



## Approaches to Inter-group Conflict Resolution in Fiji

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### Abstract

This paper utilises inter-group theory to propose resolution of inter-group conflict between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians. It is argued that a three-pronged approach is required to enhance better inter-group relations. First, a national identity that is widely embraced by the community is needed. The People's Charter for Change has proposed 'Fijian' as a common name: this idea has been vigorously contested by indigenous nationalists whereas Indo-Fijians see 'Fijian' as a vehicle for reclaiming their social identity in the country. Second, it is argued that there is a need for the establishment of some form of truth and reconciliation structure, aimed at reconciling the perpetrators and the victims of political crimes within the country and providing amnesty for those telling the truth while compensating the victims. It is argued that previous attempts at reconciliation via the Racial Tolerance and Unity Bill ended in a disaster necessitating a more structured, culturally sensitive approach. Third, it is argued that there is need for the implementation of multiparty governance through multiparty committees that could be customised to cement consensus democracy in the country. Fiji has had experience in the past with multiparty committees, and similar structures can be incorporated within the parliamentary system to manage inter-party and inter-group conflict.

### Keywords:

Fiji, Indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians, inter-group, conflict, national identity, truth and reconciliation, parliamentary committee.



## Introduction

This paper emphasises the need for a three-pronged approach to building inter-group cooperation in Fiji. By using Gordon Allport's (1954) ideas about national identity, a truth and reconciliation commission and legislative reforms, I argue the need in Fiji for the establishment of a single national identity devoid of any racial or ethnic identification; for national reconciliation among all ethnic groups. Such an approach could, in particular, take into account historical events; and encourage legislative reforms in the form of strengthening committee systems of governance, permitting political parties with opposing policies to utilise parliamentary frameworks to build consensus democracy.

Gordon Allport identified that inter-group conflict could be mitigated if there was a 'national character'. According to Allport (1954:116), national character or national identity implies that 'members of a nation, despite ethnic, racial, religious, or individual differences among them, do resemble one another in certain fundamental patterns of belief or conduct'. Before a nation can develop an effective national identity, Allport suggested individual and group therapy as a means to changing ethnic attitudes. Allport hypothesised that during the course of therapy, 'racial attitudes may assume a salient role and may conceivably be dissolved or restructured along with the patient's other fixed way of looking at life' (Allport 1954:495). Allport (1954:281) further theorised that 'prejudice may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals through institutional supports', such as legislative structures that are inclusive of the out-groups.

## National identity

Allport (1954: 99) identifies national identity as an important element in developing a common bond among diverse communities. In Fiji, identity is deeply embedded in communal politics and as a result, vigorously contested. Identity politics in Fiji has been a principal cause of inter-group conflict in the country. The Indo-Fijian leaders since the 1960s lobbied for political equality, much to the distaste of indigenous Fijian nationalists, who argued that the indigenous community had a greater claim to political power and as a result should be allowed to establish political hegemony. The social identity of indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians has a jagged history. In a sense, both communities have adopted a romanticised version of the colonial orthodoxy, based on the interpretation of the Deed of Cession of 1874 and the Salisbury Despatch of 1875. Both these colonial instruments provided indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians the justifications for their respective political positions in colonial as well as in post-colonial Fiji.

For indigenous Fijians, the Deed of Cession and the colonial interpretation of the pre-Cession culture formed the basis of the indigenous Fijian social identity. The Deed of Cession was interpreted by indigenous Fijian chiefs as a pact between the Crown and the indigenous Fijians, which allowed the Crown to undertake law and order, economic development and administration of the Colony of Fiji while providing chiefs the authority to decide collectively on matters relating to indigenous land and, to some extent, labour. Indo-Fijians in contrast saw bonded labour as a temporary detour from the ultimate goal of political equality mentioned in the Salisbury Despatch of 1876 'in which Lord Salisbury as secretary of state for the colonies in 1875 stated that Indian immigrants should have 'privileges no whit inferior' to other residents in the colonies' (Bossen 2000:130). Indo-Fijian

political discourse and their social identity as a group were shaped by the focus on political equality and often Indo-Fijian leaders invoked indentured labour and their sacrifices in the development of the Fiji economy as justification for their claim on the state.

Similar to indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians have romanticised their struggles during the indenture period to make a case for their space on the Fiji Islands. According to Leonie Huddy (2001:150) group identities move from social to political because identity remains fluid, contingent and socially constructed. Moreover, in some groups, identities are linked to historical moments and cultural practices. In Fiji the romanticised past has its own historical trajectory, which has resulted in jagged identities in both communities.

In 1997, Fiji's new multiracial Constitution established a new national category for identifying all Fiji citizens: Fiji Islanders. However, indigenous groups rejected this definition as 'Indian', and 'Fijian' remained in common use, despite the intent of the Constitution. Within the indigenous Fijian community, indigenous leaders, such as former Senator Adi Litia Cakobau and the former Minister for National Planning Jone Navakamocea, re-emphasised that they as a community had ownership of the name 'Fijian' and strongly rebuked Indo-Fijian leaders and academics for using the term 'Indo-Fijian' (*Fijilive*, 2 July 2004; *BBC* 7 July 2004; *The Fiji Times*, 5 August 2006).

Anthropologist Robert Norton noted that:

Identities are in some degree oppositional, asserting the virtue and power of 'tradition' by way of invidious contrast to foreign cultural influences. In varying degree all illustrate the activity of objectifying culture, of emphasising selected attributes of culture as a way of affirming group distinctiveness. And in all, 'tradition' is in varying degrees discrepant with the culture of pre-European times: there is an element of invention (Norton 1993:745).

The 'created' identities in Fiji have been to some extent given cultural meaning by various governments and this has continued largely unchallenged until the December 2006 coup when the military leader, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, challenged the prevailing indigenous identity, in particular the indigenous nationalist ideas on political paramountcy. Commander Bainimarama argued in support of the recommendation in the People's Charter for Change that all Fiji nationals regardless of their ethnicity and religion should be called 'Fijian'. Indigenous nationalists objected to the use of 'Fijian' as a common name because they claimed ownership of the word as well as its meaning. As a result, debates on a common name indicated that indigenous Fijians did not wish to extend the meaning of the word 'Fijian' to encompass all Fiji citizens (*The Hindustan Times*, 5 August 2006).

To some extent, the dynamics of identity in Fiji have been profoundly shaped by definitive historical moments. Upon assuming sovereignty in Fiji, the British attempted to preserve indigenous Fijian culture. As the colony developed, there was a need for labour on sugar plantations: the British recruited indentured labourers from India, creating the tripartite division between indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians, and Europeans. Larson and Aminzade (2008:801–31) noted that during colonial times, this division organised political life and indigenous Fijians often allied with Europeans to resist demands by the near-majority Indo-Fijian population for a common electoral roll. In light of these political dynamics, Fiji's negotiated independence included maintenance of separate voting rolls and constitutionally mandated racial representation. Since independence, Fiji's leaders have

continuously reinforced communal identities. In a quick move to create some semblance of national identity, the Reeves Commission in 1996 recommended that Fiji Islanders be the common name of all Fiji citizens (Reeves & Vakatora et al. 1996). However, the Constitution continued to identify indigenous Fijians and other communities by their communal names, thereby reinforcing communal identities and defeating the intent of the Reeves Commission Report of 1996. Moreover, the 1997 Constitution promoted ethnocratic regimes that encouraged the expansion of the dominant group and power structures by maintaining a democratic facade. Diverse research explores this complex idea; for example, in a study of land and identity politics in Israel and Palestine, Oren Yiftachel observed that 'in most cases the national identity is intimately involved with institutionalisation and politicised religion' (Yiftachel 2006: 3–16).

Father Kevin Barr argued that Christianity, more precisely Methodism, in Fiji has also been used by indigenous nationalists to safeguard indigenous Fijian identity. According to Barr (2004:17) indigenous nationalists have 'changed Christianity from a religion of love into an ideology justifying and promoting separation, domination, exclusion, racism and hatred'. Jacqueline Ryle (2005:72) largely supports this observation and argues that indigenous Fijian identity is based on the ownership of land, Church and Government, which gives rise to modalities of exclusion and ethnic otherness.

In a sense, identity in Fiji is highly politicised and this identity politics operates according to an 'identarian logic' (Lloyd 2005:36) where in-group unity is sought beneath differences. While church, land and holding political power are essential parts of indigenous identity (Tuwere 2002), political equality, respect, history and geography have become essential elements of Indo-Fijian identity. According to Carmen Voigt-Graf (2008:106), 'Indo-Fijian identity has been shaped through the collective memory of indenture in colonial times and of political discrimination and political coups in post-colonial times'. Similarly to the case of indigenous Fijian nationalists, identarian logic also applies to the Indo-Fijian community in Fiji. Beneath religious and class differences, there is an overwhelming centripetal Indo-Fijian communal identarian force towards glorification of the struggles of indenture or girit and the post-colonial push for political equality.

Indo-Fijian author Rajendra Prasad argued that his interpretation of the past in the book *Tears in Paradise* (2004) would change the often incorrect perception of Indo-Fijian history by emphasising that indentured labour was not a period of shame but one of great sacrifice in Fiji. The stigma of shame, according to Prasad, rested solely on the shoulders of the British and Australian governments, which considered indentured workers as sub-humans and allowed physical and sexual abuse to continue in the name of progress and civilization. In the second part of his book *Tears in Paradise*, called 'Uncertain Future', Prasad explains that the Indo-Fijians never took away the customary land rights of indigenous Fijians but both in 1987 and again in 2000, indigenous Fijian nationalists accused the Indo-Fijian community of conspiring to alienate indigenous land. This triggered two violent ethnic coups that forced Indo-Fijians to seek better futures elsewhere. In summary, Prasad suggests that Indo-Fijians are the only community in the world running away from their embattled and embittered past.

The year 2004 marked 125 years of Indo-Fijian residence in Fiji and to celebrate the anniversary, Indo-Fijian historian Brij Lal edited a collection of essays (Lal 2004) that reflected the ongoing Indo-Fijian emotions. Lal (2004:3) observed that 'one hundred and twenty-five years after arriving in the islands, the future for the Indo-Fijians look almost as bleak as it did for their forebears when they embarked in their unpredictable journeys from Calcutta and Madras to destinations unheard of or

unknown'. Vijay Naidu (2004:381) further explained that the marginalisation of Indo-Fijians has led to frustration, stress-related illnesses and suicide in the community. A series of post-2004 publications including a collection edited by Kavita Nandan (2005:XI) recorded the memories of those who remembered Fiji from outside the country. Within the stories documented, Nandan notes, lies a palpable pain, interspersed with memories of the vanishing worlds of Indo-Fijians caused by the Fiji coups and the continuing discrimination and racism for those still living in Fiji. Kavita Nandan (2005), Lal (2004), Naidu (2004) and Prasad (2004) concur that Indo-Fijian identity is shaped by the collective memory of indenture and the struggles for self-respect and belonging forced upon the community by the military coups. In contrast, indigenous Fijian identity is deeply embedded in the church, village and land (Ryle 2005) and the desire of the indigenous nationalists to establish and maintain political hegemony in perpetuity. As a result, there are two different identarian trajectories within a common identarian logic of re-imagining and to some extent romanticising the past.

The Draft People's Charter released on 5 August 2008, following consultations within Fiji, proposed a common name for all Fiji citizens with full recognition of indigenous Fijians as the *i-taukei*. The Charter argued that:

A common name includes the members of all communities in the country within a broad allegiance. It binds all of them as citizens to a larger and wider sense of belonging to 'their' nation state. The overarching significance of national identity, for governance and public policy, is that it creates a moral community within which everyone has equal rights to the care and attention of the government and the wider community. . . (The Draft People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, 5 August 2008, p.47)

The deposed SDL Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase, rejected the Charter recommendation of 'Fijian' as a common name, arguing that the 'term (Fijian) was embedded into the indigenous population: it is a very sensitive issue and it will be opposed very strongly'. Supporting Laisenia Qarase was the Methodist Church President Reverend Laisiasa Ratabacaca (Fijilive, 7 August 2008). Indigenous nationalists have argued that the word is 'indigenous' in origin and as a result, alienating the word without proper indigenous cultural processes violated the United Nations Declarations on Indigenous Peoples (Francis Waqa Sokonibogi, Fiji Indigenous Ownership Rights Association, letter to the editor, *The Fiji Times*, 11 July 2004). However, supporters of the use of 'Fijian' as a common name respond that the word 'Fijian' was a European invention and had nothing to do with indigenous culture and that the word can be used to enhance national identity (Lal 2004:2).

As evidenced in recent history, forging a national identity for Fiji via a common name is a difficult task. However, it is argued here that the risk of not working towards this goal means continuing with the instability and conflicted social and political culture that has permeated Fiji for a very long time. The leader of the current government in Fiji, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, believes that a common name of 'Fijian' will immensely assist in redirecting the indigenous Fijian mindset by providing a disincentive for discrimination, violence and destructive nationalism that had overtly plagued the country since the 1987 coup. However, indigenous Fijians also have a deep sense of indigenous identity and belonging. Thus, the proposed alternative to Fiji Islander has been dismissed by the indigenous community as a contravention of indigenous culture, tradition and history. Therefore, one of the most glaring omissions from the perspective of Allport's theory is in-group differences in the adoption of national identity, in defiance of prevailing prejudice, racial stereotypes,

and authoritarianism. Besides aiming for the implementation of an agreed national identity based on Allport's theory on inter-group conciliation, some form of truth and reconciliation needs to complement moves to create a national identity to lessen both inter-group and in-group tensions in Fiji.

### **Truth and reconciliation**

Allport (1954:495) argues that the best way to overcome discrimination, violence and continued prejudice is to initiate an open and inclusive process of 'national therapy' or 'national reconciliation'. He suggests that national therapy in terms of truth telling and reconciling with the victims can result in changes in attitudes and simply by talking about past injustices, members of the group often gain new perspectives and can discover wholesome and constructive ways of approaching the out-group (Allport 1954:496).

Experiences with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa have influenced similar models through many post-conflict societies (Graybill 2002). In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established with several fundamental characteristics that contributed to its unique character. The most important feature of the South African exercise, in comparison with other commissions, was the power to grant amnesty to individual perpetrators. It was the first time that so much power was invested in a commission. The South African Parliament granted the TRC the authority to give amnesty to acts 'associated with political objectives'. Despite the initial success of the South African approach, debate regarding the efficacy of the Truth Commission is ongoing. Audrey Chapman noted that:

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) had difficulties in conceptualizing forgiveness and reconciliation on an inter-group level and concentrated instead on relationships between individual victims and perpetrators. Former victims and members of their families who testified at the violations hearings rarely mentioned these topics unless prompted to do so, and those who did were generally not inclined to forgive perpetrators. At the amnesty hearings perpetrators were reluctant to acknowledge their wrongdoing or to offer meaningful apologies, expressions of regret, or some form of compensation to those who had suffered. In light of these data the article questions the efficacy of the TRC's approach to forgiveness and healing and the capacity of transitional justice mechanisms in post-conflict societies to promote forgiveness and reconciliation. (Chapman 2007:51)

In Northern Ireland, for example, there has been a long-term and often heated debate, particularly within civil society, as to the best way to deal with the legacy of the past. Central to this debate is whether or not there needs to be some form of an official 'truth recovery' process or truth commission. Lundy and McGovern (2007: 336–7) through their survey of attitudes among Northern Ireland residents to a truth commission conclude that for many in the community there is a 'need for some sort of mechanism to get at the truth of the past conflict'. On the other hand, the researchers discovered that 'precisely how to get to the truth, what mechanisms are best suited to do so, and what might be done with it afterwards, is far less clear'.

A report published by the Consultative Group on the Past in January 2009 in Northern Ireland recommended that a 'Legacy Commission' be established for truth recovery. The work of the

Consultative Group highlighted how international justice norms are interpreted at a local level in a way that takes account of local histories and priorities. According to Aoife Duffy (2010:26–46), instead of challenging the structural and institutional inequalities that underpinned the violence of the conflict in Northern Ireland and opening up new pathways to accessing truth and justice, the Consultative Group's report advocated a truth-recovery process that was not open to public scrutiny and was couched in the language of forgetting, which begs the question whether the Northern Ireland initiative on truth and reconciliation was a genuine attempt at exploring sidelined or dissenting narratives of conflict, or merely another forum in which to contain them. The Northern Ireland example highlights the difficulty in implementing social processes that will enable mutually trustworthy behaviour resulting in inter-group reconciliation.

In Fiji, attempts by the nationalist *Soqosoqo ni Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL) government at reconciliation had a devastating effect. While borrowing some elements of the South African approach, the Fiji government in June 2005 politicised the reconciliation endeavour by describing nationalist coups of 1987 and 2000 as a legitimate expression of indigenous fears. Moreover, the Fiji government refused to acknowledge that the 2000 coup was not only about ethnic conflict in the country but also an overt expression on internal indigenous Fijian power struggle. Jon Fraenkel (2000) noted that the 2000 coup was a clash of indigenous Fijian dynasties of Lau and Bau. Christopher Griffin (2006:258) argued that 'Bau's traditional ties with Speight's province Tailevu, and their place together in the *matanitu* or Confederacy of Kubuna, caused many Fijians to see the 2000 coup as Kubuna's answer to Tovata's gains from 1987'. Herman Muckler (2002:145) concluded that the re-emergence of long-standing rivalries between different factions of the indigenous Fijian society meant that the 'events of May 2000 coup were far from being simply a parallel with the 1987 coups'. As a consequence of indigenous internal rivalry, a broader reconciliation effort is required within the Fiji context.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to encourage truth telling with the hope of reconciling the victims and the perpetrators of the past injustices. According to Richard Wilson (2001:15), 'truth-telling healing and nation-building were integrated by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission' to provide a meaningful framework for restorative justice, repentance and ultimately forgiveness for past crimes. However, in Fiji, there was no such integrated initiative. The indigenous nationalist government borrowed only the intent of the South African truth and reconciliation initiative but chose to manipulate the process by arguing that the perpetrators of the past injustice only had to convince the Amnesty Committee of their intentions to acknowledge past injustices and not necessarily reconcile with the victims. The reconciliation process initiated by the Fiji authorities infuriated the Indo-Fijian community, which was affected by indigenous nationalist violence following the 2000 coup. Besides Indo-Fijians, the Fiji Military Forces saw the reconciliation initiative as a recipe for continued indigenous Fijian nationalist domination and intervention in government.

There were a number of concerns regarding the Racial Tolerance and Unity Bill of 2005 in Fiji. The most controversial of all was the amnesty provision. This clause was a problem for a number of reasons. First, it was feared that the amnesty would interfere with ongoing investigations into the 2000 coup and compromise the judiciary, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, and the military. Secondly, the amnesty provision was seen by many Indo-Fijians and non-government organisations as simply a political measure by the nationalist SDL government to position itself for

the 2006 general elections. Thirdly, it was widely held that the proposed amnesty would not compel perpetrators of the events of 2000 to tell the truth or offer any meaningful reconciliation to the victims.

A more reasonable and palatable approach would have been to establish an independent Commission on Healing, Truth and Justice, as was the case in South Africa, with powers to receive evidence from perpetrators and victims and then recommend appropriate reconciliation. The truth and reconciliation for past injustices against the Indo-Fijian community is mentioned in the Draft People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress (2008:38). In any case, it urges that establishment, similar to the South African experience, of an Amnesty Committee comprising three members—one representative from the victim's group, a representative from the government and an independent legal expert nominated by the Fiji Law Society. The role of the Amnesty Committee should be to invite aggrieved parties to tell the whole truth and subpoena individuals identified by these parties and seek their views of truth regarding their actions. The Amnesty Committee should also invite all aggrieved parties to tell their side of the story and ensure that a reconciliation process that is culturally meaningful to all is implemented. Once the parties have reconciled and the Amnesty Committee is satisfied that the parties have truthfully disclosed all facts regarding their past actions, the Amnesty Committee could then recommend amnesty. If the Amnesty Committee forms an opinion that the parties are not telling the truth, then the Amnesty Committee should be able to seek corroborating statements from other witnesses and potentially, deny amnesty. According to Michael Humphrey (2005:217), healing through victim-centred truth politics ensures that 'victims become the vehicle for reconciliation with the therapeutic focus for changing individual attitudes towards the past'. Evidence from South Africa demonstrates that 'recalling and publicly recounting hurts and humiliations endured have a therapeutic effect on victims and facilitate reconciliation between them and those who inflicted the injuries' (Solomon 2002:224).

In addition, it is also proposed in the Charter that a Reparation Committee shall be established comprising a representative from the aggrieved group, a government representative and an independent legal expert, similar to the arrangement for the amnesty committee. An aggrieved person should not have to prove 'gross human rights violation' as stipulated by the failed Racial Tolerance and Unity Bill of 2005. The burden of providing the truthful account of the wrongdoing should be placed on the shoulders of all parties. Individual testimony under oath in the Amnesty Committee should be taken as truthful disclosure of facts relevant for determining reparation payment, which should take into consideration physical harm, damage to property, trauma, loss of earning, and post-traumatic stress.

Fiji has an opportunity to progress an inclusive truth and healing process where both the perpetrators and the victims engage in genuine conciliation and move forward. A recent study (Pettigrew 2010:425) has indicated that truth and reconciliation measures can provide better inter-group relations, improve attitudes and provide opportunities for minorities to understand and engage with majority processes.

Whilst there is an appreciation throughout Fiji of the need for some kind of Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Allport's theoretical ideas about inter-group conciliation suggest there is also a need for a system that supports significant legislative reform (Allport 1954:461). I argue this is evident in the Fiji context as illustrated below.



## Legislative reforms

Legislative reform is identified as one of the mechanisms for achieving inter-group consensus at the political level. Allport (1954:461) identified the committee system as playing an influential role in affecting political reforms. The classic power indices relating to political representation assume that the party winning the most seats forms the government. These assumptions are largely reflected in western democracies that are based on 'winner takes all' systems. However, in Europe, especially in Nordic countries, multiparty governance with mixed electoral systems, aimed at promoting better representation of smaller parties, remains a norm, since electoral reform started in the Weimer Republic in the early twentieth century. Fiji in 1997 and New Zealand in 1998 moved away from the first past the post electoral system to more mixed preferential and or proportional forms of voting.

In ethnically divided societies such as Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Bosnia, Rwanda and Fiji, precise political engineering is not only impossible but impractical. Evidence from Guyana, South Africa, Bosnia and Rwanda indicates that politics of 'inclusion' with defined politico-constitutional structures, backed by good leadership, can lessen inter-ethnic tensions and provide a national framework for multiethnic political discourse. In some cases, truth and reconciliation systems, like the ones established in South Africa (Chapman 2007:51–69) and Rwanda (Kaminski & Nalepa 2006:393–94), assisted inter-ethnic conciliation whereas in Fiji, the Racial Tolerance and Unity Bill (RTU) created further cleavages, because civil society as well as the opposition political parties were disengaged from the initial process.

Following the 2006 military takeover of the reins of government and the publication of the Draft People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress on 5 August 2008, the question still remains whether consensus democracy in Fiji could flourish, simultaneously enabling the diminution of inter-ethnic tensions over time. Moreover, with a lack of defined institutional structures detaining legislative processes in building and maintaining consensus democracy in Fiji, the cabinet in Fiji in the past became dysfunctional and divided along either party or racial lines. Malcolm Shaw (1998:243) has observed that governing systems in mostly developing countries, including Fiji, have 'embodied typically authoritarian features which include weak legislature with an underdeveloped committee system'. However, evidence from states like Lithuania (Clark, Versekait & Lukosaitis 2006: 747) and Zambia (Burnell 2002: 291–313) suggests that changes to party system, institutional balance between executive and legislature and political culture can give rise to effective parliamentary committees.

Besides delegation, to make representative democracy work in divided plural communities, a number of electoral systems (Fraenkel 2006:623–51) and power sharing arrangements have been recommended and even tested via constitutional arrangements in a number of countries.

Power sharing is a concept popularised by Lijphardt (1995:863–64) in his work on democracy in divided societies, in which he developed the framework for consociation or consensus forms of government that allow for power sharing at the executive level without mandating a grand coalition of all significant parties and therefore eliminating significant partisan opposition in parliament (Lijphardt 2004:103). Studies in multiparty government have tended to focus on the design of multiparty systems. However, little has been said about how different parties with often competing ideologies or interests or communal, ethnic and provincial allegiance can provide political as well as cabinet stability within a framework of multiparty government (Dryzek 2005:218–42).

Usually, government parties, in multiparty settings, have the incentives to seek, and the means to secure, a policy agenda that accommodates, in as much as possible, the preferences of all partners in a coalition (Martin 2004:446). A number of instruments are available to multiparty governments, including inner-cabinet committees of coalition leaders, inter-ministerial committees, parliamentary leadership groups, and party summits. According to Lanny Martin, lawmaking is a challenge for coalition governments because it inherently demands cooperation and compromise by parties with divergent policy goals (2004:457). While academics recognise that the concept of multiparty power sharing is by and large problematic, there is, however, a need to develop parliamentary based multiparty institutional frameworks for both executive and non-executive bills, especially in divided societies. This kind of consensus approach removes the focus away from cabinet conformity to 'consensus' at the parliamentary committee stage.

### **Committee systems**

A committee system as a means of fostering greater cooperation among parties with diverging views has existed in western European and American democracies for some time. For example, Allport (1954:461) identified that the President's Committee on Civil Rights in the United States became a rallying point for the forces of tolerance and inclusive government. More importantly, committees in US and European democracies initiate legislation in the form of committee bills. However, there are only two national parliaments in western Europe, Sweden and Iceland, and a number of sub-national assemblies, including the Scottish Parliament, where committees possess unrestricted rights of legislative initiative (Arter 2003:80). The important feature of the Scottish experience is the establishment of a Consultative Steering Group (CSG) that has the task of marrying traditional representative democracy with the elements of a form of participatory democracy. For example:

Strong Committees in the Scottish setting is aimed at fostering greater consensus with an emphasis on reducing partisanship. The Scottish Parliament has permanent and specialised committees with relatively small numbers of members; a proportional (by party) number of chairs selected by a committee; committee deliberation both before and initial and final plenary stages; the ability to initiate and re-draft bills; and the ability to invite witnesses and demand government documents. (Cairney 2006:183)

The Parliamentary committee system is not new to Fiji. Under previous parliaments, committees were provided for in the Standing Orders of the House. These committees regulated the affairs of the House and dealt with public accounts. However, evidence from 1970 to 1995 and again from 1999 to 2006 indicates that the committee system was not utilised by the indigenous Fijian government to build consensus around divisive legislation. Nevertheless, there is a success story in 1996 when the government attempted to build political consensus on constitutional change by utilising parliamentary committees: the Government of Fiji established a Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on the Constitution (JPSC) to achieve 'consensus' on the recommendations of the Reeves Commission Report of 1996.

On 10 September 1996, Fiji's Constitution Review Commission report was tabled in Parliament. Following the endorsement of the CRC report from the President, the former Prime Minister of Fiji, Sitiveni Rabuka, successfully moved in the House the following motion:

That the Joint Select Committee on the Constitution shall consider and deliberate upon the report of the Constitution Review Commission to secure passage of such amendments and changes to the Constitution as may be agreed upon by and between the various parties and groups and or as deemed necessary or desirable. (The House of Representatives, Daily Hansard, 10 September 1996:1026)

Sitiveni Rabuka spoke of consensus and unity and his deliberations were supported by opposition leader Jai Ram Reddy. It was agreed that all parties in parliament would participate in the discussions and arrive at a consensus upon which the foundations of the new Fiji Constitution would be built.

The Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on the Constitution was the only time when political leaders of Fiji made a serious attempt to build consensus on the divisive issue of constitutional reform. A closer analysis of the approach of the Soqosoqo ni Vakevulewa ni Taukei (SVT) leader Sitiveni Rabuka towards constitutional accommodation of minorities indicates a desire by him to offset the rising tide of indigenous in-group tension and conflict by forging closer cooperation with Indo-Fijians. Before the 2006 coup, Fiji had a system of select committees, which met to discuss issues raised within parliament but did not deliberate on bills. Political parties remained largely isolated in their own respective communal blocs as multiparty cabinet became a forum for discussing policy differences. Nevertheless, there were missed opportunities because the 1997 Constitution, despite its failures, provided for a viable committee structure, which was never built upon by Fiji's communal leaders because it compromised their communal positions.

The abrogated 1997 Constitution of Fiji allowed for 6 sector-standing committees with the functions of scrutinising government administration. They were: Administrative Services; Economic Services; Foreign Relations; Justice, Law and Order; Natural Resources; and Social Services Committee. Under the SDL Government (2001–2006), a number of ad hoc committees were established, including the ad hoc Committee on Land, formed on 27 April 2004, consisting of 8 government members, the Leader of the Opposition, 6 members of the Fiji Labour Party and 2 nominees of the Great Council of Chiefs in the Senate.

The ad hoc Committee on Land failed after the Fiji Labour Party refused to participate following the release of the Racial Tolerance and Unity Bill in 2005. The failure of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Land suggests that there was an urgent need for developing consensus among various parties in the House before presenting a bill to the parliament. Under Fiji's past parliamentary practices, bills introduced in parliament and referred to various committees lay exposed to divisive party politicking.

Allport (1954:469) argues that legislations can affect prejudice and after drawing upon the history of legislative reforms in the US, Allport recommends that legislative reforms should be one of the avenues explored to promote inter-group tolerance. The Government of Fiji in 2006 should have utilised the committee approach for achieving consensus and making multiparty governance work. Since Fiji had a success story with multiparty committees in the past, it was important that the country legislated for an establishment of a permanent Multiparty Parliamentary Committee as a means for diminishing prejudice, discrimination, inter-group violence and in-group conflict. The role of the Joint Multiparty Parliamentary Committee is to engage in 'democratic bargaining' (Kelso 2003:57–76) and promote consensus with respect to draft bills and legislation. The selection of the

members should be from parliament and not necessarily from those who are in cabinet. In this way, there would be an even greater representation of parties in the legislative process.

In Fiji, the Joint Parliamentary Committee should play a major role in all three stages of the legislative process, as in the case of post-Soviet Lithuania, where draft bills precede the first reading, then, if needed, the second and final third readings. Joint Parliamentary Committees should work in conjunction with the author of the draft, examine all the amendments, and engage in regular communication with relevant government ministries. Although a committee cannot 'kill' a bill, it can present an alternative draft bill to the plenary, in addition to the one under review (Khmelko, Wise & Brown 2010:77).

Once the final legislation is ready, the government introduces the bill in Parliament for debate. However, since consensus is already achieved at the Joint Multiparty Parliamentary Committee, the parliament becomes more a debating forum rather than the chamber for oppositional or adversarial politics. In this way, deliberative democracy is institutionalised and multiethnic aspirations are reconciled.

The Draft People's Charter for Change (2008) has recommended parliamentary committees as a means for fostering better inter-ethnic cooperation and reducing prejudice. The government led by Commodore Frank Bainimarama has pledged support for legislative reform but the new parliamentary structure will not be finalised until 2013. However, there is appreciation, especially among the military led government of Fiji, that legislative reforms can play a major role in addressing inter-group conflict in Fiji.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued for a three-pronged approach to resolving inter-group conflict in Fiji. First, using Allport's ideas about national identity as a means for addressing inter-group prejudice, I argued that a national identity would bind different ethnic communities by creating over time a common identity. This starts with an agreement about a common name of 'Fijian' or 'Fiji Islanders'. However, as I have highlighted, indigenous community leaders remain opposed to the use of 'Fijian' as a common name, arguing that the term carries indigenous cultural meaning. Indo-Fijians see the use of 'Fijian' as a common name a vehicle for making them part of the Fijian nation, which has witnessed three race-based coups, especially targeted against the Indo-Fijian community. A common agreed name will contribute to better inter-group relations. Secondly, I utilise Allport's idea of national therapy in the form of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission that addresses past injustices, caused by indigenous nationalist coups in Fiji. In looking at the South African and the Northern Ireland experiences, I highlighted the difficulties faced by truth and reconciliation efforts and analysed Fiji's failed attempt at reconciliation through the Racial Tolerance and Unity Bill of 2005. I argued that unlike the South African approach, the nationalist SDL government in Fiji attempted to utilise the Bill to pardon individuals involved in the coup of 2000. Taking into consideration the history of discrimination and violence in the country, I proposed an Amnesty Committee with powers to grant amnesty to perpetrators provided they told the truth and the victims were acknowledged and compensated for the past trauma. Thirdly, Allport's analysis of the US President's Committee on Civil Rights in 1947 is examined to propose the establishment of a committee system of government. Fiji's past successes with parliamentary committees and a growing

appreciation in European and US democracies to use committee systems to resolve policy, inter-group and inter-party issues could become a pivotal force in embedding consensus democracy in the country. The three proposals form an interconnected nexus offering the ability to transform Fiji's political landscape and promote inter-group harmony.

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