



TONGAN DEVELOPMENT AND PACIFIC ISLAND SECURITY ISSUES

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External perceptions of the Kingdom of Tonga tend to be dominated by the awareness that, as a monarchy in which the king exercises significant authority, it is an anomaly in a world where democracy and republicanism are ascendant. All other Pacific states, like other 'new nations' of the so-called 'third world', are republics with constitutions drafted in the framework of the liberalism and optimism of the 1960s. Tonga's constitution is a liberal document of the 1870s, making it one of the oldest functioning constitutions in the world. This longevity attracts scorn rather than admiration from external observers, who see its survival not as evidence of stability and adaptability, but of anachronism, ossification and authoritarianism. It is, however, by no means self-evident that this constitution is inappropriate, and a strong argument can be made that the quality of life enjoyed by Tongans under this constitution is superior, by conventional indicators, to that of most other Pacific Islanders and other 'third world' populations.

The presence of a chapter on Tonga in this volume acknowledges the perception of Tonga as politically and socially archaic, and that as such it is likely sooner or later to experience the pangs, not to say upheavals, of a lurch into the modern world in circumstances that could make it a source of regional instability. If 'security' is an issue for the Pacific Islands, it concerns this question of internal disorder having a capacity to infect the internal affairs of neighboring countries, an interpretation which has some limited empirical support.

On the whole, none of the Pacific Island states constitutes a security threat in the normal sense of the term. That is, they are not militarily expansionist, and none of them has the military or economic capacity to threaten states outside their immediate region. With some considerable augmentation of armaments and logistics it would be physically possible for any of them to intimidate or even subdue any of the smaller states nearby given the considerable disparities of population and land area, ranging from Papua New Guinea with a land area of 462,243 kilometers and a population of nearly five million, to Niue with a population of sixteen-hundred, and Nauru with a land

area of twenty-one square kilometers.¹ Further, detaching an isolated but imperfectly integrated possession from one state and annexing it to a neighbor would also be physically possible if the region were composed of mutually hostile units defining their interests as finite and competitive. It is not outside the realm of imagination that such exchanges might take place in order to expand the size of territorial seas should these assets appreciate significantly in value.

However, the ethos of international relations in the Pacific shows no such likelihood. This benign state of affairs reflects the fact that the well-being of Pacific Island states is defined more in terms of their relationships (individual and collective) with the major international aid donors than by their relationships with their intra-regional neighbors. While they might in a sense be competitors for aid, they are not competitors for regional resources, and their aspirations therefore do not bring them into conflict with each other. Moreover, extra-regional powers continue to exercise a paternalistic guardianship of the affairs of Pacific Island states, and at the present time it is inconceivable that they would acquiesce in any acts of international destabilization.

The case for Tonga being a source of regional instability rests on persistent media representation depicting Tonga as an antiquated, feudal, absolutist state, its people oppressed and yearning for the saving breath of democracy.² Tonga, according to this view, is ripe for transition, and on the assumption that transitions are periods of increased risk of disorder, Tonga may be imagined a potential security threat.

The 'transition hypothesis' presupposes change of a particular kind, not the evolutionary, barely perceptible progressive change in which almost all societies participate to a greater or lesser degree. The word 'transition' is better reserved for a series of structural shifts from traditional to 'modern' rather than applied to a process of evolution within a historical trajectory of established structures. In this chapter I suggest that continued movement within the present trajectory is the more likely path for the immediate future of Tonga than a 'transition'.

Tonga does not fit the scenario built on the transition hypothesis. The threats to stability arise not from a supposed state of arrested modernization represented by the continued existence of a monarchy possessing both

¹ Ron Crocombe, *The South Pacific* (Suva, 2001), pp.685-86.

² See Kerry James, 'The Recent Elections in Tonga: democratic supporters win, but does democracy follow?' *Journal of Pacific History*, vol.37 no.3 (2002) p.321 n.21.

legislative and executive powers. On the contrary, potential instability arises from inequalities of wealth, the prevalence of injustice, and the weakness of political accountability. None of these is a structural inevitability: they do not follow inexorably from the constitutional forms. Regardless of the nature of Tonga's problems, the kingdom is itself too small and poor to constitute a direct security threat to its region. However, the failures of governance in certain roles means that like all isolated, small and underdeveloped states, the threat to regional security if any would lie in its potential as a staging area or transit place for extraneous destabilizing influences, such as drug trafficking, money laundering and terrorist activity. International law enforcement has already produced evidence of Tonga being used as a transit point.³

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO MODERNIZATION IN TONGA

The modern-traditional dualism that underlies the 'transition' hypothesis is unsatisfactory as a tool of analysis in Tonga because Tonga has been 'modernizing' progressively for nearly 200 years. The traditional, Polynesian political system characterized by arbitrary authority exercised by a chiefly caste and validated by religion began to break down before European influence became significant.⁴ The former political structure was destroyed by civil war and assassination extending over nearly forty years between about 1780 and 1820. Before they could be re-established, Christian missions arrived and from the late 1820s conversion to Christianity was both rapid and permanent. A new basis for political authority was established in the notion of the rule of law and the idea of the Christian state, parallel with the re-establishment of a unitary, nation-wide political system. A series of law codes adopted in 1839, 1850 and 1862 enhanced personal freedoms, extended the protection of law to all persons, and dismantled the political if not social privileges of the aristocracy. This process was taken to its apogee in 1875 with the adoption of a formal constitution incorporating a Bill of Rights, establishing parliamentary government and providing an equitable basis for land tenure. By this time the monarchy was established on the British Victorian model and was subject to law. Local government was in the hands of elected officials (mayors or town officers) and magistrates appointed by the state.⁵

³ Crocombe *op.cit.*, pp.365, 569. See also *Matangi Tonga* vol.6 no.3 (May-June 1991), p.16, and vol.7, no.2. (March-April 1992), p.5.

⁴ I. C. Campbell, *Island Kingdom: Tonga Ancient and Modern* (Christchurch, 2nd ed, 2001), ch.5.

⁵ Sione Latukefu, *Church and State in Tonga* (Canberra, 1974).

On the basis of a modern, written constitution, which was liberal by the international standards of the time, Tonga sought and obtained international recognition as a state, confirmed in treaties with Germany (1876), Britain (1879) and the United States (1886).⁶ In an age of increasing international tension manifested in the 'New Imperialism' of the late nineteenth century, Tonga hoped to remain independent but became a British protectorate.⁷ During the protectorate period (1900–1970) Tonga continued to be governed by its own monarch, parliament and civil service, though British subjects occupied key positions requiring particular expertise. The restoration of full independence was taken in a series of steps over the two decades before 1970.⁸

Important economic developments accompanied and underwrote these political and social changes. The most important was the prohibition of land sales to non-Tongans in the 1830s, the absolute non-alienation of land as the property of the state in the constitution, and finally in 1882 the institution of a system of individualized perpetual leasehold which ensured that all householders could claim and register a defined area of land sufficient not only for subsistence purposes but also for cash cropping.⁹ Tongans became increasingly involved in trade from the 1840s with the development of the trade in coconut oil, and when this was superseded by copra in the 1860s, all Tongans had their own individual means of entering a cash economy.¹⁰ Compulsory, secular education was adopted in 1882.

Thus all the normal criteria for a modern society were established in principle by the early 1880s in a series of major structural adjustments extending over about half a century. This may be referred to as a period of 'transition' in the sense that major structural departures were accomplished. Nevertheless, they were both protracted and incomplete insofar as implementation faltered from time to time, and cultural and mental habits were changed less readily than laws. In the subsequent century consciousness has gradually harmonized with the new structures.

The insulation of Tonga from serious political challenges (either internal or foreign) by the British protectorate arrested the further evolution of the

⁶ Noel Rutherford, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga* (Melbourne, 1971), chapters 7 and 9.

⁷ Paul Kennedy, 'Britain and the Tongan Harbours' *Historical Studies* vol.15 no.58 (1972), pp.251-67.

⁸ Penny Lavaka, 'The Limits of Advice: Britain and the Kingdom of Tonga 1900-1970' (Unpublished PhD thesis: Australian National University, 1981).

⁹ A. Maude and F. Sevele, 'Tonga: Equality overtaking Privilege.' In Ron Crocombe (ed.), *Land Tenure in the Pacific* (Suva, 3rd ed. 1987).

¹⁰ Campbell, *op.cit.*, ch.9.

constitution and of political conventions within the constitutional framework.

¹¹ Similarly, the isolation of Tonga from major centers of population and major trade routes impeded the development of new economic challenges or opportunities. Consequently, Tonga came to full independence in 1970 with institutions not much modified from the late nineteenth-century form.

Government had already embarked on a set of policies that would result in major social and economic changes. Heavy investment in education, agricultural diversification, electrification, international communications and public health projects during the 1950s and 60s positioned Tonga to face large-scale public investment in the 1970s. These programs were guided by a series of economic five-year plans and fuelled by lavish foreign aid, mainly from Australia and New Zealand, and on a declining scale by Britain. Rapid population increase with annual growth rates in excess of three percent strained land tenure because the 1882 system was not adapted to a growing population or to new commercial realities in that it did not permit a market in land. The economic strains were in some ways enhanced and in other ways relieved by the increasing numbers being educated at tertiary level abroad from the 1950s, and during the 1970s by the large numbers able to emigrate, mainly to New Zealand, and to a lesser extent Australia and the United States.¹²

During the 1970s tension began to build. People's economic and social aspirations were being expanded by government policy, education, and overseas experience faster than they could be satisfied. Personal freedoms expanded as opportunities for expression became available, but at the same time, as the government was taking a more directive role in economic change, its centralist tendencies inclined toward more authoritarian rather than more liberal.¹³ Simultaneously, aid money increased the money supply and enhanced the opportunities for corruption. Social status and aristocratic privilege easily led to exploitation of the needs of the people while the government rather single-mindedly pursued policies that were shaped partly by rational development thinking, and partly by the forceful personality of the king and his more fanciful aspirations.¹⁴

¹¹ The process is discussed but with a somewhat different reading in Elizabeth Wood Ellem, *Queen Salote of Tonga. The Story of an Era 1900-1965* (Auckland, 1999).

¹² Campbell, *op.cit.*, chapters 14-15.

¹³ The tendency towards authoritarianism may be seen in the attempts to ban the liberal, pro-reform newspaper, *Taimi o Tonga*, published in Auckland by an expatriate Tongan. See Note 20 below.

¹⁴ Campbell, *op.cit.*, chapters 15-16.

POLITICS AND MODERNITY

While policies of growth and diversification made government both more complex and larger, there was not a commensurate increase in popular participation in decision-making. Large numbers of unemployed youth untouched by increasing economic opportunities, and educated professional people disenchanted with limited means of political articulation or of input into development planning, constituted complementary nodes of unrest. The underlying tension manifested itself first in access to land, which also focused attention on aristocratic privilege and corrupt practices, and drew attention to the government's unresponsiveness to popular opinion. Expressions of dissent were especially aired in church and educational circles, and the government chose first to ignore and then to discourage dissent.¹⁵ As a result the constitution has become controversial in Tonga and misconstrued abroad.

The constitution preserves powers for the monarch consistent with nineteenth-century thinking. His approval is necessary for all legislation, and he presides over the supreme governing body, the Privy Council, which consists of himself and the cabinet. He chooses and appoints the prime minister and all ministers who by convention rather than constitutional requirement are drawn from outside parliament. On appointment they become members of parliament and their appointments are *sine die*. Other members of parliament include nine nobles elected by the nobles of whom there are only twenty-nine, owing to some titles having merged. The people are also represented by nine members, elected by universal adult franchise triennially.¹⁶ There is only the one house of parliament. The 'government' thus is the king's, not parliament's. Although there is an impeachment provision in the constitution, the government does not hold office at the pleasure of parliament. Elections do not choose or change governments, and the role of the people's representatives is to reflect public opinion not to decide policy. There is no requirement for government to take any notice especially as in recent history the government has generally been supported by the nobles' representatives. It was not always so, and it need not be in future. The people's representatives in recent years have inclined towards strong criticism of the

¹⁵ I. C. Campbell 'The Emergence of Parliamentary Democracy in Tonga.' *Pacific Studies* vol.15 no.1 (1992), pp.77-97.

¹⁶ The population as enumerated by the most recent census in 1996 was 97,784, with an estimated annual rate of increase of 0.5%. The electoral roll numbered 59,239 at the 2002 election, of whom 28,953 (forty-nine percent) voted. James, *loc.cit.*, p.317.

government, but they have no organization, are not united and do not vote consistently with each other.¹⁷

The democratic features of the constitution are subordinated by political convention and the dominant personality of the king. Despite the well-publicized opinion that the constitution needs reform, the present structure is capable of producing a different political culture, but as long as the king chooses to assert his constitutional prerogatives to the limit permitted by law, the system is bound to exhibit anti-democratic features. The same practice inhibits reform: any constitutional amendment, like any other legislation, requires royal consent. Critics of government point to abuses of power, the absence of accountability, corruption in high places and infringements of personal freedoms.¹⁸ On the other hand, the constitution succeeds in protecting fundamental rights and freedoms thanks to the independence of the judiciary. The courts have been successfully used to obtain redress of grievances, and government has found it expedient to meet some of the criticisms. There are no political prisoners in Tonga, have been no political assassinations,¹⁹ and the strongest critics of government are still able to speak freely in Tonga and abroad. Attempts to silence them have generally yielded to the rule of law and have therefore failed.²⁰

¹⁷ Various publications record the recent political history of Tonga, see especially I. C. Campbell 'Tongan Politics: the Arrival of Instability', *New Zealand International Review*, vol.16 n1, 1991: 8-11; 'The Emergence of Parliamentary Politics in Tonga', *Pacific Studies*, vol.1 no.1, 1992: 77-97; 'Tonga since the 1990 election: Things Change But Stay the Same.' *Journal of Pacific History*. vol.27 no.3, 1992: 61-65; 'The Doctrine of Accountability and the Unchanging Locus of Power in Tonga. *Journal of Pacific History* vol.29 no.1, 1994: 81-94; 'Fakalelea Filo and Pepetama in Tongan Politics.' *Journal of Pacific History* vol.31 no.3, 1996: 44-52; 'The Democracy Movement and the 1999 Tongan Election.' *Journal of Pacific History*, vol.34 no.3, 1999: 265-272; 'Tonga,' in Dieter Nohlen, Florian Grotz, and Christof Hartmann eds., *Elections in Asia and the Pacific, Vol.2: South East Asia, East Asia, and the South Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp.809-22. Also annual reports on Tongan affairs by Kerry James in *The Contemporary Pacific*.

¹⁸ Kalafi Moala, *Island Kingdom Strikes Back. The Story of an Independent Island Newspaper—Taimi o Tonga*, (Auckland 2002), *passim*.

¹⁹ The last attempted assassination was in 1887. Rutherford, *op.cit.*, chapter 10.

²⁰ This statement has been overtaken to some extent by events in 2003. Beginning in February, there were repeated attempts by the government to ban the newspaper *Taimi 'o Tonga*. Each attempt was ruled invalid or unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. At length, to circumvent recourse to the court, the government introduced a constitutional amendment, and two items of legislation, 'An Act to make Provision for the Regulating of Newspapers in the Kingdom (Act No. 18 of 2003)' and 'An Act Relating to Licensing of Media Operators (Act No. 4 of 2003)'. These empowered the government to prevent the publication or distribution of certain publications. A Tonga Government press release of 6 June 2003 described the constitutional

By the late 1980s a core of critics was elected to parliament. They found that the structure of parliament made it impossible to influence government or to demand accountability. Consequently, the non-democratic features of the century-old constitution and the scope for arbitrary powers by the executive came to public attention. During the 1990s the government's critics attempted on several occasions to form both political and popular organizations to press for constitutional reform. These efforts had small success, but their relative failure is due not to government oppression or opposition, but to disunity among the government's critics and the weakness of popular feelings in favor of change.²¹ Contrary to widespread media impressions, political parties are not illegal in Tonga. On the whole the government did not concede the criticisms being voiced freely in the Tongan media, and such minor concessions as it had made do not satisfy the critics who now have a well organized, well-led lobby in the Human Rights and Democracy Movement of Tonga which, however, is not a political party.

The inadequacy of accountability has so far not had serious consequences comparable with the failures of governance in other, democratic, Pacific states. Scandals have been exposed over various government projects to increase foreign earnings, the most infamous of which was the sale-of-passports scheme.²² It is unclear whether this was originally devised for personal gain or as a national project, but the former is widely suspected. Dubious development or investment proposals have for many years been inadequately scrutinized, and the king seems susceptible to the blandishments of plausible foreigners promising massive development. That these have not seriously compromised either Tonga's sovereignty or its economy seems to have been due to good fortune more than good governance, but their exposure nevertheless indicates a degree of health in the body politic.

None of these incidents has given rise to instability, to any serious threat to the regime in general terms, or to the position of the king. The reform movement has sponsored discussion of constitutional and political issues several times since 1989, but the government is unresponsive and the movement itself is non-violent. There is no likelihood of change in the foreseeable future, though speculation surrounds the policies of the next king,

amendments as clarifying rather than restricting freedom of expression and exempting decisions of parliament and Privy Council from the prerogatives of the Supreme Court. The amendments were gazetted on 27 November 2003.

²¹ Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, chapters 16 & 17, and see n 16 above.

²² Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, pp.237, 242, 245; Moala, *op.cit.*, pp.77-83.

whose accession has been thought for many years to be not long distant; the king in 2003 was 85 years of age.

It is suggested therefore, that Tonga's travails in the recent past, present and near future are less a matter of traditional structure confronting the modern world with its alien ways of doing things, alien ideas and disturbing economic practices, than of the particularities of dominant personalities. Tongans do not distinguish between their own lives and modernity: access to education and modern healthcare, the distribution of modern technology and access to foreign places and ideas is almost universal, and well in advance of the other fully independent states of the Pacific Ocean. Per capita gross domestic product in 1999 was estimated at US\$1,487; life expectancy at birth was 68.8 and 72.9 years (male and female respectively, 1999 estimate), infant mortality 20.6 per thousand, and the 1990 estimate of population per physician was 2,195. Adult literacy is almost one hundred percent and well over ninety percent of primary school-age children of both sexes attend school regularly. These are all extremely favorable levels by Pacific and third-world standards.²³ Tonga's Human Poverty Index rating is 5.9 (the lowest for PDMCs) and its Human Development Index rating is 0.647, third highest among PDMCs.²⁴ Tonga's modernization has extended over nearly two centuries, and usually in a process which has been free of bloodshed or disturbances. Neither in its external orientation nor in its domestic arrangements does Tonga contribute anything to regional instability.

ACCOUNTING FOR TONGA'S STRENGTHS

Thus, the prevalent idea in some circles that Tonga is a society untouched by modernity is false, as is the corollary that its transition from tradition to modernity has any security implications for the region. Tonga is stable, by the standards of the region well governed and neither through its strengths nor its weaknesses does it pose a security threat. This is not to say that it might not be used by extra-regional interests for their own purposes. Tonga is susceptible to manipulation by confidence men, and has been a haven for international

²³ Data from *Asia-Pacific in Figures 2001*, Statistics Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The National Reserve Bank of Tonga *Quarterly Bulletin* gives more favorable estimates for 2001, particularly for infant mortality, estimated then at <15/1000.

²⁴ Asian Development Bank, *Country Assistance Plan. Tonga 2001-2003* (December 2000). For comparison, the HDI rating for Papua New Guinea is 52.2. 'PDMC' is Pacific Developing Member Country of the ADB.

criminals through the sale of passports and even of citizenship. The country has already been used for drug trafficking.²⁵

In all these hazards, Tonga is far from unique. All the weaknesses possessed by Tonga are also possessed by most other states of the Pacific Ocean. Tonga's stability and relative prosperity have instructive hints for understanding instability elsewhere. The greatest problems facing the Pacific Islands region are represented not by this stable quasi-democracy, but by the failed or failing democracies with modern, liberal constitutions in which politicians can be bought, elections rigged and government seriously unbalanced by corruption from both internal and external sources. This is a trend that calls into question the belief that democracy is a universally viable political form, and the belief that democracy is the means to ensure peace between communities and prosperity within them. Governance is weak throughout the Pacific, and especially so where the temptations of office are not adequately balanced by either convention or law enforcement. Tonga is the state least susceptible to these hazards in the region.

As a counter-example or exceptional case, Tonga is perhaps useful in diagnosing the ills of the less successful Pacific states. First, Tonga is distinguished for its political stability and relative prosperity. Its Human Poverty Index ranking and Human Development Index ranking indicate that Tonga may be considered a success. Stability and prosperity are almost certainly related. Fundamental to both is the absence of deep ethnic or social divisions. Since pre-European times, speakers of Tongan have constituted a single, coherent political and social system. Unlike almost every other political entity in the Pacific, the state formation of the colonial period neither divided Tongans between different polities, nor joined them to another ethnic group. Consequently there is no internal ethnic rivalry to complicate politics, and there is a strong sense that the system of authority is rooted in Tongan culture. The ruling elite constitute a social category that belongs to the community as a whole rather than being alienated from it. Almost all other Pacific states are multi-ethnic, even though the different ethnicities as in French Polynesia or Cook Islands might be very closely related. In other states, such as Kiribati which has a high level of cultural coherence, there was never in pre-European times, political unity coterminous with the perceived cultural category, and it has been accordingly much more difficult to create a single, all encompassing focus of national identity or loyalty. In the largely plural societies of the Pacific, constitutional democracy tends to accentuate divisions rather than ameliorate

²⁵ See n.3 above. Also Moala, *op.cit.*, p.91.

them, so it is ironic that the least democratic state—Tonga—is probably the one in which democracy would work most successfully.

Second, constitutionalism has been absorbed into Tongan culture to a greater degree than is the case anywhere else. With a constitution that has been operating since 1875, the form of government and other principles that it established have become incorporated into Tongan perceptions of the Tongan way of life, and people look to it and to the rule of law to provide stability and redress of grievances. Everywhere else, constitutional history is shallow, being the product of the decolonization that occurred in most places between 1961 and 1980. Not only does that not give time for a particular constitution and the idea of constitutionalism to become naturalized, but the modern constitutions belong to a period when constitutions have seemed pliable or ephemeral, serving specific political purposes or factions. Tonga's constitution was from the first regarded with awe rivaling the reverence for Holy Writ.

Similarly, Tonga has a long civil service tradition. Tonga's bureaucracy has been staffed mainly by Tongans since the beginning of modern government, again a span of about 5 generations. Its procedures are stable and orthodox, and were not destabilized by an unsettling period of rapid localization which elsewhere enabled conventions to be set aside or neglected. Parallel with this is a long tradition of elite education. The elite schools of the late nineteenth century produced a high caliber of scholarship, which set a standard for later generations. While the standard was not maintained consistently over time, the association of formal education with accomplishment and with social and personal advancement predates modern commercial or political paths. Tonga thus has a longer tradition of valuing and using western education than other Pacific states.

In short, Tonga is a state that was not created by colonialism. A long-term view might encourage the conclusion that the travails of the modern Pacific states are in the nature of 'teething' problems. Tonga had its teething problems comparable to those of modern states between about 1890 and 1920. It is a striking parallel that during the first decade or two of independent government for the other states there was a similar cycle of initial stability followed by a period of disorder. Tonga came out of its period of disorder by means of strong, centralized rule that eclipsed the democratic features of the constitution.²⁶

²⁶ Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, chapters 10-11. Also Lavaka, *op.cit.*

External factors have, however, been an important component of Tonga's prosperity and stability. High rates of population increase since World War II gave rise by the 1960s to alarming population projections, followed in the mid-1970s by a perceived land shortage. Opportunities for work in New Zealand, followed by increased migration opportunities first there, and later to Australia and the United States, alleviated these pressures to the extent that the 'population bomb' failed to materialize.²⁷ The population 'safety valve' was almost certainly a social and political one also, and certainly alleviated the kind of social problems that overcrowding and underemployment might have created. Without emigration on the scale of the last quarter of the twentieth century, Tonga's population would probably have been about fifty percent larger by 2000 than it was.

Accompanying the large levels of emigration was the remittance of millions of dollars to migrants' families. These payments soon became a significant factor in Tonga's economy. For most of the period since the late 1970s, remittances exceeded the value of all exports by a factor of three.²⁸ The resulting import boom gave the Tongans a standard of living far beyond their productivity, and underpins Tongan prosperity. In later years, more of this remittance income was used as venture capital or for capital investment. Several other Pacific Island states have similarly benefited from liberal migration and currency policies by the Anglophone rim countries (Australia, New Zealand, the United States), while those that have continuing constitutional or compact relationships with industrialized countries have benefited from large official capital inflows as well. These include Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau (New Zealand), French Polynesia, Wallis & Futuna, and New Caledonia (France), and Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam and American Samoa. (United States). This is in addition to development assistance programs from many countries and multi-lateral organizations. Not all countries however have been as fortunate as Tonga in being able to send migrants to hospitable and liberal host societies, and those that have not are the ones with the greatest social and economic problems.

²⁷ The 1966 census estimated the population at 76,121, a rate of increase of four percent per annum over the 1956 count. This rate of increase projected a population in 1976 of 102,000. In fact, the 1976 census counted 90,085. Birth rates remained high, and the lower growth rate was entirely due to emigration. Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, p.208.

²⁸ During the 1990s the value of exports was generally less than twenty million pa'anga (Tongan dollars), while private transfers were officially estimated (and probably significantly under-estimated) at fifty to sixty million pa'anga.

COMPARISON WITH TONGA'S NEIGHBORS: POLYNESIA

Samoa, Tonga's northern neighbor, is also the state with which Tonga has the closest traditional cultural affinities. It too has a heritage of ethnic and cultural homogeneity but the significant difference is that Samoa is a state only by virtue of its colonial history. The elite chiefly tradition created such intense rivalry as to prevent the creation of a single political unit that commanded universal adherence in pre-colonial times. Consequently, Samoa experienced 60 years of colonial rule and on attaining independence in 1962 acquired a constitution that ostensibly combined western constitutional principles with Samoan expectations about the location and exercise of power. The result was the juxtaposition rather than the integration of two different political traditions. This formula has successfully supplied political stability, but it has also created opportunities for high levels of political corruption.²⁹ At the same time, Samoa has many of the advantages of Tonga, particularly in the strength of its educational tradition, but the presence of a colonial government, and Samoan non-cooperation with it in the 1920s and 1930s, deprived Samoa of the strong civil-service tradition that might have endowed government with greater honesty. Samoa also shares with Tonga the high levels of emigration to New Zealand and beyond, and the corresponding high levels of remittances which likewise are the main source of foreign revenue, the prop of the economy, and the foundation of the appearance of prosperity.

Cook Islands contrasts more strongly with Tonga insofar as it is a wholly contrived political unit. It was neither traditionally united nor culturally homogeneous. Its constituent parts did not all speak the same language, and its widely scattered islands were seldom or never in contact with each other before European contact. Even more than Samoa, Cook Islands owes its existence as a state to the experience of colonialism, and as elsewhere, that took a form which did not promote integration of the various parts until the closing years of foreign rule. More so than in Samoa, however, the importance of the traditional chieftainships was eroded during the colonial period so that electoral politics developed unrestrained by considerations of traditional

²⁹ Malama Meleisea and Penelope Schoeffel, 'Western Samoa. "Like a Slippery Fish,"' in Ron Crocombe and Ahmed Ali eds., *Politics in Polynesia* (Suva, 1983), pp.80-112, deals with the early stages of this process. For developments in the 1990s and later see the annual reports on Samoan affairs in *The Contemporary Pacific*.

personal rank. Political parties have flourished, but as in Samoa, more on the basis of personal loyalties than any serious ideological distinctions.³⁰

Like both its neighbors, Cook Islands owed its prosperity for many years to emigration and remittances, and unlike Tonga and Samoa, to high levels of budgetary subsidies from New Zealand, with whom it retains constitutional ties. Cook Islanders are New Zealand citizens, and can move freely between the two countries, and therefore also benefit from visa-free movement between Australia and New Zealand.³¹ It is only in recent years that the development of cultured pearls has given Cook Islands an export more valuable than its remittances, but there is a long history of ethically and legally dubious practices including money laundering, off-shore banking and ship registration.³²

When Fiji came to independence in 1970 it had a more mature infrastructure, a wider resource base and more diverse economy than any other Pacific state, a tradition of elite education and a flourishing free press. It was also the site of the newly established regional university, the University of the South Pacific. Under the leadership of its first prime minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Fiji emerged as the most influential of the new states, and there were good reasons to be optimistic about its future. On the other hand, Fiji had serious potential problems: first, it too was a state that owed its existence and configuration to colonialism, and the unity and shared identity of Fijians was shallow, masking both social and geographical differences. More serious was the fact that Fiji had become ethnically bipolar as a result of the importation of large numbers of Indians as agricultural laborers between 1881 and 1916. By the time of independence miscegenation was practically non-existent, there was a long history of contentiousness between the two populations, and the Indian population was slightly in the majority. Apart from the French territory of New Caledonia, Fiji was the only state featuring such extreme ethnic polarization. Economically, Fiji was less well positioned than Tonga, Samoa or Cook Islands to tap into international emigration, and accordingly did not benefit from remittance flows to the same extent. However, its economic diversification and international marketing arrangements for its sugar gave it a prosperity that did not need migrants'

³⁰ Kathleen Hancock, *Sir Albert Henry. His Life and Times*. Auckland, 1979. Also annual accounts of Cook Islands affairs by Marjorie and Ron Crocombe in *The Contemporary Pacific*.

³¹ Crocombe estimates that eight-three percent of Cook Islanders live abroad. Crocombe, *The South Pacific*, p.452.

³² Annual reports on Cook Islands affairs by Crocombe and Crocombe in *The Contemporary Pacific*. Also Crocombe, *The South Pacific, passim*.

remittances. The security issue as it concerns Fiji arises from ethnic bipolarization which has resulted in electoral politics being discarded in the coups of 1987 and 2000. Nevertheless, Fiji is remarkable for its adherence on the whole to constitutionalism, and to the vigor of its democratic processes. The ethnic polarization which instills venom into politics is also an important contributor to Fiji's comparative economic strength.

Thus in many ways Fiji stands apart from its Polynesian neighbors, but it shares an important feature in the strength of its aristocratic tradition, which guided democracy during the first seventeen years of independence, and still provides the framework for the apparently democratic behavior of the indigenous Fijian population,³³ including high rates of voting in general elections.³⁴ Aristocracy has not been eclipsed by social change and democratic institutions to the extent that this has happened in Cook Islands or appears to have happened in Samoa, and contributes to the social and political stability of the nation. As a working hypothesis it may be suggested that stability is proportional to ethnic homogeneity, a history of political unity, and the weakness of the democratic tradition in the context of a strong aristocratic one.

COMPARISON WITH TONGA'S NEIGHBORS: MELANESIA

The contrasts between Tonga and the states of Melanesia are so striking as to eclipse the similarities. All states are multi-ethnic, encompassing a common Austronesian heritage with varying degrees of Papuan culture (in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands), but these categories mark extreme linguistic diversity, strong local identities and differences in social organization and land tenure. Not only was there no tendency towards political unification in pre-European times, even the colonial powers could not overcome the enormous difficulties in trying to create the rudiments of stable, prosperous states in the short time available to them. This process was far from complete at the time of independence (1975 for Papua New Guinea, 1978 for Solomon Islands and 1980 for Vanuatu). To some extent, the difficulties faced by these states reflect the incompleteness of the work of colonialism, but they also reflect the failure of successor regimes to continue the work of state building.

³³ See Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano, '*Veiqati Vaka Viti* and the Fiji Islands Elections in 1999.' *Journal of Pacific History* vol.35 no.3 (2000) pp.253-67.

³⁴ Even in the disillusionment following the 2000 coup, voter turnout was high at 78.6 percent, though in the context of earlier Fijian elections, it was considered 'relatively low'. Brij Lal, 'In George Speight's Shadow: Fiji General Elections of 2001.' *Journal of Pacific History* vol.37 no1 (2002) p.87.

In Vanuatu, infrastructure is uneven, and basic services including education, health and financial services have made little progress despite two decades of independence and international aid. In the meantime, there have been acute disputes of authority between prime minister and president including the jailing and dismissal of a president; governments have not lasted their full parliamentary term as shifting coalitions form and dissolve in the quest to satisfy personal ambitions; and there have been confrontations between the government and the paramilitary forces. Nor is the task of government made easy by geography, which has provided a chain of islands varying greatly in size and usually mountainous, extending from north to south over nearly 1,000 kilometers often separated by wide ocean distances.

Solomon Islands adopted a form of provincial government to try to accommodate strong feelings of regional difference which did not solve the fundamental lack of common identity. Although threatened by secession movements in the Western District in the early years of independence, the greatest threat to the state came from a different quarter. In 1999 government broke down altogether with the formation of violent opposing forces centered on the two principal islands. The government was overthrown in 2000, and although a successor was appointed, it did not possess the strength to control the contending forces which themselves did not agree to surrender their newly asserted power. The Solomon Islands case remains the most extreme example of the failure of governance, but its circumstances are sufficiently particular to not affect processes elsewhere. Similarly, the anarchy there has not provided a seedbed for ideologically revolutionary forces to establish a bridgehead among vulnerable states. On the other hand, the civil war or rebellion in Solomon Islands is believed to have been encouraged and materially assisted by the Bougainville civil war.

Papua New Guinea has been troubled by rumors and threats of military coups from time to time; to frequent changes of government between elections, and to a protracted rebellion or civil war on the large and resource rich island of Bougainville since 1989. Provincial governments were created at the time of independence as a way of satisfying local identity and development aspirations but have neither provided good government, nor been adequately controlled by central government. In some parts of the country, notably the Highlands, the failure of authority and accompanying rise of violence became increasingly common in the 1990s. Notwithstanding substantial mineral development and continuing budgetary support from Australia ever since independence in 1975, Papua New Guinea has experienced low rates of growth and increasing incidence of urban poverty and violence.

All three Melanesian states are such extreme examples of problems present in the Polynesian states as to constitute a distinct category. Extreme ethnic fragmentation is the obvious differentiating factor. To allude again to some of the advantages possessed by the Polynesian states, the Melanesians have virtually no emigration possibilities to alleviate social or political pressures, no remittance revenue to compensate for the failure of export industries, and the lack of a universally recognized elite class. Many Melanesian societies have inherited chieftainships, but these are not so common as to represent an aristocratic class, and chiefs are not recognized as such by society at large.

Thus in Melanesia all three independent states have difficulties with maintaining central authority and law and order, and to some extent all faced serious internal security problems. All have liberal, democratic constitutions. While it is striking that these extreme examples of failed or failing governance contrast strongly with Polynesia in general and particularly with Tonga, it is equally striking that the degree of veneration for aristocracy correlates consistently in Polynesia as well. Within Polynesia the respect for aristocratic leaders distinguishes Tonga, Fiji and Samoa from Cook Islands, and the three of them from Melanesia. This single factor is not adequate to account for the differing levels of public morality in the different countries. Tonga, for all its stability and success in terms of the Human Poverty and Human Development Indices, exhibits failings of governance similar to those observed elsewhere, though to a lesser degree.

SOME COMPARATIVE REFLECTIONS

Democracy certainly opens the door to corruption and injustice, but oligarchy is no safeguard against it, for Tonga offers ample evidence of official arrogance, weakness of accountability, susceptibility to corruption, and violations of common principles of justice.³⁵ The Tongan example shows that corruption is attractive wherever there are disparities of wealth, and not just in democratic states where public office acquires a market value. Moreover, corruption in Tonga appears to be greatest among the elite, that is, among the economically privileged. If the wealthiest are those most prone to corruption,

³⁵ Corruption is widely observed and commented on, and frequently referred to in the literature as a well-known and endemic condition. Rigorous studies of corruption however are lacking. I know of no studies which have attempted to quantify it in any of the Pacific Islands, or which have constructed a typology of corruption, or even an attempted sociology of corruption. The most comprehensive discussion is in Crocombe, *The South Pacific*, especially chapter 19.

it follows that their reference group for measuring relative wealth and status is not their own impoverished compatriots, but an international peer group with whom they increasingly associate both at home and abroad. Thus it is not poverty as such that is the cause of corruption, but the opportunities of elites to depreciate their personal relative impoverishment.

Second, the means of corruption are mostly external. Extortion and abuse of power are generally home-grown, but corruption increases as the state becomes more engaged with the international economy.³⁶ Foreign interests (capital rather than governmental so far, but official sources of corruption cannot be excluded) buy privileges, pervert legislation and can change governments through their power to suborn politicians or to influence election campaigns. Corrupt capital is thus an international problem and may therefore be regarded as an international security issue in a double sense: the sources are from outside the Pacific, and the corruption itself is mobile, being able to shift from state to state according to need or opportunity. The remedy therefore needs also to be international.

Corruption, moreover, is at the core of injustice, human rights violations and misgovernment. The smallness of Pacific Islands states makes it correspondingly easier for relatively modest amounts of money to have extensive effects on the quality of governance. Even a modest corporation from a developed country will have greater revenues and disposable cash than most of the island states. Tonga, for example, in 1998-99 budgeted for a revenue (recurrent sources) of \$68.3 million (equivalent to US\$43 million at the prevailing exchange rate).

The Tongan example also shows that the most effective restraint on corruption and its corollaries is an independent judiciary and a critical, free press. It is to the credit of the Tongan government that the independence of the Supreme Court is maintained by its continuing to appoint the chief justice and puisne judges from overseas. As to the critical press, the most effective organ has had to move offshore to escape restrictions imposed by the government, but it continues to circulate freely in the country.³⁷

The common trends in the Pacific are manifested in different degrees, but the pattern is such that the following generalizations are offered, leading to the conclusion that security problems in the Pacific are almost entirely an

³⁶ Crocombe, *The South Pacific*, esp. p.647 on the easy penetration of Pacific Island societies by criminal interests from outside the region.

³⁷ Until 2003. See n.20 above. Also Moala, *op.cit.*, *passim*.

expression of political instability, political corruption, and poverty: in a phrase, weak governance.

- €# First, whereas in most Pacific democracies national leaders can come to power without their well-known failings, faults and inadequacies being an impediment, such people do not have the moral authority or probably the inclination to discipline lesser politicians or officials. The combination of democracy with a weak sense of morality is disastrous.
- €# Second, where opportunity makes people susceptible to bribery—whether of individual voters, of officials or of politicians—corruption becomes professionalized and endemic at all levels.
- €# Third, where resource limitations or capital shortages deny ambitious people honest outlets for their energies and creativity, they will take advantage of opportunities to circumvent the obstacles to wealth and power. Where foreign investors are likewise seeking similar circumvention of law or policy, a sinister harmony of interests comes about.
- €# Fourth, where these conditions become established there is virtually no scope for a society to reform itself. Unscrupulous power always overwhelms the scrupulous. In Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, where the recent rise of warlordism threatens to overwhelm the state, one cannot expect the resulting authoritarianism to institute new standards of public morality. Aid programs by Australia and New Zealand which are aimed at reform of governance are the most humane and realistic approach to a remedy, but unlikely to lead to any permanent, fundamental shift in public morals.

SOME IMPLICATIONS

The massive failings of democracy in parts of the Pacific and the relative success of the quasi-democracy of Tonga call into question both the notion of transferability of institutions, and the idea that it is a safeguard against corruption or poverty. Much depends on the particular context, which is shaped not only by social patterns but also by the actions of individuals. Moreover, the problems of governance and their security implications are unlikely to be solved by internal reforms. Reformers cannot achieve power without prior reforms, and those in power have no incentive to institute them.

It is a mistake to regard these difficulties as a symptom of transition or of a failure to modernize. Transitions create opportunities which might be used one way or another: Tongan transitions have on the whole been managed successfully because they have taken place over a long period of time and, during the period of accelerated change in recent decades, have been ameliorated by emigration and remittance income at the same time as restraint on popular political participation has restricted opportunities for corruption

such as flourished in Samoa and Cook Islands. Modernization and globalization however, have generally increased the scope and severity of the problems, in contrast with the preceding colonial period, which interrupted a previous phenomenon of globalization and delivered better government, especially in its later stages. Better governance, and therefore greater security, is most likely to be achieved in the Pacific by international cooperation.

In conclusion, security and insecurity in the Pacific Islands cannot be explained away by recourse to the modernity/tradition dyad. As an explanation this leads to the assumption that the remedy is simply more modernization.