Aitutaki will more than likely further inflate land and consumer goods prices, adding to the woes of locals.

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References


FRENCH POLYNESIA

Political life in French Polynesia during the review period was still characterized by instability and uncertainty about the future, and had only cooled down slightly after the political crisis of 2004–2005. The new government under President Oscar Temaru, who had been inaugurated in March 2005, seemed to be firmly in power during most of 2005, but 2006 brought another attempted overthrow, following a split in the governing coalition. Among the general population, the original euphoria of a new policy of Taui Roa (Big Change) has to a large degree become replaced by a more sober sentiment as taui (change) is happening slower than people had hoped. Meanwhile, the relationship between the local government and the French state fluctuates between confrontation and reconciliation. Relations between French Polynesia and other Pacific Islands, on the other hand, are becoming closer and more frequent.

In July, the president’s uneasy attitude toward France became once more apparent, when he first announced his intention to boycott the official celebration on 14 July (Bastille Day, the French national holiday) but then finally agreed to participate (TP, 14 July 2005). Earlier that month, on 4 July, he had hosted a United States Independence Day celebration in the presidential palace, a gesture that was perceived as a provocation by the pro-French opposition (TP, 6 July 2005). Temaru also participated as a guest of honor in the national holiday celebrations of Vanuatu, Cook Islands, and Niue, each time underlining the importance of the achievement of independence (or full self-govern- ment), which his country still lacks.

Meanwhile, when new French High Commissioner Anne Boquet arrived on 10 September, replacing Michel Mathieu (who had tended to favor former President Gaston Flosse and his party and shun the Temaru government), hope rose for a more harmonious relationship between Papeete and Paris. Indeed, the initial relations between Boquet and the Temaru government were very friendly. On 15 September, the new high commis- sioner was greeted by Temaru and Assembly Speaker Antony Geros with a kava ceremony in the hall of the assembly building—an event that was perceived as a symbol both of reconciliation with the French state and of the country’s cultural “reintegration into Oceania,” since kava drinking had become virtually extinct in Tahitian culture (TPM, Oct 2005).

Reintegration into Oceania remains one of the main agenda items for the Temaru government, in the cultural as well as the political sense. At the annual Pacific Island Forum meeting in Port Moresby on 25 October, proposals were made to upgrade French Polynesia’s status from that of
observer to that of “associated member.” In an interview, the president said that he hopes to achieve a better political status for his country, calling the present Statute of French Polynesia just “a scrap of paper.” These statements gave rise to renewed political controversy. High Commissioner Boquet criticized the president, arguing that he was “not mandated to talk about independence on foreign soil,” because foreign policy was the responsibility of the French state, not of the local government. Temaru replied that while perhaps he was not mandated to do so, he was certainly qualified to talk about these issues (*TPM*, Nov 2005). Moreover, Temaru’s party, Tavini Huiraatira (People’s Servant), said in a 22 November press release, “When the president expresses himself in the Pacific, he is not on foreign soil. We are people of the Pacific,” and that the statute is indeed just a scrap of paper until it becomes a constitution, on the achievement of sovereignty (Tavini Huiraatira 2005).

Another aspect of the new Pacific-oriented foreign policy of the Temaru government was its very close relationship with New Zealand. President Temaru traveled there frequently, and in late December, the government of French Polynesia purchased the historical Rocklands Hostel in central Auckland for 535 million Pacific francs (about US$5.4 million) as their future embassy in New Zealand (*TPM*, Jan 2006). Outside Oceania, the Temaru government maintains close contacts with Japan, China, and the United States.

Whereas relations with France remained tense, the Temaru government consolidated its power within the country as the opposition became weakened through internal splits and dissent. Three Tuamotu Islands representatives—Temauri Foster, Michel Yip, and Teina Maraeura—left Flosse’s party, Tahoeraa Huiraatira (People’s Rally), and approached the governing Union pour la Démocratie (UPLD) coalition. Tahoeraa’s former secretary general, Jean-Christophe Bouissou, had renounced his party membership in July and later founded his own party, Rautahi (Unity), together with another former Tahoeraa assembly member. By mid-September, Tahoeraa’s number of representatives in the Assembly of French Polynesia had been reduced to only 21, compared to 29 for UPLD, and 7 independents (*TP*, 16 Aug; 16 Sept 2005).

The Temaru government was also able to quiet Hiro Tefaarere, known as a dissident within the UPLD, by appointing him minister of small and medium businesses and mining on 16 September (*TP*, 16 Sept 2006). The appointment removed Tefaarere from the assembly and replaced him with another more loyal UPLD member, thus reinforcing the coherence of the majority.

With their majority in the assembly apparently consolidated, the Temaru government began working on its first major reform project: On 25 November, the government presented a projected tax reform, elaborated by Vice President Jacqui Drollet and economist Christian Vernaudon, called Te Autaeaeaea (Solidarity). Essentially, it would generalize and increase the Territorial Solidarity Contribution (CST) and thus create a sort of income tax
(which does not exist in French Polynesia), while decreasing health insurance contributions. The project soon became very controversial, however, as it was perceived by many as a simple tax increase. On 30 November, about 3,500 people led a protest march against the reform, after several trade unions had called for a general strike. The strikers then built roadblocks on the main entry roads to Papeete, forcing the government to withdraw the CST increase and thus virtually killing the tax reform project. The affair exposed the dubious role of the unions in local politics, with several of the strike leaders being cronies of Flosse or political opportunists rather than representatives of the working population (TPM, Dec 2006). This would become even more apparent in May 2006, when the same unions organized a strike against a law that would reform union representation in companies and thus erode their power base (TPM, May 2006).

The vote for the 2006 budget of 137.8 billion Pacific francs (about US$1.4 billion), of which 102.8 billion was for maintenance and 37 billion for investment, provoked yet more polemic debates. The opposition criticized the budget as too expensive and threatened legal action against it (TPM, Jan 2006). The 2006 budget was finally adopted by the assembly on 13 December 2005, but had to be reduced in March in order to avoid a deficit (TPM, April 2006).

On 4 January, Finance and Economy Minister Emile Vanfasse resigned, citing health reasons. Vice President Drollet, a close confident of Temaru, took over the portfolios in addition to his own portfolio of tourism. The move was protested by Emile Vernaudon, minister for postal services, telecommunications, and sports, and leader of the Ai’a Api (New Motherland) party, who argued that his party was entitled to the vacant portfolios (TPM, Feb 2006). With this issue, deep fissures became apparent between the Ai’a Api and Tavini Huiraatira parties within the UPLD coalition. Already on 9 November, Vernaudon had begun to distance himself from Temaru by publicly criticizing the latter’s pro-independence declarations (TPM, Dec 2005). While Vernaudon had signed the UPLD petition for the reinscription of the country on the UN list of non-self-governing territories in 2004, he now declared himself in favor of French rule and approached Flosse. Vernaudon has had a history of constantly switching his allegiance between Flosse and Temaru.

Another major decision made at the beginning of 2006 concerned the Groupement d’Intervention de la Polynésie (GIP, Polynesian Intervention Grouping), a presidential service agency for public works founded under Flosse. During the previous year, the GIP had constantly caused trouble, as its former commander, Léonard Puputauki, refused to comply with orders from the new government and periodically had GIP members block the bridge to Papeete’s port facilities, cutting off the country’s fuel reserves and threatening the population. On 11 January 2006, the cabinet finally decided to take action and the GIP was dissolved. The several hundred employees were to be transferred to other government departments or maintained as employees of an “administrative flotilla” whose mis-
sion is entirely depoliticized and limited to public works (TPM, Feb 2006). However, the core of the problem remained unresolved, as Puputauki still exercised considerable influence over many members, and new confrontations continued sporadically in the following months. Flosse, who had founded the GIP as some sort of personal militia, is apparently behind these activities as he attempts to destabilize the Temaru government. Strangely enough, Puputauki has never yet been arrested for his illegal activities (TPM, July 2006).

Meanwhile, Emile Vernaudon once more entered the headlines on 26 January, when the Papeete court of appeals confirmed his suspended sentence of one year in prison and a fine of 3 million Pacific francs (about US$30,000) for embezzling public funds. Vernaudon had built a private house with municipal funds in the township of Mahina, where he is the mayor. However, because his voting rights were not suspended (as is usual in political corruption cases under French law), he was able to keep both his mayoralty and his ministerial portfolio. At the same time, Vernaudon continued to occupy a public piece of land on the Tairarapu peninsula as a “party house,” thereby blocking access to an economically promising shrimp-breeding project in an adjacent valley (TP, 26 Feb 06).

While the latter project would certainly be beneficial to the country’s economy and create many jobs, the development of new tourist facilities is becoming more and more controversial within the pro-independence movement. Seeing tourism as one of French Polynesia’s main economic resources, Temaru and Tourism Minister Drollet are keen on increasing the numbers of tourists, as they support new hotel projects. However, as many grassroots independence activists are strongly opposed to a further expansion of the tourism industry, confrontations took place at hotel sites: in December with hard-line pro-independence leader Charlie Ching on Bora Bora (TPM, Jan 2006), and on 8 February with two UPLD assembly members on Moorea (TPM, March 2006). A government-supported golf course project on the island of Huahine is also seen by the local population as controversial.

Studying the consequences of the 1966–1996 nuclear testing program was another important issue during the period under review. On 15 July 2005, the UPLD majority in the assembly had voted to establish a special committee of inquiry about the issue, covering the aboveground tests from 1966 to 1974 and their effects on the country’s population. A proposal introduced by Gaston Flosse for another committee on nuclear testing that would have been limited to Flosse’s home island of Mangareva was not adopted. For seven months the committee of inquiry, headed by UPLD representative Tea Hirshon, worked in close cooperation with the nuclear test victims association Moruroa e Tatou (Moruroa and Us) and several French and international experts, in order to counter the denial by the French government of any negative consequences of the testing. Members of the committee visited the inhabited islands closest to the former testing center but were denied access to Moruroa and Fangataufa, the two atolls where testing took place, which are still military security zones.
On 9 February 2006, the committee presented its final report, containing detailed accounts of the studied islands, as well as evidence from official reports of deliberate misinformation and concealment of irradiation by the military. The report demonstrates conclusively that the atmospheric tests exposed the population to radiation (TPM, Feb 2006).

While the sad truth about nuclear testing is being uncovered and will have to be admitted by France sooner or later, abuses of power by the Flosse government are also being revealed. On 22 February, the Territorial Chamber of Accounts presented a report on Flosse’s presidency from 1991 to 2004. According to that document, the Office of the President had 626 employees in 2004, and included an intelligence section that carried out illegal surveillance operations against political opponents. The report also confirmed that a journalist who had written pro-government editorials in a local daily was paid 80 million Pacific francs (about US$800,000) by the presidential office. The report further details the wasteful use of public funds for prestige projects, including presidential residences on the atolls of Tupai and Fakarava, which cost 1.6 billion Pacific francs (about US$16 million) and 2.5 billion Pacific francs (about US$25 million), respectively, to build (TPM, March 2006). On 21 June, Flosse was sentenced to a suspended jail term of three months for authorizing the government’s purchase of his son’s hotel in 2000, when the latter was in financial difficulties. Like Vernaudon, however, Flosse was not sentenced to ineligibility (TP, 26 June 2006). On 18 January 2006, examining magistrate Jean-Bernard Taliercio, who had been very determined in his investigation of Flosse’s affairs, was suspended from office and later permanently moved to another French territory. This led to rumors of political moves by powerful people in Paris designed to protect Flosse (TPM, June 2006).

After the two reports had shed some light on the past, the focus of political debate returned to the present and the future. In March 2006, during a trip to the Cook Islands, President Temaru publicly declared his intention to lead his country to independence from France, in his clearest statement on the matter since his election to the presidency. He also questioned the country’s official name, saying he preferred Tahiti Nui (Greater Tahiti) (CH, 11 March 2006). Two weeks later, on a trip to the island of Tubuai, Temaru repeated his desire for independence, arguing that economic development will be blocked as long as the country remains part of France (TPM, Apr 2006).

In late March, French Minister for Overseas Territories François Baroin visited the country. Temaru received him cordially but made it clear that, as the country’s colonizer, France had a historic responsibility to support the process of self-determination. Temaru proposed an “Accord of Tahiti Nui” with France, inspired by the Nouméa Accord of New Caledonia. This would require France to recognize the colonial fact and promise to help Tahiti Nui prepare its independence during a transitional period of at least a decade leading to a referendum on independence (TPM, Apr 2006).

Temaru’s declarations provoked a new backlash from both the French
government and local pro-French politicians. High Commissioner Boquet accused Temaru of “placing himself outside the republican values” and reminded him that he himself had said at his inauguration that independence was not on the immediate agenda. Boquet also criticized Temaru’s referring to the country as “Tahiti Nui” (*TPM*, April 2006). This was quite astonishing, given the fact that Gaston Flosse, who had frequently called himself “President of Tahiti Nui,” had never been reprimanded by the high commission.

The Tahoeraa opposition also intensified its media campaign against the government. The Tahoeraa weekly *L’Hebdo* as well as the party’s Radio Maohi launched regular and virulent attacks on Temaru and his political ideas, discrediting the idea of independence as catastrophic for the country, using old stereotypes from French colonial times, and accusing the Temaru government of being dictatorial and racist.

Tahoeraa did everything it could to polarize society between the ideas of autonomy (implying continued French sovereignty) and independence. At the same time, Jean-Christophe Bouissou’s Rautahi party went back into a political alliance with Tahoeraa, claiming to build up an “autonomist front” in order to fight the idea of independence. Several other small parties that had split from Tahoeraa earlier joined that alliance as well. This led to the suspicion that those small parties had really been “satellites” or “submarines” of Tahoeraa (*TPM*, May 2006).

While the opposition gathered its forces, struggles within the upld were fought more and more openly. On 29 March Hiro Tefaarere resigned from his ministerial portfolio. When Temaru refused to accept his resignation, Tefaarere left both the upld and the Tavini Huiraatira party. However, he reaffirmed his political position in favor of independence (*TP*, 6 Apr 2006). With Tefaarere sitting now as an independent, the upld lost its overall majority in the assembly.

At the same time, Emile Vernaudon intensified his political agitation against Temaru. On 12 April, two days before the scheduled vote for the annual reelection of the assembly’s Speaker, Vernaudon resigned from his ministry, giving as reasons Temaru’s pro-independence activities and the lack of collegiality within upld. The following day, an agreement was signed between Flosse’s Tahoeraa, Vernaudon’s Ai’a Api, Bouissou’s Rautahi, the independent representatives from the outer islands, as well as Hiro Tefaarere, to form an “autonomist front.” The front included twenty-nine representatives, thus forming a new majority. Gaston Tong Sang, a Tahoeraa representative and Bora Bora mayor, was designated their candidate for the position of Speaker, against upld incumbent Antony Geros. The group further intended to overthrow Temaru in a motion of censure, with Vernaudon as their candidate for president. Flosse himself formally kept out of the political game, a precondition demanded by the other partners of the autonomist front.

However, the vote for Speaker turned out quite differently. Philip Schyle, the leader of Fetia Api (New Star), a pro-French, anti-Flosse party, had refused to take part in the autonomist front, but then announced his
own candidacy for the position of Speaker. When the secret ballot was conducted, 29 representatives voted for Schyle, 28 for Geros, and none for Tong Sang. Apparently, the members of the autonomist front had all voted for Schyle, preferring him as an autonomist to the pro-independence Geros. Schyle, however, did not want to play their game. He said he owed nothing to those who had voted him in and considered himself the Speaker for everyone. He also announced that he would not support a motion of censure against Temaru (TPM, May 2006).

Some days later, on 19 April, before the vote on the assembly committees, President Temaru announced major changes in his cabinet. The representatives from the Tuamotu Islands, Teina Maraeura and Michel Yip, as well as Dauphin Domingo from Tahiti island—who were all considered close allies of Vernaudon and whose names had been on the list of the autonomist front just a few days earlier—joined Temaru’s government, either as cabinet ministers or as UPLD representatives. Their support gave Temaru once more a clear majority of 30 seats in the assembly, against 25 for the autonomist front, and 2 for Schyle’s neutral group. The UPLD was thus able to keep control over both the assembly committees and the executive government. Temaru had won another round in his struggle for political survival, at the price of the loss of the assembly Speaker’s office (TPM, May 2006).

The political maneuverings by both the opposition and the government to “buy” and “re-buy” each other’s politicians worsened the image of politics and discredited all politicians. Gaston Flosse, his party, and their allies were all eager to denounce Temaru’s tactics, while keeping quiet about having used the same tactics immediately before. As Tahiti Pacifique Magazine (TPM) editor Alex Du Prel reminded readers, it was Flosse and his party who, for decades, in collaboration with the French State, had applied the tactics of “buying” politicians (TPM, May 2006).

Political corruption was not the only thing being deplored in society. Even more dramatic were threats to the survival of indigenous Polynesian languages. On 12 May, the association Te Rauti o te Reo (Exaltation of the Language) published an alarming study showing that less than 20 percent of the population speak Reo Maohi (Tahitian or another Polynesian language). In 1975 the comparable figure was 80 percent (TPM, June 2006). Especially among young people, Tahitian has been replaced almost totally by French or a pidgin version of it. The Temaru government and Education Minister Jean-Marius Rappoto are very keen to change this trend, and a revision of the education system is being prepared to that end. On 29 March, however, the French State Council prohibited the use of any language other than French in the debates of the Assembly of French Polynesia (TPM, April 2006)—an act seen by both the Temaru government and Te Rauti o te Reo as a colonial provocation.

Related to concerns for the preservation of the country’s native language are the efforts by members of the Royal Customary Council for the preservation of land rights, historical monuments, and respect for historical treaties. Founded in early 2005 by
royal descendent Joinville Pomare, the council advocates recognition of customary leadership by Arii (traditional chiefs). During the period under review, the council increased its activity, finding more and more support among both the local population and customary leaders from other Pacific Islands. On 29 October 2005, between 2,000 and 2,500 people attended a meeting of Arii descendants around the royal tomb in Arue. Guests included Gabriel Paita, the president of the Customary Senate of New Caledonia, and members of the Cook Islands’ House of Ariki, as well as delegates from Rapa Nui and Hawai’i. Pomare and his followers once again demanded the creation of a recognized customary institution in French Polynesia, modeled after that of New Caledonia (TP, 29 Oct 2005; NT, 31 Oct 2005). The alleged treaty of annexation that was signed in 1880 by Tahiti’s last king, Pomare V, and the French authorities, was subjected to a detailed analysis by a working group on legal issues within the council, led by Mareva de Montluc; the working group found the treaty legally questionable (DT, 24 Oct 2005). On 6 May, based on its preceding historical and judicial research, the council established a so-called Indigenous Land Tribunal in order to deal with land claims by Tahitian families. According to the 1880 treaty, this institution was to be preserved under French rule, but it was later suppressed. The French judiciary declared that the tribunal had no value under French law (TP, 9 May 2006).

Meanwhile, President Temaru was criticized by the opposition for excessive travel to foreign countries, such as his trip to Japan in mid-May, and for only coming back to Tahiti as a stopover before his next trip (see, eg, L’Hebdo, 9 March 2006). These critics forgot, however, that foreign relations is Temaru’s portfolio within the government, and that for the construction of a future independent state, it is essential to build and maintain a network of political and economic relations.

In late June, Temaru traveled to Paris to meet with French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin and several other cabinet ministers. However, he did not attend a scheduled meeting with President Jacques Chirac. The missed meeting caused a new controversy in Tahiti, with the opposition accusing the president of sabotaging the country’s relations with France, and the president’s office calling it a miscommunication (TP, 23 June 2006; Le Monde, 25 June 2006). At the France–Oceania summit conference in the Elysée (French presidential) palace on 26 June, Temaru talked about the right of self-determination of peoples and demanded that that issue be included in the communiqué of the meeting. Chirac responded that he believed the majority of the people of French Polynesia do not desire independence and so there was no reason for it (TPM, July 2006).

Back in Tahiti, another controversy took place at the end of June concerning historical symbols, monuments, names, and holidays. Under Flosse, 29 June had been designated as the local holiday to commemorate the signing of both the annexation treaty in 1880 and the second Statute of Autonomy in 1984. The Temaru government had, in effect, abolished that holiday and proposed 20 November, the rising of the Matarii (Pleiades), as a depoliti-
cized, purely cultural alternative. The pro-French opposition, on the other hand, continued to celebrate the “autonomy holiday” and had a “monument to autonomy” dedicated on a roundabout in Papeete. On the night before the dedication, two cabinet ministers unsuccessfully tried to remove the monument, claiming it was “hazardous to traffic” (TP, 29 and 30 June 2006). The “autonomy celebration” highlighted speeches by Emile Vernaudon and Hiro Tefaarere in favor of autonomy—demonstrating again how easily local politicians can switch from one ideology to another; two years earlier, on 29 June, Vernaudon had participated in a pro-independence ceremony in Faaa, while in March 2006, Tefaarere had still claimed to be pro-independence.

On 28 June 2006, the cabinet decided to rename Bruat Avenue in the administrative center of Papeete after Pouvanaa a Oopa. Bruat had been the first French governor of Tahiti in the 1840s, whereas Pouvanaa a Oopa had founded the anticolonial Tahitian nationalist movement after World War II. The Temaru government announced that this change was just the beginning of a process of “name decolonization,” as most roads in Papeete currently carry names of colonial officers, French presidents, or even figures from French history having no relationship at all with Tahiti (TP, 30 June 2006).

In the next act in the “war of monuments,” Temaru inaugurated a monument to the victims of French nuclear testing in another park in Papeete on 2 July, the fortieth anniversary of the first nuclear test on Moruroa (TPM, July 2006; TP, 2 July 2006). High Commissioner Boquet denounced both the monument and the street renaming as “unfriendly gestures” toward France (TP, 3 July 2006).

While arguments of this kind are likely to go on and even increase in the near future, relatively little has been done for the economic development of the country. TPM editor Alex Du Prel wrote in an editorial in March that nothing has changed one year after the Taui Roa policy was introduced (TPM, March 2006). President Temaru’s idea of an “Accord of Tahiti Nui” is certainly a good one, but it must be accompanied by more detailed economic planning. Developing a solid and sustainable economic strategy for the country’s future is becoming more necessary than ever. If the country is to survive in the long run, the government budget, which is by now almost exclusively funded by subsidies from France, must be cut drastically. According to political scientist Jean Marc Regnault, as social and economic problems in France increase, funds for overseas entities are likely to decrease (TPM, Dec 2005).

Many of French Polynesia’s current economic problems stem from the politico-economic system put in place by France in the 1960s and 1970s during the period of nuclear testing. Regnault argues that Moruroa resulted not only in health issues because of irradiation, but also in forty years of clientelism through French capital injection, which has profoundly impacted society (TPM, Feb 2006). A mentality of receiving and distributing wealth has become endemic among the local elite. Political corruption in that sense is not only common among the Tahoea and its allies, but also increasingly among the new elite of the Taui Roa.
Unfortunately, Emile Vernaudon is only one outstanding case. While Temaru and many of his collaborators are serious and honest leaders with a vision of change, many other civil servants are hardly distinguishable from their predecessors.

The other issue that constantly causes tensions in society is the question of independence. Many people still do not understand what independence would mean, and what chances the country would have once it overcame the dependency on France and became a member of the family of Pacific nations. Most people have been affected by decades of French propaganda, and hardly anyone from Tahiti has ever visited an independent Pacific Island country. Instead they have seen biased reports and documentaries emphasizing how poor and downtrodden these islands are, compared with wealthy Tahiti. The new government has worked hard to de-dramatize the independence issue, by constantly raising the issue and resisting pro-French criticism from French and local people, as well as by increasing cooperation with other Pacific islands. However, much more must be done if the government wants people to rethink their attachment to France and share their president’s vision of a future as Maohi (indigenous Polynesians) within the Pacific community.

LORENZ GONSCOR

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**Hawaiian Issues**

In the past year Native Hawaiians faced challenges in the courts, in the US Congress, and in the environment. In the courts, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs triumphed over litigation threatening first to dismantle and then to bankrupt the agency, and the Kamehameha Schools awaits a decision on its Hawaiian-preference admission policy. In the realm of indigenous rights, the “Akaka Bill” was scrutinized and denied a full debate in the US Senate, while the United Nations’ Human Rights Council adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In environmental matters, Native Hawaiians joined forces against “biopiracy,” and the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands became a national monument.

The latest in a string of lawsuits precipitated by the US Supreme Court’s 2000 Rice v Cayetano decision was defeated in June 2006. In the Rice v Cayetano ruling, the US Supreme Court invalidated the state’s Hawaiians-only voting policy for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA). In March 2002, sixteen plaintiffs filed