

# A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF GLOBAL DEMOCRATISATION: THE PACIFIC PERSPECTIVE

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*While globalisation and democratisation have brought many benefits, the ideas behind these movements have been challenged by various critics and there have been concerns raised as well about some of the consequences of these tendencies. Accordingly, this article examines democratisation and globalisation from a variety of perspectives. A Pacific Feminist critique offers its own distinctive insights, paying particular attention to the early effects of Western contact on Pacific peoples and traditions. It is argued that Pacific Feminism is a more genuinely democratic outlook than that offered by a male-dominated status quo, and that a reliance on pre-modern Pacific Feminist values offers greater hope for a more inclusive democratic future in the Pacific.*

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*Si l'on s'accorde à reconnaître quelques mérites aux phénomènes conjugués de la globalisation et de démocratisation, il reste que les principes qui les soutendent et les conséquences qui les accompagnent ne sont pas sans soulever d'importantes polémiques. Très souvent, ces critiques dépendent du contexte particulier retenu. Cet article entreprend, de manière délibérée, l'étude de ces phénomènes dans la cadre d'une analyse féministe recentrée uniquement sur le Pacifique Sud. Seront ainsi pris notamment en compte, les conséquences que peuvent avoir les contacts entre les sociétés occidentales industrialisées et celles du Pacifique Sud où les modes de vie traditionnels restent encore très marqués. Pour l'auteur, un courant féministe reposant sur les valeurs coutumières en vigueur dans le Pacifique, offre de meilleures garanties pour le respect des règles démocratiques dans des sociétés.*

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## I INTRODUCTION

The diffusion of democratic ideals around the globe makes globalisation of democracy increasingly palpable. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and therefore communism in 1989, it seemed that there were no longer any viable alternatives to democracy. The 'triumph' of democracy was to bring to prominence liberal democratic ideas and institutions as well as support for free-market capitalism. But there is more to globalisation than this. Economic transactions between multinationals have exponentially increased in the last two decades, weakening the hegemonic position of the state. Another trend has been the rise of

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international civil society, multiplying contacts throughout the world and pressuring governments to address issues such as the environment, human rights and social justice.

War between leading industrial powers, all of them Western democratic countries (or countries, such as Japan, subscribing to democratic ideals), has ceased and become almost unthinkable. Internationalists contend that democratic institutions offer the best guarantees of respect for human rights as well as the best chance to improve the lives of ordinary citizens. International institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have assumed that good governance, human rights and free-market systems are inextricably intertwined with prosperity, security and peace. Economic liberalisation orchestrated internationally by the World Trade Organisation further accelerates the globalisation of capitalism.

Globalisation is therefore intensifying in a variety of dimensions. How can we define this trend? One definition sees globalisation as involving processes in which

social relations acquire relatively distanceless and borderless qualities so that human lives are increasingly played out in the world as a single place. Social relations – that is, the countless and complex ways that people interact with and affect each other – are more and more being conducted and organized on the basis of a planetary unit. By the same token country locations, and in particular the boundaries between territorial states, are in some important senses becoming less central to our lives, although they do remain significant. Globalization is thus an ongoing trend whereby the world has – in many respects and at generally accelerating rates – become one relatively borderless social sphere.<sup>1</sup>

However, at the same time as spatial barriers are coming down for some people, other barriers are going up, as immigrant workers facing the border controls of ‘Fortress Europe’ or the work-permit requirements of individual states can testify.

Democracy would be meaningless if freedom of expression, of movement, and of association of individuals were not secured. These civil and political rights of individuals ensure that each citizen has the ability to influence the outcome of political decision-making. Democratisation comprises three consecutive stages: (1) the end of a non-democratic regime, (2) the inauguration of a democratic regime, and (3) the consolidation of a democratic system.<sup>2</sup> Democratisation can be reversed at any point during the transitional period. The process of democratic transition can last for a long time and its success is by no means assured. This article discusses global democratisation from different perspectives: the Liberal and Internationalist view, the Feminist critique and the response of a Pre-modernist Pacific woman.<sup>3</sup>

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1 J A Scholte, ‘The Globalisation of World Politics’, in J Baylis and S Smith (eds), *The Globalization of World Politics: an Introduction to International Relations*, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 13-30.

2 S Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991, p. 9.

3 This article has its origins in a paper presented to the Masters of International Relations program of Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand). I acknowledge with gratitude the support and assistance given to me by staff and students during my MIR studies.

The first part considers democratisation in the contemporary globalising world, reviewing the nature of globalisation and its impact on democratisation. The second part offers a Feminist critique of democratisation, arising out of the prolonged exclusion of women from the most basic political and civil rights, and the values of equality, freedom and democracy. The third part undertakes the original task of building a pre-modern Pacific woman's viewpoint towards democratisation. The attempt to define a methodology based on a pre-modern way of reasoning gives a different light on recent anti-democratic events in the Pacific. During the past 20 years, the South Pacific region has been considered a peaceful (and hence truly 'pacific') oasis of democracy. Unfortunately, political unrest in the Pacific region has somewhat invalidated this statement. In May 2000 Fiji experienced its third coup in thirteen years. Several weeks later, in the Solomon Islands, the Prime Minister was forced at gunpoint to resign. A year earlier, in Samoa, a cabinet minister was assassinated. Very little is known about women's response to these turbulent topics. The aim of this third part is to highlight what I consider to be a natural propensity for democracy among Pacific women. It is followed by a more personal case study on the experience of women in politics in French Polynesia.

## II DEMOCRATISATION IN A GLOBALISING WORLD

The extent and speed of the democratic transition in Europe in early 1989 led Francis Fukuyama to proclaim the 'end of history'. This he represented as the 'endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Liberal democracy as the final form of human government'.<sup>4</sup> Democracy seems a familiar and unequivocal term; however, the universal praise of democracy has produced considerable confusion with respect to this concept since the late 1980s. To understand how and why democratisation is such an important component of globalisation, the meaning of liberal democracy will be investigated through the reading of different theorists of liberal democracy, and then I will turn to the nature of global democratisation and its impact on world affairs.

### A Liberal Democracy

Classical Liberalism stresses the importance of the individual, the rule of law and the constitutional limits on government power. Democracy, on the other hand, places more emphasis upon popular participation and popular sovereignty. Liberalism has historically provided both a necessary platform for democracy and a constraint upon it. How far can these constraints be imposed upon the process of democratisation without undermining the basis of democracy itself? Should civil liberties override political rights? What is the ideal system for a maximum involvement of citizens in the decision-making process?

#### 1 Individualism versus Cultural Diversity

The Liberal principles of individualism that, in Western states, underpin the practice of democracy rest on a view of democracy as being neutral and impartial. All individuals are free to adhere to a set of values as long as no one obstructs any other individual's exercise of their values.

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4 F Fukuyama, 'The end of History', *The National Interest*, Vol 16 (1989).

The notions of neutrality and impartiality have important implications for ideas of identity, culture and community. Within the Liberal framework, the principle of one person, one vote may be detrimental to minority groups, as they are unable to impose their claims over majority interests. An argument has been made for 'a system of differential, rather than universal, rights' to recognise the cultural differences that conflict with the notion of universalism.<sup>5</sup>

Liberal democracy has been especially attacked by some Asian and Arab political elites who fear the imperialistic and monolithic nature of Liberalism. An emphasis on the good of the community rather than the good of the individual is an important challenge to traditional Liberal tenets. This brings into relief the culture-specific nature of democratisation, which is Western-centric. The process of democratisation finds resistance not so much for the lack of consensus on democratic aspirations but for some of the controversial positions on liberal values, particularly in the clash between communalism and individualism.

## 2 *Political Participation vs Equality*

Democracy means, in essence, that political power rests with and flows from the people. This element of democracy can be summed up as follows:

All citizens have an equal right to take part in, and to determine the outcome of, the constitutional process that established the laws with which they are to comply. With some exceptions, all adults should have the right to vote in fair, free and regularly held elections. People should be free to form political parties, and the idea of a 'loyal opposition' – a party in opposition to whoever is in power, yet which accepts and respects the constitution and political process – is vital to reasonable politics.<sup>6</sup>

Socialists and social democrats have argued, however, that formal equality of political rights is of only limited value if private wealth can be used as a political resource to control or influence access to public decision-making. This can happen within the institutions of the state and in the private sector as well. Major economic decisions taken by private institutions unaccountable to the public reduce political participation in decision-making in reality.

## 3 *Welfare Rights vs Individual Rights*

The inclusion of welfare rights in the body of civil and political rights has divided human rights theorists. The commitment of Liberal thought to the defense of private property conflicts with the need to restrict and regulate private property in the interests of social justice, economic equity, health and safety, and environmental protection.

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5 See K Fierbeck, *Globalizing Democracy: Power, Legitimacy and the Interpretation of Democratic Ideas*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 82.

6 J Wolff, 'J Rawls: Liberal Democracy Restated', in A Carter & G Stokes (eds), *Liberal Democracy and its Critics: Perspectives in Contemporary Political Thought*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 118-134.

For Hayek, a strong economic market prevents the concentration of political power.<sup>7</sup> For him, social justice is a ‘mirage’ as it undermines the justice of the market, ‘confiscating the wealth of the more successful, prolonging the dependency of the needy, entrenching the special powers of organised interests and overriding individual freedom’.<sup>8</sup> A slightly more progressive view is advanced by Rawls, who gives liberty an absolute priority over economic advancement and equality of opportunity. Only in times of crisis does Rawls accept the idea of limiting liberty to secure the well-being of the people.

## *B Capitalism, Civil Society and the Westphalian State*

The accelerated spread of global phenomena since the middle of the twentieth century has had a number of important implications for patterns of governance. Capitalism and civil society are important variables in the context of democratisation. The rise of global market capitalism and the increased influence of civil society around the world have had a tremendous impact on the Westphalian notion of the state, compelling governments to redefine their role in order to fit with the changing world.<sup>9</sup>

The emphasis on the importance of political and civil rights has encouraged the emancipation of civil society over the State. Social movements formed at the grassroots level have helped promote and guarantee human rights, public debate within communities and a heightened environmental awareness. With the progress of technology in transportation and communication, the world is in many ways now the ‘global village’ it was expected to become.

### *1 Global Democratisation and the Market System*

Many Liberal scholars view capitalism as an essential component of democracy. The collapse of one-party dictatorship in the Soviet-controlled Eastern Bloc gave further impetus to the world market. Liberals claim that market-capitalism leads to economic growth, which in turn improves living standards and thus fosters a better community. It is also said that democratic countries do not go to war against each other. Internationalists claim that democracy creates domestic institutions aimed at cooperation, which help pave the way for international institutions with the same objective. Economic interdependence promotes transnational relations in general and creates an incentive for developing international cooperation.

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7 C Kukathas, ‘Friedrich Hayek: Elitism and Democracy’, in A Carter and G Stokes (eds), *Liberal Democracy and its Critics: Perspectives in Contemporary Political Thought*, pp. 21-38.

8 C Pierson, ‘Democracy, Markets and Capital’, in D Held (ed), *Prospects for Democracy: North, South, East, West*, California: Stanford University Press, 1993, p. 181.

9 The Peace of Westphalia signed on 24 October 1648 in Münster between the Holy Roman Emperor and the King of France remains a cornerstone of modern diplomacy and today’s world affairs. The treaty has led to a modern nation-state system where all member states are juridically equal and enjoy absolute sovereignty within their boundaries, with international law established as an instrument of peace and order.

But the market system creates inequalities and therefore produces its own adverse consequences for political equality.<sup>10</sup> The pace of change and the redistribution of power and prosperity are eroding the social fabric more rapidly than the new order can develop. Governments need to address the negative consequences of the international economy if they do not wish to lose their own legitimacy. A newly insecure middle-class has been vulnerable to xenophobia discourse and separatism, with some preferring to opt out from the world market. At the same time, a mass of people exist everywhere searching for an escape from poverty and despair. These social disparities, if unaddressed, make for a gloomy future.

Klaus Schwab, the founder and president of the World Economic Forum at Davos, foresees the urgency for political and economic leaders to demonstrate that the new global capitalism can benefit the majority, and not only corporate managers and investors.<sup>11</sup> For many, it is not the political organisation of a society but rather its economic orientation that is important, and specifically the degree to which it is integrated into the emerging global economy. The economic self-interest behind globalisation is often hidden from view, camouflaged by claims about peace, democracy, human rights and progress. Nevertheless, its promoters believe primarily in markets; all else is negotiable. The international interdependence has seen 'the emergence of elites, themselves globalised, but semi-detached from their societies of origin and imbued with a sense of mastery of the new global environment'.<sup>12</sup> According to Ross, global society is dominated by 'cosmopolitan liberal elites' antagonistic to democratic traditions.<sup>13</sup>

## 2 *Global Democratisation and Civil Society*

Civil society is a domain parallel to but separate from the state, a realm where citizens associate with one another according to their own interests and wishes. Civil society grew out of the rise of private property, market competition, the rise of the bourgeoisie and the demand for liberty.<sup>14</sup> It is possible that 'non-state organisations may be the most efficient and equitable vehicles for democratic transformation'.<sup>15</sup> The global trend for democracy has opened up greater space for civil society in formerly dictatorial countries around the world. In Western countries, civil society acts as a means of social renewal. In the developing world, civil society has had to come up with welfare programmes to fill the gap left by local governments unable to cope with social consequences of economic reforms.

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10 R A Dahl, *On Democracy*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998.

11 H-P Martin and H Schumann, *The Global Trap: Globalization and the Assault on Democracy and Prosperity*, London and New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1997.

12 G Ross, 'Travelling Salesmen of Diplomacy: Business is our only Business', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 2000.

13 Ibid.

14 See T Carothers, 'Think again', *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1999.

15 K Fierlbeck, *Globalizing Democracy: Power, Legitimacy and the Interpretation of Democratic Ideas*, p. 18.

Civil society has played an important part in defining the requirements for development and good governance. From the reduction of poverty through structural adjustment and sustainable development, the World Bank's successive agendas have been influenced by non-governmental organisations. Although democracy is seen as a globalising force in the international community, its most enthusiastic proponents argue that in the end it must be a localised, grassroots phenomenon to be of any value. Social movements can have salutary effects on the international actions of their own governments. Pressure for change is assumed to be coming from the burgeoning international civil society with its growing network of organisations and activists. In the context of globalisation, national sovereignty has been eroded by transnational forces. One consequence is an increased tendency towards social disintegration and widespread alienation among citizens. Whether securing social justice, defending the environment, restricting the power of the media or combating international crime, the individual nation-state finds itself in an increasingly difficult position.

### 3 *Is the State in jeopardy?*

Globalisation forces the nation-state to redefine its role in a changing world. The primacy of the modern state reveals itself through the recognition given to national territorial boundaries delimiting the political space and sovereignty exercised by the state over a political community. Governments remain powerful actors in the global system. Nevertheless, a vast array of international agencies and organisations as well as non-state actors have emerged to occupy a growing importance in world affairs. By operating beyond national boundaries, these supra-national and sub-national bodies are challenging the relevance of the traditional notion of the state.

Sovereignty can serve as a shield and a pretext to enable a government to engage in abusive behaviour toward its own citizenry. At the same time, however, respect for national sovereignty can protect a progressive government committed to promoting the economic, social and cultural well-being of its people from intervention and intimidation. The concept of sovereignty protects weak states from the pressures of the more powerful. This can be important, for the trend towards globalisation can undermine democratisation and social progress in developing countries. With democracy understood as the expression of the 'national will', a weak state subject to international constraints may find itself unable to respond to popular sentiment, thus suffering internally from a crisis of legitimacy.

The development of the modern state has been facilitated historically by the emergence of capitalism. The globalisation of the market system, however, is destroying its own foundations as it undermines democratic stability and the state's ability to function. In addition, the basic institutions of market-capitalism rest upon a degree of government intervention and regulation. For instance, competitive markets, ownership of economic entities, the enforcement of contracts, prevention of monopolies, protection of property rights and many other aspects of commerce depend on laws, policies and order carried out and regulated by governments. If a truly 'laissez-faire' approach were to dominate, economic actors motivated by self-interest would have little incentive for taking the good of others into account. Indeed, there are powerful commercial incentives to ignore the weak in order to gain. In this context, the state recovers a meaningful place in society by promoting, for

instance, the interest of women against men, of the economically marginalised against the entrepreneurs, and of minority cultures against the dominant ethnic group.

The state, global governance agencies, the market and international social movements all suffer from shortcomings in respect of popular participation and access, consultation and debate, inclusion and representativeness, constitutionality and accountability. The nation-state has a keen instinct for survival and has so far adapted to new challenges. It could be argued that it is even now reconciling itself to the challenge of globalisation. The capacity of the state, and globalisation, to deal with the interests of women remains questionable, however, and is the subject of the next section of this article.

### III FEMINISTS' CRITIQUE

The goal of this segment is to suggest how a gender consciousness might change the agenda of world politics and help promote the paramount ideals of democracy. In addition, it intends to denounce how the dominance of a powerful norm, in this case patriarchy, can obscure the fact that most people lie outside its boundaries.

#### A Gender and Democratisation

One of the characteristics of mainstream international relations is that it presents itself as gender blind, as a realm of objective human knowledge. In fact, however, a study of world politics focused on the relations between states leaves women 'almost invisible, since few have been leaders of states'.<sup>16</sup> Since the institutions that enact world affairs are mostly dominated by men, they also primarily reflect male concerns.

Gender relations constitute a crucial arena for democratisation. The Feminist redefinition of the 'political' has placed issues which were previously relegated to the private sphere firmly onto the political agenda. Anne Phillips identifies two major political developments in Feminist thought which have emerged from liberal democracy.<sup>17</sup> The first is the view that 'the personal is political': 'relationships we once imagined were private or merely social are in fact infused with power, usually unequal power backed up by public authority'.<sup>18</sup> This insight led to a second development, which is the relationship between democracy and power and a renewed focus on the machinery of democracy (with a preference for more direct democracy).

#### 1 Women and Citizenship

A Feminist reading of foundational texts of classical liberalism emphasises women's exclusion from public power. Along these lines, David Beetham notes that 'almost all of the classical liberals excluded women from citizenship on the grounds that they could be

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16 See F D'Amico and P R Beckman, 'Introduction' in F D'Amico and P R Beckman (eds), *Women, Gender and World Politics: Perspectives, Policies and Prospects*, Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1994.

17 A Phillips, 'Must Feminists give up on Liberal Democracy?', in D Held (ed), *Prospects for Democracy: North, South, East, West*, pp. 93-111.

18 See C Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, p. 195.



sufficiently represented, and their interests be protected, by either their husbands or their fathers'.<sup>19</sup> In this patriarchal construct, the citizen was assumed to be male – breadwinner, worker and protector of the nation – and therefore a responsible being. Conversely, women were seen as a man's dependent, constrained to the home and in their 'sexed bodies'.

The first wave Feminists who struggled to extend the vote to women countered with the argument that women contribute to the good of the nation by giving birth and bringing up future citizens. They pointed out that some women died in doing so. On these premises, men and women were incorporated into citizenship in decisively different ways. Men's entitlement to citizenship was based on their quality as soldiers and workers, while women were integrated into citizenship based on motherhood.

Later, after the two major wars, social challenges arose and Western liberal democracies were to evolve into welfare states. Consequently, the concept of citizenship expanded to embrace social rights including the right to education and employment and social welfare for indigents.<sup>20</sup> The Feminist analysis of citizenship has helped to place particular issues on the political agenda, notably, the regulation of violence and the recognition of rape within marriage as a crime. It has therefore truly brought the personal into the political. The unequal progress of women's formal rights around the world suggests the need for feminists to keep raising these gender issues.

## 2 *Political Participation and the idea of Equality*

There remains a tension in liberal democracy between ideas about the nature of women and ideas about individual equality. Many traditional commentators assumed that women's primary role would be in the home. Although women have been granted voting rights in contemporary liberal democracies, it is clear that many people still believe they are unsuited for political life and that it would be dangerous for the state to be led and directed by women.

The composition of decision-making assemblies remains markedly at odds with the gender and ethnic make-up of the societies they represent. The level of women in parliaments in the Americas is approximately 15.5%, 13.4% in Asia, and 12.5% in Europe (excluding the Nordic countries' figures, which are at 37.6%). Only 11.6% of MPs are women in Sub-Saharan Africa, 8.3% in the Pacific and a mere 3.3% in the Arab countries.<sup>21</sup>

Although democracy implies equality, when it is superimposed on an unequal society it allows some people to count for more than others. To obtain greater equality, some propose more formal means to ensure the representation of disadvantaged groups. There have been calls for a quota system to be introduced. The institutionalising of group representation, however, seems to conflict with the perception that each individual counts equally as one. It

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19 D Beetham, 'The Limits of Democratization', in D Held (ed), *Prospects for Democracy: North, South, East, West*, pp. 58-59.

20 See A Phillips, *Democracy and Difference*, University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993, p. 107.

21 See *Women's Political Participation and Good Governance: 21st Century Challenges*, United Nations Development Programme, 2000, p. 3.

is clear, however, that in practice there remain substantial obstacles to equal participation in politics and society for women.

The enduring division of the 'public' and 'private' spheres remains a major problem for women to overcome. Participation refers to the activities by which a citizen engages with political institutions and representatives. These include registering to vote, voting, discussing politics, taking part in an election campaign, and attending election meetings. Women active in political parties in the Nordic countries have pursued the case for gender quotas with particular success. Around the world, women have found that it is still difficult for them to cope with the competing demands of their professional careers, the needs of their families and their political aspirations.

### **B Gender Relations and Global Capitalism**

The feminisation of poverty manifests itself differently in different contexts. In many contexts, the poor in general and the disadvantaged groups share many of the conditions and the needs represented by women. These underprivileged people – which include a significant number of women – suffer disproportionately from the impact of globalisation on their livelihoods. It has been pointed out that, globally, 'women represent about 60 per cent of the billion or so people earning \$1.00 or less a day'.<sup>22</sup>

Global markets find political boundaries too constraining. Esenstein remarks that transnational corporations 'often find traditional patriarchy familial relations too constraining too'.<sup>23</sup> She is uneasy about privatisation, as its objective is to produce maximum profitability, exploiting patriarchal reflexes and racist inequities in doing so. In addition, the privatisation of capital and the transnational corporate structure of privatisation reduce public accountability. The image of a weakened nation-state caught between globalising and localising forces is a common refrain in the contemporary citizenship literature. Even so, one should not exaggerate the demise of nation-state power, especially its power to exercise control over membership and citizenship.

The delimitation of territories, the centralisation of governments and the promulgation of state-wide nationalisms all promote assertive and often violent forms of masculinity. State-making and war-making are cognate activities, and the latter has long been a way of defining and demonstrating a range of stereotypically masculinist traits. 'Similar observations could be made of global capitalists in the world market (the heroic entrepreneur doing battle for greater profit or market share), as it could of those who promulgate modernism (a messianic and masculinist mixture of materialism, rationalism, secularism, and individualism)'.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Z Esenstein, 'For New Democracies', *Feminist Review*, No 57, Autumn 1997, pp. 140-167.

23 Ibid.

24 R Pettman, 'Sex, Power, and the Grail of Positive Collaboration' in F D'Amico and P R Beckman (eds), *Women, Gender, and World Politics: Perspectives, Policies and Prospects*, pp. 169-184.

### C *The International Women's Movement*

The movement for gender equality of the late 20th century is closely linked to the human rights movement. We are today witnessing the emergence of a global civil society in which women are playing a central role. In the mid-1970s, non-governmental organisations of women took part in international gatherings, believing that to bring about change at the United Nations in respect of women's status it was necessary to lobby and provide information. Most of these women were volunteers, usually unpaid. Their actions in promoting an international year for women (1975) convinced UN representatives to dedicate a full decade (1976-1985) to promoting the equality of women, ensuring the full integration of women in efforts for international peace and cooperation.

The worldwide movement for women's equality gained new impetus from the birth of the United Nations in 1945 and the promulgation in 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was not, however, until the preparations for the first world conference on women, which took place in Mexico City in 1975, that the international community became sensitive to the inequities that continued to render women second-class citizens in every country, including the industrialised democracies of the Western world.

For the first time, in 1979, women's rights were codified in an international human rights document. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been in force only since 1981. Currently 139 countries – more than two-thirds of the member states of the United Nations – are parties to the treaty. This is a major step towards integrating the advancement of women with the trend towards a globalisation of human rights standards and protections.

## IV *PACIFIC PERSPECTIVES*

The South Pacific is characterised by a complex political patchwork of states, peoples and cultures. Its traditional social and political structures have been eroded by colonial impacts to evolve in a unique way within the international cultural framework. This section seeks to examine democratisation from the viewpoint of women in the Pacific, bearing in mind its cultural and political features.

The Pacific islands are in many ways pre-modern communities. Their political structures were based on a hierarchical system with high chiefs in command (in Polynesia and in much of Micronesia) or involved loosely organised tribes with leadership functions carried out by competitive 'big men'.<sup>25</sup> In Western societies in the seventeenth century, during the Enlightenment era, philosophers in search of 'the truth' elevated reason as an end in itself: this was the precursor to 'modernity'. Although the first contact in the Pacific with European

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25 The status of a 'big man' is largely achieved. To become the political head of the village, a 'big man' must be ambitious and energetic and prove himself as a warrior. His ability to manipulate others and manoeuvre them into his debt, to organise large scale activities, and his success in the accumulation of wealth (pigs, crops, and indigenous valuables) are all indispensable qualities. A big man needs also to be generous in the redistribution of his wealth.

navigators occurred in 1513<sup>26</sup> and was followed by many other Westerners during the next 200 years, modern ideas were alien to Pacific Islanders; in many instances they still are. The uniqueness of these islands' polities in terms of their spirituality and culture requires a different way of reasoning. Instead of objectifying the modern concepts of liberal democracy and confronting them with Pacific societies' needs, the Polynesian reasoning dictates another path. The Pacific rationale departs from the Western view by regarding time in an original and different way, and favouring collective values over the claims of the individual.

The Polynesian notion of time is perhaps a peculiar one for 'rational' minds to grasp. 'Mua' means ahead and 'muri' means behind. When Polynesians talk about the future, they allude to 'muri', the time that is behind. When referring to the past, Polynesians say 'mua', asserting that the past is in front of them. To be informed about their future, Polynesians face their past. In the past, immutable values are to be found. They mainly comprise traditions, the community and ancestry. In the future, prescriptions echoing the past are held as vital reference points for today and tomorrow. They concern respect for the environment as a finite resource, support for the accomplishment of individuals for the good of the community, and the nurturing of the children through initiation in communal rituals and traditions. To succeed in the future, one has to look to one's past.

From what precedes, I am going to propose the following argument:

Although Pacific societies generally valued their past because of the insights it gave for the future, women are the ones most consistent in upholding the values and traditions of the past. This reflects their concern for land, environment and family. With the support of the colonial powers, Pacific men selected the set of values that they thought most promoted their interests, which has led to a lack of legitimacy in contemporary Pacific politics. Women in the Pacific, by remaining closer to their societies' authentic traditions and aspirations, have retained a more natural propensity for democratisation.

In the early days of Western contact, European explorers and traders, all men, overlooked Pacific women. Imbued with their highly gender stratified bias, they sought to conduct most of their dealings with male chiefs and local leaders. 'Local women were often seen merely as potential sexual release for crew.'<sup>27</sup> Gender relations and women's status are particularly difficult to track, however. It seems likely that Pacific Feminists with pre-modern belief-systems were not against modernity; on the contrary, they sought to bring modernity onto a ground which would allow tradition to be reconciled and enriched without losing its integrity. Of course, many women in the Pacific embraced Christianity and a patriarchal perspective. However, in doing so, Pacific women have not wished to obliterate their ancestors' history.

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26 The Spanish explorer Vasco Nunez de Balboa was the first European to discover the Pacific Ocean. See R C Kiste, 'Pre-colonial times', in K R Howe, R C Kiste, and B V Lal, *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994, p. 3.

27 D Denoon, S Firth, J Linnekin, M Meleisea and K Nero (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 11.

## A *The Selective Process of Tradition*

### 1 *What is tradition? How do practices and values get to be part of tradition?*

Tradition is a body of cultural practices received from the past, valued in the present, and carried forward into the future. The assimilation of a living tradition is largely unconscious, absorbed as a natural component of social life. For its importance as a source of political authority and therefore of legitimacy, tradition has to be recognised in society as authentic.

In the context of transition to modernity, Eisenstadt viewed 'true traditions' as a legitimating tool for new patterns of social and political behaviour.<sup>28</sup> For instance, colonisers codified what they assumed were customary laws, land rights and political structures. This was clearly not in accordance with traditional practice. It promoted the interests of a few local elites to the detriment of commoners and rival chiefly groups. Codification had the effect of crystallising tradition, preventing its natural evolution. The issue of 'invented' tradition has left anthropologists perplexed. How can one distinguish 'tradition as inheritance from ancestors' from tradition as the 'manipulative rhetoric of contemporary politicians'?<sup>29</sup>

A problem with 'traditional' forms of governance in the Pacific is that they no longer operate in 'traditional' ways.<sup>30</sup> Until the late 1980s all the independent Pacific island countries proceeded to independence peacefully. Notwithstanding the right given to islanders to determine their political futures, the international community – which included the former rulers – monitored these political changes so that they would conform to Western models of democratic government. Soon, however, conflicts between tradition and these new modes of governance emerged.

As Stephanie Lawson observes, 'ironically, much of the currency of tradition with respect to political institutions and practices was due, at least initially, to colonial systems of indirect rule'.<sup>31</sup> In Fiji, in 1987 and again in 2000, coup leaders claimed that they were acting to protect indigenous rights and traditional values.

### 2 *The impact of the selective practice of tradition*

A Pacific Feminist perspective towards the Fijian multicultural society would be that the British rulers, by promoting the chiefly system as the ruling class despite the diversity of pre-colonial structures throughout the islands, inadvertently disrupted the balance of political power. The result was to promote the interests of a certain local ruling class. This elite did not feel compelled anymore to perform their duty vis-à-vis their communities and even less

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28 S N Eisenstadt, 'Post-Traditional Societies and the Continuity and Reconstruction of Tradition', *Daedalus*, Vol 102, No 1, Winter 1973, p. 22.

29 S Lawson, *Tradition versus Democracy in the South Pacific: Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 20-26.

30 G A Finn and T A Wesley-Smith, *Coups, Conflicts, and Crises: The New Pacific Way?*, East-West Center Working Papers, East-West Center, June 2000.

31 S Lawson, *Tradition versus Democracy in the South Pacific: Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa*, pp. 20-26.

towards former rival villagers. In countries such as Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, the chiefly rulers have been losing their legitimacy for their perceived betrayal of their principles. The status given by the community to a chief through religious and political rituals gave him not only rights but responsibilities over the collective. By choosing only the empowering rituals, the elites truncated their own future as well as the future of their community. As long as the colonial rulers were legitimating and backing the chiefly system, order and security were assured. Pacific feminists would argue that the loss of integrity of tradition has led to a fragmented sense of identity among indigenous people.

It is interesting, nevertheless, to note that in the aftermath of the colonial period, the 'favoured' political elite has often rejected the former rulers' values, opting instead to strengthen tradition. I imagine that a Pacific pre-modern Feminist – if one existed – would disparage the wave of 'traditionalism' conjured up in the 1980s. In 1970, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara coined the term 'Pacific Way', praising communalism and traditional order against Western values. The 'selected' set of tradition of the past, picked by elite men, has served their own economic interests and their personal political agenda. The ethnic argument (Fijian Indians vs Indigenous Fijians) was provided as the reason for three coups perpetrated or attempted in Fiji. Giving more emphasis to tradition allowed native politicians to seek to exclude Indo-Fijians from national politics. The selective use of tradition was a cynical exercise in power politics, taken against democratic values, notably the principle of equality.

Stephanie Lawson has written that 'pressures favouring democratisation in each of the countries are not so much imposed from outside, but come most forcefully from within the societies concerned'.<sup>32</sup> The often negative reaction by Pacific Islanders to coups in Fiji suggests that the basic principles of democratic rule are accepted and valued. The coups should not be seen as a general negation of democratic ideals by Pacific Islanders, but rather as a reflection of the particular stresses that local democratic institutions of governance have endured in a bi-cultural setting.

## ***B Pacific Women and their Natural Propensity for Democracy***

I have suggested that Pacific women have a 'natural' propensity for democracy. They stand in front of their past – not ignoring or denying it – as they face the challenges of the future. They – more than Pacific men – have a genuine attachment to, and concern for, the land, the environment, the children, the family and the well-being of future generations. The Pacific Feminist viewpoint is intuitively approached, yet these 'subjective' conclusions have their foundations in movements led by women in the Pacific. These lead me to assert that Pacific women have a 'natural' propensity for democracy.

### ***1 Land ownership, a way to secure stability in the community***

In the Polynesian islands, anthropologists have documented that chiefly titles and land ownership are transmitted through mothers or through marriages to chiefly women. With few exceptions, matrilineal institutions prevailed throughout Micronesia as well. Women

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<sup>32</sup> S Lawson, *Tradition versus Democracy in the South Pacific: Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa*, p. 9.

seem to have assumed a pivotal role in their communities. Solomon Islands scholar Tarcisius Kabutaulaka highlights the fact that over past decades many Guadalcanal males unilaterally sold rights to customary land around the capital, Honiara. These transactions have been strongly resented by Guadalcanal's younger generations, particularly women, who decry the loss of a traditional inheritance that would normally have passed down through the female side of the family in this matrilineal society. Customary owners have demanded additional compensation from Malaitan migrants who reside in these settlements, and from the government as well, for the 'public' land on which Honiara is built.<sup>33</sup>

In Palau, too, women have been very forceful in defending their country, their land and their traditions against external manipulation.<sup>34</sup> Palauan women have been exceptionally active in politics. Gabriella Ngirmang successfully led a group of women in protest over accepting the Compact of Free Association with the United States. These women were especially vigilant in seeking to preserve Palau's environment and sovereignty, in particular its constitutional guarantee of a non-nuclear future for Palau.

Despite their small island having being mined for almost 100 years, Nauruan women have maintained control over their land and resources through matrilineal ties. Nancy Pollock states that 'Nauruan women have absorbed much of the impact of mining for phosphates on Nauru. They have provided continuity for the traditional mode of social organization through the maintenance of the matrilineages, while also adjusting the household lifestyle to meet the needs of a cash economy'.<sup>35</sup> In this way, it is the women of Nauru who have been in practice the true guardians of Nauru – the land, the traditions, the way of life of the people. As this is, in fact, the preference of the people of Nauru – who wish their society to continue and their island to survive – the women of Nauru can be said to embody the democratic will of the nation through their respect for traditional values and practises.

## 2 *The young generation, a way to ensure the transmission of values*

The 'future-oriented' quality of women can be appreciated further when we look at their respect for the land and their role as guarantor of the appropriate transmission of land ownership. This suggests a long-term consciousness, as opposed to the short-sighted inclination of the men who would rather sell their rights for immediate benefits. In Nauru, for instance, the management of the revenue produced by the mining for phosphate by men has proven to be dramatic. With the money gained from this highly valued resource, men have made poor investments in trust funds and companies, offshore and onshore, including a fertiliser development company in India, an Australian shipping company, and the local airline, Air Nauru. Men have also indulged very childish desires. At the height of their boom years, they decided to invest in a musical show in London, flying some Nauruans to

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33 *Pacific Islands Report*, 9 June 2000.

34 D R Shuster, 'Palau's Compact: Controversy, Conflict, and Compromise', *A Journal of Micronesian Studies*, University of Guam, Vol 2, No 2, 1994, pp. 207-236.

35 N Pollock, 'Impact of Mining on Nauruan Women', *Natural Resources Forum*, Vol 20, No 2, 1996, pp. 123-134.

attend the event.<sup>36</sup> The people flown in for the event stayed at government expense in a top London hotel. The show closed after only a few days and the entire investment was lost. Within the next few years Nauru's phosphate resource will be exhausted, giving no other choice to Nauruans than to find another source of income.

Women play an important role in the transmission of traditional values through the education of their children. Due to the primacy of modern school-based education, women from traditional lifestyles have not been able or allowed to pass onto their children their 'future-oriented' sensitivity. This is a loss as they are at the crossroads of social, economic and cultural change. Women can play an important role in preventing unnecessary tensions and unrest in political and social sectors. However, the quasi-matrilineal stance has not translated into a prominent place for Pacific women in contemporary politics and government. This is unfortunately the case for the few matrilineal islands of the Pacific, including Nauru, Palau and some parts of the Solomon Islands, as it is elsewhere in the region.

### C *Pacific Women's Status in Modern Days*

Most writers on gender in the Pacific believe that a male bias in public authority was not solely a European introduction. Although in Polynesia women were significantly more autonomous, assertive and culturally valued than were women in the West, it would be difficult to argue that Pacific societies were gender-egalitarian before the coming of foreigners.<sup>37</sup>

#### 1 *Women in 'Men's Club' politics*

Pacific experts suggest that chiefs were overwhelmingly male. Even in matrilineal societies, males generally held political power, which they inherited through their mothers. In Melanesia, women have suffered from an inferior status, viewed as sexually, physically and spiritually draining. Especially during menstruation and after childbirth, women are thought to be dangerous and contaminating.

In Kiribati, during an election campaign, some people told one female candidate, Teima Onorio, that she should not be running for parliament: 'I got feedback that I shouldn't be in the campaign because I am a woman and also younger and single.'<sup>38</sup> However, her eventual success suggests that not everyone shared that view. She notes that while some people's attitudes are a problem, they can nevertheless be overcome. On the other hand, she does mention that she was uncomfortable as the only woman in a legislature full of men.<sup>39</sup>

In Palau, Lorenza Olkeriil, who was a member of the Ngiwai State Legislature, reported gender discrimination against her from her male colleagues. She described one instance

36 See 'Political Reviews, Micronesia in Review: Issues and Events', *The Contemporary Pacific*.

37 J Linnekin, 'Contending Approaches', in D Denoon, S Firth, J Linnekin, M Meleisea and K Nero (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, p. 11.

38 'Women Today Pacific', *Pandanus and Politics*, p. 6.

39 'Women Today Pacific', *Pandanus and Politics*, p. 6.



where she was expected to take the minutes as at that time she was the sole woman in the legislature.<sup>40</sup> More perversely, a general perception still persists that views politics as a man's job. Finally, the high cost of campaigning as well as the advantages held by incumbents, who are mostly men, restricts the opportunities for women to advance in elective politics.<sup>41</sup>

Financing campaigns is a significant barrier to women entering politics. 'There is the need to be financially independent and women don't have the same networks to access funds as men, and do not usually have their own assets to use.'<sup>42</sup> Although many women do not enter politics in Samoa, it is notable that women with titles have speaking rights equal to men. This is one way in which traditional values and practises can sometimes give Pacific women advantages over their more 'modern' counterparts.

## 2 *Political figures around the Pacific*

In almost all the constitutions of the Pacific countries, women have been granted a constitutional right to equality during the past 40 years. Although these provisions are a necessary prerequisite, cultural barriers have proved more difficult to overcome. Tradition – selective tradition – makes it difficult for women who wish to enter politics. Gender equality at the level of political decision-making has been far from achieved. The regional average is only 3.67%. Micronesia is the leading region with 4.24% of female representatives, followed by Polynesia (3.8%) and Melanesia (3.66%). Out of the 737 seats of the different legislatures in the Pacific, only 27 were occupied by women in 1997. In Pacific Island countries, only a few women have been elected to political office since independence.

In Papua New Guinea, after the 1997 elections, only two seats out of 109 were won by women. No woman had gained parliamentary seats during the preceding 15 years. In 1983, in an attempt to redress the gender imbalance in formal political institutions, highly educated successful businesswomen established the Papua New Guinea Association for Women in Politics (WIP).<sup>43</sup> The WIP's effort to inscribe women's issue on the political agenda took a very long time to pay off.

In Vanuatu, during the 1995 elections, there were no women candidates.<sup>44</sup> In protest, six women set up their own party, Vanuatu Women in Politics (VIP).<sup>45</sup> The immediate impact of VIP was to encourage other parties to select women candidates. The existence of VIP made it disadvantageous for other political parties not to have women candidates. Consequently, one of the political parties put up two women candidates. Another woman

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40 J M Anastocio, 'Palauan Women: Their Involvement in Politics', in D Shuster, P Larmour and K Von Strokirch (eds), *Leadership in the Pacific Islands: Tradition and the Future*, Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University, 1998, p. 24.

41 Ibid, p. 24.

42 Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics.

43 Sepoe, *Women and Democratic Politics in Papua New Guinea*, p. 280.

44 Economic and Social Commission, *Working Together for Women: A Summary of the Beijing Platform for Action for Vanuatu*, 1996, p. 29.

45 Ibid, p. 31.

decided to stand as an independent. All this raised the number of women standing for election up to nine.<sup>46</sup> In the end, only one woman was elected.

Guam has stood out for having had one-third of its legislature comprised of women. In the 1998 elections, however, only four women ran as candidates and only two of them won, reducing the number of women in the Guam legislature by more than half.<sup>47</sup>

As for Palau, it has always been a matrilineal society, allowing women an at times key role in decision-making.<sup>48</sup> Over time, however, women have found themselves deprived of their traditional status.<sup>49</sup> Despite this political and social shift, Palauan women have remained active in politics, some as elected representatives, others as government officers. Their roles, however, have often consisted of being part of a supporting cast, limited to an assisting role. In addition, Palauan female politicians often campaign for their husbands without receiving any support in return.<sup>50</sup> In 2000, Palau had no woman in its Lower House and only one in its Senate. In 2000, however, Palau voters elected Sandra Pierantozzi the country's first female Vice-President. She had been Palau's first woman Senator when elected to the Senate in 1996.<sup>51</sup>

## V A CASE STUDY: FRENCH POLYNESIA

The Polynesian way of life, which I have treated here as pre-modern, as well as the French values introduced over 200 years ago, makes French Polynesia an interesting case study for Feminism and democracy. It is interesting to note that most of the Pacific islands, through the irony of history and colonialism, have inherited the Anglo-Saxon culture and have become independent except for French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna, which remain part of France. As such, the French societal codes are predominant in these territories.

French patriarchy differs from the Anglo-Saxon model. It has been described and still is perceived as a more aggressive masculine political culture in which women are considered outsiders. The peculiarity of the French situation comes from its 'legal-historical tradition'.<sup>52</sup> Many examples can be taken throughout French history, from the absolute monarchy to

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46 J Drage, 'Pacific Women in Politics: Determined Steps to Increase the Numbers', a paper presented at the New Zealand Political Studies Association conference, University of Waikato, 6-8 June 1997.

47 D R Shuster, 'Guam', *The Contemporary Pacific*, Spring 1999, p. 194. See R Nicholl, *The Woman Factor – Candidate Selection in the 1990s: New Zealand, Guam and South Africa*, Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, School of Political Science and International Relations, PhD, 2001.

48 J M Anastocio, 'Palauan Women: Their Involvement in Politics', in D Shuster, P Larmour and K Von Storkirch (eds), *Leadership in the Pacific Islands: Tradition and the Future*, p. 17.

49 Ibid, p. 19.

50 Ibid, p. 23.

51 See S Levine, 'Pacific Island States', in D S Lewis (ed), *The Annual Register: A Record of World Events 2000*, Vol 242, London: Keesing's, 2001, p. 364.

52 G Allwood and K Wadia, *Women and Politics in France: 1958-2000*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 134-138.

nowadays, to illustrate the exclusion of women from the processes of devolving political power. Although after the First World War the Chamber of Deputies voted for full political rights for both sexes, the Senate repeatedly blocked the bill, and the concept was not enacted into French law until after the end of the Second World War.

What also renders French Polynesia distinctive is the conflict in values between the significant role for women before Western contact and the 'sexism' under the French, who tended to commodify women in general and Polynesian women in particular. The early anthropologists visiting Tahiti and elsewhere were amazed by the absence of gender difference in Polynesian communities. Men expressed their emotions and weaknesses with the same 'passion' as women. With respect to the division of labour, it seemed that women were permitted to perform any task in their community. Women also appeared to be completely integrated into social and political affairs. From the accounts of 18<sup>th</sup> century travellers it seems that Polynesian women were freer and more equal than their Western counterparts in terms of their participation in the public sphere.

This section of the article draws attention to the political and social status of women in 'democratic' French Polynesia. The first part reviews the French Feminists' struggle to dispute the Jacobinist tradition, which praises the idea of Universalism over parity with the effect of excluding women from the exercise of democracy. The conclusions that will be drawn from the study of parity, democracy and citizenship within the French framework will help understand the context within which French Polynesian women are evolving. The following part shares my experience as a woman born in French Polynesia and educated in France. This social, political and professional background, although hardly common, can assist in showing how women may be at odds with the pre-modern and modern features of French Polynesia.

### *A Parity, Democracy and Citizenship in the French Context*

The first article of the French Constitution states: 'all men are born equal under the law'. In this provision, 'men' is intended to mean 'mankind'. Although the right to vote was finally granted to French women in 1945, in 2000 only five per cent of the national public representatives were women. French Feminists claim that French democracy has been only partially fulfilled from its inception. According to this view, the only remedy is through a revision to French law.

In 1982, using the notion of Universalism as a legal base, the Constitutional Council declared the introduction of quotas for candidates running for office unconstitutional. In the last decade, however, French authorities have felt a growing pressure from the European Union and from international organisations, conferences and treaties to address the inequality of men and women in politics. During the legislative campaign of June 1997, Lionel Jospin, then secretary general of the Socialist party, made gender parity part of his programme. Aware of the popularity of parity among French opinion, he announced that, if elected, the party would inscribe in the Constitution the objective of parity between men and women. The Socialist party won the elections and, as promised, initiated a constitutional reform in June 1999. Unfortunately, the draft bill lost its legal impetus after the members of Parliament introduced changes to it, weakening its significance. In 2000, France was in 54<sup>th</sup> place

internationally and next-to-last in the European Union with respect to the representation of women in its national legislature.<sup>53</sup>

The praised concept of Universalism, which regards all citizens as equal, led French legislators to state that the concept of parity was against the foundations of democracy. Indeed, male politicians argue that if women want to run for elections there is nothing to prevent them from doing so. The cohesion of the nation, they feared, could be jeopardised if minority groups were to be granted a significant and constitutionally guaranteed political status. Danielle Haase-Dubosc notes that 'calling for sexual parity is so radical in nature that it appears utopian: it postulates a bi-gendered universal where gender difference would be encompassed within an egalitarian claim – women and men both having access to the universal'.<sup>54</sup> She goes on, noting that:

The logical and economical elegance of the parity solution (50 per cent of humanity) can only be appreciated in the context of the tradition of French revolutionary Jacobinism that somehow still believes that France is, to this day, that paradoxical site: the homeland of the universal. Seen in this light, parity is therefore a daring but basically reformist project within the frame of representative parliamentary democracy.<sup>55</sup>

Most of the second wave French feminists have been attached to the notion of Universalism, forcing them to redefine women's citizenship within the Universalist framework. They dispute their male theorists by arguing that Universalism does not mean uniformity. A more inclusive interpretation of Universalism allows the idea of differences to be retained. It is more desirable for democracy to view humanity not as an abstract concept but rather in all the plurality of its existences, encompassing a migrant and multilingual citizenship.<sup>56</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, French Feminist theoreticians have offered different positions concerning sexual difference. Danielle Haase-Dubosc distinguishes the debate 'between essentialists/differentialists, who believe that there is such a thing as female nature, and the identitaires/egalitaristes, who contend that there is no female nature but only one human identity'.<sup>57</sup> She has advanced the notion of 'political equality', which she considers succeeds in reconciling the dualism identity/difference. She sees the two sexes being at once similar and different.

Eleni Varkas, a post-Marxist theorist, views political parties as essentially opportunistic. According to her, parity within parties is used as a pretence. It would promote only some

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53 Subsequently the French government has introduced parity in legislative elections, with one result being the transformation of the territorial assembly in French Polynesia from one almost devoid of women representatives to a chamber comprised 50 per cent of women and with a woman as its Speaker.

54 D Haase-Dubosc, *Sexual Difference and Politics in France Today*, <http://www.findarticles.com>.

55 Ibid.

56 G Allwood and K Wadia, *Women and Politics in France: 1958-2000*, pp. 217-222.

57 D Haase-Dubosc, *Sexual Difference and Politics in France Today*, <http://www.findarticles.com>.

'privileged' women, obscuring the differences between men and women as well as differences within these two gender categories. This argument regards parity as a mere 'technical' device, unable to bring about an alternative democracy that could be opposed to Liberalism.<sup>58</sup> Opposing this pessimistic approach, Haase-Dubosc hints that the enforcement of parity would help to increase the number of women in politics and thus avoid the current situation in which the few women representatives operate in a male milieu. With parity, women legislators will be able to act politically 'as women', without necessarily compromising their political convictions or class origins.

### ***B My experience of French Polynesia's Public and Private Spheres***

My own experience has been as a woman from French Polynesia raised in both the pre-modern and modern worlds. The French influence on what is now French Polynesia has been considerable, including, as it does, the introduction of Christianity, with its significant impact on people and daily life. My own life as a native woman and my professional experience as an educated woman shows a mix of French and traditional influences. The objective of the concluding part is to bring together all the information to demonstrate that French Polynesian women are surrounded by two layers of culture, each of which conflicts with the other. By adhering to one code of behaviour, a Tahitian woman may be putting herself at odds with the other set of values.

#### ***1 A brief historical background of French Polynesia***

##### *France's influence and the impact of Christianity on Tahiti and her Islands*

Captain Samuel Wallis, a Briton, arrived in Tahiti in 1767 as the first European explorer to reach the island.<sup>59</sup> The first French contact with the Pacific Islands region began in April 1768 with the arrival in Tahiti of Count Louis Antoine de Bougainville. The following year Captain James Cook sailed to Tahiti. French navigators as well as British discoverers helped pave the way for the later involvement of missionaries, administrators, soldiers and settlers in the Pacific. In the late eighteenth century, the influence of the British was prominent throughout the Pacific even in the islands that would later become French. Traders from the British colonies in Australia and New Zealand fanned out through the Pacific furthering the Anglo-Saxon influence. In 1797, the London Missionary Society entered Polynesia and started its mission of converting the natives to Protestantism.

The paramount chiefs were the first to be converted. Within 20 years the Tahitian mission was a success. The Catholics launched their first serious effort in the eastern Pacific with the arrival of a band of priests in Hawai'i in 1827. The Protestants would put a halt on the Catholics' ambitions, however. They re-entered Polynesia in 1834 through the remote and unwatched island of Mangareva, located southeast of Tahiti. Within two years, they had moved on to Tahiti and in 1838 a mission was opened in the Marquesas.

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58 E Varikas and M Riot-Sarcey, *Equality: An idea to be rehabilitated*, <http://www.findarticles.com>

59 The historical description has been drawn from S Henningham, 'France in Melanesia and Polynesia', in Howe, Kiste, and Lal (eds), *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century*, pp.119-146.

The Protestants and the Catholics had different strategies in their proselytism. The Protestants wanted acceptance not only of their religion but also of their lifestyle and work ethic. They attempted to suppress sexuality, insisted on clothing the women from head to foot, urged islanders to adopt Western-style houses, stressed the virtues of hard work, and railed against the evils of rum and tobacco.

In contrast, and with the exception of Micronesia, the Catholics were French. As a whole, the French Catholics were more tolerant of traditional cultures and behaviours and did not attempt to impose the strict regimes of the Protestant missionaries. Nonetheless, they did promote the French language and culture as well as the tenets of their faith.

In 1842, France declared sovereignty over the Marquesas and established a protectorate over Tahiti with Queen Pomare. Between 1881 and 1887, France annexed other islands near Tahiti, consolidating the groups of islands into the *Etablissements Français d'Océanie*. In 1957, the colony was granted the status of 'overseas territory' and was officially named French Polynesia.

#### *The legal framework binding France and French Polynesia*

In 1977, French Polynesia for the first time elected representatives for its territorial assembly and government, which deals with all matters except those regarding defence, currency, and international representation. In 1984, under the pressure of the territorial government, French legislators changed the law concerning French Polynesia's status into an organic law. The devolution of administrative and political powers to French Polynesia by the French government coincided with major changes undertaken by the European Community in 1986. These changes accelerated the achievement of a common market among the 12 member states and helped pave the way for a reform of the Treaty of Rome regarding a common currency, justice and external policy. The Tahitian representatives immediately feared this process. They did not want to see their local powers, achieved with such difficulty, removed by the European institution under the pretext of conflicting laws. The opacity of the European legislation as well as the minimal interest of the French administration in French Polynesia's European concerns motivated the territorial government to open a mission in Brussels, breaching the French state's exclusive competence over diplomacy.

#### *2 My personal background as a Native Woman*

A Polynesian of both European and Tahitian ancestry, I was born in Tahiti into a very modest household. My father, of German origin, was a military man from the French foreign legion. He had been sent to French Polynesia after the decision of President de Gaulle to transfer the French nuclear testing facility from the Sahara (in Algeria) to Maururoa and Faugataufa, two remote islands in the Tuamotus. To allow the setting up of the 'Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique', Tahiti needed an international airport. Its construction began in 1965, attracting a huge number of people from neighbouring islands in search of regular salaried work and the glitter of the capital city. My mother was part of this exodus. These projects brought great prosperity to the bulk of the population, who had previously lived in a largely subsistence economy. These years, usually referred to as 'the golden years', witnessed the growth of a local bourgeoisie, but they were also accompanied by striking inequalities within the workforce.

My grandmother looked after me as a little child at our family home in Rangiroa. From those years with her, I learned Tahitian and my set of values, which are pre-modern. One of these was the sense of communalism. When my grandparents and I would go to the 'rahui'<sup>60</sup> and harvest coconut, we would usually meet travellers like us on their boats enquiring about our plan and informing us who they had met during their journey. Everybody, it seemed, looked after each other.

In the 1970s, the exodus of the active population to Tahiti left the surrounding archipelagoes inhabited only by elders and children. This discrepancy encouraged the local authorities to subsidise the production of copra, so as to encourage the return to the outer islands of those who did not succeed in Tahiti and revitalise the archipelagos.

At the age of nine, I went back to Tahiti and attended a Catholic private school. Religion played an important role in Tahitian society and notably one of socialisation. My father was not religious but my mother, as well as the brothers of my Catholic school, compensated for this lack of religion. In 1987, after I graduated high school, a scholarship allowed me to go to France to study law in Lyon. After five years, I specialised in European law and became curious about the status of French Polynesia vis-à-vis Europe. Unbeknownst to me, this choice of study would prove to be both timely and meaningful for my country.

### 3 *My professional experience as an Educated Woman*

To validate my post-graduate degree in European Law, it was necessary to do three months of fieldwork. The French Ministry of Overseas Departments and Overseas Territories accepted my candidature and in March 1993 I joined their European Division. At that same time, the right-wing party called 'Rassemblement pour la République', hereafter referred to as the RPR, had just won the legislative elections. This political shift was to be a blessing for my professional career for two reasons. First, the local government of French Polynesia led by the charismatic and nationally active President Gaston Flosse was a member of the RPR party, locally known as the 'Taho'era'a Huira'atira'. Second, the central government by sponsoring my training was giving a positive image of its intentions towards French Polynesia.

In France the Minister's Adviser for European Affairs acted as a mentor for me. He graciously introduced me to important visitors coming from French Polynesia, whether they were from the central or local government or from the private sector. By the end of the three months my network of acquaintances had increased substantially. Thanks to this training in Paris, I was able to pursue my European expertise by undergoing a ten-month period at the Secrétariat General of the European

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60 Polynesians, especially in the atolls where water is a precious resource, divided the island into different sections or 'rahui'. On an atoll there were usually one or two villages, which gathered the islanders, and then the 'rahui'. Depending on the location, the geological qualities and the season, a 'rahui' would be known as the 'motu' of 'lime', the 'motu' of birds or turtles and so on. The villagers could visit a 'rahui', even if the land did not belong to their family, and help themselves to the crops, eggs or animals they would find there. They had, however, to preserve the integrity of the 'rahui'.

Commission I worked on issues concerning the political, financial and legal status of the Overseas Regions of the member states.

In December 1993, while searching for a job in Paris, I fortuitously met Gaston Flosse, President of French Polynesia, and a Member of the French Parliament, outside the National Assembly Palace. President Flosse had wanted to open a mission in Brussels. Alexandre Leontieff, a former protégé of President Flosse, had been the official candidate to head the mission. However, in 1987, Mr Leontieff overthrew Mr Flosse from office through a motion of censure introduced in the territorial assembly. Mr Leontieff then became President. The elections of September 1991, however, brought Mr Flosse back to the Presidency. By 1993, Mr Leontieff was still regarded as a political threat by President Flosse, who decided to send him to Brussels. The provisions Mr Leontieff wanted to include in his contract, however, turned out to be unacceptable to the President. One of the clauses proposed by Mr Leontieff concerned the possibility for him to spend six months in Brussels and six months in Tahiti. When these negotiations failed, the job opened up for me. Although without real professional experience, my nomination as the head of the mission in Brussels was warmly welcomed by the Polynesian people. I had just graduated from university, I was a native, and certainly, my being a woman was also politically positive. And so, in the end, through these circumstances, I was able to open the Delegation of French Polynesia in Brussels.

#### 4 *The Antagonism between French 'sexism' and the Polynesian free-spirited culture*

Without any attempt to judge the French and Polynesian values, my intention is to show that a French Polynesian woman has difficulties with these two sets of identities. My endeavour is to demonstrate that two layers of culture, which conflict, surround French Polynesian women. In my opinion, this phenomenon finds its full expression when we analyse sexual behaviour.

Many Westerners' accounts of the earlier contacts with Tahitian women describe them as sexual and playful. Despite the efforts by Catholic and Protestant priests to suppress these inclinations, Polynesians, both men and women, seem to have kept a free and liberal attitude towards sexuality. Sexuality, in the pre-modern belief-system, was not imbued with the religious notion of sin that Christianity has placed upon it. Sexuality was a social and natural act for commoners. Only high ranked people were to observe the codes when a 'tapu' was pronounced. In today's gender relations, this pre-modern legacy infuses the Franco-Polynesian context.

The previous section noted the French patriarchy's resistance to women's participation in politics. As with their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, French men have constrained women in the home, establishing the same dichotomy between the private and public sphere. As alluded to earlier, the French philosophers of the Enlightenment period, including Rousseau, did not consider women fit to participate in the public sphere. It is my belief that French men in French Polynesia, particularly the powerful businessmen or political administrators, have inherited this view of women, but in addition, they have added another bias having to do with the 'primitive' outlook of Pacific women. As long as a woman agrees to remain in the realm of the home and adhere to her role as mother, the relationship between men and women is balanced. As soon as a woman nurtures her professional ambitions, a feeling of



threat to men's masculinity seems to arise. Are we, Tahitian women, trapped by Gauguin's depiction of the natives' 'joie de vivre'? The answer seems to me to be mostly 'yes'.

What about those Tahitian men who should have an affinity for the pre-modern legacy, and therefore be more understanding of Tahitian women? My observation will appear to be critical of men. However, if matriarchy were to be successful, the power yielded by the system would encourage women to assume a dominant role in society. The reality is that Tahitian men do not experience the same consequences as women when they give way to their sexual feelings. When women think and act in a way that is consistent with traditional Polynesian values, they are judged negatively. When Polynesian men act 'freely', in the same way as women, they are admired, even regarded as heroes. Tahitian men, I would say, have embraced the French patriarchal frame of mind in such a way that they treat their women far worse than was the case prior to Western contact. Domestic violence is significant in French Polynesia. Unfortunately, it is the women and children who are usually the victims.

In my seven years of work for the local government of French Polynesia, I have had French and Tahitian male and female colleagues. Very early on, I have had to distinguish the different labels attributed to my character. Although very hard to justify, it was apparent to me that I was sometimes seen as a 'trophy' by my male co-workers, whatever nationality they were, and sometimes as a colleague because we were rivals competing for the same goals. On the other hand, I felt a great deal of empathy for French women, especially those with whom I went to school in France. In French Polynesia, jealousy among women operates much like the 'tall poppy syndrome' in New Zealand. Within a small community where most of the people know one another – or know about each other – a successful person, in any particular area, is at first acclaimed and worshipped but then, very soon, jealousy kicks in, and the same person is regarded with hostility and envy, described as 'arrogant' or unworthy. This occurrence, when directed at women, is, in my opinion, an expression of French patriarchy but, more and more, also of Tahitian patriarchy in action.

French Polynesian women are, with their French counterparts, excluded from the local public sphere. The 'selective tradition' process described earlier has also occurred in French Polynesia to the detriment of women's freedom. My conviction is that the women of French Polynesia are able, like men, to contribute to a better society, one that envisages the community as a whole unit, not only as a system made by men for men. Unfortunately, at the moment, this ideal is not our reality.

## VI CONCLUSION

This article is a response to global democratisation from four directions. The first two parts adopt a modernist method, looking at mainstream literature and Feminism as a critique. The last two parts adopt a pre-modern and intuitive approach, derived from a Feminist Pacific and autobiographical perspective.

The first section defined Liberal democracy and attempted to bring to light the reasons for its success around the world. It nevertheless stressed existing tensions of democratisation, first, between Western and non-Western culture, and second, within democratic countries

where the state – still an indispensable actor of world affairs – finds itself challenged by multinational corporations and civil society transactions.

The second section presented Feminist perspectives aimed at raising a gender consciousness regarding the notion of citizenship, the idea of political equality and the opportunities for women's action in the international arena.

The third section reviewed the impact of Western and Pacific men's actions in the political domain from the viewpoint of Pacific women living according to a traditional (or 'pre-modern') belief-system. Its goal was to demonstrate women's natural propensity towards promoting democratic values.

The fourth section has involved the social and political aspects of my life as a woman from Polynesia, educated and raised in both French and Polynesian contexts.

These four mini-essays together seek to place democratisation into an original framework, as this field of knowledge concerns international scholars as well as political leaders around the world.

In the last decade, Western democratic values have been promoted on a global scale as the ultimate mode of governance. The cultural specificity of Liberal democracy – as defined by men – finds, however, some resistance in non-Western cultures, compelling international agencies, nation-states and civil society to redefine their strategy regarding democratisation. In this context, Feminists' critiques of global democratisation raise some interesting propositions. They press mainstream actors to reconsider questions such as 'democracy for whom?' and 'democracy for what?'. They also remind the constituents – men, women, migrants and poor people – that politics is not exclusively a man's privilege. It is indeed a task which can be – and should be – fulfilled by anyone who wishes to place himself or herself in the competition of political representation.

In this respect, Feminists appear to be the ones who are most consistent with democratic and liberal values. Feminists seem to give a new interpretation of these values, one that is more inclusive. The pre-modern Pacific Feminism described in this paper also provides an inclusive meaning of governance and questions men's paramount role in politics as a norm for the future.

The Pacific Feminist perspectives – both pre-modern and modern – can contribute towards a further development of democratic values. My experience represents one colour in a multi-coloured palette of sensitivity on this topic. A broader spectrum of women's thinking and feelings on the subject would develop and enrich this new and expanding field of knowledge. Each woman, depending on her upbringing and background, would present a special colour and lighting, helping us all to understand what needs to be done to bring the most promising vision of global democratisation to fulfilment.