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THE BURDEN OF OTHER PEOPLE'S MODELS

BY HARRIS FRIEDMAN,
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Fiji has been undergoing a crisis that cuts across all political, economic, and social levels of the nation. Many Western countries have been quick to criticize the way in which events have unfolded in Fiji, most notably the recent removal of a democratically elected government by a coup that resulted in the appointment of a replacement transition government. Now that Western-style elections have been held and a new democratic government installed, it is appropriate to consider how this nation has been burdened with other people's models as it strives to develop its own unique path for development.
Fiji's ethnic composition, based on a 1998 estimated population of under a million people, is composed of approximately fifty-one percent native Fijians and forty-four percent Fijian Indians (with the remaining being of European, other Pacific Island, and Chinese backgrounds). The Western press and even many Fijian residents have typically attributed Fiji's crisis to ethnic tensions between the two major groups in Fiji. Instead, we maintain that the recent coup, and the coups of the 1980s, are symptoms of competing models of development that have evolved over the past two or three decades. This is not to ignore the ethnic problems, which are real, but rather to put them into an alternative cultural perspective.

Since gaining independence in 1970 after almost a century as a British colony, Fiji has gone through a number of political struggles. Most noteworthy for purposes of this discussion is that two military coups occurred in 1987, followed by the enactment of a 1990 constitution that resulted in significant Fijian Indian emigration and economic difficulties for the nation. The constitution was subsequently amended in 1997 and elections were held in 1999, resulting in a government led by a Fijian Indian. The recent coup replaced that government and now, once more, there is a democratically elected government in place headed by Fijian leadership.

Consider the following case as an illustration of the type of problems in Fiji that can better be understood from a cultural perspective of competing development models as opposed to the more simplistic attribution typically invoked, namely ethnic divisiveness. One European MBA-trained expatriate in 1993 expressed difficulties with the work ethic of Fijian villagers and related that, during his first week in Fiji, he requested a local village chief send "three men to do an eight-hour job of clearing a field," offering to pay each an hourly wage. He was surprised when, early the next morning, the entire group of able-bodied men from the village showed up to do the work. He stated, "I didn't need the forty of them, so I asked them to select three men to do the work. Then I asked the rest to go back to the village." He then stated that the chief's response was that, if all were used for the job, they could complete the work in one hour and then go back to do other work in the village. Furthermore, the chief requested that the men not be paid individually, explaining that the money for all of the workers would be put in the village fund. The process of forty men doing the work in one hour seemed to perplex the expatriate and he had no understanding about the purpose of the village fund—which is used communally to help the entire village.

We asked the expatriate what his response had been and he proudly told us that he sent the chief and villagers away, only to pay higher wages for transporting three Fijian contract workers from a nearby town. He summarized his story by commenting on the work ethic of Fijians, "They are not motivated to be productive and don't seem to have any individual initiative." This explanation revealed the expatriate's economic orientation to productivity, which the chief obviously did not share; instead, the chief emphasized getting work done through a collective effort with collective rewards. The Fijian Indians' notions about productivity more closely fit those of the expatriate, so they were given the work even though it resulted in higher costs for the expatriate's budget. The result was that the expatriate's concern with labor scheduling actually cost him money and time since he had to wait several days to import workers from the city who shared his cultural prescription for doing work. Likewise, the chief and villagers were both frustrated, as revenue was sorely needed, and discouraged from hope that the expatriate's enterprise would help replenish the village fund. There was even talk in the village of rethinking the terms of the land lease, since the land occupied by the expatriate was owned by the village—a potentially disastrous economic consequence for the expatriate. This type of problem, found frequently in Fiji, originated from the use of different cultural
models rather than just from irreconcilable ethnic divisions.

Following the coups in the 1980s, well-intentioned attempts were made to encourage development efforts in Fiji but, unfortunately, these often suffered from a lack of cultural fit. The economic development model chosen most frequently was based on individual capitalism, as practiced in Britain and America, which focuses on ideals such as conspicuous consumption, individual initiative, and the importance of self over society. This form of capitalism is more congruent with Fijian Indian than with Fijian approaches, although there are some Fijians educated abroad who endorse an individual capitalist model. This has led to an unwieldy combination of both individual and collective economic models employed within Fiji, creating numerous difficulties. For example, most pay and incentives plans used in Fijian organizations are ill-suited for Fijian workers. Nancy Adler has pointed out that most motivation systems in use today were developed based on American values and are problematic if imposed in other cultural settings, yet this has occurred in Fiji.

Lester Thurow has described the influence of culture on economics by defining two contemporary versions of capitalism as operating in today’s global economy; the individualistic British-American form and the communitarian German and Japanese. We suggest adding additional types, such as “government directed” which is typical of the economic “dragons” of South East Asia, including South Korea, Taiwan, the Peoples Republic of China, and Singapore—all of which evolved capitalist models through different paths. For example, astounding success in Singapore has resulted from an economic development plan in the last several decades strongly controlled by their government. Singapore is a globally competitive nation with an adaptive cultural blend of competencies, capabilities, and strategies. In the 1960s, the leadership of Singapore was faced with ethnic clashes, the need for economic development, and other problems faced by ex-British colonies—not so dissimilar to Fiji. Using the principles of Confucianism, a highly successful model for government and business appropriate for Singapore was devised in which concepts of social order, balance, and benevolent authority became the foundations of both government and corporate cultures. Now, it has a highly skilled workforce, low crime rates, and sustained economic success. Malaysia, Japan, Germany, and China also have developed capitalist economies that are culturally congruent and exemplify that there are many models for successfully creating wealth (see the table, below). The model for Fiji is left unnamed since it is now “in process” of being selected.

Russia provides a counterexample that illustrates the negative consequences of choosing the wrong model for capitalism. In the early period of Russian capitalism in the 1990s, there was a wholesale dismantling of the Soviet management and organizational system, without regard for what might have been working successfully and needed to be saved. Instead, Russian leaders threw out their own cultural models in their attempt to adopt the American model of capitalism and the result has been disappointing.

It is important to critically evaluate the usefulness of outside models in terms of their cultural congruence for purposes of national, corporate, or community development in Fiji. One example of an inappropriate model used in Fiji is the downsizing that occurred in the 1990s. This was a common change initiative in America when CEOs there needed to focus on short-term shareholder dividends within a tradition that viewed employees as a budget line item to be controlled—despite the consistent lack of empirical support for the effectiveness of downsizing. Similarly, privatization and corporatization were applied in Fiji in the 1990s with downsizing used as a way to achieve these goals. This led to savings in some organizations, but overall expenditures increased in the forms of police and social welfare programs. In one downsizing Fijian organization, we overheard an employee’s insightful remark, “We downsized one hundred employees this week, now where will they go? It’s difficult to go back to live in the village once you have left.”

Fijian culture is best suited for a form of collective capitalism, not individual capitalism. Collective capitalists focus on such ideals as resource sharing, group responsibility, and the importance of society over self. Individual initiative is encour-

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The clash between models for development has embroiled Fijian government and commerce in a quagmire that has led to a failure to take appropriate action on crucial problems.
aged only if it does not disrupt the balance and harmony of the group, community, corporation, or nation. As an example, the Fijian village, which functions as the core of traditional Fijian culture, is clearly more aligned with collective than individual capitalism. During our work in Fiji over the past decade, however, we have noticed that many outsiders and even some Fijians, view the traditional village as a liability and have tried to dismantle this system. In contrast, we see the village system as a great asset for economic development, despite being frequently undervalued or even denigrated. The village system provides for many basic human services that the Fijian government would otherwise have to spend tax revenues to develop. The village fund in some villages, particularly those that own and lease land to hotels and other such commercial enterprises, has been a source of well-being and collective economic development. The village system has also provided a form of enculturation and social control for many people in Fijian society. Finally, if villages did not exist, there would likely be several hundred thousand or more Fijians living in substandard conditions and poverty in the metropolitan areas.

Fiji’s liabilities also need to be examined in new ways. For one, we see Fiji’s tensions as rooted in the legacy of colonialism. Post-colonial Fiji has experienced a process in which the British-American capitalist, Fijian village, and Indian entrepreneurial models have competed for prominence. Unfortunately, Fiji’s past leadership has frequently engaged in a win-lose strategy of favoring the British-

### Different Forms of Capitalism and Related Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models for the practice of Capitalism</th>
<th>Ownership System</th>
<th>Corporate-Community Responsibility</th>
<th>Macro-economic influence on leadership decisions</th>
<th>Time Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual (British-USA)</td>
<td>Shareholders with no loyalty, continual trading</td>
<td>Limited responsibility to society; resistance to government controls</td>
<td>Shareholder value is primary; other stakeholders not considered</td>
<td>Short term, overnight turnover of share ownership; immediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codetermination (Germany)</td>
<td>Shared among banks, government, and corporations</td>
<td>Corporate and government responsibility is legally mandated</td>
<td>Shareholders and stakeholders cooperate; labor sits on board of directors</td>
<td>Longer term than USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keiretsu (Japan)</td>
<td>Groups of interlocking companies; majority of shares not traded</td>
<td>Loyalty to workers and workers “belong” to company</td>
<td>Harmony and balance critical; autocratic consensus (“ring” system)</td>
<td>Long term; investment in research &amp; development even in down times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaebol (South Korea)</td>
<td>Government supported conglomerates; cross-ownership</td>
<td>Corporation is an extension of the government</td>
<td>Government reviews plans of corporations; closely directed</td>
<td>Long-term; government and banks invest in corporate research &amp; development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Directed (Singapore)</td>
<td>Government regulated development; planned economy and investment of government in education of workers</td>
<td>Corporate social responsibility high</td>
<td>Corporations involve government as stakeholder</td>
<td>Long-term; government planning is central focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified Communist (People’s Republic of China)</td>
<td>Government controlled joint ventures with outside investors or companies, combination of state and individual enterprises</td>
<td>State is primary benefactor in redistributive economy</td>
<td>Government and joint venture partners decide</td>
<td>Long term; government directs the course of the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji (in process)</td>
<td>Conflicting models of individual and collective capitalism</td>
<td>Conflicting models of individual and collective capitalism</td>
<td>Traditional Fijian and British-USA model in conflict</td>
<td>Village is synthetic, outsiders are sequential</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
American capitalist model and, in particular, under utilizing the Fijian village model. The clash between models for development has embroiled Fijian government and commerce in a quandary that has led to a failure to take appropriate action on crucial problems. It is important to recognize that the models for development are at the roots of the crisis while the ethnic tensions are a resulting symptom, not the cause. What is needed is a balanced approach to development, a win-win model in which all stakeholders, including Fijian, Fijian Indian, and others can benefit. Economic development should focus on creating wealth, not just creating revenue, from a broader perspective that resonates with Fiji's cultural heritage.

The case of fishing in Fiji may provide some insights to facilitate how this might occur. In Fiji, traditional fishing, "ravi yau," is still practiced and it actively involves most of the able village members. They go to a reef, and as the tide is receding, they form a human circle and force the fish inside it into a smaller area as they move inward to reduce the circumference of the circle. The fish are forced into a temporary pool of water as the tide goes out. All that remains is for the villagers to harvest the catch.

The yield is impressive, considering the input of human energy expended. The traditional Fijian fishing approach is very productive, even by Western standards. This collective model for fishing productivity yields more than could be produced in the same amount of time by the same number of people using individual fishing poles. It is probably the most productive fishing technique in the world, except for commercial net fishing which has accompanying large environmental costs. Yet, we have heard those who do not share the traditional Fijian cultural model for fishing scoff at the "primitive" village practice since they are more comfortable with more individual methods, such as using fishing poles. In response to our inquiries regarding the different cultural models for fishing among ethnically diverse Fijians, one Fijian Indian manager jokingly provided the following illustrative explanation: "When Fijian villagers fish they use ravi yau, Indians use one person with one fishing pole and five hooks, and the expatriates pay someone to catch the fish for them." Just as there are many successful ways of catching fish, and the traditional Fijian way compares favorably to the others, so too does Fiji need to find its own successful way to foster culturally appropriate development.