

The Roots of Instability: Administrative and Political Reform in Tonga

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Introduction

The Kingdom of Tonga is the only remaining monarchy in the South Pacific. Until very recently, Tonga was considered one of the most stable countries in the Pacific. However changes such as globalization, better education, international migration and the push for a more democratic government have led to political problems in the last few years.

In trying to understand the roots of administrative and political reform in Tonga, this paper will analyze how Tonga avoided direct colonization and achieved stability for so long, and why this long-term consensus broke down in the last few years. In doing so, the paper will start with a review of political instability in the Pacific and the typical causes. The next section will discuss the peculiar history of Tonga, in particular the late 19th century and the influence of missionaries on Tonga's social and political structure. This will be followed by a discussion of the 1875 constitutional dispensation and why it has broken down, paving the way for the upheavals since 2005. The conclusion will focus on what Tonga can do to avoid becoming just another failed Pacific island state in the future.

While administrative and political reforms have been conducted worldwide, Oceania has its own narratives. The Pacific island states, usually referred to as Oceania, vary significantly in many critical respects of their geography and social, economic and political systems. The physical features of these islands range across a large array of landforms. These include the low-lying atolls with vast central lagoons such as those typical of Polynesia and Micronesia (Herr 2005), and mountainous islands of volcanic origin in Polynesia and Melanesia. Oceania consists of fourteen independent island states and related territories that, along with Australia and New Zealand, make up the Pacific Islands Forum, the main regional body (Henderson *et al*, 2003 and Langa'oi 2007b). Socially the many thousands of islands in this region are grouped into three broad ethno-geographic areas, namely Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia, a division that reflects both different cultures and colonial experiences.

Political Instability in Oceania

An interesting question to ask here is what kinds of instability are found elsewhere in the Pacific Island states. I next discuss various causes of instability in the region, together with a series of case studies to illustrate them. Examples are taken from the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji, which until recently were in sharp contrast to Tonga (see Langa'oi 2007a).

Generally speaking, the Pacific was once considered to be unique in the former colonial world for the longevity of its political institutions and constitutions.

However, over the past two decades, the region has become increasingly unstable politically. The political conflicts in the Pacific islands have created an arc of instability stretching from the Solomon Islands to Papua New Guinea, Fiji (Henderson et al, 2003), and more recently Tonga. Now the Kingdom of Tonga also faces increasing internal conflicts and political instability, as reflected by the 2006 riots in the capital Nuku'alofa (see Langa'oi 2007a, 2007b and 2007c). According to Campbell (1994), dissatisfaction was evident with the post-colonial political systems of the Pacific islands during the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is evident from the literature that, starting from the coup in Fiji in 1987, politicians and scholars expressed reservations about the suitability of representative parliamentary democracy for the cultures of the Pacific islands. The political instability in the Pacific has continued since the start of the 21st century, as discussed below. However, it is worth making the point that even though the instability was increasing in other island states, Tonga until 2006 was not considered to be part of it.

Ethnic tension

One cause of instability is ethnic tension, as in the case of Fiji. In 1987, a military coup in Fiji took place, the first to take place in the modern Pacific since independence (Campbell 1994). This coup was rooted in the racial antagonisms of Fiji's plural society, and resulted in a constitution that ensured Indian Fijians could only control less than half of all seats in parliament. A second coup took place in 2000, when rebels kept members of parliament hostage for 56 days, blocked the roads in the capital Suva, and engaged in intermittent gun battles with the military. This coup was caused by opposition from the native Fijians to the appointment of an Indian as Prime Minister. The coup resulted in the removal of the elected Prime Minister, who was a Hindu of Indian origin (BBC News Online, 1 June 2000).

The most recent coup in Fiji was in December 2006. This coup was reported to be caused by disagreements with various bills presented to parliament with the idea of granting an amnesty to some of those being investigated for involvement in the coup of 2000. These bills and other government policies were strongly opposed by the leader of the military, leading to the 2006 coup (Langa'oi 2007a). In general, the causes of the coups in Fiji were a combination of elements which had been part of the Fijian society for more than a century. These elements included the division of the country into two distinct racial groups which wanted to preserve their cultural differences, which were in turn reinforced by economic conditions. Another important element that led to the coup was the anxiety of the chiefly oligarchy of eastern Fiji, which saw its power being challenged by the Indians, commoners, western Fijians, and political extremists. Finally, another cause was the rising frustrations of the increasing numbers of urban Fijians whose interests were contrary to those of the old communal Fijian social organization (Campbell 1996: 222). Similarly, the relationship between the traditional chiefs and the urban proletariat is an issue which has also cropped up in Tonga in recent years.

Corruption

Another frequent cause of instability is corruption, as in Papua New Guinea (PNG). In 1997, the democratic foundations of Papua New Guinea were shaken by a military

mutiny that eventually led to a second upheaval in 2001. In 1997, Prime Minister Julius Chan agreed to pay US\$36 million to the London based mercenary contract firm Sandline International for training and equipment intended for a major offensive against rebels in Bougainville (Kerr 1999). This was Chan's quick solution to problems including obtaining peace with the rebels. However, this move was not supported by the PNG defense force, which demanded the resignation of Chan. Chan agreed to step down in March 1997 after riots rocked the capital and the defense force surrounded Parliament. However in June of the same year, Chan resumed the post of Prime Minister after arresting the leader of the PNG defense force. He was later replaced by Bill Skate in July 1997. Skate reappointed the leader of the PNG defense force and implemented key changes such as taxation reforms in an attempt to revive the economy. However, in the middle of 2001, PNG again experienced an army mutiny, when the government proposed to halve the size of the forces and put forward proposals for the privatization of various government services (ibid.). In addition to the problems of corruption, the roots of the conflicts in PNG lie also in the inability of some government leaders to hold dialogue with the native leaders. In addition it is clear that the introduction of neo-liberal reform measures such as privatization and downsizing the public service contributed to both the army mutinies and civil unrest in PNG.

Local separatism

Local separatist movements can also give rise to instability, as in the Solomon Islands in 1998 when some young men from the island of Guadalcanal, where the capital Honiara is located, started a campaign of harassment and intimidation against settlers from other islands, especially those from the neighboring island of Malaita. The group named themselves the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM). The movement raised various issues including allegations of disrespect by settlers, claims for rent for the use of Honiara as a national capital, and demands for a federal system of government (Kabutaulaka 2005). In 1999 the movement became more violent. In an attempt to resolve the issue, the government set up a task force and attempted to negotiate with the movement. By 1999, more than 20,000 people, mostly Malaitans, had been evicted from settlements on Guadalcanal. In an attempt to resolve the unrest, the government set up a task force to negotiate with the IFM and address the problems of the people who had been affected. The government signed agreements which committed it to addressing the issues raised by the IFM. However, by the beginning of 2000, the Malaitans in Honiara were frustrated with the government's perceived inaction and inability to apprehend the Guadalcanal militants, so they formed their own rival militant organization to attack the IFM. In June 2000, the Malaita movement forced the resignation of the then prime minister, Ulufa'alu. In the months that followed, confrontation between the IFM and the Malaita force led to more killings. During the height of the unrest in 2000 and 2001, the government sought help from Australia and New Zealand, in the form of armed police and military assistance to handle the law and order problem. However, these requests were ignored at the time, simply because the Australian authorities believed that it would be difficult to justify to the Australian tax payers why they were giving such assistance, and also because foreigners were not seen as having answers for the deep-seated problems afflicting the Solomons (ibid.). It is worth making the point that

Melanesia is different because it doesn't have such an important chiefship tradition as do Tonga, Hawaii, and Polynesia in general.

Local culture and political stability

The political instability in these three largest Pacific island states affected the region as a whole because smaller island countries depend on Fiji in particular, both as a transport hub and the center of regional organizations. Smaller states therefore have an interest in regional political stability because events in one major country can give the whole region a bad name among tourists and investors. The political tensions in the Pacific islands have encouraged critics to blame the political institutions of these countries and to question the compatibility between local culture and democracy. However, it can be noted that they have overlooked the fact that in some Pacific islands, democracy has functioned satisfactorily for many years, such as in the case of Western Samoa (Campbell 1994). Tonga is another example.

However, similar social and economic and political processes and instability can be found in most Pacific islands. The differences between them in terms of political change seem to stem from contrasting cultural bases and particularities of local circumstances. In the case of Tonga, particular circumstances have led to a demand for institutional change. Interestingly, the demand for change is not due to dissatisfaction with Tonga's constitution as a pattern imported from outside. Rather the demand is for more democracy along the lines of the pattern outside. This perhaps makes Tonga's case unique in the Pacific because, although Tonga has a parliament, a cabinet, and free elections, it is currently assumed that it is not very democratic (ibid.). Even though the people are represented in government, a feature of Tongan politics is that general elections cannot result in a change in government (see Langa'oi 2007a). This is linked to the constitution of the country, a constitution different from those of its neighbors which were framed in terms of representative government. The Constitution of Tonga, on the other hand, represents the thinking of the 19th century, where democrats were regarded as dangerous enemies of social order. According to Campbell (1994), the contemporary political debate in Tonga is focused on the role of the elected representatives and their relationship with the hereditary head of state, who is also the head of government. As such, the core of the debate is not the inevitable process of cultural evolution, but a series of events involving personal conflict and allegations of abuse of power (see Langa'oi 2007a and 2007b).

Generally speaking, one can argue that the political instability and conflicts in these island states take place because many of the states are said to be weak, internally divided, and increasingly impoverished. In part, they are also caused by growing economic inequalities and the challenges to traditional lifestyles, and they are also attributed to the numerous contradictions covered up by the high hopes held at the time of independence, but which are now beginning to break out after decades of concealment. These contradictions include ethnic identity issues, and the balance between traditional values and modern administration (Izumi 2007). In part, these conflicts are internal, resulting from factors such as poor governance and limited respect for democracy in these countries, factors which have been perceived by aid donors to be major problems (Langa'oi 2007a and 2007b). At the same time, the increasing political instability in the island states can also be partly attributed to

external pressures such as the China-Taiwan rivalry (ibid.) for diplomatic recognition in the Pacific and competition between Western aid donors such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.

Now we have looked at the causes of instability in general, let us look at the Tonga case. Unlike their neighbors, Tongans for many years achieved stability as they were able to avoid the problems of ethnic pluralism and corruption from becoming issues. This is because there were no commercial plantations such as sugarcane, so there was no migrant labor. In addition, the throne was treated with a high degree of reverence, so that questions were not asked about the income of the royals.

Tonga in the 19th Century

I will now look at the peculiar history of Tonga in the late 19th century, including political reforms, the role of the centralized monarchy, and the deal it made with the Christian missions. This meant that Tonga avoided both direct colonization, on the grounds that it was already “civilized,” and it gave traditional élites an unusual degree of control over land, as further discussed later on in this section.

The conversion to Christianity and its acceptance by the chiefs during the 19th century restructured the socio-political system of Tonga. This is because Christianity introduced new values, and it was considered that local customs which were in conflict with these ideals should be abolished (Latukefu 1975). As such, Christianity not only became a unifying factor but also changed those customary laws which were considered incompatible with it. There was therefore a need for new legal machinery to suit the country’s changing needs and aspirations. This led to the official promulgation of the first written Code of Laws at Pouono, Vava’u, in 1839. This was known as the Vava’u Code of 1839, and it limited the power of the chiefs over the commoners, introducing the idea that all men are equal in the sight of God. The 1839 Code was revised and enlarged with some additional provisions from the Huahine Code, and was adopted as the 1850 Code. One of the features of the 1850 Code was the promotion of “industrious habits.” The Code declared that men must work and persevere in laboring to support themselves and their families, and to contribute to the cause of God and the chief of the land. Anyone who refused to work was to be denied food or other assistance (ibid.). Although the 1839 code forbade the chiefs from taking anything by force from the commoners, the custom by which commoners were compelled to hand over to the chiefs anything which was of *‘eiki* status (i.e. reserved for the chiefs) still continued. The total abolition of these privileges was finally achieved twelve years later in the 1862 Emancipation Edict, which freed the people from an institutional system akin to feudalism (ibid.). The introduction of Christianity led to the transformation of the socio-political structure and the status of *popula or hopoate* (slaves) was abolished.

The Arrival of the Missions

During the civil war period from 1800 to 1820, a number of Europeans were resident in Tonga, such as the survivors from the English private ship of war, the *Port au Prince*, a vessel captured and destroyed by Tongan warriors under the command of a Tongan chief, Finau ‘Ulukalala, in Lifuka, Ha’apai, in 1806 (Martin 1981;

Urbanowicz 2003). Most of the crew was killed, but some survived including William Mariner, who was adopted by Finau 'Ulukalala. The others were put in the custody of the high chiefs. In 1817, William Mariner returned to England and published his recollections on Tonga and the *Port au Prince*. This publication to some degree encouraged further missionary expansion into Tonga. The missionary societies in London began to worry about the heathen state of the Tongan islands, and wanted to start work in Tonga (ibid.).

It is generally agreed that the missionaries first contacted Tonga in the early 1820s. The missionaries were very influential in the social and political developments of Tonga as they brought West European and Pacific cultures into contact with each other. The historical setting for the encounter between Europeans and Tonga is therefore important (Helu 1999: 178), because Tongan society was shaped during these periods. In particular, the external forces led to the disintegration of the tripartite kingship system in the 18th century (Lawson 1996: 84). By the mid-19th century, contact with missionaries led to formal constitutional changes, and many Tongans converted to Christianity. The conversion to Christianity was vital for formal political development because it had an effect in diluting much of the traditional chiefly system. These two developments, conversion to Christianity and the promulgation of the Constitution, were significant because they laid the foundation for other social and political developments in the country in the early 20th century and beyond.

Prior to the contact with the Europeans and missionaries, Tongans were polytheistic and possessed a hierarchy of gods. Among the principal gods were the *kau*¹ Tangaloa, who lived the sky, the *kau* Maui, who lived in the underworld, and the deity Hikule'o, who held Pulumotu or the Tongan paradise (see Latukefu 1974 and Langa'oi 2005, 2007a and 2007b). In the pre-missionary era, Tonga's polytheistic religious belief system appeared to complement the socio-political hierarchy (Lawson 1996:86). The chiefs were believed to possess some degree of *mana* derived directly from the gods, and the higher the chiefly position, the greater the *mana*. There was also a system of taboo that surrounded the chiefs, and the higher the chief the more complex the taboo. The higher the chiefly rank the greater the freedom to violate taboos without causing supernatural anger. Murder and adultery were only looked upon as crimes if the crime was committed against someone of equal or higher rank (Lawson 1996:86). This illustrates how the religious system complemented the socio-political hierarchy. In addition, the chiefs were regarded as political leaders and they relied upon priests as their mediators with the gods. Therefore, there was a close alliance that existed between the chiefs and the religious leaders in order to maintain their mutual interests. The powers of the priests were second only to those of the chiefs. This shows that the religious belief system was closely interwoven with politics.

The decline in traditional religion speeded up when Christian missions such as the London Missionary Society were established in Tonga. The first missionaries landed in Tongatapu on 12 April 1797 and they were under the protection of Tuku'aho, the most powerful chief in Tonga at the time. During the civil war in 1799, three of the missionaries were killed and the rest had to leave Tonga for New South Wales in 1800. On 16 August 1822, a Methodist minister in Sydney, the Reverend

¹ *Kau* is a plural marker which comes before nouns denoting persons

Walter Lawry, arrived in Tonga. This was the second attempt by the missionaries. Eventually the opposition of the traditional priests and the people was so strong that Lawry left Tonga in October 1823 (Latukefu 1974; Lawson 1996). From the available evidence, the opposition to Christianity was basically a conservative reaction against anything new. It sprang from a desire to preserve the status of the chiefs as well as their political power. The people felt that the old standards and values ought to be safeguarded because of the chiefs' own deep loyalty and respect for their ancestors and their beliefs.

The third attempt by the missionaries was in 1826m when Lawry's successors, the Reverend John Thomas and the Reverend John Hutchinson (both Wesleyan missionaries), arrived in Tonga (Latukefu 1974:28). The chief of Hihifo, Ata, was friendly to the missionaries and gave them a piece of land in Kolovai, although he refused to accept the new religion and stopped his people from joining the mission. In 1827 Nathaniel Turner, William Cross and Weiss arrived in Tonga (Rutherford 1977:116). During these early years of the missionaries' attempts to convert Tongans, the Wesleyan missionaries encountered continual frustration and despair.

According to Latukefu (1974), it was apparent that the Tongan chiefs were only interested in the missionaries' trade goods and not their teachings. As such, one of the first strategies used by missionaries to convert Tongans to Christianity was to use their material goods to attract Tongans to convert. The missionaries were more successful in their third attempt due to the protection given them by Aleamotu'a, the Tu'i Kanokupolu at the time, and some of the other chiefs, as they began to question the validity of the old religion and the failure of their gods to assist them in war (Latukefu 1975). Aleamotu'a was baptized on 18 January 1830 as Siosaia Aleamotu'a by Nathaniel Turner. Aleamotu'a's conversion was important because it encouraged the rulers of Vava'u, Finau 'Ulukalala, and Ha'apai, Taufu'ahau, also to convert to Christianity in 1831. After Finau 'Ulukalala died in 1833, Taufu'ahau became the ruler of both Vava'u and Ha'apai and this helped the mass acceptance of Christianity in Ha'apai and Vava'u and eventually the whole of Tonga (Rutherford 1977:133).

The problem of communication was a barrier between the missionaries and the Tongans because of their ignorance of the Tongan language. Therefore the missionaries set up new schools (ibid.) to educate the people in the basic doctrines concerning God and the Bible. This enabled the converts to read the Bible and communicate with each other, understand the doctrines of the new religion (Wesleyan Methodism), and also combat some of the superstitious beliefs of the traditional religion. This new level of understanding brought about psychological changes in the way they perceived their socio-political surroundings. Lawson (1996) argued that although the missionaries' work removed certain aspects of Tongan culture which were believed to represent "heathenism," they also helped reinforce the existing social and political structure of Tongan society through the establishment of the church. With the King as the Head of the Free Wesleyan Church, the church became a very powerful institution in the Tongan society. One can argue that what they succeeded in doing was laying a strong basis for increasing the power of the church, state, and aristocracy.

The 1875 Constitution

The promulgation in November 1875 of the Tongan Constitution, one of the oldest in the world, enabled Tonga to gain recognition from the “civilized” nations and maintain her own independent and government. It also meant that Tonga avoided direct colonization, on the grounds that it was “civilized” as mentioned earlier, and gave local élites an unusual degree of control of land and the people.

King George’s acceptance of Christianity played an important role in the success of his campaign, as missionaries and colonial powers gave him political and ethical support and Christian converts strongly backed him (*ibid.*). With the help of missionaries, King George became more familiar with the doctrines of Christianity as well as Western civilization. He then realized that many of the customary laws were incompatible with Christianity, so he recognized the need to develop a new legal machinery better suited to the country’s changing needs and aspirations (Latukeyu 1975). The social political and economic structure was also brought into line with standards in the “civilized” world (Rutherford 1977).

The Wesleyan missionaries to a great extent influenced the 1875 Constitution, especially the Reverend Shirley Baker in his capacity as King George Tupou I’s advisor. Baker, a Wesleyan missionary, arrived in Tonga in 1860 and quickly developed a firm friendship with King George Tupou I (Latukeyu 1975:33). In 1880 Baker became Prime Minister of Tonga. The 1875 Constitution was based on the Westminster model and the precepts of the Hawaiian constitution (Rutherford 1977). It is a remarkable document, well ahead of its time in terms of the freedom and rights it granted to the Tongan people. The constitution was at once both liberal and conservative, democratic and hierarchical, and hence it was the answer to the challenges that Tonga faced at that time. It comfortably encompassed both the key principles of Polynesian culture and modernity in a logical arrangement (Hills 1990).

The Constitution has three main divisions namely the “Declaration of Rights” which lays out the general principles by which the monarch, the judiciary and the government are to conduct themselves. The second part, “Form of Government,” details the role and structure of the executive including the Privy Council, the Cabinet and the Legislative Assembly (Powles 1992:22). The third part, “The Land,” deals with matters such as the principles of inheritance pertaining to estates, general laws to property and land matters (Latukeyu, 1975).

The Constitution laid down the foundation for the present system of Government in contemporary Tonga. The Kingdom of Tonga has a constitutional monarchical system. The Government consists of three main bodies, the Executive, Parliament and Judiciary. The king in Privy Council and the Cabinet serve as the Executive (see Langa’oi 2005 and 2007a).

The Constitution bestows on the Tongan monarch a great deal of power compared to the British system where the monarch acts only as a ceremonial head with limited power (Langa’oi 2005). It seems that the Constitution was aimed at maintaining the aristocracy by giving them absolute power over the people. To some extent, perhaps, the Constitution was devised to uphold the Tongan tradition to strengthen the authority of the ruling class according to tradition. For example, Clauses 67 and 69 state that the Constitution cannot be changed without the consent of the monarch.

Another example is that the monarch has the absolute power to appoint and dismiss the prime minister and other ministers in government. This suggests that the ministers are directly responsible and accountable to the monarch and not to the

parliament or the people. As such, cabinet ministers will naturally try to please the king. The Tongan monarch therefore continues to have a great deal of power and the current governmental practice is highly contrary to the principles of democratic government. This is because when the power is vested on the hands of a single individual, decisions can be made without wider consultation.

The 1875 Constitution brought about several changes in Tonga such as changes in the internal system of ranking and titles. Prior to 1875, Tonga had a loosely structured, almost feudal system, with tribute paid to the chiefs by their own people because of kin ties. With the Constitution of 1875, King George I established a hereditary class of nobles (*nopele*), and assigned various tracts of land to them for their own personal use (Latukeyu 1975). Most of the assignments were made on the basis of a chief's hereditary land rights, but some chiefs did in fact lose their land. All of the land in Tonga is now Crown Land with the land apportioned out to the nobles and then re-divided among the people of the nobles or people on Crown Land. Non-citizens of Tonga may not purchase land and can only lease it from Tongans, and this has preserved the territorial integrity of Tonga to this day.

Another important change was the breakdown of local chiefly power: the Constitution decreased the power of the chiefs and increased the power of the newly created monarchy. Although most of the existing chiefships were not actually abolished, they were simply ignored by the new legal framework (Lawson 1996:91). Most of the chiefs were very powerful and wealthy from the people under their rule. As such, they stood as threats to Tupou and his new government. It seems that the 1882 Land Act was established to dismantle the power of the nobles. For example, the Land Act called for the nobles to give every commoner male residing on their land a plot of land for farming and another plot for a house. This can be perceived as freeing the people from slavery to their chiefs, and at the same time weakening the security of the chiefs as they no longer controlled their subjects. This was a very smart strategy implemented by the king because it enabled him to gain the trust and the love of the people, while at the same time weakening the power of the chiefs.

The Constitution brought about a more rigid inheritance system. Before the Constitution, a chief was a chief because of the consensus of his people; after, he became a chief or a titled person by law. With the onset of Western religion opinions, illegitimate children were no longer considered to be in the line of inheritance, neither could adopted children and their descendants be considered in line for a title or estates. Prior to the Constitution, no man could hold more than one title since it was difficult to involve oneself continuously with one's own people. Now as a result of the Constitution, there were men holding two titles. An example was former Crown Prince Tupouto'a Lavaka. Apart from his title of Crown Prince, he held two other titles, Tupouto'a and Lavaka, which made him the chief of the villages of 'Utulau, from his Tupouto'a title, and Pea, from his Lavaka title.

However, the socio-political structure of Tonga again changed to include the new powerful social classes such the nobles (*nopele*) and cabinet ministers. In the newly transformed structure, the king is at the top of the pyramid, followed by the nobles, then the cabinet ministers, followed by the commoners at the bottom of the pyramid. Some of the new social classes shared common characteristics in terms of their responsibilities and status in the society, and therefore it became quite hard to define their precise place in the socio-political pyramid. In contemporary Tonga, the sharp differentiation between the *nopele* and the *tu'a* has declined and is slowly

eroding in government. This is due to the emergence of a new class, which includes the educated elites or *kau ako*. Being highly educated allows commoners to avoid the domination of the nobility and the aristocratic class in Tongan society. Commoners who have proved to be outstanding scholars become prominent church leaders, members of parliament, senior public servants, and even cabinet ministers or *minisita*. Better education has therefore allowed commoners to receive privileges and occupy positions in Government such as cabinet ministerial posts, which were formerly reserved for the *nopele* class. In other words, the academic credentials of commoners enable them to move upward in the social structure. When a person is appointed as a cabinet minister, he is approached and treated in a similar way as a noble. Some of the educated élites have learned that monarchy is not the best way to go after all, so they are becoming critics of the present monarchical system, thereby influencing the social economic and political developments in the country.

As mentioned earlier, Tonga became a British Protectorate in 1900, so the British intervened a lot in government affairs. By 1918, when the late Queen Salote Tupou III succeeded to the throne (Rutherford 1977: 189), there were only a few *papalangi* (Europeans) residing in Tonga, but they were very influential in Tonga's affairs and its economy. The 1921 census shows that there were 571 *papalangi* residents in Tonga, of which 37 were employees of the government, 126 were businessmen, and 18 were missionaries (Wood Ellem 1999). To combat the influence of the *papalangi*, governmental departments were to employ Tongans instead of the *papalangi*. However it was realized that *papalangi* with technical skills were still required to be employed by government until a sufficient number of Tongans could be trained to replace them (ibid.).

In trying to maintain the independent status of Tonga, Queen Salote, who reigned from 1918-1965, focused on consolidating the political system of the country. She made a determined effort to insulate Tonga socially and politically from foreign influences (Lawson 1996:98). The queen's closed door policies were also easy to enforce because they were supported by the existing cultural, social, and government policies at the time (Wood Ellem 1999). At the time, the Tongans were in practice satisfied with the social and political structure and the subsistence mode of economic activities, and the opportunities for migration and communications were minimal.

According to Rutherford (1977), in the early 20th century, the only people that were usually qualified to migrate were mainly members of the aristocratic class who were also government officials. In other words, only members of the aristocracy enjoyed the privilege of traveling externally for official purposes (Rutherford 1977, Wood Ellem 1999). The system of Government at the time allowed the children of the aristocrats and the nobles to be sent overseas, especially to New Zealand and Australia, for further education. An example is that of Queen Salote Tupou III herself. In 1909, when she was only nine years old, her father, King Tupou II sent her to Auckland, New Zealand for education. In 1913, she was sent to the Anglican Diocesan School for Girls in Epsom, Auckland, where she spent two years at boarding school. In the 1930s, the Queen also sent her sons, Prince Tupouto'a and Prince Tu'ipelehake, for further education in Australia. As the education system developed, several scholarships were sponsored by churches, government, and foreign countries, providing more opportunities for commoners who were outstanding scholars to pursue further studies abroad (Rutherford 1977).

Despite the Queen's aspirations to preserve Tongan culture, the Tongans

continued to interact with outside forces as a result of the Second World War. Although Tonga played no role as a military staging post and was outside the theatre of war, the United States and New Zealand deployed troops in Tonga between 1941 and 1945 (Helu 1999). The occupation was accompanied by the inflow of a large amount of goods and services such as machines, equipment of all kinds, vehicles, army barracks, clothing, and all kinds of supplies. The Tongans for the first time in history realized that commerce was an alternative industry to subsistence farming and that it was possible to build a way of life on it (ibid.). This changed the mindset of the Tongans, and the rising materialism led the local people to start small businesses dealing with soldiers. After the war, Tongans discovered the global economy, hence many Tongans moved towards settling in the more developed societies in search of the new materialism and capitalist opportunities. This was evident in the 1950s and 1960s when the migration of young Tongans for overseas studies and employment increased (Rutherford 1977:207).

Nevertheless, the queen continued her policies to preserve Tongan culture. She established the Tongan Tradition Committee in 1952 to focus on preserving genealogical and traditional forms of knowledge. The queen believed that “customs of the people are its heritage” (Lawson 1996: 97). She further promoted the welfare of women by fostering handicrafts and forming an organization called *Langafonua* or “National Promotion” in 1953, to improve the living conditions in the villages (Rutherford 1977:204). However, towards the mid-1960s there was a decline in the population of aristocrats, but the proportion of commoners who had gained social economic and political status in Tonga increased, indicating the changes that were affecting the social structure in Tonga.

Although Queen Salote tried to protect the Tongan people from the influences of foreign cultures, she sent her son and successor, the late King Tupou IV, for further education overseas. He was educated in Tonga at Tupou College before he continued to Newington College in Sydney, Australia. He continued on to the University of Sydney where he completed his BA and LLB degrees in 1939 and became the first Tongan to graduate from a university. When Taufa’ahau entered University and successfully completed his degrees, no other Tongan, not even anyone of noble rank, was allowed to receive a university level education (Hau’ofa 2006). The nature of the social stratification was such that no one could be equal to the Crown Prince. This was reflected in a popular saying during this time, “*Oua ‘e tangi ke tatau na’a houhau ‘a Taufa’ahau*” or “do not try to be the equal of Taufa’ahau for he will be infuriated.”

As part of his training for kingship, Taufa’ahau was appointed Minister of Education in 1943, Minister of Health in 1944, and premier in 1949 (Rutherford 1977: 206, Hau’ofa 2006). Unlike his mother who operated a closed door policy for Tonga, he adopted an open door policy which associated Tonga with the outside world. He pushed the country towards modernization but he recognized that there was a need to educate and train the Tongan people in the skills that modernization required. He then focused on the development of education, health, and other services. The Matriculation School, now known as Tonga High School, was established in 1947 in Nuku’alofa and opened to commoners (Hau’ofa 2006). The aim of the school included training a pool of manpower from which the future leaders of the country would be drawn (Helu 1999:151). To some people, Tonga High School offered the prospect of a much faster rise in the bureaucracy and

government. From the 1960s onward, the education system offered more scholarships for tertiary education abroad and these were distributed based on merit. These educational opportunities were perceived by commoners as the only way that their children could overcome the enormous barriers erected to keep them in their place (Hau'ofa 2006). Traditionally the commoners were referred to as the *kau me'avale* or the "ignorant ones." However through education, the ignorant classes struggled to surmount their ascribed status.

As mentioned earlier, the late King Tupou IV brought Tonga into the era of modernization. This was characterized by the opening of Tonga to tourism, investments, the massive outflow of Tongans overseas for education and employment, the urbanization of the capital Nuku'alofa, an increase in sea and air transport and telecommunications, and increased remittances, to name but a few. The contact with the outside world increased tremendously (Rutherford 1977) and the Tongan population continued to be well educated. As mentioned before, this allowed commoners to move up in the socio-political structure in the Kingdom.

More importantly, further contact with the West after 1965 challenged and transformed earlier Tongan custom and culture, i.e. the "Tongan way" (*anga faka-Tonga*). A useful concept in envisioning Tongan post-contact history has been the idea of "compromise culture" proposed by Marcus (1977). Marcus referred to a set of Tongan institutions, which integrated earlier Tongan culture, with a version of European or *papalangi* culture as "a compromise culture" after the missionaries arrived in the 20th century. Marcus argued that it is the institutions of the compromise culture that had come to represent what is meant by *anga faka-Tonga* to contemporary Tongans. As such, it was through understanding this compromise culture and its evolution that would allow us to gain insight into the changes confronting Tongans (Small 1995). The period of compromise culture (the reigns of the first three monarchs, to 1966) provides the historical baseline and background for the present turbulence and the increase in the pace of change as King Tupou IV brought Tonga into the era of modernization.

Based on the above discussions, I suggest that the 1875 dispensation has broken down due to a number of factors, paving the way for the upheavals of the last couple of years. These factors include emigration and high levels of education, economic stagnation coupled with the obvious prosperity of the royals and youth unemployment, the emergence of a free media, and the increasingly outdated nature of the Constitution. This resulted in the first ever civil servants' strike of 2005 and the first riots in November 2006 (see Langa'oi 2007a, 2007b, 2007c and 2007d).

The reforms introduced by King Tupou IV led to substantial changes in political thinking on the part of a growing number of ordinary people. The returned graduates played a significant role in the development of a critical outlook on politics as well as social and economic matters. According to Lawson (1996), criticism made by the educated élites played an important role in the rise of the pro-democracy movement in the 1970s which brought about a different approach to the political prerogatives of the monarch and the nobility. Towards the close of the 20th century and at the turn of the 21st century, younger westernized Tongans continued to question the role of the monarchy and the system of government. However, it seems that the stronger the pressure they put on the ruling regime for change, the more strongly the ruling regime reinforced their power as stated in the Constitution to protect their political legitimacy. However, the frustrations at the lack of reform in

the 1875 Constitution have proved to be dangerous. This is reflected in more recent political events which took place in the Kingdom in the past two years. Despite pressures from inside and outside the country to change the 1875 Constitution, the king and the nobles were unwilling to do so.

The above reflects the dynamics of socio-political developments and reforms in Tonga. Nowadays, there are growing movements from civil society in support of democratic change, and following the death of the late King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV on 10 September 2006m the pressures for reform seem to be accelerating in the Kingdom at present.

Conclusion: The future for Tonga

In conclusion, the solutions to the problems of political instability seem to lie within the island states themselves. Perhaps the more developed countries should support the efforts made by the island states to resolve their problems in a way that fits the context of each Pacific island country. In terms of foreign aid for example, donors should minimize competition for diplomatic recognition and work together so that their aid to the Pacific nations can be brought under a coordinated system. This can help to reduce dependency and the influence of donor countries on the reforms in these island states. China and Taiwan, for example, are not members of OECD, and hence their assistance is not subject to the international standards of ODA. Perhaps a first step towards having a coordinated system is to bring China and Taiwan into the same arena with other donor countries to the Pacific (see Langa'oi 2007b).

In the case of Tonga, it seems that the 1875 Constitution represented an attempt in line with British thinking at the time to introduce a measure of democracy, while actually leaving the chiefs and the Christians supporting them, headed by the king, firmly in power. By the late 20th century, this looked out of date, and it started to break down under pressure from the educated élites, well represented in the Church, with experience of living abroad, and with newer ideas of what democracy and kingship in Tonga should look like.

So what can Tonga do to avoid becoming just another failed Pacific island state? Interestingly, Tonga is a source of high quality labor for overseas countries like New Zealand, Australiam and the United States. As such, out migration will continue given that the churches seem to be well set up and financed to provide education, and given that the ties between Tongans abroad and the Tonga government remain relatively strong. In June 2007, Parliament passed the bill for dual citizenship to become law. This Act allows children born overseas to a Tongan mother or father to be Tongan citizens and allows thousands of Tongans who had become foreign nationals to retain their Tongan citizenship (Tonga Broadcasting Commission Online, 12 June 2007). This Act further strengthens the ties between Tonga and the migrants. The fact that migration will continue in the future means that the social, political and economic institutions in the Tongan society will be further transformed. However, out-migration may change in the future if there is massive development of the tourism or fishing industries, perhaps with investment of Chinese capital.

In terms of administrative reform, it is important that a politically stable system should be in place to support the administrative reforms. This paper argues that administrative reform models only work in a politically stable environment, which

some Pacific islands such as Tonga do not have at the moment. In addition, the introduction of market mechanisms to the public sector needs to be supported by a well-developed private sector. Because of the differences in the social, political, and administrative traditions of these countries, reform needs to be adjusted to fit the context and the socio-political systems of each Pacific island state. In addition, I also argue that administrative and political reforms take place in the wider context of social and cultural changes in Tonga, which need to be evaluated critically. Nevertheless, it is noted that these reforms have implications which will affect the country as a whole, particularly its economic development.

However, the outlook for administrative reform seems positive since Tonga has a very sophisticated and highly educated population who are used to metropolitan and international lifestyles and standards. These people will continue to influence Tonga and the way things are done. In that regard, I am optimistic that there is going to be a generational change in terms of attitudes of civil servants in the near future because the newly returned graduates will become senior civil servants in a few years' time. Meantime, so long as the government mobilizes the workforce to work with them, reform will be more fruitful.

As for the monarch, if the king can separate the royal businesses from his role as king or give up some of his power, he might keep his prestige and constitutional position. If he meddles in politics and has business interests at the same time, then more civil unrest will occur. The announcement made by the new king in September 2006 that he would dispose of all his commercial businesses is perhaps a positive move by the monarchy towards maintaining its prestige. On the other hand, the prospect for democratic politics in Tonga seems promising given that aid and remittances will continue to come into the country. Aid donors and migrants will continue to influence the push for more democracy. In this context, China's links with Tonga could reduce the conditions imposed by traditional donors on Tonga for a more democratic government. Some scholars argue that countries that think reforms have been imposed on them do not really feel committed to such reforms (Stiglitz 2002: 242). Yet their participation is essential if real societal change is to happen. However, the Tri-partite Committee set up by the government in July 2007 is an excellent move by government to bring together different parties to continue dialogue on the kind of political reform that would be appropriate for Tonga.

In general, I argue that Tonga will remain relatively stable because it still has a relatively low degree of ethnic conflict and it still has a non-interventionist military. However, the riots of November 2006 were warning shots that things can go desperately wrong. The main problem perhaps is the disaffected and unemployed youth. As long as the unemployed youths can become involved in training and creation of employment opportunities through tourism development and international migration, there will be few other forces for instability.

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