

INTRODUCTION:
**CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN THE PACIFIC – TOWARDS A NEW
CONSENSUS**

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Only a month before the publication of this special edition of the *Revue Juridique Polynésienne* – an issue examining some of the challenges facing the Pacific in the twenty-first century – new parliamentary elections are being held in Fiji. These elections follow a new period of political upheaval in that Pacific Island country, including the overthrow in 2000 of a democratically elected government and the imprisonment for a period of time of a Prime Minister and other members of the executive.

Developments in Fiji at the constitutional and electoral levels, against the backdrop of indigenous politics and as a consequence of both manipulated and existing ethnic rivalries, represent a further challenge to the Fijian people – elites and the Fijian public alike – to reconcile past and present, tradition and change. Fiji's complex and multi-layered power struggle make the outcome by no means certain.

What is a certainty, however, is that the Pacific, a region whose image of ease has been thoroughly shattered, is threatened from within and without – from both internally driven events and from the external challenges posed by globalisation, international crime and environmental degradation. In this climate of insecurity, the Pacific region is looking beyond the former Western colonial powers, northwards, to East Asia, and the presence of Japan, China and Taiwan is increasingly being felt within the region. Pacific island states are redefining their relationships beyond the Pacific Islands region to establish themselves more firmly as political entities determined to play a role on the international stage. Against this backdrop, one of the few remaining formally 'non-self-governing' territories, the New Zealand 'dependency' of Tokelau, is pursuing its own path towards nationhood and political self-expression. Comparable developments, equally singular, are taking place, in their own way and at their own pace, in the French territories of New Caledonia and French Polynesia.

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Many of these matters are discussed, analysed and documented in the articles presented in this volume. The issue begins with a contribution from Gaston Flosse, the President of the government of French Polynesia, drawing attention to moves to establish Polynesian citizenship within a framework that preserves the territory's place within the French Republic. This article, which launches this special issue, is being published in its original French and also in an English version intended to highlight its main points. It is followed by an overview of particular legal and constitutional developments in the Pacific, presented by one of the editors, Yves-Louis Sage. The next paper, by Jean Peres – a legal counsellor to French Polynesia's President Gaston Flosse – further elaborates on the development of democratic institutions within French Polynesia. The acquisition of a genuine capacity to enact legislation in France's overseas territories is discussed in the next paper, provided by Yves Brard, while difficulties in reconciling restrictions on the franchise in New Caledonia with more widely accepted egalitarian principles is the concern of another French academic, Jean-Yves Faberon. The complex task of designing new laws and institutions for a new nation, Tokelau, is reviewed by Tony Angelo.

The background to Fiji's political and constitutional problems is also the subject of a separate essay in this publication. Roderic Alley reviews Fiji's previous two coups – the first to take place in any Pacific Island country since the island states began to recover their independence – and looks ahead to the more recent nation-building challenges facing Fiji. Many of the other articles in this issue, however, look beyond particular countries to focus more broadly on trends and tendencies affecting the Pacific Island region as a whole.

The President of the University of French Polynesia, Sylvie André, describes the relationship that has developed over time, and through a series of legal regimes, between the European Union and the island states of the Pacific. Other articles focus on the outlook and behaviour of particular countries – New Zealand, Japan, China and Taiwan – as they have developed their own distinctive policies towards the various Pacific Island states. These studies – from Jim Rolfe (a New Zealander now based in Hawaii), Ronni Alexander (an American now based in Japan) and John Henderson (a New Zealander who has studied Pacific Island developments for a long time, both as an academic and, from time to time, as a government official) – may be read together, offering in sequence an overview of the perspectives taken by several governments and nations towards the small island states that are their distant neighbours.

The most powerful 'contemporary challenges' facing Pacific Island states are consequences of weakness and vulnerability. Global warming and sea-level rise, among other environmental developments, threaten the very survival of some island countries. Towards the possibility of environmental catastrophe there is indeed something of 'a new consensus', at least in the Pacific: concerted action by the industrialised powers needs to be

taken, urgently, if their lands, traditions and peoples are to survive the much-vaunted new millennium.

The environmental hazards faced by Pacific Island nations, reviewed systematically and sympathetically by Jon Barnett, are a reflection of economic growth – not necessarily in the Pacific, but certainly elsewhere. The absence of growth is also, of course, not without its problems. However, the dangers of attempting to introduce Western neo-liberal concepts may also be considerable. Maria Bargh highlights some of the problems involved in an effort to promote economic growth in Pacific Island countries while integrating these states (at least ideologically) into the worldwide pattern known now as 'globalisation'. Another consequence of becoming part of a global network – crime – is the subject of the article by Douglas Ranmuthugala.

All of these articles contribute complexity to simpler images of the Pacific to which outsiders have become accustomed. Indeed, many of these images of a problem-free 'paradise' do exist, but now increasingly within a context with which we are all familiar. As elsewhere, politics and law involve conflicts, disputes, and the search for agreement. Yet in the Pacific, this also involves the realities which beset most developing nations. Against this setting, one of the most important 'contemporary challenges' facing the Pacific is the development of external understanding of its current character – its diversity, its predicaments, and its opportunities.

This collection of articles – the first in what is hoped will be a series of 'special issues' of papers on the law, politics and international relations of the Pacific to be published in *Revue Juridique Polynésienne* – addresses some of the challenges faced by Pacific Island states. The goal is to promote a better understanding of the legal, political, social, economic, cultural and environmental issues facing the Pacific region. As in other fields, a consequence of better information should be a change in perceptions – in this case, a clearer and more realistic view of the Pacific region and of the various island states and territories comprising it.

Finally, it is important to emphasise the unique collaboration that is being developed through this editorial partnership. Too often, scholars interested in the Pacific have been separated from one another as a result of language, with English-language researchers publishing their findings in one set of publications and French-language authors sending in their work to a different network of journals.

We have sought, instead, to make a modest change in this state of affairs. This issue endeavours to bring together English-speaking and French-speaking authors. It is hoped that this will inspire a more energetic and productive process of communication and lead to a sharing of perspectives on the Pacific. Differences in approach and outlook have their

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origins in different political experiences and academic traditions. These, too, may be apparent in various ways as one reads through the articles in this collection.

The issue as a whole includes contributions from both English and French authors and each article is preceded by abstracts in both English and French. One result of this approach is perhaps to change perceptions of this journal as well, recognising it now as one neither English nor French, but simply committed to fresh and thought-provoking research on interesting and important contemporary Pacific issues.