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The challenge of inheritance

Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka derived from Nakobo, an isolated village in Natewa Bay, south-eastern Vanua Levu. Although a commoner, he was educated at Queen Victoria School (QVS), an elite colonial boarding school established in rural Tailevu for the sons of Fijian chiefs. Graduates of QVS have dominated the upper echelons of government in Fiji, sometimes bringing with them insular views of Fiji that neglected both its multicultural character and the diverse nature of the people they claimed to represent. This was unfortunate; Fiji's past has never been as insular or singular as they often asserted, and the political repercussions of such claims would be profound.

Indeed, 3,000 years of settlement has left legacies that we are only beginning to understand. The first migrants to the south-west Pacific islands of Fiji¹ were the coastal-based ancestors of today's Polynesians, who had travelled over 1,000 kilometres from the Bismarck Archipelago in present-day Papua New Guinea or from the eastern Solomon Islands. They were descendants of Austronesian migrants from Southern China and Taiwan over 6,000 years ago who had reached the Pacific via the

1 Fiji lies between 15 and 22 degrees south latitude and 175 degrees east and 177 degrees west longitude. It consists of two main islands, Viti Levu (10,386 square kilometres) and Vanua Levu (5,535 square kilometres) and some 330 smaller islands (2,151 square kilometres combined) predominantly within archipelagic thrusts west (the Yasawa group), south (Kadavu), and east (Taveuni and the Lau group). The small Polynesian island of Rotuma lies 400 kilometres to the north. From north to south, Fiji stretches some 1,000 kilometres and, from west to east, 500 kilometres.

Philippines and Indonesia.² They settled along Fiji's coasts, on its western grasslands and in its valleys, becoming increasingly pressured by climate change and the massive migration of Melanesians from the Solomons and Vanuatu after 1,000 CE. The latter migrants bestowed over 300 related languages on the Fiji group. But they also transformed Fiji in other ways, revolutionising agriculture and establishing the basis for the social and political structures that are today regarded as traditionally Fijian.³ Population pressure at a time of climate change resulted in competition for resources that rapidly intensified warfare in Fiji. Fortified villages sprung up and, during the 19th century, they were augmented by increasingly large political confederacies (*matanitu*) and alliances for defensive and offensive purposes.⁴ Huge wars were fought.

By then, Fiji had divided at least superficially into the Kai Colo of inland Viti Levu (nominally western Fiji) and the Kai Wai of Fiji's coastal regions and islands (again nominally eastern Fiji), with south-east Viti Levu (containing the fractious Bau, Rewa and Verata *matanitu*) the most densely populated region in the South Pacific.⁵ The peoples of maritime Fiji were heavily influenced by trade and political alliances with Polynesian island groups, especially nearby resource-scarce Tonga, which colonised parts of eastern Fiji and lent troops to Fijian allies. Polynesian influence gave eastern Fiji a more hierarchical social and political character, which contrasted with the comparatively egalitarian nature of western Fiji. Whether the Kai Colo peoples of western Fiji are remnants of an early Melanesian wave that was pushed inland by successors is uncertain, but this late period of Fijian history undoubtedly left its people deeply scarred and disoriented. It also dislocated and scattered whole tribes across Fiji on a scale never before imaginable. In 2006, when working on the history of a Tailevu village that was seeking to recreate its ring ditches and fortifications for an ecotourism project, Canadian anthropologist Tara Mar and I learned of its people's movement from Ra and down eastern Viti Levu, possibly as a consequence of warfare. The Tai village's ancestors

2 B Su et al., 'Polynesian origins: Insights from the Y chromosome', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, 97: 15, July 2000, pp. 8225–28.

3 C Walsh, 'Fiji's prehistory: Lapita', in C Walsh, *Fiji: An Encyclopaedic Atlas*. Suva: University of the South Pacific, 2006, pp. 394–95. Fijian social organisation began first with the family and then the extended family as the land holding unit, either the *i tokatoka* or the larger sub clan – the *mataqali*. The *yavusa* or clan is a grouping of *mataqali*, and related clans comprise a *vanua*.

4 In the east, the Tovata confederacy of *vanua* dominated the Lau group of islands and most of Vanua Levu. In eastern and northern Viti Levu, Bau held sway under the Kubuna confederacy while the Rewa confederacy of Burebasaga dominated southern Viti Levu.

5 Walsh, 'Fiji's prehistory: Ring-ditch fortifications', in Walsh, *Fiji*, 2006, pp. 396–97.

eventually found sanctuary as warriors for Verata, but the secrets of their past remain jealously guarded by family groupings (*mataqali*) and are not shared for fear of resurrecting ancient quarrels.⁶

At the University of the South Pacific during the 1990s and 2000s, a team of scholars led by Paddy Nunn revealed something of the many layers of that past and, in the process, challenged the general Fijian perception that they are derived from a single people, who arrived from the west with a great fleet led by the chiefly canoe, Kaunitoni, and then dispersed across Viti Levu. So powerful is the myth that, in 2005, the Fiji Museum and Radio Fiji sponsored its recreation. Fiji TV also broadcast a series devoted to exploring the myth, among others, although less for purposes of resolution than for reinforcement. That the myth bestows legitimacy on rivals (such as Verata) to dominant traditional powerholders of the country (Lau and Bau) is perhaps not insignificant. Nor the fact that the myth was cobbled together in the late 19th century by missionaries and ethnographers and later embellished with the notion that Fijians were a lost tribe of Israel that had arrived in Fiji via East Africa. Today, these stories remain enmeshed in the struggles of chiefs to reclaim heritage or status lost during the great remaking of Fiji under colonialism and in their desire to make Fijians a singular people.⁷

That remaking began before the arrival of Europeans, being most marked in south-eastern Viti Levu as the tiny island Bau gradually dominated over its hinterland and, in particular, Verata.⁸ Europeans, however, provided fresh opportunities to exploit during these ongoing struggles. Bau's military chief or *vunivalu* quickly used access to European beachcombers to gain weapons to resolve its conflict with Verata more expeditiously. European plantation owners similarly created opportunities to silence opponents. A later *vunivalu*, Ratu Seru Cakobau, sold Ovalau's Lovoni

6 T Mar, 'A village based eco-tourism venture: A case study of Tai village', in R Robertson (ed.), *Livelihoods and Identity in Fiji*. Suva: University of the South Pacific, 2006, pp. 35–56.

7 Steven Ratuva claims that 'myths of common ancestry, origin, migration and history' are an important 'basis for constructing an ethnic ideology' to 'justify certain claims' ('Politics of ethno-national identity in a post-colonial communal democracy: The case of Fiji', *Identity & Belongingness in Fiji*, 18 June 2008, ecreanfriends.wordpress.com/2008/06/18/politics-of-ethno-national-identity-in-a-post-colonial-communal-democracy-the-case-of-Fiji).

8 See David Routledge, *Matanitu: The Struggle for Power in Early Fiji*. Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1985; and Peter France, *The Charter of the Land: Custom & Colonization in Fiji*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969.

people to planters in 1871 when they challenged his control over Lomaiviti. The same fate awaited *vanua* in Colo five years later after a series of unsuccessful attempts to establish Bauan dominance.

Christianity provided another tool for ambition. Cakobau converted to Christianity to ensure Tongan support for his next struggle on Viti Levu against Verata's neighbour, Rewa. The already Christianised Tonga was always something of a wild card in these struggles. Bau feared that it might try to usurp its authority. Indeed, Tonga sent a member of its ruling family to the Lau islands in eastern Fiji to consolidate Tongan influence there and, after a series of attempts, Ma'afu established the Tovata confederacy linking Lau with Cakaudrove, Macuata and Bua on Vanua Levu. Bau responded with its own Kubuna confederacy, but this soon found itself under pressure from the United States for a 20-year-old, dubiously inflated debt. The debt was paid, but by a commercial company in return for land. Settlers soon followed in 1871 and Cakobau sought to retain control by forming a Fijian kingdom with European advisors, hoping to gain recognition from foreign powers. It failed and, in desperation, Cakobau tried once more to cede Fiji to Britain, hoping again to maintain authority in the face of growing internal and external pressures.

Historian Alumita Durutalo argues that Christianity also helped chiefs to extend their power in other ways; certainly the translation of the Bible into the Bauan dialect extended Bauan authority and laid the foundation for a neotraditional order under colonialism.⁹ Christianity destroyed the primacy of local gods; so too the power held by their priests or *bete*. The elaborate separation of gender and caste to stabilise population and maintain tribal hierarchies also disappeared from Fijian society. Missionaries demanded that husbands and wives live as nuclear families. Villages were transformed. Unexpectedly, in the midst of this revolution, came a great pestilence. In 1875, measles swept the land, wiping out nearly one quarter of the population.¹⁰ Among the Tai warriors, a complex hierarchy of villages collapsed and the survivors huddled together for the first time within a single village. Thus weakened, Fijians made easier pickings for colonial land grabbers.

9 Alumita Durutalo, 'Of roots & offshoots: Fijian political thinking, dissent & the formation of political parties, 1960–1999'. PhD Thesis, The Australian National University. Canberra, 2005, p. 61.

10 The true demographic impact may never be known, but official estimates in 1879 place the death rate at 27 per cent of the 150,000 population (Andrew D Cliff & Peter Hagggett, *The Spread of Measles in Fiji & the Pacific*. Canberra: The Australian National University, 1985, p. 35).

The colonial heritage

Historian Mike Davis once argued that underdevelopment – in his view the hallmark of most Third World countries on the eve of independence – had its origins in colonialism.¹¹ In Fiji, we can glimpse something of that origin in the way that the colonial desire for stability reduced the capacity of ordinary Fijians to engage with the modern economy, although reality was never as straightforward as Davis suggested. Colonial demands for raw materials, in particular sugar, also gave shape to an economy lacking the intersectoral linkages needed to capitalise on the creative potential of its people. An economy with such characteristics is not uniquely colonial but, under colonialism, development meant explicitly creating the conditions necessary to establish and maintain a viable export industry beneficial to the colonising power or its empire. Colonialism did not exist to benefit the colonised. Swiss sociologist Gilbert Rist argues that this approach to development cost colonialism any chance of success.¹² It was not inclusive. It could not win the hearts and minds of its subjects, no matter how much it pretended. Nonetheless, in the interim, it transformed societies like Fiji and created new dynamics that ultimately it could not control. By the early to mid-20th century, most colonies were under challenge internally, even before the Second World War and its aftermath swept away the international environment that had spawned it.

The modern era of colonialism began with the European arrival in the Americas in the late 15th century and the subsequent globalisation of trade routes. Colonies began to fulfil new economic functions, such as the production of tobacco, sugar and, later, coffee, tea and opium. Opium financed the British conquest of India and enabled it to control much of China's foreign trade by the late 19th century. Indian cotton fed British mills. The Pacific islands were incorporated for similar purposes. By the early 19th century, whalers plied the seas. Traders arrived for sandalwood and bêche de mer to sell to the Chinese. In the early 1860s, planters entered Fiji to capitalise on the American Civil War's impact on cotton supply. Cotton, already the world's most important crop, drove the mercantilist fortunes of the British East India Company and encouraged the use of slaves trafficked from Africa for American plantations. In Fiji,

11 M Davis, 'The origins of the Third World', in S Chari & S Corbridge (eds), *The Development Reader*. Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 14–30.

12 G Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*. London & New York: Zed Books, 1997, p. 58.

blackbirded Pacific islanders provided the necessary plantation labour. But, most importantly, cotton drove Britain's industrialisation, earning it wealth and power of a magnitude never before imagined. The surpluses that Britain drew from India and China enabled it to sustain deficits with its self-governing dominions and new industrial rivals.¹³ In addition, India became an important market for British products.

Industrialisation changed the nature of global dynamics and offered societies very different futures, but only if they appreciated the threat that industrialisation posed to their autonomy should they fail to respond. In the North Pacific, Japan appreciated that threat and, after 1868, began a development program to strengthen its already impressively commercial state through modernisation and industrialisation. This meant adapting what had been successful in existing industrialised countries, particularly Britain. And, if colonies were regarded as an important key to Britain's success, then countries that wished to emulate that success also sought colonies. This kind of thinking was all pervasive and long-lasting. When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1940, he declared: 'What India is for England, the territories of Russia will be for us.'¹⁴ In this way, colonies served the age-old zero-sum perceptions then held of development and change. Land and peoples were monopolised for the exclusive benefit of the coloniser. The exclusions and the inequalities they generated were justified as the reward for the coloniser's fitness and superiority. Progress possessed no universal application.

Societies unable, unwilling or unaware of the need to respond urgently to the industrial era became colonies, robbed of autonomy and incorporated into the economies of industrialising nations to supply raw materials and cheap labour. The experience was often brutal and harsh. Often, existing systems of governance were refashioned to disempower the very subjects that colonisers claimed they sought to civilise. The result was a process of dissolution and conservation that trapped future generations in legacies of disadvantage and bitterness.¹⁵ It mattered little that these consequences contradicted the mission promoted by most colonising countries

13 Davis, 'The origins of the Third World', 2008, pp. 24–27.

14 A Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*. London: Penguin, 1962, p. 656.

15 C Bettelheim, 'Theoretical comments', in A Emmanuel, *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977, pp. 293–99. Bettelheim argued that, in conserving those parts of social formations deemed functional in practice, colonialism made them seem separate from its other institutions. This appearance of isolation gave rise to the notion of duality.

to justify their actions to their own people. In the end, empire sustained national pride and made nations appear great. Conquering lesser peoples fulfilled their historic destiny. Lesser peoples were not their equal. They did not possess the same rights; certainly not the right to develop similarly, create democratic institutions or engage with the wider, more globalised world on their own terms. Those possibilities could only occur after independence. Until then colonialism induced deep psychological barriers between colonised and coloniser that perpetuated distrust and violence. Such impacts often continued long after the colonial period had ended wherever local collaborators sought to inherit the colonial state. It gave birth to a form of neocolonialism in which the social divisions that promoted or sustained colonialism simply continued, invariably with destabilising consequences. Colonial experiences also generated deep suspicions of the motives of former colonial powers, affecting reactions to development advice after the 1950s and encouraging many former colonies to pursue disastrous separate development strategies.

Many of these features of colonialism were found in Fiji and made their way into the language of revolt that was demonstrated during times of upheaval long after colonialism had ended. So, too, the struggle for supremacy between Fiji's leading chiefs that had played such a vital role in the decision of Cakobau, the *vunivalu* of Bau, to cede Fiji to Britain in 1874. Cession provided a means to deal with the outside world now rapidly crowding in, while giving scope to preserve existing structures of power. The ageing *vunivalu* provocatively styled himself Tui Viti or King of Fiji and vainly hoped that the negotiated cession might consolidate his claims to paramountcy. It was not to be, but the title he claimed and his rivalry with the Tongan Ma'afu, who laid claim to eastern Fiji, continue to resonate through Fijian politics today, in part because the colonial settlement preserved the semblance of power held by high chiefs. At least some Fijians were far from passive recipients of colonialism; from the start they collaborated and benefited, finding in their state within a state a new means to exert authority and continue old rivalries.

From a security perspective, indirect rule made immediate sense. The first governor of Fiji, Sir Arthur Gordon, established what became known as the Native Administration or Matanitu iTaukei, a hierarchy of control that began at the remodelled village level (*koro*) and moved through to the district (*tikina*) and province (*yasana*). At its apex was an assembly of high chiefs, all from the victorious eastern sections of Fiji, known as

the Bose Vaka Turaga or Council of Chiefs which advised the governor.¹⁶ As historian Brij Lal aptly records, Gordon also 'imposed a uniform, inflexible set of land laws on a people whose traditional patterns of landownership showed kaleidoscopic variety and fluidity'.¹⁷ They were laws derived largely from eastern Fiji.

This neotraditional orthodoxy became both a means of control and a focal point for dissent, in ways that Gordon never anticipated. He sought to maintain chiefly support and domestic peace, and avoid the costly war that colonialism had caused in New Zealand. And, in Fiji, colonialism did present risks. Not only were colonisers (around 2,600) vastly outnumbered by Fijians (possibly 140,000),¹⁸ but cession brought revolt from Colo tribes in central and western Viti Levu. Bau joined with Britain to suppress Colo and gain advantage. This 'Little War of Viti Levu' (1875–76) left a legacy of dissent, in part borne from Colo's cultural distance from maritime Fiji and historical antipathy to Bau, but also from its continued neglect and relative poverty. It would find voice in anti-colonial and anti-Bauan movements such as the Tuka (led by Dugumoi or Navosavakadua), the Luveniwai in the 1880s and 1890s, and in Apolosi Ranawai's anti-colonial and anti-chiefly Viti Kabani movement of the early 20th century.¹⁹ That all these movements adopted protective millennial or commercial forms should not detract from their intent. Not until independence would Fijians be permitted a political voice, but the dissent that was first demonstrated during the early decades of colonialism continued to echo in many of the small anti-establishment political parties formed in the late 20th century, in the victory of the Fiji Labour Party in 1987, and in the involvement of the Colo province Naitasiri in the 2000 coup, which also saw descendants of the Cakobau clan pitted against the Mara clan, the successors to Ma'afu and Tovata's 20th-century

16 This later became known as the Bose Levu Vaka Turaga or the Great Council of Chiefs.

17 B Lal, *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992, p. 15. Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi makes a similar point: 'Fijians were only united with the coming of the British colonisers' (Madraiwiwi, 'Ethnic tensions and the law', 2004).

18 The Fijian population declined from approximately 140,000 in 1881 to 86,000 in 1904. Europeans (half of whom derived from Australia, New Zealand or England) grew slowly in number from 2,671 in 1881 to 3,707 in 1911 (Peter Robinson, 'The Crown Colony Government & the regulation of relations between settlers & Fijians, 1880–1910'. Master of Letters Thesis, Oxford University, 1984, pp. 122, 137).

19 The best work on anticolonial resistance in Fiji is Robert Nicole's *Disturbing History: Resistance in Early Colonial Fiji* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011). See also Timothy J McNaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience: A Study of the Neo-Traditional Order under British Colonial Rule prior to World War II*. Canberra: The Australian National University, 1982.

resurgence under Ratu Sukuna. It would find echoes also in the marijuana plantations that, for much of the 2000s, provided the most viable cash crop for the isolated and impoverished but still defiant Colo region.

Gordon left another legacy that would prove equally long lasting in its impact. In order to make the new colony pay for itself, he imported Indian indentured labourers (61,000 between 1879 and 1916) to work on sugar cane fields that were eventually managed by the Australian Colonial Sugar Refinery Company (CSR). The use of CSR avoided the presence of British settlers who might demand rights similar to those enjoyed by settlers and their descendants in self-governing colonies like Australia and New Zealand.²⁰ The use of indentured Indians ensured the availability of cheap labour that would not disrupt the Fijian economy, as the withdrawal of Fijian labour would most certainly have done, and provoke anti-colonial agitation.

Fijians would later claim that the creation of the sugar industry excluded them from economic participation and marginalised them. The claim made use of notions of dualism, of a dichotomy between the tradition of the Fijian way of life and the modernity of the new economy, to assert postcolonial inequality and disadvantage, which are hallmarks of underdevelopment. This assertion became the central justification for Fijian paramountcy during the coups of 1987 and 2000. Many writers, including the political economist William Sutherland, have demonstrated that this is incorrect, or at best a gross simplification. Certainly Fijians had only marginal involvement in the sugar industry to start with, but they were never excluded from the colonial economy. Many Fijians worked as wage labourers; during the 1880s possibly one quarter of the Fijian workforce laboured in copra plantations. By the end of the 1930s many were also working in the Vatukoula goldmines. In addition, Fijians were forced to contribute indirectly to the new economy in other ways. Communal tax-in-kind made up 30 per cent of state revenue in

20 Nonetheless, settlers in Fiji still pressed for direct representation in government (their birthright), demanded Fiji's incorporation into a federated Australasia in the 1880s and with New Zealand in 1900, and pressed for access to more land, even though they never utilised more than a fraction of the land they already held. Fiji's colonial government briefly flirted with a political agitators ordinance to prevent colonists undermining Fijian support for the communal system, but eventually agreed to the representation of colonists (six) and Fijians (two) in a Legislative Council dominated by government appointees (10) (Robinson, 'The Crown Colony Government', 1984, pp. 16, 60–88, 95, 109–10). See also France, *The Charter of the Land*, 1969, pp. 149–75.

the 1870s²¹ and the cost of Fijian labour set the national benchmark for wages. Fijians were not excluded from the colonial economy, but they were integrated differently from Europeans and Indians, and it was this difference that always ensured that labour possessed a racial dimension within Fiji.²²

Rigid segmented labour markets were by no means unique to colonialism in Fiji. But, without doubt, its combination with other forms of separateness (social, political and educational) encouraged the divisions and stereotyping that would later haunt Fiji's political and economic development. Writers in the 1980s, like the sociologist Simione Durutalo, saw all this as grist to the mill for colonialism, but for those colonised it helped foster a victim mentality.

During the greater part of British rule knowledge except that provided in carefully limited doses by the missionaries, was disdained. The people were discouraged from thinking for themselves; a thirst for knowledge was considered dangerous and subversive. Trained to obey and follow, and mindful of the misfortunes that befell the poor 'native' who, using his or her reason, questioned however timidly the decisions of someone in authority, the people later transformed this training and fear into a conviction that one should allow one's social and economic superiors to do the thinking for the community. One's betters eventually included, besides the British officials and white missionaries, those members of the local elite who were by then benefitting from colonial rule. This passivity was gradually transformed and glorified as tradition.²³

In divesting its subjects of their humanity, colonialism created a sense of inferiority, and fostered a victim mentality. Above all it encouraged the idea that only colonisers were dynamic and capable of leadership and innovation. That idea – a form of cultural cringe – took some undoing.

21 If anything, the tax burden increased on Fijians because the amount in kind to be paid was never adjusted after 1881 to take into account the dramatic fall in the Fijian population (Robinson, 'The Crown Colony Government', 1984, p. 100).

22 W Sutherland, *Beyond the Politics of Race. An Alternative History of Fiji to 1992*. Canberra: The Australian National University, 1992, pp. 28–29.

23 S Durutalo, 'The liberation of the Pacific Island intellectual', *Review*, 4, September 1983, SSED, University of the South Pacific, p. 14.

Creating a plural society

The colonial approach to development and its failure to empower its subjects ultimately cost it any chance of success. It was challenged, not least because colonialism transformed societies and created dynamics that colonialists could not control.

The importation of Indian labour is a case in point. It gave labour a new racial dimension: Indian, Fijian, European, part European, Chinese, Pacific Islander and Rotuman. As Sutherland notes, however, such appearances can be deceptive.²⁴ Most indentured labourers (*girmitiya*) came initially from Hindi-speaking Uttar Pradesh in north India, but a large minority later came also from the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking south.²⁵ Southerners found fitting into a predominantly North Indian settler society difficult, partly because northerners were more established in Fiji at the time of their arrival, but partly also because of religious, linguistic and ethnic discrimination. Indians were never a singular community.

They arrived on five-year contracts to desperate conditions²⁶ in an industry dominated by a single company extracting even greater profits than its Australian operations were able to muster and paying wages seven times lower. According to economist Wadan Narsey, between 1883 and 1913, CSR profits in Fiji rose 600 per cent, despite a 53 per cent fall in sugar prices.²⁷ The colonial government saw no reason to interfere; indeed for many years the state's courts were employed to routinely discipline indentured labourers. Over time the position of Indians improved, especially once CSR ended plantation farming and leased land to free Indians as small farmers, who not unexpectedly now also carried most of the risks previously borne by the company. The indenture system ended by 1920 but, after a generation of harrowing experiences, post-indentured farmers became decidedly more assertive. Lal notes:

24 Sutherland, *Beyond the Politics of Race*, 1992, pp. 50–54.

25 See Brij V Lal, 'Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians'. Canberra: *Journal of Pacific History*, 1983.

26 V Naidu, *Violence of Indenture in Fiji*. Lautoka: Fiji Institute of Applied Studies, 2004. See also KL Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants – A History to the End of Indenture in 1920*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963.

27 W Narsey, 'Monopoly, capital, white racism and superprofits in Fiji', *Journal of Pacific Studies*, 5, 1979, pp. 66–146.

Indenture had taught its lessons well. The Fiji-born were more on their own, more individually oriented, more conscious of and sensitive to the relative deprivation they experienced in the larger society. India did not loom large in their consciousness, as it had perhaps done in the lives of the *girmitiya*, including my grandfather, who even in old age still hoped to die in his *janmabhumi* 'motherland'. In contrast Fiji was the only home the new generation had, and they did not shy away from pursuing the rights and opportunities they thought were properly theirs.²⁸

That assertiveness was most marked in a series of strikes in 1921, 1943 and 1960 over the cost of living and it was assisted also by a new but small class of Indian professionals and businessmen who migrated to Fiji, most notably after the First World War, especially from the Punjab and Gujarat. They added further to the linguistic and religious diversity of the Indian 'community' and also to the tensions within it over work, religion and political representation.

One recent migrant was a teacher from North India who had temporarily become a cane farmer in the early 1930s. Ayodhya Prasad formed the Kisan Sangh or Farmers Association in 1937 to negotiate on behalf of farmers with the CSR to reduce the huge impact of rising costs on their livelihoods. The CSR kept tight control over what farmers could do on its land, even restricting private gardens and animals, and its contracts with farmers often left them at the mercy of moneylenders and shopkeepers. The Kisan Sangh's goals were popular with farmers, and it eventually succeeded in influencing the terms of a new farmer's contract with the CSR. But its focus on debt reduction and farmer cooperatives, which released pressure on the CSR, potentially threatened the livelihoods of shopkeepers, many of whom were Gujaratis or Punjabis.

In 1941, Gujarati lawyer AD Patel formed a rival Maha Sangh devoted to the interests of the much discriminated South Indians, who were mostly employed directly by the CSR and less inclined to see the commonality of interests with the CSR that the Kisan Sangh projected. Increasingly they saw the Kisan Sangh as a North Indian association. Thus divided, cane farmers entered a period of great uncertainty. War increased inflation and hardship for farmers. A cane strike over conditions in 1943 saw the two associations assume diametrically opposed positions with disastrous consequences for farmers. Although the issues faced by the

28 Lal, *Broken Waves*, 1992, p. 75.

farmers would not be resolved until the dying days of colonialism, farmers had organised and stood up to the autocracy of both the CSR and the colonial government.²⁹

Sutherland argues that, in Fiji's highly racialised atmosphere, it was all too easy for the class nature of farmers' struggles to be obscured by ethnicity, either that of North and South Indians or of Indians in general.³⁰ Sometimes it was in the interests of the state and farmer leaders to present issues in diversionary ethnic terms. Even during the political turmoil of 1987 and 2000, cane farmer issues and access to land were similarly presented. But, in the early 20th century, there were other struggles underway in Fiji – again the unintended consequences of colonialism – and they too were portrayed as racial. Among the most significant were those concerning chiefs.

Fijian chiefs, particularly those among the dominant eastern clans, had done well from the post-cession settlement but, with the Colo peoples under control, colonial authorities considered encouraging Fijian individualism by promoting the movement of Fijians from villages and relaxing communal obligations. To that end they sought to give Fijians more opportunity to break away from the confines of their villages and, during the 1920s, they downgraded the role of chiefs in native administration. But their efforts were always somewhat ambivalent; certainly following Ranawai's launch of the subversive western Fijian Viti Kabani in 1913, the state rediscovered the value of chiefs. Apolosi formed his Fijian Company as a cooperative to monopolise Fijian commerce and unite Fijians against colonial and chiefly control. For his pains he would spend much of his final 30 years in exile within and outside of Fiji. The colonial authorities should have welcomed him as a model enterprising commoner Fijian but his activities potentially threatened European traders. He also challenged the authority of the state and its Native Administration and raised the ire of chiefs, whom he blamed for the problems facing his people. Chiefs like the Tui Lau, Ratu Lala Sukuna, gradually convinced authorities of the importance of chiefly authority for maintaining law and order, particularly as more Fijians moved from their traditional places of residence. 'Whatever his real merits as a leader, or

29 B Lal, *A Vision for Change: AD Patel and the Politics of Fiji*. Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, The Australian National University, 1997, pp. 64–80.

30 Sutherland, *Beyond the Politics of Race*, 1992, pp. 57–58.

failings as a demagogue,' one historian writes, 'Apolosi had become the Fijian bogeyman who served the authorities as the negative example to the good natives, chiefly and loyal civil servants like Ratu Sukuna.'³¹

The Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) took the lead, encouraging the formation of a Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) in 1940 to oversee the leasing of Fijian land, and mobilising many of its young men (in contrast to Indians) for war service. Loyalty eventually won Fijians a Fijian Administration in 1944, which re-established many of the old features of Fijian communal life that consolidated chiefly authority. Additionally, it assisted to paper over historic divisions and create the mythology of Fijians as one people, indivisible and united under their chiefs, with interests diametrically opposed to those of Indians. It survived until the eve of independence. Thereafter, many Fijians made its recreation an essential element in the assertion of Fijianness. Ironically it would also feature strongly in the Fijian military backlash in 2006, but for opposite reasons.

The increased assertiveness of Indians and apparent defensiveness of Fijians grew in part from demographic changes. Indians comprised 29 per cent of the population in 1911 (which totalled 140,000), 43 per cent in 1936 (160,000) and 50 per cent by 1946 (200,000). The change made electoral representation more difficult, minimal though it was in reality. By the late 1930s the advisory Legislative Council continued to be dominated by officials, with representation from subjects communalised and unproportional. Only half the European and Indian representatives were elected; Fijians were nominated by the GCC.³² Efforts by Indians to achieve more democratic forms of governance were met by European claims that the Deed of Cession necessitated European dominance to protect Fijian interests. Exaggerated though they were, such

31 Some 17 per cent of Fijians had left their villages by 1946; see J Heartfield, 'You are not a white woman: Apolosi Nawai, the Fiji Produce Agency and the trial of Stella Spencer in Fiji, 1915', *Journal of Pacific History*, 38: 1, 2003, p. 82. See also Nicole, *Disturbing History*, 2011, pp. 70–97; and McNaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience*, 1982.

32 Indians were permitted only one member nominated by the governor in 1916; Fijian chiefs, two; and Europeans, seven. The remaining 11 members were nominated officials. Agitation for change had little impact; in 1929 European representation fell to six, and Indians and Fijians were permitted three members each. Indian representatives called for a common roll rather than communal voting, but received little support either from chiefs opposed to democracy or from Europeans fearful of Indian demographic supremacy. In 1937, a revision produced a 31-member council of 16 officials, three elected and three nominated Indians, three elected and three nominated Europeans, and five Fijians nominated indirectly by the GCC. Local government representation produced similar distortions and arguments, with the state maintaining control through a preponderance of officials.

claims sent a powerful signal of support to the Fijian elite. Consequently, a new constitution prior to independence in 1970 rewarded Europeans with an equally exaggerated proportion of seats, effectively giving them the balance of power.

Colonial apartheid, represented by separate communal schools, separate suburbs, separate working environments and separate political representation marked the extremities of pluralism, a term increasingly used by social scientists after the 1930s to describe the mutually exclusive social, cultural and structural features of colonies or former colonies. Lacking any national binding, these predominantly tropical societies could only be held together by force, not consensus, or so they said.³³ Political scientists and historians echoed such views. They described two homogenous blocs confronting each other, with conflict the inevitable result. Guyanan academic Ralph Premdas believed that 'left to themselves these ethnic groups [in Fiji] would probably opt for separate states'.³⁴ 'The different social groupings are divided from each other in every respect,' claimed historian Deryck Scarr, 'the only common link is that they live in the same country.'³⁵

Politicians and ethno-nationalists similarly echoed these views. Rebel George Speight argued in 2000 that differences between Fijians and Indians were immutable: 'They have their own religion; they don't dress the same; they don't speak the same language; they don't smell the same.'³⁶ Joji Banuve, an assistant Minister for Education, later suggested that racial characteristics could be inferred from how people combed their hair. Fijian women combed their hair outwards, demonstrating how Fijians reached out to people to help them. Indian women combed their hair inwards, signifying that they only cared for themselves, not others.³⁷ Similarly, Banuve's contemporary, Adi Asenaca Caucau – Minister for Women and Social Welfare – described Indians as 'weeds': 'pushy, inconsiderate and always demanding'.³⁸ Her Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase, described

33 See JS Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy*. Cambridge University Press, 1939; L Kuper & MG Smith (eds), *Pluralism in Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

34 R Premdas, 'The foundations of political conflict in Fiji', Suva, mimeo, 1986.

35 D Scarr, *Fiji, Politics of Illusion: The Military Coups in Fiji*. Sydney: NSW University Press, 1988, p. 16.

36 *fijilive*, 23 May 2000.

37 *fijilive*, 14 April 2002. Banuve neglected to note that not all Fijian women wore the traditional *buiniga* hairstyle, and that those of Polynesian descent often had straight hair.

38 *Fiji Times*, 10 August 2002.

Fijians as 'the rarest breed of people in the world'.³⁹ 'The past is too much with us and cannot be wished away easily', Vice President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, noted at the time: 'While one may decry communalism, it is a difficult beast to subdue.'⁴⁰

When anthropologist Alexander Mamak applied the plural analysis to Fiji's capital, Suva, during the 1970s, he wanted to know exactly how mutually exclusive communities had become and whether a tipping point existed after which a nation fell beyond redemption, its communities having achieved such separate autonomy that any process of de-pluralisation became impossible. Instead he found that internal divisions among Indians and Fijians created 'bases for cross-cutting alliances between sections previously unrelated'. Hence de-pluralisation was a real possibility because most Indians and Fijians shared low pay and low status employment.⁴¹ Thus class could play a role in breaking down rigidities and providing space for the development of national goals and interests. Of course this did not explain why communities came to see their interests as so divergent in the first place. Could leaders gain in some way from promoting conflict pluralism? Could this explain the longevity of race as an organisational concept in countries like Fiji?

Political scientist Stephanie Lawson sees the overwhelming focus on race in Fiji as mistaking 'the social myth for reality and [giving] it both a force and a form that is not necessarily warranted'. Such focus distorts the nature of race relations and obscures other explanatory factors.⁴² By using race, culture or religion as a way to define societies, we accept at face value the criteria by which groups define themselves. Harold Wolpe once argued with respect to South Africa that this kind of thinking reflected the internalisation of colonial attitudes. Internal colonialism, he argued, treats racial groups as distinct essentialised entities. It takes appearances for

39 *fjilive*, 12 March 2003.

40 To these opening remarks at the Fiji National Consultations on a Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, Pacific Theological College, Suva, Madraiwiwi added: 'In the heat of political confrontation, the electorate takes refuge in the familiar and eschews difference'. In such situations 'it is critical that one engages the political actors whatever their beliefs' ('Building the peace', *Fiji Times*, 17 March 2005).

41 A Mamak, *Colour, Culture & Conflict: A Study of Pluralism in Fiji*. Sydney: Pergamon Press, 1978, pp. 5–6, 178.

42 S Lawson, *The Failure of Democratic Politics in Fiji*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, p. 39. Steven Ratuva ('Politics of ethno-national identity', 2008) argues instead for a more 'complex inter-relationship of opposition and accommodation taking place between political and cultural discourses'.

granted. It glosses over internal differences within groups. It accepts the notion of separateness and that race drives social and political processes.⁴³ Wolpe argued for critical analysis instead.

Of course conflict pluralists also contrasted the diversity of developing societies with the presumed homogeneity of developed countries, where common norms and values enabled consensus not conflict. Such convenient simplifications flowed easily in the postwar period. Economist Walt Rostow maintained that modernisation produced homogeneity and the kind of society that the United States had become. Political scientist Samuel Huntington added a caveat: where homogeneity existed only within conflicting ethnic blocs, national consensus for stability and growth would be frustrated.⁴⁴ Neither acknowledged that the perceived homogeneity of developed countries emanated from long processes of social and economic change that gradually made states fiscally accountable and democratic. In other words, the transcendence of ethnic or other identities derived from political processes; it did not derive from a fixed inherited or natural condition. No similar process occurred with Third World countries. Colonialism never developed similar institutions of accountability or public goods like education and communications. Rather, it frustrated changes that might have created a sense of nationhood.⁴⁵ Hence only exceptional political leadership and prosperity could overcome the lack of cohesion and consensus and many newly independent states experienced neither.

43 H Wolpe, 'The theory of internal colonisation: The South African case', in I Oxaal, T Barnett & D Booth (eds), *Beyond the Sociology of Development*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, p. 283. More recently Paul Collier notes the near convergence of pluralism with the long-held views of late 19th-century urban middle-class romantic nationalists who retrospectively imagined 'the sense of a common ethnic origin blended to the national soil' (*Wars, Guns & Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*. London: The Bodley Head, 2009, p. 169).

44 WW Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge University Press, 1960; S Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968. Of course, this conveniently overlooks issues such as segregation, which was then prevalent within the United States.

45 Something of the same argument can be found in John D Kelly & Martha Kaplan's *Represented Communities: Fiji & World Colonization* (University of Chicago Press, 2001): communities are never imagined but derive from colonial divide and rule legacies and decolonisation negotiations. Such legacies are far more important in determining the fate of countries like Fiji than a stubborn resistance to modernisation.

Postcolonialism

Pluralism was one way to account for the state of colonies. But, in the postwar period, the end of colonialism coincided with a remarkable period of global economic introspection that deeply influenced the strategies adopted by developing countries to overcome colonial legacies. The origins of new thinking on development lay in the Great Depression of the 1930s and in the return to long-run theorising about development led by the British economist Maynard Keynes. His stress on state stimulus packages would dominate political responses to recessions well into the next century. They also deeply influenced responses to postwar recovery. The 1947 Marshall Plan and the consolidation of welfare states in Europe are classic examples of this way of thinking. Keynesianism, together with state-driven economic development, shaped the immediate postwar decades, assisted in large measure by a long-lasting postwar boom.

Nonetheless, the Depression weakened faith in market capitalism. Together with the illusion of successful Soviet planning in the 1930s, it popularised the idea that development could be centrally planned. National security demands in the 1930s and 1940s also ensured that state directives took precedence over market signals. The Depression and its aftermath seemed to suggest that only governments could rationally and equitably ration scarce resources and allocate them to ensure national growth in domestic goods, industry and infrastructure. India chose state planning after independence and its decision influenced many politicians in newly independent African and Asian countries also. But, with a closed economy, strong state controls and heavy industry as the motor for growth, India struggled over the next two decades to achieve more than 1.9 per cent annual growth. In part this was because state planning in India dealt with a less wealthy and skilled population. By failing to democratise its economy, India also constrained popular participation in its economy. Western Europe redistributed wealth instead.

National industry was the basis for growth in modernising countries during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and colonies drew on that feature with one significant difference. The successful early industrialisers had used growing surpluses in agriculture to invest in industry; but, in many newly independent countries, no improved agricultural productivity existed to tap into. Instead taxes on food and import tariffs were used to raise the funds needed for industrial investment and for

sustaining uncompetitive national enterprises. Struggling farmers soon got the message. They fled the induced poverty of the countryside for the supposed wealth that would come from temporary encampment in urban slums, but there was never enough work and – not unexpectedly – never enough food.⁴⁶

We might ask whether this form of industrialisation was still an appropriate goal in the mid and late 20th century when economies were becoming more globalised, more service-oriented, and a new set of international institutions existed to regulate the global economy and assist with development? To be fair the changed nature of world economies was not obvious to many leaders, and international institutions rarely extended to Third World countries the social and economic privileges increasingly enjoyed by the First World. In part this failure resulted also from entrenched core–periphery ways of thinking, the legacy of decades of imperialism, and it created a crippling global divide that weakened the postwar order. Consequently, struggles for independence, national weaknesses and the exigencies of the Cold War made the state an obvious emphasis for almost all postcolonial governments.

Latin American countries, in contrast, were mostly independent but, like many colonies, their focus on primary export production left them dependent on industrialised countries for markets. The Depression destroyed the value of their products and demonstrated the extent to which terms of trade worked against primary production and reduced their capacity to respond. Raúl Prebisch, head of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America in the 1950s, believed this downward trend in demand for primary products unlikely to reverse. He argued that the best solution for the Third World lay in breaking colonial ties and pursuing import substitution industrialisation (ISI), using high tariffs to protect local industry from the anarchy of the marketplace. In the long term, this patriotic strategy increased the economic role of the state, which began to set domestic prices and wages, grant subsidies and nationalise industries. As a postcolonial strategy, however, ISI did not necessarily encourage economic or political democratisation; if anything it was in tune with the wishes of those who sought to inherit the colonial state

46 A Beattie, *False Economy: A Surprising Economic History of the World*. London: Viking, 2009, pp. 48–50. Beattie uses the example of Zambia.

or, in the case of South America, those who already controlled the state and preferred 'cosy, safe monopolies protected by government fiat and regulation to the brutal riskiness of competition'.⁴⁷

ISI was a global response to the new postwar environment, not simply a Third World one. All countries sought to protect their national industries and many rounds of international negotiations would occur before leading industrial countries gradually reduced barriers to trade late in the century. Technological change also made it possible to restructure industry and commerce globally. But, until then, ISI remained attractive to countries seeking to reduce forms of colonial dependence. Prebisch went on to launch the first UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964, which successfully negotiated the general system of preferences that granted Third World countries duty-free access for some manufactured goods into the First World.

Such postcolonial global developments generated optimism during the early postcolonial period. Real development might not only be possible but could also be achieved quickly. Indeed, the United Nations declared the 1960s the Development Decade, as if 10 years alone would be sufficient as long as the hearts and minds of people were captured. But this was also a period of Cold War, and winning hearts and minds served ideological purposes. Within the United States a broad school of development thought emerged known as Modernisation. State driven, it focused on social and political modernisation as well as economic growth, and held that the transition from tradition to modernity could be achieved by adopting a scientific outlook or Protestant work ethic. No consensus emerged, however, as to the means to achieve such a transition. Samuel Huntington believed that dictatorship could be a precondition for growth and democracy,⁴⁸ thereby justifying American interests in authoritarian countries like South Vietnam and Iran. Most modernisationists saw the United States as the model of modernity and were comfortable with the notion that development equalled Americanisation. Hence, Third World failures to modernise were due principally to internal factors such as the persistence of tradition, the plurality of societies, or cultural resistance to change.⁴⁹ An external agent of change could, however, help offset these internal factors.

47 Beattie, *False Economy*, 2009, pp. 12–13.

48 Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 1968.

49 For example, see Lawrence Harrison, *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.

If countries lacked sufficient savings to invest in growth, they might seek foreign capital or aid, which of course added to the mythology of the West as the only dynamic and modern site – the only model for development. But such aid could not be extended to traditional sectors; they were regarded as static and beyond redemption. In fact, this was an inaccurate perception. Modern sectors tended to feed off so-called traditional sectors because they kept costs low and reduced pressures for political change. Appearances of separateness could easily mask its opposite – integration – albeit in a subservient fashion, just as colonialism had recreated traditional systems for purposes of control.⁵⁰

If modernisation theories owed much to colonial thinking, then the group of ideas that briefly challenged it in the 1960s were aligned more directly to struggles for independence. They too captured a single idea, not of tradition as the stumbling block but of external relations first established under imperialism. American economist Paul Baran argued in 1957 that Western capital deliberately kept the Third World backward in order to maintain markets for its surplus production.⁵¹ Hence the Third World came to be systematically underdeveloped, as Andre Gunder Frank expressed it, rather than developed.⁵² Dependency theories held that core–periphery relationships deliberately generated underdevelopment in the periphery and that modernity was possible only if those relationships were broken. Thus underdevelopment was not generated internally, as modernisationists claimed, but externally by imperialism, surplus extraction and unequal exchange. The solution lay in cutting old links with the global economy, fostering self-reliance through state-led initiatives such as ISI, and developing new and more equal relationships with the global economy. For political leaders of newly independent countries this approach appealed more than that offered by Modernisationists because it shifted responsibility for the condition of their countries away from internal factors such as class, investment and inequalities to external relationships, both past and present. That it also signified an ahistorical, static and homogenised universal view of societies added to its appeal; it underpinned Third World solidarity.

50 Bettelheim (1977) called this process ‘dissolution-conservation’ and saw the origins of inequality in its impact on productive capabilities. His view contrasted with those who believed disadvantage derived from exchange relations.

51 P Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957.

52 AG Frank, ‘The development of underdevelopment’, in S Chew & R Denmark (eds), *The Underdevelopment of Development: Essays in Honour of Andre Gunder Frank*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications 1996.

Inevitably, the costs of self-reliance were high, resulting in inefficient uncompetitive industries isolated from technological innovation and with little emphasis on service and quality, and regimes that paid little attention to democratisation. North Korea's self-reliant hermit state is one of the few surviving examples today. But, for most countries, the result became increased debt, neglected exports and – despite all the rhetoric to the contrary – the penetration of national boundaries by subsidiaries of transnational corporations (TNCs). Nor did preferential agreements that attempted to address the legacies of unequal exchange always assist; instead they confirmed existing economic foci and postponed diversification and other reforms, as Fiji experienced with its sugar trade concessions. Preferential agreements could also become a form of rent-seeking, a Third World entitlement captured by elites with little development to show.

Dependency theories grew out of inevitable postcolonial suspicions of international markets, and former colonial actors, and fears of neocolonialism or renewed subservience. They were allied with postcolonial desires for alternative development that sprung from long-suppressed native energies rather than the dictates of former colonial masters. A natural good now had an opportunity to triumph over an obvious evil. That national isolation or protectionism might stymie growth seemed as inconceivable as capital being simultaneously both progressive and regressive in different places. British communist Bill Warren punctured the dependency bubble in 1980 when he declared underdevelopment the result of imperialism, not capitalism. Certainly colonialism generated path dependencies and class distortions, but decolonisation – he argued – now gave capital the potential to move into the periphery.⁵³ No better example existed than that of newly industrialised countries (NICs) such as South Korea and Brazil, whose industrial success by the 1980s demonstrated that the Third World was far from homogeneous or fated to mediocrity. By the end of the century, China and India's divergence would finally consume what remained of Dependency rhetoric.

By the 1980s, all theories were open to challenge, in part because of their inconsistencies but also because of experience. When postwar economic expansion finally faltered in the 1970s, recovery as a much more globalised world made nationalist solutions more problematic than they had once

53 B Warren, *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1980.

seemed. Third World solidarity proved weak and new approaches to development emerged that relied less on statist directions than on human agency. Once more, democratisation entered the development lexicon.

The case of the missing national bourgeoisie

A transition to independence invariably implied some form of democratisation. It marked the difference between colonialism and postcolonialism in terms of development goals. In Fiji the colonial state consistently refused to discipline the CSR, even when its officials privately conceded that its actions badly harmed the welfare of the country's farmers. AD Patel pleaded in vain to the Shephard Commission of Inquiry into the sugar industry in 1943 to recognise:

We growers are also human beings. We also have to meet our social, economic and religious obligations ... We have as much right to be prosperous and happy as anybody in the world, with decent housing and better comforts.⁵⁴

But, on the eve of independence, the state took a different stance, accepting a new award that gave greater weight to the needs of its farmers.⁵⁵ For the CSR, the writing was on the wall. A government elected by and responsible to its citizens must have different objectives and priorities than a non-elected colonial administration. CSR decided to leave Fiji rather than adapt and, in 1973, its assets were effectively nationalised. But to whom exactly was the new Fiji Government responsible and to what extent did that responsibility translate into a radically different direction for Fiji's economy?

We noted earlier that, after the Second World War, Fiji's eastern chiefs succeeded in creating a new bureaucracy to service the needs of Fijians, but their success did little to raise the welfare of ordinary Fijians. The same might be said of the colonial state. Its postwar drive to restructure the economy benefited Europeans with resources to invest in tourism. A declining proportion of state loans went to agriculture (40 per cent in 1960, 25 per cent in 1969), with most agricultural and industrial loans

⁵⁴ Farmers' petition to the governor, 16 November 1943, quoted in Lal, *Broken Waves*, 1992, p. 130.

⁵⁵ The Denning Award changed returns to farmers from 57.75 per cent of gross proceeds to 65 per cent. In 1975, this was altered again to 70 per cent to growers.

going to Europeans (52 per cent) and Indians (34 per cent).⁵⁶ Rural Fijians missed out. This created a dilemma for the Fijian elite. It had survived because of the powerful support gained from European businesses, eager for allies in their struggle against competing Indian enterprises and for state support to develop a secure future in tourism. Increasingly during the 1960s, the Fijian elite came to believe that the answer lay in controlling the postcolonial state to facilitate the development of a new Fijian capitalist class, the equal to that possessed by Europeans and Indians. But doing that meant sacrificing, in part, the strategies that were crucial to chiefly success in the past, namely the old racist ideology of the colonial era. At the very least it had to be de-emphasised. The reason was simple: most state resources would continue to come from the export sugar sector. If these were not to be jeopardised, thereby preventing the state financing its Fijian business project, rapprochement with Indians was necessary. Hence the introduction of a new ideology of multiracialism and the new state's symbolic but necessary decision to back cane farmers rather than the CSR in negotiations for a new cane award for the 1970s.

Colonies became independent but economies remained largely neocolonial and dependent. Their states promised the growth of strong local economies to give meaning to independence, a sign that they were moving towards equality with the First World. Yet, despite promising to develop their national capitalists, they were helpless to effect autonomous growth. Few linkages existed between the modern economy and the subsistence activities of the bulk of their population. State policies that funded industrial growth from rural taxes did not help. Taxes simply prevented new businesses from using poor peasants as a market, forcing them instead to focus on export activities that did little to generate internal growth and local participation, or provide for the welfare of the millions that urbanised in anticipation of that growth. Consequently, foreign capital still exerted tremendous sway, despite state rhetoric to the contrary. Herein lay sources for state weakness. Policies that excluded local participation bred instability, with less powerful classes eager for a higher national profile seeking compensation for their weakness by appealing to ethnic, tribal, religious or regional support. Where states found mediating between conflicting interest groups difficult, authoritarianism always loomed as a solution. Such temptation could only be avoided with inclusive social and economic change.⁵⁷

56 Sutherland, *Beyond the Politics of Race*, 1992, pp. 114–15.

57 W Ziemann & M Lanzendorfer, 'The state in peripheral societies', *The Socialist Register* 1977. London: Merlin Press, 1977, pp. 143–77.

For many analysts in the immediate postcolonial period it seemed beyond doubt that a central feature of any well-developed economy lay in its ability to act in a self-generating manner. For some that meant not just the establishment of a strong national group of capitalists but also the removal of traditional practices that made impossible the development of integrated economies. But were these unrealistic goals? Could national capital actually represent the national interest? Was the notion of a progressive national bourgeoisie still relevant in a world of internationalised capital?⁵⁸

For two decades scholars pored over contradictory evidence, particularly as it emerged in Africa. Colin Leys argued in 1975 that new Kenyan capitalists had emerged but were still dependent on foreign capital and were unlikely to secure an independent future.⁵⁹ Three years later he adjusted his views to provide more scope for the growth of an independent business class, particularly if it continued to receive state protection.⁶⁰ But protection for what purpose? To nurture ultimately competitive infant industries or to provide a guaranteed source of wealth for new elites? In 1980, Nicola Swainson also saw possibilities for expansion in association with the state, but still regarded local capitalists as weak and dependent on foreign capital.⁶¹ In the same year, Raphie Kaplinsky argued that no real change had occurred in the Kenyan economy and that what growth had occurred had been due to temporarily high coffee prices, large balance of payments deficits and the movement of international capital out of distribution and into manufacturing and tourism.⁶² In 1982, Martin Godfrey agreed: high population growth, an overemphasis on cash crops at the expense of food, a failure to redistribute land and the lack of linkages between import substitution policies and the majority of people prevented any possibility of national economic autonomy. As a result, the Kenyan state in the 1980s looked outside its own borders to fuel growth, but this export focus was hampered by the collapse of the East African community, war in Uganda, competition from Zimbabwe and lack of access to European markets.⁶³

58 A Phillips, 'The concept of development', *Review of African Political Economy*, 8, 1977, pp. 11–19.

59 Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism*. London: Heinemann, 1975.

60 C Leys, 'Capital accumulation, class formation, and dependency – the significance of the Kenyan case', *The Socialist Register 1978*. London: Merlin Press, 1978.

61 N Swainson, *The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya, 1918–1977*. London: Heinemann, 1980.

62 R Kaplinsky, 'Capitalist accumulation in the periphery – the Kenyan case re-examined', *Review of African Political Economy*, 16, 1980.

63 M Godfrey, 'Kenya: African capitalism or simple dependency?', in M Bienefeld & M Godfrey (eds), *The Struggle for Development: National Strategies in an International Context*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982.

By the start of the 1990s, a generation after independence, researchers concluded that local capitalists were expanding in former colonies but were not yet capable of accumulating and investing capital independently. But they did gain greater control over the resources of local, foreign-owned enterprises because of shareholdings and directorships. And they did influence state decision-making, even though they were weak and heavily reliant on state assistance (for example, tariffs and monopolies) for survival. Hence their need to exploit internal social differences to garner a stronger political and economic base and thereby secure continued access to the state and its resources.

The size and autonomy of national capital were not the only factors impacting on postcolonial growth. As we have noted, if a state tried to increase revenue to develop industry by raising taxes on its most productive sector, agriculture, it could potentially reduce the very local market needed to expand local commerce and consume industrial products. Both sectors would then be forced to rely on external markets to feed growth, thereby reducing intersectoral linkages and fostering unbalanced development. Favouring capital-intensive industries over small-scale labour-intensive industries could have the same impact. Similarly, encouraging public servants to enter business (with superannuation schemes that matured at 55 years) could also burden the very market their new businesses would depend on to be successful. Clearly, goals of development could be frustrated by the methods used to implement them, as political economist Gavin Williams argued in 1977. They increased foreign control or social inequalities, or both.⁶⁴

In addition, states often squandered their limited resources on luxury consumption for leaders, costly militaries and vanity monuments. Sometimes these activities were paid for by debt, which eventually needed to be serviced and repaid by later generations. Looking back on the first two decades of postcolonialism in Africa, political scientist Martin Doornbos wondered:

whether the stress on nation-building and national unity at the time [of independence] reflected a genuine desire to create a new 'national' society or whether it constituted the beginnings of an ideological defence of the colonial heritage which had become the state system.⁶⁵

64 G Williams, 'Class relations in a neo-colony: The case of Nigeria', in P Gutkind & P Waterman (eds), *African Social Studies, A Radical Reader*. London: Heinemann, 1977, pp. 284–94.

65 M Doornbos, 'The African state in academic debate: Retrospect and prospect', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 28: 2, 1990, p. 196.

But, of course, no single outcome was fated. Already signs existed that strong entrepreneurial and middle classes, together with civil institutions, could democratise the state. Whether this meant an insular as opposed to an open outcome remained uncertain.

The postcolonial heritage

Independence in Fiji in 1970 promised a new beginning for all its peoples. Multiracialism, designed to overcome colonial blockages to the joint venture in nation-building, most symbolised that change. As a postcolonial strategy for Fiji, however, it very quickly came undone, although – as we shall see – the fires of race and indigenous paramountcy that quickly ignited after independence obscured its failure. Neither corruption nor extravagance were the cause of this great undoing; rather it was prompted by a fundamental flaw in the country's approach to multiracialism.

Multiracialism sought to respect communal differences rather than transcend them. To that end, Britain accepted a racially based constitution in 1970 as its parting gift to the country. Indians and Fijians were given 22 seats each in a lower house of parliament, with a General Elector grouping of others (including Europeans)⁶⁶ holding the balance of power with eight seats, the price for Fijian chiefly acceptance of independence. The exaggerated weighting for this small minority guaranteed Fijian control of any future parliament and denied the Indian demand for a common roll.⁶⁷ Thus Fiji's independence parliament comprised a lower house of 27 communal seats (12 each for Fijians and Indians, three for General Electors) and 25 general or open seats. Only general seats enabled cross-voting but for a defined number of communal representatives (10 Fijians, 10 Indians, and five General Electors).⁶⁸

66 General Electors included Europeans, 'Part-Europeans', and Chinese. The 1970 Constitution gave 5 per cent of the population control over 15 per cent of lower house seats.

67 In 1970, Fiji's population stood at 530,000, 50.2 per cent being Indian and 45.7 per cent Fijian, Rotuman & Pacific islanders. Under the 1970 Constitution, the remainder – composed of Europeans, Part-Europeans, Chinese and Others – 4.1 per cent of the population, gained 15 per cent of lower house seats.

68 Fijians dominated the 22 members of the appointed Senate or upper house, of whom eight were appointed by the GCC, one by the Council of Rotuma, seven by the Prime Minister and six by the Leader of the Opposition; see R Robertson, 'The parliamentary system', in Walsh, *Fiji*, 2006, pp. 360–83.

While cross-voting represented an improvement on colonial irreconcilability, the concept of multiracialism that underpinned it could only be sustained if all communities believed they shared equally in the prosperity that independence brought. If prosperity failed to materialise or came unevenly, communal difference dictated a competitive zero-sum response, effectively a return to the logic of colonial pluralism. Yet, in Fiji's case, communal competition did not explain the events that unfolded. It was an outcome not a cause. Instead the answer lay within the deliberate failure of Fijian leaders to democratise their own community. In short, they reasserted policies that had already failed to improve the lot of ordinary Fijians and would continue to fail with disastrous consequences for the whole country over the next three decades.

In many respects multiracialism was a charade. Colonialism had locked Fiji's two main communities in political combat and only the threat of independence in the early 1960s forced their respective leaders to reconsider communal configurations. Few changes were anticipated. The farmer organisation, the Maha Sangh, now the dominant partner in the umbrella Federation of Cane Growers Association, lent its support to an Indian-based Federation Party after the 1960 cane strike. In 1965, its now weaker rival and opponent till the end, the Kisan Sangh (which had abandoned the strike in 1960), formed a National Congress of Fiji. A chiefly dominated Fijian Association, formed in 1956 to oppose democratic reform, quickly reorganised once legislative council elections were scheduled in 1963 to give Fijians the vote for the first time. In 1966, the association became the dominant Fijian arm of an Alliance Party, with support also from a smaller General Electors Association and the Indian Alliance, the latter derived from the National Congress. This multiracial appearance had two primary goals: to ensure that any new constitution maintained communalism and to uphold chiefly control over Fijians. In those goals it succeeded; in fresh council elections in 1966, the Alliance Party won 23 seats to the Federation Party's nine and was poised to gain control of the postcolonial state to facilitate its very conservative agenda.⁶⁹ Thus a Fijian party, which mirrored the Fijian Administration in makeup, emerged to unite all Fijians within a new expression of the neotraditional orthodoxy.⁷⁰

69 A 1965 constitutional conference altered the makeup of the legislative council to enable a form of self-government prior to independence. Fijians had 14 seats, Indians 12 and General Electors 10.

70 Durutalo, 'Of roots & offshoots', 2005, pp. 146–48.

The Federation Party attempted its own multiracial appearance, joining forces with western Viti Levu Fijian dissidents (the National Democratic Party) in 1968 to form the National Federation Party (NFP) and push for a common roll and an elected Fijian head of state. It failed, finally accepting the communal 1970 Constitution on the understanding that it would be reviewed after the first election held under the new Constitution in 1972.

The creation of democratic politics generated a new dynamic within Fiji, and Fijian society in particular, enabling for the first time legitimate political expressions of dissent and hostility to the eastern chiefly elite. Some of this discontent focused on the nature of the postcolonial settlement. Thus trade unionist Apisai Tora's Western Democratic Party sought in 1963 to have Britain shape independence as a simple revocation of cession (i.e. return Fiji to chiefly control) but with western Fiji's rights fully restored. He joined forces with Isikeli Nadala's Fijian Nationalist Party in 1966 to form the National Democratic Party. The mercurial Tora was a survivor and, over the next four decades, he shaped Fijian and west-Fijian dissent, sometimes siding with his eastern opponents, sometimes going it alone. But, in a sense, he would never be alone. As Alumita Durutalo relates, democracy gave postcolonial dissidents the space that Navosavakadua and Ranawai never enjoyed, and they would use it to bring down the postcolonial order that the country's chiefly elite had so carefully constructed in order to maintain their state within a state, the edifice that enabled them to claim to be both multiracial and pro-Fijian.⁷¹

None of this seemed possible in the heady early days of independence in 1970. Given the size of its sugar and tourism industries, its growth in services during the final decades of colonialism and the production of a small range of consumer products,⁷² Fiji gained independence in much better shape than many other colonies. At the same time as Rabuka entered the Royal Fiji Military Forces as a trainee officer in 1968, Fiji's per capita GDP of US\$1,200 equalled or bettered that of other small states such as Malta (US\$1,400) or Mauritius (US\$270). It performed better than many Asian countries such as Thailand (US\$330) and Malaysia (US\$790), even giants such as India and China (US\$105). In fact, Fiji had

71 Durutalo, 'Of roots & offshoots', 2005, p. 308.

72 B Knapman, in his 'Afterword: The economic consequences of the coups' (R Robertson & A Tamanisau, *Fiji: Shattered Coups*. Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988, pp. 161–62), lists these as beef, pork, beer, cigarettes, rice, cement and paint.

much to celebrate after independence and, during the next 17 years under Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's Alliance government, Fiji experienced greater change than it had under colonialism after the Second World War. The economy grew on average 5.6 per cent during the 1970s, with domestic investment comfortably at 20 per cent of GDP. Manufacturing expanded 7 per cent per annum, and tourism's proportion of foreign exchange earnings doubled to an average 34 per cent, almost the same as sugar (down from 60 per cent in the early 1960s), enabling Fiji for the first time to end its dependence on one main product. Actually, tourism's contribution to GDP rose from just 3.5 per cent in 1970 to nearly 14 per cent by the end of the decade.⁷³ One of Fiji's undoubted economic strengths also derived from its capacity to use local savings, generated principally through its Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF), to underwrite government deficits. This meant that, although debt was often high (over 40 per cent of GDP), its domestication sheltered government from external currency and interest changes. The downside, however, lay in depleting resources for productive investment in the economy.

Postcolonial governments clearly had different priorities from colonial ones. A new highway linked the western sugar port Lautoka and the airport town Nadi with the eastern capital Suva, opening up new markets for farmers and new prospects for tourism.⁷⁴ A new hydro scheme in Viti Levu's centre at Monasavu – once the heartland of old Colo – reduced Fiji's reliance on costly imported fuels. In the western highlands the Vaturu dam provided water to the dry west. New schools and health facilities were developed, and the regional University of the South Pacific (USP) began producing the country's skilled and professional workforce. Agricultural projects increased the production of sugar (particularly at Seaqaqa on Vanua Levu), poultry, corn, tobacco, milk, rice, ginger and timber. Assembly, packaging and small-scale manufacturing plants sprung up to capitalise on new import-substitution policies and a growing urban market. The architecture for postcolonialism had, of necessity, to be different from that required by colonialism.

73 S Britton, *Tourism & Underdevelopment in Fiji*. Canberra, The Australian National University, 1983, pp. 157–59.

74 This section draws on 'Shadows of war and revolution' in R Robertson, *Multiculturalism & Reconciliation in an Indulgent Republic. Fiji after the Coups: 1987–1998*. Suva: Fiji Institute of Applied Studies, 1998, pp. 13–14.

It had to be, for development now also entailed coping with an unstable external world. Diversification became a necessary component of Fiji's struggle for survival in a new climate of inflation, price fluctuations and trade uncertainties, yet in Fiji diversification began slowly. Instead Fiji focused on expanding existing activities, often in ways that contradicted its postcolonial desire to generate new national business leaders. Expansion came with foreign capital, against which small local businesses could not compete. Tourism, forestry and poultry industries were all successful examples of expansion that succumbed to the large-scale, centralised and more efficient operations of foreign capital, often in collaboration with the investment companies of the chiefly elite. Where the state did intervene to assist local businesses, to reduce the impact of price fluctuations and to assist with marketing, it created local monopolies; for example, in telecommunications, rice and flour milling and dairy processing, which increased business and consumer costs and took money from government coffers that could have been better employed.

The rhetoric of import substitution was understandable in a newly independent economy, but it raised unrealistic expectations. Fiji's economy was too small to develop a wide range of competitive industries, and protectionism was least likely to generate competitiveness.⁷⁵ Instead tariffs protected producers for the local market from import competition. At the same time, a high exchange rate and taxes penalised exporters. Hence, little export diversification occurred. Instead recipients treated tariff largesse not as infant protection but as a cow to be milked for as long as it lasted. When it came to exports, it was always easier to expand sugar production rather than invest in new horticulture ventures. An obvious reason lay in the European Community's Lomé Convention (1976), which paid above world prices for a guaranteed proportion of Fiji's sugar. At least increasing sugar production did not necessitate new and expensive supportive infrastructure. And Fiji's sugar production increased from 361,000 tonnes in 1970 to an all-time record of 502,000 tonnes in 1985. Thus, its share of domestic exports rose over 10 per cent to 80 per cent, providing an undoubted boost to the economy, enabling it to benefit from high sugar prices in 1975 and 1981, protecting it initially from a global recession in the early 1980s and possibly enabling greater domestic stability than might otherwise have been the case. Sugar also

75 R Cole & H Hughes, *The Fiji Economy May 1987: Problems & Prospects*. Canberra: National Centre for Development studies, The Australian National University, 1988.

absorbed 40 per cent of all new entrants to the labour market between 1976 and 1980. Thus the labour intensive industry could employ 22 per cent of Fiji's labour force while contributing 16 per cent of GDP.⁷⁶ There were costs, however: an overuse of chemicals, the degradation of hilly and marginal lands brought into production, a risk of flooding from increasingly silted rivers, a reluctance to invest as much energy into diversifying agricultural production and providing linkages with other sectors of the economy, and perhaps a false sense of security. Sugar's temporary success made it easier to overlook its associated environmental, social and economic problems.

Other local industries fared less well. Rice production suffered because the state paid poor prices to its farmers and closed down many small but efficient local rice mills. Rewa Milk never met market demand, cocoa production collapsed because of the high margins government marketers demanded, and beef production tended to be poorly managed. Citrus production likewise withered. Targets were often unrealistic, service provision poor, and semi-subsistence farmers unskilled.⁷⁷ The development of a clothing export industry became the only exception to this record in the mid-1980s. Modest early success (86 per cent growth throughout 1980–86) built on opportunities provided by Australia and New Zealand in their 1981 SPARTECA⁷⁸ trade agreement, which reduced their then-high tariffs on a limited range of goods produced in the Pacific. Some economists believe that these popular postcolonial trade initiatives – sold as helping to address uneven development – actually disadvantaged developing countries, being bureaucratic and costly to exploit. Fiji might have been better off reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade and seeking to become a specialised supplier of competitive goods in niche markets.⁷⁹

76 Lomé provided Fiji a market for 172,000 tonnes of sugar at the same price received by European farmers for sugar beet under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. In 1982, this provided \$370 per tonne compared with \$192 on the world market; see HC Brookfield, F Ellis & RG Ward, *Land, Cane & Coconuts: Papers on the Rural Economy of Fiji*. Canberra: The Australian National University, 1985, pp. 72–74, 79. All currencies referred to hereafter are in Fiji dollars unless otherwise specified.

77 P Barbour & A McGregor, 'The Fiji agricultural sector', *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, 13: 2, November 1998, pp. 68–70.

78 South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (SPARTECA). Fiji exported \$1 million under SPARTECA in 1985 and \$2 million in 1986; see R Chandra, 'Manufacturing in Fiji: Mixed results', *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, 11: 1, May 1996, p. 47.

79 Cole & Hughes, *The Fiji Economy May 1987, 1988*, p. 67.

There were, however, political reasons why Fiji's leaders did not encourage manufacturing. Already the nature of employment in the country had changed since colonial days, most specifically in agriculture. In 1963, 41 per cent of the workforce engaged in agricultural pursuits; by 1984 only 19 per cent were so employed. Much of the difference came from the rise in services provided by government. Its employment proportions rose from 14 per cent to 22 per cent during the same period. This shift posed difficulties for a government heavily reliant on rural support. Did it really want to encourage the growth of an urban working class, potentially disconnected from traditional mechanisms of control and susceptible to union influence? An early example of the impact of such a class was provided in 1959 when a multiracial Wholesale and Retail Workers Union led by Tora and Jim Anthony initiated a wages strike for oil workers in Suva that turned riotous and prompted a renewed effort by Fijian leaders to ensure the racial demarcation of unions. By 1986 some 47 per cent of Fijian wage earners were employed in the public sector, which carried all sorts of risks for a government that regarded unions as harbingers of unwanted class politics or the creatures of Indian politicians. In addition, the shift from agriculture also signalled a small rise in the urban population (from 33 per cent in 1966 to 39 per cent by 1986),⁸⁰ which further heightened concerns about employment prospects and rising levels of poverty.

The Alliance government might have handled this new urban pressure well if it had been able to demonstrate rural success. However, urban restlessness grew from rural failure. There was nothing new in this respect. Colonial authorities long struggled to provide some mechanism for change in Fijian communities, but had been stymied by Fijian leaders, who feared the impact of change on their authority.⁸¹ Consequently, colonial planners diverted their attention to the needs of urban centres or the sugar industry. A postcolonial government could not do this so easily, at least not one dependent on rural Fijian votes. It toyed with the idea of an export processing zone in Lautoka in 1981 but, when that received lukewarm donor support, it focused instead on a number of programs designed to raise rural incomes, diversify agricultural output, increase self-sufficiency and reduce urban migration. These were all

80 Walsh, *Fiji*, 2006, p. 76.

81 Several early governors (and many colonists) believed that the native system made Fijians lazy, but were wary of change that might spark instability (Robinson, 'The Crown Colony Government', 1984, pp. 43, 57, 99).

noble objectives, and – as historian Asinate Mausio notes in her study of rural development – the Alliance Party could easily have embraced modernity and multiracialism with land and local government reforms, and integrated rural Fijians into the modern economy.⁸² But it refused to do so.

In a sense, the Alliance Party still wanted to demonstrate that early colonial critics of the traditional Fijian way of life, such as Alan Burns and Oskar Spate or Fiji's own Rusiate Nayacakalou,⁸³ were wrong. Fijians could modernise in their own unique fashion. This, after all, was what Mara's postcolonial Pacific Way championed.⁸⁴ With heavy government support, the Alliance increased assistance to cocoa projects, cattle and sheep farming, ginger, lime, tea, coffee and fruit processing as a way of diversifying agricultural production. It established a new monopolist, the National Marketing Authority, in 1971 to stabilise market prices for producers and subsidise freight rates. It proposed developing 33 regional growth centres that would overcome regional disparities and provide new rural centres for growth. They all failed.

Undoubtedly a principal cause for failure lay in the Alliance Party's belief that communalism and commercialism could coexist without disruptive tensions. In the case of the 1978 Yalavou beef cattle scheme in the Sigatoka Valley, free Fijian farmers (i.e. non-village-based or 'free' Fijians – *galala*) were settled on 98 200-hectare farms, but local chiefs were given roles on its executive, and eventually they drained the program of resources. Says Mausio, it sought *galala* but embraced tradition. The principle cause for failure, however, derived elsewhere. Australia funded the scheme but repatriated as much as 60 per cent of the value of its aid to pay for experts or technology. The Fiji Government did not make up the shortfall.

82 A Mausio, 'Boomerangs & the Fijian dilemma: Australian aid for rural development 1971–1987'. PhD Thesis, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2006, pp. 196–205.

83 OHK Spate, *The Fijian People: Economic Problems & Prospects*. Suva: Legislative Council of Fiji, 1959; AAC Burns, *Fiji*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1963; RR Nayacakalou, *Tradition & Change in the Fijian Village*. Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1978; RR Nayacakalou, *Leadership in Fiji*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975.

84 Mara championed the Pacific Way after the foundation of the regional Pacific Forum organisation in 1971. Graeme Dobell has argued that, in one sense, it described a way by which Pacific elites could 'focus on conversation and consensus, respect for sovereignty and non interference in the internal affairs of neighbours'. 'Characteristically', he added, 'Mara didn't devote much effort to actually defining The Way. The Ratu often didn't see the need to explain things. After all, defining custom too exactly can limit a chief's ability to appeal to "tradition" to deal with a specific problem' ('The Pacific Way wanes', The Canberra Column, *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, Sydney, 8 August 2008, www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/pacific-way-wanes).

Consequently, farmers received insufficient establishment assistance and incentives. Additionally, the scheme was poorly planned and managed, remote and gained little marketing assistance. It possessed no linkages with the wider Sigatoka community.⁸⁵

In contrast, the proposed Vunidawa rural growth centre in Naitasiri sought more specifically to work directly from within existing communal settings, without resort to *galala*. Vunidawa planned to link some 100 villages to supply taro, bananas and *yaqona* (kava) and provide social, commercial and physical infrastructure for a region that included Monasavu. But the scheme never got off the ground, in part because of rivalry between Upper and Lower Naitasiri. According to Mausio, there was also a major contradiction in the way the government delegated responsibility. It wanted to strengthen traditional networks, but did not trust its Fijian provincial councils to engage with villagers or control funding. Instead it used its public service district officers, who did not enjoy the same close working relationship with villagers as the provincial councils.⁸⁶ Fiji's colonial inheritance of a dual system of governance made all development schemes bureaucratic and ultimately worked against the effective delivery of development assistance. Urban infrastructure projects were always better administered because they possessed no delivery gap. Hence they became more popular with foreign donors. Vunidawa's failure, however, contributed to Naitasiri's lack of infrastructure, and would become a major cause for political tension during and after the 2000 coup.⁸⁷

Mausio argues that the Alliance Party deliberately exploited rural–urban and regional gaps to mask its ethnic preference and desire to promote traditionalism. In doing so, it widened disparities further and produced a spate of failed rural projects. Communal land ownership and village settings restricted profitability and productivity. Because projects were not meant to be disruptive of traditional life, they denied villagers the kind of infrastructure that might have raised living standards and generated economic vibrancy.⁸⁸ Most projects were about crop diversification rather than diversifying export processing and, even if successful, would not have addressed Fiji's declining terms of trade. Additionally, they often

85 Mausio, 'Boomerangs & the Fijian dilemma', 2006, pp. 186–220, 344.

86 Mausio, 'Boomerangs & the Fijian dilemma', 2006, pp. 222–56.

87 Mausio, 'Boomerangs & the Fijian dilemma', 2006, pp. 327, 348.

88 Mausio, 'Boomerangs & the Fijian dilemma', 2006, pp. 58–59.

focused on semi-subsistence and marginally profitable crops that could in no way deliver the same benefits sugar did to its many Indian farmers. The government would have done better focusing on better paying crops, on plantation production and *galala* participation. But its desire to preserve Fijian orthodoxy as the basis for elite Fijian control undermined its initiatives.

The most successful rural projects were always those that were multiracial and commercial, the best example being Seaqqa in Vanua Levu. As a rural growth centre, it had the potential to link also with centres at Nabouwalu and Dreketi, the latter being the site of a successful venture that assisted Fiji (with the help of tariff protection) reach 75 per cent rice sufficiency by 1985. Seaqqa sought to overcome falling sugar production and, from the start, its 837 farmers dealt with a crop that produced better returns. Furthermore, like Dreketi, it involved both Fijians and Indians. Multi-ethnic programs helped expose Fijian farmers to the work ethic and business acumen of Indian counterparts. This is probably the most important benefit of diversity in any society; it widens the pool for skills and knowledge. In low-income countries, however, there are fewer opportunities for gaining from that pool than in higher income countries that are more dependent on skills and knowledge.⁸⁹ And less still if governments are fearful of what impact those opportunities might have on their power base. Nonetheless, these schemes demonstrated – to paraphrase Mausio – that the path to sustainable rural development lay in unlocking the economic potential of the rural *vanua* through democratisation and increased integration with the modern economy.⁹⁰ Nothing else worked.

The Alliance Party's failure to diversify economic activities had a number of political consequences, as we shall see, but in the first instance, it shifted attention to the role of foreign investment in both fuelling economic expansion and stymieing local growth. In 1979, a USP report revealed that up to 65 per cent of Fiji's annual economic turnover was controlled by foreign corporations. Foreign corporations dominated banking and financial services, insurance, distribution, tourism, gold production and manufacturing.⁹¹ Within a short while, they would also dominate timber, tobacco, chicken, soft drinks and beer production.

89 Collier, *Wars, Guns & Votes*, 2009, p. 61.

90 Collier, *Wars, Guns & Votes*, 2009, pp. 81, 331, 334.

91 R Carstairs & R Prasad, *Impact of Foreign Direct Investment on the Fiji Economy*. Suva: Centre for Applied Studies in Development, University of the South Pacific, 1981.

The chicken industry demonstrated the dangers. Between 1977 and 1986 over \$1.6 million had been loaned by the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) to chicken farmers, averaging \$20,000 per farmer, as part of a strategy for self-reliance and to expand farming, particularly for Fijians. The results were impressive: poultry meat and egg production doubled and imports fell, as they were intended to do. Unfortunately, the dramatic rise in interest rates during the 1980s crippled many farmers, particularly as it coincided with a near doubling of feed costs. Returns on meat and eggs failed to keep pace. When General Foods monopolised the more profitable poultry-processing and feed-production sides of the business, it squeezed farmer returns further. Many farmers went to the wall.⁹²

Transnationals also dominated components of the local pine industry in western Viti Levu when the forests that were first planted in the 1950s began to mature. By 1983 there were over 20,600 hectares of hardwood and pine plantations and 10 forestry stations, but conflicts developed between *mataqali* seeking to maximise local Fijian business and employment opportunities (i.e. a more active role in resource development) and the Alliance Party's preference for foreign capital and expertise to create a consolidated efficient industry in which landowners played an essentially passive role. A partnership of eastern chiefs with British Petroleum suggested to many western Fijians a very different motive. For comparable reasons, foreign involvement in tourism, again mostly in western Viti Levu, produced a similar outcome. The majority of tourist shops (91 per cent) were Indian-owned, but foreign businesses took in 72 per cent of all shopping revenue. Similarly, Fijians dominated handicraft outlets (70 per cent) but received only 2 per cent of tourist receipts.⁹³

This crowding out of employment opportunities was not felt everywhere. The Australian food and trading company, Burns Philp, gave up copra processing and some of its retail businesses in the 1980s. Similarly, the Australian Carpenter group of companies abandoned manufacturing and contracted work out to cheaper independent local workshops. These changes encouraged a small group of retailers such as RB Patel, Motibhai, Tappoo, GB Hari and Vinod Patel to expand into hardware, clothing,

92 M Chung, 'Ethnic politics and small business: The case of the Fiji poultry industry', *Pacific Viewpoint*, 30: 2, October 1989, pp. 192–206.

93 Carstairs & Prasad, *Impact of Foreign Direct Investment*, 1981.

manufacturing, motion picture and tourism sectors, in some cases assisted by the government through contracts to supply equipment or control airport duty-free outlets. By 1986, local businesses were responsible for 65 per cent of manufacturing output and 64 per cent of value added.⁹⁴

Despite this growth, Fiji's economy remained small, resource-scarce and dominated by foreign capital. What local capital existed was itself dominated by Gujarati businesses that could defend themselves economically and through political patronage. But they were dependent also on an economy that no longer expanded. Undoubtedly, sudden rises in oil prices, falling commodity returns and natural disasters were partly responsible, but the Alliance Party's failure to generate a balanced economy, to ensure intersectoral connectivity, and provide for the country's growing population contributed also. Its linkages with transnational and Gujarati businesses did not always help either, particularly in the highly racialised and expectant atmosphere it had done much to encourage. Critics easily accused it of doing little to increase space for popular economic participation. After all, the economically active population increased by 40 per cent between 1976 and 1986, but employment grew only 12 per cent, which was an effective decline of 8 per cent in the proportion of the economically active population employed.⁹⁵ No matter how well it managed the macroeconomic parameters, kept inflation down or managed Fiji's balance of payments, the government's failure to sustain growth would bear political costs.

The costs of failure

Those political costs first emerged in the mid-1970s after a period of relatively high inflation (14.4 per cent in 1974) and global recession following the first oil shock. The high rates of economic growth experienced immediately after independence (6 per cent in 1970, 12.7 per cent in 1974) quickly evaporated and the Alliance government found itself increasingly under attack from Fijians for not doing enough to assist rural Fijians. Western Fijians expressed concern over proposals

94 R Chandra, 'The political crisis and the manufacturing sector in Fiji', *Pacific Viewpoint*, 30: 2, October 1989, p. 173.

95 RV Cole, 'The Fiji economy: From go to woe', *Pacific Viewpoint*, 30: 2, October 1989, p. 155. The economically active population increased from 175,785 to 241,160 while employment grew from 70,174 to 79,854.

for the management of pine resources. In part this was a matter of expectations, but it reflected also the lack of clear leadership in many villages, as John Overton and Gerard Ward noted in 1989 when describing the implications of rural change.

Chiefly hierarchies remained and were respected but this often conflicted with economic realities. Chiefs, large and small, were caught in a dilemma: they wanted to maintain their old power, yet were drawn by the attraction of commercialism (on the land and off) and land rents (which they could pocket). In these non-traditional spheres, they were less bound to share their income with the commoner kin. Commercial agriculture, whether with sugar, rice, beef cattle or copra, touched every corner of village Fiji and the effects included greater materialism and individualism. There is evidence of individual accumulation of land and consequent inequalities ... For the majority of villagers, education, cash cropping, and non-farm employment promised much but usually failed to deliver, and as the gulf between living standards in the towns and the non-sugar countryside began to widen, frustration mounted – frustrations sometimes directed at the chiefly elite but much more commonly at Indians, town dwellers or shopkeepers.⁹⁶

Sakeasi Butadroka best illustrated this transformation. A frustrated small businessman from Rewa and a junior minister in the government in 1972, he criticised its record on assisting Fijians. This was both personal and parochial. His Rewan bus company could not survive competition from established Indian companies. When the Alliance Party chose a Lauan candidate above a local for a by-election in Rewa, he campaigned against his own party and was expelled in 1973, but not silenced.⁹⁷ From his seat in parliament he continued to attack, pointedly calling for the expulsion of Indians from Fiji, and launched his own rival Fijian Nationalist Party (FNP) in 1975. Butadroka articulated Fijian discontent, but he did so in zero-sum racial terms. He attacked Indians (not economic failure) as the cause of Fijian ‘disadvantage’ or ‘backwardness’. Butadroka articulated a form of populist nativism, reflecting the continued appeal of divisions and identities that were once fostered by colonialism. But beneath his racial focus lay a less immediately articulated hostility towards eastern

96 J Overton & RG Ward, ‘The coups in retrospect: The new political geography of Fiji’, *Pacific Viewpoint*, 30: 2 October 1989, pp. 210–11.

97 Durutalo, ‘Of roots & offshoots’, 2005, pp. 172–74.

chiefs and the dominance of Tovata under Prime Minister Mara, the man chosen by Sukuna to succeed him and who had been dutifully accepted by colonial authorities as a future Fiji leader and sent overseas for training.⁹⁸

Butadroka's racial assault resonated, as he knew it would. 'Telling Indians to get out of Fiji was just a political tactic to stir Fijian feelings,' he later conceded disingenuously, 'and so force Ratu Mara to do something about the poverty in Fijian settlements here.'⁹⁹ Many Fijians were disenchanted with their inability to benefit from the proceeds of independence. Indians were an easy target for their frustration. After all, Indians dominated the highly visible retail and transport sectors, they held the greatest proportion of white-collar jobs (58 per cent compared with 31 per cent for Fijians), and they dominated professional and managerial positions (70 per cent compared with 17 per cent).¹⁰⁰ This visibility hid the fact that the vast majority of Indians were only marginally better off than Fijians, but that did not matter. Stereotypes fed off what people wanted to see. For Butadroka, the solution was simple: remove Indians and Fijians could fill their places. And that solution had not occurred because the Alliance government connived with Indians through its policy of multiracialism.

In the April 1977 elections, many Fijians responded to Butadroka by failing to vote: a protest by default. Compared with 1972, Fijian participation rates fell 23 per cent to 65 per cent. But an unprecedented 20 per cent also voted for Butadroka's FNP. Alliance support fell 19 per cent. It was enough to unseat the government and, ironically, provide the NFP – with a narrow two-seat majority – an opportunity to demonstrate its leadership credentials. Unfortunately, it too had been damaged by the race debate. Its leader, Siddiq Koya, seen by many in his party as too close to Mara, had been injured by the Alliance Party's refusal to accept the recommendations of a Royal Commission to reduce the communal emphasis of the Constitution.¹⁰¹ In any case many of his colleagues were all too comfortable with the guarantees communalism offered them and

98 Butadroka's antipathy towards Lauans like Mara would grow and, in time, he would argue for Viti Levu's independence from the GCC and the creation of its own council of chiefs. Mara concluded that Butadroka believed only Fijians from Viti Levu should determine what happens on Viti Levu, and that all other Fijians should be declared foreigners like IndoFijians (*fjilive*, 16 October 2000).

99 *Fiji Sun*, 26 December 1986.

100 Sutherland, *Beyond the Politics of Race*, 1992, pp. 151–59.

101 The Royal Commission recommended maintaining ethnic representation at current proportions but sought to make all seats national.

were more concerned that the leader of a Muslim minority now headed a Hindu majority.¹⁰² A common roll would make campaigning more difficult.

Divisions within the NFP also widened over the duration of land leases and the system for measuring land value permitted in a new *Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act*. These issues greatly concerned all cane farmers who feared the changes would cost them dearly and discourage investment in land. Population pressures on land added further weight to the issue. Additionally, many Indians regarded inequality, in terms of restricted access to public service occupations or to education scholarships, as evidence of their continued status as second-class citizens. They had begun calling themselves IndoFijians during the 1970s to stress their belonging, but IndoFijianness could not fill the void created by the failure of the postcolonial state to foster a national identity or even to recognise the state of IndoFijianness.

When the NFP met after the elections to confirm its leader, dissidents used the opportunity to test Koya's support within the party. In the interim, the Governor-General used the long delay to conduct a constitutional coup, appointing Mara to head a minority government and lead the country to fresh elections five months later. The tactic worked. By September the NFP had split into two hostile factions, and the Alliance Party had won back its Fijian base by stealing the thunder of the FNP, imprisoning its leader for inciting unrest, and reminding voters that if they did not unite around it this time, 'the foreigners' would take over. Thus the Alliance won a massive majority (in large part because of NFP division), and Fiji returned to 'normal'.

But the real lesson of 1977 was not learned. No changes in economic policy resulted and the potential for Fijian dissatisfaction remained as trade deficits, inflation and unemployment grew, poverty became more visible, and a collapse in international commodity prices caused the economy to shrink in the early 1980s. The Alliance had increased educational scholarships to Fijians since the early 1970s, as well as soft loans for business activities through the FDB. It had also established new business ventures through the NLTB's commercial arm, the Native Land Development Corporation. But these activities hardly addressed

102 Durutalo, 'Of roots & offshoots', 2005, pp. 178–79.

the gap between rhetoric and reality. The proportion of FDB loans for rural activities fell dramatically in the early 1980s, as did the proportion of loans going to Fijians.¹⁰³

If the Alliance Party thought the race card would enable it to see off any future threat to its political dominance, the 1982 election provided another shock. The NFP had reunited under Jai Ram Reddy and joined forces with a Fijian party based in western Viti Levu, the Western United Front (WUF) led by Nadroga's Ratu Osea Gavidi. It contested the Alliance Party's interference in the nascent pine industry and articulated western concerns at the dominance of the eastern chiefly elite. Fijians wanted to be economically involved, but the nature of Fijian administration made this impossible. Land rentals were considered too low and, in any case, were distributed in such a fashion that they could not form the basis for investment. The NLTB took a massive 25 per cent for administrative costs, 30 per cent went to chiefs, with the remainder distributed to individual *mataqali* members, sometimes numbered in the hundreds if not thousands. To offset this disadvantage, Gavidi had earlier proposed that landowners become partners in a joint venture to exploit their timber resources, but the Alliance denied the proposal, even banning the head of the American company that Gavidi hoped to deal with from entering the country. Gavidi's province rallied behind him and, standing as an independent for Nadroga–Navosa in both 1977 elections, he defeated the Alliance. Other western chiefs soon lent Gavidi their support after a falling-out over the Alliance's costly refit of Bau ahead of a royal visit in 1982. Bau, the Alliance declared, represented 'the whole fabric of Fijian society'. As Durutalo notes, democracy made it much harder for the eastern elite to dismiss troublesome subjects whether those in the west or in Rewa.¹⁰⁴

The 1982 election was close; the Alliance's 16-seat majority fell to four and the WUF gained two seats. The fallout was swift: Mara accused the NFP of gaining secret funding from Russia, and the GCC called for permanent Fijian political paramountcy. In the heat of parliamentary debate Reddy resigned and the divisive Koya returned as party leader, with shocking consequences for his party, just as its Alliance opponent demonstrated

103 The proportion of FDB loans to rural activities fell from one half to one quarter over 1980–85, while loans to Fijians fell from 80 per cent of total value in 1975 to 27 per cent 1980 and to 8 per cent 1985; see Sutherland, *Beyond the Politics of Race*, 1992, p. 143.

104 Durutalo, 'Of roots & offshoots', 2005, pp. 189–96; see also S Durutalo, 'Internal colonialism & unequal regional development: The case of western Viti Levu, Fiji'. MA Thesis, University of the South Pacific. Suva, 1985, pp. 469–70.

an inability to handle difficult economic circumstances. Mara meanwhile began to shore up the position of chiefs within rural Fiji by reintroducing elements of the old Fijian Administration, including proposals for separate village courts. The defection of Tora to the Alliance camp in 1982 gave him an opportunity to tackle the disaffection of western Fiji by proposing major rural development projects in the Sigatoka valley and by rebuilding his party machinery in the west. Mara's efforts to heal the rift with western Fijians were not helped, however, by his government's rejection of a Fijian-owned plywood processing company in favour of a joint venture between an Australian company and an eastern Bau-Kubuna company, nor by the allegations of corruption that hung over his wife's dealing with a *mataqali* that managed royalties from the large Fijian Hotel near Sigatoka.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, in the manner of eastern chiefs, his strategy involved wooing western chiefs back into the Alliance fold, but this strategy brought no guarantee that their more egalitarian subjects would follow them. Indeed, he failed to appreciate that the next challenge to Alliance authority would be of a completely different order and that it would cut across the racial lines he had so successfully reasserted after 1977. The origins of that challenge lay in a sudden deterioration in the state of Fiji's economy and Mara's response to it.

A double whammy hit Fiji after 1981. After a brief boom at the start of the decade, sugar prices collapsed. This coincided with high inflation brought on by a renewed global energy crisis that plunged many economies into recession. Fiji's inflation stood at 14 per cent in 1981 and remained at 7 per cent two years later. Five cyclones and a drought added to the pain of recession in 1983. A harsh budget in 1984 increased tariffs and introduced new taxes. But talk of a possible wage freeze alienated the labour movement, which had been painfully negotiating wage increases since 1982. Strike threats now hovered at the same time that unemployment rose, a teachers' college in Nasinu closed, and graduating education students were denied employment by a polarising Minister for Education, Ahmed Ali. Nonetheless the Fiji Public Service Association (FPSA) successfully pursued its case for wage adjustments at the Tripartite Forum, an organisation of government, business and labour formerly much praised as an example of Pacific consensus-making. No longer;

105 An excellent account of this election and its fallout can be found in Lal, *Broken Waves*, 1992, pp. 245–50. See also Michael C Howard's detailed account of pre-1987 political manoeuvrings in *Fiji: Race and Politics in an Island State* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991, pp. 146–206).

the government struck back with an immediate wage freeze in late 1984. The unions left the forum and threatened a general strike. Two cyclones in January 1985 put paid to that tactic, but unions were beginning to cooperate on a scale unprecedented since 1959. Two ethnically divided teachers' unions joined forces to challenge government efforts to employ graduate students on subsistence wages. A Confederation of Public Sector Unions came into existence in April. The government struck back, supporting a Confederation of Blue Collar Workers Unions in mid-1985 and, a year later, gave support to a possible Fijian civil servants' association. By then it had also withdrawn recognition of the Fiji Trades Union Congress, the main labour umbrella organisation. It was too late. In July 1985, the union movement created its own political party.

If Fiji's politicians were growing comfortable with the manipulation of race, they were distinctly uncomfortable with the idea of class. While class was un-Pacific and potentially critical of traditional alignments it was also, above all, damaging to the neat racial compartments they had grown accustomed to working with. Those compartments were themselves social constructions. Clan and provincial loyalties still influenced Fijian thinking, despite colonial and postcolonial pressures to mould a less divisive Fijian identity. Indian experiences of indenture and post-indenture racism combined with the novelty of freedom from continental poverty and prejudice to create IndoFijians, but they too were haunted by religious and linguistic fractures. For both communities facing uncertain change, identity was something to be cherished and never surrendered or lost.

The formation of a Labour Party did not mean that race was out, but it did mean that, for the first time, a political party began to imagine new political alignments that could – no matter how weakly and imperfectly – cut across lines that many people thought were set in stone. To some extent these new alignments reflected changes in postcolonial Fiji: a more urbanised society with an expanding and well-educated middle class. It reflected also an emerging consciousness on the part of some of that class that a focus on race simply failed to address the issues that most affected Fijians and IndoFijians in their everyday lives, particularly the rural and urban poor of both communities who found accessing government services difficult and were the principal victims of low economic growth.¹⁰⁶ Race also failed

106 Cole & Hughes, *The Fiji Economy May 1987, 1988*, p. 22.

to acknowledge that, contrary to political rhetoric, both communities were remarkably accommodating and harmonious towards each other, sharing musical traditions and cuisine, and often intermarrying.

We might surmise then that, at some stage, the basic premises of race politics would always be challenged, particularly given that, historically, the most important conflict of interest between the two communities concerned access to land on which increasingly larger and larger proportions of both communities no longer directly depended. Similarly, urbanisation reduced the strict isolation of communities from each other and made possible the development of new relationships at schools and workplaces, and new shared activities around food, entertainment and sport. Of course urbanisation also enabled old distinctions to be reinforced in new forms through schools, clubs, religious practices and political mobilisation. And nothing could immediately offset the colonial legacy of land ownership, which had driven IndoFijians into professions, businesses and skilled employment at a far greater rate than Fijians, whose monopoly of land meant that they rarely faced the same urgency to transform.

Change then was never complete or tidy in its consequences. The modern economy created scope for change but, equally, it provided the setting for new forms of ethnic competition, especially around education, employment and access to state assistance.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, postcolonial changes created space for new ways of thinking and action, and nothing demonstrated these possibilities better than the labour movement, in particular unions like the FPSA, which represented all communities in the expanding civil service and helped grow new national and international linkages.¹⁰⁸

Alliance government responses to the economic challenges of the 1980s placed it on a collision course with unions, which were increasingly concerned at its authoritarianism, its political interference within the public service and its impact on worker welfare. Not surprisingly, given its bruising confrontation over wage increases, the FPSA took a lead role in the formation of the Fiji Labour Party (FLP). President Timoci Bavadra

107 Collier, *Wars, Guns & Votes*, 2009, pp. 178–79.

108 See Jacqueline Leckie's comprehensive history of the FPSA, *To Labour with the State: The Fiji Public Service Association* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1997).

and General Secretary Mahendra Chaudhry assumed the same positions in the new political party. Historian Jacqui Leckie notes the importance of the networks that Labour brought to its new political struggle:

The FLP was not just representative of organised labour and public sector workers ... [M]any of the leaders and members of these unions had other networks which drew them to the FLP, such as peace, church and women's groups. The links Chaudhry and Bavadra had formed between urban and rural workers helped to lay the basis for a Coalition being formed between the FLP and the NFP. They both had direct kin connections with the 'western side' of Fiji. Bavadra had served as a medical officer in many rural, as well as urban areas. Chaudhry's strong following in the Western Division drew on FPSA and National Farmers' Union support. Bavadra ... as an empathetic and easy going doctor had the support and loyalty of different ethnic communities. When the FLP hit the election campaign trail, Bavadra and Chaudhry brought to it years of working together ... Behind these personalities was the energy of numerous supporters and rural/urban, village/white collar connections reproduced among many FLP members.¹⁰⁹

This was no Fijian Nationalist Party or WUF, defined in the first instance by the peculiar nature of provincial dissent. The Labour Party had the potential for mass appeal and it possessed the organising capacity to reach where no opposition party had previously reached. Would that be enough to break the communalist cage that had constrained political development since independence? Early indications seemed promising.

The Labour Party arrived on the scene at the very moment that both the Alliance Party and the NFP were at their lowest ebb. Five cyclones had devastated the country in 1983 in the midst of its economic crisis. Hospital services were under pressure, roads deteriorating, crime rates and unemployment rising and, everywhere, the realities of poverty were becoming more stark. One in every eight Suva residents lived in 26 squatter settlements, subject to unhealthy crowded living conditions and with no access to utilities.¹¹⁰ The NFP remained too mired in factional fighting to notice, and the government seemed suddenly unable to manage: education slipped from crisis to crisis, housing funds for the poor disappeared, bus fares increased and minimum wages for textile workers were denied. A World Bank report in 1986 argued that no significant

109 Leckie, *To Labour with the State*, 1997, pp. 116–17.

110 *Fiji Sun*, 14 September 1986.

income disparities existed between IndoFijians and Fijians, and that IndoFijians made up the largest component of unemployed and squatters.¹¹¹ Labour and the moment were one. It denied zero-sum racial analyses and directly attacked the class bias of the Alliance government, promising a more equitable distribution of wealth. This attack on issues caught the Alliance Party off guard.

Bavadra told an audience in Lautoka that ‘the people who have suffered most under the Alliance government are the very people this government purports to champion, the native Fijians’, while its leaders ‘have amassed huge personal wealth’. No more; the time had come to democratise Fijian institutions like the NLTB:

The Fijian people therefore should question whether they can continue to entrust their future in such leadership. In a small nation such as ours the country can only progress if all sections work together.¹¹²

He declared that all Fiji people be called Fijians: ‘in spite of our cultural differences and religions backgrounds, we are but one nation’.¹¹³ The Alliance Party hit back, claiming that Labour wanted to take away Fijian constitutional rights and privileges: ‘Without a chief, there is no Fijian society’, it declared.¹¹⁴ Alliance stalwart Ratu David Toganivalu declared chiefs ‘a force for moderation, balance and fair play ... the protectors of the rights of Indians and General Electors in Fiji’.¹¹⁵

Alliance leaders were worried. Labour seemed embarked on unfamiliar territory. Its attacks on Fijian leadership resonated and could potentially win it support from disgruntled Fijians. Journalist Jo Nata (later a participant in the 2000 coup against Labour) set the ball rolling with an article aimed directly at Mara’s millionaire status, which had been consolidated since entering office. Mara and members of his family owned shares in a wide number of prominent businesses, farms and islands.¹¹⁶ Labour drew attention to Mara’s involvement with Marella House, a building leased by his family company to the Education Ministry on very generous terms. Labour also attacked the Alliance’s close ties with big business, particularly its failure to assist Nasomo people whose land had been used

111 *Fiji Times*, 23 June 1986.

112 *Fiji Sun*, 17 November 1986.

113 *Fiji Sun*, 18 February 1986.

114 *Fiji Sun*, 2 October 1986.

115 *Fiji Times*, 9 March 1987.

116 *Fiji Sun*, 2 August 1985.

by Emperor Gold Mining at Vatukoula without compensation. It also claimed that Tovata political dominance was responsible for privileging Lau for education funding. Lau, with 14,000 Fijians, received \$1.3 million over three years, the bulk of it directed around Mara's village of Tubou. Ba, with 59,000 Fijians, received only \$400,000.¹¹⁷ 'Under the Alliance, the elite have feathered their own nests,' Labour advertisements intoned, 'while conditions for the rest, particularly the poor and disadvantaged, have got steadily worse.'¹¹⁸

Despite being labelled socialist or communist, Labour was essentially reformist. It focused on issues of immediate popular concern: poverty, price rises, the wage freeze, bus fares, garment workers, women's rights, youth and crime. Its proposals for democratising Fijian institutions responded directly to abuses by a privileged few. Its education policies sought to lighten financial burdens on families and develop curricula to produce a more integrated, cooperative and enterprising nation. At the time, local journalist Akosita Tamanisau and I wrote that its 'policies responded with exacting precision to the actual problems confronting a multiracial society still to break free from colonial and postcolonial perceptions of itself and yet desperately searching for a way out of the economic and social straitjacket it found itself confined to'.¹¹⁹ For these reasons, Labour became an overnight success and quickly assumed the mantle of Opposition, highlighting the plight of workers, the dangers of high levels of poverty and unemployment, and the relationship between Fijian marginalisation and Fijian elite wealth. Hence it sought true multiracialism, a better distribution of the fruits of development, and a more transparent, open and responsible government.

Local body elections confirmed the party's immediate impact but a parliamentary by-election at the end of 1985 quickly brought Labour back to earth. A three-way struggle cost it the chance of success and raised the spectre of the Alliance Party – unused to facing an alert and assertive opposition – winning in the next elections by default and reaping revenge on the upstart labour movement. Koya seemed equally unrepentant and communal. In early 1986, he told a NFP gathering that 'Indians would be finished if they remained disunited'.¹²⁰ But Koya's days were numbered

117 *Fiji Sun*, 30 March 1987.

118 *Fiji Sun*, 2 April 1987.

119 R Robertson & A Tamanisau, *Fiji: Shattered Coups*. Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988, p. 39.

120 *Fiji Times*, 16 March 1986.

and, in May, he was replaced by party president, Harish Sharma. Still, the NFP remained divided; in November its former general secretary Sharda Nand accused Labour of trying 'to remove Indian leadership and their special position from Fiji politics'.¹²¹ Three NFP MPs left the party and joined Labour.

Nonetheless, against the advice of members, who cherished its multiracial character and feared the impact of NFP internal divisions, Labour leaders formed a coalition with the demoralised NFP in November 1986, but on terms that made it the senior partner. Only three sitting NFP members of parliament were endorsed as candidates. The old NFP rump was furious, but its appeals to IndoFijian communal support gave greater weight to Labour's claim that only radical change could create true multiculturalism. Bavadra called them 'Indian Butadrokas'.¹²² The Alliance Party now declared Labour an Indian party, a description that would haunt it in coming years.

The year 1986 should have been good for the Alliance Party. A record cane harvest and new construction and building activities finally enabled the economy to rebound 9 per cent but, after a long period of extremely low economic growth, 1981 to 1985 marked the worst period of economic growth in Fiji's postcolonial history. Average shrinkage of 1.3 per cent represented a far cry from the 9.7 per cent growth experienced for the same five-year period only a decade before. Per-capita income fared worse, declining by 3.1 per cent.¹²³ In fact, by 1987, average per-capita income stood only 21 per cent higher than in 1970.¹²⁴

Undoubtedly, the shock of the early 1980s contributed to the Alliance Party's paralysis before the unexpected strength of Labour. It did itself no service with the myriad of scandals and abuses of office, which now inconveniently surfaced during election campaigning in March 1987: urban crown land distributed to mates, debts of ministers paid off, donations from businesses to influence policies, the early release of convicted but well-connected felons and rorts over taxi licenses. The list of exposed scandals dragged on unrelentingly. The Alliance was

121 *Fiji Sun*, 12 November 1986.

122 Interview, Viseisei, 20 September 1987.

123 BC Prasad & S Kumar, 'Fiji's economic woes: A nation in search of development progress', *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, 17: 1, May 2002, p. 2.

124 S Chand, 'Coups, cyclones & recovery: The Fiji experience', *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, 15: 2, November 2000, p. 122.

unprepared for a campaign fought on issues and not the communal battles of the past. And it was unprepared for Labour's well-targeted advertising that responded daily to new issues as they arose. There had never been a campaign like it in Fiji's history. Unfortunately, there never would be again.

When the results of the elections emerged on 12 April 1987, both the extent of Labour's achievement and its limitations were apparent. Communal seats fell into their all too familiar pattern, although around 10 per cent of Fijians had voted for the Labour–NFP Coalition – a big swing but one that had no impact on communal outcomes. More significantly many voters had chosen to use their three national votes in ways that contradicted their communal vote. Hence, four crucial Suva-based national seats, a region with the largest and most visible concentration of both industrial and unemployed workers, urban youths and squatters swung to the Coalition, largely on the basis of Fijian votes.¹²⁵ IndoFijian disenchantment probably helped also. Although it retained 15 per cent of the IndoFijian vote overall, the Alliance Party's South Indian base had been weakened, leaving only Muslims and IndoFijian business leaders to promote the Alliance cause. Crucially, against the wishes of its Indian Alliance, it placed the NFP defector Mrs Irene Jai Narayan as a candidate in the Suva Indian National constituency.¹²⁶ Given also the shift in urban Fijian votes, these national seats fell, providing the Coalition a majority of four seats in a new parliament.

The Alliance government, in power for the 17 years since independence, had been banished to the Opposition benches. Mara, its undisputed leader, had been defeated by a political party that he earlier claimed to be a power crazy gang of amateurs who had never run anything, not even a bingo party.¹²⁷ Fiji's racial politics had been breached, its colonial inheritance challenged, its postcolonial order shaken. A new era now dawned, but not the one Labour envisaged. It would not be Bavadra who would give shape to that era, but a hitherto unknown Sitiveni Rabuka.

125 Overall voter turnout in 1987 stood at 70 per cent compared with 85 per cent in 1982. In Suva-based Indian communal seats, turnout plummeted as low as 60 per cent compared with up to 70 per cent in comparable Fijian seats. Sutherland argues that the low Indian turnout should have favoured the Alliance; the Coalition's win suggests instead considerable Fijian support. The two constituencies with the highest Coalition margins in fact possessed more Fijian voters (Sutherland, *Beyond the Politics of Race*, 1992, p. 180).

126 Lal, *Broken Waves*, 1992, pp. 265–66; BV Lal, *Islands of Turmoil: Elections and Politics in Fiji*. Canberra: ANU E Press, 2006, pp. 68–71.

127 Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Radio Fiji Address, 10 April 1987.

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