MAKING NEW HISTORIES OF FIJI: THE CHOICE BETWEEN MATERIALIST POLITICAL ECONOMY AND NEOCOLONIAL ORTHODOXY

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Colonial and Neocolonial Histories

From the late eighteenth century until the present Fiji's history has been perceived largely in terms of interaction between a dominant corrective and modernizing European presence and a sluggish traditional (and at times self-defeating) Fijian reality. Early histories, unashamedly biased towards the overwhelming superiority of Western "culture", pictured a dark and gloomy Fiji of anarchic forces and unbridled barbarism, pathetic in its inability to rise even to the level of the noble savage in European eyes. The Fiji Times in 1880, for example, described Fiji as "the foulest blot upon the fair face of creation; a terrestrial pandemonium and a veritable abode of fiends", "a cimmerian darkness of barbarism" only in part dispelled as its peoples "learnt the acts of peace and realised the benefits of civilisation".1

Such notions might easily be dismissed as peculiar to the small and insecure European settler population whose economic ambitions were continually frustrated by their dependency on Fijians. Yet the view persisted, and as late as 1948 R.A. Derrick continued the tradition. "The Battle of Kaba", he declared, "marks the point where Fiji turned away from the old dark ways to adopt the customs of more enlightened people".2 Similarly Derrick described Cakobau, a chief "born during the darkest years of the century", as understanding "little of the civilised ways of Government, and much of the duplicity and cynicism of savage diplomacy..."3

Such historical biases still remain today, admittedly in more subtle forms, and have yet to be thoroughly exorcized by more substantial and comprehensive historical work. Clearly the task has begun, at least at one
level, as the works surveyed in this general review will indicate. But the task is more than simply an academic concern; it is one that must be accorded high national priority particularly as school children are still taught that history began with the European "discovery" of Fiji, with the opening of trade links in the early nineteenth century, and with the eventual persuasion in 1874 of a reluctant Britain to embrace Fiji within its civilizing empire. It is partly because of such erroneous attitudes towards Fiji society that in the treatment of subsequent events all discussion of the continued effects of colonialism on the people and their institutions are pushed aside for the obviously more important considerations of colonial achievements. Recently such narrow attitudes have come under fire; in 1982 Ratu Napolioni Dawai spoke in Parliament against "Bau's history and culture as the 'norm' or yardstick against which all other people's culture or history is... measured";4 and in 1985, Simione Durutalo criticized David Routledge's Matanitu for arguing among other things that "the colonial period appears as an interlude during which power temporarily passed out of the hands of the chiefs".5

As we shall see, colonial and neocolonial histories have a common disregard for the historical process; but equally importantly they often fail to present a contemporary relevance to their studies that might serve the purpose of development. Only in studies which incorporate the post-1945 era do ethnic Fijians for instance reemerge from behind the gloss of colonialism, but inevitably in terms of a perceived juxtaposition with racial competitors - the Indo-Fijians - or in terms of the modern variant of the lightness-darkness argument - modernization versus communalism. Until recently it was possible to believe that somewhere between cession and independence, a whole history had been lost.

Since Ken Gillion's Fiji's Indian Migrants in 1962 and Peter France's path-breaking Charter of the Land in 1969,6 a new series of histories have emerged, ostensibly to correct the failings of the earlier colonial efforts. Among the more recent have been Michael Moynagh's study of the Fiji sugar industry,7 Timothy Macnaught's history of ethnic Fijians under colonialism,8 Gillion's analysis of Indo-Fijians,9 Robert Norton's Race and Politics in Fiji,10 Deryck Scarr's biography of Ratu Sukuna,11 and Routledge's study of precolonial chiefly struggles.12 These histories might well be held as indicative of the state of Fiji research in the late twentieth century. Written by non-Fiji people, they filled in many of the gaps noticeable in the older histories, although in each case similarly failed to substantially remove misconceptions concerning change and in a large measure ignored the pioneering work of France. In some instances they perpetuated a long established tradition of focusing on accepted fragments.
which were unrelated to any whole - aspects of European commerce, European-promoted urban growth, the European rationalization of land tenure, the European importation of indentured labour, and the European creation of ethnically-based political divisions. In varying degrees these histories suffered from their failure to perceive the existence of a coherent Fiji historical framework which took account of all social, political and economic variables (let alone a global historical perspective) to which their subjects could be related.

Indeed few of these histories incorporated any understanding of social change. Moynagh wrote briefly of "contradictions between capital, chiefs and government on the one side, and commoners, Indian labourers and Indian smallfarmers on the other" but failed to pursue this analysis and ended by reiterating the potential of development to generate racial conflict. 12 Macnaught also wrote of contradictions between colonial administrators, the chiefly elite, and Fijians generally, but likewise fell back on the oft-stated options of communalism and individualism. 14 Both subject restrictions and theoretical weaknesses prevented their studies from enjoying a wider value. As Durutalo has acknowledged,

Fijian historiography usually depicts colonialism as merely the result of ideology, or of personality, or at the most policy which is itself guided by the first two. Thus, if different colonial administrators or figures can be shown to have different personal motives, ideas, policies, it is concluded that there was no such thing as colonialism in any meaningful sense, except as political rule. 15

At the heart of the problem is the inadequacy of most analyses to define change. All too often historians have refused to recognise the ideological character of their perceptions, with the result that historical analysis has become trapped within a stultifying orthodoxy. Pacific history has tended to fall into two categories: colonial histories which detail the perspectives of administrators, traders, planters and missionaries; and neocolonial histories. In the immediate post-colonial era it has been the latter which have been most influential, emerging either as biographies of administrators or collaborators which attempt to strengthen or reshape the colonial orthodoxy, or as histories, such as Macnaught's, which attempt revaluation but by means of the same perceptions. Unlike the earlier colonial historians, some neocolonialists are more invidious in their effect. Colonial historians at least admitted their biases through the values they explicitly espoused and the subject matters they chose; they hid nothing of their belief in the superiority of Western culture and commerce.
Neocolonial historians, on the other hand, have implicit values of cultural elitism and ideological biases which are not stated as openly.

Riding on the crest of independence and its accompanying wave of national consciousness, some among them have sought to capitalize on indigenous dissatisfaction with colonial interpretations by stressing the need for Pacific Island oriented history. In Fiji at the beginning of the 1970s a new Pacific Way movement captured the imagination of many Pacific historians and social scientists. Regardless of its political significance in legitimating ruling class positions and reducing class perceptions, the Pacific Way represented a genuine and progressive attempt by young Pacific intellectuals to forge a new identity for themselves in the wake of the colonial withdrawal. Not unnaturally it was centred largely on the Laucaula Campus of the University of the South Pacific in Suva, a campus which was still overwhelmingly staffed by expatriates whose perceptions remained those of colonizers, indeed many expatriates had come to Fiji via the dwindling colonial university network. Sensing change in the air, they rapidly adopted the terminology of the Pacific Way but without changing the nature of their studies or the framework of their analyses. The result was a serious deflection of Pacific Way concepts away from threatening class or nationalist concerns into narrow and isolated fields whose lack of relationship with any Pacific totality was justified solely on the grounds that they represented indigenously-defined frameworks or sequences for study. Hence Durutalo's claim that "islander-oriented" history has all too easily become "the islands' ruling class ideology dressed up in another guise".

In the Pacific, some neocolonial historians have played a greater role in teaching than in writing themselves, largely because they have defined their role as supportive of local or regional efforts. At times this has created its own dilemma - like the colonialists, they claim a self-appointed duty to promote Pacific Island-written history. Their continued presence is justified on the grounds either that such a body of indigenous history remains incomplete or that their historical mission is under threat from hostile or ideologically-opposed ochlocrats. Their peculiar position is not too different from that of the colonial historians and analysts they supposedly reject; indeed France's description of the early colonial consul Pritchard is remarkably applicable to the neocolonial historian who constantly has to justify his existence:

Pritchard was the prophet of that vast band of antiquarian and protectionist administrators who believe that Fijians were governed in their every action by a complexity of arcane and
immutable laws, to the understanding of which Europeans must apply themselves if they are to have influence on Fijian affairs. Such men are held in respect by their own society because of a supposed intimacy with that of Fijians. They are pedlars of mystique who know more about indigenous traditions than the native people; they are the creators and custodians of 'immemorial custom'.

But perhaps more importantly, their links with the colonial history tradition are best betrayed by their tools of analysis. By refusing to adopt a practical theory of social change, neocolonial historians have little alternative but to retain the old colonial concepts of change. Thus European penetration of the Pacific during the nineteenth century is still described euphemistically as "contact", and the period preceding it as "pre-contact" or "pre-history". The latter term is particularly significant, incorporating the unstated but implied (colonial) assumption that history is synonymous with the invigorating and innovative European capitalist drive which among other things made history possible through the introduction of literacy and records.

While neocolonial historians might no longer accept "prehistory" or "ethnic" history as insignificant, it is nevertheless of importance that they continue to define it as a category separate from the "modern" thrust of history. Ironically, in the post-independence era this approach has necessitated a reversal of past concepts in order to maintain credibility. Whereas once the Fijian past was dark and sordid, populated by barbaric illiterate savages with no concept of national interest, a new political necessity and anthropological confinement has resulted in raising the Fijian past out of the "cannibal mode" into yet another, equally confining, 'noble savage' mode. Both are negative approaches, because even in the case of the latter the implication is still that before Europeans there was no history, but merely a static or semi-static society whose "sins" are contained in the single description - traditional. "Sins" is clearly the wrong word to use in the neocolonial context because while colonial historians certainly viewed Fijian society in this way, the patronising neocolonial analyst has substituted "sins" for "virtues". Of course there is a propaganda value in the noble savage approach, which the survival-conscious neocolonial historian has been quick to exploit, since it encourages post-colonial ruling classes to look back into the past for models of association and action. Thus the colonial and neocolonial historians are linked through their class-supportive roles.

Durutalo's review of Matanitu, a book which its author claims placed Fijians for the first time as the main protagonists in their own history,
examined processes not sequences of events, and emphasized social categories not individuals, thoroughly exposed the link between colonial and neocolonial histories. Despite Routledge's claim to the contrary, Matanitu clearly continued the colonial tradition of obscuring Fiji's relationship to global strategic and economic forces, and played down the exploitative and racist relationships existing between Whites and Fijians, and the Fijian ruling class and commoners. According to Durutalo, this permits the colonial myths of reluctant colonization, the paramountcy of Fijian interests, the conflict between individualism and communalism, and the decisive role of individuals in shaping history, to be perpetuated. Further, by avoiding class analysis and by utilizing an idealist (as opposed to a materialist) explanation of historical processes, Routledge renders impossible the use of historical study for understanding "the present configuration of social forces ... and the likely future direction that Fiji society will evolve". Matanitu, Durutalo argues, far from breaking with colonial historiography, has succeeded only in deceptively presenting it in a new guise. Hence the epithet, neocolonial.

Terms such as colonial and neocolonial do not imply a specific ethnic or racial background; rather they describe studies which tend to reinforce colonial or neocolonial precepts and interests. In this respect they might also be termed bourgeois in character - not because the writers themselves are necessarily members of the bourgeoisie, but because their analyses are supportive of bourgeois strategies. Hence many historians have tended to lend support to contemporary political and economic structures by perpetuating racial myths as well as by confusing structural positions with the people occupying such positions - a point made earlier in the first quote from Durutalo. Nowhere has this been more evident than in those studies of political and economic development in Fiji using pluralist concepts. One practitioner of the pluralist approach, and by no means the only one, has been Ralph Premdas. In a recent article he maintained that Fiji's two main races are "hostile to each other", and although "Fijians and Indians interact mainly in the area of commerce", if left to themselves these ethnic groups would "probably opt for separate states". Indeed, he asserts, "from time to time ethnic conflict erupts to the point where it threatens to engulf the entire society in collective calamity". Premdas traces this situation back to the policies of the first British Governor, Gordon, which "laid the cornerstone of communalism" and which by means of "separation" (some would say marginalization) institutionalized "Fijian economic inferiority" and laid the basis for future racial competition surfacing most around the issue of land, "the tinderbox of communal conflict".
This approach to Fiji studies has been queried by local social scientists. Writing in 1981, Vijay Naidu argued that the plural society ideology that is gaining currency in Fiji, thanks to some of our academics, is a very dangerous one... Scholars fail to realise that historical experience indicates that the domination of society by one race, with the assistance of collaborators from other races, resulted in the "plural society" in the first place. Institutional structures and the Constitution continue race awareness... If there is a genuine desire among the leadership for national unity and development, race-based issues need to be looked at and sorted out first. The present approach of keeping people ignorant about themselves and the context in which they live, must cease.24

Similarly, in 1984, William Sutherland argued that many writers of Fiji history have failed to get beneath surface appearances. Racial conflicts, he maintained, are not the root causes of Fiji's problems. Rather it is underlying class contradictions which assume a racial form.25

While Premdas concedes some weaknesses in the pluralist approach, there is still little in his analysis that pinpoints the precise way in which class conflicts are either manifested or how secondary contradictions are manipulated in order to secure class interests. While recognising that an "Indian versus a combined Fijian-European conflict increased over time", Premdas fails to go beyond racial descriptions by means of class analysis. This results in an unsatisfactory explanation for what Premdas poses as the Fijian-European alliances against Indians, if one accepts the original premise that Fijian marginality had minimized Fijian-Indian relations. This weakness reveals itself in later unexplained statements; first, that "in their struggle against each other, both groups do not seem to see the system of production and distribution as their common enemy"; second, that "what the Indian farmer failed to perceive was that his interests and those of his bourgeois leadership did not coincide at critical points".

One of the factors which has made both colonial and neocolonial analyses increasingly unsatisfactory has been their inability to explain the problems which have arisen in the post-independence period. It became necessary for social scientists in the 1970's to ask why unemployment (and underemployment) was rife, why housing remained inadequate, and why diets had deteriorated and diet-related illnesses increased. In posing such questions, researchers began to discover the existence of a historical process, although one which was still often inadequately defined. Certainly
the process began with European penetration, with the introduction of capitalist relations under the aegis of imperialism, and with the creation of a peripheral dependent mono-cultural economy which hastened Fiji's integration into the world capitalist system. The result was changes in food consumption, trade patterns, craft production, attitudes to work and social relationships, and substantially altered health and living conditions; in short social, economic and political changes which reflected transformations in resource allocation. For some neocolonial historians, however, such new awareness served only to confirm their beliefs in the virtues of the "precontact" period of strong healthy "noble savages". Whereas the colonial view recognised the civilizing and developing mission of the West as the main historical process, the neocolonial view regards the irruption of the West as confirming the need to restore paramountcy to the isolated study of the original societies supposedly on their own terms.

New Directions

In Fiji during the 1970s a new wave of indigenous social scientists (while often encountering resistance or being studiously ignored) began to establish a new direction for historical research. Of great importance in confirming the legitimacy of their approach, was their ability to tackle history from a multi-disciplinary perspective (which in the case of those from the University of the South Pacific was accidentally encouraged by the institutional nature of school and degree structures). But more importantly they could apply to their subjects both their own intimacy with the society they were investigating and their deeply-felt concern to reinterpret Fiji history in a way which better informed their understanding and explanation of contemporary problems. In many respects the latter aim was their main achievement, enabling the barriers imposed by colonial and neocolonial history, particularly such notions as "history for its own sake" or the practice of compartmentalizing historical study, to be breached. As John Dower noted in respect of the North Pacific in the 1970's:

Western scholarship...has tended to compartmentalize the historical experience. One conference is devoted to attitudes, the next, several years later, to economics, then social change, then political development, then tradition and modernity, the 'dilemmas of growth', and so on. The intricate webb of history has been rent, as inevitably it must be, but the result as yet resembles not so much a vision of intertwined strands as a line of stockings hung out in the wash. 26
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Implicit in their new treatment of Fiji history was the need to eradicate the artificially-created categories of study such as ethnology and prehistory which the colonial and neocolonial historians had done so much to consolidate and which the new Fiji historians believed had little instrumental value. Such categorization hindered the advancement of knowledge. Its usage overemphasized distinctiveness at the expense of continuity and relationships, and denied the existence of internal dynamism. The result was to make people unaware of the role they had in history or of their ability to make history. Indeed they became stereotyped into what historian Jean Chesneaux termed "the passive consumers of history", with history itself simply becoming a record of external forces foisted on them. It was clear that if history was to be reactivated as a meaningful analysis of changed and changing relations of production over time, the limiting categorization of history had to be removed.

The most important of the early new Fiji historians in this respect was Ahmed Ali. Although he focused largely on the Indo-Fijian sector of the economy, Ali was concerned to account for contemporary tensions within Fiji society by recourse to historical analysis. This was a major break-through and it inevitably resulted in the employment of a wider framework of analysis. Thus in 1976 he was able to write of independence in a manner that suggested that the restrictiveness of pluralist concepts was at last being recognised.

The inheritance was not a tabula rasa but the legacy of ninety-six years of colonial rule guided by the obsolete doctrine of white racial superiority geared towards a capitalist economy sanctifying inequality and benefits for a minority frequently foreign-based with a political system designed to sustain and perpetuate this reality which thrived on exploiting differences including those of the ethnic variety.

The consequences of colonial rule "were imprinted deeply" and, he added, with what might have been applied to his academic colleagues as much as the country's colonial rulers, "some even thought they ought to become indelible".

One important economic origin of Fiji’s current ethnic relations was highlighted in Wadan Narsey's 1979 study of the operations of the Australian Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) Company in Fiji's sugar export economy which he aptly entitled "Monopoly Capital, White Racism and Superprofits in Fiji". Narsey sought to demonstrate how the development of a colonial enclave economy (and specifically the CSR's need to maintain and increase...
its profits) resulted in the deliberate manipulation of politics along ethnic lines. It is sometimes forgotten that before and after cession, Europeans exploited Fijians for economic gain, often with the support of compliant chiefs. The use of Lovoni slaves or Vatusila and Magodoro exiles as plantation labour, the wars against the western Viti Levu people, the suppression of indigenous enterprises like the Viti Kabani, and the development of Fijian taxation and migratory labour systems bore ample witness to the paramountcy of profit through exploitation, not protection, of ethnic Fijians. Historians have tended to play down conflicts generated by White racism towards Fijians and highlight instead Fijian-Indo-Fijian antagonisms. Certainly the introduction of Indian indentured labour reduced the immediate pressure on colonial enterprises to utilize Fijian labour since profitability could now be achieved by exploiting immigrant peoples. This shift in focus, however, did not represent an abandonment of the practice of racism. New forms of control and exploitation not only minimized contact between the two peoples but also enabled their greater subordination to the requirements of the colonial economy.

The CSR and the colonial government soon discovered further advantages in this manipulation of Fiji society. In addition to the normal use of state power, the colonial government could (and did) mobilize Fijians through their chiefs to undermine attempts by Indo-Fijians to strike and thereby reduce the CSR's profitability. Thus, one of the origins of supposed Fijian-Indo-Fijian confrontation lay not in cultural differences or in direct economic competition but in the need for foreign capital to extract maximum profits from the economy.

Narsey's political economic history of the CSR and economic relations in the sugar industry also highlighted the reality that while farmers did organize against the CSR, their effectiveness was diminished by the fostering of multiple farmers' organizations which broke their unity and potential for imposing sanctions on the CSR. Behind these multiple producers' associations, which fundamentally represented the same economic interest, lay not ethnic differences but the interests of the ruling classes that fostered the divisions. One might in fact examine the later proliferation of ostensibly ethnic divisions in unions in the same light.

Although reforms were introduced which modified the operation of the sugar industry - improvements in the conditions of indentured labourers, the formation of a new class of dependent peasant planters - nothing was done to alter the basic foreign ownership and distribution of benefits from Fiji's major economic activity.
The exploitation of Fiji served the needs of the white Australians, while leaving behind a legacy of low wages and struggles, and more permanently a division between Indians and Fijians who do not know their history of common exploitation, nor the origins of their present mutual antagonisms.\textsuperscript{31}

The poor wages experienced by producers in the sugar industry were due not to marginal productivity or free market forces of supply and demand but to "white racism ensuring superprofits for monopoly capital within the favourable environment provided by British colonial policies".\textsuperscript{32}

The CSR was able to use the indenture system, to shift the burden of falling prices to the Indo-Fijian producers themselves, and money transfer pricing to subsidize its Australian and New Zealand operations. Exploitation did not cease with the end of indenture; in fact the small farmer system which replaced indenture permitted greater exploitation. It enabled the removal of European planters and a more effective means of sustaining high profits. Small farms, in Narsey's view, reduced CSR's capital investment costs, saved valuable working capital, enabled labour charges to be reduced by the utilization of family labour, and generally shifted the burden of price fluctuations to the farmers. Until 1989 none of the readjustments offered to meet growing farmer discontent substantially altered this pattern of exploitation.

But Narsey's study was more than just a study of a colonial monopoly. He also sought to refute the notion that the problems and contradictions in Fiji today are due to the lack of foreign investment. The CSR case demonstrated that Fiji had not lacked foreign investment in the past and that it was precisely the dominance of foreign capital which promoted underdevelopment. Further, Narsey concluded, nationalization in 1973 did not remove the structural inequalities inherent in what had previously been a colonial enclave industry. Most farmers still "live close to the poverty line they have known in the past". The industry still provides high incomes and standards of living in the positions once occupied by expatriates. All that has happened is that "one class of exploiters has been replaced by another class derived from our own ranks, but whose behaviour is identical and equally inexcusable". And, as before, the farmers remain not only industrially divided but also uncertain whether such disputes as surrounded the 1976 Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Ordinance and the 1977 electoral crisis implied that the new ruling classes had, to quote Narsey again, taken "on the role of exploitation that private capitalist interests previously held".\textsuperscript{33} For Narsey, then, a study of Fiji's past was instructive. It demonstrated the danger of allowing foreign investment to dominate the
economy, a danger which had political repercussions when it coincided with the colonial state's failure to develop an integrated balanced national economy. Nationalization of the sugar industry could not remove those legacies. The export-oriented industry remained substantially unaltered in the first decade of independence, with all its encumbent features—dependency on a single crop, peasant exploitation, and continued racial obfuscation.

In 1976 Jay Narayan completed a doctoral thesis on Fiji which was published in 1984 as *The Political Economy of Fiji*. Narayan's study was broad; it attempted to explain the development of uneven development within the dependency paradigm. Like other new social scientists, Narayan was concerned to explain Fiji's continued neocolonial status by reference to its past.

Fiji's socio-economic and political problems are now deep rooted in two inter-related but separate sources, one internal and the other external... Fiji is caught between the twin evils of continued uneven development from within and under-development from without, a situation which owes its origin and development to the internationalisation of capitalism.

While Narayan's study was a brave effort at breaking out of the confines of neocolonial historicism, it still took many of the neocolonial precepts for granted. Thus, "while the Fijians remained physically confined, sheltered, and protected under the aegis of an alien imposed colonial structure, their development potentials were being stagnated, if not retarded." Although Narayan emphasized that "underlying racial inequalities are class inequalities, with the differences within each racial group being greater than those between them", his reliance on external pressures and influence as the dominant explanation for internal transformation resulted in a work that more often emphasizes nationalist sentiment than class conflict.

Narayan spoke of internal elites and the growing contradiction between their interests and those of the masses. Other social scientists attempted to explain the operation of such contradictions more precisely and at the same time attack many of the basic assumptions held of Fiji society and its development which still remained the cornerstone of neocolonial writing. The first to do so was John Samy. In 1978, while directly addressing the problems of Fiji social science research, Samy argued that colonial and neocolonial analyses not only obscured reality but more importantly helped perpetuate colonial roles and dependency.
Fiji's problems are defined primarily, if not solely, on racial terms; Fijians and Indo-Fijians being treated as homogenous groups, in conflict and competition - for the position of 'wage-labour' and petty enterprise. The dominant interests, attitudes, institutions and overall ideology of the invading system as well as historical and dynamic processes through which changes have taken place in Fiji are almost always ignored in the midst of the Fijian/Indo-Fijian polemic. 38

Samy's remarks were derived from a study undertaken in 1977 for a Masters dissertation in which, like Narayan, he saw ethnic relations as part of the contradictions generated by colonialism. At the same time, however, Samy sought to demolish the long held assumptions that Fiji had been colonized to protect the ethnic Fijian population, and that ethnic Fijians had retained their traditional social structures and had been "cocooned" from the wider colonial processes. 39

Like France before him, Samy exposed the racism of colonial administrators such as the Attorney-General who wrote in 1875 that "it would be most unwise" to permit Fijians "to imagine for a moment that they are capable of exercising any control over the Ruling Class", 40 and Governor Gordon who declared that "my sympathy for the coloured races is strong; but my sympathy for my own race is stronger". 41 Samy wished principally to dispel the idealist conception of history, but to do so he had to go beyond the ideology of imperialism and relate Fiji's development to the wider historical circumstances of international capital. This required also an understanding of the transformation of Fiji social formations and the way in which such transformation had been exploited for colonial purposes and explained away by the fiction of ethnic antagonisms mediated by a benevolent European population. As a result Samy produced a concise and reasoned analysis of precolonial social formations, of the nature and demands of the colonial economy, and of the role and purpose of chiefly collaboration. Further, he related changes in the CSR's use of labour to international economic crises, and described both Fijian and Indo-Fijian resistance to colonialism as class struggles which revealed not only the determination of the state to suppress discontent but also the strategies of collaborators seeking to strengthen their own positions. As we noted earlier in Narsey's 1979 analysis, ethnic cleavages were promoted to obscure uneven development and inequalities and to preserve the interests of metropolitan capital, the colonial state, and increasingly also the collaborating local petty bourgeoisie. The result was a colony economically disarticulated internally and dependent on primary production and a new import-dependent unproductive service sector, tourism. Fiji's domestic relations of social production at
the time of independence, Samy concluded, were still largely externally determined and controlled. Later historians would draw heavily on Samy’s succinct pioneering analysis of change in Fiji.

It was not until 1984 that a comprehensive study of Fiji’s history, fully articulated in terms of class analysis, was made in William Sutherland’s thesis, "The State and Capitalist Development in Fiji." (As we shall see Simione Durutalo’s 1985 thesis adopted the same method of analysis). Sutherland was concerned to refute the notion of the "relative autonomy" of the postcolonial state and to locate the role of the state within the process of capital accumulation. In doing so he provided the first major description of the nature of class in Fiji from precolonial times until the 1970s. This was essential if later internal class changes were to be understood. Class is not something that merely appeared with colonialism and Sutherland sought to explicate the form and content of class relations in (at least) the immediate precolonial period. He argued that beneath the form of social organization lay class relations of dominance and exploitation and that this is indicated, for example, by the way in which various forms of precolonial social exchange hid the underlying process of surplus appropriation by chiefs. In other words, class relations were often mediated through distributional rather than production relations. The material basis of chiefly power lay in control over land, and was legitimized both ideologically and politically.

This made for a dynamic, changing society, as indeed the growth of larger political units in the early nineteenth century demonstrated. But by the middle of the century it had not only to accommodate underlying class contradictions but also the growing pressures of capitalist penetration on its tributary mode of production. In the struggle which followed the capitalist mode became predominant (the formation of a colonial state in 1874 represented that triumph) and the process of dissolving the tributary mode began, although with the subordinate conservation of useful elements of the tributary mode. It is this apparently contradictory nature of the struggle between capitalist and tributary relations which has resulted in the many colonial and neocolonial myths of Fijian paramountcy, Fijian marginality, the dual economy, and the subsistence economy. Sutherland argued that these are not only serious misinterpretations but have also been instrumental in obscuring class relations and perpetuating racist ideologies.

Indeed an understanding of class relations is essential if the nature of colonial rule and the various reactions to it are to be fully appreciated. For it is not simply a matter of recording ethnic Fijian
reactions or Indo-Fijian reactions, but also of probing chiefly ethnic-Fijian, peasant ethnic-Fijian, petty-bourgeois Indo-Fijian, and peasant Indo-Fijian reactions. Each reaction represented struggles between class interests, and an important determinant of outcomes was the response of the colonial state—whether that took the form of supporting particular interests, attacking others or doing nothing. But the state's response is itself dependent upon the particular balance of class forces which exists at particular historical conjunctures. The thesis of relative autonomy is therefore open to serious question. But neither should the state be conceptualized in an instrumentalist way. State practice is constitutively integral to the balance of class forces and what is necessary is a specification of how and why the balance of forces is differently constituted at different historical conjunctures. The agents of white monopoly, plantation and commercial capital similarly conflicted with each other or with indigenous classes as the nature of capitalist penetration altered and as the state itself reacted to changes in the underlying class forces.

Simione's Durutalo's "Internal Colonialism and Unequal Regional Development" in 1985 presented a similar approach to the study of Fiji, but with a greater emphasis on change within ethnic-Fijian society. In particular Durutalo sought to demonstrate how uneven development on a regional basis was initiated by early capitalist penetration. Colonialism furthered the process by consolidating a predominantly eastern chiefly class while subjecting the less compliant western peoples to a form of internal colonialism which involved their conquest and peasantization, and the suppression of popular discontent as represented by the Tuka Movement and the Viti Kabani. Unequal development was entrenched further by the transformation of the eastern chiefly class into a bureaucratic bourgeoisie able to consolidate itself through access to education and positions of influence in the colonial state. The creation of a Fijian Administration in 1944 strengthened among others things the position of eastern copra producers but not that of the western peasants producing sugar cane, tobacco and yaqona or working in gold mines. Hence, "the west did not receive the same housing and education benefits as the east" and its inequality became more marked.

The development of a neocolonial economy based on tourism and primary commodity production brought inequality into sharp focus, and precipitated a series of protests (the Bula Tale, the National Democrat Party, the Dra-ni-Lami, the Fijian Chamber of Commerce, and the Western United Front) by western Fijians who believed that the wealth they were producing for the country was being "enjoyed or taken away by others." Durutalo argues that
in attempting to transform themselves into a national bourgeoisie, the eastern elite was forced to capitalize Fijian land. In respect of tourism and the pine industry, that land lay in the much exploited west. As a result

The western Fijian peasantry remains potentially one of the most combative and class-conscious sections of Fiji's peasantry because of their double exploitation and history of class struggle through the years culminating in the confrontation with the eastern-based and neocolonial Fijian State (and its transnational allies) in the dispute over the benefits to be derived from Fiji's pine resources and its exploitation.47

The creation of uneven and unequal regional development, therefore, has been one further effect on Fiji of the international expansion of capitalism through colonialism and neocolonialism. However, there are other aspects of both Durutalo's and Sutherland's theses which are extremely important and which we will examine later.

The Nature of the Achievements

The summary given here of new directions in Fiji history is by no means complete48, but the works so far surveyed should indicate at least the tremendous break-through that has been achieved and its significance. For all these social scientists history has a value which forces them to question the nature and assumptions held of their 'plural', 'traditional', and 'dual society', and to demonstrate that "a critical understanding of our history is an indispensible precondition to the process of liberation".49 Few foreign historians have been able to incorporate into their work anything near the same depth of feeling and passion; invariably greater access to sources and funds has enabled superficially impressive publications but it has not consolidated a practical framework for historical analysis. That basis was laid by indigenous historians in the 1970s and early 1980s and in the next few years we can look forward to the flowering of Fiji history as their work continues and as new practitioners enter the field unencumbered by the diminishing influence of neocolonial perspectives. Their success so far, I suspect, has been in no small measure due to the fact that they have seen their own work as part of a struggle for the elimination of underdevelopment, and for control of their own history which is an inherent part of that process.

In 1979 for example a young Fiji sociology graduate wrote in the pilot issue of a new magazine from the University of the South Pacific that
despite nearly ten years of independence "not once during the decade have we seriously attempted to solve the question of our national identity". Despite his genuine concern at what he considered in the year of the Girmil centenary to be of major importance, his views were not widely acceptable to the academic community. Not only was he reprimanded by several expatriate and regional staff members but the future of the magazine itself was for a time called into question. It was bad enough that the ideology of racial conflict had been openly aired within the University, but the manner in which it was raised seemed likely to jeopardise staff security.

Racial prejudice and discrimination nurtured by colonialism and economic exploitation has produced vested interests of power and privilege, initially among white people, but now also among local power elites and internal colonialists. It may well be that their interests are too great to be sacrificed without a struggle. Such a struggle, if constructively directed towards national identity and nationalism should produce under one flag, one nation with one people. Only when the citizens of this country remove the tinted glasses they have been imprisoned behind by the foreign and colonial exploiters, and the present neocolonial governmental system, will true nationalism be born.

Local social scientists who wished to question assumptions held about their own society all too often found that the only tertiary institution within their country was not conducive to such debate. They no doubt would have found solace in the idea that an institution (to paraphrase John Stuart Mill) which "dwarfs its men in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes will find that with small men no great things can really be accomplished". Some social scientists turned to private means for publication, others were fortunate to be able to pursue their ideas and studies in universities outside Fiji. In time their ideas filtered back, and, as the nature of the University of the South Pacific itself changed, became more tolerated or at least were no longer so easily suppressed.

Much of the recent work being done on Fiji has come from the disciplines of sociology and political economy, partly because these disciplines have been more affected by rigorous theoretical debate. In the case of sociology at the University of the South Pacific, it has been suggested that a change in staff in 1981 resulted in more direct responses to the weaknesses of static theories and tunnel perspectives, and a new emphasis on socio-economic relations and global historical developments. But while such a change appeared to a few as dramatic, its effect was
accelerated by the return of many regional staff from overseas study who brought with them new perspectives and insights to apply to their own nations and, in the case of Fiji, consolidated the changes already outlined.

Nevertheless, the process of decolonizing Fiji's history through critical research came about, not as the result of some monolithic Marxist conspiracy, but simply because the new practitioners (mostly indigenous) have realized the need to present Fiji's history in relation to wider global developments. They have also argued that no analysis is complete if it fails to interrelate historical changes "within the compass of the single and temporarily simultaneous but multi-form process of which they were and are related parts".54 Like Chinese historians, they have discovered that such analysis is only possible if they accept that "historical research progresses backwards not forwards".55 To be effective, the historian must possess an insight into the nature of contemporary society and on the basis of such understanding use historical research as a tool for clarifying the present in a way that makes the past active. The past has little importance in its own right; its relevance is attained only by clarifying its relationship to the historical process.

To achieve this, many of the new Fiji scholars have made use of Marxist analyses as an alternative to what they regard as the stultifying orthodoxy of much contemporary research which, as we have seen, appeared to describe only surface appearances and obscured the mechanisms of change in their societies. For this abandonment of more conventional forms of analysis, they and expatriate scholars have often been criticized, sometime because their positions appear to threaten the foundations of established political interests, and at other times because they challenge the "liberalism" of non-Marxists. On occasion they have been challenged as narrow or Eurocentric in their approaches.56 Unfortunately many such attacks have not been constructive. Again, to quote the experiences of Japanese historians,

The academic jingoism by which the complexities of Marxist analysis is reduced to sterile slogans has hardly proved conducive to the formulation of refined theories of history; Marxism is a deep and hardly translucent reservoir, and those who commonly describe it as shallow have often merely been catching their own reflections.57

This can be illustrated if we focus finally on what has been the main achievements of the new histories of Fiji, including their Marxist analytical tools. This of necessity will be a brief summation for each of the authors referred to have spent much space themselves on outlining their
First, the new histories have sought to describe the nature of precolonial societies. I have discussed this above; it suffices here to reiterate that their major concern is to depict societies that were not static. Indeed the development of Fijian societies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries revealed not only the dynamic character of their diverse social relations but also how war and expansion were used to attempt to resolve underlying class conflicts.

Second, they have expelled the myth that Britain was a "reluctant colonist", by emphasizing the purpose of colonies, particularly in an age of "new imperialism", and by examining the failure of the last Cakobau government to meet the needs of commercial and plantation capital. Third, they have solidly refuted the myth that Britain sought to ensure the paramountcy of Fijian interests. In many respects this is their most important achievement because from it has flowed various ideas concerning the "articulation" of modes of production and the struggle of different class interests. Sutherland, Durutalo, and Samy in particular demonstrated that the purpose of Gordon's reforms was not the welfare of the ethnic Fijian but the viability of the new colonial state which necessitated exploiting communalism in ways that differed from those of earlier European capitalists. Hence ethnic Fijians were not marginalized, there was no dual economy, no separate subsistence economy; "Fijians were never left out, they were always involved".58 Sutherland explained this in terms of Bettelheim's thesis of the conservation/dissolution of modes of production, of the overriding tendency of capitalism to dissolve precapitalist relations while at the same time finding it necessary to conserve aspects of the latter in order to assist capital accumulation. Durutalo noted that

the colonial state employed substantial coercion to force Fijians to enter commodity production or wage labour. The most common forms of state intervention were taxation, forced labour and compulsory crop production. Articulation under colonial capitalism through these various avenues further exposed native Fijian population like those of western Viti Levu to new imported commodities whose acquisition could only be secured by participation in the cash-based market economy. The two ways open for participation were sale of labour power and/or sale of agricultural commodities.59

This selective use of Fijian labour and commodity production necessitated the introduction of Indian labour on the sugar plantations and the
cooperation of Fijian chiefs; hence Samy and others have described the chiefs as collaborators, a term recently attacked as implying "that the 'natives' were and are fools or dupes".50

In fact the opposite is the case. Samy noted that while Gordon sought to use chiefs as a means to provide both stability and a source for labour and state finance-generating commodity production,61 the chiefs used collaboration as a means to achieve ends of their own. Durutalo noted that collaboration enabled the domination of the eastern chiefs particularly over the west, but that it also resulted in the rise of a new type of bureaucratic chief, aware of the need to adjust to the demands of the colonial state if they were to achieve their class aims. In this connection Sutherland demonstrated the state's plans to dissolve the tributary mode further during and after im Thurn's governorship, which because the decline in Fijian resistance to colonialism seemed to indicate less need for state reliance on chiefly collaboration, was thwarted by this new chiefly class and reinforced by the attention given the Viti Kabani, and that at a time when European plantation and commercial interests felt threatened by changes in the nature of Indian economic activities. The result was a series of class alliances, in which each sought to buttress the other for their own purposes. For the chiefs, then, collaboration enabled survival and the uses to which they exploited it showed they were far from simply dupes or fools.

What is being discussed here is not the role of individuals but rather of classes. The ability of any one class or their representatives to act depended precisely on the balance of class forces at any particular time. This was not always easy, if we follow Sutherland's and Samy's analyses. For in suppressing Fijian and Indo-Fijian discontent, the colonial state was forced on the one hand to highlight its own essential role by fostering ethnic rivalry in order to prevent opposition from uniting, and on the other, to rely more and more on collaborators to impose order. Such actions held obvious dangers. Ethnic rivalry, once promoted, might generate a momentum of its own that could be detrimental to the interests of metropolitan capital and the local petty bourgeoisie. Periodic public relations exercises, such as the Burns Report, and legislative initiatives in communalism were all designed to placate ethnic divisions sufficiently to ensure the colonial system's continuance. Moreover, the essential collaborators might develop aspirations of their own which could run counter to European interests, or they might grow too distant from the disarticulated communities in which they operated. These tendencies were reflected in the debates over Indian political representation, in government attempts to reduce chiefly privileges before World War Two, and in the failure of Indo-Fijian peasants to unite industrially. Yet as long as the
dependency of collaborators and their communities remained externally directed and determined such tendencies could be successfully manipulated or contained.62

Sutherland has further shown how local white capital attempted to shore up its weakening position in the 1950s by appropriating provisions granted under Britain's new policies of trusteeship and by wooing the support of the Fijian chiefly and bureaucratic class under the pretext that increasing Indian demographic and economic growth threatened Fijian survival. While the resultant new class alliance permitted local white capital to direct infrastructural developments towards its own ends and to curtail the rising power of labour, it also made Fiji attractive to foreign capital. Hence, during the decade following independence, local white capital experienced the unintended consequences of its own strategy. The new tourist sector had all too easily been infiltrated, and later dominated, by foreign tourist capital. Further, the postcolonial state itself had come to be dominated by the Fijian chiefly and bureaucratic class whose support local white capital had previously sought, but who were now intent on diverting the state's resources in order to develop its own ethnic Fijian national bourgeoisie. Such a policy required rapprochement with the Indo-Fijian petty bourgeoisie and peasantry (the ideology of multiracialism) if scarce state resources derived largely from sugar production were not to be jeopardized. This was a further abandonment of white capital's earlier strategy. However the Fijian bureaucratic class's plans were themselves frustrated by the country's increasing dependence on world markets and foreign capital. Not only was the state unable to help constitute a viable ethnic Fijian bourgeoisie, but it had also to accommodate the effects of the uneven nature of capitalist development (both inherited and fostered by post-independence plans) and the racial basis of the electoral system which exacerbated working class and peasant discontent at the same time as the nation was hit by the inflationary and recessional tendencies of the world economy.63

In this brief summation the detailed and sophisticated class analysis employed by Sutherland and Durutalo is glossed over. Nevertheless I have tried to indicate a dynamic process of change in which no one class was able to ensure its survival without confronting the shifting realities of different class configurations as the nature of Fiji's economy altered and as the pressures placed upon it also changed. But there is one other important achievement made by the new social scientists that requires mention, and that is their concern to relate class strategies to development issues. Durutalo's thesis revealed how uneven development "became intensified into unequal regional development" after colonization, as the eastern-dominated Fijian bureaucratic bourgeoisie consolidated itself in
part by commodifying Fijian land at the expense of Fijian occupiers. So long as effective rights remained in the hands of the direct producers, the contradictions were hidden and the conflicts of interest in land remained latent. This was reinforced by the colonial economic and social policies of 'gradualism' or malua (as instituted by Sukuna) which ensured that the contradictions remained hidden for quite some time. This situation changed dramatically towards the end of the 1960s and early 1970s with the coming of the tourist boom and impending independence which was accompanied by the colonial government's attempt to institute an ambitious development strategy of increased primary commodity production based on the commodification of land.

This strategy, which involved the alienation of ethnic Fijians from land needed for forestry and tourism and also a reduction in scope for secondary industrial activity and self reliance, raises very important questions concerning development that have rarely been addressed in Fiji:

How can fluid and dispossessed groups with few ties to either centralised political structures or cash-based 'growth' economies be incorporated into a state-based polity in any other than a coercive, ultimately destructive manner? How can such indigenous people participate actively rather than passively in their own future, given the differences between their 'way of life' and programmes of state bureaucracies, international development agencies and other powerful interest groups represented by the transnationals determined to modernise indigenous peoples such as the western Fijians and exploit the resources of their region or the resources embodied in their labour power.

This problem of rapid development within one region of Fiji has rarely been focused upon so directly and it informs not just difficulties inherent in development strategies but also major contradictions arising from the post-colonial state's desire to promote an ethnic Fijian national bourgeoisie and attract large scale foreign investment rather than seek alternate and less alien forms of development, particularly within a region with a long history of uneven and unequal development.

Thus history becomes an examination of relations of production and the appropriation of surplus value (long ignored in orthodox histories) and of multiform processes of change, of alienation and exploitation. The latter are not coincidental dilemmas of growth but functional to it, and reveal the
effects of change upon people's lives, thereby simultaneously bringing us closer to a genuine people's history while escaping the false "people's histories" concerned solely with the articulate and the elite. Finally it must be noted that if there is one basic feature of Fiji's new histories it lies in their strongly declared concern for human values and social justice. Hence there is no pretence that their work is value-free. From the outset it is designed to give meaning to history and to reveal that meaning through the different and honestly declared perspectives adopted. The result can only be a tremendous stimulation of interest in Fiji history, which, even if controversial at times, must help to foster what Durutalo has called "the liberation of the Pacific Island intellectual".67

ENDNOTES

3. ibid., p.117.

12. Routledge, op. cit.


21. ibid., p. 127.

22. ibid., p. 118.


28. A collection of some of A. Ali's articles are to be found in A. Ali, Plantation to Politics, Studies on Fiji Indians, USP - Fiji Times, Suva, 1980.


31. ibid., p. 135.

32. ibid., p. 67.

33. ibid., p. 136.


35. ibid., p. ix.

36. ibid., p. 90.

37. ibid., p. 64.

38. J. Samy, "Development and Research for Whom? Towards a critique of economism in the Pacific", in A. Mamak and G. McCall, Paradise Postponed, essays on research and development in the South Pacific,
40. ibid., p.43.
41. ibid., p.52.
42. ibid., p.123.
43. Sutherland, op. cit.
44. S. Durutalo, "Internal Colonialism".
45. ibid., p.403.
46. ibid., p.465.
47. ibid., p.530.
51. ibid., p. 27.
57. Dower, p. 45.
58. Sutherland, p. 81.
60. Meleisea and Schoeffel, p. 103.
62. ibid., p. 123-130.
63. Sutherland, Parts 3 and 4 passim.
64. Durutalo, "Internal Colonialism", p. 129.
65. ibid., p. 421.
66. ibid., p. 529.