

Hegemony and counter hegemony in Fiji

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Abstract

The article analyses Fiji politics by utilising the analytical framework established by neo-Gramscian scholars, who emphasise the role of social forces and constitutive moments in the making of history. Elite hegemony in Fiji was founded on the hegemony of indigenous chiefs, local and transnational capital and indigenous nationalism. These three pillars of elite hegemony are central arguments of critical and cultural neo-Gramscian theories on power, social forces and neoliberal economic discourses and this neo-Gramscian approach provides both ontological and epistemological frameworks for the study of both hegemony and counter-hegemony in Fiji and reflect convergence, divergence, mobilisation, resistance, and control, and inform counter history and social reframing, where ethnic social forces collide with inter-ethnic alliances, creating new political counter-hegemonic paradigms that usher in new historical and social trajectories.

Keywords: Fiji, Gramsci, hegemony, counter hegemony, politics

Introduction

Gramscian analysis is focused on two forms of discourses – political power and historical processes – and these inform domination, resistance, class warfare, hegemony, counter hegemony and social forces as constitutive moments where social and historical elements converge to create new deliberative moments. Hegemony is achieved through the combination of consensus and coercion with ideas, institutions, culture and history assembled according to the visions of the ruling class or the elite (Glassman, 2013: 241-257), who control political, economic and social discourses by manipulating the socio-economic and legislative structures of the society. Most importantly, hegemonic discourses are based on an overt neoliberal rhetoric (Gill, 2003; 2008; 2015) of laissez faire (Friedman, 1962; Friedman and Friedman, 1980; Fukuyama, 1989), small government, managerialism² (Magretta, 2012), instrumentalism³ and excessive positivism (Dewey, 1933), where masses are subjugated to elite controls. In the neoliberal hegemony, individual and societies are reduced to economic and “market” units, subjected to efficiency, productivity, and performance measures, which are benchmarked to the neoliberal economy, small government, and disruptions caused by digitisation (Pellizoni and Ylonen, 2012). The consequences of elite

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² Managerialism posits a hypothesis that nothing meaningful in organisational discourse can exist outside management control within the capitalist system.

³ Instrumentalism theory asserts that nothing exists outside known knowledge. Background knowledge then becomes defining cognitive authority on the subject being discussed.

hegemony are environmental⁴ degradation (Clammer, 2016: 118), income and wealth disparities between the rich and the poor, rising poverty, rampant homelessness, social isolation of the vulnerable and marginalisation of the majority (Tavanti, 2014: 170). Elite hegemony is undemocratic, oppressive and socially irresponsible and policies of this group are focused on excessive accumulation of wealth, reduction in public services, low wages, and tax incentives to foreign investors, transnational companies and local developers. Moreover, hegemony of the elite is a kind of “solidarity of popular beliefs” (Liguori, 2015: 50) that binds the capitalist ruling class together.

Counter hegemony names challenges to the elite hegemony and attempts at creating alternative historical and political discourses, where elite and ruling classes discourses are challenged and reframed within an alternative sociological and historical ideological framework centred on deliberative social forces. Counter hegemony is a kind of social reorganisation, where human beings are conceptualised primarily as social beings with complex needs, which require careful social policy programming and state intervention. These social units are informed by social and historical discourses aimed at emphasising social programs as central to public policy, rather than economic and elite outcomes of neoliberalism. Moreover, these alternative discourses are based on recasting culture, history and social forces of the ruling class to establish oppositional strategies, where non-elite and more broad-based deliberative forms of political, social and economic discourses are encouraged and embedded within the civil society with an aim to promote true participatory and deliberative democracy, instead of elite politics of disinformation and structural and legislative manipulation of the socio-economic system (Filippini, 2017: 93). Under the counter hegemonic framework, market forces and technological innovation are subjected to state regulation, and productivity and performance are not measured as quantitative indices but as social outcomes informed by community engagement, evidence-based decisions and robust social policies aimed at bridging inequality and social marginalisation.

The reinterpretation of the work of the Italian scholar, Antonio Gramsci, has allowed for the establishment of multiple level epistemologies for framing the analysis of historical, social, economic, and political hegemony and counter hegemony (Rosengarten, 2014). These epistemologies or knowledge bases are concerned with deliberative forms of engagement, resistance and mobilisation, where ordinary citizens are empowered through tactical political organisation, embedded in the collective action from non-elite voices, aimed at emphasising the centrality and the utility of deliberation and social outcomes in the local and the global political economy (Tortosa, 2012: 103-126). These non-elite deliberative voices are concerned with gender equality, indigenous rights, protection of minorities, social programs, economic justice, and inter-ethnic and multicultural political discourses and are vehemently opposed to the mainstream ideology based on racism, control and domination by the elite.

Historical constitutive moments are ontological expressions of alternate political, social and historical solutions, where elite structures are re-examined and challenged and new political

⁴ John Clammer (2016) argues that environmental degradation has a long-term impact on the planet. According to him, “this issue is of paramount importance not only because it addresses the question of the continuance of life on earth as we now know it (and certainly of human life), but equally because it poses fundamental ontological questions, of which the most significant is whether to be human is to be separated from (and presumably “above”) the other life forms that inhabit the same biosphere as ourselves?”

paradigms premised on collective social engagement are established. In this context, social, political and economic structures, culture, history, ethnicity and social forces, including conflicts between the capitalist elite and marginalised voices, provide for deeper analysis of the dynamics of history and society. It is here that constitutive historical moments take shape primarily as an anti-neoliberal discourse, framed around deliberation, mobilisation, resistance and collective action. Neo-Gramscian scholarship has played an important role in informing mobilisation and deliberation of marginalised groups and it is within this analytical framework that I will discuss the neo-Gramscian approaches and how they can be utilised to understand historical and political hegemony and counter hegemony in Fiji, which has a history of contested culture and a political legacy of ethnic tensions and conflict. The former, however, has emerged as a pervasive social force in Fiji, where struggles for political hegemony within the indigenous community continue to cause instability, factionalisation and fragmentation of the indigenous polity. The historical constitutive moment for Fiji was achieved with the alliance among the indigenous chiefs, the indigenous nationalists and local business and transnational classes, which established hegemonic and authoritarian historic blocs to counter deliberative movements for change, social and economic justice and interethnic collaboration. The countervailing socio-historical momentum of anti-neoliberal social and political forces created its own social and historical trajectories, undermining elite narratives.

The constitutive moment in Fiji is located in the critical and cultural neo-Gramscian discourses on power, history and social forces and these three elements are inter-related and re-align throughout Fiji problematic history to create new political and social discourses, including new cultural epistemology and social ontology in the form of control and resistance, anti-establishment activism, agitations for equality, protests against transnational local capital, and inter-ethnic alliances. The chiefly political hegemony in Fiji, established in 1970, was premised on the liberal economic ideology, which in the 1980s mutated into a neo-liberal variant that allowed transnational and local businesses to exploit indigenous and Indo-Fijian labour. The industrial relations structure encouraging docile and flexible labour was established by the Fiji government, which promoted an indigenous hierarchy, where privilege and control were seen by mostly indigenous Fijians as a 'natural' socio-economic order supported by indigenous nationalism and the neoliberal economic visions of the ruling elite, including local businesses and their overseas counterparts. Atu Bain (1984: 2) identified exploitation of indigenous Fijian labour in the mining industry, where 'indigenous Fijians were required to form the core of an industrial workforce'. In overseas-owned gold mines anti-worker laws were enforced with the support of the government, leading to countless industrial disputes in the 1980s. Also, following the military coups in 1987, there was growth in the garment industry in the country and Anand Chand (2012: 171-191) highlighted exploitation of local indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian garment workers who, he argued, were at the bottom of the global commodity chain on meagre wages and with poor working conditions. The three-tiered structure in Fiji was based on indigenous Fijian chiefly political hegemony, an alliance between transnational and local capital and political support from indigenous Fijian nationalists. This formed a unique tripartite hegemonic model for Fiji, where a capital-centric neoliberal economy operated within the constitution of global capitalism, and each of these three tactical alliances established and nurtured an ideological structure to undermine counter-hegemony from inter-ethnic alliances between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians.

The theoretical origins of what transpired in Fiji can be found in the analytical framework established by neo-Gramscian scholars, who emphasise the role of social forces and constitutive moments in the making of history. These neo-Gramscian scholars may seem removed from the post-colonial history of Fiji but the underlying themes point towards a neoliberal political and economic order in Fiji, founded on the repression of labour and exploitation of ethnic divisions with a post-colonial political system, framed around the culturally accepted colonial political orthodoxy of neo-traditional hierarchy, privilege and power. These three pillars are central arguments of critical and cultural neo-Gramscian theories on power, social forces and neoliberal economic discourses; and the neo-Gramscian approach provides both ontological and epistemological frameworks for Fijian political discourse, which are analysed as constitutive moments in history, a kind of reflexivity on convergence, divergence, mobilisation, resistance and control that informs counter history and social reframing, where ethnic social forces collide with inter-ethnic alliances, creating new political paradigms that usher in new historical and social trajectories.

Critical and cultural neo-Gramscian theories

Critical theory was established by Robert Cox at York University in Canada in the early 1980s to address the polemic of history and social forces in shaping political orders. Cox utilised Gramscian historicism to construct a historical analytical framework that provided a new ontology for the analysis of social forces. According to Cox, critical theory is a ‘theory of history in the sense of being concerned not just with the past but with a continuous process of historical change’ (Cox, 1981: 129). Critical theory is also concerned with real world problems ‘and its aims are just as practical as those of problem-solving theory’ (Cox, 1981: 130). For Cox, the objective of the historicist approach is to identify alternative social orders and trigger ‘strategic action’ (Cox, 1981: 130) for change. Through careful reading of the past, Cox problematised history and social forces and reinforced the role of political consciousness, thus assisting analysts in gaining understanding of the ‘broader time perspective of historical structures’ (Cox, 1981: 135).

After rigorously analysing Gramscian theory of hegemony, Cox formulated his critical theory analytical framework as consisting of three interrelated ‘categories of social forces’ (Cox, 1981: 136). Borrowing from Gramsci, these categories included ideas, institutions and material capabilities. Ideas, for Cox, were shared understanding of history, institutions were structures that had their origins in ideas and history, and material capabilities were technological and organisational factors that informed social order. The three categories of social forces operated with different permutations and combinations in different states and had the structural power to transcend state boundaries. According to Thomas Edward Gillon, Cox is a thinker in the critical theory tradition. His work is accepted as historically oriented and social theory, for Cox, is a product of an interaction between an evolving historical reality and critical reflection. Cox re-defined the concept of core and periphery as neither geographic designations nor economic zones as such; rather they refer to categories of work.

In the transnational mode of production, the periphery is characterised by a cheap, semi-skilled, mobile, and disciplined labour force both in the industrialised and less developed countries, whereas the core is a more affluent, dominant ruling class that is motivated by a neoliberal ideology based on the free market and accumulation of capital. Using the Gramscian conceptual framework on superstructure, Cox resolves the internal-external dichotomy of the development theory by illustrating that the system of social dependence and under-development is determined by the transnational mode of production, which is sustained by an international historic bloc. The transnational mode of production is the *modus operandi* of capitalism that operates globally, incorporating vast regions into production relations between the owners of capital and the workers. The relationship established by transnational capitalism is one of exploitation where the owners of capital emphasise accumulation of wealth as their primary motivation and the workers struggle for fair, just and reasonable social conditions for their livelihood and survival.

While Cox's critical approach had a focus on transnational capitalist class alliances, international historic bloc, and their constitutive historical structural power in shaping international political order, Stephen Gill focused on the neoliberal transnational hegemony.

The transnational mode of production was explained by Gill who made adjustments to Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Hegemony would be fully achieved when major institutions and forms of organisation – economic, social and political – and key values of the dominant state become models for emulation in other subordinate states. In this view of hegemony, the patterns of emulation are most likely in the core or most developed states, rather than in the less developed periphery (Gill, 1990: 47). In essence, what the neo-Gramscian scholars were doing was using Gramscian theory – in particular Gramsci's most important theoretical formulations, hegemony and counter-hegemony, to analyse global capitalism and the structural power of capital. The main feature of this global capitalism was post-World War II transnational capitalism, which effectively integrated a large part of the globe into a single capitalist bloc. However, the whole world was not included, since the Soviet bloc and China had put constraints on the limit to capital expansion, but this changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and following a series of economic reforms in China in the 1990s.

Sustained by an elite capitalist class across the globe, the dominance of transnational capital was institutionalised and regularised by the organic intellectuals, who helped cement the link between structure and superstructure. According to Gill:

The organic intellectuals are the 'concrete articulators' of the hegemonic ideology which provides cohesion for, and helps to integrate, the historic bloc. Intellectuals are not simply producers of ideology, they are also 'organisers of hegemony', that is, they theorise the way in which hegemony can be developed or maintained (Gill, 1990: 49-50).

While organic intellectuals are articulators of hegemony, they function within a clearly defined institutional structure such as the Trilateral Commission. The Commission was created initially as a response to a pervasive sense that the international system and the global distribution of power were in a state of flux (Gill, 1990: 123). The Trilateral Commission, in the post-war era, became the network from which the ideological basis for a capitalist world economy emanated. This supra-state institution, however, also assisted in shaping state policies, especially of countries that were members of the liberal capitalist bloc. The power of capital had significantly increased its

structural capabilities, thus directly challenging and occasionally undermining the relative power of the state. Historic structures are shaped by this structural power of capital within the transnational mode of production. According to Gill, 'the staggering flows of transnational finance have a much more murky 'nationality', with the result that they fit less well into the nation-centred analytical categories still quite common in theories of capital-state relations'. In fact, the increase in the structural power of capital and the decline in the relative power of the state assisted the structural power of business. In particular, Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and private firms which operate globally can easily adopt strategies of exit and evasion.

The rapid growth of transnational corporations and multinational companies after World War II had drastically altered core-periphery relations. Within the transnational mode of production, core and peripheral economic structures are found in both developing and industrialised countries and this blurring of boundaries has increased the structural power of capital.

According to Stephen Gill (1992), the capitalist market economy of the United States is now ever more central in the world economy, although its centrality contains substantial contradictions for the rest of the world because of economic interdependence. The changes in the United States reflect a global trend, which we can call the internationalisation of the state, a development which calls into question the Westphalian model of state sovereignty. Thus, globalisation is linked to, and partly engenders, a process of mutation in previous forms of state and political identity. According to Gill, the neo-Gramscian framework provides theoreticians with a set of meta-principles to help explain and interpret the ontology and the constitution of historically specific configurations: 'social ontology rests upon the inter-subjective (historical-subjective) frameworks that help to objectify and constitute social life, such as patterns of social reproduction, the political economy of production and destruction, of culture and civilisation' (Gill, 2003: 44).

The most significant theoretical advancement in the neo-Gramscian scholarship on culture, history and ethnicity was heralded by Stuart Hall, who was influenced by Gramsci's work on hegemony and used Gramscian theory to analyse culture and ethnicity in Great Britain. While Gill focused on the transnational nature of the global political economy, Hall (1986) sought to construct Gramsci's ideas and categories in a way that transcended divisions between the working class and the liberal capitalist system in Great Britain. Hall saw hegemony as an exploitative process, where those in control subjugated the powerless to the political structure of manipulation and marginalisation. Hall sketched some of the ways in which a Gramscian perspective could be used to 'transform and rework some of the existing theories and paradigms in the analysis of racism and related social phenomena' (Hall, 1986: 23). This was a major progress in the reinterpretation of the Gramscian theory because it successfully moved the Gramscian analysis from the Italian School to the study of ethnicity and culture in hegemonic European states like Great Britain.

Hall developed an analytical framework around seven key social and cultural concepts: the centrality of history in cultural formations, the dialectical aspects of cultural discourses, the non-reductive approaches to questions of culture, the non-homogenous nature of class, the lack of linkages among Gramsci's key concepts (ideas, institutions and culture), the role of the state in ethnic and class struggles, the role of culture in social formations, and the role of ideology in ethnicity and culture (Hall, 1986: 23-27).

Hall embedded Gramsci in history and in particular in historical processes and historical interpretation and argued that history played a role in cultural hegemony and influenced ethnic relations within nation states. Hall analysed that ethnic relations were more fluid than was class and that ethnic hegemony was sustained by hegemonic ideas, institutions and culture. In essence, Hall stated that class was not the only factor that contributed to ethnic hegemony but that there were systemic and structural layers that permeated the social terrains of political hegemony. Utilising Hall's thesis on the role of culture and ethnicity in hegemonic formations, Mark Rupert argued that Hall's Gramsci is one which sees history as a complex and contradictory story of social self-production under specific cultural circumstances with multiple social identities, powers, and forms of agency (Rupert, 1998: 430-431). The multi-layered interaction between history, culture, ethnicity and political power provided Hall the epistemological foundation for challenging the foundations of racial discrimination in Great Britain (Rupert, 1998: 433).

Hall's neo-Gramscian approach to culture and ethnicity has been described by David Andrews as a kind of 'conjuncturalism' (Andrews, 2002: 113), which re-locates both the problematic of cultural studies and the line between culture and society and recognises the complexity of the terrain of culture, models of elite/mass, public/private and even centre/margin as specifically historical and politically infected descriptors. Hall's conjuncturalism, according to Andrews, is "preconfigured on the uniqueness of any historical moment, which has to be reconstructed in terms of the levels and trajectories of determination that help to constitute the conjuncture and the experience thereof" (Andrews, 2002: 113). The objective for Hall is to locate and problematise the questions of ethnicity and culture as historical discourses on political power (Bieler and Morton, 2004: 87) which 'filters through structures of society, economy, culture, gender, ethnicity, class and ideology' and can be utilised for the development of an alternative politics and culture. The design of this alternative politics and culture was based on the Gramscian war of position, which was a kind of programmatic social action that exposed fault lines in the existing capitalist hegemony and proposed social and political alternatives.

The cultural approach was built on the growing appreciation among neo-Gramscian scholars of the critical role of culture and ethnicity as a driving force in social formation and re-focused Gramscian analysis towards the study of colonial and post-colonial societies. More importantly, these scholars analysed ethnic and cultural divisions, sub-cultures and the hegemonic role of the military by re-conceptualising hegemonic formations, counter hegemony and historic blocs, the same Gramscian conceptual tools used by Robert Cox in his formulation of critical theory in the early 1980s. Building on Hall and Cox, Randolph Persaud and Rob Walker argued that culture and ethnicity have been given the epistemological status of silence in international relations and international studies and provided alternatives on how questions of culture might be taken up in the contemporary analysis of international relations (Persaud and Walker, 2001: 373-377). Quoting Michel Ralph Trouillott, Persaud and Walker describe this status of silence as the moment of fact creation, the moment of fact assembly, the moment of retrieval and the moment of retrospective significance.

Randolph Persaud argued that there was 'hesitancy in understanding the generative capacity of culture in the configuration and reproduction of domestic social formations' because it did not fit neatly into the state-centric international relations theory. Persaud highlighted that the international political order was an aggregation of domestic social formations and as a result

effort has to be made to understand the way local ethnic and cultural configurations ‘influence core values and ideas’ (Persaud, 2001: 112-128). The central thesis of Persaud was to locate dominant ideas in the social relations of power. These social relations are produced at the local level by the local capitalist elites who also play a decisive role in the international historic-bloc. One of the tenets of the social relations is ethnic or cultural and these are reproduced at both the local and the international level and synchronised historically so that the ruling elite continue their political hegemony without interruption.

Cultural analysis highlighted political formations within states and utilised Gramscian theory to analyse colonial culture, post-colonial hegemonic formations, sub-culture, counter hegemony and politicisation of culture and ethnicity. In 2004, Bob Jessop steered the culture and ethnicity neo-Gramscian analysis towards the concept of cultural political economy (Jessop, 2004, 2010). There is ongoing debate whether the emerging cultural political economy analysis is based on Gramscian and Coxian epistemology (Kranke, 2014: 897-907; Shields, Bruff and Macartney, 2015: 735-737). According to Jessop (2010: 336), cultural political economy is concerned with meaning making in the articulation between the economic and the political and their embedding in broader sets of social relations. He refers to this as a ‘cultural turn’ in the study of critical political economy and grounds it in a theoretical framework with an emphasis on the role of evolutionary mechanisms in the production of hegemony, interdependence of co-evolution of semiotic (meaning) and extra-semiotic (meta-meaning), significance of technologies in the consolidation of hegemony and its contestations, and de-naturalisation of economic and political imaginaries (Jessop, 2010: 336-337).

Jessop (2010: 338) treats the ‘cultural turn’ as social and dialectically related moments of the social world from the viewpoint of four interrelated aspects: semiosis (meaning), agency, technologies and structure. Meaning, in the production of hegemony for Cultural Political Economy, is influenced by the work of Foucault (1970; 1972); the role of agency in hegemony is sociological in origin and has a reflexive element embedded in causal analysis (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), and the relevance of technologies in hegemony approximate the Coxian epistemology (Cox, 1981) on material capabilities. Whilst Jessop (2010: 340) argues that Cultural Political Economy is a ‘third way’ between Structuralism and Constructivism, it could be argued that Cultural Political Economy is an integrative neo-Gramscian construct with conclusions similar to Cox that there is a crisis in neoliberalism (Jessop, 2010: 349). The problematisation of neoliberalism is a form of ‘vernacular materialism’ that ‘poses questions about the relation of historic bloc formation’ (Sum and Jessop, 2013: 202), including historical materialism. Persaud (2001) also problematised social forces as hegemonic discourses similar to what Sum and Jessop (2013) have proposed. Persaud’s problematisation of mobilisation and control in Jamaica draws on the neo-Gramscian critical approach developed by Robert Cox (1981). However, Sum and Jessop utilise Foucault for developing their thesis on ‘constructing, producing and circulating bodies of knowledge’ (Sum and Jessop, 2013: 203). This epistemic approach is embedded in the understanding of culture and the historical forces that shape agency and structure in hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses.

While the Cultural Political Economy agenda ‘considers how discourse and discursive practices condition subjectivities and what role they play in consolidating domination and hegemony’ (Sum

and Jessop, 2013: 205), the 'cultural turn' that Jessop proposes has a lot in common with the 'historical and social turn' of Critical Theory that looks at the strategic context of political hegemony. Hegemony and Counter hegemony are mobilisations of social and cultural forces and the context of these hegemonic discourses is embedded in Gramscian ideas, institutions and culture. What emerges from the Cultural Political Economy School is similar to the neo-Gramscian critical and cultural schools. However, a notable difference is that the Cultural Political School has adopted Foucault, Structural Marxism, elements of sociological perspectivism and subaltern studies to create an integrative analytical framework: but this should be conceptualised as an extension of the neo-Gramscian scholarship rather than a new analytical framework detached from its Gramscian roots. Cox, Gill, Hall, Persaud and Jessop are all concerned with the capitalist system and the neoliberal political economic discourse that has created global inequality. They are also troubled by the political hegemony and counter hegemony that characterises international, national, social and cultural discourses on power, production and social forces that create and sustain structures of inequality. In part, these neo-Gramscian analytical discourses may seem disconnected from the tiny island of Fiji in the South Pacific with references to international order, transnational hegemony, cultural and ethnic hegemony, and state power, but the overall themes that emerge provide for an analytical framework on hegemony and counter hegemony as multiple moments in history, where an indigenous nationalist historic bloc in Fiji imposed its political will in alliance with neoliberal local and transnational capital and defended its position against inter-ethnic alliances, which attempted to reframe Fiji's political and economic landscapes.

Application of neo-Gramscian theory to Fiji

The neo-Gramscian definitions on hegemony as the political power of the ethnic state and counter hegemony as popular resistance forms the conceptual basis for the neo-Gramscian model for Fiji that is used to study the character of social formations as historical moments in Fijian history. The neo-Gramscian interpretation of hegemony when applied to Fiji means the domination of the chiefly political and social forces in post-colonial Fiji until the coup of December 2006. It includes the neoliberal social and economic order that was championed by the indigenous chiefs in the 1980s and the overtly ethnicist rhetoric of the paramouncy of indigenous interest and the pervasive alliance among the indigenous authority, the capitalist class, and indigenous nationalists, which resulted in an elite autocratic ruling class that undermined deliberative initiatives, including inter-ethnic alliances for change. Counter hegemony in Fiji was in the form of inter-ethnic alliances between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians in post-colonial Fiji, where the ruling elite was challenged by non-ethnic forces that regrouped in the 1980s as a response to the autocratic state and the neoliberal economic order. The influences of local and transnational capital led to painful neoliberal economic reforms in the 1980s, reflecting the larger global political economic ideology, promoted by Margaret Thatcher's United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan's United States (Harvey, 2007).

In colonial Fiji, the social and cultural counter hegemonic forces were largely ethnic and as a result unable to form a successful countervailing force and replace the political and economic

order, even though attempts were made to overthrow the colonial system during the 1959 strike through interethnic collaboration (Heartfield, 2002: 75-86). Nevertheless, the re-configuration of social, economic and historical forces in 1987 (Lal, 1990; Lawson, 1991; Howard, 1991) and in 1999 (Field, Baba and Nabobo-Baba, 2005) led to political counter hegemony and the transformation of the Fijian state along non-ethnic lines. However, these achievements were short-lived as indigenous nationalists reclaimed the state by force and established the hegemony of the indigenous Fijian chiefs with the assistance of the military. Since 2000, the military, which had played a central role in undermining counter hegemonic forces of the past, started its own counter hegemonic movement against indigenous nationalists and the chiefs, leading to military hegemony from December 2006 (Ramesh, 2011). These cycles of hegemony and counter hegemony form a unique model for the study of the ruling Fijian elite, historical moments, social forces and political power in Fiji. This model highlights the fragility of the Fijian state established after independence, including the political structures of command and control that were unable to withstand challenges from popular social forces.

Post-colonial hegemony and counter hegemony in Fiji: 1970-2006

The cultural hegemony of the chiefs in colonial Fiji was transformed into the political hegemony of the chiefs in post-colonial Fiji after independence. The chiefs were provided with a special status in colonial Fiji as official guardians of indigenous land, culture and tradition but in post-colonial Fiji the Fijian state went through cycles of chiefly political hegemony (1970-1987), factionalisation of the indigenous bloc (1975, 1982, 1987, and 1999), inter-ethnic alliances (1987 and 1999) and the assertion of indigenous coercive hegemony (1987, 2000 and 2006). These political and historical cycles demonstrate the fragility of the alliance among the chiefs, local and transnational capital and indigenous Fijian nationalists as a hegemonic bloc. Indigenous Fijian commoners increasingly started to see the promise of indigenous Fijian chiefs and the ruling class as incompatible with deliberative democracy, good governance, social empowerment, transparency and anti-corruption. Elite authoritarian structures embedded alongside chiefly political hegemony were also seen by the masses as anachronistic in terms of transparent and accountable government. Besides these cycles of control and resistance, post-colonial chiefly and elite hegemony operated at three levels before the December 2006 coup: within the indigenous Fijian community as neo-traditional authority, over the neoliberal state system, and over other ethnic groups, characterised by ethnic conflict between Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians. Among indigenous Fijians, there was a growing appreciation of democratic reforms and participatory democracy as opposed to prescriptive forms of hierarchy, elitism, economic liberalism and social control. The state in Fiji has been largely ethnic, where indigenous nationalists claimed perpetual right to political power premised upon the neo-traditional interpretation of indigenous rights, where chiefs were seen as natural political rulers, supported by nationalist commoner indigenous Fijians and their local and transnational business associates. Under this elite set up political discourse in Fiji caused and festered under political, economic and social conflict, with both indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, who were caught up in history, cultural and social interpretation wars, each claiming a place in the nation where ethnocracy and ethnicity defined daily social discourses.

The first cycle of chiefly political hegemony – factionalisation of the indigenous bloc, inter-ethnic alliances and indigenous coercive hegemony – began when the political hegemony of the chiefs was consolidated in post-colonial Fiji by the chief-led Alliance Party, which formed alliances with the minority faction of the Indo-Fijian community and the Europeans (General Voters). The political setup of the Alliance Party was also premised upon an understanding whereby Indo-Fijians without question would accept chiefly political leadership and the neoliberal economic order (Sofar, 1985: 55-74) characterised by local and transnational capital. The political and economic arrangements of the chiefs were challenged in 1975 by indigenous nationalists, led by Sakeasi Butadroka, who argued that the three-tier structure of the Alliance Party ought to be nullified because it was premised upon the exploitation of indigenous Fijians. While Butadroka highlighted important social issues affecting indigenous Fijians, his criticisms took a racist turn when he highlighted that Indo-Fijians were alien to indigenous Fijian culture and suggested they be promptly deported to India (Milne, 1981). The anti-Indo-Fijian rhetoric of the indigenous Fijian nationalists was based on concerns that Indo-Fijians had ambitions to utilise their economic strength to elbow their way into political power and usurp indigenous Fijian land.

Buatadroka's Fijian Nationalist Party fractured the indigenous political bloc established by the Alliance Party in the first 1977 election, allowing the Indo-Fijian NFP to win office in April. However, divisions and indecisions on the part of the NFP leadership led to the intervention of the Governor General, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, who restored the chiefly political bloc (Ali, 1979: 76). As expected, in the second 1977 election, the indigenous nationalists realised that division meant loss of political power and heeded the advice of Alliance campaigners, voting the Alliance Party leader, Ratu Mara, back into office. In 1982, the indigenous bloc further fragmented with the formation of a region-based Western United Front, which formed inter-ethnic alliances with the NFP but was unsuccessful in winning office because it was seen by indigenous Fijians as a party promoted to divide the community and repeat the outcome of the April 1977 election (Lal, 1983: 134-159). However, in 1987, the Fiji Labour Party, which was based on inter-ethnic class alliances between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, dislodged the chiefly elite from political power, resulting in military intervention and the re-assertion of chiefly political hegemony (Robertson and Tamanisau, 1988). The political trajectory of the 1980s highlighted divisions among indigenous Fijians as well as Indo-Fijians and these divisions created new political alliances, based mainly on inter-ethnic and inter-class alliances that challenged chiefly hegemony and the neoliberal economic order (Sutherland, 1992; Taylor, 1987) that exploited both Indo-Fijian and indigenous Fijians.

Inter-ethnic counter hegemony: 1987 and 1999

The FLP was the first political party in Fiji that was based on inter-ethnic collaboration between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians. The overt class and non-ethnic characteristics of the FLP posed a serious challenge to the chief-led and highly ethnicised Alliance Party because the FLP successfully provided an alternative to the political hegemony of the chiefs. Ten years after independence, Fiji continued to have an overspecialised economy with guaranteed access to European markets under the Lome Conventions. In the recessions of the 1970s, Fiji remained

largely shielded from the down-turn in the international market, but by 1981 sluggish growth in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and a 30 per cent decline in the terms of trade caused national income to fall. The Alliance Party blamed global recession for the economic woes of the country (Browne, 1989: 41), and became increasingly hostile towards trade unions. According to Michael Howard:

“Between 1981 and 1982, the government placed a virtual freeze on new positions in the public service and many vacant posts were not filled. There was little hiring in the public sector and redundancies, sometimes on a relatively large scale, became increasingly commonplace. In particular, larger foreign owned firms initiated ‘rationalisation’ moves entailing laying off a significant number of workers (Howard, 1987: 114).”

The growing anti-union rhetoric of the Alliance government caused frustrations within the trade union movement and, in the middle of 1982, a Public Service Review Team recommended restructuring the public service, which was rejected by all stakeholders as unnecessary. By 1984, the Alliance government announced a public-sector-wide wage freeze that further alienated and infuriated the unions. Fiji’s largest trade union organisation, the Fiji Trade Union Council (FTUC), condemned the actions of the Alliance and threatened a national strike. In response the Alliance promised that it would declare a national emergency and use the armed forces to provide essential services. The FTUC and the Fiji Public Service Association (FPSA) began to scope the possibility of forming a political party to challenge the Alliance Party in the 1987 elections. While the FTUC and the FPSA were plotting the demise of the Alliance, the government infuriated the teachers by announcing the Volunteer Service Scheme (VSS), where graduate teachers would be employed for up to two years while they awaited appointment from the Ministry of Education. Under the VSS, the government agreed to pay a salary of \$3,000 while the committee-run schools in the rural areas would meet housing and other costs. According to Brij Lal (1986: 143) ‘the government decided to move away from the former practice of automatic absorption of graduate teachers in late 1982, justifying its new policy in terms of financial restraints facing the government’. The Fijian Teachers Confederation (FTC) called the VSS unprofessional, ill-conceived and exploitative. Members of both the Fiji Teachers Union (FTU) and the Fijian Teachers Association (FTA) joined forces with the FPSA and the FTUC to oppose the policies of the Alliance government. The Minister for Education in the Alliance government, Ahmed Ali, was in particular targeted by the FTU as the unions forced the VSS issue to an arbitration hearing, which in 1985 ruled that the VSS was unlawful.

By the middle of the 1980s, unions in Fiji were increasingly politicised due to the tension with the government. Noisy demonstrations were held in cities and towns across the country. However, the opposition NFP failed to capitalise on the stand-off between the unions and the government and started to fragment after its leader Jai Ram Reddy quit the party in 1983 only to be succeeded by the former leader, Siddiq Koya. With Koya back as leader, divisions within the NFP resurfaced and in 1986, Koya was forced to resign and Nadi lawyer Harish Sharma took over as party leader. By then, a number of prominent NFP members had left the party or had joined the FLP. Harish Sharma realised that the NFP had become a spent force in Fiji politics, particularly following its defeats in the 1972, 1977 and 1982 elections and, further, struggled to get support from indigenous Fijians. Hence, the party contemplated a coalition with the FLP.

In 1985, the Indo-Fijian and the indigenous Fijian members of the FPSA and the FTUC joined forces to form the FLP. The party was led by an indigenous Fijian medical doctor, Timoci Bavadra, who articulated an alternative multiethnic vision for Fiji based on the equality of all communities. After the formation of the FLP, the party turned out to be a formidable political force in Fiji within a very short period of time. Dr Bavadra was a former President of the FPSA and Assistant Director of Primary and Preventive Health and was motivated to bring changes to the culture of corruption and chiefly entitlements that plagued the Alliance administration.

In what was a meteoric rise of the party, FLP candidate, Bob Kumar, won the Suva City Council elections and became the mayor of Suva in 1985. Challenges to the hegemony of the chiefs in the 1977 elections by both the FNP and the NFP were defeated due to strong appeals to indigenous Fijian communal sentiments but in 1985 a new counter hegemonic force challenged the chiefly leadership of the Alliance Party and for the first time this counter hegemonic movement was multiracial in character. That caused concerns among Alliance strategists and, as expected, the Alliance government resorted to its old tactics and accused the FLP of 'left' inclination because many in the party espoused social democracy as opposed to the pro-West liberalism of the Alliance. Despite voting as a bloc with indigenous Fijians in the past, the General Elector community was divided in 1987, as were many indigenous Fijians living in the urban areas, who were concerned by the rising cost of living and the privileged position of the chiefs and their clans in national affairs. Feeling the winds of change sweeping Fiji's political landscape, indigenous Fijian chiefs started a campaign of fear against the FLP and its coalition partner, the NFP. On 25 September 1986, a Senator appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs warned all races not to push the indigenous Fijians. Ratu Mara also warned politicians not to take politics into the Great Council of Chiefs meeting (The Fiji Sun, 29 August 1986). The chiefs were essentially warning Indo-Fijian leaders that indigenous Fijian chiefs were the natural rulers of the country and any attempts to oust the chiefs would cause political instability.

The 1987 general election was the first real test for inter-ethnic alliances under the 1970 Constitution. Unlike in previous elections, the Alliance Party was accused of continuing with the colonial policy of divide and rule. Moreover, the party was accused of protecting and preserving chiefly privilege in the community while social conditions of commoner indigenous Fijians deteriorated. On 21 February 1987, the FLP-NFP Coalition launched its manifesto at the Girmit Centre in Lautoka. In the manifesto, the Coalition promised better prices through securing the best marketing arrangement for Fiji goods, greater milling efficiency, reduction of cane transportation costs, better roads, cheaper fertilisers, fee-free education, and improvement in teacher training (Bain and Baba, 1988: 87-89). The coalition continued with its frontal attack on the Alliance, arguing that corruption had become endemic in indigenous Fijian politics and promising to enact anti-corruption legislation if elected. The coalition noted that the Alliance government had placed indigenous interest behind the commercial interests of multinational companies. In March 1986, a block of 1,062 acres belonging to Namoso landowners was leased to Western Mining for 21 years. The villagers were not happy with the terms of the lease, and in February 1986 approached the FLP leader, Dr Bavadra, for assistance. The villagers filed a \$10 million claim against the Emperor Gold Mining Company; and at the centre of the Namoso struggle was the manager of the Emperor Gold Mines, Jeffrey Reid, who was a close ally of Ratu Mara and the Alliance Party. Reid supported efforts to revive the Vatukoula branch of the Fijian

Association in response to the FLP's growing influence in the area (Howard, 1992: 32-34). Reid went further and accused the FLP of damaging the company's reputation. In response, the Coalition charged that Emperor Gold Mining had exploited its workers and used its political influence to cheat indigenous landowners of their rightful entitlements, accused the Alliance of extractive corruption and singled out Ratu Mara as the wealthiest man in Fiji by alleging that Mara had built a complex in Suva with a government loan and leased it back to the Ministry of Education. Some of the other charges of corruption by the Coalition were abuse of a hurricane relief fund, associations with under-world figures, fraudulent investments and corrupt deals with big businesses (Lawson, 1991: 247).

The Alliance Party denied charges of corruption and promised new jobs, selective privatisation and the establishment of export processing zones. Ratu Mara and the Alliance continued to argue that the policies of the Coalition would destroy chiefly hegemony, threaten indigenous Fijian land, and undermine indigenous religion and tradition. The leader of the FLP, Dr Bavadra, quickly dispelled the attacks from the Alliance as another elaborate invention of a party that had abused traditional chiefly authority to keep itself in power for the past 17 years. More importantly, by 1987 the coalition had become a powerful counter-hegemonic force comprising union leaders of different ethnicities, former politicians disgruntled with race-based politics, members of the urban middle class, working class indigenous Fijians and social activists. Helen Ware (2005: 435-454) notes that in 1987 the Indo-Fijians were able to create class-based political coalitions, which gave their party political predominance through the inclusion of poor, urban indigenous Fijians. Moreover, the FLP espoused an overtly non-aligned foreign policy much to the frustration of the Alliance and the West, which were concerned about Soviet, Indian and Libyan influences in the Pacific.

The coalition between the FLP and the NFP represented an alliance between the left and centre-right parties, consisting of Indo-Fijians, General Voters and urban indigenous Fijian professional and working classes, farmers and small businesses. The Coalition had become a powerful multiethnic political bloc by 1987, which was made possible by the factionalisation of the indigenous polity. The coalition agenda was to de-ethnicise politics by removing the discrimination and clientelism of the Alliance Party. The Alliance Party, in contrast, was the party of the right with its support for foreign multinationals, medium and small businesses, rural indigenous Fijians and chiefs. The Alliance continued with the colonial policy of reinforcing cultural and ethnic divisions by implementing discriminatory policies in favour of indigenous Fijians. Moreover, indigenous chiefs in the Alliance portrayed themselves as the most experienced persons in managing Fiji's diverse communal interests and further argued that communal harmony could only be guaranteed with the continuation of the chiefly political hegemony.

The Alliance Party's divide and rule strategy failed in 1987 and the Coalition won the election by capturing 28 out of 52 seats. According to Brij Lal (1988: 45), a majority of the indigenous Fijians still supported the Alliance Party but what was also important to note was the fact that 24 per cent of indigenous Fijians voted for other parties, indicating that the party of the chiefs was no longer regarded as the sole voice of the indigenous Fijians. The General Electors, like urban indigenous Fijians, swung towards the Coalition by a massive 8 per cent. The swing away from

the Alliance was enough to compromise chiefly hegemony In the Gramscian sense; the ascendancy of the coalition was made possible by its strategic political positioning and the ability of the Coalition to create an alternative historic bloc within two years since the formation of the FLP.

Unlike the inter-ethnic counter hegemony of 1987, the 1999 counter hegemony was entirely of a different flavour. While in 1987 the Fiji Labour Party Coalition consisted of members of multi-ethnic trade unions including urban indigenous Fijians and general voters, the People's Coalition consisted of disgruntled indigenous Fijians from the FAP, Party of National Unity (PANU) and the VLV who were disillusioned with the chief-sponsored SVT Party. In 1999, the Fiji Labour Party was very much focused on its Indo-Fijian constituencies but still maintained some support from the urban indigenous Fijian trade unionists. The People's Coalition, even though on the face of it seeming like an inter-ethnic collaboration, was a combination of a multitude of indigenous and Indo-Fijian political interests.

The vote count started in the evening of 15 May 1999. By 16 May, it was clear that the FLP was going to win a majority of Indo-Fijian communal seats. By 17 May, the SVT was in serious trouble and so was its coalition partner, the NFP. On 18 May 1999, the election results were out and to the surprise of the FLP supporters, the party won 37 seats – 19 Indo-Fijian Communal and 18 Open seats. The FAP won 10 seats and PANU 4. On the opposite side, the NFP was totally annihilated, but its coalition partner SVT managed to win 8 seats and the United General Party won 2. The VLV won 3 seats and the nationalists captured 2. Rotuma won a single seat as usual and there were 5 Independents elected. Following the final vote count, the FLP convened a meeting where elected members agreed to nominate Mahendra Chaudhry as the first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister of Fiji. Unfortunately, FLP's coalition partners – the FAP and the PANU – were not happy with the decision. The leader of the PANU, Apisai Tora, criticised the Indo-Fijians for bloc voting and being insensitive to indigenous Fijian interest. A similar sentiment was echoed by the outgoing Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, who tendered his resignation to the President of Fiji on 18 May 1999. In a speech to the nation that afternoon, Rabuka expressed concern over the way in which Indo-Fijians voted for the FLP. Also lamenting over the election results was the leader of the NFP, Jai Ram Reddy, who accepted the verdict of the people.

While Chaudhry started work on his new cabinet, indigenous Fijian political parties lashed out at the FLP as well as at Indo Fijians. VLV's Poseci Bune called for indigenous Fijian parties to unite against Indo-Fijians. A similar call was made by the nationalist leader Sakeasi Butadroka. Meanwhile, the FAP advised the FLP that it wanted Adi Kuini Speed to become Prime Minister. However, the FLP reminded its coalition partners that it was agreed beforehand that the party winning the most seats would choose the position of Prime Minister. While the debate on who should be the Prime Minister continued, on 19 May 1999 at 11 am Mahendra Chaudhry was sworn in by the President as the first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister of Fiji.

Chaudhry had been elected to Parliament in the April 1987 general election and held the Finance Minister's portfolio before being deposed in a military coup on 14 May. Since then, Chaudhry had remained at the forefront of politics, constantly agitating for democratic reforms. In 1991, Chaudhry organised nation-wide strikes against the interim government's Sugar Masters Award. In addition, he was instrumental in campaigning against the 1990 Constitution. In 1992,

Chaudhry was elected as a Member of Parliament and continued to fight for social justice. Among his most notable motions were the ones on corruption and on the select committee on agricultural leases. In 1996, Chaudhry remained steadfast in his resolve to lobby for a full implementation of the Reeves Commission Report. In 1997, he fought hard to ensure that drought-stricken Indo-Fijian farmers were forwarded loans on generous terms, and remained an overt critic of privatisation and corporatisation.

After Chaudhry was sworn in as the Prime Minister of Fiji, the FAP accepted the Fiji Labour Party's endorsement of Adi Kuini Speed and Tupeni Baba for the position of Deputy Prime Ministers of Fiji. Meanwhile reports surfaced that arsonists had targeted the Department of Lands at the Government Building on the night of 19 May. According to *The Daily Post* (1999), 'the fire was noticed at about 7.38 pm. But, quick action from police and the fire department helped control the blaze. Deputy Chief Fire officer Isireli Qasenivalu said they have ruled out the possibility that the fire was caused by an electric fault'.

By 21 May, PANU agreed to join the FLP and the FAP. Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry went a step further and invited SVT and the VLV to join in a 'Government of National Unity'. Under the 1997 constitution, only those parties securing 10 per cent of total votes could be invited to join cabinet. However, Chaudhry argued that for the sake of unity and stability, parties receiving less than the required threshold should be invited as well. The VLV party considered Chaudhry's offer and to the surprise of many agreed to join the new cabinet. The SVT party leader Sitiveni Rabuka requested four cabinet positions in the new government, including the post of Deputy Prime Minister and when his request was refused, he withdrew from any further consultations with the new government.

The 1999 election saw the realignment of political forces in Fiji. PANU, which was a regionally based party in the west, formed an alliance with the FLP to ensure that they had political representation in government. The FAP was a more urban-based political movement but was influenced by the chiefs who were disenchanted with the SVT party. The VLV had a similar political setup, with dissident chiefs and supporters punishing the SVT for changing the constitution. In the 1999 election, indigenous votes were split four ways among the SVT, the FAP, the VLV and the PANU. Indo-Fijians had only two choices, the FLP and the NFP, and a majority chose the FLP for continuing the fight for political equality under the 1997 Constitution. At the end of the election, the chief-led political order since the 1987 coups had collapsed and the FLP once again formed a counter-hegemonic bloc with the support of indigenous parties seeking a voice under the new multiethnic constitution. The indigenous ideology based on the supremacy of the hegemony of chiefs had crumbled due to divisions, conflict and rivalries among the chiefs themselves. More importantly perhaps, the outcome of the 1999 election reflected the failure of Prime Minister Rabuka's strategy of amalgamating majority indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian parties into a political bloc that supported chiefly hegemony. In hindsight, Rabuka's strategy further fragmented indigenous votes and deepened competition for political power within indigenous groups. With the establishment of a new political counter hegemonic bloc led by the FLP, indigenous divisions including divisions among chiefs continued to intensify after the 1999 election, resulting in the May 2000 coup.

Military and interim government hegemony: 2006 to 2014

The 2006 coup was unlike previous coups. Bainimarama's actions against the SDL party and the chiefs of Fiji were based on a non-ethnicist rhetoric. The military ousted the government because it believed it was racist and corrupt. The 2006 coup saw the dismantling of the chiefly hegemony that had continued since independence, interrupted only in 1987 and 1999 by inter-ethnic alliances. Indigenous institutions that entrenched chiefly cultural and political hegemony were targeted for dissolution by the military. They included the Native Land Trust Board, the Fijian Affairs Board, Fijian Holdings Ltd and the Great Council of Chiefs. Moreover, provincial councils were audited and individuals suspected of corruption were removed from office. The 2006 coup leaders transformed the Republic of Fiji Military Forces from an ethnic institution to an agent of political and social change, but this transformation was turbulent and many opposed to the military accused it of serious human rights abuses.

Following the coup, a number of groups, some sympathetic to the deposed government, protested against the military takeover. The military, in response, arrested and detained a number of individuals, resulting in condemnation from human rights' organisations. Fiji's Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF) condemned the actions of the military in intimidating members of the public who spoke against the military regime. CCF President, Reverend Aquila Yabaki stated that while the CCF deplored the mistreatment as unnecessary it advised that protesters should be attuned to the fact that there has been a military takeover and it was not business as usual. Joining the CCF was Pacific Resource Concerns Centre Director, Tupou Vere, who called for a full return to the rule of law (Fiji Village News, 2006). The military continued to detain members of pro-democracy groups and banned Virisila Buadromo, Imraz Iqbal, Laisa Digitaki, Pita Waqavonovono and Jacqueline Koroi from leaving the country (Fiji TV, 2006). The deposed Fijian Affairs Board chief executive, Adi Litia Qionibaravi was taken in for questioning by the military on 29 December as protests against the military spread to indigenous Fijians living overseas.

Detentions and physical abuse of critics of the military created concerns among a number of international human rights' organisations. On 16 February 2007 Amnesty International urged the interim government of Fiji to comply with its obligations under international human rights' law. According to the Amnesty report, Amnesty International stated it was highly concerned over President Ratu Josefa Iloilo Uluivuda's announcement on 18 January 2007 of a decree, known as the Immunity (Fiji Military Government Intervention) Promulgation 2007, which granted 'full and unconditional immunity from all criminal or civil or legal or military disciplinary or professional proceedings or consequences' to the disciplined forces in the country involved in the coup and all other persons who acted under their command, in the run-up to 5 December 2006 until 5 January 2007, the day after President Ratu Josefa resumed executive authority over the interim government. Despite repeated assurances by the Interim Attorney-General, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, that the Fiji Human Rights Commission would handle complaints concerning human rights violations with the interim government's full support, the fact that the persons covered by the above decree could not be held accountable for any human rights violations that they may

have committed seriously jeopardised the state of human rights and the rule of law in Fiji. This decree entrenched the legacy of impunity experienced in Fiji.

The military returned to barracks but the interim government that was established supported the objectives of the military coup and one of its actions was to suspend the Great Council of Chiefs indefinitely. The composition of the GCC was determined under the Fijian Affairs Act and the Council was given the role of nominating the President under the 1997 Constitution. The interim Minister of Fijian Affairs, Heritage, Provincial Development and Multi Ethnic Affairs, Ratu Epeli Ganilau, exercised his powers under the Fijian Affairs Act and initiated the Fijian Affairs (Great Council of Chiefs) suspension Regulations of 2007, which came into effect from 13 April, 2007.

With the GCC suspended and SDL supporters and nominees purged from state-owned enterprises and the public service, the interim government formulated and distributed the People's Charter for Change and Progress in 2008. Developed by John Sami, a consultant from New Zealand, the Charter aimed to promote multiracial political strategy and formed the framework for the new Constitution Review Commission (CRC) established after the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution in 2009. Stewart Firth (2015: 110) argued that Bainimarama's approach was that 'if the courts were thought to be wrong in reaching judgment, they should be ignored and the constitution abrogated'. The CRC was comprised of constitutional expert Professor Yash Ghai, academic Satendra Nandan and former minister Taufa Vakatale. In total, the CRC received 7,000 submissions and recommended a '144 member National People's Assembly including civil society appointees and representatives of the GCC' (Fraenkel, 2014: 477). The interim government, including the President, criticised the recommendations of the CRC and initiated its own consultation process, which received only 1,093 responses (Fraenkel, 2014: 479). Furthermore, the 2013 Constitution was drafted behind closed doors and imposed restrictive conventions on trade union members and those opposed to the military-backed regime.

Already, the union movement was incensed by the Essential Industries Decree that outlawed strike action in 'essential' sectors of the economy and journalists and news organisations pondered on the utility of the Media Decree, which banned majority foreign shares in the local media. According to the Decree, 'any media organisation which fails to comply with this requirement shall cease to operate as a media organisation, and shall also be liable for an offence under the Decree. At this stage, Fiji Times is the media organisation that needs to comply with the ownership requirements, and this represents a major challenge for the country's longest serving newspaper' (Fiji Broadcasting Commission, 2010). Critics argued that actions against the unions and the media aimed at thwarting any unfavourable assessment of the interim government or the military.

FijiFirst and military hegemony

Fiji went to the polls on 17 September 2014 and this election was the first democratic election since the government of former Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase was deposed in a bloodless coup on 6 December 2006 by the Republic of Fiji Military Forces. The election was held under Fiji's 2013 Constitution that required election of a 50-member parliament under a proportional voting

system, where political parties and independent candidates had to win more than 5 per cent of the total vote to win a seat in parliament. Unlike other proportional systems, Fiji has a single national constituency without any regions or districts. The ballot paper consisted of numbers from 135 to 382 and each number was randomly allocated to a candidate who represented a registered political party. There were two independent candidates but the proportional system favoured larger political parties, especially those with popular political leaders. The new electoral decree on the registration of political parties provided information on the registration of political parties, the conduct of elections, and the role of the Supervisor of Elections in managing the election process. Some 92 international observers from 13 countries were in Fiji to observe the September 2014 election, which was contested by seven political parties including FijiFirst, Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), People's Democratic Party (PDP), NFP, FLP, One Fiji, and Fiji United Freedom Party.

Before the September 2014 elections, the military established itself as a 'guarantor' of peace and stability in Fiji and many military officials served in the interim government, indicating that the military fully supported the interim government, the visions espoused in the People's Charter, the 2013 Fiji Constitution and the FijiFirst Party. Jon Fraenkel (2015: 52) analysed that '92.6 per cent of the soldiers supported FijiFirst in the general election', supporting the argument that the military was fully behind the reforms initiated by Voreqe Bainimarama. It also highlights, as suggested by Jukka Siikala (2014: 224), that the military in Fiji had transformed itself into a 'tribe', which 'looked for support amongst Indo-Fijians' who believe that Bainimarama's rule has 'curbed indigenous nationalism which had long been a threat to political order' (Norton, 2015: 115). Brij Lal expands the 'military tribe' thesis by arguing that the 2013 constitution gives the military 'a guardian role as the defender of national interest (not an elected parliament) and it can legitimately use that provision to intervene if it feels its interests are under threat' (Lal, 2015: 86-87). Former Fiji military officer, Jone Baledrokadroka (2015: 131), argues that the 'military tribe' in Fiji is a form of super confederacy, where Bainimarama 'enticed a clique of officers with accelerated promotion and handsome salary increases that has enabled him to build a strong political base, thus using military as a nation building institution.' The military has in fact established itself in Fiji as a hegemonic entity, adopting a non-ethnic narrative of the interim regime from 2006 to 2014 and the FijiFirst political party from 2014 onwards. This non-ethnic narrative promotes, among other things, ethnic equality, social responsibility and revisionist discourses against institutions created by colonial government, including the Great Council of Chiefs and the Fijian Affairs Board.

Closely allied to the military was the hegemonic FijiFirst party, led by Voreqe Bainimarama, who modelled the party along the principles enshrined in the People's Charter of 2008, which laid out non-ethnic political and social foundations for Fiji. FijiFirst believes in the separation of state and religion, a common name of 'Fijian' for all Fiji citizens, allocation of state resources based on community needs instead of race, fair agricultural leases, a land bank for indigenous landowners, anti-corruption measures spearheaded by the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption, reducing violence and exploitation against women and children, affordable housing, a national employment scheme, an infrastructure investment plan, agri-business diversification, reducing bureaucratic red tape for foreign investment, modernising the legal framework with greater access to legal aid, encouraging women in the workplace, lowering youth unemployment, being tough

on sacrilege and other criminal acts, free water, reasonable rates for electricity and gas, fee-free education, investment in higher education, subsidised milk for primary school students, and equal citizenry. The hegemony of the military and the FijiFirst Party in Fiji is firmly embedded in the constitutional, parliamentary, social and historical structures and has cross-ethnic appeal among Fiji's multiethnic community.

The Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), is a more indigenous-Fijian communal-oriented party and the support for her campaign was provided by former Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase. SODELPA criticised 'Fijian' as a common name, wanted Fiji to be a declared a Christian state, preferred changes to land lease money distribution in favour of indigenous chiefs, return of the political role of the Great Council of Chiefs, reinstatement of Fijian Affairs Board scholarships, a restructured i-taukei Land Trust Board, the possibility of bringing back the 1997 Constitution, the reform of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, establishment of Indigenous Fijian foreshore rights via a Qoliqoli law, review of all decrees between 2006 and 2014, and implementation of social justice and affirmative action programs for indigenous Fijians, similar to what existed during the reign of the former SDL Government (2001 to 2006).

The FLP, the People's Democratic Party and the NFP supported the reinstatement of the Great Council of Chiefs but criticised SODELPA on their stand against "Fijian" as a common name and on introduction of a Christian state. The FLP was led by former Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, who was disqualified from standing in the September 2014 election due to his conviction on Fiji's foreign exchange law violations. The party continued to campaign for the rights of workers and farmers. However, the People's Democratic Party also had workers' rights as part of its election manifesto. Led by a former Fiji Labour Party member and trade unionist, Felix Anthony, the People's Democratic Party criticised the Essential Industries Decree, claiming that the Decree had diminished the rights of workers in specific industries such as tourism, infrastructure and emergency services. The National Federation Party was led by Professor Biman Prasad, who resigned from the University of the South Pacific as Professor of Economics to lead the party. The National Federation Party vowed to reduce Value Added Tax (VAT), address poverty, unemployment and inflation. The party called for 99-year leases so that there was some certainty for tenants with agricultural leases.

The One Fiji party was led by Filimoni Vosarogo. The party planned to boost Fiji's economy by creating more local jobs and investing in education. The party highlighted that the issues of economic development required a 10-year development plan. The Fiji United Freedom Party was led by Jagath Karunaratne and the party planned to provide a platform for Fiji's youth to voice their issues. In 2011, Karunaratne, a Sri-Lankan-born Fiji citizen, was accused of painting anti-government graffiti.

There were in total 590,000 registered voters, out of which 496,364 (83.9 per cent) voted in the 2014 general election. The voting was carried out in 1500 polling stations, where voters showed their identity cards to electoral officers who verified their name on the voter list, marked their finger with an indelible ink and then issued them the ballot paper, whereon the voter marked with a cross or a tick his or her preferred candidate's number and deposited the ballot into a secured ballot box. Most of the voting on 17 September was completed before 3 pm and the provisional results were published in the morning of 18 September.

The provisional election figures placed FijiFirst in the lead with 60 per cent of the seats, followed by SODELPA and the National Federation Party. The Fiji Labour Party, the People's Democratic Party, One Fiji and the Fiji United Freedom Party failed to secure the required 5 per cent threshold of 24,818 votes.

In the afternoon of 18 September, the Fiji Labour Party, People's Democratic Party, SODELPA, One Fiji and the National Federation party issued a joint statement in a letter, arguing that there were irregularities in the conduct of the election and requested the count of the votes be suspended. The Supervisor of Elections responded that the allegations from political parties were too general and refused to suspend counting. On 19 September, political parties questioning the election produced a list of 'evidence' claiming that extra ballot papers were printed, seals on the ballot boxes were broken, the count was suspended without explanation and ballot papers were tampered with. The Election Office rejected the claims on 20 September and the full and final result of the election was published on 21 September.

The new parliament in Fiji represents a quasi-inter-ethnic hegemony with 14 Indo-Fijians MPs in the new FijiFirst government, despite the fact that the 'military remains almost exclusively Taukei and the public service disproportionately Taukei' (Madraiwiwi, 2015: 58). According to Steven Ratuva (2015: 147-148), the election result showed that 'SODELPA was able to attract the rural based voters and those committed to the preservation of Taukei customary ways and FijiFirst was able to attract urban voters and those who preferred reform of Taukei institutions as well as socio-economic development'. Nevertheless, FijiFirst did manage to establish an inter-ethnic alliance and, as Jon Fraenkel (2015: 49) noted, the 2014 general election in Fiji had the 'geographical configuration of political loyalties that echoed the pattern witnessed 15 years earlier when the Fiji Labour Party built an alliance that toppled SVT'. However, the verdict still remains open as to how this inter-ethnic hegemony supported by the military will play out.

There are concerns that there are centripetal inter-ethnic social forces and centrifugal ethnic forces competing for political hegemony in Fiji within hegemonic and counter-hegemonic political discourses. The indigenous Fijian nationalists continue to argue for a greater entitlement to state power, whereas Indo-Fijians and other minority groups emphasise political equality as the preferred political direction. The tensions between nationalist social forces and multicultural and ethnically inclusive forces have created diverging hegemonic narratives that reflect divisions within Fiji's communities. These divisions may seem benign but highlight the undercurrent of Fijian political conceptualisation of indigenous and others, out-groups and in-groups and perceptions about the self and the other. Political equality may have been established under the 2013 Fiji Constitution, but competing claims on identity and nation have caused factions and factions, with emotions and cultural sensitivities at an all-time high among the local communities. How the current FijiFirst government reconciles these diverging views on state, nation and identity remains an open-ended issue for the country.

Conclusion

Whilst neo-Gramscian approaches focused on historical and social contradictions of the capitalist system, the analytical framework of Cox, Gill, Hall, Persaud, and Jessop provides the theoretical

tools for extending the study of social and historical forces to post-colonial communities such as Fiji. Hegemony not only entails the material capabilities to dominate, control and influence but the ability to disrupt anti-hegemony views via coercive interventions. Cultural forces in Fiji, including social and historical forces, were aligned to the interest of the ruling classes and hence the political hegemony of the indigenous chiefs in Fiji was successful in establishing a three-tiered structure of indigenous neo-traditional influence, domination of local and transnational capital and indigenous Fijian nationalism. But in assembling and lining up historical, social and cultural forces, the ideological fault lines emerged, leading to counter-hegemony where opposing historical, economic, social and cultural interpretations led to inter-ethnic alliances and strategic political action. The hegemony of the chiefs in Fiji was undermined by a non-ethnic historic bloc, but the military intervened and restored the elite. However, in Fiji the military changed from preserving the political hegemony of indigenous chiefs and nationalists to a counter-hegemonic movement, embracing inter-ethnic alliances as a new political discourse for Fiji and, as a result, indigenous nationalist forces were not only put on notice but were dislodged from political power in 2006. Following the coup, opposition to the military-backed regime was outlawed as the government embarked on a non-ethnic political model of hegemony, where all ethnic groups in Fiji were provided equal rights. This model, informed by the People's Charter, led to the 2013 Fiji Constitution and the 2014 general elections which established FijiFirst and military hegemony.

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