State Society *and* Governance *in* Melanesia

CULTURES OF DOMINANCE: INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS IN MELANESIA

MICHAEL
MORGAN

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I outline the institutional and cultural aspects of parliamentary politics in Melanesia with the intention of charting areas apt for institutional strengthening and capacity building projects, and those that are not. The paper represents part of a wider survey of attitudes to parliaments and parliamentarians across Melanesia.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the institutional and cultural aspects of parliamentary politics in the Melanesian states Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji, and in so doing seeks to provide a baseline of information about Melanesian parliamentary politics.[1] The paper argues that executive dominance has become entrenched and normalised because of the interplay between parliamentary institutional design and the particular political cultures that have arisen in the Melanesian states.

Much of the scepticism about the operation of Melanesian parliaments is derived from a set of basic premises. First, they are weak institutionally. The classical liberal philosophy that provides the basis for institutional expectations of parliaments' and parliamentarians' roles assumes that members of parliament shall take part in activities such as lawmaking, oversight and representation, and these technical aspects of parliamentary governance are poorly executed in Melanesia.[2] Grassroots Melanesians often appear ambivalent about the roles of the parliament and parliamentarians. Similarly, they may be antagonistic or sceptical about the role of parliamentary politics, seeing in them frameworks for patronage rather than participation.[3] National MPs are simultaneously characterised as profligate, opportunistic and corrupt.

Parliaments and parliamentarians operate in conditions of worsening law and order, societal conflict and stalled development. In Vanuatu, endemic parliamentary instability brought policymaking and oversight virtually to a halt in the mid-to-late 1990s.[4] In Solomon Islands, the inscrutability and instability of the national parliament precipitated the breakdown of social order, notably contributing to the bloody ethnic conflict that erupted in 1999, although clearly other factors were at play.[5] These events have prompted the fear that the breakdown of effective and stable legislative functions will provide the preconditions for other, possibly worse, human tragedies. From the vantage point of Australia, and

other Western states, these factors have contributed to the categorisation of Melanesian states as 'weak', 'unstable' and, in the case of Solomon Islands, 'failed'.[6] Indeed, given the belief that Melanesian parliaments have decayed virtually in parallel with rising disenchantment with the state, it can often appear that weak parliamentary institutions, which promote or allow poor governance, cause many of the region's problems.

However, focusing on these negative issues serves to obscure the local functions of Melanesian parliaments. Because legislatures persist in Melanesian polities and because membership in them is generally hotly contested, they are likely to perform manifest functions. That is, they endure because they are seen to have some use for local stakeholders. A particular feature of the Melanesian states is that activity within their legislatures has become predominantly focused upon constituting the executive; parliaments remain crucial sites of contestation for political power. Melanesian political cultures place emphasis on constituting the executive and stress the importance of dominating state resources.

Eschewing the conventional political science approach to power and politics, which focuses on institutions – parliaments, bureaucracies and parties – I seek to situate Melanesian parliaments in their broader national, political and social contexts;[7] to explore both the cultural and institutional aspects of parliamentary politics. In recognising the processes that add up to parliamentary governance, including the emergence of distinct Melanesian political cultures, we can understand the functions of Melanesian parliaments and the locally perceived roles of their parliamentarians. Only then can we chart appropriate parliamentary strengthening projects. A secondary intention of this paper, therefore, is to predict some of the implications of institutional reform.[8]

The paper begins with an overview of legislative research in Melanesia and the Pacific Islands. It then examines the peculiar conditions of parliamentary politics in Melanesia where extant political cultures militate against the execution of MPs' "institutional responsibilities" as lawmakers, overseers of government and community representatives/delegates. Taking up these themes, it examines the particular hindrances to the execution of these responsibilities and gives attention to recent attempts to make Pacific parliaments more effective and representative, namely programs aimed to encourage civil society to participate in parliament, those directed towards strengthening political parties and those intended to advance the position of women in public decision-making.

RESEARCH-REFORM LINKAGES

While governance in the Pacific Islands has, generally, received consistent academic scrutiny over the past decade,[9] parliament – the apex of the Westminster system of government and arguably the pinnacle of the 'state' – has received relatively little systematic attention. Not since Norman Meller's benchmark research in the 60s, 70s and 80s have Pacific legislatures – let alone Melanesian ones – been subject to intensive study.[10] In the mid-1980s, students of comparative politics shifted their focus away from research on legislatures because they were not seen to be the locus of actual rule making and administrative regulation, a shift consistent with earlier research trends in Asian and African studies.[11] Pacific research agendas – including Meller's – shifted to address the rise and interaction of dominant groups;[12] leadership styles, including those of elected representatives;[13] the apparent lack of fit between introduced systems of government and pre-existing or coexisting autochthonous ones;[14] political parties;[15] and the potential for electoral engineering to ameliorate societal conflict.[16]

In recent years, parliaments – and Melanesian parliaments in particular – have come under renewed international scrutiny. Given the centrality of the legislature to the Westminster system, it was inevitable that development planners would eventually target it as a potential means of improving systems of government. The United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) governance projects – Governance & Sustainable Human Development Program (GSHDP) and Governance for Livelihoods and Development (GOLD) – have made parliamentary strengthening projects core activities since 1999. Since 2000, meeting the demands of regional presiding officers, the GOLD project undertook several research projects on Pacific legislatures.[17] Countering the perceived capacity weakness of Pacific parliamentarians was central to training programs for parliamentarians conducted by the United Nations ESCAP secretariat, AusAID and United Kingdom Department for International Development (UKDFID) beginning in the late 1990s. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has involved Pacific countries in its programs since their independence and is in the process of devolving secretariat duties for Pacific programs to a Pacific Islands country. Using the UNDP's earlier research, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) targeted Vanuatu's parliament as part of its overall plan for institutional reform there, citing the apparent inability of Vanuatu's

parliament to 'review bills and policies'.[18] In post-conflict Solomon Islands, AusAID and UNDP are cooperating on a parliamentary strengthening project.

Clearly, the health of Pacific legislatures is increasingly subject to outside inspection, and – but for a handful of cases – the image that emerges is gloomy.[19] Indeed, the resurgent interest in Melanesian parliaments from both academics and policy-makers is clearly linked to the apparent deterioration of parliamentary functions. There are few such explicit examples of policy driving the research agenda as this. Consequently, a handful of articles has been written by regional academics, such as University of Papua New Guinea political science lecturer, Henry Okole.[20]

INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN

Given their emergence from British colonialism in the 1970s and 1980s, each of the Melanesian states inherited a Westminster origin parliamentary system, although in size and design each varies markedly from the others. Papua New Guinea and Fiji possess the two largest legislatures: Papua New Guinea's 109 members include 20 provincial MPs and 89 open seats; Fiji's House of Representatives consists of 71 members elected from ethnically differentiated communal rolls and open seats (and a Speaker nominated from outside the House's membership).[21] Fiji is the lone bicameral system in Melanesia, possessing a Senate, consisting of 32 members appointed by the President, which acts as a house of review.[22] The Solomon Islands parliament consists of 50 members elected from single member constituencies. Formerly a conjoint colony between Britain and France, Vanuatu possesses a 52-seat legislature elected from single non-transferable vote constituencies.[23]

Like Westminster style governments around the world, the Melanesian states are unified by their requirement that executive power be constituted from the legislature – either through parliamentary elections or by the dominant parliamentary party – and that the executive 'remain responsible to the legislature'.[24] A particular feature of these parliaments is that the appointment and dismissal of the Prime Minister are the responsibilities of the parliament, rather than the head of state.[25] Vanuatu's legislature is notable because the parliament is invested with the power to elect the Prime Minister from among its members, irrespective of whether the candidate is the leader of the majority party.

This has allowed the leaders of minority parties to take the position, and may in future allow an independent to become Prime Minister. The ability of legislatures to topple executives has come under scrutiny in Melanesia in recent years due to the increasingly commonplace moves to oust governments during the term of parliament through motions of no confidence. Bar Fiji, in each of the Melanesian states, options have been explored for limiting the ability of the legislature to topple executives, to foster greater parliamentary stability. The most notable example of this is Papua New Guinea's 2001 Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC), which was enacted to limit the 'chronic instability of governments in the absence of a strong party system.'[26] Although amended in 2003, the results of these reforms are as yet unclear.

MELANESIAN POLITICAL CULTURES

While they may differ in magnitude and effect, common behaviour has developed around formal state institutions in Melanesia, which are distinct from parliamentary behaviour in other Pacific and Western countries, such as Australia, and which confound the institutional expectations of members of parliament, as laid out in their respective constitutions, laws and standing orders. Despite the variations in institutional design mentioned above, common practices have emerged in parliamentary politics that suggest the emergence of a Melanesian political culture, or a Melanesian style of parliamentary politics.[27]

Gledhill argues that 'the Western tradition of political analysis places excessive emphasis on the state and the formal … institutions of government.'[28] In this paper, the state, its formal institutions and actors take centre stage, but my intention is to contextualise them within their cultural settings, to move away from the 'excessive emphasis' on institutions. Drawing on select anthropological and political science theory, political culture may be defined loosely as the sets of actions and values that define and guide political behaviour.[29] As with any definition of culture, political culture does not deny 'struggles of meanings and representations', acknowledging that 'culture' at every turn may be asserted, contested and transformed.[30] Without reducing Melanesians to a singular type and without glossing over the real variations in structure, agency and history between and within the Melanesian states, there are discernible similarities in elite, parliamentary behaviour.

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Bearing these qualifications in mind, the following sections discuss the effects of local political cultures on parliamentary behaviour. Beginning with an exploration of local political settings, the section then shifts focus to discuss the effects of grassroots' expectations, actions and agency on elite political behaviour.

Local political cultures

Arguably, the drivers of parliamentary politics are to be found in the encompassing atmosphere of the constituency and it is here that the cultural argument is the most compelling. Given the state's relatively recent imposition in Melanesia, there is considerable ambivalence about it, as there is about parliament and democracy. The hegemony of the nation and the dominance of the state are challenged by salient regional, ethnic or religious identities. A brief survey of recent anthropological and ethno-historical literature suggests that nationalism in Melanesia is weak, contested or absent.[31] Where Melanesians – rural and urban – engage with the state, they often treat it with a high degree of suspicion or antagonism.[32]

Part of the legacy of statehood is the growing sense that independence has created wealthy urban elites, at the expense of 'grassroots' Melanesians. Governments can often appear distant and uninterested in local people's lives. For example, Kragur people in East Sepik, PNG, 'sense…the distance that separates them… from the indigenous governmental elite'.[33] Occupying the state's apex, the parliament and parliamentarians are subject to similar censure. In rural areas of northern Vanuatu, for example, parliamentary democracy is seen to contribute to the erosion of community cohesion and benefit no one but a political elite. In northern Vanuatu, an Ambae man, who had formerly been an advocate of independence and Westminster-style democracy, told me: 'We elected these people [MPs] to free us and all they do is oppress us'.[34]

Certainly, Melanesian MPs are characterised as self-serving. Public office has become an attractive opportunity for personal and group gain. Election to national parliament offers local people avenues for becoming more influential big men and gaining greater access to state resources for redistribution. As Sinclair Dinnen argues: 'Government ministers [use] their official powers to appropriate entire national policies or divert public resources to their own personal agendas'.[35] National leaders may believe 'that the accumulation of wealth is an essential element of political status'.[36]

Given these beliefs, it is understandable that scholars *and* local people, including national political leaders, highlight the disjunctures between Western and local understandings of Westminster's viability and appropriateness.[37] Arguments about the harmony between local and introduced forms of government emerged almost as soon as the question of decolonisation was raised in Melanesia, and they have not stopped since.[38] Most analyses of the state in Melanesia suggest that pre-existing social forms pervade the state at almost every level.[39] For example, the Papua New Guinean anthropologist, Joe Ketan, argues that 'politics at all levels…are organised along traditional structural lines'.[40] Intensely local forms of social control are stronger than the order – or disorder – imposed by the state.[41] As Bronwen Douglas suggests, Melanesian states are notable for their awkward fit between the Westminster system with its 'capitalist models of ideal relationships between the individual, the state and civil society' and the indigenous socialities of kinship and community.[42]

Drawing on these networks of 'kinship and community', providing access to state resources in the form of development funds, projects and policies, as well as employment, education and travel, offers one of the most viable means for MPs to cement local support. This is reinforced by the weakness of the state in delivering services to rural areas. For their part, local people demand reciprocity from their MPs as they do from the state. In Solomon Islands, MPs are expected to do little more than ensure 'returns for their community once…in'.[43] Paula Brown suggests: 'people have come to regard government as the major…source of opportunity and finance. Having a friend in national government is seen as necessary for economic success.'[44] According to Jeffrey Clark, while the state may be considered to be 'liminal and ambiguous' by the Wiru in Southern Highlands, situated between the norms and expectations of the tribe and engagement with the institutional forms of order and control, it is often understood to be akin to a distant bigman, who provides gifts, materials and wealth.[45] The belief that political leaders, rather than impartial state services, are the most bankable avenues for resource distribution now characterises Melanesian politics.[46] For many Melanesians, *wantokism* naturally influences employment prospects.[47] It is for these reasons that Laurence Goldman argues that politics in Papua New Guinea are commonly more about patronage than participation, a characterisation, moreover that may be applied more generally in Melanesia.[48]

Ron May suggests that the net effect of these forces disenchants voters *and* donors:

> the tendency to place short-term expediency and the demands of individual MPs above longer-term national objectives…has impacted adversely on state capacity and fostered cynicism among ordinary people and frustration on the part of aid donors and financial institutions.… [I]t is these developments which diminish the perceived legitimacy of the state.[49]

Yet, individual MPs' support is based not on their record of governance, but on their reciprocity. MPs who do not fulfil their obligations in these respects may be subject to threats and violence for failing to meet their reciprocal responsibilities.[50] At the very least, unresponsive MPs face the unattractive prospect of not being re-elected.

While the dynamics may vary in intensity between and within the Melanesian states, they offer a salutary reminder that Melanesian MPs, like all Melanesians, are enmeshed in networks of social and financial obligation, and that this often influences their actions as elected officials. It is important, therefore, not to characterise Melanesians as irretrievably at odds with their MPs. Melanesian people are often outwardly supportive of projects aimed at holding their elected representatives, particularly their ministers, to account, although in practice they may find the requisite infrastructure programs with their attendant influxes of foreign advisors threatening. Moreover, protestations about the poor quality of elected leadership may be particularly strong when Melanesians lament the deterioration of their quality of life since the ending of colonialism, a common, although complex, way of pillorying national leaders.[51] However, there is an ambivalence underscoring these aspects of political culture. On the one hand, Melanesians deride national politicians for their profligacy, opportunism, corrupt practices, incompetence and inefficiency. On the other, they simultaneously take part in the activities that characterise state malfunctioning in Melanesia. Arguably, it is *their* expectations that motor the political economies of resource distribution that characterise parliamentary politics and which impel Melanesian MPs to join the executive, at all costs.

Parliamentary behaviour

Governments in Melanesia are often formed by unwieldy or flimsy coalitions, without ideological coherence and unified primarily by the pragmatic considerations of attaining access to state resources.[52] With the possible exception of Fiji, coalition governments have proved precarious, being beleaguered by competition over ministerial posts. Parliamentary factions congregate around one or more powerful individuals, who are linked to their junior party members and other parliamentarians by complex arrangements of reciprocity and patronage. Coalition member parties often show little respect for coalition fidelity, preferring rather to progress upwardly within governments, with the intention of claiming the post of Prime Minister – the position which dominates control of state resources and therefore represents the most powerful position from which to organise coalitions – or one of the other preferred portfolios. In turn, a particular responsibility of Melanesian prime ministers has become the mediation of contending claims, through inducements (money, ministerial portfolios, the appointment of political adherents and *wantoks* to party and bureaucratic positions) and sanctions (censure, expulsion). Simultaneously, allegiances to political parties have weakened as national politicians have adopted pragmatic and opportunistic attitudes to attaining positions within government coalitions, therefore lessening the importance of ideological differences between members. MPs also give particular attention to attaining influence over utilities and placing allies and party-members on governing boards of state-owned enterprises. These positions represent important strategic points from which to distribute resources and thereby strengthen political alliances. The responsibilities of parliaments and parliamentarians outlined by classical liberal theorists, which form the core of institutional expectations of parliaments, have become subordinated to these factional contests.

The manoeuvring required by these processes has mostly excluded policymaking and lawmaking from the public and transparent realms of parliamentary debate, to *in camera* cabinet, party room and 'resort' discussions, which leave the public, many partisans and even members of the government unaware of the implications and means of political machination. Their intensity oftentimes diverts the attention of Melanesian MPs from parliamentary procedures. Many of the problems facing Melanesian parliaments are determined by the time it takes any given Melanesian MP to negotiate the tensions mentioned above; to navigate a path to (relative) power in any parliament; simply, to be elected and enter government. These tendencies necessarily propel political centrifugalism within

the parliamentary parties and, therefore, within the national parliament. The importance of the social cleavages or policy platforms that differentiate parliamentary political parties is lessened by the need for pragmatism, with the imperatives of patronage and pay-offs being emphasised.

The effect of these machinations on policy is also clear. Melanesian executives are driven to extreme ends to raise the funds necessary to maintain their hold on power. For example, after the 2004 elections in Vanuatu, Serge Vohor, at the head of an increasingly brittle coalition and an internally fractious party (the Union of Moderate Parties), opened diplomatic relations with Taiwan, despite Vanuatu's One China Policy, to access the funds needed to pay-off dissident coalition and party members. In this instance, the vicissitudes of factional politics and the desire to stay in office regardless of the implications were perceptibly driving policy.

EXECUTIVE DOMINANCE

The de-emphasising of lawmaking and oversight of the executive in favour of reciprocity, as outlined above, serves to bolster the ability of Melanesian governments to sideline the parliament in issues of day-to-day governance. The emphasis on constituting the executive in Melanesian parliaments subordinates the importance of the technical parliamentary aspects of interrogating government performance and formulating laws to the immediate concerns of constituting the executive. This serves to upturn the institutional expectations on MPs and allows the relative ease with which executives push through their legislative and policy agendas. Indeed, Melanesian parliaments often appear to provide only the rubber stamp to the executive's programs. The notable exceptions to executive dominance are the commonplace motions of no confidence through which regime change often takes place in Melanesia. In contemporary Melanesian politics, most executives supported by development actors are seeking to limit this mechanism because it has served to entrench political instability.[53]

Arguably, executive dominance is allowed to continue because no critical mass has been generated among constituents to fundamentally alter the patronage politics that have arisen in Melanesia. The inbuilt expectations for effective oversight are diluted by the relative paucity of information about parliaments and MPs' responsibilities among grassroots

constituents.[54] While the deliberations of Pacific parliaments are generally broadcast, and have been in most instances since independence, awareness of the content and implications of legislation is poor. Systems for disseminating information to constituents about parliament and for representing constituency aspirations in law making are weak. Local understandings of the roles and duties of members are unclear. Melanesians rarely differentiate between the executive, the bureaucracy and the legislature; all are aggregated simply under the rubric of *gavman*.[55] For example, many Melanesians believe that MPs may legitimately divert state resources to local needs.

Executive dominance is also allowed by elements of the design of formal state institutions. To ensure that their legislative agendas are passed, Melanesian governments often expedite the progress of bills through the house by the strategic suspension of standing orders, and this has become part of the armoury of most Melanesian governments. The reasons for suspending standing orders are legion: for example, sometimes standing orders are suspended because executives simply have not had draft bills ready early enough to be submitted to the secretariat for notification; sometimes it is because executives wish to avoid awkward or intense parliamentary debates.

In most instances, no debate is allowed on motions to suspend standing orders. In the absence of any other business for parliaments to deal with, presiding officers generally allow such procedures to be used in this manner. Moreover, many speakers of parliament are partisan. Thus, even if they chose to fulfil their responsibilities, many parliamentarians would be unable to amend proposed legislation in parliament. Nonetheless, these widely used tactics demonstrate an astute reading of the rules and regulations of parliament.

To counter the personal executive excesses, development actors have advocated strengthened oversight mechanisms, such as strengthened ombudsmen and leadership codes. To counter the systemic aspects of executive dominance, mechanisms such as committee systems have been created. However, this is possibly creating gulfs between the agendas of development actors and local executives. There is no global consensus about the appropriate level of oversight required for an effective parliament. The issue of strengthening the oversight capacity of parliaments in the Pacific has become increasingly vexatious, with two basic schools of thought emerging. On the one hand, development agencies, such as UNDP, and supported by the Forum Presiding Officer's

Conference (FPOC) – the principal forum for the presidents and speakers of the region's legislatures – tend to favour stronger oversight to regulate key industries or portfolios and limit government excesses, corruption and maladministration.[56]

The region's executives, however, often voice concern that their ability to govern is already hampered by factors such as political fragmentation, and suggest that sufficient oversight and representation mechanisms are built in to their respective electoral systems already. Arguably, this merely represents a defence of their dominance of the legislature, but two key issues must be kept in mind. First, in that the Westminster system vests in the executive the right to initiate or move to increase appropriations and taxes, the executive is invested with significant powers to determine policy and legislative programs: few government MPs ultimately want this situation to be upset. Thus, while recognising that certain modification may be needed, their position is that executives should be left to do what they are elected to do – govern. Second, some of the strongest advocates for improved oversight mechanisms base their positions on ostensibly political positions. Fijian Labour Party MPs routinely advocate strengthened oversight mechanisms, in part because – despite a series of court cases – they are sceptical that they will again join the executive's ranks.

Committees

Each of the Melanesian parliaments possesses a committee system, including house committees and select or sectoral committees, to scrutinise legislation and deliberate on relevant government policy.[57] Although designed to strengthen oversight and lawmaking procedures, the performance of the committee system in Melanesia has been criticised as ineffective and costly: attendance at committee meetings is generally poor, they often deliberate on backdated issues and community consultation is rarely effected. The propensity of MPs to take their committee allowances without fulfilling these responsibilities makes the committee system – potentially a mechanism for ensuring oversight and fostering community consultation on lawmaking – appear to be a further self-serving organ of inefficient and ineffective state apparatuses. In Vanuatu, for example, the Members Privileges Committee has sat three times between its creation in 1998 and 2001 and each time voted only to raise MP allowances.

However, committees remain popular targets for institutional strengthening because they are designed to facilitate better acknowledgment of public expectations within the parliament and to strengthen the parliament's ability to hold the executive to account. In particular, strengthening Public Accounts Committees (PACs) has become a prominent strategy employed to foster better oversight in parliament, primarily because in their operation the expenditure of public funds merges with the representative and oversight roles of parliamentarians. Yet PACs are also often criticised for their apparent inertia. Committee members often lack the requisite knowledge to interview experienced public servants effectively and are generally unable to use their powers – such as the ability to subpoena public servants. In Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and PNG their effectiveness is undermined by the inability of the bureaucracy to scrutinise its own expenditure systematically, thereby lessening the ability of public servants to report adequately to the PAC on their operation. Where they are effective, most PACs are dealing with problems in arrears; sometimes they are still considering events from the early 1990s. The problem remains that PACs, while guided by quite comprehensive and appropriate regulations and legislation, are still ineffective.[58] Most PACs are simply ignored by their governments. However, in PNG and Fiji they have succeeded in generating media interest in preferential loan schemes, misappropriations of public funds and so on.

Stronger provisions for relevant civil society actors, such as professional accountants, to be co-opted to PACs has been suggested to enable the non-political review of the expenditure of public funds and to increase the technical capabilities of PACs. Civil society actors have been targeted for capacity building and institutional strengthening to provide public checks and balances and opposition MPs have been empowered through amendments to standing orders or legally. For example, in Fiji and Vanuatu, the chair of the Public Accounts Committee must be an opposition member. This style of adversarial oversight dominates UNDP thinking on accountability mechanisms but it is by no means the only system in operation in the Pacific and it is not the only system advocated by development agencies such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre (PFTAC). In Vanuatu, the insistence upon an opposition chair in the PAC is seen potentially to cultivate political antagonism within that committee. That is, the competition that paralyses the national parliament may be replicated in the confines of this nine-member group.

THE CAPACITY OF MPS

A commonly cited reason for executive dominance in Melanesia is the limited capacity of MPs, particularly their lack of knowledge about their roles and responsibilities as defined by their standing orders and privileges acts.[59] Many representatives have limited formal education and no doubt find some technical briefings and training sessions difficult. Disarmed by their inability to tackle government legislation on technical matters, Melanesian MPs have allowed much of it to pass largely as tabled.

Preparing new MPs for their roles in public life – outlining their responsibilities as lawmakers, as overseers of the executive arm of government and as representative of their constituents – is clearly necessary for the effective operation of any parliament. The high turnover of MPs – about 50% serve only one term in parliament[60] – means that many new members have little time to learn their roles. Although induction courses for MPs are becoming more frequent, few secretariats have been able to provide adequate induction sessions for their members at the beginning of each Parliament in their own right, responsibilities which have fallen to development projects, or which have been undertaken with significant support from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), UNDP and other institutions. While MPs clearly need and desire training in their roles, the basic unsustainability of capacity building for them – given their high turn over – suggests that parliamentary secretariats, not politicians, are apt targets for strengthening projects. This is certainly true if the ability of secretariats to induct MPs at the beginning of a term of parliament is to be bolstered.

Members themselves often complain that they receive inadequate information about bills from either their own party executives or their respective parliamentary secretariats, suggesting that many MPs take their roles seriously but are unable to change the underlying structures which govern parliamentary behaviour, particularly relating to the factional politics mentioned above. Indeed, during the GOLD project's research among Melanesian MPs, parliamentarians complained in specific terms about the lack of adequate secretarial support that hampers their ability to fulfil their roles. Put simply, many Melanesian MPs argued that the major hindrances to their responsibilities of representation, lawmaking and oversight were created by insufficient infrastructure.

Most parliamentary secretariats admit major systemic weaknesses in their ability to support their MPs adequately. Despite the implementation of piecemeal initiatives undertaken already through diplomatic posts' discretionary funds or through direct programs between Australian, New Zealand clerks' offices and regional secretariats, parliamentary secretariats in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu remain underfunded and understaffed. The larger secretariats in Papua New Guinea and Fiji also suffer from severe staff and resource constraints. For reasons of logistics, many secretariats are without Internet and CD-ROM capable computers, a major problem given that the Forum Secretariat now provides documentation on its protocols via CD-ROM.

Most regional parliamentary secretariats suggest that the constitutional and legal arrangements which created these offices and which guide their operation are part of the problem. Most parliamentary secretariats demand greater autonomy from the parliament or from their respective public service commissions to determine their financial requirements and recruitment processes. Problems have arisen in Fiji, for example, because the House Committee, responsible for setting the parliament's operating budget, has provided insufficient funding. Specialist parliamentary staff, such as Hansard reporters, hired by the Public Service Commission, has been relocated to other departments arbitrarily. In Vanuatu during the 1990s, a cash-strapped government stripped the office of the clerk and diverted funds to financial crises elsewhere in the bureaucracy.

However, to suggest that Melanesian MPs are uniformly under-skilled is to provide an incomplete and misleading picture. While they appear ineffectual in key technical functions, when necessary Melanesian parliamentarians are able to utilise parliamentary procedures to expedite legislation or outmanoeuvre their parliamentary rivals. Governments often use parliamentary procedures to secure their hold on office. For example, facing a mobilised opposition and possible rebellion within its own ranks in the May 2004 sitting of parliament in Papua New Guinea, the Somare government stacked the membership of the Private Members' Committee, which controls the introduction of motions of no confidence into the House, thereby limiting a major threat to the government's ability to enact its programs.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Westminster systems of government predicate oversight of the executive at least partially on an informed and active 'civil society'. With the intention of bridging the information gaps between parliaments and people, aid agencies have placed greater emphasis on civic education to be offered at primary, secondary and tertiary levels and on an ad hoc basis to instil greater understanding and acceptance of formal state institutions among rural Melanesians.[61] Only Fiji has an established civic education component in the schools curriculum, although several PICs are reputedly developing courses in collaboration with donors and NGOs such as Transparency International (TI). The insistence on 'good governance' training at USP combined with the creation of the new Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance provide avenues for effective regional strategies for civic education for tertiary students, in addition to advanced training in research methods, academic writing and so on. While these strategies target younger generations of Melanesians, the educating of people in parliamentary processes is largely ad hoc. Organisations such as Vanuatu's Wan Smol Bag theatre group provide accessible and appropriate formats for the dissemination of information on issues of governance, politics, and legal and constitutional issues, but they are unable to substitute for schools curricula.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have come to be seen as potential, effective democratic controls on elite behaviour and effective means by which the concentrated problems of poor economic performance and crises of legitimacy in developing countries might be rectified. Including churches, trade unions, non-government organisations (NGOs) involved in lobbying and advocacy on particular issues, Pacific CSOs might provide the basis for an informed, active and mobilised public. However, their effectiveness in penetrating decision-making circles has been limited. Many are organisationally weak and lack local legitimacy. Those CSOs with strong local legitimacy, such as churches, are often reluctant to influence government policy on certain issues and may in fact be ignored largely by MPs on policy matters. Relations between NGOs and Pacific governments are routinely tense, as are relations between NGOs themselves. When NGOs oppose government initiatives – part of the Western expectation of civil society – they have been targeted for prosecution. In 2001, in the process of establishing itself, the interim government of Laesenia Qarase suppressed civil society activism. The Citizens Constitutional Forum – an NGO critical of the government – was deregistered and its advertising was banned from public broadcast media. Similarly, in Vanuatu, NGO organised demonstrations have been banned; in PNG they have been forcibly quashed, resulting in civilian casualties.

In key instances they have broken down the insularity of the executive, both through their own agency and with the support of parliamentary secretariats. In the Pacific Islands, where communication networks are often limited, where members of parliament often appear inaccessible to the constituents, CSOs, including churches and NGOs, are able to act as intermediaries on issues of social relevance. Already, NGOs created to champion specific issues – such as the Fiji Women's Rights Movement – are involved in advocating legislative change, participating in policy discussions through consultative forums and contributing to public education programs. Given that certain bills before parliament may not be accessible to rural or undereducated people – who nonetheless are affected by legislation – NGOs offer avenues for the dissemination of information on their content and ramifications. In Fiji, the Secretary General of Parliament commissions briefing papers from relevant NGOs to strengthen committee work, which provides an example of how effective support institutions may contribute to better parliamentary functions.

Recognising that the committee system does not operate effectively in Melanesia, new institutions have been created to try to strengthen the linkages between states and societies. Given the weaknesses in formal parliamentary committee systems across Melanesia, several strategies outside the direct control of parliament – but involving MPs – such as the Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council (CIMC) in PNG and a system of national summits in Vanuatu have been created to bridge the divide between government and people. However, in that these institutions appear to draw the responsibilities of community representation and liaison further away from the orbit of national parliaments and MPs they may provide further disincentives to MPs to fulfil their institutional expectations. Their creation suggests that some degree of institutional harmonisation or rationalisation must be undertaken to avoid the duplication of scarce government resources.

POLITICAL PARTIES

An issue of increasing prominence in Melanesia is the apparent weakness of political parties. They are often characterised as being arbitrary and ephemeral, or institutionally weak.[62] They appear prone to fragmentation because of the highly personalised nature of Melanesian politics.[63] Consequently, candidates often trade on personal qualities and their connection to particular constituents, rather than party-based platforms. Established parties with centralised administrative functions can often appear unresponsive to local needs. In Vanuatu, electoral results indicate a shift away from the major parties to minor parties and independents, which in turn implies the subordination of national concerns (e.g. good governance) to intensely local ones (local development, responsive local representation, access to development funds). This is exemplified by increasing support for locally credible candidates whose major platforms are local development above all else.[64] As argued above, the political cultures of Melanesia lend themselves to patronage politics because of local peoples' needs for approachable political leaders. No Melanesian MP can afford to ignore local demands in favour of national or regional ones because unfulfilled promises to constituencies carry with them the threat of electoral defeat and a host of other negative social sanctions. Of course, the high turnover of MPs in the Melanesian states suggests that fulfilling election promises is no easy task, not least because of the demands placed upon MPs by the intense factional politics surrounding election to parliament and the formation of governments.

In recent years, political parties have become increasingly popular targets for strengthening democratic institutions, based on the belief that they are major indicators of social cleavages and that stronger parties will lead to more effective legislatures and more stable societies.[65] No consensus exists among these development actors as to the best means of engaging with political parties and most active development actors are cautious about the prospects of engaging with them at all. The focus of most political party support by UNDP tends to be on institutional strengthening and capacity building, especially party operating structures, campaign strategies, candidate pre-selection and the role of parties in legislatures.[66] Many UNDP support strategies, however, were formulated to strengthen democratic politics in post-conflict or newly democratic countries, which may not be appropriate for the purposes of strengthening democracy in the Melanesian states. Organisations such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), the Australian Political Exchange Bureau, the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project, Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) and America's National Democratic Institute (NDI) facilitate visits by Pacific politicians to Australia, the United Kingdom or the United States – or vice versa – and fund them to accompany politicians on constituency visits. Certainly strategies such as these offer politicians comparative experiences. Clearly, those MPs most apt for initiatives such as these are newly elected MPs.

The point of these exercises is clearly to improve the individual capacity of MPs but they rarely get to the heart of the major issues facing parliaments and parliamentarians over the long-term. Despite the apparent lack of skills of MPs across Melanesia, political fragmentation and patronage politics, not incompetence, provide the most prominent obstacles to effective government. Without the emergence of broad social cleavages around which parties can mobilise and without the curtailing of party fragmentation, Melanesian parliamentarians are unlikely to change their ways. Thus, it may be naïve and implicitly paternalistic to expect Pacific MPs to renounce their ways of doing things overnight, especially without viable alternative strategies being presented. To return to a point made earlier, many established MPs are not quite as ignorant about the frameworks of parliament as they may appear. They are operating within political cultures with their own sets of norms and assumptions. Ignoring the expectations of electors in favour of seemingly abstract principles of governance advocated by Western countries might not be the best way for Melanesian MPs to be elected to parliament in the first instance, and there is little consolation in not being elected. The point is not to suggest that little can be done to strengthen political parties, elections and parliamentary performance but that whatever the strategies for improving parliamentary governance advocated, due consideration be given to the parameters of acceptable behaviour and shared meanings in which Melanesian MPs must operate, and realistic expectations of the probable success or failure of initiatives of this kind be held. Certainly, changing the political cultures that have arisen in Melanesia will be a long and arduous process, and doomed to failure without associated shifts in local public perceptions about acceptable political behaviour.

WOMEN IN PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING

In addition to their resistance to stimuli from civil society actors, Melanesian parliaments offer few avenues for improving women's roles in public decision-making. Despite their increasing employment in the upper echelons of government bureaucracies throughout Melanesia, women remain under-represented in the region's legislatures. Most of Melanesia, even where matriliny predominates, is patriarchal. Thus, while there are no explicit legal barriers preventing women from running for office, women are impeded at every step along the route to election to national parliament. This resistance is often couched in terms of tradition, Christian principles and gendered assumptions about leadership. In Papua New Guinea, only four women have been elected to parliament. Solomon Islands have only ever had one woman elected to parliament. Vanuatu has now elected four women; two have become ministers. Of all the small islands states, Fiji has the strongest representation of women in national parliament, arguably reflecting the comparatively stronger position of women within Fijian society. In 2002, there were eight national representatives, five in the lower house and four who held ministries.

Few women run for election to local, regional or national assemblies, although organisations such as UNIFEM – the United Nations Fund for Women – are engaged in advocacy and capacity-building programs across the region. Throughout the Pacific – even where concrete initiatives have been taken to strengthen the position of women in society generally and in public decision-making specifically – empowerment programs have had only limited effect. International agencies and local NGOs have focused on achievable reforms such as ensuring that laws are drafted in non-gender specific language and supporting legal and political literacy programs for grassroots women with an eye to facilitating the advancement of women at all levels of society, with mixed success. Even UNIFEM acknowledges that a key problem it faces in furthering women's participation in public decision-making is that many programs tend to corral women away from men. This can be useful in building women's networks but it generally reinforces existing problems.

Throughout Melanesia, while political parties publicly acknowledge the value of electoral support from women, change has been slow. Despite PNG's *Organic Law on the Integrity on Political Parties and Candidates* (OLIPPAC), under which women candidates who receive 10 percent or more of the votes shall have three quarters of their campaign expenses refunded by Central Fund Board of Management to the political party that endorsed them, few parties have put women candidates forward.[67] In Vanuatu, UNIFEM supported the creation of the Vanuatu Women in Politics (VANWIP) Project in 1995 to encourage women to run for public office. In the 1995 and 1998 elections, the major parties were forced to deploy women members to campaign against VANWIP candidates actively in their electorates. While no VANWIP candidate was elected, each of the major parties consequently incorporated some level of gender recognition into their respective platforms, recognising potential payoffs in the form of electoral support. The actual effects of this platform shift were limited. Only the VP incorporated detailed strategies for women's empowerment to its party platform in a detailed manner, although most parties now have women representatives on their executives or support women's election in principle.

Certain lessons can be drawn from prior attempts to support women's election to public office. By contesting Vanuatu's 1995 and 1998 elections on non-partisan pro-women platforms, VANWIP candidates increased public awareness of the issues surrounding under-representation of women but in neither instance was a candidate elected. Given the efforts of UNIFEM and VANWIP mentioned above, it is notable that the two current serving women MPs – Isabelle Donald (VP) and Leinavao Tasso (Ind.), both from Epi – won their seats on their long-standing commitment to voluntary community service through local church organisations, rather than through the networks of the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW) – a major stakeholder in VANWIP. VNCW officials are often considered by local women's groups to be overpaid and inefficient, beset by the same internal squabbling as the major political parties and ultimately, the entire state.

CONCLUSIONS

In introducing this paper, I suggested that the emphasis on the negative aspects of parliamentary politics in Melanesia has obscured the actual operation of these parliaments by emphasising ideals of parliamentary governance. These principles – including lawmaking, oversight and representation – form the basis of the institutional expectations of parliaments in general, and clearly Melanesian parliaments are often weak in these technical areas of parliamentary governance.

The utility of these aspects of parliamentary governance as analytical tools is limited by their inability to explain the actual functions of Melanesian parliaments, as they currently exist, and to explore the dynamics of parliamentary politics. That is, to explore what makes Melanesian parliamentary politics the way they are, what makes Melanesian parliamentarians so resistant to external impetus, and what factors, despite the aspects of institutional design discussed above, promote the entrenched executive dominance found in Melanesian parliaments.

The emphasis on *political culture* found in this paper is driven by the need to understand the roles of MPs and parliaments in locally meaningful ways. To recapitulate this aspect of the paper, Melanesian political culture draws the attention of MPs away from their institutional responsibilities as lawmakers and overseers of government. These elements of political culture provide some initial reasons for the particular weaknesses in lawmaking and oversight in Melanesia. The technical aspects of parliamentary governance are less important to people than access to resources and materials or having approachable leaders, enmeshed within social networks, in office. MPs who fulfil these obligations are more bankable sources of support than state institutions. MPs who engage in explicit resource distribution are more appealing to voters than those with solid track records as legislators and overseers of the executive. This simple fact may serve to subvert a basic building block of democracy – its relevance to everyday people. Thus, given the emphasis on the redistribution of resources, local people may not be able to provide MPs with incentives to alter their behaviour unless significant shifts in attitude take place among constituents. However, the parliament remains a crucial site for contests of political power – it is the arena for constituting the executive – and is therefore still central to local politics. Constituting the executive has become the major intention of MPs and to protect this dominance, parliamentarians are resistant to change, especially external stimulus from civil society groups.

Attention to these aspects of political culture may allow for the exploration of parliamentary politics without recourse to categorisations of Melanesian MPs as ignorant and un-skilled, assumptions that will benefit neither them nor the people who elected them and which in many instances are patently untrue. As I have argued, where necessary, Melanesian parliamentarians have proved marvellously adroit at following, bending or suspending their regulations to maximum effect. These factors serve as salutary reminders that Melanesian MPs are not always ignorant of their powers and responsibilities, even if they tend to under-utilise them. Arguably, the particular weaknesses in parliamentary functions such as oversight and lawmaking are not such great concerns for Melanesians. It is important to note that the emphasis on these technical aspects of parliamentary operation is often more important to donors than to local people. Many Melanesians consider the cultures of dominance that characterise parliamentary politics normal and bankable, if not ideal.

It is crucial to recognise that some of the problems that beset Pacific parliaments may be addressed through institutional strengthening or capacity building initiatives. Strengthening their regulatory and support infrastructure will presumably provide MPs with the resources necessary to acquit their responsibilities more effectively, even if their involvement in networks of resource distribution remain compelling. Addressing the problems of members' capacities to acquit their responsibilities through training *them* may overcome some of the shortfalls of parliamentary performance in the short term but by virtue of the high turnover of MPs in Melanesian parliaments many such programs will be unsustainable. A medium term goal, therefore, should be placed on strengthening secretariats and clerk's offices to allow them to conduct members' induction courses regularly, rather than to rely on external institutions to deliver the training to MPs.

Civic education programs offer long-term strategies for improving community awareness about the roles and responsibilities of members of parliament, as they will for other formal institutions of the state, although clearly the capacity of Melanesian governments to deliver civic education is also at stake. In the short term, *ad hoc* civic education such as that conducted by *Wan Smol Bag* and other development theatre groups have provided readily accessible programs for grassroots Melanesians.

Formal parliamentary institutions such as the committee system have proved popular among donors but their success has been limited due to several factors. First, sectoral committees have been characteristically weak in facilitating community consultation on key issues, contributing to the need to create institutions such as PNG's CIMC. Second, they are often used in self-serving manners by Melanesian MPs. However, clearly they may still serve some use. Encouraging secretariats to commission NGOs to write briefing papers may strengthen the capacity

of committees to fulfil these responsibilities. Furthermore, key NGOs may represent potential bridges between the 'state' and Melanesian societies.

Initiatives aimed to encourage the participation of women in public decision-making have been arduous, although certain returns are notable. Drawing on Vanuatu's example, local legitimacy figures more prominently than involvement in regionally funded empowerment programs as a basis for electoral success. The two approaches, however, are mutually reinforcing, with programs such as VANWIP contributing to reform among political institutions and community work providing the basis for grassroots mobilisation.

In conclusion, two qualifications must be recognised. First, much of what influences the operation of Pacific parliaments is beyond the scope of institutional strengthening and capacity building; the political cultures of Melanesia and more widely in the Pacific are pervasive and resilient. It is important, therefore, not to ignore the particular national and sub-regional issues; not to adopt blanket approaches to parliamentary strengthening that merely replicate universal principles of governance. Second, expecting institutional strengthening projects to facilitate the overhaul of the Melanesian polities in their totality, without regard for the cultural influences on parliamentary politics, is blindly ethnocentric. An eye for such differences is crucial to ensuring appropriate institutional reforms and capacity building programs are instituted.

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AUTHOR NOTE

Dr Michael Morgan is a consultant and academic who is currently the Deputy Director for the Centre for Democratic Institutions at the Australian National University. His current research interests are governance and representation in Pacific Parliaments, especially in Melanesia, and constituency politics and political parties in Vanuatu. He has lived and worked in Vanuatu for nearly three years and is a fluent speaker of Bislama, Vanuatu's national language. From 1999 to 2000, he conducted doctoral field research focusing on local conceptions of politics in Penama Province, northern Vanuatu. He has undertaken consultancies on politics and development policy in Melanesia for the Bonn-International Centre for Conversion (BICC), the United Nations Development Programme Governance for Livelihoods and Development (UNDP-GOLD) Project and AusAID.

ENDNOTES

[1] Acknowledgments: I thank Prof. Ron May, Prof. Hank Nelson, Dr. Ben Reilly, Dr Peter Larmour and Dr Abby McLeod for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. All errors are my own.

[2] Classical liberal philosophy suggests certain expectations of parliaments and parliamentarians. Essentially, four basic premises for parliamentary government emerge from these theories: constituting the executive, lawmaking, oversight and representation/delegation. However, no clear consensus emerges from political philosophy about the exact proportions in which these elements *should* be in evidence. For example, Walter Bagehot assigned principal significance to the British parliament's responsibility to electing the cabinet (constituting an executive), with the secondary function being to communicate 'ideas, grievances and wishes' between governors and governed (representation/communication). Gerhard Loewenberg, "The Influence of Parliamentary Behaviour on Regime Stability: Some Conceptual Clarifications," *Comparative Politics* 03, no. 02 (1971): 177-79. The structures and histories of Westminster systems globally are also varied.

[3] Laurence Goldman, "'Hoo-Ha in Huli': Considerations on Commotion and Community in the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Discussion Paper*, no. 2003/08 (2003): 12.

[4] Michael G. Morgan, "The Origins and Effects of Party Fragmentation in Vanuatu, 1980-2004," in *Political Parties in the Asia Pacific*, ed. Roland Rich (Canberra: Centre for Democratic Institutions, forthcoming), Michael G. Morgan, "Political Chronicles 1995 – 1998," *Journal of Pacific History* 33, no. 3 (1998).

[5] See e.g. Judith Bennett, "Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands. Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Discussion Paper*, no. 2002/5 (2002): 9-10, Tarcissius Tara Kabutaulaka, "Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in the Solomon Islands," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Working Paper* 01, no. 01 (2001): 1-3.

[6] Aldo Borgu, "Beyond Bali: Aspi's Strategic Assessment 2002," (Canberra: Australia Strategic Policy Institute, 2002), 37, Peter Larmour, "Migdal in Melanesia," in *Weak and Strong States in Asia-Pacific Societies*, ed. Joel Migdal and Peter Dauvergne (Canberra: Allen & Unwin; Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, 1998), Peter Larmour, "Research on Governance in Weak States in Melanesia," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Discussion Paper*, no. 1996/01 (1996).

[7] See John Gledhill, *Power and Its Disguises, Anthropological Perspectives on Politics*, ed. Richard A. Wilson and Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 2nd Edition ed., Anthropology, Culture and Society (London/Sterling Virginia: Pluto Press, 1994 [2000]), 20, Bert Rockman, "Legislative-Executive Relations and Legislative Oversight," Legislative Studies Quarterly 9, no. 3 (1984): 387.

[8] See Paul Sillitoe, "The Development of Indigenous Knowledge: A New Applied Anthropology (in Anthropology and the Indigenous)," *Current Anthropology* 39, no. 02 (1998): 234.

[9] See e.g. Peter Larmour, ed., *Governance and Good Government: Policy and Implementation in the South Pacific* (Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, 1994), Barrie Macdonald, *Governance and Political Process in Kiribati* (Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, 1996).

[10] Norman Meller, "Districting a New Legislature in Micronesia," *Asian Survey* 7, no. 7 (1967), Norman Meller, "Legislative Behaviour Research Revisited: A Review of Five Years' Publications," *Western Political Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1965), Norman Meller, *Papers on the Papua-New Guinea House of Assembly* (New Guinea Research Unit, Australian National University, 1968), Norman Meller, "Political Change in the Pacific," *Asian Survey* 5, no. 5 (1965), Norman Meller and J. Anthony, *Fiji Goes to the Polls: The Crucial Legislative Council Elections of 1963* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1968), Norman Meller and Terza Meller, *The Congress of Micronesia: Development of the Legislative Process in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1969).

[11] See e.g. Michael L. Mezey, "The Functions of a Minimal Legislature: Role Perceptions of Thai Legislators," *The Western Political Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1972): 687.

[12] Norman Meller, "Traditional Leaders and Modern Pacific Island Governance," *Asian Survey* 24, no. 7 (1984).

[13] Paula Brown, *Beyond a Mountain Valley: The Simbu of Papua New Guinea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), Paula Brown, "The Simbu Election," in *Eleksin: The 1987 National Election in Papua New Guinea*, ed. Michael Oliver (Port Moresby: University of Papua New Guinea, 1989), 245, Jeffrey Clark, "Imagining the State," in *Narratives of Nation in the South Pacific, Studies in Anthropology and History*, ed. Ton Otto and Nicholas Thomas (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Press, 1997), 70-71, Sinclair Dinnen, *Law and Order in a Weak State: Crime and Politics in Papua New Guinea* (Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies, School of Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Studies, University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 175, Robert J. Gordon and Mervyn J. Meggitt, *Law and Order in the New Guinea Highlands* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985), 181, R.J. May, *State and Society in Papua New Guinea, the First Twenty-Five Years* (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2001), 37ff, Ron May, "Political Style in Melanesia," in *Melanesia: Beyond Diversity*, ed. Ron May and Hank Nelson (Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the Australian National University, 1982), Bill Standish, "Elite Communalism: The Highlands Liberation Front," in *Micronationalist Movements in Papua New Guinea*, ed. R.J. May, *Political and Social Change Monograph 1* (Canberra: Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1982), Bill Standish, "Warfare, Leadership and Law in the Highlands," in *Lo Bilong Ol Manmeri: Crime, Compensation and Village Courts*, ed. Jean Zorn and Peter Bayne (Port Moresby: The University of Papua New Guinea, 1975), William Standish, "Simbu Paths to Power: Political Change and Cultural Continuity in the Papua New Guinea Highlands" (Doctor of Philosophy, Australian National University, 1992), Wayne Warry, *Chuave Politics: Changing Patterns of Leadership in the Papua New Guinea Highlands*, vol. 4, *Political and Social Change Monograph* (Canberra: Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1987), 6-9.

[14] Peter Larmour, "Westminster in the Pacific: A 'Policy Transfer' Approach," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Discussion Paper*, no. 2001/01 (2001): 1, Edward P. Wolfers, "Aspects of Political Culture and Institution-Building in Melanesia: Constitutional Planning in Papua New Guinea and the Special Committee on Provincial Government in Solomon Islands," *Pacific Studies* 6, no. 1 (1982).

[15] Henry Okole, "The Fluid Party System of Papua New Guinea: Continuity and Change in a Third Wave Democracy" (Doctoral Thesis, Northern Illinois University, 2001), Benjamin Reilly, "Political Engineering of Parties and Party Systems" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 28 – August 31 2003).

[16] See e.g. Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy in Divided Societies: Electoral Engineering for Conflict Management* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 89, Alan Rumsey, "Social Segmentation, Voting, and Violence in Papua New Guinea," *The Contemporary Pacific* 11, no. 2 (1999): 313-14.

[17] I was a consultant on the legislative needs assessments for Vanuatu and Fiji. Michael G. Morgan, "Building the Parliamentary Process: Legislative Needs Assessment, Republic of the Fiji Islands," (Suva: UNDP (GOLD), 2002), Michael G. Morgan, "Integrating Reform: Legislative Needs Assessment, Republic of Vanuatu," (Suva: UNDP (GOLD), 2001). In addition, I undertook to regional review of parliamentary strengthening projects. Michael G. Morgan, "Strengthening Pacific Parliaments: Legislative Reform Program for Pacific Island Countries," (Suva: UNDP (GOLD), 2003). See also, Quinton Clements, "Challenges for a Small Island Parliament: Legislative Needs Assessment Republic of Tuvalu.," (Suva: UNDP (GOLD), 2000), Quinton Clements, "Constitutional Stability Amid Pressure for Change: Legislative Needs Assessment Kingdom of Tonga," (Suva: UNDP (GOLD), 2001), Quinton Clements, "Rebuilding Parliamentary Rule Post-Conflict: Legislative Needs Assessment, Solomon Islands," (Suva: UNDP (GOLD), 2001), Jon Fraenkel, "Marshall Islands Legislative Needs Assessment," (Suva: UNDP (GOLD), 2002), Leulua'iali'i Tasi Malifa, "Kiribati Legislative Needs Assessments," (Suva: UNDP (GOLD), 2000). Most of these parliamentary strengthening projects are premised on restoring or establishing the classical liberal ideals of parliamentary roles and functions mentioned earlier. They suggest that the three main functions of legislatures are to enact laws, represent constituencies and share information with decision-makers and to monitor government performance, particularly public expenditure. See e.g. UNDP, *Why Support Parliaments?* [Website] (UNDP (GOLD), 2001 [cited Dec. 2004]).

[18] Asian Development Bank, "Vanuatu 2001 Economic Report: Strengthening Development Policies," (2001). cf. Morgan, "Integrating Reform: Legislative Needs Assessment, Republic of Vanuatu."

[19] The possible exception is Fiji where despite coups focused on the parliament in 1987 and 2000, the legislature works effectively and the institution of parliament, its traditions and processes are highly respected, even if debate in the ethnically polarised parliament is intense.

[20] John Henderson, "The Future of Democracy in Melanesia: What Role for Outside Powers?," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 44, no. 3 (2003), Henry Okole, "Institutional Decay in a Melanesian Parliamentary Democracy: Papua New Guinea," *Development Bulletin*, no. 60 (2002), Henry Okole, "Issues of Governance in Parliamentary Democracies: The Case of Papua New Guinea" (paper presented at the Pacific Development Research Symposium,

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Brisbane, Nov 2002), Okole, Henry. "Papua New Guinea's Brand of Westminster: Democratic Traditions Overlaying Melanesian Cultures." In *Westminster Legacies: Democracy and Responsible Government in Asia, Australasia and the Pacific*, edited by Haig Patapan, John Wanna and Patrick Weller. Sydney: UNSW Press, forthcoming 2005.

[21] Twenty-three Members of the House are elected from Fijian communal rolls. nineteen from Indian communal seats and one from the Rotuman communal roll. Three Members are elected from the General Communal Constituencies, i.e. voters who are not Fijians, Indians or Rotumans. In addition twenty-five Members are elected from Open Constituencies, i.e. seats that are not dependent on ethnically specific communal rolls.

[22] Fourteen (14) members are nominated by the *Bose levu Vakaturaga* (Great Council of Chiefs) representing the fourteen Provinces, and one senator is appointed on the advice of the Council of Rotuma. Of the partisan appointees, the Prime Minister nominates nine senators and the Leader of the Opposition nominates eight (*The Constitution*, s.64).

[23] Republic of Vanuatu, "Constitution," (1980), s.17 (1). Since 1980, the number of seats in parliament has been raised from 39 to 52.

[24] Yash Gai, *Law, Government and Politics in the Pacific Island States* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1988), 56-7.

[25] Ibid., 57-58.

[26] Henry Okole, Quinton Clements, and Bernard Narakobi, "Strengthening a Parliamentary Democracy for the 21st Century, Legislative Needs Assessment for Papua New Guinea," (personal copy, n.d.), 27.

[27] Cf. May, "Political Style in Melanesia.", Howard van Trease, ed., *Melanesian Politics: Stael Bong Vanuatu* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1995).

[28] Gledhill, *Power and Its Disguises*, 20.

[29] Cf. Stephen Chilton, "Defining Political Culture," *The Western Political Quarterly* 41, no. 03 (1988): 419-20, 21ff.

[30] Willem Assies and Ton Salman, "Revisioning Cultures of Politics: An Essay on Social Movements, Politics and Culture," *Critique of Anthropology* 20, no. 3 (2000).

[31] See e.g. Bronwen Douglas, "Christian Citizens: Women and Negotiations of Modernity in Vanuatu," *Contemporary Pacific* 14 (2002): 17, Dan Jorgensen, "Regional History and Ethnic Identity in the Hub of New Guinea: The Emergence of the Min," *Oceania* 66, no. 3 (1996), Joel Robbins, "On Reading 'World News': Apocalyptic Narrative, Negative Nationalism and Transnational Christianity in a Papua New Guinea Society," *Social Analysis* 2, no. 42 (1998), Henry J. Rutz, "Occupying the Headwaters of Tradition: Rhetorical Strategies of Nation-Making in Fiji," in *Nation-Making, Emergent Identities in Postcolonial Melanesia*, ed. Robert J. Foster (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997).

[32] See e.g. Michael Jacobsen, "Vanishing Nations and the Infiltration of Nationalism: The Case of Papua New Guinea," in *Nation Making, Emergent Identities in Post Colonial Melanesia*, ed. Robert J. Foster (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 237, Don Kulick, "Heroes from Hell: Representations of 'Rascals' in a Papua New Guinean Village," *Anthropology Today* 9, no. 3 (1993): 11-12.

[33] Michael French Smith, *Hard Times on Kairuru Island, Poverty, Development, and Morality in a Papua New Guinea Village* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 5-6, see also 12, 25.

[34] Samuel Vusi, Principal, Banmatmat Bible College. Interview with the author, English. 16 Aug. 1999, south Pentecost. Tape recording, notes, Michael G. Morgan, "Politik Is Poison: Local Conceptions of Politics in Northern Vanuatu," *New Pacific Revue, Special Issue: L'etat des etats* 2, no. 2 (2004): 241-42.

[35] Dinnen, *Law and Order in a Weak State: Crime and Politics in Papua New Guinea,* Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, "Money, Politics, and Persons in Papua New Guinea," *Social Analysis* 42, no. 02 (1998): 134.

[36] May, *State and Society in Papua New Guinea, the First Twenty-Five Years*, 44.

[37] Dinnen, *Law and Order in a Weak State: Crime and Politics in Papua New Guinea,* Peter Larmour, "Westminster in the Pacific: A 'Policy Transfer' Approach," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper*, no. 01 (2001): 9, Hilda Lini, "Fourth Sub-Regional Caucus for Melanesian Women" (Annex 3, Port Vila, Vanuatu, 26 April – 5 May 1995), "Women's Role in the Peace Process," *Port Vila Presse*, 27 Oct 2001.

[38] See e.g. Cyril Belshaw, *Island Administration in the South West Pacific: Government and Reconstruction in New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, and the British Solomon Islands* (London and New York: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1950), 76. In the mid-1980s, Edward Wolfers suggested that the national project in Papua New Guinea might be challenged by its intense cultural diversity. Wolfers, "Aspects of Political Culture and Institution-Building in Melanesia: Constitutional Planning in Papua New Guinea and the Special Committee on Provincial Government in Solomon Islands," 85-108.

[39] Dinnen, *Law and Order in a Weak State: Crime and Politics in Papua New Guinea,* Gordon and Meggitt, *Law and Order in the New Guinea Highlands,* Yaw Saffu, "Continuity and Change in Png Electoral Politics," in *The 1992 Png Election: Change and Continuity in Electoral Politics*, ed. Yaw Saffu (Canberra: Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU, 1996), 40. "Women's role in the peace process", Port Vila Presse, 27 Oct. 2001, 1. Lini, "Fourth Sub-Regional Caucus for Melanesian Women".

[40] Joe Ketan, "Electoral Politics in Mount Hagen: The Dei Open Election," in *The 1992 Png Election: Change and Continuity in Electoral Politics*, ed. Yaw Saffu (Canberra: Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU, 1996), Saffu, "Continuity and Change in PNG Electoral Politics," 40.

[41] For PNG, see e.g. Laurence Goldman, "'Hoo-Ha in Huli': Considerations on Commotion and Community in the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Discussion Paper*, no. 2003/08 (2003): 5, 7-9, Gordon and Meggitt, *Law and Order in the New Guinea Highlands*, 12-14, 206, Abby McLeod, "Contesting Violence: State and Simbu Approaches of Law and Order in Contemporary Papua New Guinea" (PhD Dissertation, University of Brisbane, 2003), Marilyn Strathern, "Legality or Legitimacy: Hageners' Perception of the Judiciary," (Unpublished paper, 1971), Marilyn Strathern, *Official and Unofficial Courts: Legal Assumptions and Expectations in a Highlands Community*, ed. R.J. May, *New Guinea Research Bulletin No. 47* (Canberra: New Guinea Research Unit, The Australian National University, 1972).

[42] Bronwen Douglas, "Weak States and Other Nationalisms? Emerging Melanesian Paradigms," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Discussion Paper*, no. 03 (2000): 3, Edward LiPuma, "The Formation of Nation-States and National Cultures in Oceania," in *Nation Making: Emergent Identities in Postcolonial Melanesia*, ed. Robert J. Foster (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 47-48.

[43] Bennett, "Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands. Though Much Is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism," 9-10.

[44] Brown, "The Simbu Election," 245.

[45] Clark, "Imagining the State," 67, 81-82, Jeffrey Clark, *Steel to Stone, a Chronicle of Colonialism in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, ed. Michael Nihill, *Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 150-51. Clark, in fact, suggests that colonialism itself was considered a 'lethal' gift, bestowed upon the Highlands by whites who refused to share their crucial knowledge and resources, and who thereby kept Highlanders subjugated.

[46] Philip Gibbs, Nicole Haley, and Abby McLeod, "Politicking and Voting in the Highlands: The 2002 Papua New Guinea National Elections," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Discussion Paper*, no. 2004/01 (2004): 5.

[47] See e.g. Clark, "Imagining the State," 74-75, Joseph Lakane and Philip Gibbs, "Haves and Have-Nots: The 2002 Elections in the Enga Province Png," *Catalyst* 33, no. 02 (2003).

[48] Goldman, "'Hoo-Ha in Huli': Considerations on Commotion and Community in the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea," 12.

[49] Ron May, "Disorderly Democracy: Political Turbulence and Institutional Reform in Papua New Guinea," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Discussion Paper*, no. 2003/03 (2003): 10.

[50] See e.g. Clark, *Steel to Stone*, 150-51.

[51] Clark, "Imagining the State," 179. Following Clark, I take positive accounts of the colonial or mission past to be implicit critiques of modernity, although they cannot always be read at face value. Clark argues that nostalgia for the colonial period is not because of a love of Australian control but a longing for general equality between 'Blacks' and a return to the 'infinite possibility' of having 'time and future' to look forward to.

[52] See e.g. Sam Alasia, "Party Politics and Government in Solomon Islands," *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Discussion Paper*, no. 1997/07 (1997), Morgan, "The Origins and Effects of Party Fragmentation in Vanuatu, 1980-2004.", Reilly, "Political Engineering of Parties and Party Systems".

[53] Cf. Benjamin Reilly, "Party Politics in Papua New Guinea: A Deviant Case?," *Pacific Affairs* 72, no. 2 (1999): 239. Reilly argues that these tactics provide sufficient evidence that 'the executive really is beholden to the legislature'. However, this represents only one aspect of executive-legislature relations. As this paper argues, in most aspects of parliamentary politics, the legislature is subordinate to the executive.

[54] For example, strong and effective opposition, responsible and responsive executives, active and effective committee systems, effective constitutional oversight agencies, active media and an informed and educated public might provide ideal conditions for oversight.

[55] Although rarely disentangled, the usage of 'gavman' suggests a composite meaning. Se e.g. Ton Otto, "The Politics of Tradition in Baluan Social Change and He Construction of the Past in a Manus Society" (PhD, Australian National University, 1991), Jaap Timmer, "Living with Intricate Futures: Order and Confusion in Imyan Worlds, Irian Jaya, Indonesia" (PhD Dissertation, University of Nijmegen, 2000), 316. This interpretation is consistent with representations of 'gavman' in islander accounts and possibly derives from local perceptions of colonial officers, such as district agents, district commissioners and kiaps, who were seen to embody colonial government. See e.g., Alasia, "Party Politics and Government in Solomon Islands," 2.

[56] Forum Presiding Officers Conference and UNDP (GOLD), "First Pacific Regional Conference on Governance for Parliamentarians" (Tanoa International Hotel, Nadi, 27 – 30 March 2000), 1, UNDP, "How UNDP Supports Parliaments," *UNDP Fast Facts*, Apr 2003, 1.

[57] For example, Papua New Guinea has three house committees: the Public Accounts Committee, the Private Members' Committee and the house Business Committee. In all, it has 38 committees tasked with vetting aspects of legislation and reporting to parliament on their findings. Very few are operational, yet all members draw allowances. The committees include: the Standing Orders Committee; the Committee of Privileges; the National Parliament Committee; the Private Business Committee; the Subordinate Legislation Committee; the Parliamentary Legislation Committee; the Parliamentary Committee on Appointments; the Constitutional Laws and Acts Committee; the Economic Affairs Committee; the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee; and, the Law and Order Committee. Fiji possesses six standing Select Committees and six sector standing committees. These include the Business Committee, the House Committee, the Committee of Privileges, the Standing Orders Committee, the Sugar Select Committee, and the Public Accounts Committee. Additionally, there is provision for the formation of *ad hoc* Select Committees with the responsibility to carry out particular assignments specified by a resolution of the House (e.g. The Legal and Consequential Legislation Committee). Each year, all Members of the House constitute the Committee of Supply to consider the Government's Appropriation Bill and Estimates (and Parliament's Annual Appropriation Bill and Estimates). Vanuatu possesses only three standing committees, the Public Accounts Committee, the Members Privilege Committee and the Standing Orders Committee. Membership in these parties is generally determined by nomination from the government and opposition.

[58] The powers of Vanuatu's PAC are set out in the *Vanuatu Expenditure Review and Audit Act*, 3, Part II, s.4-6.

[59] See e.g. *The National [PNG]*, 29 Nov 1999, Pearson Vetuna, *Time to Talk: Roles and Structures of Government* [Broadcast Transcript] (Abc Radio Australia, 2002 [cited 7 Oct 2004]); available from http://abc.net.au/timetotalk/english/radio/stories/TimeToTalkTranscript_418683.htm.

[60] See e.g. Michael G. Morgan, "Political Fragmentation and the Policy Environment in Vanuatu, 1980-2004," *Pacific Economic Bulletin* 19, no. 3 (2004): 44, Reilly, "Party Politics in Papua New Guinea," 239. Reilly notes that 52% of members were not re-elected to PNG's parliament in 1997.

[61] See e.g. Bruce Davis, "Statement by the Director General of Ausaid Mr Bruce Davis," (Canberra: Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Committee Inquiry into PNG and the Island States of the Southwest Pacific, 2002), Siteveni Ratuva, "Baseline Study on Civic Education Needs and Attitudes Towards Democratic Governance in Fiji," (Suva: State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project/United Nations Development Programme, 2004).

[62] Gai, *Law, Government and Politics in the Pacific Island States*, 59-61, Peter Larmour and Manuhuia Barcham, "National Integrity Systems, Transparency International National Country Study Report, Vanuatu 2004," (Port Vila, Canberra: Transparency International, 2004), 17, Okole, "Papua New Guinea's Brand of Westminster: Democratic Traditions Overlaying Melanesian Cultures," 12-13, Reilly, "Political Engineering of Parties and Party Systems".

[63] Morgan, "The Origins and Effects of Party Fragmentation in Vanuatu, 1980-2004," 19.

[64] See e.g. Morgan, "Political Fragmentation," 46. Independents or minor parties hold 26 seats in Vanuatu's 52-seat parliament.

[65] Reilly, "Political Engineering of Parties and Party Systems", 1-2.

[66] Morgan, "Strengthening Pacific Parliaments: Legislative Reform Program for Pacific Island Countries.", Reilly, "Political Engineering of Parties and Party Systems", UNDP, *Political Parties in the Legislature* [website] (United Nations Development Programme (Parliamentary Development), 2005 [cited Feb. 2005]).

[67] Okole, Clements, and Narakobi, "Strengthening a Parliamentary Democracy for the 21st Century, Legislative Needs Assessment for Papua New Guinea." Indeed, Okole et al. argue that the 'Central Fund does not currently have the funds to meet the requirements of Section 62 of the Organic Law, [thus] it is unlikely political parties will take this into consideration when choosing candidates in the future.'

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