parties to form grand coalitions and adopt preference engineering against their foes. While a new era dawned on Fiji's ethnic politics, the indigenous nationalists remained unconvinced with the political outcome on constitutional reform and privately expressed shock with the election of the first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister. Chaudhry, a former trade union leader and a Minister for Finance in the deposed Bavadra

government, reintroduced some of the Labour policies that had led to the coups of 1987. Within six months in office, the Peoples' Coalition Government was heading for a showdown with the GCC and the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) over sugar lease arrangements under the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act (ALTA). Capitalising on the sensitivities over land, indigenous nationalists led by George Speight, with the support from a section of the Fiji military, deposed the Peoples' Coalition Government on 19 May 2000.

On 19 May 2000, armed men stormed Fiji's parliament and held cabinet members of the Peoples' Coalition Government hostage for 56 days (Robertson & Sutherland 2001). The May 2000 coup, the third in a series of coups, was executed by indigenous Fijian nationalists and members of Fiji's military's Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit. However, unlike in 1987, the 2000 putsch caused indigenous fragmentation and paved way for further coups. Like in May 1987, the 2000 coup leaders mistakenly thought that there would be overwhelming support among indigenous Fijians for the takeover, following claims by indigenous nationalists that the Peoples' Coalition Government, led by an Indo-Fijian Mahendra Chaudhry, proposed a number of bills aimed at diluting the rights of indigenous Fijians. Moreover, the coup makers wanted to oust the President of Fiji, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who remained steadfast in his support for the multiracial 1997 Constitution, after indigenous petitions for its abrogation.

George Speight and his supporters exploited traditional divisions and quietly negotiated with the vanua of Vuda to nominate Ratu Josefa Iloilo (Burebasaga) to the position of the President and a high chief of Bau, Ratu Jope Seniloili (Kubuna) to the position of Vice President. The Speight group argued that President Ratu Mara had become an obstacle to their 'objective' because he had failed to persuade Mahendra Chaudhry and his government to 'voluntarily resign', and 'address the grievances of the indigenous community in the light of the 1997 Constitution' (Confidential Draft, George Speight group, Parliamentary Complex, Suva, 21 May 2000).

George Speight produced more than divisions and fragmentation among indigenous Fijians. According to Graham Dobell (2000, p. 176), 'there were Pacific rhythms at work' and one such rhythm involved racial violence. After the Speight group failed to unite indigenous Fijians behind its cause, it started exploiting ethnic and cultural divisions and ordered indigenous supporters to attack Indo-Fijians in areas sympathetic to the coup. Susanna Trnka

(2011, p. 333) during her research in Fiji at the height of the 2000 mayhem observed that ‘members of the Indo-Fijian community that I was working among were profoundly shaken by the violence. They talked about the coup incessantly, relating accounts of physical attacks that had happened to them or to their relatives. They spoke at length about their fears that the country was going to devolve into anarchy. Some foretold that this might be the beginning of ethnic genocide’. At the end of the 56 day siege of the parliament, George Speight and his rebels humiliated the military, divided the Great Council of Chiefs, and succeeded in having their own supporters in an interim government (Alley 2000, p. 515).

The interim government that was eventually established after the 2000 coup continued with the direction espoused by the Speight group. The interim Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase, argued that there was an urgent need to bridge the economic gap between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians and immediately implemented a ‘blueprint on supremacy’, which re-invented affirmative action programs that had existed under previous indigenous governments following the 1987 coups. Steven Ratuva labelled the affirmative action program under the interim government as ‘second phase’, which had two parts: ‘first the attempt by the military appointed interim government led by Laisenia Qarase to appease ethno-nationalists who supported and were responsible for the ethnic violence surrounding the 2000 coup and, secondly, to harness political support by the newly elected SDL government led by Qarase’ (Ratuva 2014, p. 142). The ‘blueprint’, after the 2001 elections, passed the legislature and became the Social Justice Act 2001, which had scheduled 29 schemes, out of which ‘9 were discriminatory in racial terms’ (Cottrell & Ghai 2007, p. 240-41). According to the Citizens’ Constitutional Forum (CCF), the Social Justice Act contained a number of anomalies that required revisions and amendments. The CCF further observed that the weaknesses in the Act existed because it was promoted as a general election promise (Citizens Constitutional Forum, 11 February 2002).

According to Brij Lal, ‘Fijian nationalists want Fijian paramountcy recognised as a right, but there is no basis on which the paramountcy of Fijian interests or Fijian political paramountcy can be elevated into a right. But no constitution can guarantee political paramountcy of a particular ethnic group in a multi-ethnic state unless, of course, it abandons all claim to be democratic’ (Lal 2000, p. 292). Brian Martin (1993, p. 53) also observed that ‘the use of ethnic divisions for political purposes has a long history in Fiji. The Labour Party itself represented a challenge to this political use of ethnicity, and the coup represented a reversion

to this status quo', both in 1987 and 2000. However, after the 2001 election, the military had started to question ethnically exclusive policies of the Qarase government.

After the August 2001 general elections, the SDL and the CAMV formed a coalition government and ensured that the FLP was not allowed to join cabinet as stipulated under the 1997 Constitution. As expected, the FLP leader challenged his party's exclusion from government and in a landmark judgment in 2003, the Supreme Court of Fiji upheld the multiparty cabinet provision in the Fiji Constitution but allowed political parties to resolve differences and agree to a multiparty government rules. Unfortunately the SDL refused to cooperate with the FLP and the two parties drifted further apart. By 2003, the military Commander had lost all faith in the SDL government. While initially supporting affirmative action for indigenous Fijians, Voreqe Bainimarama, Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, saw the SDL's Social Justice Act and the blueprint on indigenous supremacy as divisive and counterproductive for Fiji. Moreover, the army was equally concerned about the SDL's support for the individuals implicated in the 2000 coup.

The tensions between the army and the SDL government escalated from June 2005 with the release of the Racial Tolerance and Unity Bill (RTU), which provided amnesty to the individuals involved in the events of 2000. The government proposed not only the RTU but it had plans to enact the Qoliqoli and the Lands Claims Tribunal Bills. The bills in their totality were seen by the army Commander as a threat to 'national security'. According to Stephen McCarthy (2011, p. 566), 'the perpetrators of the 2000 coup sought their amnesty and pushed for the establishment of an independent unity commission as part of a reconciliation initiative – the Reconciliation Tolerance and Unity Bill – to address causes of the crisis and resolve Fiji's ongoing political instability'. To make matters worse, the SDL supporters in the Fiji military were given the go-ahead to depose Commander Voreqe Bainimarama and in January 2006, there was another failed mutiny at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks in Suva.

As Fiji headed towards elections in May 2006, the SDL absorbed the nationalist CAMV party and went to the polls with an agenda to divide the country along religious lines. A large number of the SDL Indo-Fijian candidates were Muslims whereas the FLP candidates were predominantly Hindu. This type of religion-based electioneering backfired when the SDL failed to win a single Indo-Fijian communal seat. Seeing the country divided ferociously along racial lines, the triumphant SDL Prime Minister invited nine FLP members to join his

government. While the FLP leader Mahendra Chaudhry, throughout the previous SDL term, was enthusiastic about multiparty government, after May 2006 elections, his response was lukewarm and at times obscurantist. Despite nominating party members to join the SDL government, Chaudhry wanted to be the leader of the opposition. One cannot be part of the government and be in opposition at the same time. It is contrary to the fundamental principle of parliamentarianism. Just before the 5 December coup, Chaudhry remained committed to derailing the multiparty government after four FLP cabinet ministers voted against the 1997 Budget. Chaudhry warned earlier that all nine FLP cabinet ministers had to vote against the budget. However, five FLP cabinet members were granted leave of absence by the deposed Prime Minister Qarase on the day of the budget vote. Chaudhry was unhappy after the 2007 budget passed with forty votes to twenty six. In a last bid to save the multiparty government, Qarase on 24 November came up with a compromise. Qarase proposed that he would allow FLP cabinet ministers who voted against the budget to stay in cabinet provided the FLP did not take any disciplinary action against the other five. This was rejected by Chaudhry who argued that party directives superseded those of the cabinet in what was the final nail into the coffin of a disintegrating multiparty government. According to Mahendra Chaudhry:

The FLP, for instance, was not consulted on the formulation of the 2007 budget, especially on the imposition of an increase in the value added tax (VAT) from 12.5 per cent to 15 per cent – a totally insensitive move that would have greatly intensified the hardship faced by our lower-paid workers and the poor. Laisenia Qarase also shunned every overture I made as leader of the FLP to get bipartisan talks going on the highly contentious and divisive Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity (RTU) Bill (a misnomer because its main objective was to grant amnesty to those convicted for their part in the 2000 coup), and the Qoliqoli and Land Claims Tribunal bills (Chaudhry 2009, p.346).

Not only did Chaudhry criticise the SDL government's handling of controversial bill, he also was very scathing of the 1997 Constitution, despite the fact that he won an absolute majority in the 1999 election under it. Chaudhry (2009, p. 345) argued that the 1997 Constitution was 'flawed' and 'deliberately damaged by the political leadership of Sitiveni Rabuka and Jai Ram Reddy when they wrote it and entrenched the communal electoral system'. The 1997 Constitution of Fiji required parties with 10 per cent or more of the total seats in parliament to be included in a multiparty cabinet. The electoral system was changed from the first-past-the-post system under the 1970 Constitution to Alternative Vote, which was to 'promote majority victors and to encourage interethnic accommodation' (Reilly 2007, p. 62). However,

evidence from the 1999, 2000 and the 2006 Fiji elections showed that ‘the majority of transfers of preference votes in Fiji flowed from the more moderate or centrist parties towards the more extremist organisations’ (Fraenkel 2004, p. 126) as interethnic moderation, envisaged by the Constitution Review Commission, did not materialise, leading to the failure of multiparty cabinet, and the collapse of the mid-1990s ‘constitutional engineering project’ (Fraenkel 2007, p. 44). In his analysis of the 1999 Fiji elections, Fraenkel (2000, p. 106) observed that ‘strong opposition can provide an important check and balance in the system, particularly where this represents substantial sections of the electorate. The SVT-NFP coalition might, under proportional representation, have commanded 25 seats’. In addition, there was another serious problem overlooked by constitution designers, and identified by FLP leader Mahendra Chaudhry, and that was preponderance of communal seats (45) over national ones (25), thus continuing with the failed post-colonial political trajectory of ethnocracy, ethnoclass and ethnonation led by indigenous Fijian nationalism.

Worse, the deposed Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase was a poor political strategist because he made futile attempts to make Chaudhry a substantial stakeholder by offering him the position of the Deputy Prime Minister in the ill-fated multiparty government, especially after the army wrenched up its anti-government rhetoric with the reintroduction of the controversial Racial Tolerance and Unity, Qoliqoli and Land Claims bills. Instead of trying to salvage the multiparty government, Laisenia Qarase should have agreed to the demands of the army because there was no other way. Laisenia Qarase (2009, pp. 353-374) was also perhaps somewhat delusional as he believed he led a ‘genuinely representative multiracial government’ accusing Mahendra Chaudhry of the FLP of ‘distortion and misrepresentation about affirmative action’ and further labelling Bainimarama as ‘the bad guy’ who wanted to ‘evade the law’ for the alleged murder of those military officers who wanted him dead.

The army Commander, Voreqe Bainimarama, was on a path of no return and on 5 December, the SDL government was deposed in a bloodless military coup. Soon after the coup, the GCC, sections of the Methodist Church, the NGOs, and the Fiji Law Society condemned the takeover and called for a quick restoration of democracy. Previously in 1987 and in 2000, both the GCC and the Methodist Church supported armed takeover of government but this time around the deposed government was voted into office by more than 80 per cent of the total eligible indigenous Fijian communal votes. The deposed Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase’s fight to restore the SDL government became stuck because in 2001 Qarase

reiterated that democracy was a 'foreign flower' and that it was incompatible with the indigenous tradition and culture. The army moved quickly against its critics and in less than a month secured its grip on the country. Laisenia Qarase was banished to his island home of Mavana in Vanuabalavu, parliament was dissolved, all SDL appointed board members dismissed and dissidents silenced.

On 4 January 2007, the army Commander handed executive authority to the President of Fiji Ratu Josefa Iloilo, who appointed Voreqe Bainimarama as the interim Prime Minister of Fiji. A new interim government was sworn in on 8 and 9 January 2007 as the 1987 coup was repeated with some slight modifications. While the SDL was entirely excluded from the interim line up, the FLP and the NAPF were given substantial portfolios, leading to criticisms from the deposed leader of the opposition, Mick Beddoes and the deposed Prime Minister Qarase. The return of veteran politician and the FLP leader Chaudhry to the portfolio of finance was observed with interest in both Fiji and abroad.

Dismantling Ethnocracy

The military takeover in Fiji in December 2006 was aimed at dismantling the ethnoclass and the ethnonation that were characteristic of the political order established at independence in 1970. As I have argued, this ethnoclass consisted of indigenous Fijian chiefs, commoner indigenous Fijian nationalists and the Europeans from 1970 to 1987 when the ethnoclass incorporated the military in defining the ethnonation from 1987 to 2000. By 2000, the military split when forced to confront George Speight and his supporters and following the failed mutiny in 2000 against military commander Voreqe Bainimarama, the military was effectively purged and turned against the ethnoclass resulting in the coup of 2006. Robert Norton (2015, p. 122) observed that 'during the conflict with Qarase, Bainimarama had begun to shape the corporate identity of his army as guardian and guide for the multi-ethnic nation'. The new ethnoclass that emerged from the ashes of the 1997 Constitution was based on alliance between the military, progressive indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, who for a very long time campaigned for political equality and a common name. A non-ethnic nation was achieved with the promulgation of the 2013 Constitution and democratic elections in 2014 where the new ethnoclass in the form of FijiFirst won 59 per cent of the votes to win government.

Fiji went to the polls on 17 September 2014 as overseas anti-government blog sites ramped up its anti-FijiFirst Party commentary, even though there was a 48 hour political campaign blackout in Fiji. Blog sites accused FijiFirst of manipulating the election, planning curfews, buying votes, and threatening non-FijiFirst participants, but the international observer group found no evidence of such activities. There were in total 590,000 registered voters out of which 496,364 (83.9 per cent) voted in the 2014 general election. The voting was carried out in 1500 polling stations where voters showed their identity cards to the electoral officers who verified their name on the voter list, marked their finger with an indelible ink and then issued them the ballot paper whereon the voter marked with a cross or a tick against his or her preferred candidates number and deposited the ballot into a secured ballot box. Most of the voting on 17 September was completed before 3 pm and the provisional results were published in the morning of 18 September.

The provisional election figures placed FijiFirst in the lead with 60 per cent of the seats, followed by SODELPA and the National Federation Party. The Fiji Labour Party, the Peoples' Democratic Party, One Fiji and the Fiji United Freedom Party failed to secure the required 5 per cent threshold of 24,818 votes. In the afternoon of 18 September, Fiji Labour Party, Peoples' Democratic Party, SODELPA, One Fiji and the National Federation party issued a joint statement in a letter, arguing that there were irregularities in the conduct of the election and requested the count of the votes be suspended. The Supervisor of Elections responded that the allegations from political parties were too general and refused to suspend counting. On 19 September, political parties questioning the election produced a list of 'evidence' claiming that extra ballot papers were printed, seals on the ballot boxes were broken, counting was suspended without explanation and ballot papers were tampered with. The Election Office rejected the claims on 20 September and the full and final result of the election was published on 21 September 2014.

While FijiFirst came out on the top with 59 per cent of the votes, there were concerns that the 2014 election was rushed with very little thought given on the transition from military rule to democratic elections, including restrictions on political parties with the promulgation of electoral and political parties' registration decrees. Also, there were allegations that the non-ethnic political agenda of the FijiFirst was nothing more than window dressing since majority in the FijiFirst government and the public service are indigenous Fijians, thus a continuation of ethnocracy under the guise of non-ethnic rhetoric. However, these criticisms have been

dismissed by FijiFirst as political posturing by the opposition which hopes to bring back the communal and ethnic agendas of the past.

To understand the new ethnoclass in Fiji, it is imperative that we visit some of the underpinning ideologies of the ethnoclass that was deposed in the 2006 coup. An analysis by Stewart Firth (2015, pp. 101-112) provides an insight into the exclusive ethnic trajectory that was adopted by the Social Democratic Liberal Party of Fiji (SODELPA) before the 2014 election. According to Firth, a minority within the indigenous Fijian community see that they have 'special rights that belong only to the descendants of Fiji's original occupiers' and consider the 'United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007 guarantees a form self-determination, entrenching indigenous dominance' (Firth 2015, p. 103). Ratuva notes that SODELPA 'increasingly shifted towards extreme ethno-nationalist and protectionist position'. However despite utilising the indigenous Fijian supremacy template of the previous nationalist regimes, SODELPA managed to only secure '46 percent of indigenous votes compared to FijiFirst with 50 per cent' (Ratuva 2015, p. 147).

Perhaps even more telling is Ratuva's assertions that it was time to move away from ethnic analysis and focus on 'deeper intra-ethnic dynamics' (Ratuva 2015, p. 137) because a new political landscape based on ethnic equality operates in Fiji. In fact, analysis of the Indo-Fijian votes in the 2014 Fiji election shows that Indo-Fijian voters who went to FLP in 2006 elections pledged their support for FijiFirst (72 per cent). According to Jon Fraenkel (2015, p. 41) 'the collapse of support for the Fiji FLP – which had obtained 81% of the first-preference votes of the Fiji Indian community (and 39.2% of the national vote) at the previous elections in 2006 but which secured only 2.4% of the national vote in 2014 – gave an obvious indication of one key source of FijiFirst's new support base'. Beside Indo-Fijian votes, Fraenkel (2015, p. 46) analyses in detail indigenous Fijian votes by provinces and in particular highlights the support for SODELPA in Fiji's maritime provinces including Bua (51%), Kadavu (68%) Lau (75%) and Lomaiviti (58%). These provinces along with parts of the main islands Viti Levu and Vanua Levu traditionally supported candidates who advocated strong nationalist views. However, in 2014, except for Namosi (57%), the rest of the provinces supported FijiFirst. This shift in historical voting pattern may have been caused by the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 and the younger generation in both urban and rural areas accepting a non-ethnic political discourse.

According to Patrick Vakaoti, 'for young people concerned about completing school and finding employment, FijiFirst offered an element of stability and continuity, even if their track record of adherence to democratic principles was questionable. It could be argued that the reduction of the voting age to 18 years was a calculated decision, given the Bainimarama Government's appeal for a new brand of politics and the many policies and forms of assistance that directly impacted on first-time voters' (Vakaoti 2015, p. 163). Besides young voters, there were also other forces at play including the popularity of Bainimarama, who was seen as committed to a non-ethnic nation where social policies were enacted on the basis of need and open and accountable government instead of repacking discriminatory policies of past indigenous nationalists.

FijiFirst called for the separation of state and religion, a common name of 'Fijian' for all Fiji citizens, allocation of state resources based on community needs instead of race, fair agricultural leases, land bank, anti-corruption measures via the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption, reducing violence against women, affordable housing, national employment scheme, infrastructure plan, agri-business diversification, reducing bureaucratic red tape, modernising the legal framework, encouraging women in the workplace, lowering youth unemployment, being tough on sacrilege and other criminal acts, free water, reasonable rates for electricity and gas, fee-free education, investment in higher education, subsidised milk for primary school students and equal citizenry.

The Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) led by Rewa chief Ro Teimumu Kepa, and supported by former Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, criticised 'Fijian' as a common name, wanted Fiji to be declared a Christian state, preferred changes to land lease money distribution for a larger share to indigenous chiefs, sought the return of the political role of the Great Council of Chiefs, the reinstatement of Fijian Affairs Board scholarships, a restructured Taukei Land Trust Board, the possibility of bringing back the 1997 Constitution, reforming the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, establishing Indigenous Fijian foreshore rights via a Qoliqoli legislation, the review of all decrees between 2006 and 2014, and the implementation social justice and affirmative action programs for indigenous Fijians, similar to what existed during the reign of the former SDL Government (2001 to 2006).

In the end SODELPA managed to muster only 28% of the vote as voters rejected its exclusionary political agenda and embraced FijiFirst. The new ethnoclass of FijiFirst

consisting of progressive indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians and members of the military is the new Fijian elite which has started work on reducing ethnic polarisation with an aim to establish a broad-based national leadership, sensitive to the needs of the people of Fiji.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how Fiji has continued along a turbulent ethnocratic trajectory established during colonial times. Post-colonial Fiji emphasised an indigenous Fijian political hegemony and this led to tensions with Indo-Fijians, who pushed for political equality. These tensions have played out in political instability over several decades, until a new ethnoclass emerged through the FijiFirst political party, at least for now uniting progressive indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians and members of the military in a new multiracial Fijian elite.

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Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the contribution of the anonymous reviewers of this paper to clarifying the expression of my central argument.

Statement of Conflict of Interest

I have no conflict of interest to declare.

Funding

This research was funded by The Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney.