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Dual-Power and Direct Democracy in Fiji: An Analysis of the iTaukei Administration

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Dual-Power and Direct Democracy in Fiji:
An Analysis of the iTaukei Administration

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A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master
of Arts in Sustainable Development at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro,
Vermont, USA

August 12, 2019

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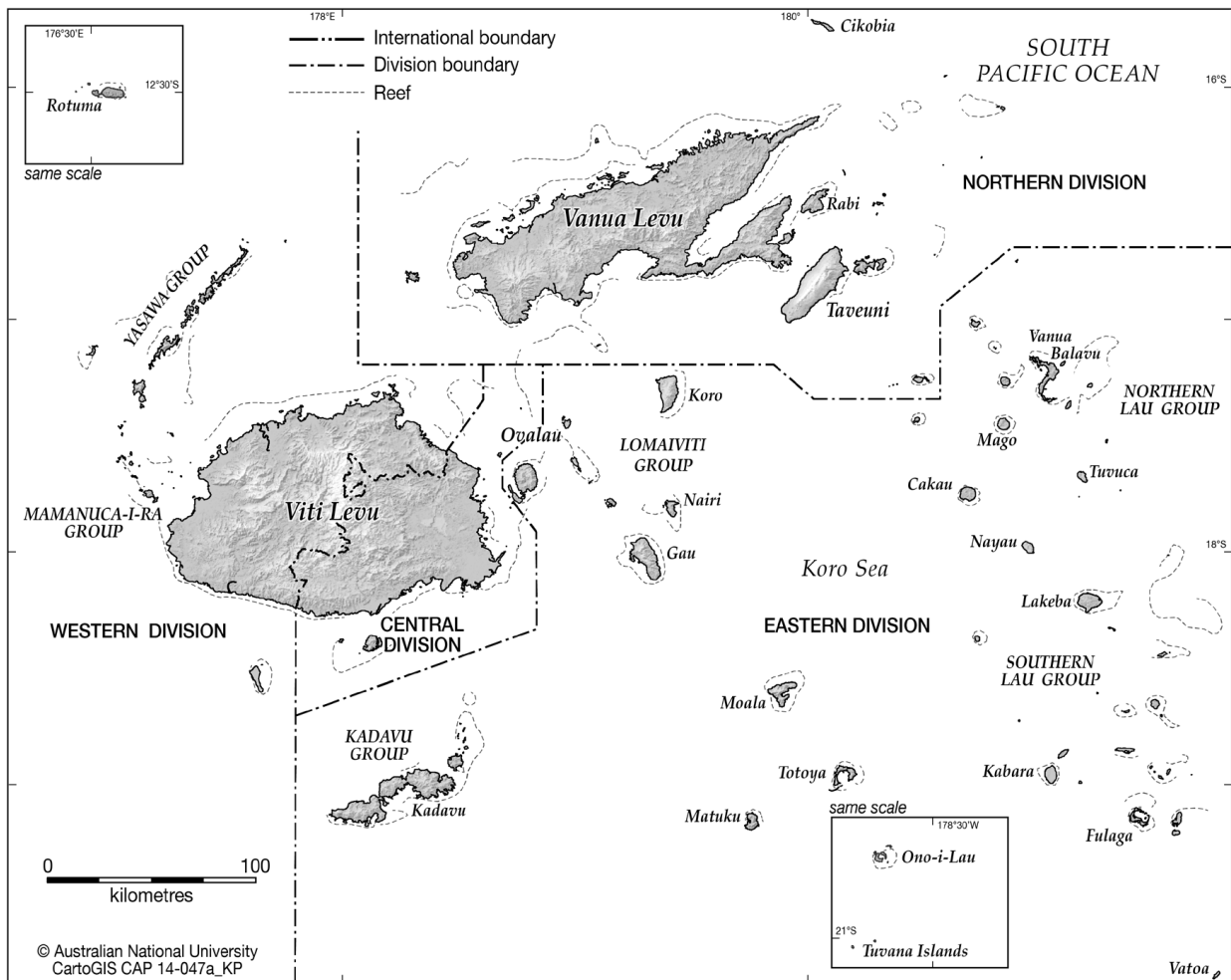
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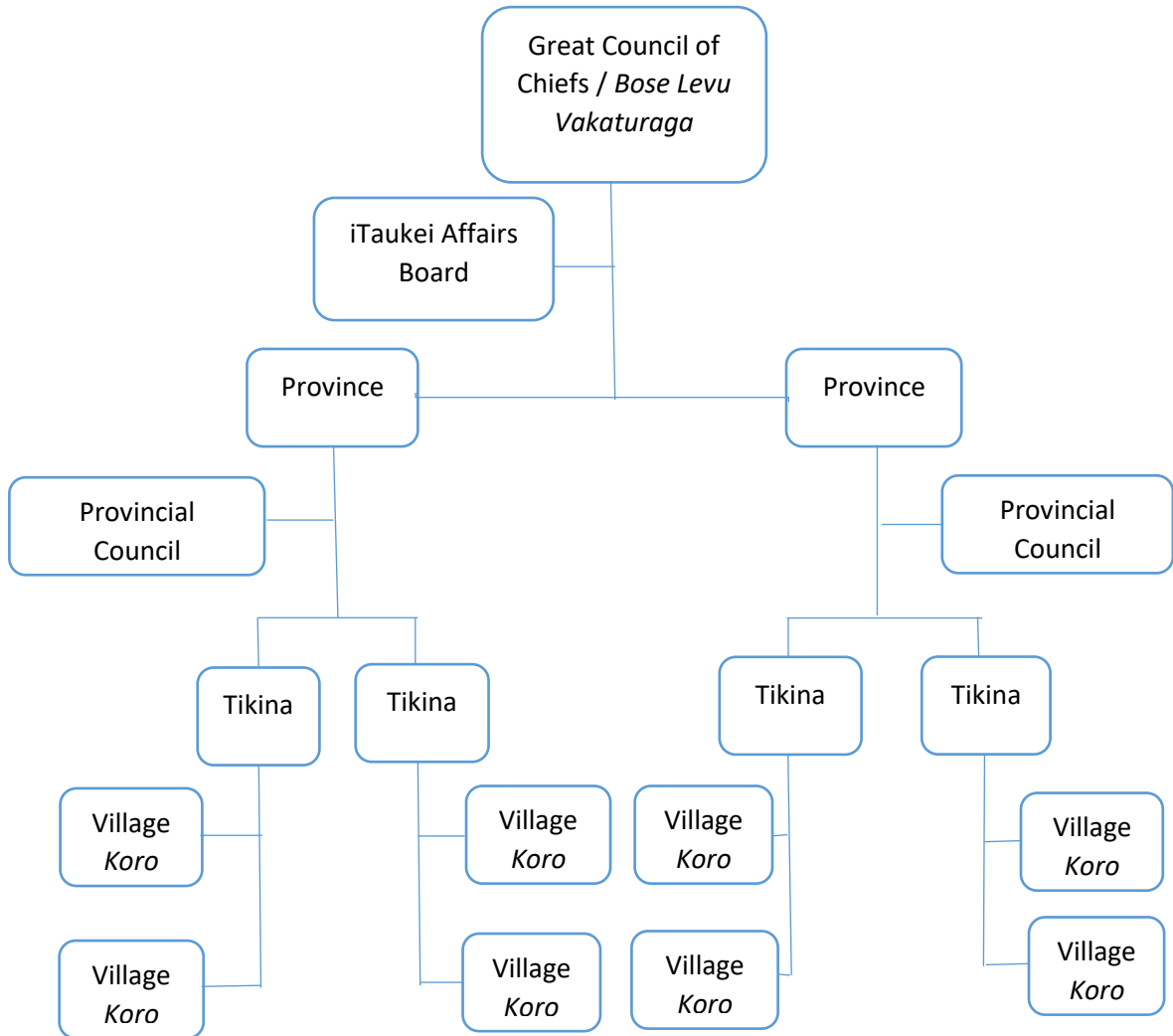
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Map of Fiji Archipelago



Source: Parke, 2014

Structure of iTaukei Administration



Source: Rotuivaqali, 2012

Note on Pronunciation

The iTaukei language is varied and heterogeneous, but the *Bau* form is the officially accepted dialect. Vowels are pronounced softly:

A as in “father”

E as in “enter”

Etc.

However, a few consonants have different pronunciations:

B is “mb” (Bula as in mBula)

C is “th” (Cakabau as in Thakambau)

D is “nd” (Nadi as in Nandi)

G is a soft “ng” (as in sing)

Q is a hard “ng” (as in finger)

Timeline of Events

- 1867—King Cakabau of Bau Island establishes ‘unified’ Fiji government
- 1874—Deed of Cession signed, making Fiji a colony of the British Empire
- 1879—First Girmitya (Indentured Servants from India) brought to Fiji
- 1916—Indentured Servitude of Indians Outlawed
- 1920—General Strike of Indo-Fijians
- 1930s—Movement to ‘Develop’ the iTaukei population and lands
- 1940—Creation of Native Land Trust Board
- 1945—Reorganization of Separate Administration into the Fijian Administration
- 1970—Fiji Gains Independence
- 1987—Sitiveni Rabuka leads two coups; in May and September
- 2000—George Speight leads 3rd coup
- 2006— 4th coup led by Voreqe Bainimarama, beginning of military regime
- 2007—Suspension of Great Council of Chiefs by Bainimarama
- 2012—Dissolution of the Great Council of Chiefs by Bainimarama
- 2014—First official voting for new Republic, resulting in Fiji First election (headed by Bainimarama)
- 2018—Suspension of Village Bylaws Consultation by Bainimarama; second official election with current constitution

Abstract

This paper examines the origins, history and social impact of the iTaukei (E-tow-kay) Administration in Fiji, which is an autonomous system of indigenous dual-power within the government of Fiji. It traces the history, social implications, and current status of the iTaukei Administration, focusing on (1) to what extent this administration has frustrated the advances of liberalism in the form of both nation-state and capitalism, and (2) if there is an alternative to the dichotomy of cultural, political, and economic domination of chiefly elites versus that of the global neoliberal hegemony. In this analysis, the origins of developmental discourse is examined, looking at the colonial government and then chiefly and political elites as creators and producers of this discourse. Using Social Ecology as a methodology, this paper peels apart the manifold of conflict that surrounds this administration, consisting of interpenetrating ethnic, class, economic, and hierarchical conflict. The administration was designed to impede capitalist expansion in Fiji, yet as time went on the colonial government desired further profit, leading to the creation of development discourse directed at increasing 'individualism' amongst the iTaukei people. In parallel to this there has been a continuous call for the drawdown of dual-power encapsulated in the iTaukei Administration. The tension between creators of this discourse—British colonialists, iTaukei chiefly and political elite,—and the iTaukei people is laid out through a history of the iTaukei Administration. Through this examination, the importance of non-state directly democratic institutions, such as the localized aspect of the iTaukei Administration, create and inherent weakness in the State, and allow for the possibility of cultural autonomy that can be inclusive, as opposed to parochial. It also reveals the paramount importance of land in struggles to disrupt Capital, and the importance of preserving or creating communal land control.

Introduction

All over the world, people are looking for hope. They are looking for a way out of the seemingly uninterrupted march toward ecological oblivion. It seems that the only major choices before people are between a globalized marketplace, rushing like an engorged river through communities, sweeping away their culture, jobs, stability, and even the future itself. In response to this has risen an opposite pull toward parochialism—most commonly situated at the level of the nation-state. These movements seek to create a fortress of nationality by rejecting the homogenizing effects of the global market. These movements are largely reactionary, seeking a return to a mythologized golden age by expunging the countries they are in of anything deemed undesirable. This is embodied in places like the USA with the Trump administration, Brazil with Bolsonaro, of Brexit and the gains of right-wing parties all over Europe, to list just a small few.

Yet when we look closer, we find alternatives to these in blossom all over the world. Autonomous movements of people not only demanding their future, but building the worlds in which they want to live. Across the world, there are movements that we can both support and learn from; especially in the Global South, they are pushing back on these two paths—global capitalism or fortress nationalism, and building new paths. This is taking place mainly around Development—for decades countries and peoples have been submitting (willingly or otherwise) to efforts to become ‘developed’ like the Global North (Mainly US/European countries). Yet these efforts have consistently fallen flat, leaving many countries poorer and with less resources than when they began. This is the ferment in which movements toward a Pluriverse—a world in which many worlds fit—have taken root.

In the context of the Fijian archipelago, there exists a continuous thread of development discourse, from before its colonization in 1875, through independence in 1970, across four coups, and into the current day. This discourse was created by European settlers and missionaries, and carried on by ethnic and political elites into the current day. Fiji is an archipelago of over 300 islands located in the Oceania region. Its ethnic groups are comprised of a majority of indigenous Fijians—the iTaukei (E-tow-kay). The largest minority are Indo-Fijians (descended from indentured servants), and small percentages of other ethnic groups, including the Rotuman (a small island included in the colonization of Fiji). It is one of the most economically developed states in the region, based largely on tourism and exports like sugar cane and fish, yet economic growth has been relatively slow due to the coups it has experienced—most recently in 2006. The economy has grown, even if slowly, and the level of poverty has been increasing—revealing a widening gap between rich and poor, with the former having readier access to developmental programs, further increasing the disparity (Sriskandarajah, 2003; UNICEF, 2007). As of 2006 Fiji had a Human Development Index of 0.758 (UNICEF, 2007) and has been holding relatively steady in this position. The average life expectancy is 69; the leading health risk factors are from non-communicable diseases (NCDs)—like heart disease, diabetes, and stroke—lack of exercise, and high rates of smoking (WHO, 2015).

Development has meant the imposition of Western political, social, and economic power, in collaboration with emergent and dominant Fijian chiefly elites. As has been pointed out by Escobar (2012) and others (Shiva, 2016; Peet, 2015), the creation of “developing countries” is not something that is merely imposed on a people; they become complicit, seeing

themselves as subjects of development. In looking at Fiji, this cultural shaping is embodied in the chiefs of the eastern isles and the formation of the institution variously called the Separate Administration, the Fijian Administration, and the iTaukei Administration currently embedded in the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs (Lason & Aminzade, 2008; Macnaught, 2016; Norton, 2012). From their collaboration with European settlers in the early 1800's against the people of Viti Levu (Fiji's largest island) and the western islands, to today with the undercurrent of political and cultural dominance, the chiefs of this eastern region still hold sway.

Currently, though, the political and cultural dominance of eastern chiefs is being dissolved, as the 2006 coup and its attendant narratives show (Lal, 2012). It is being replaced with a more liberal vision. There are a few interesting implications—both explicit and implicit—that can be drawn from this emerging reality as it relates to cultural autonomy, development, Western modernity, and national sovereignty. Many critics of Western development, liberalism, and capitalism have noted that this vision of progress—development as the step into modernity—is far too simplistic (Bookchin, 2005; Escobar, 2012; Öcalan, 2017; Shiva, 2016). As we will see, with the eclipse of the iTaukei Administration and the chiefly system associated with it, a space is opening up for the liberalization of Fiji—politically, economically, and culturally. This, taken in the common understanding of development, is seen as a great step forward—after all, the iTaukei Administration is built on the hereditary transition of power, land, and political influence, as well as the de facto exclusion of other ethnicities and cultures. Yet there is more to it than this; its core is an institution of communal land control as well as apparatuses (sometimes latent, sometimes active) for directly democratic control of development.

For movements looking to learn ways of building a different world, Fiji offers many interesting and unique opportunities. In living and serving in Fiji over the last two years I have come to see the vibrancy and self-creation of communities here, as well as ways of living that are in themselves acts of resistance to both capitalist and state penetration. Yet there is also in Fiji a divide that parallels the rest of the world, the tension between entrenchment in global capitalist markets and an ethno-nationalism centered on iTaukei chiefly elites. The questions I want to explore in this paper are:

- 1) *to what extent has the iTaukei Administration frustrated the advances of liberalism in the form of the nation-state and capitalism, and*
- 2) *is there an alternative to the dichotomy of cultural, political, and economic domination of chiefly elites versus that of the global neoliberal hegemony?*

In so doing, I hope to be able to find takeaways on methods to disrupt the nation-state and capitalism, as well as the potential of Fiji as a place of resistance. I will first trace the thread of the eastern chiefly elite through colonization and statehood, which is embodied in the institution of the iTaukei Administration, along with its conflict with the Indo-Fijians—who were brought as indentured servants. I will then examine the four coups through the connecting discourse of nation building and liberalization. This will be accomplished through looking at the work of various authors discussing the weakness of Fijian government in its attempt to form a multi-ethnic liberal nation-state, and the conflict this causes with the existing iTaukei Administration (Hegarty et al, 2013; Larson & Aminzade, 2008; Naidu, 2013; Sayed-Khaiyum,

2002). In doing so I hope to tease apart the manifold of conflict and pinpoint specific pieces that have caused state weakness and slowed the penetration of the cash economy in rural areas. This will also help create space to look for potential outlets from the cul-de-sac of hegemonic neoliberalism and reactionary nationalism.

Using a social ecological methodology, explained below, I then will examine an alternative to the narrative of the positives of Western modernity and accepting the de facto regimes of the nation-state and capitalism; along with the hindrance that the cultural autonomy of the iTaukei Administration presents to this. Within this discourse, an opportunity emerges that allows us to look at possibilities other than the cultural alienation and economic domination of neoliberalism and the parochial, reactionary retreat into an imagined past that has been swallowing the globe over the last decade or more. This alternative is neither one of homogenization nor ethnic/national chauvinism, but of Unity-in-Diversity, a method of multi-cultural autonomy as well as a cultural interdependence sketched by Murray Bookchin to denote the importance of fecund, evolving *humanitas* expressed in the many ethnic and cultural sensibilities around the world, in contravention to a homogenizing ‘oneness’ of development discourses around globalization, where culture is reduced to a matter of consumption.

Methodology

In looking at the framework from which to approach the understanding of the history and present context of Fiji and its people, I will use social ecology (SE) as the dominant method of inquiry. It was developed largely by theorist Murray Bookchin through the 1960's and into the early 2000's, and continued by others after his death in 2006. Social ecology holds tremendous potential as a method of critique and inquiry, as it is fundamentally a synthesis of the Marxist critique of capitalism combined with the anti-authoritarianism of anarchism and a deeply ecological outlook (Bookchin et al, 2015, p 25). Originally developed by Bookchin as a tendency within anarchism (Biehl, 2015), its premise is pithily stated that “the very notion of the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human” (Bookchin, 2005). Social ecology synthesizes anthropological, sociological, scientific, and historical theories to posit that systems of domination and control have developed within the social sphere of humankind, and then spread into our very conception of the biotic world, rendering it from a fecund process of evolution and complexity into a stilted pile of resources over which we are destined to rule (Bookchin, 2005; Chodorkoff, 2014).

In this conception, social ecology provides a nexus for many varied forms of critique to slot into, allowing unique analyses to come together into a coherent whole. This gives SE an ability to evolve and diversify, rather than becoming a rote series of dogmatic tenets to be digested and regurgitated. In this way, it can maintain its integrity as a method of inquiry while including an ever more diverse system of critique. Feminism, anti-racism, anti-capitalism, utopianism, post-scarcity, urban design, and indigenous liberation can all be synthesized together, yet taken separately as needed. It also explicitly rejects aspects of environmental and ecology movements that rely on mysticism or misanthropic tenets—particularly in the deep ecology movement (Bookchin, 2005). We do not need to treat the life of a human the same as a mosquito, nor do we need to posit that the earth is a goddess that must be protected with prayer and worship. It also rejects an anthropocentric view of human dominion over nature.

This method of inquiry is not merely negative—it also constructs positive visions of the future, and an ethics that is grounded in the natural world. These ethics come from the understanding of nature as a process of evolution toward greater diversity, complexity and subjectivity (Chodorkoff, 2014). While the ethical formulation of SE is explicitly plastic and subject to change as we come to understand more about our universe, there are some basic points that can be pointed to as foundational principles: “If our goal is an ecological society our ethics must ensure complex, diverse societies and cultures that encourage ever-greater degrees of self-consciousness, characterized by respect, participation, equity, and scientific understanding” (Chodorkoff, 2014, p. 149).

Social ecology has the potential to provide alternative pathways to reaching ‘the good life’ by showing alternatives to centralization, domination, and capitalist exploitation. While this description is by no means exhaustive, it does point out central ideas such as the reharmonization of humanity with the biotic world, directly democratic institutions separate and against the State, and an emphasis on diverse and participatory culture building. These things lend themselves to a unique vision of development, and one that has been articulated in various ways by groups calling for an end to development-as-usual.

In doing this, a social ecological outlook seeks to connect disparate phenomena into a coherent whole. Bookchin makes a crucial point on the concept of a formless, shapeless whole versus a carefully constructed, variegated one by saying that wholeness “is not to be mistaken for a spectral ‘oneness’ that yields cosmic dissolution in a structureless nirvana; it is a richly articulated structure with a history and internal logic of its own” (Bookchin, 2005, p. 87). This points to a methodology, not of reduction, but of complexity and gradation—giving it the sensitivity to negotiate the manifold components of our reality. Bookchin goes on to lay out one of the key principles of social ecology: “ecological wholeness is not an immutable homogeneity but rather the very opposite—a dynamic *unity in diversity*” (p. 88). This becomes the political, philosophical, and ethical positions that Bookchin in his later years formulated as a Communalism, a tendency separate both from Marxism and anarchism. The political aspect is known as libertarian municipalism (Biehl, 2013) and the philosophical aspect as dialectical naturalism (Bookchin, 2017).

Ecological vs. Environmental

Social ecology distinguishes itself from liberal forms of environmental analysis in a number of ways. One concept that has persisted in popular environmentalist discourse is a focus on Malthusian notions of population control. This is especially prevalent in discourse on sustainable development, where impoverished and formerly colonized countries are tasked with bringing birth rates down (Escobar, 2012). This notion slips easily into misanthropy, and misconstrues the deleterious effects of corporations and capital as the product of ‘humanity’—thereby forcing a child burning trash to bear the same weight of blame as an oil executive or weapons manufacturer. Another environmentalist concept that dovetails with this is the fetish of preserving a narrowly defined ‘nature’. By this I mean that wildlife preservation can be given priority over the preservation of humanity, impinging on indigenous lifeways through enclosure and cutting off an ecological region from the potential for sensitive human support. One of the important conceptions of SE is of nature, not as stingy and withholding, but as a fecund and giving ‘unfolding’—especially with the help and support of humanity (Bookchin, 2005). In addition to this is the emphasis of individual habits to resist environmental destruction—changing lightbulbs, buying organic food, etc. While these things certainly have a place in reorienting people to a more ecological mindset, it is not nearly enough to combat the ecological destruction wrought by militaries or resource extraction such as fracking or corporate oil consumption.

SE seeks to navigate between the misanthropy of deep ecology/environmentalist movements and the anthropocentric tendencies of other movements (notably Liberalism) that see nature as a pile of resources to be exploited for human interests. This is encapsulated in the formulation of First and Second Nature. First nature, according to Bookchin, is the entirety of the biotic world, understood as a constant unfolding of potential—as evolution itself (Bookchin, 2005). This includes humanity, and those things that humans have built and wrought on this planet (and others). Second nature is conceived as the social world and institutions built by humans themselves and, while still embedded within First nature, is an aspect unique to humanity. Sometimes second nature is erroneously taken to be part of ALL nature (Bookchin, 2004). For example, people might look at collections of animals, and consider them organized

into a hierarchy (one may hear talk of lobsters and chickens' 'pecking order' as exhibiting such hierarchies). This then is used as a way to normalize hierarchy in human society as something eternal and indeed natural. The notion of hierarchy itself is a human conception that has been projected into First nature. Hierarchy, properly conceived, is a social ordering through institutions. Bookchin traces this development in *The Ecology of Freedom* (2005), discussing the development of hierarchy within humanity as a precondition for the idea of nature as something that can be dominated and consisting of hierarchies (consider the naked ideology in discussing the 'animal kingdom').

There is potential for the synthesis of First and Second Nature as 'nature rendered self-conscious', according to Bookchin (2005). This is described as the state when humanity rids itself of hierarchy and comes to live with nature, not as a passive watcher, but taking an active hand in shaping a more fecund nature. Since humanity itself is part of nature, if we can take a generative hand in nature itself humanity can fulfil this potential of nature rendered self-conscious. This is not a forgone conclusion, however; there is no concept of teleology within SE. There is 'potential' which can either be met, or not (Bookchin, 2017). Part of meeting this is for humanity to extricate itself from all forms of hierarchy and domination, for as stated above our ecological problems are rooted in our notions of domination and control. These hierarchies include the class conflict explicated by Marx, but also the various forms of domination that are not related to economic class—hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, colonization, etc. are all included. In addition, the State itself is understood as an institution based on domination and control, and any attempt to flatten hierarchy must be prepared to dissolve the State (Biehl, 2013). This critique of hierarchy has many repercussions, both positive and negative. One of these is the critique of technology; in many societal commentaries popular today technology receives blame for alienating us, killing our imagination, harming the environment, encouraging resource exploitation, and much more. The point that SE makes is that technology is essentially neutral, but embedded in our broader social matrix (Chodorkoff, 2014). In a society based on domination, exploitation and control, technology will reflect these aspects. The upshot is that a society based on equitable relationships and freedom will have technology that reflects these things.

Positionality

Complementing the social ecological framework I have laid out above I will include my own experience and positionality, in order to better situate both the research and myself within it. This project was borne of conversations I had during my service in Peace Corps Fiji, starting in September 2017. As of this writing, I am serving in a village setting in Western Fiji (Ba Province), under the Peace Corps framework of Community and Youth Empowerment. As part of this I teach Health Science at the village primary school, as well as conduct health and sanitation sessions within the village. I have also worked with the youth group (ages 18-35) and Mothers' Club on skill development. The structure of the Peace Corps also requires that I share the history and culture of the United States, which I regard as an extension of imperial soft power into areas vulnerable to neo-colonial exploitation through globalized capitalism.

I am a cisgender white heterosexual male, from a working class background. As such, I have been afforded special privileges within the village, being seen as someone “who was sent to help civilize us” (quoted from a host-country national when we were discussing my reason for being in the village). As part of my service, I have been working to dispel the myths and expectations surrounding Western development, and emphasizing the strengths already apparent within the community, which I will explain further below. This desire to decolonize my service led me to look into the local customs of culture, history and development. During discussions with my host family and Peace Corps local staff, they explained the structure of the village meetings, land ownership, and the culture of *kerekere*, an indigenous practice of mutual aid. Through these discussions, I came to desire to understand the history of the iTaukei people and the link between the limited intrusion of the cash economy into rural areas with the practices of direct democracy and communal land ownership. Being from the United States, I have only ever experienced culture and relationships as something closer to transactions or commodities. As such it was a shock to see the free (literally) flow of food, drink, work and material by the people of Fiji. Given my embeddedness in an iTaukei village, as well as the focus of the Peace Corps itself on rural (overwhelmingly iTaukei) areas, my perspective is necessarily skewed—yet I wish to express my deepest respect for both Indo-Fijian and Rotuman peoples and the half of the country living in urban areas. Being in the country has enabled me to learn the iTaukei language (the national language is English, and is the language of government and the cities), engage in both formal and informal conversations with Fijians of all ethnicities, and have access to research materials that would otherwise be unavailable.

I live on the main island of Fiji—Viti Levu—where most of the main towns are, as well as the capital of Suva. I live in the West in the mountains. It's an interesting experience to be surrounded by mountains, and forget that I am on an island most days. Because of my unique position in Fiji, I am able to experience some of the lived reality of being in the ‘less hierarchical’ culture (as opposed to a more rigidly hierarchical East). In many places there are rigid rules for comportment inside a village, women must wear a sulu (sarong), one cannot wear hats, sunglasses, ‘up’ hair, or sometimes even shoes. In my village these rules are not there, though guests still wear sulus. The houses are grouped together, with people's farms being out in the *vanua* (countryside). Horses, cows, goats, and chickens roam around, sometimes through the village, but mainly in the countryside. In many villages, a chief leads the village and has a special place, yet in my village the *turaga ni koro* (village headman), and elected position, leads

meetings and makes village announcements. My area is heavily Catholic, yet in the village there are several other denominations as well, making for an interesting mix of Christian faith-based activities.

The village has its own primary school, a Catholic school where I teach health science to years 3, 4, 5, and 6. The schools seem to be similar to Australian or British ones, where the teachers recite notes and the children are expected to copy them. I have attempted to do more experiential teaching, which has met with limited success in some ways. The children, though boisterous and cheeky outside of school, are reluctant to be called on in class, or to offer any opinions on issues raised. In one instance, I called on a student to answer a question, and they refused to answer (I had heard them say the desired answer earlier, so I knew they knew it), just sitting in their seat with their heads down. After a year of mixing note taking with more interactive methods, though, the students have become more animated and are more willing to participate, especially if the lesson involves games.

Houses are simple, most made from a frame of timber and walled with corrugated iron. Many of the houses in my village were blown away in 2015 from cyclone Winston, which devastated Fiji and from which many areas are still struggling to recover. As such, new houses are built with a base of concrete and cinder block, with corrugated iron covering the upper walls and the roof. We have access to water, though I must filter or boil it because our dam is open and animals poop in it/ fruit falls in and rots. There is a water filtration system at the front of the village, but it sits unused and broken—water sanitation is not a high priority in the village, though this has been changing through engagement and discussions. We have access to fairly stable electricity, thanks to the proximity of the Vatukoula gold mine. Cell phones are common, especially amongst my generation, but otherwise appliances are rare. Those families that have TVs or refrigerators are met often with a *kerekere*.

Kerekere can be loosely translated as “please”, but contains within it a lot of deeper connotations. As stated above, there is a mutual aid network the people call the ‘*kerekere* system’, where you can rely on members of the community to provide just about anything—indeed, in my research for this paper I came across instances of people asking for TVs, lamps, furniture, and much more. One can walk to any house and sit in for a meal, or ask for a place to stay. No one in a village will lack for food or a place to sleep. In addition, it is customary to work together on projects—if you are building a house, the men in the village will come to help, and the women will come with tea and baked goods. A heightened level of communal culture in this case comes with a diminished individual or private culture, which was a hard adjustment as someone from the USA. Open doors are the norm, and if yours are closed people become curious as to why. It is part of the culture to come and sit, smoke, play music, drink kava, and eat at someone’s house out of the blue. So, some days turn into impromptu parties. Some people have jobs, but mostly people look after subsistence farms of cassava, dalo, bele, and other crops. Mangoes and papaya are seasonal treats, along with guava. Typically, people will go in the early morning before sunrise to move cattle and horses to different pasture, weed their crops as needed, or get firewood. If there is any labor to be done (building, repair, or similar things) these are done in the morning. Once lunch comes around, the village gets a lot quieter as people eat and then spend the next few hours *vaka cequ*, or resting. Walking thru the village at this time will show people in each house laying on the floor sleeping, playing cards, or chatting.

I find this an interesting contrast to my own experience, because I grew up in a rural farming community and the differences are stark indeed. As opposed to agricultural plots farmed by family or clan for subsistence, the area I grew up in has miles of either corn or soybean farmed by one or two families. Houses are spaced hundreds of yards or miles apart, and there is no real coherent community. In the village in Fiji it is possible to live for weeks or months without needing money of any kind, since there is no rent to be paid, food is easily pulled from the ground, and water is available—which represents how little the cash economy has penetrated into rural Fiji. Yet in the US (even in rural areas) one has no other option but to participate in the cash economy. Some people in the village sell things, there is a canteen for things like oil, flour, and the like—however, most of these money-making projects are run as cooperatives, where people buy in and receive a payout after so many months. To my mind, these differences represent the extent to which relationships have turned into mere transactions in the US—a symptom of the deleterious effects of capitalism on social relations.

Origins and History of the iTaukei Administration

To begin our analysis, we must examine the form and content of the iTaukei Administration, to see the extent of its impact in Fiji. As with any historical telling, there is much that must necessarily be omitted for brevity and coherence, but which is still important. In 1875, Fiji officially became a British colony under the Deed of Cession (Macnaught, 2016). The Deed was the product of the self-styled King of Fiji, Ratu Cakabau, and representatives of the British government. While this agreement purported to include all the islands of Fiji, the people of the western areas were not included in this decision, and initially refused to go along with its stipulations (Norton, 2012). The western section of Fiji is historically less hierarchical, and did not consider itself to be under the rule of King Cakabau—who was an eastern chief—which meant his agreement was an overreach of power (Macnaught, 2016). To prevent widespread rebellion and resentment of British rule, the first Governor of Fiji, Arthur Gordon, organized a regiment of eastern Fijians to go and suppress uprisings in the west. We can see this as classic divide-and-conquer strategy used in European colonialism of favoring a minority against others. Once this one done, Gordon created the Separate Administration to help execute the policy of indirect rule in Fiji.

The Separate Administration (later re-named the Fijian Administration, then again to the iTaukei Administration) was an attempt to codify what the British knew of local cultural practices into law, and to ensure that they worked to empower colonial rule. This administration bracketed out the iTaukei population from the governmental and economic functioning of the colony, because the apparatuses of governance used to control the European capitalist settlers was incompatible with the various lifeways of the indigenous people (Sayed-Khaiyum, 2002). Gordon felt strongly about the preservation of the iTaukei culture, and as such the administration was meant to structure a hermetic system of governance (and control) that would allow the colonialists to conduct their business without entanglement from the iTaukei themselves. It was meant to be a brake on development of the indigenous people, as Sayed-Khaiyum (2002) points out:

Gordon believed the Indigenous Fijians had to be buffered from the rigours of the everyday capitalist/commercialised life, which the European settlers had evolved to handle and handle well. Indigenous Fijians needed guidance to slowly ease them into the next stage of evolutionary development as it were. In the meantime Gordon decided the Indigenous Fijians needed protection from the ‘other’, the European settler, in particular the unscrupulous ones (p. 32).

From this we can see a paternalistic attitude towards the iTaukei, and the plan to slowly ‘develop’ them into the highest form of culture—Europeans. This is the beginning of a push-and-pull between development, westernization, and the penetration of the capitalist economy and that of the traditional lifeways of the iTaukei people. This tension will persist through the rest of the history of Fiji up to the present day (as explained though this paper).

Broadly sketched, the system broke the Fiji into 12 *yasana* (provinces), later expanded to 14, with each *yasana* containing a varying number of *tikina* (districts). The *koro*, or village, is the smallest unit. Each of these units has a chief, or *tui* that is in charge—the *Roko Tui* for the province, *Buli* for the district, various local chiefs, and the *Turaga Ni Koro* (translated as ‘village headman’) at the village level (Parke, 2014). Each of these communal units has its own council, which meet together to take care of issues, and then meet with the next level up to confer. For example, in my area we have a *bose va koro* (village meeting) every month, and then every three months the *Tikina* chief will come to meet with our village and discuss issues pertaining to the district. The village level is guided by a set of created village bylaws, which vary from village to village. In addition, the chiefs of the village and the village headman will meet every quarter of the year to collaborate on district issues and nominate members to the provincial council meeting, held twice a year (Rotuivaqali, 2012). The provincial councils help to coordinate development within the villages, from infrastructure to investment. They are also empowered to create and run public-private corporations and cooperatives in order to help economic development in rural areas and generate iTaukei controlled capital, but as Rotuivaqali (2012) notes in her survey on provincial accountability, graft and corruption of those in charge (many of them of chiefly status) is rampant.

<u>AREA</u>	<u>OFFICIAL IN CHARGE</u>
<i>Yasana</i> (Province)	Roko Tui
<i>Tikina</i> (District)	Buli
<i>Koro</i> (Village)	Turaga Ni Koro

Issues discussed pertained to tax collection, issues raised by the communities about sickness, religion, infrastructure, and culture. It should also be noted that the Separate Administration was conceived exclusively as a rural institution, and never extended into city/town areas. Part of the administration was meant to structure the lives of the iTaukei people, from marriage and divorce, laws forbidding fornication, and to prevent iTaukei peoples from leaving their villages without permission from a chief, which stayed in place largely until 1967 (Sayed-Khaiyum, 2002). This essentially rural conception will pose many challenges in the future, as towns and cities grown and the iTaukei begin to move freely into them.

These chiefs were codified into law as hereditary positions within the various *mataqali*, or clans. The exception to this was the village headman, who was chosen to act as a secretary and administrator to the local village chiefs (Macnaught, 2016). The most powerful of these clans would form confederations with each other, and a *bose vakaturaga* (Council of Chiefs) was created with the chiefs of these confederations and various powerful clans to be the head of the Separate Administration, with Gordon himself as the lead chief (Norton, 2012). This council was later renamed the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* (Great Council of Chiefs). These chiefs conferred with the colonial government, passed down decrees and delivered taxes collected by their provinces.

It is important to note that chiefly status before colonization was not typically hereditary. As Aubrey Parke states: “Dominant status and leadership mainly depended on achievement rather than on birth, reflecting individual ambition, internal rivalry and success in war” (2014, p. 13). The liminal state of the chiefs is confirmed by Timothy Macnaught (2016), who says:

A traditional chief presiding over the cycle of service and tribute, drawing together the constituent groups of a local society under the aegis of ancestral and other gods, was only superficially the autocratic paterfamilias he seemed to outsiders. In truth he was at one intersection of a flexible web of horizontal and hierarchical ‘paths of the land’ (p. 3).

For a more thorough diagram of the structure of the iTaukei Administration, please see the example in the front matter. This is crucial to understand; the mutable nature of the iTaukei chiefly position becomes institutionalized and ossified into a monolithic structure through British colonization, which sets up one of the intertwining conflicts explored in this work. Where once culture was held by chiefs as a matter of ritual, the creation of the Separate Administration conferred significant political power onto the position, creating what Macnaught calls a “neotraditional identity” (2016). In conferring this power in the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) made up of mostly eastern chiefs, he also set the stage for another thread of conflict.

In creating this Separate Administration, Gordon also ensured that the land of Fiji would be inalienable from the *mataqali* that laid claim to them. This process was fraught, as until Europeans appeared there was no unified system of land ownership (Macnaught, 2016). Before Cession, European capitalists were settling in Fiji and taking over land for sugarcane and other agricultural production. An interesting aspect of this is that many people came to plant cotton, because the American Civil War had caused prices to skyrocket (Sayed-Khaiyum, 2002, p. 26). Gordon reversed many of these sales, and codified communal land ownership into law (Macnaught, 2016). “Native Dealings ordinances limited the amount [of money] that could be recovered from a Fijian in the courts. Labour recruiting was closely regulated. Alienation of Fijian land, except to the Crown, was halted, and leases limited to twenty-one years” (Macnaught, 2016, p. 8). To this day, over 80% of the land in Fiji is owned by the various *mataqali* of Fiji. The codification of land rights was a long and contentious process, where any party wishing to lease land would have to meet with clan leaders who owned the land (“The Creation of TLTB”, 2018). The leases length was in the beginning up to 21 years. In 1940 the creation of the Native Land Trust Board (later renamed the iTaukei Land Trust Board) centralized land leasing under government control on the owners behalf.

The iTaukei Administration effectively created a dual-power administration, with the GCC having a hand in any legislation and implementation that the Government of Fiji creates (Appana & Abbott, 2015). I say ‘dual-power’ because this system was implemented parallel to the colonial government that took care of the aspects of governance that wasn’t deemed to directly affect the iTaukei population. The Separate Administration applied only to the iTaukei, and in its current form situated in the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs still holds a separate power for the iTaukei, who could until 2018 interact with local bylaws, deal with leasing land and receiving rents all through this Ministry. This is in distinction to other ethnic groups, which have

to go through the general State apparatus common in the liberal nation-state. In this way, the iTaukei people have cultural autonomy codified into the government, separate from general State oversight that others are the subject of. The GCC was seen as the voice of the iTaukei people, and they met with the Governor of Fiji to advise on policies, in addition to ensuring the decrees of the British were followed and enforced (Macnaught, 2016).

While the Separate Administration was supposedly implemented in an attempt to preserve the culture of the people of Fiji, it took a specific part of the Fijian culture, tied to a specific geography, and raised it up to be a representation of the entirety of Fijian culture. It also had the effect of ossifying the iTaukei culture at a certain point in time. As John Nation puts it: “Before cession brought British sovereignty, warfare enabled some places to rise and caused other places to fall in stature. After Cession the whole order was supposed to have been ‘frozen’ in that warfare could no longer expand or contract the power and status of a *vanua* and its chiefs” (1978). The enshrining of the rigid hierarchical organization of the eastern chiefly system helped to create gatekeepers of Fijian culture, and convenient methods to help institute the will of the British (Tomlinson, 2006). In this way, we can see the aspect of collaboration that Arturo Escobar discusses in *Encountering Development* (2012); colonization was not simply something forced on the iTaukei people, but something the elite of Fiji actively participated in and shaped. This included providing taxes, labor, and ensuring that villagers did not leave their villages without permission (Macnaught, 2016; Rotuivaqali, 2012). The chiefs of Fiji thus became the official voices of the people, as well as the holders of their culture (Appana & Abbott, 2015). They also worked with the British administration in Fiji to help implement policies (Macnaught, 2016), turning these chiefly positions into both cultural and bureaucratic positions.

The iTaukei people were confined to their villages, denied common role voting (only the GCC was allowed to pick government representatives)—power was concentrated in the “chiefly class”, both politically and culturally (Macnaught, 2016). These laws were kept in place until 1967, just before Independence, with the abolition of the Native Regulations (Lawson, 2016). Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the Separate Administration was the collection of communal taxes, rendered in-kind in the form of monthly labor or quotas of produce and organized by the *Roko Tui* (Macnaught, 2016). Significantly, these laws were coordinated thru a separate system of courts apart from the colonial government. Colonial police rarely interfered with iTaukei peoples, and only if they lived in Suva or a larger town (Macnaught, 2016). It could best be thought of as a literal second government within the Fijian colonial government, with its own unique laws, courts, and governance structures. In this way, we see the simplification of iTaukei culture into a monolithic entity, tied to one specific geographic and hierarchical expression. Fiji itself turns out to be a complex and multifaceted group of islands, with the unifying term of “Feejee” imposed upon it by Europeans (Parke, 2014). The makeup of Fiji is diverse, as it is a meeting point in both the Melanesian and Polynesian migration patterns (Norton, 2012). Thus, there was a wide variety of cultural practices among different islands, and even differences amongst the main island of Viti Levu itself.

The people of the west living in the mountains of the Ba and Ra regions, and the outer islands, lived in far more egalitarian communities, with the chiefly position either not existing, or

being merely a symbolic title (Macnaught, 2016; Norton, 2012; Sayed-Khaiyum, 2002). The interactions of iTaukei people were much more fluid than the codification of the Separate Administration would be able to allow. The *mataqali* had a significant dependence on location, rather than blood ties (though kinship does still play a role). It was, and still is, common for a distant relative to make a lateral integration into another family if they move into another village (Nation, 1978). Indeed, in order to be included in the deliberations of the *koro*, one must be formally included into one of the village *mataqali*. As I will explore later, this presents structural barriers for any non-iTaukei living in the area to be included in the local decisions—creating a sort of de facto disenfranchisement.

Though a certain cultural perspective has been enshrined into law, other traditional customs continue, submerged just below the surface, to emerge when the legal and extra-legal customs come into conflict. This diversity of cultural expression can be seen in the numerous dialects of the iTaukei language (Nation, 1978); in fact, these ‘dialects’ are perhaps better described as different languages altogether, with different sentence structures and different alphabetical constitution. During my training, I had to learn the *Bau* dialect that was taken as the base for iTaukei language during Cession. Yet in going to my service site, I had to learn a specific dialect of *Na Colo* (the mountains) common to my region. The language one uses immediately identifies one as coming from a certain geographical location, be it the mountains or any of the over 100 habited islands that make up Fiji. Anecdotally, when I give the traditional greeting of my village—*Colo gali*—in the cities and towns around Viti Levu, I am immediately recognized as living in the mountains of Ba. This lingual difference is included with different customs of respect and, as noted earlier, different relational status to hierarchies. In this lingual variation we can also see the work of the colonial administration to affect cultural monopoly. The British, working closely with Ratu Cakabau and the chiefs of the south-eastern islands, declared that the Bauan dialect should be the lingua franca of the iTaukei people. *Bau* is the home island of Ratu Cakabau, and the dialect from this area is still taught as the “Fijian” language, with other dialects not being allowed to be spoken in schools.

Girmitya

Gordon’s attempts to ‘preserve’ Fijian (iTaukei) culture by creating the Separate Administration was immediately met with the challenge of making the colony profitable and satisfying the European settlers’ demands. To walk the line of cultural preservation and profit, Gordon ordered the import of indentured servants known as Girit from India (Norton, 2012; Macnaught, 2016). ‘Girit’ comes from the Indian understanding of the word ‘agreement’, which they signed to come to Fiji. So, starting in 1875 and continuing until 1916 the British brought thousands of Girmitya from India to work sugarcane fields for the British (Macnaught, 2016). The logic of this approach was that the iTaukei population would be kept in their villages—their culture would not suffer the trauma of being uprooted in order to suit the needs of sugarcane farming. The Girmitya in turn would satisfy the need for labor in order to make the

Fijian colony profitable for the Crown (One wonders what the colonizers thought of the culture of the Indians themselves). Many of the Girmitya stayed in Fiji after the end of their contract, and their descendants have constituted a non-indigenous group. There have been fluctuations over the last century, but the population Fiji as of 2007 consists of 54% iTaukei, and 38% Indo-Fijian (Naidu, 2013). Until 2006 the indigenous population was known simply as Fijians, and the descendants of the Girmitya as Indians. However, the current Fiji First party government has declared that the term “Fijian” should include everyone who is born within the nation-state of Fiji. This has led to the identification of the indigenous population as iTaukei (translating to “keepers of the land”) and Indo-Fijians, although this has yet to fully integrate into common language usage.

Manifold Tensions: an Analysis

Let’s examine the various actions of the British in simplifying and institutionalizing the culture of Fiji, and the forced importation of Indians into Fiji, have created significant tensions that echo through history and are clearly felt to this day (Naidu, 2013; Lason & Aminzade, 2008; Lal, 2012, 2006; Fraenkel, 2009). Ethnic tensions have been fairly persistent between the iTaukei and Indo-Fijian population, and its origins and persistence have many implications. Fiji has had four coups since its independence from Great Britain, and in each case one of the animating factors has been iTaukei animosity toward the Indo-Fijian population and the perception that they are displacing the indigenous population. However, the beginnings of this tension can be traced back to the inherent disparity between the European capitalist interest in agriculture and the subsistence farming traditional iTaukei peoples. As Vandana Shiva point out in *Earth Democracy* (2016), class inequalities created by capitalist globalization can become masked, appearing as ethnic conflicts: “As diverse cultures experience a threat to their values, norms, and practices by globalization, there is a cultural backlash. When the cultural response does not simultaneously defend economic democracy and create living economies, it takes the form of negative identities and negative cultures” (p. 105).

The iTaukei could not be mobilized into the capitalist economy without dissolving their communal way of living, and so the Girmitya were brought in. Put bluntly: “There was... a contradiction in the colonial society between the European-dominated capitalist economy and a Fijian social system perpetuated on the basis of subsistence cultivation” (Norton, 2012). Norton goes on to say that the Indo-Fijian pressure on iTaukei land and its creation of tension between the two groups can be clarified by pointing out the conflict is implicitly between the capitalist desires of Britain and the social system of the iTaukei. The Indians were the bulwark put in between the European and iTaukei peoples, to satisfy the European desire for profit without eliciting iTaukei hatred of Europeans. “At this stage the 'divide and rule' doctrine became increasingly important to ensure that the two communities did not inter-mingle to the extent that either changed the prescribed orientation and position of the other in the wider scheme of governance for the country” (Appana & Abbott, 2015, p. 95). The Indo-Fijians who stayed in Fiji

could rarely find land of their own to settle on and farm, and thus resorted to working in cities and leasing land from the iTaukei population. This resulted in the swift proletarianization of the Indo-Fijian population, who were unable to escape the cash economy and had to sell their labor in order to survive—in contrast with the iTaukei people, whose protected status within the iTaukei Administration stalled the intrusion of the cash economy into villages (Macnaught, 2016; Norton, 2012; Sayed-Khaiyum, 2002).

This tension has created in Fiji an interesting paradigm in relation to indigenous movements worldwide. In Fiji, the iTaukei are indigenous, and face anxieties of being replaced by another population. The Deed of Cession is seen by those in power as the original outline of indigenous rights in Fiji, establishing the promise of “Fijian Paramountcy”, or the idea that the iTaukei should first and foremost be protected from displacement. This is functionally enshrined in the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, which contains the systems of the iTaukei Administration outlined above as well as the iTaukei Land Trust Board (TLTB), which records the *mataqali* lineages, handles leasing and payouts to *mataqali*, and border disputes as they arise. We can see in this the creation of what Timothy Macnaught (2016) has called neotraditional culture, or a culture seen as traditional but based on a mélange of pre- and post-Cession systems.

In addition, the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) had a political hand in legislative efforts, vetoing or augmenting bills as they saw fit, and communal voting rolls, which ensured the larger population of iTaukei would have control over Parliament (Macnaught, 2016; Norton, 2012). Despite the power codified in the GCC, there is still a vibrant democratic life within the village and district *bose*, which allow for a large degree of local autonomy in cultural and developmental aspects of everyday life, as opposed to the rigid structure of power at the top of the iTaukei Administration.

These things have ensured preservation of indigenous rights, but have created a de facto second class of citizens in Fiji, i.e. all of the peoples who aren't included in the *mataqali* roles. This group is well over 45% of the population of Fiji, the overwhelming majority of which are Indo-Fijians. Being excluded from these roles cuts off access to over 80% of land, monetary benefits from leasing land, and being included within the local decision-making process of villages, districts, and provinces that the iTaukei Administration facilitates. The formal governmental process for redress is not nearly as robust as the systems of the iTaukei Administration, lacking any inherent institutions of direct democracy such as the *bose*. We can see in this brief history of the Fijian Administration the creation of a neotraditional culture, where colonial boundaries were put on a richly textured and vibrant collection of cultures, ethnicities and traditions in order to create the concept of the ‘native Fijian’. Further, we can see how this structure was designed to sit upon the cultural foundation of the Eastern chiefs to serve as a structure to support both the divide-and-conquer and indirect rule strategies of the British Empire.

Development Discourse of Fiji

Here it is worthwhile to look at what the development paradigm of European and chiefly elites, to see expectations for Fiji have been as well as their desired outcomes. This will allow us to add another thread the manifold of interpenetration tensions explicated above, in order to identify their role in the frustration of the nation-state and hindrance of capitalist penetration into rural Fiji. To begin with, as stated above, the import of Girmitya rendered the iTaukei people and their culture superfluous to development. The European capitalists were able to make profit without investing much time or effort into the iTaukei population. In this way, the iTaukei were left out of the development discourse (Norton, 2012). However, after indentured labor was outlawed in 1916, the Indo-Fijian population gained an upper hand as workers—cheap labor could no longer be imported, so the Indo-Fijians had an advantage in negotiating for better wages. So, in 1920, dissatisfied by stagnating wages and increased prices of commodities, they went on a massive strike throughout the Suva area. Norton points out that this shattered the perception of Indo-Fijians as subservient workers and scared the Europeans who relied on their labor for profit (2012). As the strikes were going on the iTaukei population was initially sympathetic, lending shelter and supplies to the striking workers, but missionaries and the GCC (at the behest of their European counterparts) convinced the people to turn against the Indo-Fijians—helping to break strikes and to cut cane in place of Indo-Fijians (Norton, 2012). This event proved to be a paradigm shift in the perceptions of Europeans; as Indo-Fijians were demanding treatment equal to them, they came to see the iTaukei as allies against a potentially rebellious Indo-Fijian population (Macnaught, 2016). Thus, the iTaukei entered the discourse of development.

This alliance was cemented further in the 1930s when Indo-Fijians began pressing for governmental equality with Europeans, including common roll voting. At that time, parliament had one Indo-Fijian member who was nominated by the Governor, as opposed to six elected European seats and two iTaukei seats chosen by the GCC (Macnaught, 2016). The Europeans worked with the iTaukei chiefs to quell this call for equal voting rights, using the Deed of Cession as a reification of the British role of guarding the iTaukei against Indo-Fijian encroachment. It is important here to underscore that the chiefs themselves were the totality of colonial political power for the iTaukei people, and the chiefs sensed a threat in the Indo-Fijian push for common roll voting—if they achieved it, surely the iTaukei people would also want to vote for their representatives in the colonial government, a terminal threat to the absolute political power of the chiefs (Norton, 2012).

These instances are examples of the roots of racial tensions between iTaukei and Indo-Fijian peoples. Typically, they have been enflamed and salient when Indo-Fijians presented a threat to the hegemony of both European and chiefly control. In this way Indo-Fijians have become scapegoats for the effects of British colonization, a stigma that exists to this day, and becomes apparent whenever a coup occurs. This represents another aspect of the intertwined conflicts: not only is there tension between Eastern chiefly elites and the ‘common’ iTaukei, there is also tension between the chiefly elite (in collaboration with British government) and

Indo-Fijians. The iTaukei people for the most part only took part in racial violence at the behest of the chiefly elite, who used their positions as cultural gatekeepers to cement racial tension for political ends. This was seen clearly in the lead-ups to both the 1987 and 2000 coups, where ethnic hatred was enflamed through the rhetoric of ethno-nationalist parties, conspicuously headed by chiefly elites (Norton, 2012).

It also represents a paradigm shift in the development discourse of the Europeans and their counterparts in the GCC for the iTaukei people. The 1930s saw a move by them to encourage iTaukei people to commercially cultivate their own land, rather than leasing it to Indo-Fijians. At this time there was no pressure to join the waged workforce, as the cash economy had yet to penetrate the villages and islands throughout Fiji. In 1936 the GCC decreed that land unused for subsistence farming or living be opened up for development, culminating in the centralization of leasing rights by the government in 1940 (“The Creation of the TLTD”, 2018). In this way, the Europeans and chiefly elites hoped to push the ‘reserve labor’ of iTaukei villagers into production (Norton, 2012; Macnaught, 2016). This also coincided with liberalizing reforms in the iTaukei Administration in order to make a transition from “Communalism” to “Individualism” (Norton, 2012; Spate, 1960). John Nation states in *Customs of Respect* (1978) that:

Development... is more fundamentally higher income due to greater production resulting from the increased productivity of more scientific methods of agriculture. The key to this modern commercial agriculture was thought to be individual initiative. The Fijian administration was seen, therefore, as not merely expensive and unnecessary, but actually harmful to economic growth because it hampered individual initiative (p. 48).

O.H.K. Spate’s commentary on the Burns Report (a development report released in 1960) stated that communal systems ought to “...disappear as soon as possible. Probably nearly all detached and informed observers would fully agree that this system and its institutional expression, the Fijian Administration, are very strong brakes on the advance both of the Fijians and of Fiji, and should be got rid of...” (Spate, 1960, p. 54). Spate himself had produced a development report in 1959. According to another study of development commissioned by the colonial government in 1969, John Nation (1978) makes this point: “There is a temptation to rank villages or provinces along a scale of ‘development’ according to the degree of penetration of the cash economy. Watters’ study tends to make this kind of ranking judgement, using the term ‘westernization’ as an occasional synonym or substitute” (p. 36). The claims in these reports are that the iTaukei lag behind their Indo-Fijian counterparts in employment, income, quality of life, and access to basic necessities.

We see over and over again during the period of the early 1900’s to roughly the 1950’s this conflict between Fijian communal society and the desire for ‘individualism’ masking the deeper penetration of the capitalist economy. One British official claimed that “salvation... was for Fijians to become more like ‘the sturdy yeomen’ of England were romantically understood to

be: hardworking, individually self-sufficient, thrifty farmers and artisans, loyal to their social superiors and devoted to their families in the privacy of picturesque, clean little cottages with separate bedrooms” (Macnaught, 2016, p. 15). We see in this the spinning wheels of teleological development—that a people must progress from backwardness and chaos into a prim and superior society—consequently modeled by British capitalists.

Yet how does a system, of which the political power-holders explicitly collaborate with European colonialists, produce such a strong negative response and push for abolition? The answer, I would like to posit, is two-fold: the retention of inalienable land rights and the living culture of everyday lifeways of the iTaukei people. As stated above, they rarely were involved in the colonial government (the GCC held all the power), and did not have to be involved with the capitalist economy (as this was populated with Europeans and Indo-Fijian workers). While these systems were whirring along, the iTaukei kept a subsistence economy supplemented with money got from land leasing, and practiced a vibrant political life apart from colonial government structure. To explain this analysis, I rely on the distinction in social ecological thought between ‘Statecraft’ and ‘Politics’. “A State, by its very nature, is structurally and professionally separated from the general population—in fact, it is set over and above ordinary men and women” (Biehl, 2017, p. 1). In *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* (1987), Bookchin traces the origins of politics and political institutions from early formations in tribes and clans, through the Athenian polis, and to the current day—and in so doing draws a distinction between Statecraft and Politics. Statecraft is the current understanding of the political process, of representative democracy, elections, congressional or parliamentary processes, and most conspicuously, the threat of violence that undergirds noncompliance with the State.

In contrast to this is Politics, the engagement in a public body by people to decide their own affairs. Some components of this are its directly democratic aspect, and its scale of face-to-face decision making. The critique that SE makes of the current political terrain is that Statecraft is employed to stifle truly political movements and organization, and as such has acted to sterilize communal consociation and direct the focus of people from each other onto the mechanics of the Nation-State. In Bookchin’s words: “Aristocracies, monarchies, and republics ultimately dissolve the body politic as a participatory entity, and essentially ecological phenomenon into an amorphous mass of privatized “social” beings we so aptly call an electorate or a constituency” (1987).

The systems of the State have over centuries colonized the very notion of politics itself, until the very notion of politics has come to be synonymous with statecraft “In past centuries, before the emergence of the Nation-State, politics was understood to mean the activity of citizens in a public body, empowered in shared, indeed participatory institutions. In contrast to the State, politics, as it once was and as it could be again, is directly democratic” (Biehl, 2017, p. 5). Though the State has been acting in ways to sterilize these methods of political organization in Fiji, they have persisted. This is because the State can be thought of, not as an overruling power in the lives of the people for most of this time, but as a temporary inconvenience. The State and its officials are concentrated in certain areas, while most people carried on their everyday lifeways and political processes. This analysis enables us to see that while the GCC was politically expedient to the British, communal control of land and politics independent of them was not.

Indeed, the European capitalists who had settled in Fiji before Cession saw this as an attack on liberty, and they “despaired of Fijians ever being accorded the full personal liberty of British subjects, the liberty above all else to sell their lands and become a free-floating pool of labour” (Macnaught, 2016, p. 8). What we see in this is the roots of a conflict still very much in play today—one between the profit motive of capitalists and of the collective culture of Fiji. Macnaught (2016) goes on to explain: “The native taxation scheme was particularly resented by the European settlers: more than anything else it gave teeth to the government policy of insulating Fijians from the need to divert their labour resources to the plantations, and to become wholly dependent on local merchants” (p. 8).

What we see here is a nascent development discourse surrounding the iTaukei people and their relationship to both land and labor. During this time, there was increasing pressure from capitalist penetration to make the colony profitable in the wake of the end of indentured servitude and the demand of Indo-Fijians for both wages and representation equal to that of their European counterparts. This would mean stifling the communal way of life still very much entrenched in Fiji. Macnaught (2016) encapsulates this progression quite well, saying:

Whenever possible Fijians were trying to subvert, so to speak, the economic goals of the colony by subsuming them into more congenial and traditional ways of meeting their needs. Whereas in the nineteenth century the government valued the stability this state of affairs gave to the colony and recognized the satisfactions of Fijian social life as good in themselves, in the twentieth century the proponents of more material progress were to become impatient with a society that showed such disrespect for individual profit (p. 26).

We can see the origins of the discourse of development in Fiji as a method of exerting power and control over both Indo-Fijian and iTaukei populations by European settlers and chiefly elites embodied in the GCC. This is not something that went unnoticed by the iTaukei themselves, who began to chafe under the Great Chiefs when they stopped the reciprocal nature of the traditional chief-commoner relationship: “...it concerned Fijians... when they did not take place with the customary sense of proportion and reciprocity, or when the Bauan [Eastern] chiefs (the main culprits) and others failed in their return obligations” (Macnaught, 2016, p. 40). This gives us a glimpse at the mutable nature of the chief-commoner relationship, where power and status were imbued by the people into a chief as their representative, and the chief was expected to reciprocate through magnanimity and support. When this relationship began to break down, conflict between the upper and lower strata of iTaukei society intensified.

It is important then, to look at the results of this policy of liberalization on the iTaukei and Indo-Fijian peoples. Put succinctly, the iTaukei were directed to farm the land for themselves, and stopped leasing land to Indo-Fijians; which caused mass unrest with the latter population. To the dismay of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) though, the iTaukei were less industrious in the production of sugarcane, leaving the company with less product than they had with Indo-Fijian workers. One British official in charge of supervising iTaukei planters gave instructions on how to plant sugarcane, then left to attend to other business. When he came back he found: “The men had already gone home. To his disgust he found that the cane tops had

been thrown anywhere into the furrows, uncut, and with a foot or two exposed to the scorching sun” (Macnaught, 2016, p. 24).

In addition, there was rising sentiment amongst the iTaukei that they could cut out Europeans from the land leasing arrangement (Norton, 2012). Within this milieu, the iTaukei and Indo-Fijians in parliament and in factories began collaborating, seeing common ground between themselves against the white colonialists, with Indo-Fijians and iTaukei collaborating on leasing and labor without consulting the colonial government. The response by a prominent chief and member of the GCC Ratu Lala Sukunato was to centralize control of the land in the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB), later renamed the iTaukei Land Trust Board (TLTB) in 1940, and to reorganize the iTaukei Administration (“The Creation of the TLTB”, 2018). The centralization of land leasing, done ostensibly to rationalize land leasing practices, had the effect of taking land issues out of the hands of the *mataqais* and placing it in the hand of a newly reorganized and bureaucratized iTaukei Administration, working closely with the British colonial government. This is a reversal of the move toward ‘individualization’ pushed in 1930s, and the chiefly elite, which had been losing influence over the iTaukei people, were more firmly tied into the bureaucracy of the iTaukei Administration. Appana & Abbott (2015) state that: “This acceptance, of the centrality of chiefs, by the colonial administration was in no small measure due to pressure and support from ‘hard-pressed European mercantile capitalists.’” (p. 96). In this way, the chiefs of Fiji were cemented as the dual actors of holding authority over the *vanua* and the wielders of political bureaucratic authority (Norton, 2012; Macnaught, 2016).

This shift in the 1940s and beyond accompanied a conscious reversal of the previous move toward individualism, and the village was taken to be the ideal site for economic growth (as opposed to the commercial production encouraged through the 1930s). As time went on, there began to be more and more of a separation between the chiefly elites and the commoners, a tension which had been forcibly snuffed out with the reversal of ‘individualist’ development in the 1940s and the investiture of the chiefs with much more extensive bureaucratic power. However, this conflict has been building again since then: “Commoner assertions of individual rights and aspirations are clearly being pitted against chiefly authority with greater regularity. This is closely linked to an ever-widening rural-urban divide that continues to shrink the domain of the chief.” (Appana & Abbott, 2016, p. 104). This is an instructive example of the tension that exists between traditional lifeways and the push for development. It is important to see the actors in this tension, and to be able to identify who is benefitting from these pushes. “A function of these institutions”, as Norton points out, “was to support the dominant capitalist enterprise by facilitating its access to land for use by Indian farmers” (2012). In this way, we can see the discourse of development in Fiji has been in an effort to solve the contradiction of the communal society of the iTaukei with the need to sustain a parallel capitalist economy.

According to research in 2003 on inequality in Fiji, Sriskandarajah lays out the political motivation and vacuous rhetoric of inter-ethnic economic inequality. In this report they lay out data collected to show income statistics from 1977 through the mid-90s, which shows a relatively equal incomes from the middle of both iTaukei and Indo-Fijian populations (Sriskandarajah, 2003, p. 316). The political implications are clear: “Importantly, perceptions

about inequality are often coupled with a feeling of vulnerability among *both* major groups... These perceptions, and the grievances they generate in both groups, create the possibility of ‘inter-communal malaise (Premdas, 1993) and pave the way for political entrepreneurs to exploit grievances to their own advantage” (Sriskandarajah, 2003, p. 317). Interestingly, the report points out that since the 1970s intra-ethnic income inequality has grown significantly, and the highest income group consist of Chinese and European descended people. Yet despite this, the British colonialists and then political/chiefly elite iTaukei have used economic inequality as a wedge issue to inflame racial tensions—with many of the ethno-centric political parties implementing ‘development projects’ at the expense of non-iTaukei populations (Sriskandarajah, 2003). Stated by the report: “Redistributing income along ethnic lines is unlikely to be effective in achieving equality in Fiji” (Sriskandarajah, 2003, p. 320). This report on income should also carry with it an understanding that income is but one factor in understanding equality, and that the non-commodified advantages of rural iTaukei villages (access to land, food, water, & shelter free of cost) is left unremarked upon.

As part of my service, and in concert with my research for this paper, I have tried to unbury the assumptions and expectations for my being placed here in this village. When Peace Corps staff does consultations with potential service sites, they discuss with the community what development is and the potentials of having a Peace Corps Volunteer. What I have found, through my own experience and in discussions with other PCVs, is that oftentimes our communities see themselves as passive objects of development—asking “what will you do for us?” or “will you help make us more civilized?” These questions are disturbing to me, and I have worked to discuss with the community that they have the potential and ability to direct their own development, and that I would be happy to serve and support, but wouldn’t tell them what must be done. We made a development plan together, with me holding meetings with the various councils and age groups to get a sense of what kinds of projects and needs the community saw for itself. Then, in the monthly *bose*, I held an information session and instant-runoff ballot voting to decide the order of projects/issues. From this a list was created and given to the *turaga ni koro* for safekeeping and use.

A more ephemeral part of my service has been to discuss the differences between the US and Fiji in terms of land and culture. I have worked to invert the perception of the US society as a pinnacle to be achieved, and emphasized the deleterious effects of capitalism and land alienation. This is especially effective in relating my experience in a small ‘village’ in the US, and the many differences around and between people. I also seek to answer candidly questions of US militarism and imperialism, especially regarding our invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. Fiji has a military whose main actions are serving in UN Peacekeeping forces in the Golan Heights, so there is some interest in the area. I have also tried to make explicit the potentials and pitfalls of capitalist penetration into the countryside, discussing land issues and how losing control of land to corporations destroys ways of living. While I am not allowed to make overt political statements regarding the Fijian nation-state, most of the people I discuss this with bring up the Fiji Pine Corporation and the Vatukoula gold mine, both of which operate in the area and both have leased large amounts of land for industrial/agro-industrial development.

The Gradient of Democracy

Within the liberal developmental discourse, the capitalist economy is discussed in terms of promoting ‘individualism’ and the ‘liberalization’ of Fijian society. As we will see, this tension has been a major factor in the instability of the post-colonial Fijian nation-state. It has also—not by accident—been tied together with the racial tensions that have also been a large factor. Along with development and liberalization must come democracy, and that the structure of the iTaukei Administration hinders representative democracy. In recent development discourse, the concept of ‘participatory development’ has become popular (Kindon, 2009). The participatory approach calls for the inclusion of the various stakeholders in the subject of development—be it new farming techniques, construction, or new education methods. While this is useful in many respects, it also presents a problem of re-creating power dynamics between North and South participants (Kindon, 2009).

As Farrelly (2011) ably shows in her study of the Bouma area of Fiji, implementation of participatory, democratic processes does not necessarily lead to political empowerment, and indeed can lead to difficulties in stakeholder led development. The study conducted follows the development of an eco-tourist park in the north of Fiji, on Taveuni. As part of the development of this tourist site, a method of participatory decision making was introduced in an effort to make the development more egalitarian. Yet, after a few years of the site being up and running, there were threats from some community members to burn the resort down, and one *turaga ni koro* had been murdered over disputes about said resort.

In investigating, it was discovered that the participatory processes were implemented from the top-down, and ignored the indigenous processes that were already in place (Farrelly, 2011). An important factor that resulted from this oversight was the split of the decision-making processes into component parts—one process for the management and administration of the resort, and one for local political issues. This is a standard Western method of management, but is foreign to the iTaukei people. For the iTaukei, the concepts of land, community, economy and prosperity are all corded together in one expression—*vanua*. Literally translated, it means “land” or countryside, but the implication is that the land, spirits, and the people are tied together, as is their prosperity. It is the unification of social, political, and economic interests.

As may have become clear, the management of an eco-resort is much more than a business venture, but indeed the management of the prosperity of the people themselves. Thus, it cannot be reasonably separated out by western style of decision-making. Quoted from Farrelly, (2011):

The majority of the Bouma community make every effort to live their lives *va’avanua* or “the *vanua* way”. Living life *va’avanua* requires that an individual encourages and maintains social harmony and social solidarity. There is no direct translation of “success” in the Bouma dialect. Indigenous Fijians may refer instead to *sautu* as an ideal goal. Nabobo-Baba (2007) describes *sautu* as “good health and wealth” in which good health is explained in terms of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual wellbeing and

wealth is “an abundance of material resources ... but more importantly ... a wide and healthy network of relationships” (Nabobo-Baba, 2006, p. 74).

This point about participatory decision-making development is not to denigrate it as such, but to point out that within a specific context, certain methods of participation and democracy are incompatible with the methods of indigenous peoples. In some ways, says Kindon: “participation operates as a new form of tyranny subjecting people to particular disciplinary forces- facilitation, participatory and visual methods and group analysis in public spaces - often reproducing the very power relations it was supposed to subvert” (2009, p. 526). The resort in Bouma is still struggling to resolve the contradiction of fast-paced Western conceptions of bureaucratic decision making and slower paced, consensus based decision making. This is also to show that within the discourse of development in general, and participatory approaches in particular, there can be an inherent paternalism of ‘democracy’ in its western conception. Another point to consider is the tension in miniature between the paradigm of economic development through ‘participation’ in the capitalist economy and the paradigm of living *va’avanua*.

In Fiji, this direct democracy is embedded both in system of the iTaukei Administration though the *bose va koro* and the cultural practice of *talanoa* (story telling). *Talanoa* sessions are essentially informal spaces where people will talk, usually in a circle and involve the drinking of kava. This forum is a method of decision-making and consensus building, as well as for disseminating information. Farrelly also points out that: “...formal *talanoa* in village meetings provides “the opportunity for ‘slow thinkers’ to be engaged in the discussions ... [T]he philosophy of *talanoa* is centred on an open-style of deliberation, focusing on respect, tolerance, flexibility, openness and fairness” (Robinson & Robinson, 2005, as cited in Farrelly 2011, p. 827). In a *talanoa* people combine chatting about their day and gossiping with any business or larger decisions that ought to be made. This can make the sessions extend for hours as people show up, chat, drink kava, and weave any proper business throughout. This can be seen as inefficient from a western development perspective, preferring a professionalized style of decision making. In addition, it in many places can have elements of hierarchy within it, as with privileging elders over youth, or men over women.

In her work on indigenous direct democracy, Eleanor Finely points out that such democracies are incompatible with market-driven social relations (2016). She lays out the structure of three indigenous systems of direct democracy in the Americas, and their employment as a form of resistance to globalized capitalist and state intrusion. In Fiji however, the indigenous decision-making process is institutionalized first within the colonial governance, and then in the state apparatus. This has led to some complications and contradictions within Fiji; as outlined above, political and cultural power have been invested in the chiefs, who have become a hybrid of state and traditional power. Yet, in the local context of the village, the people gather in *talanoa* sessions to elect their own village headman (or woman, though this is far less common), and typically a village meets monthly to review the workings of the village, make decisions, and organize and employ resources.

Usually, a *bose va koro* consists of the various councils giving reports to the village at large, concerns are brought to light, and plans of action are made. The councils can change from

village to village, but broadly speaking there are councils for women, youth, crime and mediation, finance, health, religion, elder care, and cultural preservation. If the village looks to do a project and needs funds, they perform a *solu* (fundraiser) to pool resources, or give it to support families in need. So, while the upper strata of the iTaukei Administration is tied to a chiefly power elite, the grassroots consists of a directly democratic form, with an emphasis on the harmony of the *vanua*. These village councils operate mostly autonomously, since there is no official governmental oversight or enforcement, especially in the islands and remote portions of Fiji.

In the monthly *bose* in the community I live in people will show up early to *talanoa*, smoke cigarettes, drink kava and joke before transitioning into the meeting, where discussion is a bit more structured and kava is drunk in a ritual manner. During this time, the various councils debrief and discuss both the previous month and plans going forward. Recently, a decision was reached to charge each household \$2 (FJD) a month for the use of piped water, in order to help fund the maintenance of piping and to afford a cover for the dam (which is currently open and has become a sanitation issue). Village meetings, bylaws, and existence of councils changes from place to place for numerous reasons, which results in a gradient of democracy. Some of the bylaws restrict women from participating in the meetings (one *turaga ni koro* took time in a meeting to admonish the women present for speaking too much), some have inactive councils, meetings can be held infrequently, and in some cases the *bose va koro* has broken down completely.

It seems that in villages that are close to towns and cities, population can balloon quickly as the urban sprawl grows, causing a breakdown of the ability to have face-to-face meetings. Some villages hold *bose* based on clan ties, as opposed to geographical ties, leading to several meetings taking place in a single village. This is in addition to well documented issues of graft and lack of accountability in the provincial councils (Rotuivaqali, 2012). Yet, as Bookchin discusses in his work on dialectical naturalism, it is important to look at the lived reality of cultures—the forms of freedom as well as the legacy of domination—and to recognize that unfulfilled potential does not negate potentiality as such (2005; 2017). The fact that some of these meetings and councils partake in forms of oppression and domination does not mean that they do not have a potential to become organs of non-oppressive direct democracy.

It must be remarked upon that nearly all the literature discussing Fijian development, nation-state, economics and constitution I have come across frame the need for democracy as a State issue. They discuss the need for democracy as a necessary step to support the development of market capitalism in Fiji, and repeatedly mention that the iTaukei culture must ‘change with the times’ to accommodate the new economy. Yash Ghai (2017), in his analysis of the most recent constitution, states that: “Fiji is caught up in a culture that is based on the organisation of an outdated economy” (p. 197). In a social ecological analysis, this configuration is almost directly backwards—a state reduces the experience of democracy and cultural vibrancy. We see this borne out in the establishment of the iTaukei Administration itself, as it was a reduction of culture and an implementation of state methods of control, like the GCC. Yet as things filter down, we find a fecund operation of grassroots democracy. In these reports, many of them

claiming to be objective, we see unburied the ideology of Capital and State, appropriating democracy and economic ‘development’ for themselves and reducing Fijians to objects of development. We will look at a case study of this below, but the impact and vibrancy of everyday directly democratic lifeways in Fiji warrants much further study and support.

As hopefully has become clear from earlier analyses, the iTaukei Administration is a complex system, weaving together traditional, neo-traditional, colonialist, communalist and individualist strands that have caused a lot of conflict and different parts become salient as different avenues for development are constructed. We can see the local direct democracy graduate into hierarchical structures, foremost of which is the Great Council of Chiefs. This sensitive analysis must be kept in mind as we discuss the potentials and effects of the iTaukei Administration in relation to ethnic conflict, state weakness, democracy and the liberal nation-state.

Urbanization Against Citizenship in Fiji

In looking at the development of capitalist penetration into Fiji, we can use towns and cities as a useful weathervane. The concept of a city as the potential site for the formation of inter-ethnic citizenship is one closely held in social ecology. Parallel to this is a critique of the devolution of cities into a sprawling, shapeless urban mass. In Fiji, this can be examined through the bloated growth of cities—Suva, Lautoka, Labasa, and their satellite towns. As of 2017, the total number of people living in cities is 55.9% (FBoS, 2018). Typically, there are two ways Fijians interact in the flux between urban and rural. For the iTaukei people, cities serve as a site for income generation as well as finding a spouse. Money earned in the city is brought back to the village and family, and often an iTaukei person will work until they have enough money to achieve a project (building a new house or business) or to live off for a few months, and come back to the village. In this way the village serves as the anchor, and people will go into a city to siphon out funds from the city. One major exception to this are those who hold civil service or educational positions—they make up the portion of the city that can be called a suburb. The experience of Indo-Fijians, Rotuman, and other structurally landless communities experience city life in much the same manner as we would find familiar in the US, renting apartments or living in government provided housing and working continuously to afford their daily, monthly, and yearly expenses.

The massive growth of urbanization is evidenced in the large ‘squatter towns’ that have sprung up mainly around the cities of Suva and Labasa. These areas are sprawling and ramshackle towns built of cheap and discarded materials to form crude houses, and as of 2006 represented anywhere from 16%-24% of urban housing in Fiji (UNICEF, 2007). People living in these areas look for work, but are living in a liminal space between governance structures—there is no municipal, traditional, or national institutions that can coordinate these squatter settlements, resulting in tenuous and unsafe conditions for the residents. Those that come to these squatter

towns largely do not have the benefit of familial or traditional networks, and are proletarianized through being subjected to waged labor and unsanitary housing conditions.

The city factors prominently in social ecological theory as a site to help bring together people, historically breaking the blood-tie of tribal bands and serving as the loam from which a common notion of citizenship can blossom. The city then becomes a site for a conscious creation of culture and society, allowing for a fecund exchange of ideas, practices and exchange. It also served as a site of resistance for nascent and developing States. According to Bookchin (1987):

“Confederations...were the principal political weapons for resisting—and, for a time, diminishing—state power. The struggles for confederated Rhenish cities in the late Middle Ages against the Holy Roman Empire and of the confederated Spanish cities against Charles V during the Reformation era can be cited as partially successful attempts to abort or restrict imperial and national power” (p. xx).

Yet, as capitalism has molded the city into instruments of capital accumulation, there has been a corresponding destruction of the city itself and the rise of the urban sprawl. This includes the destruction of public spaces in favor of commercial spaces, and the penetration of state control mechanisms that supplanted the more common municipally confederated structure that rivaled the nation-state.

In addition, the devolution of social life from the homogenizing effects of capital and hierarchy radiate out from the urban sprawl to consume the rural life as well (Bookchin, 1987). Where in the past there was a relationship between the city and countryside that could be both in conflict and in tension, the trend of formless urbanization has supplanted both city and country into itself. In looking at the squatter towns, we see this being played out. As globalized capital penetrates into Fiji, it causes people to become decoupled from their cultural, social, and political contexts and become free-floating labor. This is a desideratum of globalized capitalist markets—in the Global South this process is named “development”.

It represents a breakdown of any kind of coherent forms of governance, as the State seeks to impose its will upon these areas and any face-to-face direct democracy becomes unwieldy. This is true in the villages surrounding towns as well, as they grow in size the *bose* begins to break down. However, as stated above there is still a relationship between city and country that exist together for the iTaukei villages. Rural areas are statistically poorer than those living in the city, and as such most of the development efforts have been focused on this area, and specifically the iTaukei people. While this is discussed elsewhere, it is important to note that most of the people who live in rural areas have the means of traditional lifeways available to them, which do not register on many development reports, whose focus is on income, GDP, and production.

State Failure in Fiji

Holding the tension between communal lifeways and the capitalist economy in mind (along with the inter- and intra-ethnic tensions that augment and give vent to it), let's examine the literature around the post-colonial nation-state of Fiji. This will allow us to pinpoint the role of the iTaukei Administration amongst the manifold of interpenetrating conflicts. In order to do so, we must take a brief survey of the four coups that have occurred in Fiji which have brought many scholars of state instability and have earned Fiji the nickname 'coup coup land'. After, I will examine the literature about the causes of state weakness in Fiji, specifically focusing on the work of Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, current (as of 2019) Attorney General (AG) in the Fiji First government. While at first it looks to be state weakness, parochialism, and under-development caused by maintaining a system of cultural autonomy, there turns out to be a swirl of interpenetrating causes. Tensions between a heterogeneous 'iTaukei' people (Eastern Chiefly elite versus a less hierarchical West); between iTaukei chiefs as holders of both power and culture and 'commoners'; between the iTaukei and other ethnicities (most notably the Indo-Fijians); and between the communal culture of the iTaukei with the individualism and homogeneity demanded by a liberal capitalist nation-state. These tensions have erupted into open conflict and resulted in four coups during Fiji's post-colonial statehood.

Fiji became an independent nation-state in 1970. Under the newly formed government, one party held sway for over a decade. The Alliance, headed by the Fijian National Party (FNP) was led by a prominent chief, Ratu Kamisese Mara, and was the party mostly composed of iTaukei and had the support of the chiefly elite, many of whom were active politically with the party, either explicitly or through the GCC. The Alliance billed itself as the party of iTaukei paramountcy and the preservation of chiefly rights (Lawson, 2016). In 1987, the Alliance party was unseated by a multi-ethnic coalition headed by Fiji Labour Party (FLP). The election was fraught, with Labour campaigning on economic and welfare issues, ending corruption, and lowering unemployment. The Alliance party framed the election as a potential attack on iTaukei culture—after all, the Alliance Party was headed by a powerful chief, and many of the officials accused of corruption were themselves chiefs (Norton, 2012). One must look at the rhetoric before the election, with the Alliance framing the election in terms of iTaukei custom versus foreign invasion—indeed one chief claimed that “without a chief there is no Fijian society” (Lawson, 2016, p. 59).

The Labour leader, Timoci Bavadra, pointed out that an abuse of chiefly power, and a bias of eastern chiefs in positions of power, had left the west of Fiji under-developed. Labour won with large support from the Indo-Fijian population, and a record high (though still small by comparison) amount of support from the iTaukei population—mostly from western Fiji. This shows the emerging unity of cultures through trade unionism and shared economic interests (Lawson, 2016). Under the 1970 constitution, there were communal role voting for election which favored iTaukei delegates, which meant that no matter the outcomes the racial makeup of parliament would remain the same (Norton, 2012). This is important to understand in the context of the backlash of the election, when opponents accused Indo-Fijians of taking over the

government, with the intention of curtailing iTaukei paramountcy. This was far from the truth, yet the government in 1987 was overthrown by Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka on the grounds that he was protecting the indigenous peoples of Fiji, and their revered chiefs (Sayed-Khaiyum, 2002). Yash Ghai (2017) points out in his analysis that this coup in actuality marked the zenith of chiefly power. While the losing Alliance leaders claimed they had no known of the coup conspiracy, Lawson (2016) claims that there is little doubt that they had knowledge of these plans.

As the interim government began the process of crafting a new constitution, Rabuka expressed dissatisfaction with the direction they were heading, and again overthrew the provisional government in September of that same year. The construction of the new constitution continued to enshrine communal voting, reserving specific spots in the legislature based on race, with a majority going to the iTaukei, and the GCC was allowed control over certain legislation perceived to effect indigenous cultural matters (Ghai, 2017). The party sponsored by the GCC, called the *Soqosoqo Vakavulewa n iTaukei* (SVT) and headed by Rabuka was elected to power (Sayed-Khaiyum, 2002). As far as development goes, special programs were created for the economic, social, educational and cultural advancement of the iTaukei people (specifically in rural areas), to the exclusion of Indo-Fijians. In addition, indigenous institutions like the TLTB was given more autonomy (Ghai, 2017). Yet the iTaukei people were split, says Lawson (2016):

Despite, or perhaps because of, guaranteed political predominance, disunity continued to characterise intra-indigenous Fijian politics. This disunity together with continuing international opprobrium surrounding a constitution that discriminated so deeply against a population on the grounds of race were no doubt factors that influenced a rethink of political arrangements (p. 62).

The resulting review produced a new constitution in 1997, opening up more seats in the legislature to common role voting and a (slight) reduction in the power of the GCC—it could nominate fewer legislators, but still retained the right to appoint the President and Vice-President (Ghai, 2017; Lawson, 2016). Under this new constitution, the SVT lost the elections of 1999 (Sayed-Khaiyum, 2002).

The FLP won again, elected with Mahendra Chaudry as the first Indo-Fijian to become Prime Minister. This perceived assault on indigenous rights (though again, the GCC and indigenous rights were still firmly entrenched in the constitution) eventually saw George Speight and fellow conspirators take government members hostage in 2000 (Lawson, 2016). This was again done in the name of preserving “Fijian Paramountcy”. Yet this coup split the GCC—even though they had overseen and approved of the 1997, they were riven with political rivalries and ethno-nationalism, and were unable to respond (Lawson, 2016). The military instituted an interim government, and when the 1997 constitution was reinstated and new elections were called the leader of this interim government, Laisenia Qarase, was elected using the same nationalist rhetoric espoused by Speight himself (Lawson, 2003; 2016). As part of this violent re-centering of the iTaukei Qarase introduced the succinctly titled “Blueprint for the protection of Fijian and Rotuman rights and interests, and the advancement of their development”—a twenty year development plan to give iTaukei and Rotuman control of half the economy by 2020

(Sriskandarajah, 2003). A further report by Vijay Naidu (2013) examined this development plan, with debt forgiveness to iTaukei business, preferential taxi licensing to iTaukei applicants, and extra money to iTaukei Schools, ended up funneling money to upper-class and politically connected iTaukei, and left impoverished communities unchanged (p. 13-15)

In 2006 Voreqe Bainimarama overthrew Qarase and his government in the name of anti-corruption and ‘good governance’. He famously declared it a “coup to end the coup culture”. This overthrow, unlike the others, had support from Indo-Fijians, as Bainimarama’s rhetoric promised an end to communal voting and a racialized government. This coup was indeed a reversal, perpetrated by a non-chiefly iTaukei against the chiefs and their party and expressing a desire to end racist governance in Fiji. The GCC earned his ire when they would not support his coup (as they had done with Rabuka and partially with Speight), and in 2007 he suspended the council by fiat. Bainimarama and Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum then led a military regime from 2006-2014, suspending courts and legislation while ruling by decree (Ghali, 2017). During this time speech was severely restricted, and there were reports of torture by military and police during this time (“Beating Justice”, 2016) as well as “suppression of basic human rights and increasingly vindictive administration” (Ghai, 2017, p. 194). The 2014 election saw the official election of Bainimarama and his Fiji First party. The election was deemed free and fair, but both Lawson (2016) and Ghai (2017) attribute its overwhelming success to the regimes suppression of association and the media, combined with rural development projects (road and bridge construction, as well as water piping) it had been implementing since 2006.

The Bainimarama government should not be construed as one built on the wellbeing of the people though. More accurately, it can be said to be the neoliberal state coming to fruition through the attempted stifling of not only ethnic autonomy, but of trade unions as well. Since my coming to Fiji in 2017, there has been one major strike of airline workers, as well as several smaller strikes. In each one, Bainimarama has made statements against the trade unions, saying they are harming national unity and causing divisions in society. This seems to be a recurrence of ethnic rhetoric brought to the scale of the nation-state. As with much of the ethno-nationalist rhetoric before this, it also serves to mask the interest of capital, and framing any threat to capital as a threat to ethnic or national identity. As Arturo Escobar (2012) has stated: “scratch at a management scheme, and you’ll find a power and cultural struggle, even if couched in terms of rational action” (p. xvi).

It is hard to miss the entwined notions of race and class here, embodied in a multiracial party pushing for economic changes and an end to corruption, and a party headed by mostly eastern chiefly political elites. This is a drama that seems to repeat itself through the history of Fiji, something of an eternal recurrence. What is the way out? The logic of the system seems to imply that a disassembly of the iTaukei Administration is necessary for the equality of Indo-Fijian and iTaukei peoples—to ensure the stability of the liberal nation-state. However, what this logic fails to grapple with is the necessity of the liberal nation-state itself, and its attendant economic model—capitalism. As has been outlined above, there is an inherent tension in the *vanua* lifeways of the iTaukei people and the pull of profit in a capitalist economy. This is

necessity of preserving the liberal nation-state through a reduction of cultural autonomy will be explored later.

For example, "communally held property rights constitute, by virtue of their continuing existence, a form of anti-capitalist resistance." (Fenelon and Hall 2004, 162, as cited from Finley, 2016, p. 7). It is interesting to look at this in the context of Fiji, where communal property rights are encoded within the government. This is another frame to look at the instability within the nation-state itself. The nation-state is constituted as a support of the capitalist economy (Öcalan, 2017; Bookchin, 2005; Karatani, 2014), and thus having a form of anti-capitalism within the nation-state itself would contribute to a systemic fissure and weakness. In this way, conflict tends to arise when either of these entities experience a seismic shift. This contradiction was attempted to be squashed in the 2006 coup in what Bainimarama called "the coup to end the coup culture". The result of this was to disband the GCC, suspend the village bylaws, and to focus on the "economic development" of the iTaukei people. As has been shown above, this discourse of economic development is a disguise for the institution of neoliberal economic reforms. It is not insignificant that one of the motivating factors for the coup was a bill that would revert monetary control of coastlines back to *mataqali* control instead of private control (Lal, 2012).

The current development paradigm laid out by the Fiji First party is shifting increasingly to focus on the economic development of the iTaukei people. There have been a number of governmental policies directly aimed at this group of people, under the justification that they are lagging behind economically to the Indo-Fijian population (Naidu, 2013). This indeed is the current focus of the Peace Corps in Fiji. Our mission framework is Community and Youth Empowerment, and an overwhelming majority of the Peace Corps Volunteers work in rural iTaukei villages, teaching at schools and participating in community development and projects related to healthy living. Indeed, the current Attorney General, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, wrote a Master's thesis on the need to create space for the iTaukei people to develop economically.

The major obstacle that stands in the way of this progress, says Sayed-Khaiyum, is the cultural autonomy institutionalized in the iTaukei Administration (2002). In his work, he states that in order to have a functioning nation-state, any type of cultural autonomy that diverts support and allegiance from the state itself must be eliminated, or there will be a constant conflict among the people and a weakness of the state:

If groups (and individuals within those groups) recognised as homogenised entities pledge their 'first' loyalty to their own institutions of autonomy rather than to the official nation-state or the centre then it is an enormous paradigmatic shift from the classical Liberal view of citizen-state relationship. This shift could in all likelihood weaken the very foundation of the Liberal nation-state. The asymmetrical relationships not only transmute 'notions of the organisation of the state, the rationalisation of public power and homogenising mission of the state but it has ramifications on citizenship, loyalty, identity and nationhood (Sayed-Khaiyum, 2002, p. 6)

Let us explore this claim in further detail, its premises and conclusions. As stated above, there is significant evidence that the state weakness can be traced to an ethnic division between Indo-Fijians and iTaukei peoples. However, peeling this premise apart revealed a manifold of intertwined causes, which must be analyzed in order to see another path. To lay this out explicitly, we have examined that racially motivated attacks are not uncommon in Fiji, especially in the coups. However, as Norton (2012) pointed out, these attacks are relatively restrained in comparison to other ethnic tensions around the world, lacking popular support outside of urban areas. This is not to make them seem insignificant, but merely to point out the corresponding level of co-existence that iTaukei and Indo-Fijian peoples experience as part of their day-to-day, lived experience. Quoted from Norton's *Race and Politics in Fiji*:

The conjunction of economic inequalities with pronounced cultural and social divisions contains the potential for catastrophic conflict. Yet Fiji presents us with something of a paradox on the spectrum of so-called "plural societies". Perhaps more than most of them it contains the conditions one might expect to produce violent struggle. But the most significant feature of ethnic conflict has been constraint, not acrimony and confrontation. What is most notable about Fiji is not the potential for catastrophic conflict but the countervailing social and political processes that have encouraged accommodation. These processes show the reality of a society transcending the ethnic division (Loc. 150).

This is contra other incidents of coups within the context of ethnic conflict, where violence wracks the country in both urban and rural areas. Norton (2012) goes on to explain that in the coup of 1987, the ethno-nationalist movement failed to develop outside of spheres of political leaders. Another layer to explore is the economic tensions of the capitalist economy penetrating into the communal spaces of the iTaukei, and how this can be masked as an output of ethnic intrusion, sometimes from Europeans, but mainly from Indo-Fijians. On top of this is the implication of how racially motivated grievances are spread and maintained by a chiefly elite, who are the gatekeepers of both cultural and state-political power. We can then add to this the reality that iTaukei culture is not monolithic, and indeed the established chiefly elite are mostly from eastern Fiji, who have a particular cultural outlook, which has stoked resentment from the iTaukei peoples of the West (Macnaught, 2016).

Sayed-Khaiyum (2002) has pointed out that the cultural autonomy enshrined in the iTaukei Administration is an ossified version of culture, keeping it stuck in a conservative model, as opposed to a living cultural model. This is supported by the work of various historians and anthropologists, as pointed out by theorists like Vandana Shiva in her discussion of "Living Cultures" (2016), or Wolfgang Sachs in his discussion of "Fortress Thinking" (Acosta et al, 2019). Shiva notes that: "Living cultures are based on cultural diversity and recognizes our universal and common humanity" (p. 97), whereas negative or exclusive cultures consider diversity and pluralism to be weaknesses to be eliminated. Sachs discusses the same phenomena in the introduction to *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (2019), describing fortress thinking as a neo-nationalism that seeks to revive a golden past of an imagined community. In

order to retain its integrity, its leaders want to all themselves off from other cultures and ethnicities, as well as the globalized market.

These premises are solid, and well supported, but the conclusion Sayed-Khaiyum comes to is disputable. His conclusion is that cultural autonomy itself must have a sunset clause, to ensure the unity of the nation-state, and to allow for the development of the iTaukei peoples and to bring them into the globalized world. We have explored the discursive nature of development by European and then iTaukei elites in Fiji—usually a cover for allowing the penetration of the capitalist economy into the country, which has been tried through various time periods, and has resulted in cultural upheaval and is typically reversed as the iTaukei peoples do indeed start entering the ranks of wage earners and agricultural production.

When this is done, it is done in a way that itself subverts the state—as exemplified by the iTaukei people being pushed to participate in industrial agricultural production. In so doing, they stopped renting to their Indo-Fijian counterparts, but to the dismay of the colonially owned CSR, there was no economic pressure on the iTaukei to produce their required quota (Macnaught, 2016; Norton, 2012). And because the Indo-Fijians had no land to farm, there was no one else to go to. This alarmed the colonial state, as it struck a blow to the most important aspect of their rule—the bottom line. The decision was reversed when the Europeans realized the iTaukei people were moving toward shutting them out of the profit. These can be looked at as the creation of negative cultures described by Shiva (2016), where exclusion and disparity destroy identity and culture. This negative culture sees exclusion as a key feature of a revitalized culture in the face of homogenization through globalized economics, most often accomplished through violence. We have also looked at the problems of development in a general context, along with its attendant critique of capitalism. In this way we can begin to find the fault lines in the conclusion of Sayed-Khaiyum, who posits as a desideratum the ending of cultural autonomy and the need to fully participate on the global stage as a liberal nation-state.

However, here we can sketch a critique of the nation-state within the context of development, capitalism, and the specific context of Fiji. In his book *The Structure of World History* (2014), Kojin Karatani lays out an argument that the toppling of monarchies in the bourgeois revolutions of 1848 obscured the inter-connection of economy and politics, allowing the emergent nation-state to appear as if it is independent of economic interplay. Recovering this intimate connection between state and capital allows us to see the nation-state as a particular form of enforcement for the interests of capital. This is shown throughout history, including in ‘real socialist’ countries. Bookchin (2004) points out, in his critique of actually existing socialism, that even these states did not take significant steps to abolish capitalism, but merely centralized it into a form of “state capitalism”, with its attendant bureaucracies and class exploitation.

This connection can be seen clearly in how the tension between cultural autonomy and the state tends to play out along economic lines—in addition to other forms of hierarchical exploitation. Strengthening the nation-state will deepen the penetration of the capitalist economy into the land of Fiji, both literally and metaphorically. Thus, adopting a critique of development and capitalism as exploitative of peoples must also include a critique of the nation-state: “The

design of the nation-state, the ideal arena for the creation and expansion of capitalism, has become an obstacle in the era of globalization” (Esteva, et al., 2013). This turns many arguments about the stability of Fiji on its head, as many theorists take all three of these factors to be desirable for Fiji. If we upset these conclusions, then a lot of the rationale behind disempowering the cultural autonomy of the iTaukei becomes nonsensical. Indeed, as has been shown by recent indigenous movements around the world in places like Chiapas, Northern Syria (Rojava), and Turkish Kurdistan (Bakur), cultural autonomy can be a model for stateless, directly democratic peoples (Egret & Anderson, 2016; Escobar, 2012; Knapp, et al, 2016; Öcalan, 2015) . This is also flourishing in non-indigenous communities, such as in Portland, Barcelona, and Venezuela (Ciccariello-Maher, 2016).

We can see from this analysis that interpenetrating conflicts between Eastern and Western iTaukei, between chiefly and common, between iTaukei and Indo-Fijian (kindled and enflamed largely by the power elite of the iTaukei) erupt as the globalized capitalist economy sinks deeper into Fiji. This causes a cyclical rupture of ‘development’ where iTaukei are pushed to homogenize into the liberal nation-state framework, but react by falling back onto ethno-nationalism and a desire for paramountcy above others. This has led to four coups, each resulting in the steady weakening of the iTaukei Administration, culminating in the dissolution of the Great Council of Chiefs, a suspension of village bylaws, and an increase of land lease length from 21 to 99 years.

The Current Landscape: Status of Fiji and the Fijian Administration

The current Fiji First Party (FF), led by the onetime coup maker Voreqe Bainimarama represents a homogenizing push to turn Fiji into a stable nation-state, ready to participate in the global market by dismantling institutions within the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. In 2012 Bainimarama officially abolished the GCC, after having suspended it in 2007 after his coup. During this decree, he officially made the term ‘Fijian’ apply to all born in Fiji, while noting that ‘iTaukei’ would refer to indigenous peoples (Field, 2012). In 2018, Bainimara suspended consultations for creating updated and official village bylaws (Cava, 2018). This was after many rounds of consultation with various regional, political and NGO groups in preparation for their update and reimplemention under the new constitution. In addition, land controlled by the TLTB has begun to be effectively alienated through 99-year leases: "the government has set up Committee on Better Utilization of Land (CBUL) and the Land Use Unit, which is responsible for the ‘land bank’ scheme. CBUL seeks to identify idle land to bring it into productive use. Land-owners voluntarily designate land that they do not need and also indicate their preferred use of the land. The state then leases out the land to investors for up to 99 years” (Naidu, 2013, p. 16).

This neoliberal restructuring has been opposed by Sitiveni Rabuka (leader of both 1987 coups) and the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODEPLA), formed in 2013. This party is explicitly an ethno-nationalist party, and have promised to abrogate the newest constitution of

Fiji, calling it illegitimate and having been forced on the people during the reign of Bainimarama (Ratuva & Lawson, 2016). The party has promised to bring back communal voting and forcing a specific ethnic makeup of parliament. This is expressly counter to liberal democratic notions of universal role voting, where citizens are free to choose candidates regardless of ethnic background. Vandana Shiva (2016) makes the point that: “Representative democracy in this context [of economic globalization] becomes increasingly shaped and driven by cultural nationalism. Cultural Nationalism emerges as the twin of economic globalization” (p. 65).

In the 2014 elections, for the iTaukei people “was between SODELPA’s conservative cultural preservation approach or FF’s cultural transformation and socioeconomic modernisation strategy” (Ratuva & Lawson, 2016, p. 36). The choices presented by the nation-state are revealed in their limitations. As Shiva (2016) points out: “Politicians must win elections but cannot intervene in economic processes on behalf of the public. Instead of economic justice, they therefore capitalize on cultural and religious identity and insecurity” (p. 72). As such, the iTaukei people have been pushed by first the British, and then Fijian government to join the cash economy by getting jobs in the cities, signing long-term leases on *mataqali* land to be productively developed, and to rely on the government (Naidu, 2013; Sayed-Khaiyum, 2002), as opposed to the grassroots direct democracy associated with the iTaukei *bose*. In this milieu of swirling ethnic conflict and capitalist development the roots of ethno-nationalism are nourished and allowed to grow. The real test of whether Fiji has been liberalized enough to overcome its stigma of being an unstable state will come once a peaceful transfer of power happens. This would represent a new party displacing the dominant one without triggering another coup. This has yet to happen in Fiji in its post-colonial history, as whenever power has been transferred from the dominant party to a challenger, a coup has occurred.

I was in the country during the 2018 elections, and was surprised at how tense the country was, yet how placid the village was. In reading newspapers and articles online, the rhetoric from both SODELPA and FF were negative, and the shadow of the previous coups hung over all of it, receiving mention from time to time. A few months before the election, Fiji First held an extensive program in the West of giving out disaster funding in relation to the recent (but relatively small) Cyclone Keni. Families were entitled to up to \$2,000 FJD. While I have not seen anything linking it explicitly, the timing of funds dispersal is not something I would count as coincidence. I was given special instructions by the Peace Corps staff to be ready to leave the country in the event of a coup, and my travel was restricted for weeks before and after the election. Yet in the village, there was very little discussion of politics or of the situation at all, even when I was able to ask benign questions or listen in on conversations during kava sessions. One of the few instances when politics became salient was when the parties would come to the village and host meetings in the community hall, to explain their positions and give out materials and swag. I was forbidden from attending these by the Peace Corps staff, so I was only able to hear about them secondhand from friends in the village.

A Social Ecological Critique

Using a social ecological method of inquiry, let's look at the iTaukei Administration, the nation-state of Fiji, and the ongoing penetration of the capitalist economy. So far we have examined the tensions inherent in the iTaukei Administration, its effect on the colonial and nation-state project, and how it has been an brake on 'development' (consumption of land and labor for the global market), as well as how these weaknesses have contributed to state failure. First, as has been established, the iTaukei Administration was established in an effort partially to preserve iTaukei culture, and partially to facilitate easier colonial rule. However the former was at odds with the needs of the capitalist ventures of the British, and thus Indian workers were brought in to ensure the profitability of the colony. Again, this importation of peoples has been a source of conflict, and has been a factor in four separate coups—indeed a significant factor in the weakness of Fiji as a nation-state. The cultural autonomy of the iTaukei has been a fissure in the supposed unity of the 'Nation-State', if the Nation is separate from the State, then weakness must necessarily result. The Indo-Fijians have much less robust institutionalized cultural protections, bringing them closer in line with the nation-state, this also precludes any specific cultural autonomy in behalf of the Indo-Fijian or Rotuman peoples.

The submerged assumption behind both Marxist and liberal forms of development discourse is one of *teleology*. That in order to break the chains of tribalism and the blood tie, we must progress through stages of development—from monarchy to liberal democracy (and for Marx, to then progress to communism) (Bookchin et al, 2015, p. 20). We see this same logic played out in the development of discourse—countries must progress through industrial stages in order to join the 'developed world'. This process mirrors the development of the West in a disturbingly narcissistic way. However, this telos has been challenged in a number of different ways; as stated by Escobar (2012): "Development assumes a teleology to the extent that it proposes that the "natives" will sooner or later be reformed; at the same time, however, it reproduces endlessly the separation between reformers and those to be reformed..." (p. 53). In addition, the social ecological mode of inquiry eschews this notion of telos, that there are specific stages countries and people must progress through in order to 'develop'.

Vandana Shiva (2016) points out that non-Western modes of cultivation and consumption are excluded from development discourses, where people have no income but live off the land and use traditional materials to construct housing and other living spaces, they are seen as living in misery and poverty by Western eyes. "The organizing principles of development based on economic growth render valueless all resources and resource processes that are not priced in the market and are not inputs to commodity production. This premise very often generates economic development programs that divert or destroy the resources base for survival" (Shiva, 2016, p. 43). This is clearly seen in my experience living in an iTaukei village. Families have farms, where they harvest cassava, dalo, and other local foods as needed, planting more and weeding as necessary. They take extra to a local market in order to get money, or gather the seasonal fruits like mango, guava, and papaya to take to bigger towns. Houses have traditionally been made of local materials, though this has been affected in the last decade due to climate change and

increasingly intense cyclones. This is necessitating the use of more expensive materials such as cinder blocks and large amounts of cement.

From this we can see the hollowness of using income as a method of tracking development. If one has the means for living available to them, but makes limited cash income, they are seen as living in poverty—where taking people out of their cultural context, forcing them into the wage economy and taking away means of living may constitute a success of development. This has been pointed out handily by Jason Hickel, in a 2019 article addressing the creation of global poverty and its reduction. In it he discusses the claim put out by Bill Gates and Steven Pinker that “the proportion of people living in poverty has declined from 94% in 1820 to only 10% today” (Hickel, 2019). He describes this formulation as the creation of needs through forcing colonized peoples out of commonly held ecologies and into forced labor for paltry wages. What we see, so far as development metrics are concerned, millions of people ‘living below the poverty line’ economically, yet living richly sustainable, ecological (if sometimes hard) lives.

The cultural autonomy of the iTaukei has provided an institutional barrier to the penetration of the capitalist economy into the land and villages around Fiji, leaving a large number of iTaukei people working as subsistence farmers, and not participating in waged labor, or participating at-will and returning to their community. This is not the case for the Indo-Fijians, who must either purchase the land not under control of the TLTB, or lease from the TLTB. This produces a de facto need to participate in waged labor and the capitalist economy. In this way, the iTaukei are viewed as under-developed because they do not hit the standards put forth by the creators of development discourse—yet the extent to which they are actually materially suffering has plenty of room for discussion and nuance.

Access to land and food are relatively easy, and the major factors affecting the iTaukei people are ones that result from being “developed”. Non-communicable diseases caused by poor diet and lack of exercise is the highest cause of death in Fiji and 1 in 3 Fijians are diagnosed with diabetes (Ministry of Health, 2019) In addition, rates of suicide (Ministry of Health, 2019) and domestic violence (Bo, 2018) are among the highest in the world. According to a 2007 UNICEF report, these trends come from the tensions of families being pressured to join the labor force, resulting from an increase in urbanization combined with stagnation of wages. These issues are serious, and must be confronted and dealt with. But they all have common origin—they are the indicators of a nation experiencing development—more bluntly, they are the effects of a society confronting the dislocation and devolution engendered the global marketplace. In looking at reports like the one just cited, we find that health risks like NCDs, suicide, and domestic violence increase alongside efforts of ‘development’. The diagnosis of these reports, paradoxically, usually shakes out to be more and varied forms of ‘development’.

The goal of Peace Corps in Fiji is to help create better health and sanitation habits in the villages. As such, much of my service has been tailored to education on various aspects of health and sanitation. One of the major impacts on the health of iTaukei people in my village is one of diet. A typical breakfast for adults and children is crackers put in cups of tea. It is common for people to put 3-4 heaping spoons of sugar into a cup of tea, and have two or three at a sitting.

Even after two years, people are still visibly shocked when they notice that I don't take sugar with my tea. As part of my integration, I had to start keeping sugar in my house for times when people came for tea. I realized this when people would ask for sugar, and when I apologized that I didn't have any, they left the cup untouched. Lunch is usually similar fare, crackers or bread with butter, or cake. In a more traditional vein, some families have a few cassava for a meal, which doesn't have much nutritional value on its own. There is a lot of snacking on processed foods like chips, candies, or dry ramen. A lot of the Fijian diet involves fish and coconuts, but since we are in the mountains fish is rare and coconut trees don't grow well (some say due to the altitude, other say the introduction of horses have stunted coconut reproduction), the average diet here is filled with processed wheat and sugar. Special events and Sundays bring a wider variety of food, with greens and meat being served along with cassava and dalo.

Social Ecology and Development

The current landscape of global development is in something of a flux—while many organizations like the UNDP, USAID, and various NGOs continue to push for 'development-as-usual' there is an increasingly insistent call for a transition to something else. The call is coming, not from major organizations, but from grassroots movements and communities around the globe. This takes many forms, from Escobar (2012) discussing "postdevelopment" or pluriversal creation, and the importance of going beyond liberal and capitalistic notions of development discourse to Vandana Shiva (2016) and her explication of "Earth Democracy" as an alternative to western globalized development. It is in this exciting ferment of possibilities that social ecology may enter.

In *The Anthropology of Utopia*, Dan Chodorkoff states that social ecology "understands the elimination of all relationships based on hierarchy and domination as an integral part of the development process, and as the starting point for a reharmonization of people's relationship with the rest of nature" (2014). He goes on to lay out some tendencies that social ecological development would hold: unity-in-diversity, non-hierarchical relationships, mutualism, spontaneity and co-evolution. The principle of unity-in-diversity is a guide to encourage the flourishing of diverse and local cultures as a way to ensure a fecund cultural ecosystem. This is in contravention to the current understanding of development as teleological—cultures must pass out of backwardness and into 'modernity'. This is essentially a homogenization process that turns societies into a monoculture, reflecting the monoculture of the land under 'development'. SE rejects such a teleology, and instead affirms that communities and regions should be empowered directly to choose what, how, and when they would like to 'develop'.

Since Fiji's decolonization there has been a fissure in the nation and the state, creating a weakness and state collapse when these two circles come into conflict. The solution of Voreqe Bainimarama and the Fiji First government since the 2006 coup has been to reduce the cultural autonomy of the iTaukei, disbanding the GCC and the village bylaws that have served as the top and bottom of the dual power structure. We can separate these two things out by understanding the GCC as an institution of hierarchical domination, designed to reduce the living culture of the iTaukei into something held exclusively by an elite class. However, the local *bose* is an ideal site

for an evolving and variegated culture to thrive, through institutions of direct democracy. The logic of capital requires that land becomes available on the market, and the iTaukei must enter waged labor in order to become “developed”, their labor generating wealth to inflate the GDP of Fiji. As the country proves that it is more stable, investors will become more interested in investing and industrializing Fiji, as it is placed advantageously as the hub of Oceania. This brings the iTaukei people closer in line with the state itself, reducing the tension of the nation and state, allowing for the liberalization of Fiji as a whole and to allow deeper penetration of the globalized capitalist economy. Yet it also produces the reactionary creation of an exclusionary ethno-nationalism, identifying problems within the liberal nation-state yet prescribing a return to a fictional golden age of undiluted culture.

However, as we have seen, this is little more than a pathway to have resources extracted and actually sets people on a treadmill of exploitation. Indeed, this has been the impetus of the discourse of development surrounding Fiji since Europeans first landed. The conflict of the communal culture in Fiji and the capitalist economy has been shown to be irreconcilable. But, we can expand this critique further to incorporate not just the economic and cultural, but to the state itself. There are compelling arguments that point to the explosion of nation-states created after colonization and the simultaneous creation of development discourse after World War II as method of continuing the colonial project (Bookchin et al, 2015; Escobar, 2012; Öcalan, 2017; Shiva, 2016). Many of the nation-states were created as a result of Western pressure, and the economic exploitation of them through the narrative of development have left these countries with crippling debt and an easy method of resource and labor extraction. As these things continue, we see a rising tide of conservative revolt against the exploitation, harnessed usually in reactionary racism and fundamentalism.

Given the above analysis, we can reframe discussions of ‘development’ in Fiji to be directly tied and many cases explicitly a cover for ‘capitalist development’. Taking a pillar of pluriversal creation as well as of social ecology, can see that capitalism itself institutes devolution of many different kinds—cultural, ecological, relational, and economic. It grows like cancer, absorbing and killing its host. Because of this, a social ecological theory of development must be extremely discerning in discussions of development, since they are most commonly framed in terms of (capitalist) economic growth and commercialism. The origins of Fijian developmental discourse are steeped in this assumption, and as has been pointed out above, have been a driving factor in inflaming both inter and intra-ethnic tensions.

So, let us take as a case study a report on the need for Fijian rural development called *Breaking Fiji’s Coup Culture through Effective Rural Development* (2019). In it, the author sets up one of the main factors for the coups as a lack of rural development, and the perception by rural Fijians (overwhelmingly iTaukei) that the incoming regime will support rural development better than the previous administration (p. 400-402). This in some respects is true, but as my earlier analysis of the manifold of conflicts point out, ‘rural development’ means more than anything facilitating the penetration of market capitalism. It should come as no surprise, then, that the same language used by British colonists is still being used in developmental discourse today: “Indigenous Fijians in many parts of the country require capital, infrastructure, experience

and skills, managerial expertise, *and hard work and dedication* [emphasis added] to be successful (Veitayaki, 2019, p. 415).

The author goes on to state that in that in villages: “Community work takes up a significant portion of time, which takes people away from their individual pursuits” (Veitayaki, 2019, p. 419). We can see in this the same colonial theorizing of the indigenous community as lazy, childlike and too communally oriented to receive development properly. “A lot of the reserved native land is unutilised as people have only small gardens because they do not have the means to maximise their production” (Veitayaki, 2019, p. 409). So, the problem of coup culture is the tensions of capital and culture, and the resolution is to privilege capital over culture: “...the poor state of the markets and infrastructure, and people’s customs and traditions hinder the operation of profit-making ventures in rural areas” (Veitayaki, 2019, p. 412). This quote lays naked the tensions in play, as well as the implicit conclusion that profit-making is the end of development. In a social ecological theory of development, individual profit-motive is not an appropriate indicator of success—economic indicators would be able to track communal wellbeing, ecological and personal health and safety, and access to the means of life common to all. Above all, economy itself would be re-embedded into social life, so that economies may become democratized and start to serve life.

According to the stated goals of Sayed-Khaiyum (2002), current Attorney General of the Fijian government, the cultural autonomy of the iTaukei people must have a sunset clause, and we can see from the policies enacted by the Fiji First government that this is being carried out in preparation for a more thorough integration in the globalized market. The opposing view politically is the SODELPA party, where the iTaukei should be paramount to the exclusion (or subordination) of Indo-Fijian and other nations in Fiji. This is in line with the rising tide of reactionary movements and attempts to purify the nation-state—witness the movements of ISIS, Brazil, Israel, Turkey, and the United States in working to exclude ethnic and cultural groups seen as ‘inferior’ or ‘dangerous’.

This is where the social ecological point of view comes into play. Capitalism, and its attendant enforcement structure of the nation-state have come up against in Fiji a cultural structure that, although it has been simplified and enmeshed with British Colonialism, still poses a threat to the penetration of waged labor and the commodification of land. There is beyond a doubt need for development of some kind within Fiji, the previous arguments should not be seen as a defense of the status quo, nor to put rose-tinted glasses on the rural and urban populations of Fiji. If anything, the above analysis should expose the manifold tensions at play that get simplified when Fiji is theorized in current development discourses about the need for economic development.

Fundamentally, the creation of the development paradigm was the creation of scarcity. In *The Future of Development*, the authors state that: “A catastrophic destitution, dispossessing people of their way of life, is the precondition for every modern ‘need’ (and thus the root cause of modernized poverty). Market society operates through the creation of scarcity, which in turn shapes all needs, usually through dispossession” (Esteva, et al., 2013). This analysis comes from an understanding that a teleological development into a Western-style nation-state cannot be

sustained, nor is a possibility. The massive consumption of the United States is based on the inability of consumption by the Global South (Esteva, et al., 2013). This is in total contravention of a social ecological model, the cornerstone of which is post-scarcity (Bookchin, 2004). As a cornerstone of the social ecological outlook, post-scarcity is the understanding that the current level of technological achievement makes possible the end of material scarcity. Not through hyper-consumption, but the sensitive and ecological application of renewable power, agroecology, and a production for use (as opposed to profit) can help ferment a post-ecological society. The only thing truly lacking is the political will to make it so.

The social ecological stance on the nation-state is that it is an inherent institution of domination and control. It exists to propagate and support capitalist expansion, and as such one cannot be anti-capitalist without being against the state. This view is supported by Esteva, et al. (2013), Öcalan (2017), and discussed as possible alternatives by both Arturo Escobar (2012) and Vandana Shiva (2016). They all discuss this in terms of indigenous struggle for autonomy against the nation-state. In this particular paradigm, we see the continual failure of the nation-state to provide for a “radical pluralism” (Esteva, et al., 2013), “living cultures” (Shiva, 2016), “transition discourses” (Escobar, 2012), or “unity-in-diversity” (Bookchin, 2005). These phrases have differentiating nuances, but can largely be placed together as similar explications of the same phenomenon. Within this search for autonomy, we can situate the iTaukei cultural autonomy. What we see occurring is the reduction of indigenous autonomy into a dehumanizing neoliberal monoculture, the result of capitalist colonization through the Trojan horse of ‘development’. This in turn, as pointed out above by Shiva, creates a negative culture and identity, based on a reactionary stance to economic dehumanization. This creates the grounds for the current paradigm we see in Fiji (and echoed around the world) of a neoliberal push opposed by a reactionary nationalism.

As part of this rejection comes a resurgence of the local, situated within the global. This is a conceptualization of local culture and spaces that are interdependent with localities around the world. This is codified in social ecology as a confederal network of municipalities, eco-regions, or communes. In this, we can see the parallels of the Fijian Administration to the structure of democratic assemblies of villages, towns and cities confederated together in contravention to the state. Even given the latent form of the village *bose*, and its district and provincial counterparts, they still pose a direct challenge to the state itself, being at the nexus of the manifold conflicts within Fiji. There is no doubt that in their current state (especially at the provincial level) they are riven with graft, hierarchy, and susceptible to parochialism as Rotuivaqali (2012) lays out in her detailed work on provincial accountability in Fiji. Yet this does not in itself negate the potential of the institution as a libertatory body.

But what of nationalism itself? This is a question that has been grappled with on the Left for some time, whether the support of nationalist projects constitutes a sufficiently radical project. On this subject, we can see the difference between social ecology and other frameworks, like Marxism. Bookchin (2015) states that nationalism is a step along the path to the recognition of a universal *humanitas*—as humanity has moved beyond the blood tie and kinship bonds as the basis for differentiating ‘people’ from the ‘other’, so too nationalism must be moved past for

internationalism. This does not mean a homogenizing ‘oneness’ of culture and ethnicity however, far from it: “We are obliged to formulate an ethics of complementarity in which cultural differentia mutualistically serve to enhance human unity itself, in short, that constitute a new mosaic of vigorous cultures that *enrich* the human condition and that foster its *advance*...” (Bookchin et al, 2015, p 110). Further, he states that “Cultural freedom and variety, let me emphasize, should not be confused with nationalism. That specific peoples should be free to fully develop their own cultural capacities is not merely a right but a desideratum.” (Bookchin et al, 2015, p. 110).

Through this paper I have attempted to show the extent to which current conceptions of what is ‘traditional’ iTaukei culture (espoused by ethno-nationalist parties like SODELPA) have been created through colonialism, as well as how some structures of colonialism have liberatory potential in them. In this way I want to highlight the complex, interpenetrating legacy of both freedom and domination and how they have already been synthesized into a neotraditional culture. This is the heart of a social ecological critique—while it is not for me (as an observer of Fijian lifeways) to decree what is and is not good for the people of Fiji, I want to open a space for discourse by those creators and holders of Fijian lifeways on the potential for synthesizing a more liberatory path—with the dissolution of hierarchy and a generative relationship with the biotic world—and how it does not have to be a weakening or compromise of cultural integrity. So, in a social ecological conception, cultural autonomy is not the issue per se, but that only one culture in Fiji has autonomy. In allowing for autonomous multi-ethnic consociation, we can begin to sketch the other paths that benefit all parties. This type of inter-ethnic autonomy is the foundation upon which the Self-Administration of Northern Syria is built—with allowances for cultural integrity socially and inter-cultural solidarity politically—as well as many other movements such as *Buen Vivir*, *Ubuntu*, and *Swaraj*.

Conclusion

The structure of the Fijian Administration from villages to district to province, along with the election process for attending provincial councils mirrors the structure Bookchin discusses in *The Nest Revolution* (2015) where he talks about creating a Commune of communes through confederated networks based on municipal citizen assemblies. This structure also bears close resemblance to the structure of Cantons in Northern Syria, also known as Rojava (See Appendix I for more details). As covered above, this structure is one imposed by British Colonialism, one that was meant to mirror traditional structures but to appropriate them for the indirect rule strategy employed by the British Empire at that time. While these structures are colonial in nature, they have been assimilated into iTaukei tradition much the same way Christianity has. These structures represent what Bookchin discussed as a ‘form of freedom’, one that can be filled with liberatory or hierarchical content. Such structures have been used by the Cantons in Rojava to create an inclusive, multicultural society while preserving heterogeneous cultural autonomy.

We can look at a hypothetical social ecological political/economic structure that closely mirrors the iTaukei Administration shorn of its Statecraft elements. The structure of village/community *bose* fits the conception of directly democratic councils, and serve as the anchor and place of power for decision making. The process of *talanoa* and deliberation is useful for *paideia*, or the self-conscious process of forming people into active participants and managers of their community. This is a crucial process in social ecology, because unlike anarchism it doesn't theorize spontaneous human nature to be ready to self-manage once oppressive systems are deconstructed; nor does it hold that the factory is the site of revolutionary discipline as with Marxism. The ability for local *booses* to democratically pick recallable delegates to send to *tikina* and *yasana* councils would ensure that power stays with the local, as opposed to the current conception of power residing at the top. The ability for provincial councils to create and maintain cooperatives represents Libertarian Municipalism potential—for production and economic activity to take place on a human scale, with ethical distribution playing over profit. In Fiji, the conception of the *Vanua* as a harmonic unity of people, place, and spirit lays out the potential ethical bent of municipalized production.

Discourses of de-colonizing and activating parts of a culture is something that is best carried out by groups affected by these issues, and as such I cannot in good faith make any prescriptions or definitive claims on what 'ought' to happen. This is a point well taken, and I wish to stress it. I think that it can be useful to point out some conclusions, and illustrate some possibilities. For one thing, it is useful to point out that land rights before Cession were something fluid, something to be negotiated and, at worst, fought over. They were ossified into a bureaucratic structure by the creation of the Separate Administration, and given over to the management of *mataqali* as a matter of institutional convenience. It is also worth noting that the many cultures and ethnicities of Fiji were for long years before Cession relatively peaceful and inclusive—Fiji is at the crux of Melanesian and Polynesian migration, and each island/region has different ethnic make-up, homogenized as the 'iTaukei' only after the fact for bureaucratic simplicity. As such, one can imagine, not a naïve return to some 'golden age' but a recognition that unity-in-diversity is something deeply held, and can be used to expand communal land-holding to include those who have come to Fiji after Cession—Indo-Fijians, Rotumans, and others. This is meant as an example to show that there are many more paths to walk than the two paths laid out before Fiji by the State—one of cultural homogenization through the intrusion of globalized capital, or of ethno-centricity and isolation and an impossible return to the past.

As shown above, the very existence of the iTaukei Administration has contributed to state weakness and instability, even in a latent form riven with methods of domination and control. It was put in place as a measure to preserve communal culture and to retard the growth of capitalism, and has continued to do so to the detriment of the nation-state project. Built within the iTaukei Administration is a *mélange* of traditional, colonial, and neo-traditional systems, the base of which is the village *bose* and its practice of *talanoa* and honoring the *vanua*. At the center of the manifold of conflict explained above sits this administration—the eye of an ever evolving storm. While currently land is held at the *matagali* level of tribal configuration, one can see the potential for inter- and intra-ethnic solidarity through further decentralization and

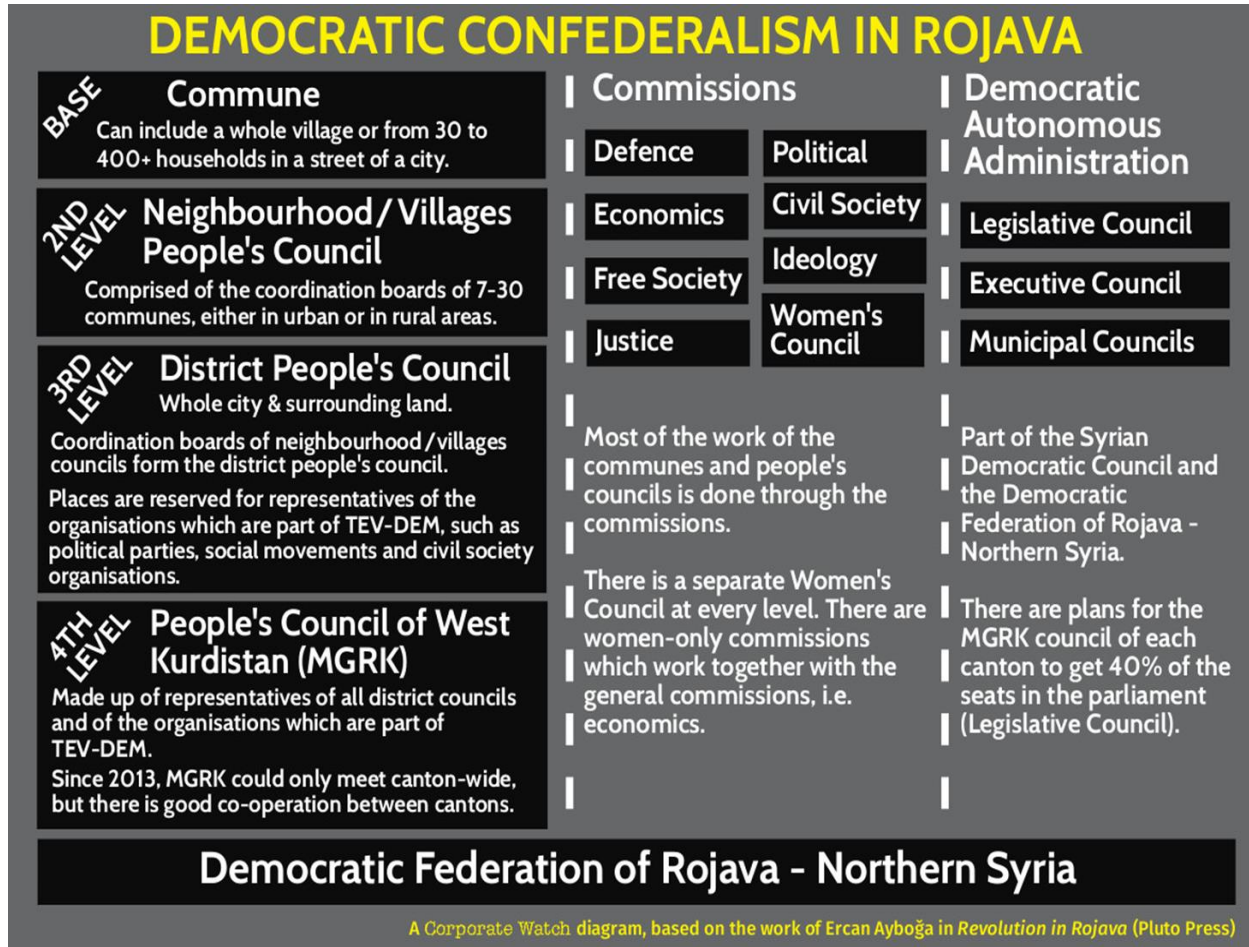
communing of land and resources, granting cultural autonomy to not one ethnic group, but each one on its own terms.

In order for the liberal nation-state to reach a point of stability, it must have capitalism as its base of economic organization, which is why the last decade we have seen the erosion of this institution; a preparation for a homogenization of culture within Fiji to suit the needs of a global marketplace. In reaction to this, there has been an ethno-nationalist push to reclaim Fiji for the iTaukei, to the exclusion of others. This is a common development when, as Vandana Shiva points out, that economic exploitation creates negative identities and cultures, leading to reactionary nationalism. These are not the only two paths, however. The way has been chartered by indigenous movements around the world that it is possible to create a liberatory and inclusive culture that preserves cultural autonomy by allowing it to grow and evolve with other cultures. For Öcalan this is called the Democratic Nation, and for Bookchin it is the principle of unity-in-diversity.

Taking this, and looking at potential takeaways for those outside the Fijian context, we see the absolute importance of control of land by the community. In Fiji it is controlled by clans, and excludes non-indigenous groups, but the potential for municipalization of land can be seen in the TLTB. This is increasingly important as a site of resistance given the hyper-financialization of real estate around the world. In addition, we can see how the creation of institutional forms of direct democracy can help maintain and generate resistance to capital, and create weaknesses within the nation-state that can be supplanted with non-state institutions of economic, political, ecological, and cultural democracy. It also shows the need to understand directly democratic institutions as separate from more hierarchical state structures. Another takeaway for those hesitant to engage with theories of power and engagement with the state is the inside-outside nature of the iTauke Administration, and how engaging in this governmental structure can be useful to help maintain a directly democratic method of decision making, while at the same time understanding the separation of the grassroots from the more hierarchal structures that exist above it.

Appendix I

Graphic of Rojava governance structure



Source: Egret & Anderson, 2016

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