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Thy kingdom burn: Hegemony, resistance and securitisation in Tonga

There will be no end to the troubles of states, or of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands.

Plato

Although Tonga and Fiji have very close historical and cultural links (Geraghty, 1994), their political architecture and security dynamics are very different. As we saw in Chapter 4, Fiji's security configuration is complicated by its multicultural make-up, in which ethnicity, religion and culture interplay with sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors in complex ways. This is in contrast to Tonga, a culturally homogenous society, where security has been largely shaped by intracommunal sociopolitical and socioeconomic class cleavages consisting of contending vertically stratified groups; on the one hand, the majority—commoners with subaltern status and privileges; on the other hand, the minority—an hereditary monarch and nobles, who by virtue of their control over land also wield significant political and economic power (Campbell, 2015).

The dissolution of Parliament by King Tupou VI on 24 August 2017 sent shockwaves around the region because it signalled a rather gloomy prospect about the promise of sustainable democracy in the young burgeoning Pacific island state. Although the government of Prime Minister Akilisi

Pohiva, the target of the disolution, returned to power after new elections were called, the King's unilateral intervention in democratic politics has fundamental implications for Tonga's security environment. This is manifested in a contested relationship between the monarch and the interests of commoners, as this chapter attempts to explore. This chapter focuses largely on the deteriorating security situation building up to riots in Nuku'alofa (the capital) on 16 November 2006 and its implications for security dynamics in Tonga, in particular the way they redefined the political culture and democratic process and the implications they have for the future security of the kingdom. The riot was a watershed event in Tonga's modern history, and it is important to see it in the context of the big picture, including the growth of the democracy movement. This involves examining the multilayered relationships between authoritarian monarchical rule, feudalistic restrictions of political rights, depressed socioeconomic conditions, inequality, corruption, cultural patronage, the pro-democracy movement and the demand for reform. The interplay between these forces provided the energy that had built up over the years before the final spark that led to rioting, looting and burning.

Before Tonga became unified under the current Tupou dynasty, in the 1870s, Tonga consisted of warring chiefdoms until Tupou I conquered the country and imposed his rule on it for a long time; however, its internal dynamics and contradictions intensified and the system was bound to give way. The so-called 'stability' that existed was not entirely due to the benevolence of the monarch, who sits at the apex of the cultural and political hierarchy, as suggested by Campbell (2011a), but must be seen in the context of complex factors, including the use of cultural, ideological and political leveraging and hegemony as means of manufacturing consent. For instance, the monarchy derived its legitimacy from the Church, which bestowed on it a 'divine right'. This justificatory ideology is reinforced by collective cultural loyalty; and central to this is the belief that the monarch is the embodiment of sacredness, whose demigod status is part of the cosmological order of things, which dictates profane social life and the secular state. These complex layers of cultural hegemony provided the ideological mysticism that sustained an authoritarian system of rule for some time. The first organised counterhegemonic resistance to the monarchy was by educated individuals who began questioning the privileges of the traditional elites. The critical exposé of these 'organic intellectuals', to use a term coined by Gramsci (1971), inspired generations of Tongans to demand their political as well as their economic rights in an authoritarian and impoverished country.

Rather than being imported from outside, the security situation in Tonga was largely brewed, sustained and controlled from home. The accompanying reactions and counter-reactions were manifestations of the local political dynamics that helped to shape the historical trajectory of the country. Contrary to popular belief, the period between 1875 (when Tonga was unified) and 2006 (when the riot took place) was not one of 'stability' but rather one of effective control and hegemony that kept the population in a state of willing submission under the ideologically pacifying spell of religious and cultural conformity. Over time, this nurtured the conditions for resistance, which needed the right trigger and right circumstances to reach the threshold of action.

This chapter makes the argument that instead of looking at the riot of 16 November 2006 in terms of spontaneous lawlessness (Campbell, 2012), it must be understood in the broader context of transformational social consciousness manifested in resistance against the monarch and the establishment. In 'rethinking' Tonga's security dynamics, it is important to look at the broader 'habitus', to use Bourdieu's term, referring to the interplay between structures and agencies to shape people's thinking, behaviour and responses. This relationship, according to Bourdieu (1984), reproduces power in symbolic but asymmetric fashion, whereby dominant classes impose their values as natural and legitimate. In the case of Tonga, the institution of the monarchy has been able to harness and impose its power through the use of overbearing ideological and institutional mechanisms to shape people's consciousness and responses. However, consent to hegemony, as Gramsci (1971) advises, cannot be total. The pro-democracy movement and the riot in November 2006 showed the limitations of hegemony as attempts by the ruling elites to domesticate consciousness may invoke counterconsciousness.

To understand this counterconsciousness, this chapter, using the postcolonial, securitisation and human security lenses, unpacks the surface impression of stability, which often sheltered deeper structures of inequality, political and ideological hegemony and feudalistic patronage. These are often framed and justified by both religion and dominant cultural discourse as 'divine' and 'natural'. The chapter then examines the counterforces at play, focusing on the people's resistance movement, the riot and, finally, on the implications of the riot for the political culture and future security of the kingdom.

The evolution and contestation of political power

Archaeological evidence suggests that around 3,000 years ago Tonga might have been first settled by Austronesian Lapita people who originated from South-East Asia and who had migrated through the western Pacific over several centuries. Carbon dating suggests that Tongatapu was settled before any of the other islands in the Tongan group (Daly, 2009).

Oral records further suggest that the first Tu'i Tonga (High Chief or King of Tonga), 'Aho'eitu, emerged around 950 AD. He was believed to have originated from the sun god Tangaloa, and he was considered to be sacred. He possessed *mana* (divine right to rule) and was the head of a society based on *tapu* (prohibition, restriction, sacredness). In ancient Tongan cosmology, *mana* was not in the blood but in the head and genitals of chiefs (Van der Grijp, 2014: 23). The *mana*, which possessed both political and religious power, provided the cosmological prism that defined one's place in society and the ideological glue that bound the community together. The residues of this belief have been passed down over the years and still exist today, although the source of *mana* is now the Christian god and the religious conduit is the Free Wesleyan Church, the official Church of the monarch. We will address this point further later, when we consider the ideological means for sustaining the monarchical hegemony in the face of the anti-monarchical struggle by the pro-democracy movement.

According to oral history, there was a continuous dynastic line until European contact, when the written record started. The thirty-ninth and last Tu'i Tonga, Laufilitonga, died in 1865. The second dynasty, the Tui Ha'atakalaua, assumed the temporal authority of the Tu'i Tonga, which meant that the Tu'i Tonga was left only with the sacred role. The third dynasty, Tu'i Kanokupolu, was a temporal line and, by the mid-19th century, had become the most powerful of the three. Through marriages, the three lines converged under the current Tupou dynasty (Spurway, 2015). An important aspect of Tongan culture and lineage that is often overlooked is the interface between gender and rank and the way the convergence of lineages helps to reinforce rather than water down women's rank (Herda, 2008).

The successive reigns of the Tu'i Tonga were often turbulent, and violent deaths occurred. There were also cases of trans-Pacific contact and exchanges with Niue, Samoa, Rotuma, Wallis and Futuna, Rotuma, Fiji, and New Caledonia; and Tikopia, in Solomon Islands, was quite prominent in the 12th century under the Tui Tonga. Under successive Tu'i Tonga, the trilithon at Ha'amonga, used for astronomical purposes, was built, in addition to the *langi*, the terraced tombs at Mu'a, the old capital.

The arrival of the Dutch trading vessel *Eendracht* in 1616 signalled the first European contact and also marked the beginning of external, European-initiated changes to Tongan society. In 1643 Abel Tasman, another Dutch explorer, landed in Tongatapu. But it was really Captain Cook who put Tonga prominently on the then world map by giving it the name 'Friendly Islands' after his visits in 1773, 1774 and 1777. Alessandro Malaspina, a Spanish sailor, visited in 1793 and in 1797. The first London missionaries arrived in 1797, followed in 1822 by the Revd Walter Lawry, a Wesleyan missionary. The missionaries were to have a lasting influence on the social and political landscape of Tonga (Wood, 1938).

In 1831, Taufā'ahau, who also assumed the title of Tu'i Kanokupolu, was baptised with the name Siaso (George) after King George IV of Britain. The reign of Taufā'ahau, who also took the name of Tupou, was characterised by a trail of conquest, which included taking over power in Ha'apai and Va'avau and the defeat of Tu'i Tonga. The unification of Tonga was a result of a power struggle resulting in wars and the usurpation of titles and territories. Siaso brought about significant changes, including the abolition of serfdom in Vava'u in 1835, and the publication of the Vava'u Code in 1838, the first written laws in Tonga and the Pacific generally. With the help of the missionary Shirley Baker (incidentally a male), he declared Tonga a constitutional monarchy in 1875; incorporated the European royal style; provided emancipation for the 'serfs'; instituted land tenure, a code of law and freedom of the press; and weakened the power of chiefs who posed a threat to his position. The so-called 'emancipation' was really a way of transferring the loyalty of people away from their chiefs, thus weakening their legitimate powerbase while strengthening his own hegemony in the process.

Tupou I's tactical manoeuvres saved Tonga from foreign colonial rule. At the end of the 19th century he called a meeting of chiefs of Va'avau, Niufu'ou, Niuatoputapu, Tongatapu, 'Eua and Ha'apai and urged them not to give up Tongan sovereignty to any foreign power but only to God.

Problems began when the British High Commission deported Shirley Baker, a British subject who had become Tonga's premier, and appointed Tuku'alo, a competitor for the royal throne, to the post. Infuriated, Tupou I moved to Ha'apai and ignored the new government under Tuku'aho. In protest at what was seen as British arrogance, a large part of the Tonga population refused to pay tax. Although Tuku'aho was dismissed as premier by the Privy Council in 1893, the unilateral imposition of power by the British, including Tuku'aho's appointment, contributed to diminishing the authority of the King. At the time of his death in 1893, Tupou I's *mana* had declined considerably. Tuku'aho's misfortune was exacerbated after he was accused of introducing a flu pandemic from New Zealand. The population was reduced by 10 per cent as a result of the disease (Rutherford, 1977).

A major irony is that while Tupou I fought to keep European imperial powers out of Tonga, he himself remodelled the Tongan Tu'i institution after the British monarchy. He was named after King George of England, transformed the chiefly position of Tu'i Kanakupolu to a fully fledged European-style monarch, including the formal ceremonies, state institutions, official dress and other symbols. This was fine-tuned over the years by generations of the Tupou dynasty to include their general lifestyle and even accents, to the extent that the institution became more European than Tongan, ironically at a time when some European countries had done away with the archaic institution of a monarchy. It was and still is probably the most ridiculous case of superficial political imitation of Europeans anywhere in the world.

European influence, especially the direct involvement of missionaries in local social and political transformation, also strengthened Tupou I's power through the use of British-style laws and the 1875 constitution to legitimise his rule. The irony was that, while this transformed Tonga into a modern monarchy at a time when Pacific states were still under colonial rule, it also locked Tonga into a historical time warp, a situation that was to haunt the kingdom later. As other Pacific states gained independence and embraced democracy towards the end of the 1900s, the Tongan political system had hardly evolved and remained relatively static until constitutional reforms almost 120 years later. The rigid system served the monarch and nobles well by institutionalising their power as well as providing for their dynastic continuity (Herda, Terrell & Gunson, 1990). To further bolster the power and perpetuity of the elite, children of royalty and nobles were sent overseas, especially to Australia, to study.

Despite there being a number of contenders for the throne, Tupou I, who died aged 96, was succeeded by his great-grandson, Tupou II. The new King immediately faced continuing controversy, including criticism of his womanising ways, choice of wife, abuse of state fund, and poor governance. This led to financial crises in 1895 and 1897, and the government was forced to borrow externally from Deutsche Handels und Plantagen Gesellschaft, a German trading company based in Samoa. The King was very unpopular among Tongans, and there was widespread resentment—perhaps the first recorded mass grievances in the history of modern Tonga. People complained that, although they paid taxes, there was no visible improvement in their lives. However, Tongans, including nobles (who feared losing status and land) were afraid to publicise their views about the King who has been described as a ‘vain and egotistical man’ (Van der Grijp, 2014: 235).

The crisis provided Britain with the option of annexation. Many commoners wanted British rule as a way of removing the scourge of chiefly oppression. On the other hand, the nobles detested any idea of British rule because of the certainty of losing power and land, a situation similar to Fiji under British rule. Amid the internal power struggle, on 18 May 1900, Tonga became a protected state by the Treaty of Friendship with Britain. Despite its protectorate status, Tonga maintained its sovereignty, and a British consul became the representative of Britain from 1901 to 1970 (Bott, 1981).

Europeans lobbied for the removal of the monarch’s power and a reduction in significance to a symbolic institution with a flag but no governing or judicial power. Europeans were frustrated with government policies such as blockages on free trade, curbing of copra exports, difficulty in extension of land leases, ineffectiveness of the police and lack of protection against theft of trade goods. There was also fear among the British that what they saw as the lack of discipline and the rebelliousness of the Tongans might influence Fijians, who also had their share of resistance against British rule, as we saw in Chapter 4.

The British decided that the best way to deal with the unpopular King was to give him an ultimatum: cooperate with the British in reforming the operation of the state or be deported to Fiji. Tupou II opted for the former and carried out a number of important reforms, such as the appointment of locals and Europeans to the civil service. The reforms benefited Tonga

through the building of hospitals, water towers and other public amenities. The King was saved from the humiliation of deportation and instead the Premier, Sateki, and the Minister of Finance, Fatu, were deported to Fiji.

The British bullying tactic manifested a rather odd political arrangement where, despite the fact that Tonga was not a full British colony, British interest still prevailed in various circumstances. To ensure Tongan compliance with British imperial interests, the Treaty of Friendship was renewed in 1905, 1958, 1965 and 1968 in preparation for eventual 'independence' (from its protectorate status) on 4 June 1970 (Rutherford, 1977). This was part of the familiar evolutionary process towards independence in British colonies. Because Fiji was the centre of British imperial rule in the Pacific, political developments in Fiji would also have repercussions in other colonies or protectorates. It was hardly coincidental that Tonga as a protectorate was also granted self-rule in 1970, the same year that Fiji gained independence, although in different months. It needs to be stated here that Tonga was a protectorate of Britain and not a colony like Fiji.

As was to be the case in Fiji, resistance to British rule in Tonga took the form of economic self-empowerment. A copra growers' cooperative called the Ma'a Tonga Kautaha was formed. The idea was that Tongans as producers could produce and market their produce directly rather than going through European intermediaries and traders. Started by a failed British businessman, Alister Cameron, and supported by Vaema, a noble from Houma, the cooperative was an instant success, with 1,300 members on Tongatapu in May 1909 and 2,000 in Ha'apai and Vava'u in July 1909. This was an amazing feat for a population of only 22,000 and with 5,000 adult taxpayers (Hempenstall & Rutherford, 1984). The Ma'a Tonga Kautaha inspired the Viti Kabani, the Fijian version, led by Apolosi Nawai, who was later arrested and exiled by the British to Rotuma, as we saw in Chapter 4. The movement died out around 1914 after a dispute over Cameron's bookkeeping practices, amid hostility towards cooperative endeavours by the Europeans and the British. The British saw the Ma'a Tonga Kautaha as an attempt to undermine European capital, which the imperial system was supposed to protect, as well as a direct threat to British authority itself.

After the collapse of the Ma'a Tonga Kautaha, European-owned companies such as Burns Philp (BP) suddenly made large profits. The BP inspector of companies for Tonga had earlier complained that Tongan

workers were not to be trusted because they refused to make copra when the price was low. Instead they withheld and accumulated their copra, forcing the price up. The company complained that Tongans were only prepared to work for the meagre amount of 10 shillings a day (Hove, Kiste & Lal, 1994: 77). Tongan economic resistance was quite sophisticated and effective, and demonstrated the potential for collective people's action against overwhelming odds, a political virtue that was to be useful in future pro-democracy protests.

Tupou II was succeeded by his 18-year-old daughter Salote Tupou III, who ruled for 48 years from 5 April 1918 to 16 December 1965. Although Salote's early years were quite challenging, her reign inspired great interest in the institution of the monarch as she embarked on ambitious projects to modernise Tonga through improved economic development, health and education, and, at the same time, sought to record and resurrect cultural aspects of Tongan identity, literature and philosophy. She was very closely connected with the people through her village visits, scholarly endeavours such as poetry, helping to mediate differences between churches and her involvement with American soldiers during World War II. Her visit to London for Queen Elizabeth II's coronation exposed Tonga on the global stage. Queen Salote's reign was a 'romantic' yet nostalgic period in Tonga's collective consciousness. The queen was an accomplished composer of songs and poetry (Wood-Ellem, 1999). Her paternalistic political style reinforced Tongan loyalty and strengthened the ideological legitimacy of the monarchy, which had been threatened by opposition to Tupou II's rule.

Queen Salote was succeeded by her son Taufa'au Tupou IV, whom she appointed prime minister during her reign. Under Tupou IV, the Treaty of Friendship and Tonga's protectorate status ended in 1970 in accordance with the arrangements put in place by Queen Salote Tupou III before her death in 1965 (Wood-Ellem, 1999). Following this, Tonga became part of the Commonwealth of Nations in 1970 and a member of the United Nations in 1999. As part of its cost-cutting measures, the British Government closed the British High Commission in Nuku'alofa in March 2006, and all responsibility was shifted to the British High Commission in Fiji.

After Tupou IV's death in September 2006, he was succeeded by Tupou V, who had been minister for foreign affairs and defence for 25 years until 1998. Tupou V, who had lived the life of an unmarried international playboy, was more independent minded and was in a much better position

to open the floodgates of political reform. Barely two months into his new role, even before the official coronation, the riot of November 2006 took place, providing a catalyst for reform. In the middle of the reform, Tupou V passed away on 18 March 2012. The process of reform culminated in a major amendment to the constitution in 2010. Tupou V was succeeded by his younger brother, Crown Prince Tupouto‘a ‘Ulukalala or Tupou VI, a more conservative and less popular figure than his elder brother.

Competing security discourses: Dynastic hegemony versus people’s resistance

Perhaps the two most ideologically incongruent forces in contemporary Tongan political history, whose competing interests defined Tongan political security from the 1970s onwards, were the institution of the monarchy (together with the *nopele*) and the pro-democracy movement. These groups held divergent ideological discourses about Tongan politics and society. One relied on the appeal to cosmological *mana* and divine will for societal consent and legitimacy whereas the other relied on principles of equality and human rights as the basis for political action and social transformation (Herda, Terrell & Gunson, , 1990). The only thing in between was the shared collective identity of being Tongan, but even then there are still very clear distinctions between the cultural worlds of royal and commoner Tongans.

The power differential is reinforced by landownership; constitutionally the monarch literally ‘owns’ all the land, and he or she has the power to distribute it to the nobles or *matapule* (talking chiefs) as part of their hereditary estates. The ordinary people have no land of their own but have to rely on the landed gentry to provide them with lots when required.

Mana, divinity and royalty

The end of the Tu‘i Tonga dynasty in the 19th century did not necessarily end the sacred and divine disposition associated with the Tu‘i Tonga’s position. In fact, notions of sacredness and divine origin were reinvented and institutionalised by Tupou I, who merged the three dynasties—Tu‘i Tonga, Tu‘i Ha’atakalaua and Tu‘i Kanokupolu—under his own Tu‘i Kanokupolu title (Bott, 1981). The mythical ideology of spirituality was

a powerful lever to gain consent, which Tupou I and his descendants used strategically to maintain their unrivalled rule when the use of force—last used by Tupou I as a tool of unification—to ensure submission, was no longer necessary.

The unification process allowed Tupou I to reconstruct Tongan history and cosmology to his and his descendants' advantage. It ensured that the Tupou dynasty could claim not only direct descent along the Tu'i Tonga line but also the heritage of its associated sacredness. Moreover, the role of the sun god, Tangaloa, as the direct guardian of the monarch was supplemented and not totally replaced by the Christian God. Christianity became the new opium that reified the divine origin of the monarch as well as instilled mass consent in Tongans, who saw their culture as part of that divine obligation of submission. This reification process was integrated into the Tongan socialisation process to strengthen people's sense of belonging within the divinely ordained three-tier sociopolitical structure.

Thus the syncretic coexistence of traditional cosmology embodied in *mana* and Christian cosmology manifested in divinity became a powerful ideological force and at the same time a legitimising tool for the monarch. This means that any other social or political grouping or institution, including the state, must remain subservient to this cosmological discourse. For instance, modern state governance was ultimately subject to monarchical endorsement, as Section 41 of the 1875 constitution stated:

The King is the Sovereign of all the Chiefs and all the people.
The person of the King is sacred. He governs the country but his ministers are responsible. All Acts that have passed the Legislative Assembly must bear the King's signature before they become law.
(Kingdom of Tonga, 1875: 13)

The constitutionalisation of the 'sacred' status of the King transcends the human and makes the political status of the monarch irreproachable. In the domain of secular politics, the nobles, who acted as the comprador class for the monarch, elected nine members out of the 33 members of the nobility compared to only nine members elected by the rest of the population. The supremacy of the monarch was endorsed by the constitutionally prescribed oath of councillors and representatives, which states: 'I solemnly swear before God that I will be truly loyal to His Majesty King Taufā'ahau Tupou IV the rightful King of Tonga' (Kingdom of Tonga, 1875: 20). The name had been amended to reflect the current

monarch in power. Nevertheless the oath of allegiance and the emphasis on the claim to 'the rightful King of Tonga' made the Tupou dynasty impermeable to counterclaims and attempts to question its legitimacy.

Land is also a powerful hegemonic and social control mechanism. Section 104 of the 1875 constitution stated that: 'All the land is the property of the King and he may at pleasure grant to the nobles and titular chiefs or *matabules* one or more estates to become their hereditary estates' (Kingdom of Tonga, 1875: 24). The line of control over land from the King to the nobles and eventually the people creates a power hierarchy that gives the nobles and monarch significant control over people's livelihood, identity and sense of loyalty. This system of feudalistic patronage was given divine approval by the Church and remains one of the most powerful sociocultural forces in Tongan society.

Apart from this religious, cultural and cosmological appeal, the powers of the monarch were fully entrenched in the 1875 constitution. It guaranteed perpetual dynastic succession and provided for absolute authority to govern the kingdom. The monarch appointed the prime minister and ministers and had authority over them, and had the power to dismiss as he or she wished. Laws were legislated by Parliament under his or her authority. Also, the monarch had unrestricted power to make treaties with foreign states and to grant hereditary noble titles and estates, and could not be impeached. The constitution itself could not be changed without the monarch's consent (Kingdom of Tonga, 1875). Although the day-to-day running of the kingdom was in the hands of the government, the monarch could intervene at will (Powles, 2007).

One must situate the pro-democracy movement in the context of such a monolithic sociopolitical structure. According to Gramsci, hegemony can never be total because of what he refers to as 'dual consciousness', or the capacity of people to think and act independently of the dominant ideological forces. The inability of the feudal patronage system to evolve and adapt to changing aspirations and expectations of the newly educated and globalised young generation became its own nemesis. Paradoxically, education since Tupou I and his predecessors was meant to breed conformity to Tongan identity as constructed by the Tupou dynasty. By the 1980s, a new breed of critical thinkers was able to look beyond the ideological blinkers and started what came to be known as the pro-democracy movement. Power asymmetry created its own contradictions and conditions for resistance.

Counterhegemony: People's movement

Resistance to feudal patronage and the excesses of the monarch caused rumblings within the Tongan community, but these were largely absorbed by a collective sense of cultural loyalty and, for the more religious, the subconscious fear of committing sin by being anti-monarch. Queen Salote's efforts in creating a Tongan cultural renaissance through education, poetry, and mythologisation and romanticisation of Tongan royal genealogy gave the royal institution a regenerated populist image and provided Tongans with a resurgence of cultural euphoria and belief in the benevolence of the monarchy. However, the era of romanticism quickly faded under Tupou IV, who, unlike his poetic mother, Queen Salote, was an enthusiastic economic dreamer who wanted to drive Tonga towards a technocratic path of modernity and development. In the process, he committed one economic blunder after another and thus allowed cocooned grievances to emerge.

Possessed of an overly ambitious entrepreneurial streak, Tupou IV embarked on a modernisation process and vowed to integrate Tonga more deeply into the global economy through education, resource development, an improved health system, transport, tourism and communication, although he was reluctant to carry out political reforms. As part of this plan, Tongans were also encouraged to migrate overseas and send back remittances to relatives to improve their standard of living. These modernisation initiatives had minimal impact because of the misuse of state funds, the unilateral control of investments by royalty in ill-conceived investments and the unequal distribution of resources such as land, wealth and power, which were concentrated largely in the hands of the nobles and monarch. One by one, Tupou IV's entrepreneurial ambitions were thwarted by incompetence and unethical deals and the list of failures became a source of embarrassment for the government: the collapse of Royal Tonga Airlines, sale of Tongan passports, loss of funds in an American insurance scam, and establishment of a ship registry that was misused and generated no income. Under his watch, members of the royal family expanded their business empire to control state assets such as electricity and Tongasat, a company that 'owns' Tonga's satellite slots and is run by Princess Pilolevu, Tupou IV's daughter. In recent years, the *Tonga Herald*, an online paper, was created to defend and promote

the Tongan establishment and the royal family against critics. These were the circumstances that galvanised people's grievances and inspired the clamour for greater democratic reforms.

Although the desire for democratisation of Tonga had been nurtured over the years, debates became public in the 1980s and it was not until the pro-democratic national convention in 1992 that the Tonga Pro-Democracy Movement (TPDM) was officially launched as an organised political movement based on the demand for a more egalitarian political system and a greater share of political power by the people. Some pioneers of the pro-democracy movement are Dr Langi Kavaliku, a prominent scholar; the Revd Dr Siupeli Taliai, a respected educator; the late Revd Dr Sione 'Amanaki Havea, former president of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga; the late Bishop Patelisio Finau,¹ the first Tongan leader of the Catholic Church in Tonga; and the late Professor Futa Helu,² prominent scholar and founder of the Atenisi University. Over the years the younger generation took control of the leadership and future direction of the movement. Samuela 'Akilisi Pohiva, a graduate of the University of the South Pacific and former educator with a very charismatic and outspoken personality, became the public face and symbol of the movement.³ Others, like Dr Feleti Sevele, the former prime minister, and Lopeti Senituli, former director of the Suva-based Pacific Concerns Resources Center, were also among the leading lights.

The name of the TPDM was changed to Tonga Human Rights and Democracy Movement in 1998, in recognition of the need to emphasise the significance of human rights in the movement. The name was changed to the Friendly Islands Human Rights and Democracy Movement

1 A number of Bishop Finau's contemporaries in the Pacific, like the Revd Akuila Yabaki in Fiji, also adhered to the liberation theology movement, which began in Latin America and spread to other developing countries because of its appeal to those seeking social change, especially its focus on the liberation of the oppressed from the powerful classes of society. In my interview with Bishop Finau in 1994, he talked at length about his love for liberation theology and the need for a 'social revolution' in Tonga; that is, significant transformation of the cultural and political structures.

2 Professor Helu described his trip to Italy with his performance group as being 'in the footsteps of Gramsci tour'. Gramsci (1891–1937) is well known to sociologists and political scientists as a major exponent of the theory of 'hegemony', which refers to the way the state and those in power use social, cultural and economic mechanisms to generate consent and domination of the population. Hence the best response is to use 'counterhegemonic' strategies. Gramsci's ideas have influenced generations of revolutionaries and social reformists over the years, including some Pacific activists and scholars. See Gramsci (1971).

3 Mr Pohiva was controversially dismissed from his teaching position by the government, which set his colourful political career in motion.

(FIHRDM) in 2005, when the movement was registered under the Incorporated Societies Act. One of the demands of the government was that the word 'Tonga' should be dropped, because the pro-democracy movement had no right to use it unilaterally but needed the permission of the government.⁴

Like any other new political organisation, there were external as well as internal pressures as the FIHRDM attempted to consolidate its political position amid differences. Jockeying by members for endorsement as candidates for the 2005 election led to internal rifts within the FIHRDM, and some members, such as Professor Helu, deputy chairperson of the organisation, were expelled. The Tonga Democratic Party (TDP), which was formed by the dissident group, became incorporated under the Incorporated Societies Act and emerged as an alternative pro-democracy political grouping. The members of the TDP consisted of strong supporters of the FIHRDM like Father Seluini 'Akau'ola, Teisina Fuko, Semisi Tapueluelu and former minister of police and acting Deputy Prime Minister, William Clive Edwards, whose pro-democracy credentials have often been questioned because of his previous links with the establishment.⁵

Nevertheless, the FIHRDM was the leading political voice in a much larger loose alliance of pro-democracy groups, which included the Friendly Islands Teachers Association, with Finua Tutone as president, the Tonga National Council of Churches, with the Revd Simote Ve'a as its general secretary until the end of 2005, and the Legal Literacy Project Team, with Betty Blake as its coordinator.⁶ The line of demarcation between these organisations and the FIHRDM was blurred, since their

4 Tonga, unlike its neighbours Fiji and Samoa, does not have a history of political movements and political parties. The FIHRDM was probably the first organised political group. The refusal of the government to allow use of the word 'Tonga' in the FIHRDM's name was seen as a way of taking away the legitimacy and national status of the pro-democracy movement.

5 As Minister of Police in the 1990s, Edwards was a strong opponent of the pro-democracy movement. He banned the *Times of Tonga* newspaper, ordered surveillance of pro-democracy meetings and brought civil actions against 'Akilisi Pohiva and other democracy activists for defamation. Pohiva and two *Times of Tonga* journalists, Kalafi Moala and Filokalafi 'Akaula, were found guilty by the Tongan Parliament of contempt of Parliament in 1996 and were jailed for 30 days. However, the three were later awarded US\$26,000 for wrongful imprisonment. As Minister of Police and Prisons, Edwards was responsible for their imprisonment. The turning point for Edwards was when he was sacked as minister by the Prime Minister, Ulukālala Lavaka, in 2004. Edwards then joined the pro-democracy camp.

6 Over the years, the number of Tongan civil society organisations taking up the pro-democracy cause increased. They provided greater diversity in terms issues relating to of trade union rights, women's rights and community health and community development to the broader pro-democracy agenda.

leaders held key positions in both organisations. For instance, the Revd Simote Vea was chairperson and Finau Tutone the deputy secretary of the FIHRDM for a number of years. Also, Professor Helu, while head of Atenisi University, was also deputy chairperson when he was expelled. In an interesting development, during the September 2005 annual general meeting, HRH Prince Tu'ipelehake was appointed patron of FIHRDM.⁷

Although pro-democracy sentiments had a long period of development and consolidation, between the September 2005 civil service strike and the 16 November 2006 riot, the pro-democracy movement developed into a stronger, more proactive and more assertive nationwide network of politicians, civil servants, business people, journalists, churches, lawyers, villagers, schoolchildren, the unemployed and even royalty in the form of Prince Tu'ipalehake. Senituli describes the situation thus:

These new emergent organisations, together with the more established member organisations of the 'pro-democracy movement', and individuals, including the People's Representatives to the Legislative Assembly and individual members of the clergy and of the legal profession, had formed a loose coalition of political actors looking for a cause. It included a number of people who felt personally aggrieved by some government policy or decisions and were intent on seeking revenge. It also included a large group of aspiring politicians who had failed in numerous attempts to win a seat in the Legislative Assembly or had lost seats they once held and saw the opportunity to stake early claims for seats in a reformed Parliament. (Senituli, 2006: 3–4)

The need for a more unified front was apparent, and this led to the formation of the People's Committee for Political Reform (PCPR).

The broad pro-democracy alliance swelled after the 22 July 2005 public servants' strike with the inclusion of the Public Servants Association Interim Committee, Tonga National Business Association (TNBA) and the Oceania Broadcasting Network Television (OBN-TV), whose general manager was Sangster Saulala, a government minister, who was later

⁷ Dubbed the 'prince of the people', Prince Tu'ipelehake's pro-democracy stance gave a moral boost to the pro-democracy movement. He was the first member of the royal family who publicly pronounced his support for political reform in support of the commoners' demands.

suspected as being one of the organisers of the riot. However, it should be noted that because of their professional and personal interests, some key members of these associations were ambivalent about, or even opposed to, alignment with the FIHRDM in case it should undermine their demands for better pay and work conditions.⁸

The involvement of the TNBA was of interest because it comprised entrepreneurs who owned small- to medium-sized businesses and who supported the public service strike. The strikers were members of the Tongan middle class who made up a significant portion of the customer base of these businessmen. Any increase in pay would also have a positive flow-on effect to their businesses. In addition, the TNBA saw the proliferation of foreign businesses, especially those belonging to Chinese, Indians and Europeans, as a threat to their survival in the constricted Tongan market. They were also against Tonga's attempt to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) because of its potential impact in allowing an unrestricted flow of cheap foreign goods into Tonga, which they would find difficult to compete against.⁹ In addition, they were also opposed to the government's anti-corruption policy, because of its clampdown on businesses.¹⁰ Key players in the TNBA included Dr Tu'i Uata, 'Ofa Simiki and Peseti Ma'afu who, with others in the association, were members of either the FIHRDM or TDP.

OBN-TV played a key role in raising public consciousness through direct live coverage of the activities and speeches at Pangai Si'i. Set up in the early 1990s as a Christian station by Christopher Racine, an American businessman, OBN-TV was a strong advocate of the pro-monarchy and anti-democracy Tonga Kotoa Movement but later changed political allegiance as the wave of pro-democracy sentiment became

8 The 2005 strike was the largest in the history of the kingdom. While it was seen by some as part of the pro-democracy mobilisation, the strike had its own rationale and dynamics, which were industrial in nature and independent of the pro-democracy agenda. However, the strikers' demands, which included higher pay, were fully supported by pro-democracy supporters. Many strikers were also members of the movement.

9 Tonga's membership of the WTO affected local business as well as the Tongan economy generally in a profoundly negative way. The TNBA saw the pro-democracy movement as a useful political mechanism through which they could articulate their commercial interests.

10 The government's anti-corruption policies, which targeted the business community, were viewed with cynicism, especially given the number of highly publicised scandals and cases of corruption involving the government and the royal family.

insurmountable.¹¹ In assuming the role of the ‘CNN of Pangai Si’i’, OBN-TV became the media link between Pangai Si’i, which was the centre of political action, and the rest of the country.¹²

The electoral successes of the pro-democracy campaigners were stunning. For instance, the HRDM won seven of the nine people’s seats during the 2002 election. They won the same number of seats in 2005 and proceeded to introduce reform proposals in the Legislative Assembly. These electoral gains posed a direct threat to the establishment. They brought into question the long-held assumption that, in the symbiotic relationship between cultural and political loyalty, the two elements are immutably related. The voting pattern showed that ordinary Tongans were able to express their independent political choice against the political establishment under the patronage of the monarch. While people still revere the monarchy as a cultural institution, they were eager to see changes in the political realm.

The anti-establishment votes could also be seen as a way of directly demystifying the perceived ‘sacredness’ of the Tupou dynasty. One may also say that it was a referendum against the feudal patronage system that gave the nobles uncontested privileges. It affirmed in the minds of the people that they had the power to exercise freedom of choice and to transform society. It was a liberating process that opened up opportunities for rethinking alternatives outside the hegemonic order created through Tupou I’s appropriation of Tu’i Tonga’s *mana*, Queen Salote’s cultural renaissance and Tupou IV’s globalisation strategies.

Maintaining state security: Repression of pro-democracy movement

The autocratic leverage of the monarchy through the mysticism of *mana* and divinity and the political and ideological appeal of the constitutional supremacy of the monarch were not sufficient to contain the chorus

11 The Tonga Kotoa movement was set up as a pro-monarchical organisation in the face of the call for political change by the pro-democracy movement. Nevertheless it supported the ousting of Prince Ulukalala as prime minister in 2005.

12 One of the strengths of the pro-democracy movement is its very effective use of the media. Apart from the *Kele’a*, it also uses other papers like *Matangi Tonga*, an independent and critical medium under the guidance of one of the Pacific’s most experienced journalists, Pesi Fonua, and *Taimi Tonga Media*, under the direction of Kalafi Moala, a well-respected journalist. Radio and TV were also well utilised. OBN-TV became the most important mobilising medium at Pangai Si’i on 16 November 2006.

of pro-democracy voices and their revolutionary fervour. Hence the monarch and the state had to resort to more secular and psychologically coercive means.

As far back as the 1980s, at the time of the Cold War, Pacific states like Fiji and Tonga that felt threatened by potential internal resistance to the status quo (in the form of the Fiji Labour Party and the demand for democracy in Tonga) were attracted to the Asia-Pacific Anti-Communist League (APACL), formed in Taiwan to keep Chinese communism at bay in the Pacific. A leading supporter of the APACL, Tongan nobleman Fusitua, a former speaker of the Tongan Parliament, made the link between the demand for democracy and communism thus: 'Anybody who tries to move the people against the established order, causing chaos, anarchy, that's the first degree of communism' (Crocombe, 2005: 266). In an APACL meeting in Tonga in 1985, the pro-democracy advocates were branded 'communist' conspirators as a way of discrediting them. Bishop Finau was once labelled a 'Marxist' by the King for his support of the pro-democracy movement (Bain, 1993). A favourite strategy, as in Singapore, was the use of defamation against the pro-democracy supporters as a retaliatory and punitive response. A number of selected cases are given below as examples.

In September 1996, Pohiva, Kalafi Moala and Filokalafi 'Akau'ola, *Times of Tonga* editor, publisher and deputy editor, respectively, were imprisoned after being convicted of alleged contempt of the Legislative Assembly following the publication in *Taimi Tonga*, a weekly newspaper, of an impeachment motion against the minister of justice that had not been tabled in the legislature (Robie, 1996). They were released after serving 24 days of a 30-day sentence after the Supreme Court ruled that the assembly, which overwhelmingly consisted of pro-monarchy supporters, breached a number of constitutional provisions in the conviction of the three. This decision was later upheld by the Tonga Court of Appeal.

In early March 1998, the Supreme Court acquitted Pohiva in a libel case brought against him by the government regarding his claims in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* and reprinted in *Kele'a*, in which he called Tupou IV a 'dictator'. In the interview, Pohiva alleged that the King was involved in 'financial legerdemain' in relation to the proceeds from the sales of Tongan passports to foreigners as well as revenues generated by Tongasat, a company run by the King's daughter, Pilolevu, which leased global satellite positions Tonga claimed (*Matangi Tonga*, 1998).

Later in the month, on 30 March 1998, the Magistrate's Court convicted and fined 'Akilisi Pohiva US\$336 or in default ordered six months imprisonment for defamatory remarks about the minister of police published in *Taimi Tonga*. Pohiva was also convicted and fined US\$336 or in default imprisoned for six months for an article published in *Kele'a* (PINA, 1998).

In another case the editor of *Kele'a*, Mateni Tapueluelu, and his wife, Laucala Pohiva, were fined almost T\$70,000 in damages and costs for defamation after publishing a letter to the editor that alleged corruption by a particular minister (Stuff NZ, 2013). The case had ramifications for the 2014 election, as Tapueluelu later lost the seat he won after the supervisor of elections ruled that he did not declare his pending court fine when he submitted his application for candidacy.

It began to dawn on the establishment that the constitution to which they declared allegiance in their oath was paradoxically a liability as far as provisions related to free speech were concerned. To remedy the situation and to erect a firewall against the media onslaught, the government initiated restrictive measures such as the Media Operator's Bill as well as, in 2003, a constitutional amendment to restrict media freedom. The legislation gave the government the power to control coverage of 'cultural' and 'moral' issues, ban publications it deemed offensive and ban foreign ownership of the media. This was a big blow to the pro-democracy movement because of its heavy reliance on the media, including ownership of *Kele'a*, as part of its mobilisation campaign.

The intended legislation provoked thousands of people to take part in a protest march through the streets of Nuku'alofa in October 2003 in the first demonstration of its kind in the kingdom. Oblivious to the people's demands and the international outcry, and despite a hot debate in Parliament, the Media Operator's Bill and the constitutional amendment were passed in 2004, and the new licensing process started in earnest. All the papers that were critical of the excesses and corruption of the monarch and government, including *Taimi 'o Tonga* (*Tongan Times*), *Kele'a* and *Matangi Tonga*, were denied licences, while those granted licences were church-based or pro-government. The constitutionality of the amendment was contested in the Supreme Court, and the chief justice struck out most of the clauses in the amendment. This was just one in a series of judgements in which the Supreme Court declared attempts to control the media unconstitutional.

The paradox was that the monarch's attempt to use the constitution that had served its hegemonic interests for generations to undermine free speech was declared unconstitutional. This was a serious blow to the monarch's claim to sacredness. It also raised fundamental issues about the empowering role of the judiciary as an independent organ of the state on which people could rely to confront the overriding political powers of the monarchical juggernaut.

In the broader context of security, the Supreme Court's decision had two implications. First, it provided people with a sense of sociopolitical security in the face of authoritarianism, and second, the court's legal declaration as a secular institution of the state demystified some of the divine and sacred images associated with the monarch. As the ideological veil lifted, people could then see the nakedness of the monarch's control over state power, which was often hidden under the veil of cultural *mana* and Christian divinity. By resorting to legal and other secular means of control and coercion, the monarchy might have felt that its unquestioned acceptance by the people could no longer be guaranteed and might no longer have felt secure simply by using ideological leverage such as *mana* to cultivate and perpetuate what Marx refers to as 'false consciousness'.

Maintaining security through concessions

The failed attempt to weaken the pro-democracy movement through constitutional reform and passage of the anti-media legislation gave way to the only other available option, cooption and 'taming' of the opposition through reform. In 2004, responding to public demand for reform, Prince Tu'ipelehake suggested that a parliamentary committee be set up to facilitate consultations and discussions on possible constitutional reform. This was approved by Parliament. Although its implementation was resisted by some entrenched interests, it was given renewed vigour by the 2005 civil service strike.

With the support of the monarch, the National Committee for Political Reform (NCPR) was set up with Tu'ipelehake as chair, assisted by Dr Sitiveni Halapua, a prominent Tongan scholar based at the East-West Center in Hawaii. After the untimely death of Tu'ipelehake in the United States, the chair of the NCPR was taken over by Halapua, who, on 31 August 2006, presented the report, written in the Tongan language, to the ailing King Tupou IV. Meanwhile, among the signals that

changes were afoot, two HRDM supporters, Dr Feleti Sevele and Sione Haukinima, were appointed Cabinet ministers. In 2006 Sevele became the first commoner to be appointed prime minister. He succeeded 'Ulukalala Lavaka-Ata, the King's younger son, whose term was rocked by scandal.

The death of Tupou IV in 2006 signalled a new era in political change for Tonga, as his son and successor, King George Tupou V, seemed more attuned to reform. However, before Parliament could enact any reform agenda, the riot took place and fear of more violence became the major catalyst for speedy change. The King promised wide reforms in political representation, the power of the monarch and other areas of state governance. This led to the establishment in 2008 of the Constitutional and Electoral Commission, whose task was to engage in wide consultation with the Tongan people and propose changes to the constitution. The amendments to the constitution were passed by the assembly in April 2010 and enacted five months later.

Some of the significant reforms included changes in parliamentary representation, the appointment of the prime minister and the appointment of Cabinet. Previously, the unicameral Legislative Assembly consisted of the King's nominees in the form of privy councillors and Cabinet ministers, nine representatives of the nobles and six representatives of the people. Under the new changes, the number of seats for the people's representatives increased from nine out of 30 (30 per cent) to 17 out of 26 (65.4 per cent) and the number of seats for the 33 nobles remained at nine. While previously the monarch appointed the prime minister and Cabinet, the new changes gave power to Parliament to elect a prime minister, who then appointed Cabinet. The prime minister may choose up to 12 ministers for Cabinet, including up to four non-elected persons from outside Parliament. While the coopted Cabinet members became part of and responsible to Parliament, they could not, however, take part in parliamentary votes. In a limited way, the executive authority of the monarch shifted to Cabinet, which was accountable to Parliament.

However, there were differences between the government and pro-democracy group in their approaches to reform. The pro-democracy group claimed that '60 per cent of our proposal was in line with Tu'ipelehake's Committee' (Pohiva, 2007: 3). In their original proposal to the assembly on 9 November 2006, the people's representatives argued for six nobles' representatives and 17 people's representatives. On 13 November this was changed to nine seats for nobles and 21 for the

people's representatives. The government's proposal was for 14 people's representatives and 9 nobles' representatives. However, the government wanted to retain the monarch's prerogative of appointing a third of a Cabinet of 14 ministers from the 14 people's representatives and nine nobles' representatives in the assembly or from outside. There were other differences, including views on the electoral system (Senituli, 2006). Some of these differences also helped to fuel the tension that had already built up.

In 2010 the first election under the new electoral system took place. Optimism reigned that at last, and for the first time, Tonga would see an elected commoner-led government. Although Pohiva's party, the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands (DPFI), won 12 out of 17 seats, they could not form a government because the other five independent parliamentarians opted to join the nobles, who had nine seats, to form a 14-seat government. This power dynamic changed after the 2014 election. Although the DPFI won only nine seats (a decrease of three seats) and independents won eight seats (an increase of three), six of the independent parliamentarians joined the DPFI to form the government. The dramatic U-turn by the independents was probably out of fear of further violence if the DPFI did not come to power (Akilisi Pohiva, personal communication). This enabled Pohiva to become prime minister (Ratuva, 2015b). This became the pinnacle of Tonga's political reform—the leader of the pro-democracy movement becoming prime minister of the kingdom.

But how substantive and sustainable was the reform? Despite the reforms, the monarch still reigns supreme politically as head of state with veto powers, and culturally as the highest symbol of Tongan social cosmology. Although King George V provided the much-needed blessing for the reform, the power of the monarch was not actually reduced. Rather, the exercise of those powers was to be limited. This means that, rather than directly making executive decisions, the monarch would seek the advice of the prime minister as well as the law lords. King George V emphasised this when he said in a press release:

Officially, the sovereign's powers remain unchanged. Because we are a monarchy, we have a unity of power as opposed to a separation of power. The difference in future is that I shall not be able to exercise any of my powers at will, but all the sovereign's powers must be exercised solely on the advice of the Prime Minister in most things, and in traditional matters the law lords who advise

exercise of power. In that case, I suppose we are different from other nominal monarchies which retain the trappings of monarchy, but actually govern themselves as republics. (King George V, 2012)

The King still retains veto power as well as the power to dismiss the government. One of the conceptual changes in the constitution in relation to 'King's powers' was the deletion of the word 'governs' and substitution of the word 'reigns' (Government of Tonga, 2010a). This is to shift the emphasis from an authoritarian to a ceremonial image. However, questions are still being asked as to whether the reform of the monarch's role is substantively genuine or merely symbolic.

The reformist King George Tupou V died in March 2012. He was succeeded by his brother Crown Prince Tupouto'a Lavaka, who was sworn in as King Tupou VI. The new King is considered less amenable to reform, and questions are already being asked as to whether his reactionary political demeanour might provoke future upheavals.

The riot and ensuing debates

The build-up towards the riots followed a series of developments in a tense and high-pressure atmosphere. The long-awaited report of the National Committee on Political Reform (NCPR) was presented to the Legislative Assembly in October 2006, together with two other reports, one from Cabinet and the other from the People's Committee for Political Reform (PCPR), which was submitted by the people's representatives. After some deliberation, the Legislative Assembly adopted the report and recommendations of the NCPR 'in principle' and, following this, the government proposed that a tripartite committee, consisting of equal numbers of representatives from Cabinet, the people's representatives and the noble's representatives, be formed to try to arrive at a consensus regarding a model that would combine all three reports (Senituli, 2017).

This suggestion for a tripartite committee was opposed by the people's representatives, who insisted that the Legislative Assembly conduct a vote on the PCPR report and recommendations. Further action on the issue was to proceed during the scheduled 6 November 2006 session but, due to concerns about the security of members of the assembly, the speaker decided to adjourn the house for the year. This deference was the last trigger that sparked the riots.

The pro-democracy supporters who had camped at Pangai Si'i Park in central Nuku'alofa for days marched to the Legislative Assembly and threw coconuts at the building. The crowd later scattered and became uncontrollable as people ran amok around the capital, burning, looting, tipping over cars and throwing rocks and other objects.

The riot started around 3.30pm. The destruction of properties was not indiscriminate but well targeted. The businesses destroyed belonged to the government, prime minister, royalty and foreign entrepreneurs, mostly Europeans, Chinese and Indian. As we have seen earlier, the pro-democracy grievances were linked to political rights and economic exploitation. By and large, these were reflected in the choice of targets for smashing, burning and looting. There was 'collateral' damage to other properties as the rioters went out of control.

In subsequent Court of Appeal cases, a number of individuals were singled out as potential ring leaders. One of them was Isileli Pulu, a pro-democracy leader, who was heard by witnesses yelling out: 'Proceed to plan number four' when the government-owned Leiola Duty Free store was being vandalised. He reportedly thanked the rioters saying, 'Thank you, thank you, we have accomplished what we wanted' (Court of Appeal, 2009b: 9). A video tape of the riot shows Pulu in the midst of the destruction directing people in the manner of a 'field commander' (Matavesi, 2006).¹³

The same film showed that the rioters seemed to be aware of which shops to attack and which ones to miss. Those that were targeted were stoned and plundered. The 'onlookers' seemed to be aware also of the 'appropriate targets'. Another film on YouTube showed a woman yelling to the camera, 'We are free', perhaps referring to her newfound political status, real or imagined, symbolised by the free-for-all destruction, as she, together with other bystanders, cheered on the rioters.

Unemployed youths, some of whom were sent home for 'cultural education' from overseas, notably the United States, took advantage of the opportunity to vent their frustrations by joining the fracas. The destruction of businesses by ordinary protesters was a classic example of how political protests could create conditions for the development of multiple expressions of grievances. In the broader context of their

13 A Fijian sports administrator filmed the build-up to the riots and the riots themselves, and this video was used as a significant source of evidence during the trial.

demand for equality and reform, people singled out businesses belonging to the monarch as evidence of greed and corruption that contributed to inequality. In the same way, Chinese were seen as contributing to the ordinary Tongan's lack of socioeconomic progress through control of retail and merchandise trading. As we have seen elsewhere, socioeconomic grievances readily transform into ethnopolitical grievances and ethnic scapegoating when the circumstances are favourable (Ratuva, 2013).

About 80 per cent of the central business district (CBD) was destroyed, and about 10 people, mostly looters, died in the fire. Footage of the riot taken by a Tonga-based Fijian sports administrator showed a number of interesting scenarios. It appeared that the riot was pre-planned. Not only were particular shops targeted but also certain individuals were seen organising rioters. Many bystanders also joined in and helped themselves in the looting spree. There were a lot of opportunistic activities by small groups of looters targeting alcohol, which contributed to more drunkenness and fuelled the free-for-all destruction.

The looting and the burning were symbolic political acts. In my field interviews in Tonga, several views were suggested. Some said that the riots provided protesters with an opportunity to express their repugnance at a system they saw as being unfair and exploitative. Some saw the riots as a cleansing act for Tonga, to clear out the dirt-filled past and restart with a new future and identity. Some also saw the incident as a moment of empowerment when, in a hitherto unthinkable way, the people finally 'took control' of the country's capital, albeit in an extralegal way.

State security responses

In the beginning, the police and His Majesty's Armed Forces (HMAF) were caught off guard by the spontaneous eruption of violence. Later, as things began to calm down, they regained control and cordoned off the CBD, ensuring that no one entered the 'crime scene'. The day after, a state of emergency was declared, and only fire-fighters, police, utility workers and those involved in essential services were allowed inside a defined perimeter. Residents within the perimeter had to undergo searches. The emergency laws were wide-ranging, including prohibiting the gathering of more than five people within the area. Security forces were given the right to stop and search people without a warrant (Radio New Zealand, 2006b).

Fearing further escalation, the government's major response on 17 November was to promise prompt democratic reforms, including the guarantee that elections that would ensure the dominance of people's representation would be held in 2008. Meanwhile, the Chinese embassy started evacuating Chinese nationals who were victims of the riot on a chartered plane. There were also chartered flights for people of other nationalities who wanted to leave Tonga.

The post-riot security situation in Tonga was still unpredictable and potentially volatile, and the government sought help from Australia and New Zealand, under the provisions of the Biketawa Declaration. The two countries obliged by providing 110 soldiers and 44 police officers to act as peace-keepers. There was a clear division of labour for the Australian and New Zealand security personnel. The Australians were directly involved in patrolling the streets to assist the Tongan police while the New Zealand soldiers were deployed to look after airport security and the New Zealand police were in charge of the New Zealand High Commission's security. The involvement of security forces from Australia and New Zealand raised a number of questions. Pohiva himself criticised the involvement of foreign troops, stating that it was further proof of the ineffectiveness of the government and its security apparatus under Sevele, which failed to heed the warning signs of the people's anger and did not intervene in time to stop the riots (ABC, 2006).

On 19 November, the restrictions surrounding the CBD were relaxed and access was granted for the Sunday church service, but only on foot. Meanwhile, police investigations were under way, and some looted goods were returned. Part of the investigation was to examine the call logs at the telecommunication centre, hoping to find some clues as to who was involved in organising the riot. By 22 November, police had arrested about 26 people. At last it appeared that the security forces were in control and the security of the country was being normalised. Some shops and commercial centres were open in town as well as in the suburbs.

In early December the Australian and New Zealand forces began withdrawing, and the local security forces took firm control of the situation. The police had by then made about 571 arrests, some in controversial circumstances. There were allegations of police brutality associated with the investigation, codenamed 'Operation Kaliloa'. Pro-democracy MP

and former police minister Clive Edwards alleged that police brutality was widespread, with an estimated 300 people, including himself, being brutalised. He was quoted as saying:

We are trying to get the medical certificates and photographs of these and we are hoping to be processing and publishing them, because instead of having a state of trying to restore peace and order, the soldiers are causing problems [for] the people, and attacking people. It's very bad over here at the moment. (Radio New Zealand, 2006a)

Under the state of emergency law, a number of high-profile individuals were arrested and charged with inciting violence. These included Edwards and Pohiva. The state of emergency was renewed several times. In January 2008, one year and four months after the state of emergency was first declared, a Proclamation of Public Order was once again declared on the grounds that 'there exists a state of danger' in Nuku'alofa. The proclamation further stated that central Nuku'alofa would be 'controlled and maintained by the Tonga Police Force and Tonga Defence Force for the sole purpose of maintaining public order for all people of the country' (Fonua, 2008: 1). This drew heavy criticism from the pro-democracy leaders, who saw no need for it because of a lack of threat to security. The state of emergency was finally lifted in January 2011 after the 2010 election, which saw Siale Tu'ivakano, a *nopele*, become prime minister.

Most of the post-riot cases were tried in the Court of Appeal. The court quashed a number of cases, such as the charges of uttering seditious comments and inciting violence, against five leading pro-democracy campaigners, 'Akilisi Pohiva, Isileli Pulu, William Clive Edwards, 'Uliti Uata and Lepolo Taunisila. It stated that 'it would be impossible for a reasonable jury to conclude that the appellants were uttering threats rather than legitimate warnings'; however, it also suggested that the warnings pertained to 'what would inevitably happen if no heed were taken of the people's will' (Court of Appeal, 2009a: 21). The term 'inevitably' is significant because it is an endorsement of the fact that violence was unavoidable in the circumstances if the political demands were not met. The 'people's will' in this case refers to what the people at Pangai Si'i wanted, which was the proposal for 30 parliamentary seats, consisting of 21 representatives for the people and nine for the nobles. The inability of the government to promptly agree to this spawned what Pohiva referred to as the 'people's upheaval'. The judgement quoted Pohiva saying that: 'The people are waiting if it's a yes or no ... the rule of law is a fraud ...

The law is in the hands of the people' (Court of Appeal, 2009a: 15). Although this might not have been an 'order' to carry out the riot, it was a direct endorsement and pre-empting of the riot.

Thus the judgement acknowledged that while there was no prima facie evidence of the pro-democracy leaders uttering seditious comments or inciting people to riot, they did acknowledge that the leaders were aware of the potentially explosive situation if their political demands were not met. It was probably a case of not directly ordering an 'attack' but indirectly prodding and encouraging until the threshold of patience was reached.

The court cases reduced the tension and anxiety considerably as people realised that the rule of law had once again taken charge of the once chaotic situation, although the security threat had not totally disappeared. The riot was no doubt the climax of decades of seismic relationships between the contesting classes and the accumulating grievances. The build-up of tension, anger, anxiety and impatience for change was going to erupt at any moment when the circumstances were favourable and the right triggers were in place. The delay by the Legislative Assembly in passing the PCPR's recommendation for reform was the last straw.

All the King's men: The role of His Majesty's Armed Forces

Where does HMAF fit into all these? Perhaps a brief discussion of the emergency powers of the military would throw more light on the state's responses.

Despite the growing political tension and demands for greater democracy, HMAF (known as the Tongan Defence Force until 2013) was not deployed locally in the 1980s and 1990s during the formative years of the pro-democracy movement, although it might have been involved in secret surveillance operations and might have also developed strategies to protect the monarch in times of emergency. It was only during the riot in November 2006 that it was actively used and, even then, because of the time taken for the decision-making process for deployment to be reached (as we shall later discuss), there were delays and it was powerless to do anything during the actual period of riot and burning.

Although Tongan soldiers served in World War I as members of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, it was not until 1939, at the beginning of World War II, that the then Tongan Defence Force (TDF) came into existence. Tongan soldiers, trained by the New Zealand military, saw active service in Solomon Islands in 1943 at a time when American and New Zealand troops were also stationed on Tongatapu. The TDF was disbanded after the war and was reactivated in 1946, remaining for a long time a ceremonial military for the monarch.

Constitutionally, the King is the commander-in-chief of HMAF. That position gives him total authority over the security mechanism of the state. HMAF has been virtually an extension of the monarchy by acting as its ceremonial and coercive arm. Both Tupou V and Tupou VI, the current King, had military training, the former at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the UK and the latter at the US Naval War College. Their military training was symbolic of the close integration of the monarch, the state and the military. Tupou VI started as a naval officer in 1982, and rose to the rank of lieutenant commander in 1987. He commanded the naval vessel *Pangai* from 1990 to 1995 and later became military commander. During his term as commander, Tongan forces participated in the regional peace-keeping mission in Bougainville. He completed his military career in 1998 and was appointed minister for defence and minister for foreign affairs. He was later appointed prime minister on 3 January 2000 until his sudden resignation on 11 February 2006 amid increasing pro-democracy protests.

Tongan soldiers were deployed as part of the regional peace-keeping force under the Regional Mission Assistance Mission (RAMSI) in Solomon Islands from 2004 to 2005. Tongan troops also joined the 'coalition of the willing' in Iraq from 2004 to 2008. They were also deployed in Afghanistan under a Royal Air Force regiment from February 2011 to April 2014.

The name His Majesty's Armed Forces was conferred in September 2013, a politically symbolic move that subtly, yet clearly signalled where the control and loyalty of the armed forces must lie. This was ironic in a time of reform and the loosening of certain powers of the monarch in the affairs of the state. On the other hand, it might have been a deliberate act to consolidate the military's accountability to the monarch at a time when the latter's power was being threatened by greater democracy represented by an elected government. It appears that, more and more, as Tonga's

political dynamics unfold in an uncertain direction, the monarchy is eager to protect its institutional interests and ultimately its perpetuity through reliance on HMAF. The new name signalled in an unambiguous way the close security alliance between the monarch and the military.

With a total of about 450 personnel, HMAF, whose official mission is to 'defend the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Tonga', consists of three operational command components and two support elements (logistics and training groups). It is partially supported by Australia, the United States, China, the United Kingdom, India and New Zealand through defence cooperation agreements. This security cooperation was activated after the Nuku'alofa riot and resulted in the deployment of New Zealand and Australian troops. The three major components, organised in a unified command system, are the regular force, the territorial force and the active reserve, and the three major units of the regular force are the land force, Her majesty's Defence Force (HMDF) and the navy.

The governance and command structure of the force consists of a number of components, including HMAF Headquarters, Joint Force Headquarters, Territorial Forces, Land Force, Tonga Royal Guards, Tongan Navy, Royal Tongan Marines, Air Wing, Training Wing and Support Unit. In recent years, the HMAF has forged links with relevant international defence organisations for training and operations purposes. These include the Pacific Armies Management Seminar, Pacific Area Senior Officers Logistics Seminar, Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), International Hydrographic Organisation, South Pacific Hydrographic Commission, NATO Codification and the United Nations. These engagements and alliances have helped to expand and deepen Tonga's security capability, both regionally and internally.

The Tonga Defence Service Act 1992 (Section 5 [1]) defines the roles of the HMAF as:

The defence of the Kingdom; the aid of the civil authorities in the maintenance of order in the Kingdom; the support of the civil authorities; and, those other functions and duties that His Majesty may from time to time determine.

Clearly there is provision for the military to act as an internal security mechanism in the 'maintenance of order'. In fact Subsections 2 and 3 endorse the use of force, which might even lead to death, if it is necessary in the circumstances, under 'lawful orders', as long as such an

order complies with international law (Government of Tonga, 1992). Furthermore, the Public Order Preservation Act 1988 (POP; Government of Tonga, 1988b), enacted four years earlier, provides the legal scenario for intervention of the military in times of emergencies. There is an administrative and political process to be followed in the declaration of a 'state of danger to public order', starting with the determination by the prime minister through the advice of the minister of police or minister responsible for internal security whether, given the state of security, an emergency needs to be declared. This declaration is then submitted to the Privy Council, which will then make the final decision before it is gazetted and takes effect.

Sections 5–18 of the POP give wide-ranging powers to the police and HMAF, ranging from setting up roadblocks to arrest and use of lethal force. This is supplemented by the Emergency Powers Act 1959, which provides the King with emergency powers to make regulations:

Subject to the provisions of this Act, His Majesty in Council may in an emergency make such Regulations as appear to him to be necessary or expedient for securing the public safety, the defence of the Kingdom, the maintenance of public order and for the maintaining of supplies and services essential to the life of the community. (Government of Tonga, 1988a: 5)

The emergency powers of the military and police were used to arrest suspected rioters and, by 17 January 2007, two months after the riots, 678 people, ranging from nine to 70 years old and including 54 women, had been arrested and charged with offences relating to the violence (Senituli, 2017). There were altogether 320 related prosecutions, accompanied by allegations of widespread brutality by the security forces. The state of emergency was renewed every 30 days, until it was eventually lifted in 2011.

One of the dilemmas of the HMAF is that, although, as an institution, it is controlled by the monarch, the individual soldiers of the rank and file are still closely linked to the community as members of the *kainga*. They are often torn between, on one hand, their professional loyalty to the Crown and, on the other, their obligation to their families and communities. Sometimes their own families and local communities might be supporters of the pro-democracy movement. To be caught in a situation where a soldier's sense of commitment is being pulled by opposing forces can be a psychologically intimidating and unsettling experience. Hence

the strongest weapon that the HMAF has is not so much its praetorian militaristic strategy but its community engagement role as community peace-keepers. This is despite allegations of brutality by soldiers, which were denied by the military (Radio New Zealand, 2006c).

Competing narratives of security

The smoke had hardly cleared when the debate as to who was responsible for the violence started in earnest. There was a clear division of competing narratives between those who were part of the government and those who were not, with each group accusing the other of being responsible.

Writing in 2005, Lopeti Senituli, the then prime minister's political adviser, said: 'Political transitions are frequently occasions for violence; Tonga, however, has so far managed change and conflict with a notable lack of violence' (Senituli, 2005: 1). However, after the riot of 16 November 2006, he forthrightly declared that an 'attempted coup' had taken place (Senituli, 2006: 1). On the other hand, Pohiva, the leading people's representative in Parliament, referred to the same incident as a 'people's upheaval' (Pohiva, 2007: 1). The language used by the two sides diverged considerably and represented their different positions in the political divide.

From his vantage point, Senituli, a former secretary of the pro-democracy movement who later joined the government as adviser to the prime minister, accused the pro-democracy supporters of attempting to overthrow the government, Fiji-style. He stated that the members of the pro-democracy PCPR must bear the full responsibility for the violence and deaths of 16 November and added that:

The People's Representatives (and the PCPR's) plan was to call for a ballot anyway, which they knew they would lose, which would then provide the people in Pangai Si'i with the excuse to storm the Legislative Assembly and inflict injury, if not death, on the Prime Minister and the Cabinet ministers, which would then be the justification for their Petition to His Majesty on the day after, to appoint a new Prime Minister and Cabinet. (I accidentally witnessed part of the preparation of this Petition on Wednesday, 15 November by 'Akilisi Pohiva, 'Ulitu Uata and Lepolo Taunisila at the Offices of the Legislative Assembly.) (Senituli, 2006: 20)

This was disputed by Akilisi Pohiva, who argued that:

It was rather a people's upheaval caused and consistently activated by suppressive and dictatorial measures and continuous refusal of government to listen and respond to people's grievances over a long period of time. The exercise of suppressive methods and delay tactics to avoid the vote on the people representatives' proposals in the last session of Parliament for the year sparked people's anger and discontent. (Pohiva, 2007: 1)

For Pohiva, the collective angry mood was beyond his control. Whether or not the PCPR leaders gave direct 'orders' to demonstrators to 'attack' is not clear, although Pohiva himself admitted that he was 'in front of an angry mob that surrounded the Prime Minister's office to stop them from attacking him and from invading the Cabinet room where the Prime Minister, and a few others, including the speaker of the House, remained' (Pohiva, 2007: 1). An eyewitness and editor of *Kele'a*, the pro-democracy movement newspaper, Mateni Tapueluelu (Pohiva's son-in-law, now a government minister), affirmed that rioters 'were pro-democracy supporters, and some had been at a rally at which thousands of people demanded that a vote approving democratic reforms take place in the Legislative Assembly before the House rose for the year'. He added that 'they demanded that if the Government did not agree to political reform by 2008, they would do something—nobody knew what they meant' (*New Zealand Herald*, 2006).

In a further response to Senituli's suggestion that what happened was tantamount to a 'coup', as we saw earlier, Pohiva countered that 'the crisis of November 16 was not a *coup d'état*' because, if it was, 'we would all have witnessed a totally different picture of the situation' (Pohiva, 2007: 1). If there was 'a plan to harm the Prime Minister and other Ministers and/or even kill them ... it could have come from a different group of people unknown to our committee' (Pohiva, 2007: 2).

The NCPR was also blamed for undermining the power of the monarch and inciting the riot, but a member of the NCPR, Dr Ana Taufē'ulungaki, defended the committee by arguing that the recommendations of the committee were merely constitutional and not structural:

In essence, there were no changes recommended to the existing political and social structures but there were recommendations for some shifts in the powers of the King and greater participation of the people in political decisions. The reforms would occur at the Constitutional level, not in the political system as such. (Taufe'ulungaki, 2006: 3)

This was disputed by Senituli, who argued:

The changes that the NCPR recommended amounted to the total overhaul of the constitution and of the country's political system and turning a uniquely Tongan, and a uniquely tripartite but unicameral Legislative Assembly into a bipartisan Westminster-type Parliament and in the process disenfranchising His Majesty the King. (Senituli, 2006: 9)

For instance, one of the key recommendations was the increase in the people's representation in the Legislative Assembly from nine to 17, while the number of noble representatives remained at nine, and the King lost his prerogative to select his nine representatives as well as the appointment of the Cabinet (NCPR, 2006).

Dr Taufe'ulungaki also blamed the pro-democracy movement for inciting the protesters during the build-up to 16 November:

The abusive language, charges of corruption, and threats, targeting Government leaders and the Royal Family, continued unabated in these public meetings. Their members also continued to protest and occupy Pangai Si'i, and held panel discussions almost every night on OBNTV, which was more of the same kind of content as their public meetings around Tongatapu. (Taufe'ulungaki, 2006: 6–7)

The then director of the Friendly Islands Human Rights and Democracy Movement, 'Akenete Lauti, a close associate of Pohiva, retorted that they advocated 'non-violence' but blamed the government for the riot (AIMC, 2006). Both sides blamed each other for the violence and, understandably, no one was prepared to take responsibility. From the pro-democracy side, the blame lay squarely with the government for being too slow in responding to the people's wishes, whereas, from the government side, the blame lay with the pro-democracy forces for deliberately instigating the violence to force regime change.

Dr Sitiveni Halapua, the deputy chair and later chair of the NCPR, concurred with Pohiva that the prime minister should shoulder the blame for the crisis. Dr Halapua accused the government of not responding positively to the NCPR's and the people's proposals and instead tried to put forward its own counter proposals (*New Zealand Herald*, 2006).

In response to the spontaneous violence, the prime minister, under immense duress, convened a meeting with the nobles and people's representatives in the hope of making some concessions to help quell public anger. He wrote in a letter:

A meeting was held between the Prime Minister, Nobles and the People's Representatives today the 16th November 2006. They agreed to have the people elect 21 representatives and Nobles to elect 9 representatives commencing in 2008, and the total seats in Parliament will be 30. (Court of Appeal, 2009a: 16)

This agreement had little influence on stopping the wave of political anger, which had spilled onto the streets of Nuku'alofa. Perhaps the disturbances could have been avoided had the agreement been reached earlier.

Given their minority position in Parliament, PCPR deployed the strategy of using people power as political leverage. In his letter to the secretary general of the Pacific Islands Forum in Suva in July 2006 (four months before the riot), Pohiva wrote that the PCPR had devised a strategy of demonstrations and civil disobedience, which they planned to use until the Forum meeting, and added that:

Because the Tonga Government has been ignoring the will of its people for a considerable number of years, it now feels it can no longer ignore nor tolerate the continuation of the present despotic regime therefore would like to warn the Forum Secretariat that the demonstration cannot be guaranteed to be peaceful. (Pohiva, 2006: 1)

The warning to the Forum that 'the demonstration cannot be guaranteed to be peaceful' was a veiled threat to attract the attention of the regional organisation and the region generally to the lack of democracy in Tonga.

In a way, Pohiva claimed victory by the people. Although he did not have the numbers in the Legislative Assembly, his use of people power to pressure the government might have worked:

The only chance lay with people outside Parliament. It was proved true when the Prime Minister was forced by pressure from the angry mob outside the Prime Minister's building to agree to our proposals. Despite that, why did they want the people, our power base, to leave Pangai si'i and allow them, as the majority to win the game inside Parliament by default? We appealed to the people to come to Pangai si'i to show their support to our proposals and to demonstrate that we are the majority outside. And we had the right to do that. And ministers had nothing to worry about if they were willing to listen to the majority. (Pohiva, 2007: 1)

The PCPR's strategy was quite clear. Tongan democracy was unfair and unjust, and provided little potential for the majority of the population to realise political transformation through Parliament. The only viable option they had was the use of extraparliamentary means; that is, as Pohiva argues, the use of 'pressure from the angry mob' to force Parliament 'to agree to our proposals' (Pohiva, 2007: 2).

The contending security narratives shows the wide political divide in a culturally homogenous society. The riot had unleashed the genie of political grievances and social gripes that had been bottled up for decades. One of the positive consequences of the riots, as we have seen in this section, is that it forced the debates to become more rigorous and arrive at a conclusion quite fast. The government's decision to engage in a lengthy process of deliberation to arrive at a consensus was not a very smart strategy in the circumstances. The post-riot debate was a time to reflect on where things went wrong and how the destruction could have been avoided. Whether the crisis constituted a coup or whether it was a 'people's upheaval' or both, the government and pro-democracy forces both played a part in heightening the political tension, which eventually exploded into Tonga's worst case of political violence in the modern era.

Fanning the fire of insecurity: The security symbolism of Si'i Park

Any discussion of the 16 November 2006 event must necessarily include an analysis of the significance of Pangai Si'i Park, which over the years had been used as 'ground zero', as it were, of agitation, mobilisation and activism. For the protesters, the park was strategically located because it was adjacent to the offices of the prime minister and the Ministry of Finance—two important symbols of state power.

In the years leading to the 2006 riot, the park had become a symbol of protest, democracy and free expression in the political life of the kingdom. It was where the 2005 civil service strike was organised and for days became 'home' to strikers and their supporters. Again, in 2006 it was the gathering centre of the pro-democracy supporters throughout the year. It was a hive of festivities, cultural performance and political mobilisation. For days before 16 November, it was where people converged, political banners were hung, political speeches made, prayers dedicated and a feeling of common bonds forged. It was a safe space where people could feel protected by the presence of other fellow pro-democracy supporters. It was also a source of information on what was happening and instructions on what needed to be done. It was where the pro-democracy identity was defined and vision articulated. There was a public appeal by the pro-democracy leaders for people to come to Pangai Si'i Park, which had acted as a kind of people's alternative assembly, outside the parliamentary process. Pohiva stated:

To me it was part of the process of continuous events of the last 15–20 years. My role is to speak on behalf of the people. Government kept telling us that we didn't have the support of the people. So we had to show the government we have the support of the people. We called them. Just to show that we have the support of the people. That's why they said we didn't have the support. So we appeared on TV and appealed to people to come to Pangai Si'i to show support. We had come to a point in Parliament where we were asking people to support us ... during the Parliament's discussions, just to show support. (Fonua, 2006: 1)

Loudspeakers were directed at Parliament to drown out proceedings. On 7 November, for instance, Parliament had to stop its session for the day as a result of abusive language and threats emanating from Pangai Si'i. A parliamentary subcommittee was set up to look into the matter, and it was decided to shift the speakers to the far end of the park.

The fiery speeches leading up to the riot would have nurtured an atmosphere of collective anger and anticipation of collective action, as reported in *Tonga Now*:

During the daily Pangai Sii protest, people were led to believe that everything was going to be held peacefully and in accordance with the law. However, if you analyse the events of the last two weeks—you will find that the rhetoric and abusive words used at Pangai Si'i was increasing on a daily basis and up to a point

where supporters were swearing in the open though this was very disrespectful. Many prominent individuals as well as People's Representatives were on-hand to cheer and urge the speakers on.

Pangai Si'i was where the people's parliamentary representatives generated legitimacy and support and the base from which they consulted the people as they engaged in talks with Parliament and the government. In a speech captured on film on 16 November, before the riot, Mr Pohiva said:

Before we return to Parliament and pass onto the chair and the nobles the things that we want and the things we are waiting for, I want the news media of Tonga today to tell the world the truth. The will of the people is here in Pangai Si'i today. My ministers, we have visited all the villages and have had meetings. How many Misi? Thirty-four meetings. And we have spread this issue to the people of this country ... We are not going to change our minds. We represent 98 per cent of the population.

The collective synergy, group dynamics and political solidarity that the Pangai Si'i environment created was to have a very powerful impact on crowd behaviour during the day. The 'route' of the riot began and ended at Pangai Si'i. A film of the riot showed many who were at Pangai Si'i being involved in the riot and then returning to Pangai Si'i later. The park symbolised resistance, democratisation, transformation and indeed security. It is now part of Tonga's security narrative. Some of the sentiments fermented at Pangai Si'i could be seen around Nuku'aloka in the form of graffiti such as: 'The nu face of youth rebellion', 'Revolutionary not evolutionary', 'Freedomfighter', 'Fight the Power', 'Democracy not Hypocrisy', 'You had it coming' and 'F ... Prime Minister'.

Tongan masculinity and security

Like any other political organisation with an overtly transformative agenda, the pro-democracy movement consisted of diverse individuals and subgroups with different political positions relating to strategies for change. By and large the movement, under the leadership and ideological direction of Pohiva, advocated peaceful reform. However, there was a very small minority who advocated extremist methods in the form of violence. While researching the pro-democracy movement in Tonga, I encountered rumblings about the potential for deliberate use of violence to bring about change. For instance, in 1994, a Tongan scholar (name

withheld), now residing in Australia, talked of the possibility of Tongans who were Vietnam War veterans being mobilised to carry out a Fiji-style coup.¹⁴ During a public lecture on Tongan pro-democracy in 2002, which I chaired at The Australian National University in Canberra, where I worked, the same pro-democracy supporter expressed his desire to see the monarchy totally eradicated. Discussions in some of the international Tongan blogs also raised similar sentiments. The use of military-style violence might have been based on speculation; however, given the experiences of some countries where foreign mercenaries have been used to topple governments, there was reason to take note of its seriousness at the time.

The second violent option was spontaneous public expression of anger. This was always seen as an alternative in the minds of some pro-democracy campaigners, and this was often used as a warning to those resisting change. Speeches by pro-democracy leaders have often included threats of possible violence if demands were not met.

Culturally, Tongans have profound respect for authority and community values, a factor that provides political restraint and mitigates against the potential for violence. However, the threshold for violent action had been lowered considerably by the increasing grievances and anger of the people, the national campaign for democracy through the media, village meetings and international and public campaigns over a period of more than two decades by the pro-democracy movement.

While the pro-democracy leaders did not explicitly preach about violence, the tense environment and the interpretation of speeches in this politically charged atmosphere made violence almost imperative. At the same time, there were also elements of masculinity, which found expression in the politically volatile situation. Within the Tongan framing of masculinity, the image of the warrior (*to'a*) personality features strongly. This is often represented in traditional mythology, songs and male dances (*kailao*). A version of warrior dancing (*sipi tau*) is now being used as a 'pre-war' psyching challenge before an international rugby match. Tongans pride themselves on being natural warriors whose ancestors defeated their Fijian

14 The Fiji coup in 1987 redefined new parameters for extralegal options for political change in the Pacific. It provided inspiration for some Maori activists, and in the 1990s some Tongans I spoke to showed enthusiasm about a similar coup in Tonga. These were based more on speculative thinking rather than serious political strategising.

and Samoan neighbours in fierce battles of the past.¹⁵ This masculine identity is often masked by the Tongans' calm and humorous disposition. However, when threatened, the Tongan spirit of *to'a* can be manifested in the form of threats or sometimes violent behaviour.

This expression of masculinity was very much identifiable in the fiery speeches and challenges to the government by the pro-democracy leaders during village gatherings and at Pangai Si'i. Moreover, the occasional festive environment at Pangai Si'i kept the peace for a certain period before the riot began. This is not to say that the *to'a* spirit caused the riot. Rather, the *to'a* spirit might have provided some psychological boost to the male participants in the riot. Having said this, it is important to note that Tongan culture has a powerful peace-building mechanism where anger and conflict can be easily mitigated through traditional forms of reconciliation. This became obvious after the riot as the reconciliation process started.

Hence, despite the appeal for peaceful orderly demonstrations, pro-democracy leaders were fully aware that beneath the veneer of a Christian and law-abiding friendly citizen was a proud Tongan warrior ready to defend his honour when his human and political rights were trampled on. All that was needed was the right political environment, appropriate political psyching and a trigger, before an explosion took place. Most of those involved in the riots were males, although some females were also seen participating.

Individual criminality or collective political action: Implications for security

It has been argued that the riots of 16 November 2006 in Tonga need to be understood in relation to the criminal behaviour of the individual rioters rather than the political context. Campbell (2012: 20) contends that the 'arson was the work of criminal elements separate from the larger political events going on around them'. This argument was used in a court case involving insurance payout to a number of businesses that were burnt during the riots. How valid is Campbell's position?

15 Some of these past victories are still referred to today as a way of asserting Tongan identity and pride.

Over the years, sociologists studying crowd psychology have shifted the focus of their work from the classical psychological reductionist approach (CPR) to the sociocontextual approach. CPR, first advocated by French sociologist Gustave Le Bon (1895), argued that in a situation of crowd conflict, people must be seen as individualised, irrational and regressive beings acting robotically without any coherent thinking. This approach has been criticised for being too mechanical and simplistic because it reduces rioters to thoughtless packs of potentially destructive beings inspired by primordial (or inborn) and irrational criminal urges. It portrays rioters as unrelated and autonomous individuals driven by self-gratifying instincts (Waddington & King, 2005). These explanations do not stand up to the results of sociological research on human behaviour and crowd psychology over the years.

Sociologists now accept the sociocontextual approach as the most appropriate way to understand the complex nature and dynamics of crowd behaviour and individual responses in a situation of conflict and riot. The importance of the political context, collective social identity and the role of beliefs and ideologies are crucial in shaping crowd behaviour. A leading British and world expert on street riots and crowd behaviour, Professor Steven Reicher, wrote:

Indeed, understanding social identity is the key to understanding crowds and how to deal with them. It is not simply that social identity shapes the values and standards on which we act, it also determines, amongst other things, who can influence us and how, the nature of our goals and priorities, how we view others and interpret their behavior, and, more specifically, the conditions under which we enter into conflict with others. (Reicher et al., 2004: 556)

Reicher developed the now widely used Elaborated Social Identity Model of crowd psychology and conflict as a result of years of careful research into riots in British cities and other parts of the world. This approach is now widely used by police forces around the world as a guide to riot control. The approach concluded that, in the context of British riots, participants shared common social attributes and definitions of themselves and others: (a) they unanimously considered themselves exploited and impoverished by the government and financial institutions, and perceived themselves as victims of regular police discrimination; (b) they suffered constant humiliation due to their dependency on the welfare system; (c) they were resentful of local retailers who were taking advantage of low local rental

costs but whose goods were not affordable to the community; and (d) they felt that they had lost the capacity to exert any control over community matters (Waddington & King, 2005: 496).

The above assessment sounds uncannily similar to the Nuku'alofa situation on 16 November 2006. The Nuku'alofa rioters shared some common immediate goals: (a) a collective desire for reform, (b) a guarantee that reform be visible and real, and (c) that reform be prompt. There were broader shared attributes as well: (a) they collectively saw themselves as exploited, poor, commoner Tongans; (b) they were resentful of nepotism, corruption and business monopolies by royals; (c) they were resentful of government allowing foreign entrepreneurs to operate locally at the cost of Tongan business; (d) given their politically disadvantaged position in a highly rigid feudal-type sociopolitical hierarchy dominated by the privileged few, they felt a sense of alienation, powerlessness and lack of control over their future and the future of their children; and (e) given the lack of meaningful reform after more than 20 years of demands for change, many were beginning to lose patience. These shared attributes provided the potentially explosive cocktail for spontaneous collective action.

Sociologically, the broader and specific contexts of riots have to be understood because human beings do not behave responsively in a vacuum but in a cultural, social or political context.

While the political and cultural contexts of riots differ from society to society, the group dynamics and the way they shape people's behaviour and the outcome of the violence have similar characteristics. The analyses of the situation by eyewitnesses from both sides of the political divide (Senituli and Pohiva for instance), despite disagreement as to who was responsible, agree that collective identification with the political cause of reform spawned the wave of grievances that reached a flashpoint leading to the riot.

Sociologists and social psychologists doing research on crowd psychology will reject in no uncertain terms the assumption that individual criminal intent led to or inspired the Nuku'alofa riot. In fact there is no *prima facie* evidence from research carried out on crowd riots around the world in recent times to suggest this conclusion. While there would be individuals joining in to be part of the crowd, the common goal is the overriding factor. As Reicher (2008) argues, the driving force, the momentum of the

crowd and even the targets of the riots often become part of the collective synergy and identity. While it might appear that certain individuals are acting on their own, they are still part of the group, and their behaviour is shaped by what sociologists refer to as 'group dynamics', defined as the roles, relationships, collective goals, collective identity, collective expectations and behaviour of people in a group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). If you remove the situation of group dynamics, then individuals would not be rioting publicly on their own as they did in Nuku'alofa.

Although the riot itself appeared to be spontaneous, the build-up took years of political resentment and anger. The expressions of political grievances spanning almost two decades of demand for political reform had reached a flashpoint, which inevitably manifested itself in the form of the riot. This was a case of political expression overriding communal and cultural ethos, which revolved around the community and *kainga* (family). The autocratic rule of the monarch, the widely publicised corruption, the violation of human rights and free speech and the increase in poverty and inequality nurtured widespread dissatisfaction over time and changed people's perception of and attitude to authority.

The riot needs to be understood in the context of a number of factors, including the broader political climate of demand for reform over a period of almost two decades; the extensive campaign by the pro-democracy movement in mobilising people's opinions, sentiments and anger through the media and village meetings weeks before 16 November; the way the campaign became intensified as people converged on Panagai Si'i Park days before the riot and on the day of the riot; and the perceived 'delay' in adopting the pro-democracy proposal for constitutional change.

The constitutional reform process had heightened expectations as people realised that it was the only option for political reform available to them. This high expectation, built up by months of country-wide mobilisation of opinion through village meetings, media hype and fiery speeches at Pangai Si'i, provided a politically combustible condition for crowd psychology. Although the law was broken and there were sporadic acts of criminality, the wider mobilising and motivating force was political.

Socioeconomic deprivation: A future security threat?

One of the major threats to the future security of Tonga is growing poverty, inequality and lack of opportunity. Although political reform has always been highlighted as being of the utmost importance, economic reform is equally significant. The monarchy might have relinquished some political power, but its control over wealth and resources such as land will continue to be problematic and might cause even more friction in the future as people's expectations grow rapidly as a result of globalisation in the context of retarded socioeconomic development.

The deprived economic situation of ordinary Tongans fed into the swelling vortex of grievances that fuelled the riot. The inequality between the monarch and the nobles on the one hand and the ordinary people on the other was made worse by the monarchy's monopoly of some major national business operations such as power, airlines and geostationary satellite slots.¹⁶ Many Tongans relied on remittances from their relatives working overseas, but this source of income was badly affected by the global economic crisis in 2008.¹⁷

The GDP per capita for Tonga in 2004–05, the period leading up to the riot, was US\$2,350. Comparatively, around the same period, close neighbour Samoa had a GDP per capita of US\$5,125. The growth rate for Tonga in the 20 years between 1990 and 2010 was 1.6 per cent, compared to Samoa's 3 per cent. The 2009 Tonga Household Income and Expenditure Survey showed that absolute poverty in Tonga increased from 2.8 per cent in 2001 to 3.1 per cent in 2009 and that the proportion of people living below the basic needs poverty line jumped from 16.2 per cent in 2001 to 22.5 per cent of the population in 2009 (Government of Tonga, 2010b). The United Nations Millennium

16 The distinction between property and wealth belonging to the state and those belonging to the royal family personally has not been very clear. This was brought out into the open when the late King tried to sell a property in Auckland. The controversial sale led to a debate between royal ownership and people/state ownership. The lack of clear distinction between the state and the monarch's assets and the behaviour of members of the royal family using state resources and privileges for family business has been a major concern of the pro-democracy advocates.

17 The global crisis led to a reduction in remittances, and Tonga's membership of the WTO undermined local business as well as depriving the government of income worth millions of dollars. These factors have contributed to increased poverty.

Development Goal Report states that more than 3,000 Tongans live in 'absolute poverty' or 'food poverty'—having less than T\$24.12 per person per week (UN, 2010).

There was an increase in the Poverty Gap Index (the average gap between poor people's standard of living and the basic needs poverty line) from 4.4 in 2001 to 6.3 in 2009. Poverty in the outer islands almost doubled from 11.8 per cent of the population in 2001 to 22.9 per cent in 2009. The very low growth in Tonga's economy (0.9 per cent in 2009 and 1.2 per cent in 2010) compares unfavourably with 3.9 per cent in growth for the rest of the Pacific.

The lack of socioeconomic opportunities is a major factor for migration of Tongans to New Zealand, Australia and the United States. Although Tonga had for a number of years achieved a high Human Development Index, it was more an indication of the level of universal access to education and life expectancy supported by subsistence farming and kinship support systems than a measure of disposable income and wealth in the country. Economic production and investment in Tonga has been low, and many people have had to rely on the subsistence economy for sustenance. What kept the economy going was remittances from overseas, but even this source declined over the years as a result of the 2008 global financial crisis. The growing business of a few elites, including members of the royal family and foreigners, made the disparity more obvious, and this was a cause of resentment. The targeted burning of some shops reflected that anger. Political discourse and action became a means by which economic grievances were articulated.

Frustrations emanating from socioeconomic conditions were exacerbated by the visible inequality manifested by the opulent lifestyle of royalty and nobles. Over the years, the increase in the number of European, Chinese and Indian business immigrants has added to the socioeconomic grievances of locals, and this was expressed in a violent way during the riot, when Chinese shops were burnt and looted.¹⁸

18 Anti-foreigner feelings were also aimed at the government for allowing Tonga to be flooded with foreign entrepreneurs with whom local Tongan shopkeepers and businessmen could not compete.

Unfinished revolution? Implications of the riot for Tonga's security

Have reforms in Tonga been sufficient to ensure the sustainability of Tonga's security in the future? Was November 2006 an unfinished revolution that has not completed the process of democratisation? A starting point is to examine more carefully the statement by Tupou V, the reformist monarch, who, as we saw earlier, categorically stated: 'Officially, the sovereign's powers remain unchanged. Because we are a monarchy, we have a unity of power as opposed to a separation of power.' The notion of 'unity of power' is another way of articulating the subservience of all state institutions under the supreme authority of the monarch.

One of the changes is that, instead of exercising his power 'at will', the monarch would rely on the advice of the prime minister or the law lords. Despite this public declaration, the monarch still retains veto powers over bills adopted by the Legislative Assembly. The first test of the new doctrine was in relation to the adoption, by a vote of 10 to eight, of the Arms and Ammunition (Amendment) Bill in October 2012, which aimed to reduce criminal sentences for illicit possession of firearms. Members of the government, including the prime minister, voted for the Bill in support of two government members who had been charged under the law. The Opposition was incensed with what they saw as political nepotism and conflict of interest, and asked the King to veto the decision of the Legislative Assembly. The King agreed and vetoed the Bill. Although ethically it could be argued that the King might have made the right decision in vetoing a highly questionable bill, the broader principle relating to the exercise of veto power by the monarch could be problematic in future.

Although commoners now have 17 representatives in Parliament, this expression of democratic representation is still overshadowed by the uncontested supreme power of the monarch. As demonstrated during the 2010 election, the reform did not guarantee a functional democratic process whereby all members of the Legislative Assembly are elected through popular votes. The 33 nobles are still represented by nine members and 40,736 voters are represented by a mere 17 members. This is a startling contrast of seat-to-voter ratio of 1:2,396 as opposed to 1:4 for the nobles. The reform has simply brought down the people's seat-to-voter ratio from 1:4,526, a reduction of almost 50 per cent.

However, despite the changes in favour of the people's representatives, the nobles still hold the balance of power and, as we saw during the 2010 election, they can leverage their position to return to power and maintain the status quo. The role of the independents is also critical in shifting the balance of power, as we saw in the last two elections. The shift in the centre of political gravity from the nobles after the 2010 election to Pohiva's pro-democracy group after the 2014 election signifies a see-saw tendency, which could become a permanent feature of Tongan politics. If at some point the nobles are able to claw their way back into power and maintain their rule, there might be counter-reaction by the new generation, who would feel that their high expectations and hopes for democratisation had been dashed by the self-serving nobles. This is a long-term security dilemma for Tonga.

At the same time, what holds the pro-democracy group together is the charisma and leadership skills of Pohiva, who is now sickly and frail. When he steps down, the political dynamics will change quickly. Because his son, who has been groomed as his successor, might not have the same charisma, there is bound to be a leadership struggle, and there will no doubt be casualties. This will probably divide the pro-democracy group further and thus make Tongan politics more unstable. Pohiva's rule as prime minister has been a challenge because of lack of policy experience, inability to maintain a coherent stance and pressures from the nobles to undermine his rule. The suspension of Parliament in August 2017 shows that the democratic transformation is far from over.

Another major security issue is the role of the military. The military is directly under the control of the monarch and, as in Thailand, it can be used against an 'unwanted' government. This might sound far-fetched, but any attempt to weaken the real power of the monarch into mere titular authority, such as in Britain, through large-scale reform, could provoke stiff resistance from the nobles and monarch; and the military could be used either to directly suppress any disturbance or even to remove a government bent on neutralising the power of the monarch.

The dilemma for Tonga is that on the one hand the unfinished revolution provides a breathing space and hope, but it also raises expectations that could unfold into a 16 November-type scenario if expectations are not fulfilled. On the other hand, attempts to execute a 'complete' change have the potential to invoke the wrath of the ruling classes, as we have seen in the King's intervention to suspend Parliament on the pretext that the government under Pohiva was trying to undermine the King's power.

Conclusion

Although Tonga was never formally colonised, the British influence was similar to other colonies. The political structure, economic system and class structure are very much reflective of postcolonial realities. The history and sociology of conflict in Tonga might not be as complex as that of Fiji, but it is unique in the sense that it shows a classical intracommunal class tension in a way that has not been seen in the Pacific. Tonga's rigid class structure, consisting of the monarch, nobles and commoners, had been sustained and reproduced through Christianity, the constitution, education, political hegemony, cultural loyalty and social mythology. The contradictions began to unravel as subaltern social class forces began to exert their demands. As commoners attempted to express their grievances as a subaltern group, the establishment was not in a position to accommodate their demands by instituting necessary changes. It was really after George Tupou V came to the throne that reforms began in earnest. The reforms gave the pro-democracy movement an added political thrust and heightened people's expectations of greater things to come. The high expectations and rising tension, coupled with the slow pace of reform, triggered the riot. The violence, although politically driven, also became an opportunity for unemployed, disgruntled young people and poor sections of the community to vent their anger and appropriate goods from burning shops.

The violence, the worst in Tonga's contemporary history, redefined Tonga's historical trajectory in an unprecedented way. It showed how formal state authority and hegemony, which had been the cornerstone of Tongan 'stability', could easily be usurped by collective expressions of power by the people. Resorting to violence is often an unstated option in situations of political contestation and, as in the case of Tonga, it became a latent result of the ongoing power struggle between the people and the establishment. Often, as in the case of Fiji's first coup in 1987, the first case of extralegal violence sometimes opens the floodgate, as extra-violence becomes a recognised option in regime change when legal mechanisms are seen as ineffective. The possibility of further political violence resurfacing in Tonga will depend on the right circumstances and triggers occurring. As poverty and inequality increases and as economic and political reforms stall amid high expectations and repressed grievances, a repetition of 16 November is not impossible.

The role of the Tongan military will increasingly become important in future as the vanguard of Tonga's security. Although it was largely ineffective during the 2006 riot, its symbolic presence and the rearticulation of its role might help to consolidate the state's capacity to respond to national emergencies. The expansion of the military coincided with the rise and expansion of the pro-democracy movement. The fact that the military is directly under the control of the monarch creates an ironic situation akin to Thailand, where the government can be constantly threatened by a military it does not control.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most powerful forces that have kept the peace in Tonga are religion and culture, which in everyday life are inseparably tied together. Tongan communal life is resilient and adaptive and, despite the violence, relationships have normalised as people have moved on as they embrace the future. However, the ghosts of 16 November 2006 have not completely disappeared, and there is constant fear that history might return for another eerie visit. In a country where human security factors like socioeconomic difficulties are prevalent, and where the hegemonic role of the monarch and lords still dominate political power and wealth, this is not a remote possibility.

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