
Mare Ever-changing? Sailing between Generalisations in Oceanic Political Analysis

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Key words: Oceania, Democracy, Executive, Legislative, government

The region of Oceania is so far a relatively understudied region in terms of substantive political analysis from political science and international relations specialists. Perhaps because of the lack of specialists in the area, there is a tendency for many observers to rely on stereotypes and generalizations. Often, political assessments of the region as a whole rely on the characterization of individual state systems as derived from Westminster Parliamentary Democracy. However, there is a need for more comprehensive research to be undertaken before the way in which democracy works within individual states and communities is understood. This paper serves to introduce Korean scholars to sixteen of the independent states of the region: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia,

Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand/Aotearoa, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. It provides an overview of executive and legislative structures and processes within each of the state and provides some demographic detail to help support the argument that the region is much more complex than often perceived. The paper also serves to introduce readers to some of the challenges teachers of politics within the smaller states of the region face as a result of such generalizations.

Submitted: 2009.11.20/ Reviewed: 2009.12.15/ Accepted: 2009.12.22

I. Introduction

It is well known that the Pacific owes its name to a Portuguese explorer who used the term *Mare Pacificum* (peaceful sea) to describe his voyage through the waters in the 16th century.¹⁾ Less celebrated is that a later explorer countered this description with his own—*Mare Furiosum* (furious or violent sea)—after his tumultuous experiences.²⁾ Such extremities have set the pace for exogenous stereotyping of the region—the proposition that the ocean could be both ‘pacificum’ and ‘furiosum’ rarely considered—and the stereotypes continue to permeate Western or European discourse and analysis of the Pacific and its peoples today.

While explorers habitually referred to local people as either

1) The explorer was Ferdinand Magellan or Fernão de Magalhães.

2) Francis Drake later in the same century.