The politics of managing urban development in Pacific Island states

The case of Samoa and Tonga

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Introduction

Although Pacific Island (PI) towns and cities rarely feature in global accounts of urbanisation, the region's urban areas are facing comparable problems of rural–urban drift and sustainability.[1] According to the United Nations (1995:92–93) there were almost two million 'urban' Pacific Islanders in 1995, and this population will grow to slightly less than five million in the year 2025. By 2015, only the Melanesian states will have more rural dwellers than urban, though with current annual growth rates averaging 7.3%, Melanesia is experiencing one of the most dramatic rural–urban transformations of any region in the world (SPC 1996; United Nations 1995:84–85). This rapid transformation to urban living has outpaced the capacities of PI governments to provide and plan for sustainable and productive urban habitats. As several observers have noted, urban growth throughout the region has been accompanied by a gradual deterioration in the quality of urban life (Bryant 1993; Jones 1995:6, 14). Environmental degradation, unemployment, inadequate housing and land scarcities are indicators of emerging urban predicaments now evident (at least in part) in all Pacific Island urban centres (Bryant 1993; Connell & Lea 1993, 1995).

However, despite concern expressed by governments over their unbalanced development dating over several decades (ADB 1996a:22; Fairbairn 1993:238; Walsh 1982:106), there has been, altogether, an

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absence of assertive urban management throughout the region (Bryant-Tokalau 1994:80; Jones 1996:160; UNDP 1994:20,33). Indeed, Paul Jones has lamented that government response to urbanisation in the PI countries has been 'weak, inadequate and ineffective' (1995:3). To date, PI governments appear to be content to remain distant from their urban futures, preferring, in many cases, to allow traditional systems to accommodate people's needs, notwithstanding evidence that they may no longer be able to do so (Jones 1996:162; Monsell-Davis 1993).

While this 'non-performance' with regard to committed government action has often been attributed to human resource and financial constraints (see Jones 1996:162), this article will address the political context of urban development and government response in the context of Samoa and Tonga. I will further examine increasing social discord as one manifestation of popular concern over urban decline and (mis)management. Devas and Rakodi (1996b:54) have noted that debates about urban planning and management often take place within domains of political encounters and negotiation. Indeed, 'urban planning and management are not about producing a technically perfect plan or devising a policy to bring about an ideal situation in which all will benefit equally . . . Most of the issues, in fact, involve political choices: choices between competing interests or claims [and] choices between alternative policies with varying consequences for different groups . . .' (Devas & Rakodi 1996b:48). Consequently, (successful) urban management involves managing conflict, between and among government departments, government and donors, between public authorities and the community, and among communities themselves (Devas and Rakodi 1996b:48–52).

Nevertheless, to date the politics of urban management has been either downplayed or ignored in chronicles of Pacific Island urbanisation. Instead, accounts and analysis of urbanisation in the region have focused primarily on migration, poverty, housing and, only recently, on the environment (see Ward 1997). Overall, there has been a lack of critical debate on and accounts of urban management,[2] and the significant and changing shifts in power and social relations that have emerged as a result of urban primacy.[3] As Connell and Lea have noted: 'A central difficulty in the debate about urban futures in the South Pacific are the universal problems of addressing specific urban strategies of one kind or another when basic (and missing) elements of the discourse cover much more fundamental issues' (1995:91).

Samoa and Tonga introduced briefly

Samoa and Tonga are often held in comparison, characterised as they are by hierarchical Polynesian social and political structures, which have been relatively impervious to change. However, while broadly comparable, each country consists of unique social and political systems, which have both undergone increasingly critical introspection over the past two decades. These systems are central to the context of urban management and the nature of discord that has emerged in recent years (and beyond the urban context, see Campbell 1992). Although by no means comprehensive, a brief review of the most salient characteristics of these respective political systems, emphasising the processes of concurrent continuity and change, will precede discussion on the politics of urban development.

Both Samoa and Tonga are characterised by systems of rank and conformity, which permeate political systems and citizen–elite relationships. *Fa'a Samoa* (the Samoan way) is the cultural ethos by which Samoans define themselves (and against *palangi*), but it is *fa'amatai* that is the more important in serving as the social order of Samoan society and polity (Lawson 1996: ch. 4; Le Tagaloa 1992). *Fa'amatai,* which has been described as the 'ideal social system', links *matai* (and by default the state), the *nu'u* (village) and *aiga* (family) and ranks them hierarchically. Essentially, Samoan politics and society continue to be grounded at the *nu'u* level and under the tutelage of *matai*. *Fa'amatai* acts to provide Samoans of all ranks with access to livelihoods (particularly land), but also, through reciprocity, binds all Samoans, thus ensuring that everyone has 'a stake in the traditional system' (Lawson 1996:124).

The village council, or *fono*, is the arena where issues are deliberated and instructions given. Through the *fono*, opinions are (unevenly) expressed, censored and mediated. These decisions are then communicated to the state through the *Pulenu'u* (government agent). Throughout state/*nu'u* relations, the village acts as a 'politically and administratively autonomous' unit, a situation 'fiercely guarded' for generations (Thomas 1985:215). These decentralised power structures have often clashed with the jurisdictions and roles of the modern state (Davidson 1967:262, 299–300). Both *fa'a Samoa* and *fa'amatai*, with their strict edict of obedience to conformity and service, are said to be deeply entrenched in Samoan politics (a situation further solidified through the *Fono* Act of 1990[4]) and

continue to be essential elements in Samoan life and culture. However, while it is often considered an egalitarian and non-exploitative system, in practice equal participation is rarely evident, with *matai* possessing considerable power through their rank and political authority as elected representatives.[5]

Tonga has a much greater character of centralisation and hierarchy. As prescribed in the 1875 Constitution, the rank of order descends from the King, to the nobles, and then commoners. It is a system, at least on the outside, that promotes an idealistic image of 'stability, contentment and durability' (Lawson 1996:79). All power emanates from the King. In essence 'the King is accountable to no-one' (bar God) (Campbell 1994:86; Latukefu 1975), and, as such, he 'can summon or dissolve parliament at any time, suspend habeas corpus, proclaim martial law, make treaties, command the forces, appoint nobles, grant estates etc.' (Helu 1992:143). While it is a system that at least constitutionally provides all with access to land and therefore subsistence, it is also a strictly hierarchical order that has been described as essentially exploitative and unequal, with minimal right of appeal (Campbell 1994; Helu 1992; Lawson 1996). Consequently, unquestioning loyalty, service and respect are the honoured hallmarks of Tongan society, and are attributes particularly demanded of commoners.[6]

Despite the endurance of these powerful and efficacious systems, both Samoa and Tonga are witnessing increased comment on their respective social and political orders. Over the past two decades, Samoan politics and society has been the site of augmented social stress and political competition. Political life has been punctuated by regular public demonstrations over corruption, wages, the cost of living, passport-selling scams, and a feeling of increased political instability, despite (or perhaps in spite of) the shift to universal suffrage in 1990. Of late, and in part due to its political reification, the *matai* system has been criticised as contributing to a 'thoroughgoing authoritarianism' in Samoan life (Lawson 1996:155).

In Tonga, there has also been a discernible shift away from the stability of the past. Despite the continued popularity of King Tupou IV, in recent years the social and political system in Tonga has been hobbled by concerns over corruption, accountability, privilege and responsibility (Campbell 1994; James 1997; Lawson 1996:80). Ability is not an important prerequisite in the allocation of ministerial responsibilities, which often is reflected in ineffective policy action to rapidly changing circumstances (Hau'ofa

1994:418–19). This has been lucidly evidenced in the steadily growing popularity of the pro-democracy movement and support for more 'anti-establishment' people's representatives,[7] the emergence of an independent and critical tertiary institution (the 'Atenisi Institute), and a widespread call for greater accountability (Campbell 1994; Helu 1992). In both Samoa and Tonga, the prevailing rural-based order, which has been characterised by systems of obedience and conformity and patronage over performance, is being challenged by the forces of development and change, accentuated in the context of urban growth and lifestyles.

Background to urban growth and planning in Samoa and Tonga

Apia

Though its present site was originally chosen by Europeans because it was rejected by Samoans as unsuitable for habitat, Apia has grown into one of the largest urban agglomerations in the Pacific. With peri-urban communities included, its population has been estimated at over 48,000 out of a national population of 165,100 (ADB 1996a:21). Despite considerable freehold land in the capital, most residential growth occurs in the adjacent 'urban villages', which do not come under national jurisdiction. Of late, several observers have noted that increasingly incoherent and unmanaged growth has tested both the ecological and administrative capacity of Apia and Northwest Upolu to cope (ADB 1996a; Taule'alo 1993:30–34; Storey (forthcoming)). Migrants, who have no access to communal land, are often forced to settle on mangrove sites and swamp land in and around town. In the absence of land reform, reclamation has sought to offset the 'scarcity' of urban land, but has led to the destruction of the fringing reef and marine environment. While there is a sizeable body of environmental legislation, health acts and available controls on (particularly industrial) pollution, there is little in the way of enforcement. In short, Apia, as evidenced in its widening sprawl, the destruction of its fringing mangroves and reefs, and in the spatial disorder that combines residential, commercial and marginal environments, is a town in need of improved management and planning if it is to meet the needs of future generations in a sustainable fashion.

Calls for more effective urban management date back into the 1950s. Since that time, there have been several unsuccessful attempts to establish

or implement a town plan, meaning today that there are still 'no formal structures for defining urban development policies or plans and no processes for coordinating . . . activities in pursuit of common objectives' (ADB 1996a:28). This has transpired despite significant concerns expressed in past reports regarding the future sustainability of Apia. Lindquist's 1972 call for an urban plan noted that there was a 'desperate need' for improved planning and that 'the planning and execution of public services such as sewager, drainage, water supply and electricity are not keeping pace with the rapid urbanisation of Apia' (Lindquist 1972:28). A decade later, Sturms (1984:14) noted the risks of a typhoid or hepatitis epidemic if water and sewerage systems were not significantly improved. In many of these reviews there have been appeals for the establishment of an Apia Municipal Council (or Authority) to manage future urban development (Kearns 1965:50; Sturms 1984).[8] The last call for an urban management structure came as recently as 1996 (ADB 1996c), though in the current political environment it is unlikely to be pursued (Department of Lands, Surveys and Environment (DSLE), pers. comm., 29 January 1997). For manifold reasons, most notably a concern over the implications of land reform, politics between government departments and a significant lack of government will, a comprehensive urban plan for Apia appears to be an indistinct prospect, at least in the short term.

Nuku'alofa

Nuku'alofa has also steadily increased its demographic, economic and political primacy in the post-war period. Its population has recently been estimated at 34,000, though it is difficult to differentiate urban boundaries, with the rapid growth of peri-urban corridors to the south and west. There has been clear evidence of significant and non-returning migration from the other island groups to Tongatapu (which has easy access to the capital) for a number of decades. Tongatapu now accounts for over 68% of all Tongans, an increase from 61% in 1966 (Central Planning Department 1991:64; Statistics Department 1997). This growth, combined with a corresponding lack of available *'api* (allotments), has exacerbated demand for land on the main island far beyond availability.[9] Recently, the Tongan landless population has been estimated at some 20,000, most of whom are concentrated on Tongatapu (Fukofuka, 1994:147).

In Nuku'alofa, a lack of access to land, employment and an effective sewerage system has led to a steadily deteriorating urban situation characterised by the growth in informal settlements and an increasingly degraded environment (Storey:forthcoming). Nevertheless, in comparison to Samoa, there has been even less inclination toward urban management and planning for Nuku'alofa, notwithstanding calls for action dating back over three decades (Walsh 1964:15), and the commissioning of over a dozen town plans (which have been shelved by the state) (*Matangi Tonga* March 1993:11). This is despite the admission by Tongan authorities that while a third of Tongans were urbanised, government had no urban policy to speak of (Central Planning Department 1991:257). Urban management continues to be dispersed among several departments and organisations with very little, if any, central direction and overlordship. Policy continues to be informed by a wide plethora of town regulations and public health (building) regulations addressing 'house location, town cleanliness, planting, cutting of plants, pig and goat control, and littering', some dating back to the turn of the century (Thistlewaite, Sheppard & Prescott 1993:18–19; Qalo 1985:240–42). Whether this situation is an adequate response toward the sustainable living of one in three Tongans is increasingly the subject of public concern and conjecture.

Urban management and planning: The political context

Jones (1996) has noted that weak coordination, a lack of a concern over public interest, inter-personal and traditional rivalries, resistance to central control and a faith in technical/aid solutions hamper urban development throughout the Pacific.[10] Conceptions of public good and interest are often overlooked, with more emphasis placed on kinship relations and rights (Jones 1996:162). Coordination is also notoriously poor (Connell & Lea 1995:8–9). Though there are numerous regulations relevant to urban areas in both countries, many of them are dated and lack relevance to modern urban places, or they remain unenforced by national bodies or local gatekeepers. Urban centres are often collations of several villages, and authority and planning are exercised within these boundaries. Despite its obvious need, coherent and long term planning is rare. Previous town plans and regulations that gave rise to (or threatened) conflict with traditional authorities and systems were often ignored or bypassed (Jones 1995:8).

To date, any sustained effort at planning and implementation has been a victim of the narrow representative bases of communal politics played out on the national stage. Policy suffers because of the fluidity of patronage politics: coalitions and loyalties are often built on shifting political sands (UNDP 1994:49). Additionally, ministries and departments have been ill-equipped and have lacked support for attempts to put necessary measures in place. Often, even relatively well-directed and funded organisations cannot act for fear that their actions may antagonise another department, government minister or traditional authority. This has resulted in inadequate urban regulation and land use laws leading to a situation today where 'many Pacific Island towns are facing insurmountable planning problems' (Dupon 1993:5).

While significant numbers of reports are constant in their desire to see improved urban management and planning commitment,[11] such a shift would clearly involve considerable re-organisation in (often 'traditional') power relationships in both Samoa and Tonga. Urban development implies more than building houses, redirecting traffic or turning on streetlights: it involves power over decision making and the ceding of traditional controls to 'third parties' and away from the widespread practice of policy orientation toward short-term benefits to select groups (UNDP 1994:49). In examining the question of 'why is there no implementation?' (Connell & Lea 1995:135–136), a political frame of analysis placed more firmly within the orbit of state–society relations needs to be further advanced and developed with regard to urban experience in the PI states.

In Samoa, it is apparent that there is a lack of political will to implement reformist legislation or to reduce *matai* control over 'traditional' structures in order to augment a greater technocratic role in urban management.[12] Samoa has a long tradition of leaders concerned to see that educated elites do not usurp traditional bases of authority and that modernisation and development do not affect their traditional spheres of influence and power (Meleisea & Schoeffel 1983:93, 102). This impedes attempts at the adequate definition of departmental roles. At present, top-down structures hinder autonomy, accountability and responsiveness within the system: 'Decentralisation involves political risks for the centre and there are obvious advantages in terms of personal rewards and potential for patronage for both politicians and bureaucrats in the centralisation of powers' (ADB 1996c:50). This has resulted in plans being sidelined as political contests

over who should be in charge of such actions are played out. One senior adviser to the Samoan government feels that the real reason a central administration has not emerged in Apia is due to patronage, and not the oft-cited 'limitations of bureaucracy, cost, and expertise', which he described as 'smoke-screens' for other interests (DSLE, pers. comm., 29 January 1997). Accordingly, he felt that a recent Asian Development Bank urban report calling for central authority will probably go the same way: 'Nobody wants to give way to a potentially powerful organisation'.

The (Western) Samoa Water Authority

The recently created (Western) Samoa Water Authority (WSWA) is an instructive example of the politics of establishing service-based and autonomous urban institutions. The Authority was established in 1994 and replaced the ineffective Water Division in the Public Works Department (PWD). Initially, it was given the task of centralising water services with the hope of improving health and environmental conditions in Apia and beyond. The goal of the Authority was to 'operate as a successful business without support from the government' (World Bank 1995:89). Since then, however, it has been dogged by a number of problems that typify the difficulties of urban management.

Firstly, the Authority has been obstructed in imposing a comprehensive user-pays system upon the 45,000 residents it serves. Subsequently, the Authority has been unable to meter usage, which is very high—the World Bank (1995:99) has recently styled it as 'lavish'—and thus cover the cost of servicing. More recent attempts to meter usage have led to widespread vandalism and tampering with the devices. Secondly, and relatedly, although the Authority was conceived in order to bypass government inaction and politicisation as a 'commercially oriented, autonomous, modern water utility', it has not succeeded in such independence of action in practice (World Bank 1995:97; WSWA, pers. com., 22 January 1997). Currently, government restricts tariffs to only 20% of operating and maintenance costs and, through promises made during the 1996 general election campaign, requires the WSWA to increase its services significantly. Additionally, due to adverse public reaction, the widespread installation of water meters has been delayed for a number of years (ADB 1996b:6–12). Finally, an overlapping of functions considerably restricts WSWA operation

(WSWA, pers. com., 22 January 1997). Though it is supposed to protect watershed resources to maintain the quality of its intake, these are maintained and controlled by other government departments at a poor standard, or under subsistence use and village authority, thus affecting the quality of supply (ADB 1996b:8). The Authority is therefore at times powerless to carry out its own functions, and public attitudes to it are critical, particularly over the commercialising of the supplying of water, which previously was referred to as a 'divine right' (World Bank 1995:89). Currently, water is being used at unsustainable levels and conservation is poor.[13] Consequently, while the system was upgraded in 1989 at a cost of WS$32 million, it now relies upon additional and untreated supply pumped in from the polluted Vaisigano River. Supply is intermittent, and is still not considered entirely safe.

Tonga: The Central Planning Department

The experience of the Central Planning Department (CPD) in Tonga provides comparable experience to the WSWA. Initiated over two decades ago, the CPD's mandate was to fulfil the need for a formal body with overall responsibility for planning, and secondly, to perform between government departments the pivotal coordinating role that had been missing. However, its role and function have been considerably constrained by 'turf wars' with other ministries and its inability to implement plans, due to the constraints of local power dynamics.

Perhaps because of the organisation's potentially powerful and centralising role, the CPD has been mistrusted and resented by other key ministries (Connell & Lea 1995:104). Additionally, in procuring land for urban projects, the department is often 'held hostage' by 'extortionate' compensation claims from nobles. Formal planning, in the context of intra-government politics and monarchic decree, according to one official, was 'absolutely impossible' and described as 'a joke' (CPD, pers. comm., 6 February 1997). As a consequence, the CPD now plays the more confined function of mediating between foreign donors and respective government departments: over 90% of its projects are foreign funded and its relationship with local organisations is described as 'poor' (CPD, pers. comm., 6 February 1997).

Emerging discord

Though some commentators have noted the lack of grassroots pressure for change (ADB 1996c:53; Campbell 1992:221; Utoikamanu 1980:432), there are signs that the declining quality of urban life is fuelling incipient and new forms of social and political disenchantment. Recently, urban issues have moved, at times controversially, onto the public and political agenda (Connell & Lea 1995:147). Such debates are strongly connected with increased discord over national issues of corruption, accountability and performance as discussed earlier. For example, in Tonga, there are links to the pro-democracy movement, and in Samoa, non-government organisations (NGOs), trade unions and environmental organisations are gradually, if cautiously, becoming vocal in calling for more effective urban management.

In Tonga 'traditional' social structures are under increasing stress and today there is evidence of increasing polemical pluralism in political debate (Campbell 1992:227). Just 15 years ago Afeaki (1983:71) suggested that, at least publicly, Tongans were not prepared to consider themselves exploited by what Futa Helu has referred to as the 'anti-equality' ethic in Tongan society (Helu 1992:140). Since then, Tonga's 'modernisation project' and the conflicts that have arisen from it have led to a much greater scrutiny being directed at the political and 'development system' for, as Campbell has put it, 'what it was doing and for what it was not doing' (1994:82).

Subsequent to Tonga's first 'issues-based' election in 1987, the shift of popular discontent (and support for the people's representatives) has wavered between the personal and the structural (Campbell 1994:86–87). Yet, there has been a much greater and more public debate in recent years linking development issues to the performance of the present political system. These current demands for accountability and 'new politics' (Larmour 1994) have been described as not being directed at development policy per se. Nevertheless, as argued by development ethicists such as Crocker (1991), Goulet (1995) and Qizilbash (1996), informed public debate over ethics and accountability can rarely be conducted without reference to the means by which development is conducted and how it is managed (i.e. policy). For an increasing number of urbanised Tongans (at home and abroad), these issues are expositions of their urban experience.

The highly visible and widely supported pro-democracy movement is an indicative example of emerging discord in Tongan society and politics. Though reasons for support vary greatly, as greatly as the 'pro-democracy' stance of political aspirants, the movement has symbolised commoner[14] and middle-class frustration with Tongan politics (Campbell 1994; James 1997). 'Akilisi Pohiva (notably the most 'radical' *and* popular pro-democracy activist (James 1997)) is adamant that the pro-democracy movement does indeed offer an alternative to what he has referred to as Tonga's 'distorted development'. For him, the current system requires a complete overhaul as it is on the verge of collapse from both outside and within ('Akilisi Pohiva, pers. comm., 7 February 1997). The movement's broadsheet, *Ko e Kele'a* (The Conch Shell) has been referred to as the most popular publication in the country and is widely available, often selling out (Helu 1992:147). Elections, once relatively solemn affairs that generated little excitement (Afeaki 1983:64), have recently become contexts for not only increased competition among nobles and their heirs, but also stiff opposition from commoners who have, on several occasions, proved more popular than royalty at the ballot box. With the rise of educated and increasingly globalised commoners (Overton 1996), and the growth of the pro-democracy movement (which has very wide support, including the main churches, Helu 1992:145–146; Campbell 1992:217; Tongan Council of Churches (TCC), pers. comm., 7 February 1997), challenges to the status-quo are being aired more openly and a consciousness for change is emerging (Helu 1992:141).

Similar issues and opposing voices are now common in Samoa, and are freely expressed in the media (Connell & Lea 1995:61–64). The increasing number of generally well attended protest marches to the national *fono* over living conditions are another (*PIM* December 1997:30–31). Meleisea (1997) has recently argued that there is emerging tension between people and *matai*/government, which is leading to endemic cynicism, withdrawal and individualism. *Matai* and government, no longer seen as providing leadership, are being viewed instead as corrupt and parasitic.[15]

There are a few factors in this scenario that should give greater impetus to more coherent and serious government urban responses. Both Samoan and Tongan governments are currently pursuing development strategies (particularly export industrialisation and tourism) that are almost certain to place greater emphasis on urban centres in the future (Connell & Lea

1995:5; Fairbairn 1993: 242–46, 248–49; Government of Western Samoa 1996; World Bank 1995:102), and that will be likely to exacerbate the 'urban bias' in Pacific development that Connell referred to over 15 years ago (Connell 1982:34). For example, the Samoan government has announced intentions to develop export-oriented industries along the lines of Yazaki,[16] and to increase tourist numbers fivefold within 10 years (from 17,700 in 1995 to 77,600 in 2004), to open two new garment industries, and a Pepsi-Cola regional outlet (Government of Western Samoa 1996:10, 15). Yet, in seeking to create globally 'competitive states' and economies with increased emphasis on tourism and manufacturing there are several implications for urban managers to consider. The irony of invoking the 'lowest common denominator' (costs) to attract increased investment is that 'countries that do not have sufficient levels of urban infrastructure and services, as well as good urban management, are being sidelined by the economic changes and globalisation processes under way' (UNCHS 1996:13).

Conclusions

It is not inevitable that Pacific Island urbanisation be unmanageable or that urban problems worsen (Connell 1982:35). However, 'unless urban planning and urban management can take a higher profile on national and local agendas, the outlook for the resolution of pressing urban issues in the Pacific in the short term is not optimistic' (Jones 1995:12). Continuing urban growth demands a more effective response in both Tonga and Samoa, particularly in regard to land, shelter and essential services such as water and sanitation (Devas & Rakodi 1996a:28). Presently, urban management is plagued by poor programme coordination and a fragmentation of development activities (Connell & Lea 1995:136; Taule'alo 1993:xvii). This is compounded by official and public attitudes in both countries that disallow the admission of poverty and urban decline.

There is unlikely to be much respite for political leaders in the foreseeable future. Although Samoa and Tonga are often depicted as traditional and even moribund places,[17] there are indications that urban development problems are inciting increased public dissatisfaction and censure, as residents are intensifying demands and asserting their rights as urban citizens. As safety valves such as emigration and traditional controls become less desirable or available, demands on the system are likely to increase. Additionally, both countries appear to be pursuing development

plans that concentrate greater activities in urban areas and on the 'main' island. By ignoring the incongruities readily apparent in their urban development, governments risk an uncertain and unstable urban future, with significant, and unforeseeable, political implications.

It is often suggested that the establishment of urban municipal governments based on imported principles would provide more effective urban management and the solution to urban malaise. Yet they are not a panacea elsewhere in the Third World or beyond. In the case of Vanuatu, municipal authorities have not managed to avoid the political difficulties apparent in Polynesian towns as outlined here. In fact, current social and political systems 'may have more popular support, and be more accessible to more people than a potentially fairer but alien system' (Batley 1996:184). As Batley (1996:180) has noted, it is therefore essential to support 'positive tendencies' that will facilitate and advance increased 'equity, flexibility and efficiency' in the context of urban management and governance in ways that increase participation in decision making over urban issues that affect their lives. Yet, and herein lies a conundrum, traditional systems (in the context of this discussion) *may* serve to strengthen rather than oppose centrism and *may* act to stifle civil society and the accountability of the state as much as counteract these effects. Effective urban management in Apia will only eventuate from a formal resolution of the tensions between state centralisation and social decentralisation models. In Tonga, similar progress in urban management is largely contingent upon consensus over the future of the monarchy and issues of state accountability and performance. 'Successful' (solutions to) present and future urban problems are thereby bound into the politics of development in both states. At present, increasingly modern demands are stressing the ability of traditional structures and communication channels to cope. In the short term, at least, it is likely that there will be increased discord deriving from decisions regarding how the human and ecological burdens of urban 'development' are to be shared out. The immediate future for urban citizens appears to be one more of conflict than of choice. Though effectively managing and resolving urban issues implies change in wider political and social relations (the consequences of which may be far reaching), both countries will need to put into place more responsive systems and institutions to deal with the urban citizen, who, after all, will come to dominate their nations in the century to come.

Notes

An earlier partial version of this paper was presented at the VIII Pacific Science Inter-Congress 'Islands in the Pacific Century', Suva 13–19 July 1997. This article has also benefited from the comments of three anonymous referees, though the usual disclaimer applies.

The article has been informed through several interviews conducted in Samoa and Tonga in January and February of 1997. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the material and quotations and the 'smallness' of Polynesian societies, I have included only the name of the organisation rather than the person interviewed, except where permission was granted.

1 In the context of this discussion I define urban sustainability broadly to include environmental, economic, political and social factors (see Drakakis-Smith 1995, 1996; Storey (forthcoming)).

2 Subsequently, Ward has recently stated with regard to urban studies in the region, that 'the whole issue of urban government and planning, or lack of it, is ripe for study' (Ward 1997:8).

3 Some notable exceptions to this claim include Connell and Curtain (1982), Jones (1995, 1996) and some discussion in Connell and Lea (1993, 1995).

4 The Village *Fono* Act of 1990 grants powers 'to exercise any power or authority in accordance with the customs and usage of that village' (Lawson 1996:156). Essentially, it has meant that the 320-odd villages throughout Samoa are autonomous political and legal units, which may act independently on issues ranging from punishment to land use.

5 Since the 1990 referendum full franchise has been exercised, though only *matai* may stand for elected positions.

6 Though the term is less frequent in common usage now, commoners are referred to as *Me'a vale* ('the ignorant') (Hau'ofa 1994:422).

7 Though Campbell (1994) and James (1997) have argued that neither the pro-democracy 'group' nor their supporters are a coordinated or distinctively ideological movement.

8 The World Bank should not be included in these proposals. In its 1995 report, the Bank demonstrated unease at the establishment of such an institution because of concern over expense and increased bureaucracy. Of note, it claims traditional structures are an effective enough 'safety-net' (see Monsell-Davis 1993 for an alternative view) and traditional systems as sufficient for urban management. This reluctance to establish urban authorities and planning conventions (as evinced by the World Bank 1995) is 'informed' by the 'new convention' in urban management, whereby a deregulated, decentralised, and governance approach prevails. But, as Batley notes, this Western-derived model may have less relevance to contexts such as Samoa and Tonga, which are characterised, not by the equal partnership of civil society and the state, but rather by 'elite dominance, popular exclusion from policy formulation, and political vulnerability of public officials' (1996:180).

9 Under the Constitution an *'api kolo* (town allotment of no more than 0.4 acres) is allocated via the appropriate noble to every Tongan male once he reaches the age of 16 years. He is also entitled to a rural allotment (*'api uta*) of 8.25 acres.

10 Aid has become a driving force for urban development in both countries. While urban development aid has offset many consequences of unproductive economies, it is expensive, tends to focus on large-scale capital intensive projects, and rarely alleviates or addresses many of the factors that created the compulsion to borrow. Aid has also been piecemeal, leading to uneven urban development dependent on both the technologies and expertise of outsiders. A recent World Bank report (1993:38) noted that there were at least six major international donors *and* the Western Samoan government dealing with watershed management and water supply in Apia. This was, rather unsurprisingly, resulting in poor coordination and planning. Still, according to Utoikamanu (1980:432), because attracting aid offsets altering the social status quo while achieving necessary physical development, development planning (and plans) are used in both countries to attract project-led development. However, many urban development issues are more rooted in political and social (rather than technical or financial) affairs, which foreign donors are only too able or willing to ignore.

11 It should be noted that these reports are principally written by foreign 'experts', often with little regard for local expectations and realities.

12 *Matai* may also oppose such delegation of powers for similar reasons. Such reluctance to allow alternative power clusters to emerge is also cited as accounting for the poor support and performance of urban municipal authorities that have emerged in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands (Connell & Lea 1995:75).

13 In one survey of over a dozen Asia–Pacific capitals, Apia recorded the highest per capita daily usage of water, more than double that of Suva, and four times that of Nuku'alofa (World Bank 1995:84).

14 Hau'ofa (1994:421) considers the rural and urban poor and landless population as among 'the strongest supporters of the pro-democracy movement'.

15 Still, there is reluctance to become confrontational. Even one of Samoa's leading NGOs prefers to work in 'traditional ways [and] paying deference to the way things are done' (pers. comm., 28 January 1997).

16 Yazaki is a Japanese-owned wire factory relocated from Australia to Samoa in 1991. Apart from the obvious employment benefits (the factory employs around 2,000, mainly young females) Yazaki's annual income generation for Samoa is estimated to be the equivalent of the country's total agricultural export revenue of 1995–96 (*PIM*, December 1997:37–38).

17 In reviewing an Albert Wendt novel in 1980, a British literary critic for *The Spectator* lauded its appeal on the basis that it was about an 'obsolete society' (cited in Meleisea & Schoeffel 1983:81).

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