

289. From the original paper I have deleted some words and added roughly one typed page. I wish to express my appreciation to Marie Reay, who was immensely helpful in discussing some of the ideas expressed in the essay; Inge Riebe, who read an early draft and pronounced it too tame; and Barbara Hau'ofa, who reads my mind and says wise and critical things that are not always flattering.

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The New South Pacific Society

INTEGRATION AND INDEPENDENCE

I WOULD LIKE to advance the view that there already exists in our part of the world a single regional economy upon which has emerged a South Pacific society, the privileged groups of which share a single dominant culture with increasingly marginalised local subcultures shared by the poorer classes. The regional society is emerging from the process of decolonisation that, contrary to stated intentions, has integrated the Pacific Islands into the Australian/New Zealand economy and society to the extent that the islands cannot or will not disentangle themselves. In view of this integration, we must reexamine many of the assumptions we have about development in our region.

All the countries in the South Pacific have been drawn into a single economic system controlled by transnational industrial, commercial, and financial interests backed and defended by powerful governmental and military organisations working closely with each other. In saying this I do not propose to enter into a discussion of the world economy; I confine myself to our South Pacific region because it directly and immediately concerns us. By isolating our region from the world economy I do not imply that ours is in any way a closed system; rather our region is a distinct subgroup of the global unit, a subgrouping based on geographic alignment and on a growing multiplicity of economic, social, and cultural ties including a common concern with the security and well-being of our part of the world. By "South Pacific" I mean the region covered by Australia and Papua New Guinea in the west, Kiribati in the north, New Zealand in the south, and the Cook Islands in the east. I would also include French Polynesia and New Caledonia, whose full membership in our regional subgrouping is but a matter of time.

It is probably true to say that no major geographic region in the world is as integrated as the South Pacific. We are, for all practical purposes, a single economy and increasingly a single society. All the economies of the

South Pacific Forum countries are so tied to that of Australia and New Zealand that they cannot be considered separate entities. In addition to trade and industries, the financial, transport, and communications systems are tied to New Zealand and Australia. Australia and New Zealand are the major exporters of goods and services to the islands, and in view of the rising costs of transportation, they will maintain this position for some time to come. Australian and New Zealand banks and insurance firms are the major nonnational financial institutions in the islands. The travel industry, which has become a major foreign exchange earner in several island countries, relies heavily on the Australian and New Zealand market and indeed is controlled by their airlines and travel agencies. Qantas and Ansett manage the national airlines of the islands, and together with Air New Zealand they are the major carriers on the regional air routes. The regional shipping service, the Forum Line, which connects the various islands to Australia and New Zealand, depends for its survival upon subsidies from these countries. The prospective development of television broadcasting in the islands seems now to be in the hands of the Sydney-based Channel 9. Radio Australia is the islands' source of information on contemporary world events, and the major daily newspapers are owned by Australian interests. The island regional institutions—such as the South Pacific Commission, the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation, the University of the South Pacific, the Forum Fisheries, and so forth—rely very much on Australia and New Zealand for funding and staff. And all kinds of development activities in the islands depend to a large extent on Australian and New Zealand aid.

When people view things from the vantage point of national economies, they may be excused for thinking that Australia and New Zealand are the main beneficiaries in the intraregional economic relationships. But when reality is perceived from the point of view of a regional economy, then the answer to the question of who benefits most comes out differently. The main beneficiaries from this point of view are the privileged, elite groups all over the region, not just Australia or New Zealand—groups that are directly or indirectly concerned with economic activities in the South Pacific. These include elements of both the public and private sectors in the islands as well as in Australia and New Zealand. These elite groups are locked to each other through their privileged access to and control of resources moving within the region and between the South Pacific and other regions of the world. They form the ruling tiers of the emerging regional society. I use

the word "society" deliberately. Through governmental, business, professional, educational, and other connections, including migration and marriage, members of these groups have forged intimate links to the extent that they have a great deal more in common with each other than with members of the other classes in their own communities. These groups, to which most of us attending this conference belong, form the backbone of the emerging South Pacific society. I include the intelligentsia in these groups because they are the intellectual arm of the ruling classes.

As part of the process of integration and the emergence of the new society, the ruling classes of the South Pacific are increasingly culturally homogeneous: they speak the same language, which is English (this language is becoming the first tongue of an increasing number of children in the islands); they share the same ideologies and the same material lifestyles (admittedly with local variations due to physical environment and original cultural factors, but the similarities are much more numerous than the differences). The privileged classes share a single dominant regional culture; the underprivileged maintain subcultures related to the dominant one through ties of patronage and growing inequality. These localised subcultures are modified versions of indigenous cultures that existed before the capitalist penetration of the South Pacific. Scholars and politicians often point to the enormous diversity and persistence of traditional cultures in the South Pacific as a factor for disunity and economic backwardness at the national and regional levels. But they overlook the fact that today the important differences and problems in development are due not so much to the multiplicity and persistence of indigenous cultures as, increasingly, to the emergence of classes in the region. I suggest that we should not be misled by the existence of subsistence, nonmonetised sectors of economy and by cultural diversity as well as national politics into concluding that there is neither regional integration nor a regional class system. The nonmonetised sectors are being marginalised especially through aided development with its overemphasis on commercial and export-oriented production. Subsistence activities are rapidly becoming the preserve of the poor. Cultural diversity is also largely found among the underprivileged classes especially in rural areas.

Among the privileged there is homogeneity throughout the region through the sharing of a single dominant culture. Variations among these homogeneous groups are minor in character: the differences largely add spice to social intercourse as Chinese, Indian, Lebanese, and other exotic dishes

make bourgeois dinner parties more interesting. It is one of the privileges of the affluent classes to have access to a wide range of superficial cultural experiences and expertise; it is the privileged who can afford to tell the poor to preserve their traditions. But their perceptions of which traits of traditional culture to preserve are increasingly divergent from those of the poor. In the final analysis it is the poor who have to live out the traditional culture; the privileged can merely talk about it, and they are in a position to be selective about what traits they use or more correctly urge others to observe; and this is increasingly seen by the poor as part of the ploy by the privileged to secure greater advantages for themselves. I return to this theme later. The point I wish to emphasise now is that the poor in the islands are not so different in their relative deprivation from the poor in New Zealand and Australia. And from the perspective of the regional economy, they all belong to the same underprivileged groups since their deprivation is directly related to the same regional and indeed international development forces and trends that always seem to favour the already privileged.

The Pacific Islands educational systems are an essential tool for promoting greater incorporation into the regional economy and society. They are also a vital instrument for the development of elite groups tied to Australia and New Zealand and increasingly to each other. The medium of instruction in all secondary schools, with the exception of schools in the French colonies, is English. Furthermore, Western Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Niue, and the Cook Islands follow the New Zealand secondary school system, and their senior students sit for the New Zealand University Entrance examination. Tens of thousands of Polynesian and Fiji Indian minds have been conditioned by the New Zealand educational system as many people of my generation were conditioned by the British system and the Senior Cambridge examination. The difference was that Britain was halfway around the world whereas Australia and New Zealand loom over the horizon in an ineradicable presence. Thousands of Pacific Islanders have attended secondary and tertiary educational institutions in Australia and New Zealand. Thousands of island civil servants have been trained in the Australian School for Pacific Administration at Mossman in Sydney. Given the absolute size of island populations, the proportion of island people affected by the educational systems of Australia and New Zealand, and therefore mentally and emotionally attuned to these countries, is quite staggering. Since these are the people who comprise the ruling classes of their communities, it is not at

all surprising that development policies of the islands are increasingly and smoothly synchronised with policies set in Canberra and Wellington, the main centres of control for our region.

In recent years there has been a mounting concern with the relevance of the academic and urban orientation of general education in island communities. Despite this concern nothing really substantial has been done to revise educational curricula apart from adding greater local content to the existing forms. What seems not to have been fully grasped is that the present orientation and policy are the most appropriate to the overall development towards greater regional integration. The idea of tailoring educational systems away from the present preoccupation with academic and urban orientation arises from the basic misconception of islands being territorially bounded economies and societies. Alternatives to the present forms of education can only be effected if the economy is radically altered, which is highly unlikely, or if a dual education system is introduced—that is, the present emphasis will be reserved for the privileged while more rural and technically oriented curricula are devised for the poor. Neither alternative is politically acceptable, at least publicly, although a form of dual system is emerging in Papua New Guinea and Fiji, the two most economically advanced communities in the islands. There are already exclusive “international” schools in these communities, schools that are oriented towards giving children of the ruling classes advantages in training for lucrative positions in the regional economy. The same is true of island universities; the University of the South Pacific, for example, is probably the leading manpower factory in the islands. It aims to fulfil certain training needs of the countries it serves. These needs are defined for the university by island governments and private organisations—the very institutions that are spearheading the integrative development. As such, the university is an arm of the ruling classes in the region; under present circumstances it cannot be anything else.

The overall process of integration has gone much further in Polynesia than in Melanesia and Kiribati. This has been a function of migration from Polynesia to New Zealand and Australia and, as well, the greater reliance of Polynesia on aid. The Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau are the most integrated with much more than half of their populations living in New Zealand. Western Samoans, Tongans, and Fiji Indians are not very far behind. Fijians do not emigrate as much as other Polynesians, but as they

face greater economic hardship than they face today, more of them will undoubtedly emigrate. The significance of this population mobility is the extension of numerous kinship and other social networks from the islands to New Zealand and Australia, which facilitates a continuous flow of people and resources within the region. For many islanders these networks provide the main source of economic benefits for the poor. But they also contribute greatly to regional integration.

There live in Australia the descendants of the nineteenth-century Melanesian indentured labourers. It is not inconceivable that more of these may attempt to rediscover their roots in Melanesia as black Americans have searched for theirs in Africa. This seems more likely now that Melanesians in their homelands are asserting their cultural identities and are on the verge of forming a Melanesian Alliance. We must also keep in mind the facts that Australia's northern boundary is within a stone's throw of mainland Papua New Guinea and, moreover, that within its borders Australia contains the Torres Strait Islands whose largely Melanesian population has close ethnic affinity with the people of the southwestern coast of Papua New Guinea. A similar situation obtains on the boundary between Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. Whether or not population movement between Melanesia and Australia will develop beyond the predominantly circular mobility of today remains to be seen. But it is not beyond the realm of possibility given the regional alignment, the vast natural resources of Melanesia (especially of Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia), and the volatile frontier relationship between Papua New Guinea and Indonesia.

Population movement in the region is not only between the islands and Australia and New Zealand. Each community in the South Pacific contains people from other island groups. Fiji is probably the best example of this. The population of Suva includes people from just about every South Pacific community, and there are islands in Fiji that have been used to resettle excess population from Kiribati and Tuvalu. Because of our preoccupation with the migration of Pacific Islanders to Australia and New Zealand we tend to overlook the glaring and important fact that there are thousands of Australians and New Zealanders living in the islands as migrants—or diplomats, advisers, professionals, businessmen, hired hands of various kinds, even drugrunners and other unsavoury elements. The presence of Australians and New Zealanders in the islands contributes greatly to integration since they tend to occupy powerful or influential positions in both the pub-

lic and the private sectors. The placement of kinsmen and kinswomen in the various communities in the region adds flesh and blood to the framework of integration.

We should also be mindful of the fact that every year tens of thousands of Australians and New Zealanders travel to the islands as short-term visitors staying in hotels, motels, and guesthouses. Moreover, thousands of Pacific Islanders travel each year to Australia and New Zealand as short-term visitors staying mostly with their relatives. The flow of island visitors to Australia and New Zealand has been largely overlooked by those who study tourism. But anyone who looks into this movement is likely to discover a very important variation of international travel. The short-term circular mobility of ordinary people contributes to awareness of and familiarity with each other, and therefore to the course of regional integration.

In addition, the privileged groups in the islands have forged increasing links with each other, facilitated by such regional institutions as the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation, the University of the South Pacific, and a host of international organisations such as the agencies of the United Nations. Frequent meetings of representatives of government, business, and educational and other organisations, in the islands as well as in Australia and New Zealand, have contributed to the emergence of an elitist regional identity generally known as the Pacific Way.

One important development is that highly trained Pacific Islanders have become specialists in their various fields and an increasing number of them are entering the arena of consultancy within the region, doing the kinds of lucrative assignments previously the preserve of consultants and advisers from the West. This particular development is very significant. By combining their specialist expertise with their insiders' insights into the workings of island societies, island consultants are becoming more effective for the cause of capitalist development than their non-Islander counterparts. The co-option of island intellectuals into the system is politically judicious; it gives the appearance of localisation and a fair division of labour, not to mention lucre, while at the same time promoting development towards ever greater regionalism.

For many years now it has been recognised that there are common problems—such as the nuclearisation of the Pacific, the impact of superpower rivalry, the exploration and exploitation of resources within the exclusive economic zones, the protection of exclusive economic zone rights, and the

stability and security of the South Pacific—that could only be dealt with on a regional basis. Cooperation on these matters further promotes regional integration.

Given the situation that I have just outlined, I suggest that we should reexamine our assumptions about relationships within the South Pacific. The degree to which integration has been achieved has not been acknowledged by the component communities of the region—partly because of particular national interests protecting their own turf and partly because of the hangover from colonialism when Australia and New Zealand were metropolitan powers. Underlying the concern by Australia and New Zealand for the development of the islands are strategic considerations for their own security. The ruling classes of all the communities have now seen the problem of regional security as probably the most important thing they have in common. Australia and New Zealand still see most if not all development in the Pacific in terms of its contribution to their security. For internal political reasons neither country really wants to recognise the extent of economic and social integration that is taking place—an integration that has been a direct outcome of Australia's and New Zealand's concern with their own security, initially as distant and vulnerable outposts of the British Empire and now as affluent communities in a rising sea of poverty. To both these countries the Pacific Islands are of little economic significance; this has been stated publicly by high government officials and by influential academics of both countries.

The Pacific Islands, believing in their alleged economic insignificance, tend to play to the full their strategic value to get as much advantage as they can from Australia and New Zealand. The latest incident of this kind was reported by the *New Zealand Times* of 11 August 1985 in an article with a revealing heading: "Fiji Twists Arms at Forum." It appears that before the Forum meeting in Rarotonga, Prime Minister Bob Hawke received a letter from the prime minister of Fiji. According to the *Times* an extract of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's letter reads as follows:

We have all expressed concern about the ongoing fisheries access negotiations between Kiribati and the Soviet Union. Other countries in the region, including Fiji, have received similar overtures from the Soviet Union. These developments, in my view, make it all the more urgent that Australia and other long-standing friends in the Pacific come forward with further positive, visible and affirmative action in providing supportive economic measures.

I believe that no island country would feel compelled to enter into new alignments if such support were readily available from within our region.

According to the *Times* Mr. Hawke was so concerned with Mara's letter that while in Fiji on his way to Rarotonga he telephoned New Zealand's prime minister, David Lange, who was then in Western Samoa and also on his way to Rarotonga, seven times in one night to discuss the matter. This arm-twisting game I believe was inaugurated in the early 1970s by the king of Tonga when he announced a forthcoming "affirmative action" deal with the Soviet Union; since then other Pacific countries have joined the game, some using as aces up their sleeves the dreaded names of Cuba and Libya, resulting in "affirmative actions" and "supportive economic measures" from Australia and New Zealand rocketing into orbit—where they have since remained. This regional gamesmanship is reminiscent of the typical torrid, nocturnal negotiations conducted between debauched customers and depraved streetwalkers. This is the kind of situation we find ourselves in when we ignore reality and see our common interests mainly in terms of strategic considerations. If we acknowledge our economic and social integration we will be able to deal with the problem of the security of the South Pacific as an aspect of that integration. This could make a lot of difference in the conduct of our regional relationships.

As pointed out earlier, there is a belief that the Pacific Islands are of little or no economic interest to Australia and New Zealand and, moreover, that these two countries' main concern is to help the islands through aid to achieve increasing self-reliance as part of the decolonisation process. Australia and New Zealand tend to consider the islands as bounded economies and states; the smallest island communities are taken as examples of economic insignificance and burden on their taxpayers. But if we take the region as a whole, the resources of the islands are not so negligible. The mineral resources of Melanesia, especially those of Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia, are of great regional significance. The potential offshore resources within the exclusive economic zones of the region may not be negligible. It may be noted here that the combined exclusive economic zones of all the South Pacific countries cover a very large portion of the earth's surface. When Papua New Guinea was still a colony and a resource-poor country, it was always considered together with the rest of the Pacific Islands. Now that its vast mineral resources have been discovered, Papua New Guinea has been taken off the list of Pacific Islands by Australia and

given a special status of its own. This divisive tactic helps to keep alive the image of the Pacific Islands as being of little economic significance.

New Zealand may claim that its aid to a particular small country is far in excess of any economic benefit it gains in return. But New Zealand's overall trade with Pacific Islands as a whole is so much in its favour that its total aid outlay goes only a modest way towards correcting the imbalance. The same is true of Australia—except that much of its monetary aid never leaves the country or it may leave like a tourist only to fly back home in great comfort and loaded with duty-free goods. The point is that when the flows of resources within the region are added up, Australia and New Zealand still come out well ahead. For what they give out in aid they receive in return a great deal more in the forms of export earnings and repatriation of profits on investments. It may be said that as far as the regional relationships are concerned, if the words "aid" and "help" are to be used at all, they should more correctly be used in terms of the small islands "aiding" their two big neighbours.

Another problem with the use of the term "aid" in our region is that it purportedly aims to help the Pacific Islands to become self-reliant so that there will be no need for further aid. But as I have tried to show, instead of increasing self-reliance the development trends over the past decades have been towards economic and social integration. That the Pacific Islands will ever again be truly self-reliant is an impossibility. It is an impossibility not because, as experts say, they lack the necessary resources to be self-reliant—for given a different economy and society they could very well be self-sufficient as they were for centuries until about a hundred years ago. They cannot be self-reliant because they are in an economy that will not allow them to be; they are too much part of the overall regional strategic alignment for the protection of that economy to be allowed any real measure of independence. Furthermore, the ruling classes in the whole region benefit so much from the present arrangements that, despite rhetoric to the contrary, they would have it no other way. What is termed "aid" has in fact turned out to be a necessary corrective and integrative mechanism, and as such will continue unabated and grow, for it does not really cost much to keep a few tiny communities with very small populations within the system. In fact, as I have pointed out, it costs Australia and New Zealand hardly anything to maintain and even to intensify the integration. I have argued elsewhere that there is no such thing as aid.¹ I will not repeat that argument here except to reinforce it by saying that since aid has achieved the complete opposite

of its stated aims, it is no longer aid. Either we should adopt a new term for the resource distribution it represents, or we should give it a new and more honest definition.

Development towards self-reliance and full national sovereignty has been the stated goal of decolonisation. But we have seen that decolonisation has led to integration. Without self-reliance there can be no real national sovereignty in the South Pacific islands. It follows that what we call national sovereignty in the region is little more than a measure of local autonomy in the hands of competing national interests within the larger regional economy. These interests are represented by the ruling groups within each community. Their control of the resources within their communities and their privileged access to resources moving through the region make them indispensable to the regional centres located in Australia and New Zealand. Many of the resources including aid moving from these centres to the regional communities go towards the support of elite groups that, as we have seen, have strong economic, social, and cultural ties with Australia and New Zealand. The economic and strategic integration that I have discussed rests on the maintenance of the local ruling classes and their continued affiliation with regional centres of control.

Finally, I think that a very important development, one that we have to watch carefully, is the emergence of privileged classes in the islands. For it is certain that the fates of the island communities are being decided by the ways in which these groups act, first, in relation to their own under-privileged people and, second, in relation to their important connections with each other and with similar groups elsewhere. It has been said that a main problem with Pacific Islanders is their high level of material aspirations—that they desire goods and services which their own communities' resources cannot provide. An immediate reaction to this is to say that this is so because Pacific Islanders are part of an economy that thrives on consumerism. To have drawn people into an economy dominated by Australia and New Zealand and then to expect them to have aspirations different from Australians and New Zealanders is to expect something that is not in the nature of human beings. A further examination of the problem would reveal that people's aspirations are not uniformly high. We would most likely see that the levels of aspiration vary according to social classes. The highest levels would be found among the privileged; the poor merely struggle to survive and scrounge for what they can get from the effluent of the affluent. The privileged have high aspirations because they can generally get

what they want through their ability to plug into the wider economy and, as well, by strictly regulating the access to the same resources by others. The underprivileged are poor because of their inability to tap the regional resources and are therefore left to make the best out of what is available in their immediate physical surroundings.

There are people who believe that our economy is wrong and that the conditions of the underprivileged in the islands will continue to deteriorate. My experiences over the last decade have led me towards the same conclusion. But I also think that, in the short-term future at least, the present system will continue and that in the South Pacific there cannot be any real change without fundamental structural alterations in Islander relations with Australia and New Zealand, the twin hubs of our region. It is no longer realistic to say that each island country must be able to clean up its own house. Those who wish to see Pacific Islanders living at the levels their own national resources can support overlook the obvious fact that there are no bounded economies in the region. Given that situation, the problem of the poor remains—or perhaps I should say that the problem of the affluent remains. It is the privileged who decide on the needs of their communities and the directions of development and whose rising aspirations and affluence entail the worsening conditions of the poor. I deliberately state this truism because it is something relatively new to the islands. There is a strong reluctance on the part of the regional privileged, including academics, to recognise the emergence of modern classes in the island world. There is a tendency for island analysts, businessmen, state officials, and politicians, influenced by their Western mentors, to blame the poor for their own conditions. They are said to be too culture-bound to see things as they should be seen and act accordingly. If they could only be less traditional and less indolent, pull up their socks (as if they had any to begin with), and adopt the Protestant Work Ethic, they could easily raise their standards of living. I submit that this is a red herring. Firstly, the problem is not so much a cultural issue of stubborn adherence to outmoded traditions as it is an economic matter. The poor adhere to some of their traditions because they have consistently been denied any real benefits from their labour. Their adherence to their traditions is a matter of necessity and economic security. Given real opportunities within the larger economy, they would more than pull up their socks: witness the rush of Polynesians to the factories of New Zealand, Australia, and the United States when real opportunities and alternatives were in the offing.

Secondly, the very sections in island communities that preach against adherence to “outmoded traditions” are the very groups that simultaneously try to force the dead weight of other traditions on the poor. This is especially true of parts of Polynesia where aristocratic rules and Christian church traditions, combined with the depredations of the emerging bourgeoisie, have inflicted suffering on the poor. Increasingly the privileged and the poor observe different traditions, each adhering to those that serve their interest best. The difference is that the poor merely live by their preferred traditions while the privileged often try to force certain other traditions on the poor in order to maintain social stability—that is, in order to secure the privileges that they have gained, not so much from their involvement in traditional activities as from their privileged access to resources in the regional economy. In such a situation, traditions are used by the ruling classes to enforce the new order.

Notes

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1. I am referring here to another paper that I delivered in Australia.