

Chiefly Leadership in Fiji: Past, Present, and Future



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Introduction

Fiji's traditional chiefly leaders once occupied the most prominent political roles in both national and regional politics. Historically, chiefly political authority was consolidated under the British colonial regime and carried forward into the period of independence from 1970. But the last quarter century has seen a significant decline of chiefly influence, perhaps part of a broader trend in the Pacific islands where traditional authority is being undermined by demographic and other changes, contributing in turn to increased social and political instability (Heartfield 2009:126). In Fiji, the decline began with the first military coup in 1987, continuing through to the present, albeit with some periods of enhanced status for the paramount symbol of traditionalism in Fiji, the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC), sometimes known by its Fijian language name, the Bose Levu Vakaturaga. The GCC, however, was abolished by decree under the military regime of Commodore Josaia Voreque (Frank) Bainimarama in March 2012. The September 2014 elections held prospects for the restoration of chiefly authority and status, and the role of traditionalism, through the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) led by the Roko Tui Dreketi, Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa. A victory by SODELPA would also have seen the restoration of the GCC. With SODELPA's resounding defeat by Bainimarama's FijiFirst Party, such prospects have received a significant blow.

This Discussion Paper provides an account of the rise and fall of chiefly leadership and the apparent ebbing of a longstanding ideology of traditionalism among indigenous Fijians in the context of national politics and of the claims made in the name of indigenous nationalism. It begins with a brief survey of Fiji's colonisation in the late nineteenth century; the establishment of the GCC and the role of chiefs in the British colonial regime;

and their domination of national politics, despite some challenges, up until 1987. The second section reviews the political dynamics surrounding chiefly leadership from 1987 until the Bainimarama-led coup of 2006. The final sections examine the nature of chiefly involvement in national politics in the lead-up to the 2014 elections and prospects for the future of traditional chiefly political leadership.

The discussion is set within a framework that takes the term 'chief' as simply designating a political leader who draws his or her authority 'from a discourse of local tradition' (White and Lindstrom 1997:10). In Fiji, chiefship is incorporated within the concept of the *vanua*. In a literal sense, *vanua* simply means 'land'. As we see later, *vanua* is also used to designate groupings of villages within a broad structure of Fijian sociopolitical organisation. But *vanua* has another dimension, as it is understood to incorporate chiefs, and, more recently, the Christian church. Rutz (1997:75) notes that, taken together, the unity of chiefs, land, and church became expressed in an 'ontology of tradition' during the colonial period, which incorporated events, persons, and institutions into a single fixed narrative about 'the Fijian way of life' or *vakavanua*. 'Tradition' is to be understood here as a construct through which the past is implicated in political projects in the present (ibid.: 78; see also Lawson 1996). Among Fijians, *vakavanua* is the term that carries the meaning closest to 'tradition' and is in turn closely related to *vakaturaga* — 'the way of the chiefs' (Cretton 2005:407).

In Fiji, as in Pacific politics more generally, 'tradition' has often been reified and essentialised through discourses and reconfigured rituals seeking not only to preserve the value of local practices, but to de-legitimize other possible claims to recognition, giving



rise to an ideological rendering of traditionalism. The latter may be understood as an ideology that ‘espouses certain parts of the older tradition as the only legitimate symbols of the traditional order and upholds them against “new” trends.’ (Eisenstadt 1973:22; Lawson 1996:17). Furthermore, as Earle (1997:8) notes, ideology emerges as ‘the cultural perspective of a ruling segment’ imposed as a set of ordering principles for the society as a whole, thereby facilitating and legitimising dominance. The act of legitimating one set of actors logically de-legitimises another. In the case of Fiji, discourses of tradition and chiefly status have been deployed at an ideological level to de-legitimate claims by non-indigenous Fijians — and Indo-Fijians in particular — to equal political status, thereby serving the cause of an exclusivist indigenous nationalism (see Rutz 1997:72; Lawson 1996 and 2004). This was once an extraordinarily powerful discourse that now appears to have been trumped by Bainimarama’s unapologetic modernism, at least for the time being.

British Colonialism and Chiefly Rule

The formal colonisation of Fiji in 1874 was an unusual affair. In contrast to many other parts of the world where colonial rule was imposed by force, the paramount chiefs of Fiji, located mainly in the south and east of the island group, petitioned the British to establish a Crown colony. Although significant pressures emanated from expatriate British and other interlopers in the islands, the cession of the Fiji islands was, nonetheless, a voluntary act, and, indeed, an act benefiting the leading chiefs as much as particular groups of settlers. It also ensured that the leading chiefly clans of the east, who held sway over relatively large confederations called *matanitū*, were incorporated into the colonial administration where they remained firmly entrenched throughout the colonial period (see Newbury 2008). The deed of cession, signed on 10 October 1874, was unconditional in ceding authority to the British Crown, but it came to be regarded as a charter of Fijian rights, especially those of the chiefs, and a guarantee that these rights would always be paramount over those of settlers in the colony. This ‘doctrine of paramountcy’ came to underpin all the special provisions made in relation to indigenous Fijians,

including traditional institutions, and to constitute the foundational principle from which indigenous nationalist claims proceed (Lawson 2004:522).

The most prominent and powerful Fijian chief at the time of cession was Ratu Seru Cakobau, Vunivalu (warlord) of Bau, regarded as the highest chiefly title in the Kubuna confederacy, which incorporates the provinces of Tailevu, Naitasiri, and Lomaiviti. Cakobau was also styled Tui Viti (king of Fiji), but this was not a traditional title. Nor did he ever exercise authority over the whole island group. Indeed, the Fiji islands had never comprised a single political entity, nor had the people ever shared a common national identity as Fijians. These were to be products of the colonial state.

Cakobau’s main rival in the period leading to cession was Ma’afu — a Tongan chief who had established a power base in the eastern Lau group through his Tovata confederacy, which took in the provinces of Bua, Cakaudrove, Macuata, and the Lau islands. The third confederacy, Burebasaga, traditionally covered the provinces of Rewa, Nadroga, Serua, and Kadavu. As Roko Tui Dreketi (a title not restricted to males as many others in Fiji are), Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa now holds the highest ranking title in the Burebasaga confederacy.

While the sociopolitical systems of these southern and eastern areas conformed more closely with a hierarchical Polynesian model of chiefly rule — a model that resonated with conservative British notions of good order — the central and western parts of the islands were characterised by less hierarchical sociopolitical forms, and have, therefore, often been described as more Melanesian in character. There were no *matanitū* in these regions, and, therefore, no chiefs of the status of the south-eastern paramount chiefs. Under colonial rule, however, the western provinces of Ba and Ra became divided between, and formally incorporated into, the Burebasaga and Kubuna confederacies. Prior to this, there was nothing larger than *vanua*, consisting of groupings of villages or *yavusa*, themselves composed of family groups or *mataqali* and smaller family units called *itokatoka*.

Chiefly figures appeared at the various levels, exercising authority over people and land accordingly, although the most powerful chiefs remained

those presiding over the confederacies. The latter, in particular, embodied *mana* (divine power), characteristic of Polynesian forms and readily transferred from pre-Christian deities to the Christian God who now stood for ‘truth’. And once a high chief such as Cakobau conceded the truth of the Christian God, it followed that all his subordinates did so as well (see Sahlins 1987:37–38). Kaplan (1990:129) notes the extent to which a ‘Fijian cultural logic’ saw Christianity absorbed into a system of meaning supporting a special relationship with God, in turn authorising the political paramountcy of Fijian chiefs as well as indigenous Fijians, and the *vanua* more generally, and which persisted through to multiethnic post-colonial Fiji. The idea of divine power embodied in high chiefs flows through to the present, as illustrated by a comment reported in 2004 on the consequences of a vacant high chiefly office in Kubuna: ‘Because of the longstanding vacancy ... you cannot expect *mana* to flow down to the minor chiefs when there is no one holding that powerful position’ (Ratu Sakiusa Matuku quoted in Tuimaleali’ifano 2007:269).

The series of groupings from *vanua* to *itokatokata* sketched above presents a very simplified schema of what were, in reality, more complex structures and relationships with much variation throughout the islands, and which have been described and analysed in detail elsewhere (France 1969; Naya-cakalou 1975). But if the sociopolitical groupings throughout the islands, and their relationship to the land were complex and varied, it was the task of the colonial administration to simplify and rationalise them. For these purposes, it was especially important to achieve a certain level of uniformity, and so pre-existing structures underwent something of a transformation, resulting in what is actually best described as a neotraditional order (see Macnaught 1982). This included the formalisation of the provinces as administrative units and the establishment of provincial councils presided over largely by chiefs.

At the apex of the colonial Fijian administration was the GCC. It had not existed prior to colonisation but arose initially when Fiji’s first substantive colonial governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, summoned the high chiefs to a meeting — an event that became a more-or-less annual affair that was, in turn, transformed into a formal advisory body. It is, therefore,

very much a *neotraditional* institution. With the later establishment of a legislative council, leading chiefs were, once again, appointed to represent indigenous Fijians, with the initial nomination process conducted through the GCC. Reforms in the 1950s allowed a small number of ‘commoners’ to serve. Indigenous Fijians as a whole were not enfranchised until the early 1960s. Even then, the GCC continued to nominate two members of the legislative council until independence, when all seats in the new house of representatives were filled through election, albeit on a communal basis. The 1970 constitution of independent Fiji also provided for a Senate, with appointees nominated by the GCC comprising the largest bloc, and with the GCC as a whole having a veto over any legislation affecting Fijian interests. At the same time, GCC membership widened to include all indigenous Fijians elected to the lower house as *ex officio* members (Constitution of Fiji 1970).

The most prominent chiefs of the colonial period were Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, holder of the Tui Lau title, and his protégé and nephew, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who was to succeed to the Tui Lau title as well as the hereditary Tui Nayau title through his father. Mara became chief minister in the colonial government prior to independence, then prime minister at independence in 1970, and president from 1993 to 2000. Mara once described himself as a ‘citizen-chief’ and one of the ‘natural leaders of the country’ (cited in Scarr 2008:244). Both Sukuna and Mara enjoyed high chiefly status in the traditional sphere, but both were also intelligent and well educated — Sukuna being the first indigenous Fijian to earn a university degree. Sukuna subsequently worked in Fiji’s Native Lands Commission and eventually established the Native Land Trust Board (now iTaukei Land Trust Board), which rationalised the leasing of native land to Indo-Fijian tenant farmers, bringing benefits to both communities at the time (Norton 2005:149).

Ratu Mara was groomed as Sukuna’s successor, but a number of other key chiefly figures, also from the east, who came to occupy high office in both the colonial and post-independence regimes, benefited from his mentorship as well, including Fiji’s first two indigenous governors-general, Ratu Sir George Cakobau and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau,

as well as Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau — a leading politician in the transition to independence and after. Mara, Penaia, and the two Cakobaus were to become known as the ‘Big Four’. Mara, in particular, promulgated what Rutz terms a ‘royalist strategy’, which worked to locate ‘the tradition of a Fijian nation in the near past of a colonial narrative that irremovably ties the destiny of the Fijian people to that of the British monarchy through the agency of their chiefs’ (Rutz 1979). Rutz further notes that Ratu Mara and the other paramount chiefs were the most vocal advocates of the link between the chiefs and the British Crown (*ibid.*) — a link that was emblematic of the neotraditional order. More generally, it was through the colonial practices and institutions outlined above that a degree of cultural uniformity was produced, and this came to provide the basis for the imagination of an indigenous Fijian national identity based squarely on traditionalist values that entailed, above all, continuing respect for chiefly leadership even as the institutions and structures themselves evolved to accommodate social and political change.

The consolidation and political mobilisation of this identity owed much to another key development — the introduction of a substantial non-indigenous population from India that came to mediate relations between the colonial government, European settlers (mainly British), and indigenous Fijians, as well as to strengthen the neotraditional order. Indian indentured labourers were brought in to provide cheap labour for the colony’s plantation economy. Gordon’s paternalistic policies required commoner Fijians to remain, for the most part, in their own villages and under the control of their chiefs, thus preserving the ‘Fijian way of life’ or *vakavanua* in what Gordon, and most of his successors, saw as its ‘natural state’. This remained largely the case until the Native Regulations, which had controlled the lives of Fijians and restricted movement to and from urban centres, were abolished in 1967 — only three years before independence (Madraiwiwi 26/10/1985).

Tensions in indigenous Fijian leadership had already emerged during this time. Nayacakalou noted that with the establishment of a modern state, a different kind of leadership may be required, chal-

lenging those who derived their leadership status from traditional sources. This would make the shift towards democracy difficult, ‘owing partly to the resistance of groups which have a vested interest in the preservation of the old order, and partly to actual conflict of authority between traditional and modern leaders’ (Nayacakalou 1975:7–8). These dynamics have certainly been evident in contemporary politics.

Preservation of the Fijian way of life under the colonial system of government also meant that Indians were to be strictly segregated from indigenous Fijians in virtually every sphere of life. As the colony developed, this segregation was evident in educational and religious institutions, the labour force, in residential arrangements and, therefore, in ordinary social relations. When political representation was introduced, Indians, Europeans, and Fijians were all catered for separately, giving rise to a system of communal (that is, race-based) political representation, and, therefore, communal electoral politics, elements of which persisted right through to the promulgation of Fiji’s 2013 constitution.

The presence of what was to become a very substantial ‘alien’ population — far larger than the local European (and part-European) population, which never amounted to more than a small, albeit privileged, percentage — contributed substantially to the ideology not only of Fijian ‘paramountcy of interests’ over those of other population groups, but also of the chiefs as differentiating symbols of racial/ethnic identity and guardians of the *vanua*. It is in this context that a generalised notion of the *vanua* came to be understood as embodying a sacred connection between chiefs, land, and people.

This was strengthened rather than undermined by the widespread adoption of Christianity (*lotu*) among indigenous Fijians, which was to become charged with political meaning over the years. Ryle (2012:xxx) notes that the term ‘my God, my land’ was coined by Sukuna to emphasise the interconnections between the *vanua* and the Christian God, although it was to become heavily political and associated with nationalist rhetoric and violence. Similarly, Tomlinson (2002:238) writes that *lotu* and *vanua* along with *matanitū*, have come to form a culturally standardised trope through which Fiji-

ans 'can describe a reified Fijian culture'. Tomlinson notes further that these symbols of Fijian identity are scarcely politically neutral, and that *lotu* affiliation is 'a politically volatile marker separating indigenous Fijians from Indo-Fijians' (ibid.; see also Halapua 2003). Around 98 per cent of indigenous Fijians are Christian, and of these about three-quarters are Methodists. Indo-Fijians remain predominantly Hindu, while approximately 15 per cent are Muslim and five per cent are Christian (Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2013). Christianity, therefore, became part and parcel of the neotraditional order through which the indigenous Fijian self could be affirmed in opposition to the Indian other. This further reinforced the processes through which an indigenous Fijian 'monoculture', which had not existed prior to colonisation, could be readily imagined and deployed in the construction of a national identity.

Chiefly Politics and Indigenous Nationalism in Independent Fiji

Ratu Mara's prime ministership at independence had been uncontested, the opposition Indo-Fijian leadership having agreed, in the interests of making the transition as smooth as possible, for Mara to occupy the position until general elections in 1972. Mara, with others, had formed the Alliance Party, which ostensibly represented all interests in the country. Communal seats under the 1970 constitution required that both candidates and electors be classified indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians, or general electors (the latter mainly European and part-European but with small numbers of 'others' such as Chinese or other Pacific islanders). Additional cross-voting seats for the first time provided a measure of non-communal representation. But since political parties had developed along largely communal lines, electoral politics was very much attuned to perceived communal interests. The National Federation Party (NFP), which grew out of cane farmers' organisations in the 1960s, was essentially an Indo-Fijian party.

Although the Alliance initially sought to embrace all communities, and attracted around 25 per cent of the Indo-Fijian vote in 1972, it could not maintain such backing in a system so oriented to communal politics. Rather, it came to embody

a reified notion of 'Fijian tradition', including the privileged role of chiefs in every sphere of political life from the village to the national level. However, this came under challenge in the mid-1970s from an ultra-nationalist Fijian party — the Fijian Nationalist Party (FNP) — led by a disgruntled former Alliance member, Sakeasi Butadroka, a commoner, who believed the Alliance government under Mara was selling out indigenous Fijian interests to 'foreigners' and Indo-Fijians in particular (Lal 2012:76). Butadroka's form of populism also cut against the grain of Mara's neotraditionalism. While Mara emphasised the links between chiefs and the British crown, Butadroka saw these links as an impediment to progress among ordinary Fijians. Indeed, he opposed the chiefly system itself and called for the withdrawal of chiefs from politics (see Rutz 1997:83).

At the same time, the extent of Indo-Fijian backing for the Alliance, evident in 1972, was slipping away, so that by the time of the 1977 elections, the Alliance had not only lost much of that support, but also around 25 per cent of indigenous Fijian votes to Butadroka, who personally took a Fijian communal seat. The FNP also drew votes away from the Alliance in the cross-voting constituencies. The Alliance thus failed to secure a parliamentary majority, but the NFP, caught unawares by a surprise electoral victory, dithered in forming a government. The governor-general, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, stepped in and appointed Mara to lead a minority government. Unsurprisingly, Mara lost a parliamentary vote of confidence and fresh elections were held in September of the same year. This time, the Alliance was returned with a majority. But it was never to recapture the popularity it enjoyed in the early 1970s. The nationalists had opened up an aggressive political discourse that threatened to outbid the Alliance in catering to indigenous interests, and so the Alliance shifted its own discourse in that direction. The advantage that the Alliance enjoyed, however, came through the chiefly status and authority of its traditional leadership — something that Butadroka as a commoner was unable to challenge effectively at that time. This was despite the fact that the GCC itself had, by the late 1970s, come to include in its membership chiefs of modest rank and non-chiefs from various walks of life

(Norton 2009:99). But, of course, it remained exclusively indigenous.

In 1982, after an acrimonious election campaign, the Alliance, under Mara's leadership, emerged victorious once again. A major issue in the latter stages of the campaign was an ABC TV (Australia) current affairs program's report on the Fiji election campaign. It described the Alliance government as being led by

the descendants of the Great Chiefs who clubbed and ate their way to power in these islands centuries ago. The democratic chief of Fiji for the past 12 years is such a descendant. A Ratu, a Chief, and a knight too, Sir Kamisese Mara. (Quoted in Lawson 1996:61)

The remark, a very unsubtle reference to the practice of cannibalism, which had indeed been common in Fiji's past, was interpreted as a deadly insult to Mara and the chiefly establishment, and, therefore, to the entire Fijian people (*ibid.*). This illustrates, incidentally, the gap between the traditions of the pre-colonial and pre-Christian past and the neotraditional order. It is interesting to recall here Sahlins' observation that in the pre-Christian period, one of the most respectful salutations a commoner could offer a chief was to say 'eat me' (Sahlins 1987:75).

The NFP had played a part in disseminating videotapes of the program, and the last stage of the campaign, which the Alliance won, was almost completely dominated by very effective Alliance attacks on the part the NFP had played in insulting Fiji's chiefly leaders. The Alliance emerged more clearly than before as the party representing indigenous Fijian tradition and identity, rights, and interests, in opposition to an Indo-Fijian dominated party that represented none of these.

Developments before the next elections in 1987 saw the emergence of a party that sought to challenge the established two-party divide, now based squarely on ethnic/racial identification. The Fiji Labour Party, led by an indigenous Fijian commoner from the west, Dr Timoci Bavadra, grew out of both blue- and white-collar trade union interests. It attempted to transcend the ethnic divide and promote a new discourse supporting the rights

and interests of middle and lower socioeconomic groups generally. The fact that everyday relations between ordinary indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians had always been largely cordial and certainly non-violent provided a basis for optimism that a new multiracial party could succeed. On the political-strategic level, however, it became clear that any split in the Indo-Fijian vote would guarantee an Alliance victory, thus prompting a coalition agreement between Labour and the NFP that could then be depicted as 'Indian dominated'.

The Alliance continued to warn of the dangers to indigenous Fijian interests, especially with respect to the land, if the party and its chiefly leadership were to ever lose office. One senior figure, attempting to put the Alliance leadership beyond criticism of any kind, argued that

[T]he chiefs represent the people, the land, the custom. Without a chief there is no Fijian society. When Fijian chiefs are attacked or criticized in whatever capacity — personal or political — it is the Fijian *vanua* which is also being criticized. (Quoted in Lawson 1996:62)

Labour countered that indigenous Fijian land rental monies, after the bureaucracy had taken its cut, were often appropriated largely by chiefs who distributed very little to ordinary *mataqali* members — a theme later taken up by Bainimarama. Although these were not the only issues of importance during the campaign, the very idea of an overriding threat to indigenous Fijian land, traditional chiefly leadership and their very identity as indigenous Fijians, expressed through the *vanua*, dominated Alliance discourse.

When the coalition won the 1987 elections, they were more than ready to form a government, and did so with Cabinet positions evenly divided between indigenous and Indo-Fijians. Given Alliance rhetoric during the campaign, however, there was considerable unease among many indigenous Fijians about the security of the *vanua*. Anti-government rhetoric in the immediate aftermath of the elections focused on the threat to everything that the *vanua* concept stood for and of which the chiefly system itself was the foundation. In the following weeks, an emergent

Taukei movement (Taukei meaning literally 'owners' or 'land people') promoted an extremist nationalist agenda and fomented civil disorder and violence against Indo-Fijians. Alliance leaders did little or nothing to calm the situation, or to reassure indigenous Fijians that their rights and interests were not actually in danger. The fact that such rights and interests were triply entrenched in the 1970 constitution, with the GCC veto the final block on any change, was never mentioned by Alliance or Taukei leaders.

When the third-ranking officer of the Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) intervened less than six weeks after the elections by taking the coalition government hostage at gunpoint on the floor of the parliament, Alliance leaders professed shock and amazement. Despite denial all around that anyone but Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka and his immediate followers in the military were involved in the plot (see Mara 1997:198), there can be little doubt that key figures in the Alliance had prior knowledge of the plans, and endorsed them. Rabuka certainly justified the coup in precisely the same general terms used by Alliance and Taukei figures alike — namely, the threat to the Fijian *vanua* posed by an 'Indian government' accompanied by the aggressive assertion of indigenous nationalist motifs (Lawson 1996:64). These included the relationship between the Christian God, the chiefs, and *vakavanua* (the way of the land). In this context, Rabuka recalled the earlier conversion of 'true chiefs' to Christianity and highlighted the fact that the national political paramountcy of chiefs in postcolonial Fiji was still legitimated by God (Rabuka cited in Kaplan 1990:141).

There were, however, tensions within the forces generally aligned with the coup-maker, including some anti-Alliance/anti-Mara antagonism among Taukei members (who included FNP figures). Norton (2005:153) observes that proponents of the more extreme Taukei/FNP ethno-nationalist vision of exclusivity have typically been commoners, while Howard (1991:358) notes that after the first coup, when Mara lost control of the GCC, extremists in the Taukei movement had sought to bolster its power and use it to thwart Mara's quest to regain control. Nonetheless, an interim administration was

put together, comprising leading Alliance figures, and receiving endorsement by the GCC.

A few months later, however, Rabuka led a second intervention, claiming that the 'objectives' of his May coup — namely, the permanent entrenchment of indigenous Fijian political and cultural dominance — were being compromised by the interim administration making too many concessions to Indo-Fijians. This was effectively a coup against the paramount chiefs and an apparent usurpation of their authority. Here we may note an interesting observation on the nature of power, succession, and usurpation in Polynesian chiefly hierarchies. According to Sahlins, usurpation consists 'in the double sense of a forceful seizure of sovereignty and a sovereign denial of the prevailing moral order rather than a normal succession'. It follows that usurpation of political power becomes the principle of legitimacy (Sahlins 1987:80). In the context of Fiji's politics, however, Rabuka's usurpation was only partial and temporary. As we shall see, Bainimarama's usurpation is of a different order.

Just under two weeks later, on 7 October 1987, Rabuka declared Fiji a republic, showing he was much less a traditionalist in some respects than Mara, Ganilau, and other leading chiefs who all but worshipped the British Crown. But it was not long before the chiefs were back at the helm, with Mara as interim prime minister and Ganilau as president, while Rabuka himself took charge of the home affairs ministry. The Taukei movement remained a force, but a diminished one. Norton (2009:103) argues that it could not 'sustain an aggressive ethnic movement independently of the ideology that affirmed the legitimacy of chiefly leadership', adding that the 'long established ritualized assertion of indigenous Fijian identity and strength dampen[ed] the force of aggressive nationalism'.

A fresh review of the constitution led in due course to the promulgation of the 1990 constitution of the 'Sovereign Democratic Republic of Fiji', approved by the GCC, dictating that all seats in the new parliament were to be communal, with the majority reserved for indigenous Fijians. It not only discriminated heavily against Indo-Fijians, but also against urban-based indigenous Fijians in favour of the more conservative rural constituencies. Reforms

to the GCC excluded many lesser chiefs and commoners, thereby boosting the power of higher chiefs. Around two-thirds of the Senate was to be made up of GCC appointees.

Since the Alliance had imploded in the aftermath of the 1987 coups, a new political party sponsored by leading GCC chiefs was established. Called the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT), its very name signaled that Indo-Fijians were excluded. The NFP and Labour went their separate ways, both attempting to maintain a multiethnic character. The SVT, led by Rabuka, now turned civilian politician, won the 1992 elections with 32 seats, while minor parties and independents took the remaining five indigenous Fijian communal seats. Serious disunity within SVT ranks led to another general election in 1994. The SVT increased its majority slightly, but indigenous Fijian disunity continued generally, as various groups and factions struggled to assert claims to superior legitimacy within the 'Fijian nation'. As Rutz (1997:75) points out, the coups of 1987 and subsequent events effectively removed 'the Other' (that is, Indo-Fijians), against which Fijian identity had been shaped in the *milieu* of racialised politics in previous periods. 'Henceforth, the contest over "the nation" would be de-centred, resurfacing within the Fijian community itself' (*ibid.*).

Another notable point is that although the SVT had initially been sponsored by chiefs, chiefly leadership within the party was scarcely in evidence. Indeed, since the departure of Mara before the 1992 elections, none of chiefly status, low or high, has held the office of prime minister, although high chiefs have always been appointed to the symbolic offices of governor-general or president, and that remains the case to the present time. Mara himself became vice-president and then president of Fiji after Ganilau's death in 1993 — a position he retained until the coup of 2000, which put an end to his political career. Mara was succeeded by Ratu Josefa Iloilo, a paramount chief of Ba province, and then by Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, who had been the RFMF commander at the time of the 1987 coup (but overseas when it took place). He is a son of the late Ratu Edward Cakobau as well as son-in-law of the late Ratu Mara. Interestingly, Nailatikau was to become one of Bainimarama's strongest supporters.

Despite, or perhaps because of, guaranteed political predominance, disunity continued to characterise intra-indigenous Fijian politics — a factor no doubt implicated in a rethink of political arrangements. This was combined with continuing international opprobrium surrounding a constitution that discriminated so deeply against a population on grounds of race. The latter had led as well to many skilled Indo-Fijians emigrating, leaving Fiji short of their talent but taking the edge off the demographic issue of indigenous Fijians being 'swamped' by an immigrant race. After 1994, Rabuka initiated moves to review the constitution, and appointed an independent review body to do so.

The result was the 1997 Constitution of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, in which a common identity of 'Fiji Islander' was proclaimed and some open electorates introduced. But it still retained a significant number of the communal seats, which, in addition to undermining the possibilities for a new, inclusive national identity, could only encourage communal electioneering. Indigenous Fijian primacy of status was reflected in the retention of the GCC's restricted membership and enhanced privileges, which included the right to appoint the president and vice-president, although the number of senators nominated by the GCC was reduced. These provisions obviously reflect the continuity of key elements of the neotraditional order established under colonial rule.

The GCC had been persuaded to endorse the new constitution by both Mara and Rabuka — an endorsement seen as essential for broader acceptance by indigenous Fijians. The more extreme nationalists nonetheless saw it as a sellout. And it received little support in the provinces, where eight of the 14 Fijian provincial councils opposed it. Opposition was heightened following the result of the 1999 elections, which saw Fiji's first, and so far only, Indo-Fijian prime minister, Labour's Mahendra Chaudhry, emerge as leader of a victorious coalition, and the defeat of an SVT–NFP coalition led by Rabuka and longstanding NFP leader Jai Ram Reddy. The coalition between Rabuka's and Reddy's parties, and the compromises it entailed, had inflamed nationalists further. A number of new Fijian parties had emerged

alongside the successor to the old FNP — the Fiji Nationalists United Front Party — but these lost out to the newer, more regionally based parties. A significant proportion of Indo-Fijian voters probably saw a similar sellout by the NFP to the forces behind the 1987 coup, and many switched support to Labour. As with the Bavadra government, Chaudhry's Cabinet was balanced, and included among its most prominent members Mara's daughter (and wife of Ratu Epeli Nailatikau), Adi Koila Nailatikau, elected to her father's old seat as a member of one of the new regionally based parties, the Veitokani ni Lewenivanua Vakarisito (VLV), which had joined in coalition with Labour.

On winning government, Chaudhry had been careful to heap praise on the GCC, echoing the words of NFP leader Jai Ram Reddy several years earlier by stating that all Fiji's communities 'look to this great and venerable institution for leadership and guidance in the good governance and well-being of our nation' (quoted in Norton 2009:105). Whether or not the GCC really had contributed in this way, the diplomatic sentiments expressed by Chaudhry were politically expedient. He could not expect significant indigenous Fijian grassroots support for his government, and must have been aware that indigenous nationalist ideology took as given the essential illegitimacy of an Indo-Fijian-led government.

After a difficult year in office, where issues concerning the renewal of leases on agricultural land further inflamed nationalist sentiment, the Chaudhry government was overthrown in a coup led by failed business entrepreneur, George Speight, and a handful of disloyal soldiers from the military's Counter-Revolutionary Warfare (CRW) unit who took government members hostage, holding them for 56 days in the parliamentary compound. Their justification was, once again, the threat posed to indigenous Fijians by an 'Indian government'. This was not a military coup, and it was not backed by RFMF commander Commodore Bainimarama. Ratuva (2011:110) reports that some (un-named) ethno-nationalist politicians had actually approached the military commander some time after the 1999 elections to request that he lead a coup, and were met with a refusal. In December

2000, however, Bainimarama declared martial law in the absence of an effective government following the Speight intervention. This sidelined president Mara, who was forced to resign in the process.

Bainimarama also sidelined the GCC, which was split between pro- and anti-coup supporters — the former every bit as vociferous as Speight himself in proclaiming the nationalist cause. Norton (2009:105) observes that dissent and rivalries had always been a feature of GCC meetings, but the impasse created by the coup was unprecedented. He further observes that the failure of leading chiefs to unite in support of a constitution they themselves had endorsed was partly due to a longstanding resentment among some Bauan chiefs over the continuing political pre-eminence of the Lauan paramount chief, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Among the Bauans was Adi Litia Cakobau, daughter of the late Ratu Sir George Cakobau and a strong supporter of the Speight coup, who had previously served in the post-1987 government. The GCC later accepted a court ruling that the 1997 constitution remained the law of the land. In any event, a nationalist government went on to win two general elections held under its auspices, thereby dampening some of the nationalist opposition to the constitution's more liberal provisions. Two weeks after the 2000 coup, Bainimarama declared he was no longer willing to let the chiefs decide who should rule (*Guardian* 4/6/2000). This followed demands by Speight that the GCC be granted executive authority (*ibid.*). These demands were rejected by Bainimarama, and Speight himself was to be sidelined soon enough.

The resolution of the hostage crisis saw Mara's forced resignation as president and the appointment of a caretaker government led by Laisenia Qarase, a former GCC appointee to the Senate (although Qarase himself is not a chief). Speight had agreed to this appointment, relinquished his own claims to office, and finally freed the hostages after working out an amnesty agreement. However, he was soon to break the terms of the amnesty, was arrested by the military, and subsequently faced trial for treason. He is now in prison serving a life sentence.

Another key development, and almost certainly a personal tipping point for Bainimarama, was an

attempted mutiny in November 2000 by CRW soldiers supportive of Speight and his agenda, which involved a plan to assassinate Bainimarama for his opposition to Speight. The assassination attempt very nearly succeeded, but was thwarted by soldiers loyal to Bainimarama. Eight soldiers were killed, five of them from the CRW unit who were beaten to death by loyalists in the military. No-one has ever been charged over the deaths.

Qarase went on to win elections in 2001 under the 1997 constitution, having supported attempts to abrogate it during the turmoil of 2000, and to initiate yet another review, with the object of returning to something like the 1990 constitution. Qarase's nationalist sentiments were clearly aligned with those of Speight's supporters. His new government, in fact, included members of a new party, Matanitu Vanua (MV), set up by Speight and his supporters and which won six seats. Speight won one of these from prison, but soon forfeited it for non-attendance in parliament. Qarase's own party was the Soqosoqo Duavatu ni Lewenivanua (SDL), which formed government in a coalition with the MV (the latter was later absorbed into the SDL). As noted above, the tendency to use Fijian language names for political parties sends the signal that the party is primarily *of* indigenous Fijians and *for* indigenous Fijians, and excludes Indo-Fijians.

The Qarase government rode what seemed to be a high tide of indigenous Fijian nationalism, and certainly its policies were specifically attuned to nationalist demands. Qarase also sought to ingratiate himself further with the GCC by suggesting, among other things, that the sovereignty of Fiji be shared between parliament and the GCC. His government established an independent income stream for the GCC, and work on a grand new building next to Government House commenced (Norton 2009:106). Qarase was, therefore, less a usurper of chiefly power than its servant. However, Qarase failed to ingratiate himself with Bainimarama, and, in fact, provoked his implacable hostility. Qarase appeared to pave the way for the early release of the coup perpetrators and mutineers through the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill by providing terms for an amnesty. The Qarase government also proposed the Qoliqoli Bill, which would have placed all Fijian foreshores

and immediate fishing grounds in the possession of their 'traditional owners', thus excluding all other users. The GCC supported both Bills.

For Bainimarama, the very idea of an amnesty for the coup perpetrators meant the Qarase government was contemplating the release of those who had conspired to assassinate him. Although the amnesty provisions were later withdrawn from the Bill, Bainimarama's relationship with Qarase had reached the point of no return. For his part, Qarase made several unsuccessful attempts to remove Bainimarama as military commander (Lal 2012:29–30), which no doubt contributed to Bainimarama's determination to remove *him* one way or another. Bainimarama campaigned strongly against the SDL in the lead-up to the May 2006 elections, and, although Qarase emerged victorious, Bainimarama refused to accept his government's legitimacy, charging it with corruption, incompetence, and racism (Norton 2009:107). These were to be the principal themes in the justification of the December 2006 coup.

In the final days before the coup, Qarase had attempted to use the GCC to help resolve the confrontation with Bainimarama, but the latter refused to have the GCC involved. As Bainimarama announced his takeover, the GCC chair, the Tui Tavua, Ratu Ovini Bokini, highlighted what he saw as Bainimarama's betrayal; 'You told the GCC you would protect this country. Now you have turned your back on God, the chiefs, our country and the church ...' (quoted in Norton 2009:107). Bainimarama certainly turned his back on the chiefs. He promised to bring about not just a change of regime, but a revolution in political thinking and behaviour in Fiji that moved well beyond traditionalism and indigenous nationalism and all that these entailed.

The Retreat of Traditionalism in Post-2006 Fiji

Qarase's SDL government was clearly based on a nationalist/traditionalist ideology with close ties to a range of indigenous Fijian institutions, including the GCC, the Methodist Church, and the provincial councils as well as other smaller groups and organisations (Ratuva 2011:112). But another major institution that had previously been closely aligned with a traditionalist ethos is the military itself,

perceived as the final guarantor of indigenous Fijian rights and interests, composed as it is of around 99 per cent indigenous Fijians. Part of Bainimarama's task was to reorient the military away from that ethos — a task not without its difficulties given that a significant proportion of military personnel had probably voted for the SDL in both 2001 and 2006 (Firth and Fraenkel 2009:117). This task required two key strategies: first, the purging of all elements among the more senior officers suspected of disloyalty; and second, the remaking of the military's corporate identity separate from and indeed in opposition to a traditionalist identity (see Lawson 2012).

Bainimarama's post-2006 military regime was determined to counter the anti-modernist elements in indigenous Fijian society, again through two key strategies — the political repression of oppositional opinion on the one hand, and the concerted social and political engagement of indigenous Fijians through a major exercise in public relations on the other, especially in rural villages. The latter exercise was to be boosted by long-overdue development works, including basic infrastructure provision to upgrade roads and bridges, school buildings, and water supplies, and to extend the electrification of villages. Newspaper reports throughout the period recounted numerous stories of visits to villages followed up by development works. Bainimarama's regime, therefore, delivered where many previous governments had been strong on rhetoric and short on practical action. Constitutional change would also prove essential to Bainimarama's long-term vision, entailing the abrogation of the constitution in 2009.

In the meantime, the relationship between the GCC and Bainimarama was deteriorating, even though GCC appointee president Ratu Iloilo had 'meekly accepted being shunted aside' by Bainimarama during the events of 2006, then 'ignominiously [accepted] re-appointment as president, and consequently doing all of Bainimarama's bidding' (Narsey 21/5/2012). As for the GCC itself,

The GCC said nothing of their presidential nominee Iloilo being abused in this fashion, nor did they collectively say anything about his subsequent actions all following the regime's commands (ibid.).

But resistance was evident in April 2007, when the GCC rejected the nomination of Bainimarama supporter, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, for the vice-presidency. Bainimarama responded by suspending it. In February 2008, new regulations for the GCC were introduced, designed to 'depoliticise' it. But this exercise became irrelevant as the GCC was never to meet again.

In April 2009, another major development occurred following a court case in which the coup of 2006 was declared illegal under the constitution and Bainimarama's interim government invalid. Bainimarama promptly bade president Iloilo abrogate the constitution, reappoint himself president and then reappoint Bainimarama prime minister, and dismiss the judiciary. Public Emergency Regulations (PERs) were introduced and Bainimarama commenced rule by decree. A major effect of the PERs was to muzzle the media as well as organisations such as trade unions; non-government organisations; and the arch-traditionalist Methodist Church, which had close links with the SDL. The aim was to suppress not just racist nationalist discourse but any criticism of the regime in the name of national security. The PERs were withdrawn in January 2012, ostensibly to allow public debate on a new constitution, but a new set of amendments to an older Public Order Act simply reinstated them in another form (Welch 11/1/2012).

In March 2012, Bainimarama announced that he had abolished the GCC, justifying his decision on the grounds that it was an anachronism and could serve no positive function in the new Fiji under construction by the Bainimarama regime. The GCC, he said, 'is a product of our colonial past and Fiji must now focus on a future in which all Fijians are represented on the same basis' (quoted in Ratuva 2013:175). Interestingly, this has not prevented Bainimarama from allowing himself to be addressed as 'Ratu' from time to time by his supporters. Nor did he decline the honour bestowed on him by Vanuatu in awarding him a chiefly title the very same month that he abolished the GCC (see Nabivalu 12/3/2012). So, although Rabuka has attempted to legitimise his power through a rhetorical strategy antithetical to traditionalism (or neotraditionalism), he is

prepared to embrace selected elements of chiefly prestige under other circumstances.

Another product of the colonial past was the way in which chiefs had become the major beneficiaries of rental income generated through the leasing of native land for various purposes, from farming to tourist resorts and infrastructure. Part of the logic was that chiefs required this income to meet their traditional obligations *as* chiefs in funding projects that would benefit their communities. There had been criticism over the years, however, that many chiefs kept most of the money for themselves. In this respect, it seems that chiefs undermined their own legitimacy and authority by failing to carry out their traditional reciprocal obligations. Under the Bainmarama regime, new provisions were made for the distribution of land rental monies to all members of the land-owning units on an equal basis, with chiefs to receive no more and no less than any other member (see Fiji iTaukei Land Trust Board 2010).

It has been suggested that the GCC had been the only national non-political institution capable of providing leadership on issues critical to indigenous Fijians, and that some individual chiefs had very good track records in this respect. Even so, it was

clear from the blog sites that modern day Fijians criticise their chiefs for serving their own ends: quick to claim titles for their own benefit; obtaining their disproportionately high share of lease money; [and] seeking appointments as Ministers, Senators, Diplomats, board members and military promotions (Narsey 17/3/2012).

Moreover, the GCC had indeed become increasingly politicised, embroiled as it was in so many facets of Fiji's politics. Chiefs, therefore, *could* have been at the forefront of productive development strategies for the benefit of those under their authority, but it seems that many failed to grasp the opportunity to exercise effective leadership in the contemporary sphere. Arguably, it is this failure that produced a tradition/modernity binary that Bainimarama was then able to capitalise on in promoting his modernisation agenda.

The abolition of the GCC in 2012 coincided with an announcement that an independent constitutional review committee would be established to hear submissions and draft a new constitution. In the event, the Bainimarama regime rejected many elements of the draft, believing it pandered to the very same groups who had previously brought the country to grief. The draft was therefore rewritten to reflect the regime's own vision and the new constitution was promulgated in September 2013. Another institution effectively abolished in the constitution was the Senate, which had been an important avenue through which chiefs could gain a seat in parliament. During Qarase's tenure in office, for example, he made up for the 'scarcity of Kubuna's presence in the lower house and the conspicuous absence of a Cakobau descendent' was compensated for by the appointment, at different times, of three Cakobaus to the Senate (Tuimaleali'ifano 2007:296).

A decree relating to the registration of political parties had been issued in January 2013, allowing parties only 28 days to register, severely restricting sources of funding, disqualifying civil servants and trade union officials from candidature, as well as undischarged bankrupts and those who had served a prison sentence for more than six months in the previous five years. It also required that parties use English names, and introduced a code of conduct for political parties that prohibited, among other things, advocating 'racial or religious hatred, incitement or vilification'. Parties were also required to have a multi-racial membership (Fijian Elections Office 2014a).

The conviction of Qarase in 2012 on corruption charges relating to activities back in the 1990s disqualified him from candidature, while the ruling on the use of English names meant that his party could not use *Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua* to identify it. The party, therefore, reformulated itself as the Social Democratic Liberal Party — an interesting assortment of monikers. Originally designed to at least retain the SDL abbreviation, the party was forced to use SODELPA as its acronym instead following a further ban on the use of previous acronyms. SODELPA's new leader was Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa, who had succeeded to the title Roko Tui Deketi on the death of her older sister, Ro Lady Lala Mara (wife of Ratu Mara). She had been

appointed a senator in 1999 and then served in the Qarase government from 2001 while also a member of the GCC. Chiefly leadership, therefore, featured again in Fiji's foremost traditionalist political party.

A statement by Ro Teimumu and the Tui Cakau, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, issued as a critical response to the 2013 constitution on the 149th anniversary of the signing of the deed of cession, referred, among other things, to the regime's undermining of 'group rights' in relation to land, prefaced by a traditionalist summary of their legitimacy anchored in the deed of cession and appealing to international instruments underscoring respect for historical treaty obligations.

We issue this statement in response to the Constitution ... with the mandate we have, as the customary heads of Fiji's Tribal Confederacies or the Vanua, whose population constitutes over 57% of this country and whose members continue to live and organize themselves under their customary institutions within their tribes, their Vanua, Yavusa, Villages, Mataqalis, Tokatokas and Family Units ... It was on this very same day that our ancestors and our Chiefs signed the Deed of Cession, to cede this country to the British Crown in exchange for the Crown's promise ... to protect their land rights and their way of life under their customary Institutions and Chiefly system ... The essence of Group Rights is identity, manifested in the uniqueness of the way of life, in our case the indigenous people or native inhabitants of this country. It refers to our language, our custom, and our tradition, our customary institutions, our traditional knowledge or the totality of our culture and our cultural way of living entrenched in the customary ownership of land that give it meaning ... We request, as we call upon the IMG to respect our group rights by restoration of the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) as well as policies and laws that have been passed since 2006 that are in breach of the rights recognized for us under the ILO [International Labour Organization] C169 that Fiji Ratified in 1998 and under the 2007 UN [United Nations] Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples ... The Group Rights of Indig-

enous Fijians is not the concern only of the indigenous population of Fiji. It is the concern of all right thinking Fiji citizens who proudly share in the ownership of its unique identity. (Fiji Coupfourpointfive 24/10/2013)

This last appeal can scarcely have persuaded the great majority of Indo-Fijians to maintain respect for, let alone defer to, the very institutions of indigenous Fijian custom and tradition that had so often been used to de-legitimize their own political aspirations and cast them in the role of second-class citizens. Rather, Indo-Fijian political support had swung firmly behind the Bainimarama regime, which promised to make them fully equal citizens in a new Fiji. What is more surprising, however, is the extent to which indigenous Fijians also shifted their support to Bainimarama, as evidenced by the result of the 2014 elections.

The 2014 Elections

The 2013 constitution had abolished communal voting and the elections were conducted on the basis of one voter, one vote, one value under an open list proportional representation system. The ballot papers showed only the number assigned to each candidate for the 50 seats that would comprise the new parliament, and no names or party symbols appeared on the ballot paper. Each voter chose just one number (representing their preferred candidate) by circling, crossing or ticking the number. Given that eight years had elapsed since the last elections, and only citizens over 21 had been entitled to vote then, there was a large cohort of young, first-time voters. Every citizen over 18 was now enfranchised on a single national register. The main parties contesting the elections were Bainimarama's party, FijiFirst; SODELPA; the Fiji Labour Party; the NFP; and the People's Democratic Party (a new moderate, left-of-centre party). But the principal contest was between FijiFirst and SODELPA, the former promising a new, 'modern' Fiji, free of the crippling legacies of a racially divided political past based on anachronistic values, and in which merit rather than particular identities would be rewarded.

The mission of FijiFirst is to build a just and fair society where the benefits of progress

include everyone. FijiFirst's core values will remain constant. FijiFirst reaffirms its ideals to successfully govern and transform Fiji into a modern nation-state and cement its position as the preeminent Pacific island nation. (FijiFirst 2014)

FijiFirst also promised a continuation of the substantial development projects that had been a feature of the past eight years, and which had indeed brought tangible benefits to many towns and villages around the islands. No doubt these benefits played a very significant part in drawing indigenous Fijian support to FijiFirst. Another contributing factor was, very likely, a certain ambivalence concerning the notion of 'traditional Fijian culture' generally. Although deeply valued in many respects, and underpinning much of the pride that is voiced by indigenous Fijians about their uniqueness and sense of self, it has also been seen by indigenous Fijians themselves as an impediment to prosperity, and as the primary reason why they have lagged behind Indo-Fijians and other ethnic groups in so many areas, from education to commercial pursuits (see Brison 2007:3–4). This indicates the extent to which a pragmatic/modernist ontology has trumped traditionality as a value in itself.

Bainimarama's efforts to eliminate racist discourse and to curb the power and privileges of chiefs also played its part among indigenous Fijians as well as Indo-Fijians. It would be too much to claim that racist discourse has disappeared, as various rather vicious blogs in unregulated cyberspace attest, but public expression of racist views was certainly repressed during the 2014 campaign, along with previous nationalist scare tactics warning that indigenous Fijians would lose their land, their way of life, and their very identity under any party not committed to the traditionalist cause. This was a positive feature of the campaign, although it came at the expense of freedom of expression. Parties opposing FijiFirst were clearly stifled in their criticism given the climate created by the Bainimarama regime in threatening, imprisoning, fining, and deporting (where possible) critics of the regime, as well as the muzzling of the media over the previous eight years.

SODELPA, while not deploying explicit anti-Indo-Fijian rhetoric, and, indeed, declaring its sensitivity 'to the traditions of all communities who call Fiji home' (SODELPA 2014), nonetheless promoted the traditionalist/nationalist cause. Its manifesto called for the restoration of the GCC and other chiefly privileges lost under the Bainimarama regime, again appealing to the ILO Convention 169 and the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and declaring that

It is important to put to rest the fears of our native Fijians about what they see as the erosion of their rights, interests and place in the islands they first populated. The principles of the UN Declaration and the ILO Convention are not racist, as some people would claim. They are internationally recognized platforms for indigenous populations everywhere as they seek to advance and sustain themselves in the 21st century. It has special significance now for the ethnic Fijians. The traditions and beliefs that define them must be honoured — and adapted for the 21st century where necessary. (Ibid.)

SODELPA also made much of the Bainimarama regime's support of Fiji as a secular state in which no particular religion was to be elevated over others. In contrast, SODELPA promoted Fiji as a 'Christian state' while denouncing the 2013 constitution as 'Godless' (28/7/2014). Such policies could hardly hold much appeal for the great majority of Indo-Fijian voters.

But neither the NFP nor Labour could match Bainimarama's appeal to both Indo-Fijian and indigenous Fijian voters. Labour, with just 2.4 per cent of the vote, failed to secure a single seat, while the NFP managed just three seats with 5.5 per cent. SODELPA gained 28.2 per cent of the votes and 15 seats. Bainimarama personally attracted 41 per cent of all votes cast, which was 12.6 per cent higher than the total for SODELPA and four times more than the individual votes for Ro Teimumu Kepa (Fijian Elections Office 2014b; Ratuva forthcoming). The victory by Bainimarama's FijiFirst, securing almost 60 per cent of the vote and 32 seats can only be described as resounding. The fact that

FijiFirst must have attracted around 50 per cent of the indigenous Fijian vote (Ratuva forthcoming) is also remarkable. Support for Bainimarama among younger indigenous Fijian voters may well have been a significant factor here, but in the absence of survey or opinion poll data there is no way of calculating this.

There were, inevitably, claims of electoral fraud, but international observers declared it largely free and fair, at least procedurally. The main limitation on 'free and fair' was not ballot-rigging, for which there was little evidence, but the muzzling of the media, political parties, and others with critical opinions to voice, carried out in a fashion similar to the infamous practices of the ruling party in authoritarian Singapore, where self-censorship is well entrenched. Even given this, it was a remarkable result for a country that had been mired so long in racially oriented politics to produce a victory for a party whose leader had consistently declared his opposition to any form of race-based discourse along with the repudiation of virtually everything that indigenous Fijian nationalists had stood for. That he did so largely through deploying the force of the military — an institution that historically has been as much a part of the traditionalist superstructure of Fiji as any other — remains a paradox. Indeed, in some ways, the military may be seen as the usurper more so than the individuals who have used its power.

Conclusion

Traditional chiefly leadership has been a powerful political force from the moment the Fiji islands became a unified state entity under colonial rule. Initially institutionalised through the colonial administrative structure and supported by an uncompromising traditionalist ideology, allied at times with an equally uncompromising nationalism, all the higher offices of the Fijian state were held by paramount chiefs until 1987, when the first of a succession of Fijian commoners, and briefly an Indo-Fijian, took office as prime minister. The GCC maintained an authoritative presence in government until it was suspended and then finally abolished by the Bainimarama regime in 2012. The Senate — another body through which chiefs had often gained

national political status — was also effectively abolished through the 2013 constitution. The sole high official position still held by a leading chief is the presidency, which the incumbent holds by virtue of his support for Bainimarama. The only other official position in the parliamentary system now held by a high chief is that of leader of the opposition.

The future of traditional chiefly leadership in Fiji's national politics, therefore, looks rather bleak at the present time. Bainimarama has not only routed the chiefly establishment through new constitutional arrangements at the national level, but he appears also to have achieved considerable success in quashing traditionalist and nationalist discourses among indigenous Fijians more generally. Although achieved partly through suppression, the apparent strength of electoral support from this constituency for Bainimarama's vision of a modern, secular Fiji, in which the racism born of an exclusivist nationalist discourse has no place, can scarcely be denied. This vision may well have had a particular impact on the large cohort of first-time voters, boosting FijiFirst's electoral success, but, as indicated above, any such assumption can only be speculative.

At the same time, it would be foolish to claim that the ideas and beliefs underpinning racism in Fiji — evident in all communities — have been eliminated in Bainimarama's new normative order, as attested by the ongoing diatribes in the blogosphere. Nor has the chiefly system been eliminated. It is likely to continue to hold a valued place among indigenous Fijians in ceremonial life, and may well maintain a strong presence in local and provincial politics. But it does seem unlikely that chiefs will ever dominate national politics to the extent they once did, especially given persistent tensions within their own ranks. Having said that, the current political situation is, very largely, the creation of one individual, and when Bainimarama goes, one way or another, we may well witness a resurgence of indigenous nationalism and at least some of the privileges of chiefly status and authority in Fiji's national politics. In the final analysis, however, much will depend on who controls the military — an institution whose role in Fiji's politics is now much more strongly entrenched than any other.

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