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The state-building process in the South Pacific – the Fiji case

Abstract

For almost two decades, since obtaining independence, Fiji has been viewed as an example of perfect and successful operating democracy. There had been many internationally recognised indicators proving the effectiveness of this political system, both for security and economic prosperity. Then, everything collapsed. While the explanation for the conflicts occurred in the small island region is often summarized very sketchy in a general phrase „ethnic tensions”, in fact, the problems are far more complex. It has been pointed out that where such tensions do exist, they are usually accompanied by other factors, such as disputes over lands, economic disparities and a lack of confidence in the government’s ability or the willingness to solve the basic problems. Similar pattern can be observed in Europe and North America, where the institutional system was unable to survive in the past over petrified also in XIXth century traditional tribal structure. Liberal democracy is simply unable to deal and cope with problems generated by the society of different mentality and social attitudes. Nevertheless, Fijian axiological system is dominated by European protestant values, so the question should be raised: why Westerners from Europe, the United States, Australia, New Zealand failed to incorporate Fiji into the system of western alliances? Why did they leave an open and empty space for Russian and Chinese infiltration?

Keywords: *state building, the South Pacific, Fiji, state security, geopolitics*

The question of how nation-states acquire, maintain and enhance their security is perennial in international relations. Right after the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama announced the end of the history and the beginning of the new era dominated by the liberal democracy order. International conflicts in his futuristic vision would be reduced to fight for the positive image, national brands and nation/state reputation. History, which still continues its existence and perpetually surprises us with unexpected events falsified this romantic and overoptimistic concept. Wars are still around us and the regional and global debates about most appropriate socio-political and economic order continues. Recent international discussions have been dominated by the analyses of unsuccessful experiment with liberal democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan. The question of the type of order that may secure the best conditions for the individual and collective security and wellbeing is still open. It is worth noticing that when it comes to the security issues for small island states, the attention has been focused on what has happened or may happen to the island states rather than what these island states can do to enhance their own security outlook. Looking for a new microcosmos for the analysis, I have decided to concentrate on a relatively unknown and neglected part of our globe, namely the state islands of the Pacific Ocean with a particular case of Fiji.

A man always lives in a particular time and in a particular space. Geographical factors always influence every aspect of a human activity. Space is a set of places, which are existing objectively, however they are subjectively perceived and extracted from the space, depending on the analytical needs. It is also known that space is absolute and infinite and if one wants to focus on relations between the objects, then one must deal with the space flows. In every case geographical determinants are a challenge, could be an easily formed matter or a milestone around your neck. Despite an enormous distance between Western Civilization, which characterizes the Transatlantic alliance of culture and security politics, people do not differ from each other so much. Undoubtedly, people are of various identity, placing an emphasis on different values, however under similar circumstances, human nature and the groups of societies are programmed for similar patterns of behavior.

For instance, it refers to the enslavement by the enemy, further relations with the past enemy after liberation and the whole complex process of the existence of the state and cultural groups. Fiji provides one of the most evident illustrations of how the very concept of legal political system has the potential capacity to influence peace and the

social order. Together with Iraq and Afghanistan, Fiji is an example of incongruence between the concept of liberal democracy and the local background. Moreover, owing to its peripheral location, it can serve as an object of an experiment of how to modify western-minded liberal democracy in order to build a well-rooted and extensively accepted rules of a political game, which in consequence, would establish peace and well-being.

Fiji lies in a part of the most fascinating area on our planet. The whole region of the Pacific Islands comprises of three ethno-geographic groupings – Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia and excludes the neighbouring continent of Australia. Every historic and ethno-geographic part has its own specific and separate atmosphere of ethnicity. There are thousands of islands belonging to the Fijian Archipelago. In pre-colonial phase Fiji was torn between two main powers – Melanesian in central and west part on Viti Levu and Polynesian, in eastern part and in Vanua Levu. What is more, the third very distant and distinctive European power appeared. It was the time when the people of Fiji lived „in the shadow of coco palmtree” – the greatest ally of the men and a tree of abundance. In the whole Pacific Islands region the fortune of the habitants of Fiji was closely related to the vegetation of tropical forests. In the colonial period a vast tracts of lands were changed into plantations, hence the inhabitants on their own land became laborers in many overseas companies and corporations. Parallel to the local land cultivation, colonial powers introduced new plants (Posern-Zieliński 1971, p. 64).

Not only the creation of sugarcane plantations was the infringement of the local economic space, but also the inception of the Christian values brought by the British people. Christian affiliation was connected with a pass to money income and served a basis to create a strong local position as a middleman with the colonial centre. Between 1879-1917 the inflow of Indian population was observed. During the time between two main groups: indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians a lot of misperceptions were accumulated, which was an effect of the Divide and Rule policy. If it refers to the creation of one group of the citizens, regardless of the issue of nation-state or just a depended territory, one of the most unifying factor is a common language. In Fiji, there are three major official languages being representative of certain cultural groups: Fijian, English and Hindustani. The compounds of the language and philosophical ideas are still very strong, since the language is the main determinant of the ideology. Language is the main means of transmission of the culture. According to the theory of structuralism, the

language embraces all the spiritual possibilities of a man. Ideology can only assimilate with the code generated by the articulation. One of the most important aspect of the British colonization was to co-opt with the local leaders of the tribes. The British Empire played with local animosities, being positive about Indians who amounted to nothing more than farmers. The two ethno-groupings were kept separated in terms of territorial separation and various contractual arrangements (Kelly 1995, p. 65).

In the colonial history of Fiji perhaps the most obvious example of the danger of a polarized ethnic formation can be observed. However still evident ethnic cleavage shows just a superficial division of the society. First, during the colonial period, a political narration was created between European and Fijians contra „Indian threat.” In reality, there was a lot more complex divisions. The Fijian population divided itself along tribal, regional and cultural lines, more evolved and distinctive groups of Fijian elite, which occupied the position of „wealth distributors.” The British Empire played a decision making role in Fijian policy, after gaining independence in 1970, a political and economic gap leading occurred, which was the consequence of an apparently controlled chaos. Fiji became a republic based on the Westminster system, however the proportional representation with the majoritarian electoral system proved something of a mismatch (Coakley, Fraenkel 2012).

In fact, it is unknown who represents the Fijian elite. The first intellectual challenge when we analyse this issue is to create an appropriate and locally applicable definition of democracy and dictatorship. Apart from that, the name of Max Weber should be mentioned here, since he designed the concept of a political leadership. In the post-colonial era, dominated by charismatic and traditional patterns, former colonial states and the western opinion-making centres constantly try to enforce „universal” legal system.

When it comes to the conditions and determinants of coups d`etats, the aim of mine is not to describe the complexity of an idiosyncratic situation in Fiji, but to take Fiji as an example of certain mechanism which seems to be the curse of XXIst century. Namely, this is the conflict between the legal structure and the local background. In every case the state- building process should be related to the nation-building process. The question that should be asked at this stage concerns the understanding of the term *nation*. Political nation is a community of the citizens which has been created by political and social conversions. The nation is an association of partners living under one law

and represented by one legislation. Such a definition is strongly correlated with democracy. Language, religion, ethnicity are not a matter of first importance. In Europe, we can be proud of the creation of “modern societies.” To be more precise, it happened when divided feudal societies crashed and a cult of a decisional personality was born from the ashes. It took centuries and still language and culture were an issue. Nowadays, the mobility of individualities are unlimited.

In Fiji, the process of mixing ethnicities was imposed beforehand. The ties between the state and the people are very strict and remain in mutual relations. On the one hand, state unites various ethnic groups, which are united around the achievement of common benefits offered by the government. The habitants of certain territory may unite in order to conclude the social contract. It should also be clearly stated that *State* and *Nation* are two separate entities. The existence of the nation does not determine the creation of the state and each other. Thus, it can be concluded that a nation is a product of a man, since through belonging to the certain territory one feels obliged to have rights and duties towards other residents (Gellner 2009, p. 125).

The next question to ponder over is where the line between ethnicity and citizenship lies. Every case should be analyzed as a separate object and the potential answer may have a large margin of error. Democracy is a system of government in which individuals and groups have got an extensive competition for all effective positions of the government power through regular, free and fair elections. There is a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies and the whole catalogue of civil and political liberties. A real democratic system should be all about “good institutions” accountability, supplemented by a government that has credibility, and by rules and regulations that apply equally to every citizen (Fraenkel 2009).

Institutional system in Fiji has never been democratic. Persisted patterns about wealth distribution concentrated around one limited group taking care of their further voters. One can criticize Prime Minister Bainimarama, but it should be noticed that during the years quasi-institutions were a smokescreen for the elites. Another crucial issue is to analyse carefully whether the reforms which he submitted have been applied in reality. Being under an authoritarian governance there is always a risk of applying the “middle of the road” strategy. Over some time the leaders became less charismatic and the internal conditions would not allow to change the reality just at the behest. In order to remain a relatively calm leader, one could make a deal with the local elites. Either way,

there is still a little chance of changing something in different sections of the society, since old problems are just covered.

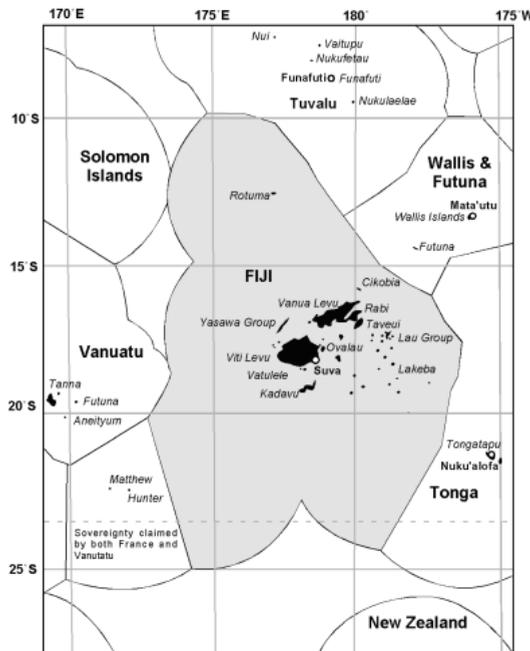
The question that needs an answer concerns the reasons why the leaders decided to pick such a solution. In Fiji's case it would be global economies and the most influential actors as states and transnational organizations, when taking into account the internal political situation and the neighbouring space. EU renewed bilateral relations with Fiji after general elections in 2014 in this country. The rupture of diplomatic and most of all the economic relations between Fiji and EU left an economic gap, which was filled up by China and Russia to some extent. Then, in 2007 a smashing moment in Fijians bilateral relations with EU came, which was an effect of the Council Decision 2007/627/EC to end the Sugar Protocol (Fraenkel 2009, p. 48).

There was a pejorative opinion about China taking advantage of Fiji, the result of which was the most difficult time for Fiji over the last ten years, because diplomatic relations were established in 1975. The Fijian coup in 2006 also had an influence on the political situation. China began to respect non-interference in internal affairs and have separate indicators of measurability of their state power. It is vital to mention that sometimes in international relations it is more important to maintain human and economic presence in one part of the globe, than create the present political reality, which simply does not calculate in equation, as too much effort and resources should be accumulated in the first phase of involvement. What is more, the aim of promoting democracy is too nebulous and downright, unnecessary to build an economic coalition. The Republic of the Fiji Islands has an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of around 1,290,000 km², while having a land area of around 18,333 km² (Fiji, Fishery Management on-line).

Not only it refers to Fiji, but also to the South Pacific space, where there are numerous transport routes, both by sea and air. The statistics show that approx. 90% of all imports and exports of China and 40% of oil is dependent on the maritime transport. According to the draft, the twenty-first century Maritime Silk Road, the islands of the Oceania, would be a natural extension of the belt of the economic exchange with China. In addition, starting in 1984, the Middle Kingdom has a research station in Antarctica called the "Great Wall Station" to which there is no way to get past the region of the small islands of the Oceania. The marginal role of the Oceania in the world of politics can be expressed in defining this region as "an American lake".

Contrary to a popular belief about the strong relationship between the geopolitical area of the South Pacific and the United States, it must be admitted that, de facto, the US involvement in the Oceania was limited to a minimum just to ensure their economic security and, on the occasion, the interests of Australia, New Zealand and France. It took place both during the alleged civil protection of the Pacific against the Japanese occupation during the second World War and during the Cold War, to establish a buffer zone against the Soviet Union (Brown 2013, p. 15).

Figure 1. Fiji



Source: Fiji, Fishery Management on-line.

The whole Oceania is between, on the one hand, the economic benefits flowing from Asia, and on the other, the stability and support of the largest gendarme of the world, namely the US. Specific evolution of the security of the region creates a unique catalogue of opportunities, threats and risks for the development and potential business partners. If one analyses closer the policy of the little island, referring to management

science, a third partner to diversify policy and economic options can always be found. Thinking “out of the box” this is the European Union, that such a role should play such a role in Fiji and the little island region.

Time and distance in the twenty-first century changed its meaning thanks to the globalization process. Modern, global world travels all the time. Holidays have become a routine part of the western lifestyle. At the same time, tourists are often an easy target for different groups, which through violence and terror, aim to pursue their own interests. Safety becomes more important than attractiveness of the place. The issue of the tourist safety in Europe, in traditional holiday destinations, has significantly changed due to the activities of the Islamic State, the war in Syria and the massive influx of immigrants into the European Union. The area of the Oceania still remains as a poorly examined space for the expansion of the tourism. It is an exotic, attractive area in which there is no high risk of conflicts on religious or social background. The safety and attractiveness of the site are also connected with the infrastructure equipment, thankful to the area of the economic activity. Safety is a paramount human need and a priority existential objective. The final cause of the need of security is the very existence of life and its improvement. This objective has been realized through various tools and resources from the ethical, through political, and economic ones. Security and development are two mutually conditioning dimensions of existence of entire communities. Security is the foundation of everything you can dream of, hence the successful development helps to ensure safety (Koziej 2010, p. 2).

Fiji has several options of the progressive development. One that can be mentioned is about reconciliation with the major ideological principles of the European Union. It seems that it is going to be a potentially successful cooperation, but on the other hand the economic system of the Republic of Fiji is still rooted in the context of the post-colonial past. Currently, the major challenge is finding a way to combine political will with a hard economic context. The major flaw of the Fijian economy is a lack of financial resources, so there is an urgent need to open a local economy for a penetration and possible financial investment of major global economic institutions. The key for the success and reconciliation between contradictory factors, namely local tradition, historical memory and the selection of the global economic market, is a local original wisdom and a common sense.

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