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THE PACIFIC POST

OCEANIA'S VOICE ON CAMPUS

Photo by Kase gz

Editors' Note

This edition of Pacific Post arrives at a moment of quiet significance.

After months of groundwork and collective effort, Pacific Post is finally an official association at Sciences Po. That change is more than administrative. It marks a commitment: to build a lasting platform on campus for Oceania, one that is serious about representation and relevance. It also marks our largest edition yet, both in scale and in ambition.

The Pacific is too often spoken about as a single place, a strategic space, or a distant afterthought. This edition pushes back against that flattening.

The pieces gathered here reflect the region's diversity, tensions, creativity, and resilience. They move across islands, identities, and disciplines: from the contested meanings of Australia Day to Indigenous identity in New Caledonia; from experiments in digital nationhood in Tuvalu to the state of LGBTQ rights in Papua New Guinea; from Tahitian dance and Māori-language metal music to the future of the Pacific amid shifting geopolitical tides.

Taken together, these articles resist easy narratives. They show a region that is politically engaged, culturally vibrant, and deeply aware of the forces shaping its future. They also show how questions of sovereignty, identity, and survival are lived realities, not abstract policy debates.

This edition was made possible by contributors who cared deeply about telling these stories with nuance and respect, and by a team that believed the Pacific deserved more space, more attention, and more seriousness within campus conversations. As Pacific Post steps into this new chapter as an association, our aim remains simple: to amplify Pacific voices, challenge dominant narratives, and create room for conversations that are too often sidelined.

We hope this issue invites you to read slowly, think critically, and engage more deeply with a region that has always mattered, even when the world failed to notice.

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The Pacific Post Team

Swapnarka Arnan, Lenka Lalie, Sarah Leeder, Thomas Landerretche, and Lilou Hardonnière

Any views expressed in the articles are the authors' and do not reflect the beliefs of the Pacific Post as a whole

Tuvalu: The Paradox of Disappearing Nations

By **Margherita Greco**

Source: Tuvalu Foreign Ministry | via Reuters

When tides rise high enough to swallow an entire nation, does that nation cease to exist?

For Tuvalu, a Polynesian nation of nine coral atolls covering just 10 square miles, this is no longer a hypothetical or philosophical question — it has become a threatening reality. Tuvalu is facing what no modern nation has ever had to deal with: the complete disappearance of its territories within 50 to 100 years, due to the rising sea level.

When the Foreign Minister Simon Kofe stood knee-deep in the Pacific Ocean during the COP26 climate summit in November 2021, he was not only performing an effective political gesture: he was highlighting an unprecedented environmental crisis. Two years later, during COP27, he announced a groundbreaking statement that would lead to reconsidering the now-entrenched concept of State. Tuvalu will create a digital version of itself to ensure survival "regardless of what happens in the physical world," Kofe said. This statement brings us to reflect on a pressing matter that philosophers have been debating for centuries, but not international jurists: can a nation exist without territory?

When we think about nations, we instinctively associate them with a territory — the French with France, Italians with Italy, Brazilians with Brazil. The 1933 Montevideo Conference on the Rights and Duties of States translated this instinctive thought into international law, establishing four main criteria for recognizing statehood: a permanent population, a defined territory, a government and the capacity to enter into relations with other states — asserting a definite response to the philosophical debate concerning the necessity of land for a State's recognition.

Yet this framework takes for granted something that climate change is now challenging: the endurance of the land itself.

According to Locke's "Two Treatises of Government," the foundation of political legitimacy remains in property and place. Going further, Max Weber, in "Politics as a Vocation," defines the concept of state as "a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."

So, does the social contract dissolve when the property disappears beneath the sea and the place becomes uninhabitable? And what happens to the state's authority — does it sink as well? If we base our reasoning on these two major philosophers' thesis, Tuvalu does not have a future: without a territory, it cannot exist.

A light of hope comes from Benedict Anderson, who proposes a brighter alternative. He argues, in "Imagined Communities," that nations are imagined political communities united by shared values and narratives, rather than physical areas. Tuvalu's national identity will not sink along with its territory, as it will persist through collective imagination.

However, identity alone is not sufficient to legally recognize a state: even if a nation endures in memory, a state must exist according to international laws, making Anderson's theory weak and legally unenforceable. For instance, the Kurdish people have preserved a strong national identity despite the lack of legal statehood, perfectly illustrating that cultural continuity is not synonymous with political sovereignty.

Laws are made to be changed and to be updated to keep up with the modern, fast-paced, always-evolving society. Internalizing this concept, Tuvalu's government is not surrendering to the evidence and the destiny of its territory. Indeed, it is negotiating a treaty with Australia to allow Tuvaluans to migrate with special status, while holding their Tuvaluan citizenship.

Additionally, Tuvalu argues before the international forum that it should maintain its maritime boundaries and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) even if the islands submerge. This claim generates an unprecedented situation: a state exercising power over ocean space without a habitable territory. This move aligns with Anderson's view, challenging the status quo and current legal framework.

With the idea of Tuvalu's digital nation, a new dilemma arises. The international system, established at Westphalia in 1648, has no precedent for recognizing virtual sovereignty. Every existing treaty, norm and law assumes control over a physical territory — an actual territory in which power and laws can be enforced by authorities. Tuvalu's project poses a greater question, which has never been investigated so far: can sovereignty exist even when it is detached from geography, and connected to the continuity of governance, citizenship and community will?
Tuvalu's voice challenges this paradoxical condition. Its digital nation is the solution to an environmental issue, to which it has contributed only 0.001% of global carbon emissions.

Yet, it is paying the highest price; the vanishing of its territories, among all the other states, many of which have been far more responsible for this unstoppable crisis.

The digital dimension is a demand for recognition, declaring that national identity, governance and rights can transcend geography.

Tuvalu's submergence would embody not only an environmental failure but also a political one — the failure of international laws to accept the digital dimension as a form of national sovereignty, failing to expand its moral imagination faster than the seas are rising. Yet, recognizing digital sovereignty now would set the first step of "cyber international law" that welcomes new technologies to recognize new legal institutions, which from now on will impact the evolution of states and the future history of nations.

Why Anti-Sodomy Laws Persist in Papua New Guinea

By **Angelia Lanna Chams**

Source: UN news

Out of the 69 countries that criminalise same-sex sexual activity, six are located in Oceania. While these six countries vary in how and what they criminalise, the recent enforcement of anti-sodomy laws in Papua New Guinea has raised renewed questions about whether these laws are being meaningfully challenged today. With a maximum punishment of 14 years' imprisonment, Section 210 of the Criminal Code Act (1974) criminalises any person who "sexually penetrates any person against the order of nature", underscoring the deep social stigma surrounding both sodomy and the LGBTQ+ community more broadly. As the state's criminalisation focuses solely on male same-sex relationships, as reflected in Sections 210 and 212 of the Criminal Code Act, this article examines the origins of these laws and considers whether change is likely in the near future.

The Colonial Origins of Anti-Sodomy Laws

The roots of Papua New Guinea's anti-sodomy laws lie largely in British colonialism. In particular, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860 can be identified as a key origin.

Although there were no direct colonial ties between India and Papua New Guinea, the influence of Section 377 spread widely across the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through this provision, the British Empire criminalised sexual acts deemed to be "against the order of nature". While vague, this phrase became embedded in the criminal codes of many colonies as a means of regulating sodomy and homosexual activity more broadly. In this sense, Section 377 reflected the imperial ideology articulated by Rudyard Kipling in "The White Man's Burden"(1899), which framed colonialism as a moral mission to "civilise" colonised societies. Introducing fixed standards of acceptable behaviour served both political and social objectives, reinforcing colonial authority through imposed moral norms.

With its origins in India, these legal principles spread into Oceania through Australia's Queensland Criminal Code of 1899. As another British colony, Australia expanded upon Section 377 by explicitly criminalising consensual male same-sex activity between two individuals. Following the cession of the Colony of Papua to Australia in 1906, Papua New Guinea, as an external Australian territory, adopted similar provisions. These were later codified as Sections 210 and 212 of the Criminal Code Act (1974). When Australia's administration ended and Papua New Guinea gained independence in 1975, the state regained full sovereignty over its legal system, including the option to repeal these provisions. Instead, the decision was made to retain them.

Challenged in the Present Day?

A comparison with Australia is revealing. While Papua New Guinea retained its colonial-era laws, Australia began decriminalising same-sex activity from 1975 onwards. This divergence raises the question of why such laws have remained largely unchallenged in Papua New Guinea. One significant obstacle is the country's religious landscape. According to the 2011 census, approximately 98% of the population identifies as Christian. Although Christianity does not inherently entail anti-LGBTQ+ views, religious beliefs and opposition to same-sex relationships are closely intertwined in Papua New Guinea. This connection is itself a legacy of colonial influence, which reshaped local culture and attitudes toward sexuality. As a result, homosexuality is often framed as sinful and in need of regulation.

The political implications of this dynamic are evident in Prime Minister James Marape's 2023 statement that existing laws are "sufficient to protect the rights of all PNG citizens and residents including those in the LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bi-Sexual Transgender Queer) community". Such statements suggest that, from the government's perspective, legal reform is neither urgent nor culturally necessary, making meaningful change unlikely in the short term.

It could be argued that some progress has been made, given the limited number of known prosecutions, most notably in 2015 and 2022. However, this interpretation is undermined by the persistent social stigma faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, a stigma reinforced by the continued existence of these laws. The 2015 sentencing of Joe Sevese to two years' imprisonment, justified by the court as a means to "deter [him] and others from indulging in this type of behaviour", illustrates how punitive enforcement continues to shape public attitudes. Moreover, the absence of mandatory reporting of court cases suggests that publicly available data may significantly underrepresent the true extent of enforcement and discrimination.

Conclusion

Anti-sodomy laws persist in Papua New Guinea largely because of the enduring influence of colonial-era moral frameworks on the country's culture and belief systems. From their introduction under British and Australian rule to their retention after independence, these laws have remained embedded in social and political life. While international pressure and human rights advocacy may challenge such frameworks from the outside, their deep integration into local cultural and religious norms makes substantial change difficult to achieve in the near future.

Colonization and the Manufacture of Dependence in Australia

By **Thomas Landerretche**

Source: Rawlinna Station/Facebook

With the first British fleets arriving in Terra Australis carrying convicts, the process of colonization and settlement by the British Empire occurred. Despite initial resistance against the colonists, most notably the one led by Aboriginal warrior Pemulwuy, the epidemics, added with the mass killings of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population by the colonists, effectively led to the dismantlement of local indigenous communities and permanently altered their economic and socio-cultural structures, customs, and traditions.

Colonization settled its claws into the Australian continent, bringing with it the pastoral industry. In the 19th century, its exponential expansion drastically changed not only the Australian physical territory but also indigenous traditional land practices. Charles Dunford Rowley explores in his 1972 book The Destruction of Aboriginal Society how cattle "stock occupied the waterholes, drove off the game, ate out the seed-bearing grasses, and generally upset the somewhat precarious balance of nature".

With this upset in Australia's ecosystem, the first nations' populations were unable to continue their traditional agricultural and hunting practices. This loss in first nations practices of sustainable land usage was further exacerbated by the dispossession of the first peoples from the waterholes, which were essential to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander food production systems before colonization.

With the drastic change in Australia's fauna, the indigenous populations were facing starvation, creating the condition of economic dependency. Indeed, hunger was a large factor in attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to pastoral stations and Christian missions. As the first peoples were displaced from their land, which had been used to nourish them, they became dependent on the settlers' institutions, such as pastoral stations and Christian missions, for food. This led to the exploitation of first peoples labor as the effects of settler colonialism erased the indigenous practices around land usage. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were forced to not only adapt to this Eurocentric economic model by joining the colonial slave labor, but also be dependent on it for their survival.

Tragically, colonial exploitation of Australia's natural resources led to a cycle fostering indigenous dependency on the Empire's economic model: through European exploitation of the land's raw materials, there was a loss in traditional agricultural practices, which forced starving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to congregate around Eurocentric economic institutions, which itself alienated them from their traditional economies and practices. This cycle of worsening economic indigenous dependency on extractive Western institutions was facilitated through legal and political frameworks.

Maori Metal and the Sound of Indigenous Resistence

By **Swapnarka Arnan**

Photo by Wendy Collings

Music has always been a place where stories survive. Across cultures, it carries memory, pride, and belonging, especially for communities whose voices are often pushed aside. Originating in industrial towns and developing into a worldwide genre for people who felt marginalized or unheard by society, Metal happens to be my favorite genre, and today I would like to talk about a band that is not only transforming the genre but has turned metal into a living archive of language, history, and resistance.

Alien Weaponry in Aotearoa (New Zealand) has taken that tradition and transformed it through a uniquely Māori perspective, transforming metal into a tool for resistance, revival, memory, and language preservation. The band, consisting of bassist Tūranga Morgan-Edmonds and brothers Lewis and Henry de Jong, is unique not only because of their weight but also because of the words and language they choose to use. Te Reo Māori, a language that was suppressed for decades under colonial education and assimilation policies, is used to write and perform a large portion of their music. That decision feels subtly defiant in an English-dominated global music industry.

Songs like Kai Tangata draws on stories of intertribal conflict and survival during the New Zealand Wars, while songs like Raupatu address the history of land confiscations imposed on Māori communities by the British Crown. These songs don't teach history in the traditional sense. They are cultural transmission acts. They put stories at the center of a modern soundscape that were previously silenced, sanitized, or reduced to footnotes. In the hands of Alien Weaponry, metal becomes amplified oral history.

This is very important for younger Māori audiences. When Indigenous languages are portrayed as ceremonial, academic, or unrelated to contemporary life, language revitalization initiatives frequently fail to connect with young people. That framing is changed by alien weaponry. Te Reo Māori is reframed as strong, current, and vibrant when it is screamed over distorted guitars. It conveys a message that I instinctively understand: Indigenous identity and culture lives on.

That message strikes a chord for someone from North-East India, where Indigenous cultures are also frequently viewed as backward, and many Indigenous languages have become endangered.

What I have always liked the most about Metal is the refusal to be courteous and assimilated, which is similar to the refusal of many Indigenous communities to give up their culture. The genre maintains room for memory, pride, and identity while allowing expression without apology.

The significance of Alien Weaponry is that it goes beyond simply incorporating Indigenous themes into an already-existing genre. They are changing the genre itself. The Māori language, history, and worldview are essential to the meaning of the music and are not merely stylistic elements. This is neither nostalgia nor export-oriented symbolism. It is the loud expression of cultural survival.

Alien Weaponry defies a society that frequently requests that Indigenous voices be softer, quieter, or more palatable. And that rejection feels like acknowledgment to those of us from other Indigenous margins who are listening from a distance.

Décolonisation et citoyenneté inédites en Nouvelle-Calédonie

la question de l'identité Kanak autochtone

By **Marilou Moisset**

Image Credit: Kanaks demonstrating in Paris, 1st May 2024. Photo: Colin Falconer

Wamytan Roch, chef coutumier kanak indépendantiste de la Nouvelle Calédonie affirme souhaiter que l'ensemble du peuple calédonien comprenne son identité comme intrinsèquement océanienne plutôt que française. Conscient de la diversité ethnique présente sur le territoire, il affirme d'autant plus son espoir qu'une croissance démographique de la population autochtone kanak lui permettra de devenir l'ethnie majoritaire du territoire. Ces déclarations s'inscrivent dans le contexte politique particulier auquel la Nouvelle-Calédonie fait face : la question de la citoyenneté y est centrale, et elle représente le principal sujet de tension entre les partis pro et anti-indépendantistes.

Tandis que les critères de citoyenneté agissent habituellement en tant que barrière aux étrangers, ils font ici barrage à des résidents

de la Nouvelle-Calédonie selon le critère qu'ils possèdent la nationalité française. Cette tentative d'exclusion s'explique par le désir des kanaks de mener le pays vers l'indépendance et de demeurer les réels détenteurs de la souveraineté alors qu'ils représentent actuellement moins de la moitié de la population. Dans cette lutte entre les deux grandes factions politiques présentes en Nouvelle-Calédonie plusieurs visions s'affrontent alors: celle d'une citoyenneté calédonienne allant au delà des différents ethniques, de la construction d'un "destin commun" et celle d'une citoyenneté calédonienne-kanak qui permettrait une reconnaissance de l'identité kanak. Il convient de revenir sur l'histoire de l'ancienne colonie pour comprendre la situation présente.

Il n'est point une exagération de dire que le processus de décolonisation dont a fait l'objet la Nouvelle-Calédonie, annexée en 1853 par l'Empire français est pour le moins originale. Long et laborieux, basé autour de la collaboration ainsi qu'incomplet, puisque le pays bien que reconnu entant qu'Etat demeure une province de la République, détonne en contraste avec les autres anciennes colonies françaises telles que l'Algérie ou l'Indochine. Néanmoins, comme pour beaucoup d'autres, le début du chemin vers l'auto-détermination pour le territoire océanien coïncide avec le coup final de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, en 1946, lorsque la Nouvelle-Calédonie devient territoire outremer. Par la suite, plusieurs accords signés entre ce dernier et la métropole font évoluer le statut du territoire d'une manière plus qu'atypique. En 1988, l'Accord de Matignon, dix ans plus tard l'Accord de Nouméa, et enfin en 2025 l'Accord de Bougival. C'est l'accord de 1998 qui marque le premier écart par rapport aux

cheminements habituels de la décolonisation : il prévoit la tenue d'un à trois référendums qui auront pour but de déterminer si la population souhaite accéder à la souveraineté et l'indépendance. Ils sont tenus respectivement en 2018, 2020 et 2021. C'est le "non" qui prévaut à chacun d'entre eux, au grand désarroi des partis indépendantistes, menant à la signature de l'Accord de Bougival le 12 juillet de l'année dernière, faisant définitivement de l'État de la Nouvelle-Calédonie une collectivité de la République.

Selon la charte des Nations unies, la Nouvelle-Calédonie, malgré ces rêves d'indépendance, demeure alors un territoire non autonome administré par la France. Elle ne porte plus le nom de colonie, mais elle n'en demeure pas moins dépendante de la métropole. Le projet de l'accord prévoit de transférer au territoire océanien la compétence en matière de relations internationales (bien que la Nouvelle-Calédonie doive conduire "ses actions diplomatiques dans le respect des engagements internationaux et des intérêts fondamentaux de la France"), mais la France retient les compétences régaliennes telles que la monnaie ou encore la défense. L'historienne Isabelle Merles note : "L'histoire calédonienne reflète les contradictions d'une France qui clame les valeurs d'égalité, de liberté et de fraternité mais qui désire également maintenir son pouvoir colonial". De fait, ce sont ces territoires ultramarins et leurs 320 000 kilomètres carrés de zones économiques exclusives qui élèvent la République de la quarante-cinquième à la troisième place mondiale en termes de territoire maritime. La métropole consent alors à accorder à la Nouvelle-Calédonie un statut sans précédent dans l'histoire constitutionnelle française. L'Accord de Bougival assigne au territoire une situation juridique ne correspondant à aucun des cinq cas prévus par le titre XII de la Constitution. La Nouvelle-Calédonie n'est ni un État fédéré ni un État associé, alors même qu'elle reprend des traits de chaque, devenant alors ce qu'on appelle une collectivité sui generis, c'est-à-dire une entité qui se soustrait au cadre des modèles traditionnels. Cette originalité transparaît dans plusieurs domaines dont celui de la double citoyenneté prévue par l'Accord.

Mais quelles sont les conséquences de cette dernière pour l'identité kanak ? Les descendants de la population autochtone colonisée il y a un peu moins de deux siècles peuvent-ils réellement espérer accéder à la reconnaissance, autant symbolique que politique, au sein de cette nouvelle Nouvelle-Calédonie ?

L'avis du Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste (FLNKS), organisation faîtière pour les partis pro-indépendance, est tranché : l'accord de Bougival ne pourvoit pas d'assurance à la reconnaissance de l'identité kanak. L'accord ne reprend pas le préambule de l'Accord de Nouméa qui établissait un ensemble d'institutions assurant la reconnaissance complète de l'identité et la culture kanak et le terme "kanaky" n'est plus adossé à l'appellation "État de la Nouvelle-Calédonie".

Le FLNKS exprime son inquiétude; il craint que l'identité calédonienne, promue par l'Etat, ne vienne se substituer à l'identité kanak. Les indépendantistes ne se contentent pas d'énoncer l'insuffisance symbolique de la reconnaissance kanak, ils pointent aussi du doigt les limites de sa portée politique. Leur critique la plus véhémente porte sur le dégel du corps électoral. Bien que ce dégel soit inévitable, en vertu du pacte international de 1966 sur les droits civils et politiques de la Cour Européenne, le mouvement indépendantiste anticipe que les populations kanaks feront face à des difficultés de long-terme pour être entendues sur la scène politique.

De fait, l'appartenance au corps électoral comme prévu par l'accord de Bougival correspondra à la détention de la citoyenneté calédonienne. Or, selon les critères d'éligibilité à la citoyenneté prévus par l'accord, pourront être citoyens et donc pourront voter tous les français qui :

- Sont admis à participer à l'action des assemblées de province et du Congrès de la Nouvelle-Calédonie de 2026
- Ont un parent remplissant les conditions d'acquisition de la nationalité calédonienne
- Sont nés en Nouvelle-Calédonie et y résident à la date de la demande d'acquisition de la nationalité depuis au moins 10 ans
- Sont résident en Nouvelle-Calédonie depuis au moins 10 ans
- Sont unis depuis au moins cinq années par le mariage ou un pacte civil de solidarité a une personne ayant la nationalité calédonienne ou résidant en Nouvelle-Calédonie depuis au moins cinq années

Ainsi la proposition de l'accord agrandit l'accès au vote aux européens qui en viennent à former la majorité de l'électorat : selon les Nations Unies, en 2025 le territoire accueille 41.2 pour cent de Maliens dont la plupart sont kanaks. Ils sont alors dans l'incapacité de conquérir une majorité démocratique. Les européens en Nouvelle-Calédonie étant déjà les plus favorisés économiquement et politiquement, les kanaks s'en retrouvent marginalisés du processus vers l'autodétermination.

Il est également important de noter l'exclusion du Sénat Coutumier, l'institution représentant la coutume kanak, des négociations de l'accord de Bougival. Or, la culture kanak structure considérablement le mode de vie des communautés et la grande majorité des autochtones sont de statut civil coutumier. Inclure les sénateurs coutumiers aurait alors permis une meilleure réflexion concernant le rôle que peuvent jouer des institutions coutumières dans la prise de décision publique.

De fait, reconnaître l'identité kanak non seulement symboliquement mais politiquement serait assurer une intégration de structures coutumières dans les politiques publiques, évitant par là la reproduction de politiques occidentales pour une population à presque 50% kanak. Il serait plus inclusif de réfléchir à une élaboration constitutionnelle qui permettrait d'inclure des préoccupations coutumières dans le champ politique et de produire une législation plus métissée reflétant plus fidèlement la diversité ethnique et culturelle en Nouvelle-Calédonie.

Infrastructure-Backed Authoritarianism

How China's BRI Threatens Democracy in the Solomon Islands

By **Kunwoo Kim**

When the Solomon Islands switched diplomatic ties from the Republic of China (Taiwan) to the People's Republic of China in 2019, bulldozers followed close behind. Highways, ports, stadiums, and utilities rose almost overnight, financed under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Yet beneath the surface lies a more troubling construction project, one reshaping the foundations of the islands' polity. Western concerns about the BRI in the Pacific have centered on the potential security implications of a Chinese military presence. Far less examined is how infrastructure-backed patronage has entrenched authoritarian tendencies within the Solomon Islands' governance.

The country offers an unconventional case of democratic backsliding driven not by overt coercion, but by development itself. Due to weak transparency and limited independent oversight, the government has negotiated BRI deals behind closed doors, channeled foreign funding into clientelist networks, and weakened institutional checks and balances. The islands' leadership has increasingly accounted itself to Beijing rather than to its own citizens for political gain.

If left unaddressed, the Solomon Islands could become a cautionary tale for other fragile Pacific democracies, where foreign-backed development risks becoming a tool not for nation-building but for democratic erosion

Political Vulnerabilities of the Solomon Islands

The political characteristics of the Solomon Islands have made the country vulnerable to the effects of BRI infrastructure projects. The Solomon Islands has maintained a parliamentary democracy since 1978, with regular elections and formal respect for civil liberties. In practice, however, institutional oversight remains weak and patronage politics deeply entrenched. A 2017 Transparency International report described the country as "very corrupt," citing weak institutional integrity and widespread clientelism. Political instability has further compounded these vulnerabilities. Governments have frequently changed through votes of no confidence, and no prime minister served consecutive terms until recently. In such an environment, infrastructure projects become political resources used to reward allies and secure voter loyalty.

BRI projects exacerbate this dynamic by bypassing normal budgetary processes. Political elites welcome them because, as one observer put it, "they bring the red flags, not the red tape."

Diplomatic Shift and Infrastructure Politics

Prime Minister Sogavare's decision to sever diplomatic relations with Taiwan and recognize China in September 2019 marked a decisive turning point. The switch was pushed through with minimal public consultation, sidelining debate and fracturing the ruling coalition. Dissent was not tolerated. Planning Minister Rick Hou was dismissed after abstaining from the cabinet vote on the diplomatic shift. Subsequent reporting revealed that Beijing allegedly provided financial inducements to secure political backing, with claims of payments reaching up to US$125,000 per politician. Several MPs publicly stated that both China and Taiwan had offered substantial sums to influence their votes. The process lacked meaningful deliberation, and alleged bribery undermined parliamentary scrutiny over a major foreign policy decision.

Following the diplomatic switch, the Solomon Islands signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China on BRI cooperation, paving the way for major infrastructure projects. These projects were soon instrumentalized to consolidate political power.

The most prominent example was the 2023 Pacific Games, hosted by the Solomon Islands with significant Chinese financial backing. Beijing provided a grant of approximately 1 billion Solomon Islands dollars (US$119 million) for facilities such as the National Stadium. While the government framed the Games as a developmental success, critical issues, including nationwide medical shortages, remained unresolved. Sogavare further used the Games to justify postponing the 2023 national election, pushing through a constitutional amendment to delay the vote by one year. This move weakened electoral accountability and allowed the government to evade immediate public scrutiny over governance failures. Chinese support, notably free from political conditionality, enabled this maneuver in ways that would likely have provoked stronger objections from Western donors.

Clientelism and Authoritarian Shift

The influence of BRI extended beyond infrastructure into the Solomon Islands' clientelist political economy. Since 2019, China has funded the Constituency Development Fund, previously supported largely by Taiwan. Beijing has also backed the National Development Fund, which is directly controlled by the prime minister and distributed exclusively to ruling party MPs, excluding the opposition. These funds lack meaningful accountability mechanisms, creating significant corruption risks.

The partisan allocation of public resources has weakened parliamentary independence by incentivizing MPs to support the executive rather than scrutinize it. In 2021, Chinese-funded disbursements totaling nearly US$3 million were reportedly directed toward pro-government MPs, widely interpreted as a strategy to avert a vote of no confidence.

The removal of Daniel Suidani, the Premier of Malaita Province, marked one of the most severe blows to democratic pluralism. Suidani was a vocal critic of the diplomatic shift to China and refused Chinese investment in his province. In 2023, he was removed through a provincial vote of no confidence, reportedly facilitated by bribery. One assembly member was recorded admitting to receiving payments in exchange for voting against Suidani. The episode illustrated how financial leverage was used to silence dissent and centralize authority, undermining local autonomy and democratic norms. The China-Solomon Islands security agreement further expanded the government's coercive capacity. Signed in April 2022 without parliamentary debate or public consultation, the pact permits Beijing to deploy police or military forces to assist in maintaining "social order." The ambiguity of this mandate has raised concerns about potential repression of political opposition. Even before the agreement was finalized, China dispatched police advisers and anti-riot equipment following unrest in November 2021.

Given China's record of heavy-handed domestic policing, the agreement risks normalizing authoritarian security practices within the Solomon Islands.

Prospects for BRI and Autocratization

The April 2024 general election brought Jeremiah Manele to power, replacing Sogavare as prime minister. While Manele has adopted a less confrontational tone and re-engaged with regional partners such as Australia, key features of infrastructure-backed authoritarianism remain intact. In early 2025, Manele and the Chinese ambassador jointly launched the China-funded Auki Road Network Rehabilitation Project in Malaita Province, symbolically extending Chinese influence into a region previously resistant to it. Oversight and transparency reforms have yet to materialize, and Sogavare continues to wield significant influence as finance minister, directly overseeing BRI-linked funds. Structural incentives for opaque governance therefore remain largely unchanged.

At the same time, it would be misleading to attribute the Solomon Islands' democratic decline solely to China. Corruption, patronage, and weak institutions long predate the BRI. What Chinese infrastructure financing has done is magnify these existing vulnerabilities. BRI projects are often negotiated without public scrutiny, kept off-budget, and shielded from parliamentary oversight. Unlike institutions such as the IMF, China imposes few governance or transparency conditions on its lending and grants. This concentration of discretionary power in the executive has fostered clientelism and heightened corruption risks.

What This Means to the World

Infrastructure-backed authoritarianism represents a gradual and often overlooked pathway to democratic erosion. In the Solomon Islands, democratic institutions formally persist, but their substance has been hollowed out. Elections continue, yet foreign-funded patronage distorts political competition. Courts and oversight bodies exist, but executive power increasingly bypasses them. China's involvement has not imposed authoritarianism outright; rather, it has enabled domestic actors to consolidate power with fewer constraints.

For Beijing, such outcomes align with its broader ambition to challenge liberal democratic norms without direct confrontation. Infrastructure investment becomes a vehicle for influence, particularly in fragile democracies where institutional safeguards are weak. If this model proliferates, it risks fostering an illiberal bloc aligned with China's doctrine of non-interference. The Solomon Islands thus serves as a warning: development without democratic accountability can entrench authoritarian governance. Infrastructure can either strengthen democracy or quietly undermine it. The difference lies in transparency, oversight, and political will.

Pride with a Price

My Reflections on Australia Day

By **Patrick Luo**

Photo by Johan Mouchet

It is January 26th. Australia Day.

Thousands of Australians, particularly Indigenous Australians, march through Sydney holding banners reading "Invasion Day - January 26, 1788." Nearby, thousands of others wave blue Australian flags, carrying signs that say "Proud to be a True Blue Aussie."

That image reflects an internal battle within me about where I stand. Is January 26, 1788, a day worth celebrating? Is it a day to celebrate what we know as modern Australia and its achievements? Or is it a day that should not be celebrated, because a modern nation was built on the persecution of Indigenous Australians, a persecution that continues today? If this date is so polarising, should we change the date, or change the way we celebrate it?

Economically, I am deeply grateful for my family, part of the many migrants who came to Australia and worked with determination despite language barriers, long working hours, and financial risks. Yet when I return to my room and look at my laptop, I am met with headlines showing statistics of Aboriginal youth like me struggling with education and being overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

Politically, standing at the Hyde Park War Memorial in Sydney, I feel immense respect for Australian servicemen and servicewomen who served abroad to ensure that young Australians like me never have to pick up a rifle to protect ourselves. Yet as I watch documentaries, I see Indigenous war veterans recalling, with anger still in their eyes, how they were barred from voting until the 1960s despite having sacrificed so much.

I also celebrate an Australia where diversity is not seen as a limit, but as an opportunity to build coexistence under a stable and strong framework. This was evident when Australians from all backgrounds held a moment of silence during New Year's 2025, paying tribute to 15 Australians, mostly Jewish, killed in a terrorist attack at Bondi Beach. Yet I cannot forget what we were taught in school: Aboriginal children systematically separated from their families, entire generations losing cultural connections as they were forced into mission homes to assimilate.

During the Olympics, I celebrate the determination that pushed Australia to fourth place at the 2024 Paris Games, outranking the host nation, France. Yet as the world cheers Australia's performance, I vividly remember watching on television as boos filled the stadium when Adam Goodes played. An Indigenous Australian footballer, he dedicated himself to forcing our society to confront racism after being called an "ape" by a 13-year-old girl during a match in 2013.

When I look at other countries' national days, they often appear rooted in moments of clear triumph. France celebrates July 14, marking the storming of the Bastille in 1789. The United States, a settler colony like Australia, does not celebrate the day of settlement, but July 4, 1776, when the thirteen colonies declared independence from Britain. Critics may argue that no national day is purely good. France's revolution led to a republic that later practiced brutal colonialism. American independence marked the beginning of a state that systematically dispossessed Native Americans through reservations.

So if January 26 is so polarising, why do Australians, even as society becomes increasingly multicultural, resist changing the date?

From my experience, there is one overarching reason: Australia struggles to find an alternative date with the same emotional weight that does not clash with another major event. January 1, the day Australia federated in 1901, clashes with New Year's Day. March 3, marking full legislative independence from Britain in 1986, lacks emotional resonance. April 25, commemorating the Gallipoli landings, is seen as a day of remembrance for fallen servicepeople, not celebration.

Without another date that carries similar national significance, Australians are repeatedly pulled back to the polarising date of January 26, 1788.

I have made my decision individually: Pride with a price. I celebrate modern Australia's achievements on January 26, but I do so while also celebrating the achievements of Aboriginal Australians, achieved not because of the nation's history, but in spite of its repression.

Beyond Great-Power Rivalry

How the Pacific Islands Forum Is Reclaiming Agency

By **Thibaud Brilland**

Photo by RNZ

In September 2025, the Solomon Islands hosted the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Summit. Despite being one of China's key partners in the region since the signing of a framework agreement in March 2022, Honiara made a striking decision: it excluded the Forum's usual dialogue partners, including China, the United States, France, and Japan, from the summit. In doing so, PIF member states asserted their agency under the "Blue Pacific" doctrine in a clear and deliberate manner. The decision shifted the regional conversation away from great-power rivalry and toward Pacific ownership of regional affairs.

This raises a series of broader questions. Is the PIF merely a stage for US-China competition? How have geopolitical strategies in the region evolved? And to what extent have Pacific Island states succeeded in building a unified bloc capable of safeguarding their independence?

The United States' strategy in the Pacific can be clearly illustrated through its relationships with Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau. This approach, originally developed during the Cold War in response to the Soviet Union, is now increasingly oriented toward China.

Historically, Washington viewed the Pacific Islands as an "American lake". The region had been wrested from Japanese control through pivotal battles such as Midway at sea and Guadalcanal on land in the Solomon Islands. When the Cold War began, the United States sought to prevent any third military power, namely the USSR, from gaining access to what became known as the "Compact Islands": Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau.

This approach was formalised through the doctrine of "strategic denial". Developed by Anthony Solomon in the *Solomon Report* (1963), it argued for a strong and permanent US presence to prevent the possibility of a second Pearl Harbor. The doctrine was legally entrenched under Henry Kissinger during the Nixon and Ford administrations through three agreements signed in 1986 and a further agreement in 1994, collectively forming the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) with the Freely Associated States (FAS). These agreements combine economic assistance with military oversight. The United States provides trust funds, support for education, healthcare, public administration, private sector development, and visa-free access for FAS citizens. In return, Washington retains the right to veto any policy or action taken by FAS governments if it is deemed to interfere with US defence interests. In the current geopolitical climate, this effectively prevents FAS states from signing security or strategic agreements with China.

COFA also underpins a substantial US military footprint in the Pacific, including airfields, radar systems such as the TACMOR radar currently under construction in Palau, maritime patrol operations, and historically, nuclear testing sites like Bikini Atoll. This strategy of denial is even more visible in US Pacific territories such as Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa.

China's geopolitical interests in PIF countries are largely threefold and must be understood as interconnected rather than isolated.

They align with Xi Jinping's vision of ushering China into a "new era" of global prominence, articulated at the 19th Party Congress, with 2049 serving as a symbolic milestone marking the centenary of the People's Republic of China. The first dimension of China's engagement is economic. Access to natural resources is central to this strategy. Fisheries, supported by the vast exclusive economic zones of Pacific Island states, are critical to Chinese food security and are often secured through licensing agreements. Beyond fisheries, polymetallic nodules containing cobalt, nickel, and manganese are found on the seabed around the Cook Islands, Kiribati, and Nauru. These minerals are essential for battery production. China already dominates the rare earth sector, accounting for roughly 60 percent of global extraction and nearly 90 percent of refining capacity. Protecting and expanding this advantage is a strategic priority, often reinforced through debt leverage and ownership of key infrastructure in small island states.

The second dimension of China's interest is geographic. Beijing views itself as constrained by three island chains, the second and third of which include several PIF countries. Although this framework originated as a US strategic concept developed by John Foster Dulles in 1951 during the Korean War, it has been adopted by China to argue that it is strategically encircled by the United States and its allies. This narrative is frequently used to justify the expansion of Chinese military capabilities.

The third dimension concerns the diplomatic isolation of Taiwan. Of the twelve states that officially recognise Taiwan, three are Pacific Island countries: Palau, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu. In 2024, Nauru faced a significant budget shortfall following a reduction in Australian funding. China stepped in with an offer of non-conditional financial support, prompting Nauru to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to Beijing.

In recent years, the PIF has demonstrated a growing determination to avoid being subsumed by rivalry between the region's two major external powers. While member states continue to sign bilateral agreements, they have shown increasing cohesion at the multilateral level.

Contemporary diplomatic scholarship highlights a shift away from viewing the Pacific as a passive arena of competition and toward recognising Pacific agency through "Blue Pacific" regionalism. In *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, Greg Fry argues that by exercising normative power rooted in shared identity, context, and challenges, Pacific states have expanded their strategic autonomy.

This approach is formalised in the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*, launched in 2022. Through seven thematic pillars and shared values, PIF states articulate a collective voice grounded in their common strengths and vulnerabilities. This positioning has already produced concrete outcomes. In 2022, the United States, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom launched the Partners in the Blue Pacific initiative to coordinate aid to the region without formally including the PIF in decision-making. The initiative was criticised as an attempt at geopolitical co-optation and was collectively rejected. That same year, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed a pre-drafted multilateral agreement for PIF countries to sign. It too was rejected, with leaders citing concerns over sovereignty, security, and the lack of consensus within the PIF framework.

Growing external interest has also created space for what Kuik Cheng-Chwee describes as "hedging". Rather than aligning rigidly with a single major power, Pacific states pursue diversified and sometimes contradictory strategies to create safety nets in an uncertain geopolitical environment. In practice, this often means deepening economic ties with China while relying on the United States and Australia for security cooperation. These shifts have enabled Pacific Island states to refocus attention on internal priorities such as climate change, infrastructure gaps, and development needs, rather than being drawn into external rivalries that do not serve their long-term interests.

Nevertheless, this multilateral approach remains fragile. Bilateral agreements continue to pose a challenge to regional unity, and Pacific states remain dependent on external funding. Diversifying partnerships, including with actors such as France and ASEAN countries, remains essential if Pacific agency is to be sustained over the long term.

Ori Tahiti

Where the Soul of the Islands Dance

By **Keanu Lis**

Photo by Daniel Rodriguez

Diversity sits at the very heart of Polynesian identity. Long before modern borders, Polynesian peoples crossed vast oceans, journeying from Asia and settling across the Pacific through extraordinary feats of navigation and resilience. This history of movement shaped not only island societies, but also a deep-rooted openness: a cultural instinct to welcome, to share, and to connect with those who arrive from afar.

That openness is most vividly expressed through art, and few forms capture it as powerfully as Ori Tahiti, the traditional dance that stands as a proud emblem of Polynesian identity. More than performance, Ori Tahiti is a living archive of history, emotion, and communal memory. In French Polynesia, it is one of the most widely practiced cultural traditions, celebrated annually through major events such as the Ori Tahiti Nui competitions and the Ori Tahiti World Championship.

The 2025 World Championship, held from Friday 21 to Sunday 23 November, brought together more than 3,500 dancers representing ten nationalities. Accompanied by rhythmic percussion, striking costumes, and precise choreography, each performance told a story while generating a powerful collective energy. After centuries defined by ocean crossings and island solitude, Ori Tahiti bursts with colour, rhythm, and joy, inviting audiences to feel movement rather than simply watch it.

The dance's expressive body language, combined with its dazzling costumes, creates an atmosphere that feels unmistakably Polynesian. Yet behind the umbrella term Ori Tahiti lies a rich mosaic of styles. Five major traditional forms shape its repertoire: ʻōteʻa, ʻaparima, hivināu, paʻoʻa, and pātaʻutaʻu.

Though often performed together, each follows its own rhythms, gestures, and purpose, reflecting different aspects of island life, storytelling, and social expression.

Cris Dominguez on Facebook

Nothing in Ori Tahiti is random. Costume designs and colour choices are carefully matched to the intensity and rhythm of traditional instruments crafted from wood, stone, bamboo, and shells. Movement and attire together symbolise a direct communion with nature. Watching an Ori Tahiti performance feels like standing inside a surge of energy: the earth vibrating with percussion, bodies narrating ancestral stories, and costumes rustling like a forest stirred by wind. The audience is not merely observing; they are carried by the radiance, strength, and emotion unfolding on stage.

Above all, Ori Tahiti affirms the soul of the Polynesian islands. A cornerstone of Tahitian cultural singularity, the dance has travelled far beyond its place of origin, carrying warmth wherever it takes root. From international schools teaching Ori Tahiti abroad to foreigners travelling to Polynesia to learn it at its source, the tradition continues to grow. One unforgettable image captures this resilience perfectly: a smiling vahine, barefoot, performing Ori Tahiti outdoors in mainland France in winter, dancing at 0°C as if the sun itself followed her movements.

Rather than diluting Polynesian identity, this global spread strengthens it. As more people learn, perform, and honour Ori Tahiti, the colours of the islands' souls do not fade. They shine brighter, carried across oceans once again, this time through dance.

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Thank you for reading our fourth edition of the Pacific Post. We hope you have been able to explore the cultural, political, and socio-economic nuances behind such an amazing region of the world.

This newspaper would have been impossible without the help of our sponsor Sciences Po Paris and the support of the writers and the team!