

South Pacific Island Futures: Paradise, Prosperity, or Pauperism?

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Thirty-two years ago, one midnight in September 1959, I boarded a Qantas 707 jet at Honolulu airport for Nadi, Fiji. It was the second ever commercial jet flight from the United States to the South Pacific Islands and Australia. Three months later, in the early hours of another morning, at Nadi Airport, Fiji, I heard the announcer call passengers for a Qantas plane *eastbound to Sydney*—via Honolulu, San Francisco, New York, London, Rome, Cairo, Karachi, Calcutta, Bangkok, Singapore, Darwin, and Brisbane. The announcer was having fun as he called the first, same aircraft, round-the-world jet service by any airline. Pan American and other jets soon followed. New technology had come to transform the relations of the South Pacific Islands with the rest of the world. The islands seemed to have arrived in a new age. They were now connected to the rest of the world by the latest technology. Few noticed that the atoll of Canton (now Kanton) was about to disappear from airline schedules, to be disconnected, as a result of the same technological change. It scarcely mattered, as Canton was populated only by the technical people who maintained the airport. It was a time for optimism. Independence was coming. Agricultural exports were growing. Cocoa would help Samoa and the Solomons. Coffee was spreading in New Guinea. Samoan banana exports were at an all-time high. Tourism would supplement the expanding sugar industry of Fiji. Pineapples, oranges, and bananas would boost the Cook Islands. New roads were being built. Development was happening, and it was good.

On 18 April 1991, Canadian International, which, under its earlier name of Canadian Pacific, had been flying to Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand for forty-one years, flew its last South Pacific flight. For Cana-

dian International, the Pacific now ends in Honolulu. Its South Pacific passengers fly on in Qantas aircraft. No mainland-based North American airline flies direct to the South Pacific Islands. Apart from a Continental service from Guam to Papua New Guinea, only Hawaiian Air crosses the equator to land on a South Pacific island. It is like an internal carrier providing holiday links between the Samoan and Tongan communities of Hawai'i and California and their homelands (*Islands Business Pacific*, June 1991, 23–25). The same advance of technology and scale that bypassed tiny Canton now threatens to bypass even Fiji—the second largest of the South Pacific states in terms of population.

Since 1959 the islands and peoples of the South Pacific have changed dramatically, and the social, economic, and political changes are, in large measure, concomitants of the transport changes. Anyone who tried in 1959 to predict in detail the character of the Pacific Islands of 1991 would have been rash. For me to try and forecast features of the islands and their peoples in the next quarter century is equally rash. I shall be selective and deal mainly with social, economic, and spatial issues. I shall be cautious and simply outline some of the underlying trends and suggest some of their implications. I shall say little about strategic issues—a field in which we are all very aware that predictions are hazardous. But there remain risks, and the greatest is that of overgeneralization.

The South Pacific Islands are very diverse. The range of scale in population, degree of fragmentation, and land area is great. I shall deal mainly with the islands south of the equator, and leave aside the largest state in the region, Papua New Guinea, which is so different in scale and resource base that its problems are of quite a different order and kind to those of the smaller states. Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, and New Caledonia—the Melanesian group—have resource potentials far greater than those of most Polynesian countries. Partly for historical reasons the Solomons and Vanuatu have much lower levels of literacy than the Polynesian states, a situation that tends to limit realization of their potential (Figure 1). Within Polynesia the larger and more compact states of Western Samoa and Tonga have good soils and considerable agricultural potential, and populations large enough for some modest industrial activity to be envisaged. The atoll countries of Tuvalu and Kiribati have extremely limited resource bases, major internal transport problems, the highest population densities, and the fewest options. I emphasize diversity, but there are general processes at work. Some countries have been experiencing these pro-

cesses for longer than others, and one might arrange them in a sequence as if they are at different stages on the same path. Although it may be helpful to think in these terms, in reality the processes never work in exactly the same way in two places. So much for caveats.

The well-worn concept of the South Pacific Islands as a paradise is as old as the first European incursions into the region. It is exploited in the tourist brochures in some variant of the images of sun, sea, and sand. It sits uneasily with other images of exotic, mysterious—even “savage” or “primitive”—islands that are used to attract more adventurous tourists to parts of Melanesia. To Islanders themselves it is not a real image except in some fantasy, parallel to Westerners’ notions when they hark back wistfully to some unreal past, or to some particular element of the past. Paradise lost to be regained.

For some, the key to finding “paradise” lay in independence, or control over their own affairs. Most of the colonial territories of 1959 are now independent states. First Western Samoa in 1962, then many others through to the latest in Micronesia, gained independence in a remarkably peaceful—pacific—manner befitting paradise. But if independence represents paradise regained, it is a flawed paradise. Nationhood and sovereignty are very constrained forms of independence for South Pacific Island states. Some would argue that independence is close to pauperism with its extremely heavy dependence on foreign aid. Nevertheless, many of the material conditions of life have improved for most South Pacific Islanders over the last thirty years. Whereas in 1959 only urban residents in Western Samoa had access to piped water and electricity, now 78 and 59 percent respectively of all agriculturally active households enjoy these services (WSDS 1990, 41–42). By the measures of our material world—gross domestic product, access to health services, longevity, levels of formal education, the volume of consumables in houses, or vehicle ownership—most Pacific Islanders are better off than they were in 1959. The bases of these living standards are more problematic, with foreign aid the major source for infrastructure investment. In the majority of South Pacific Island countries, receipts from foreign aid exceed the total value of exports. The dictionary defines pauperism as “poverty, with dependence on public relief, as an established condition or fact among a people” (OED 1971). We might need to redefine the word for the South Pacific—perhaps “comfort, with dependence on foreign relief as an established condition.” Will the foreign relief continue to flow to maintain comfort if not prosperity?

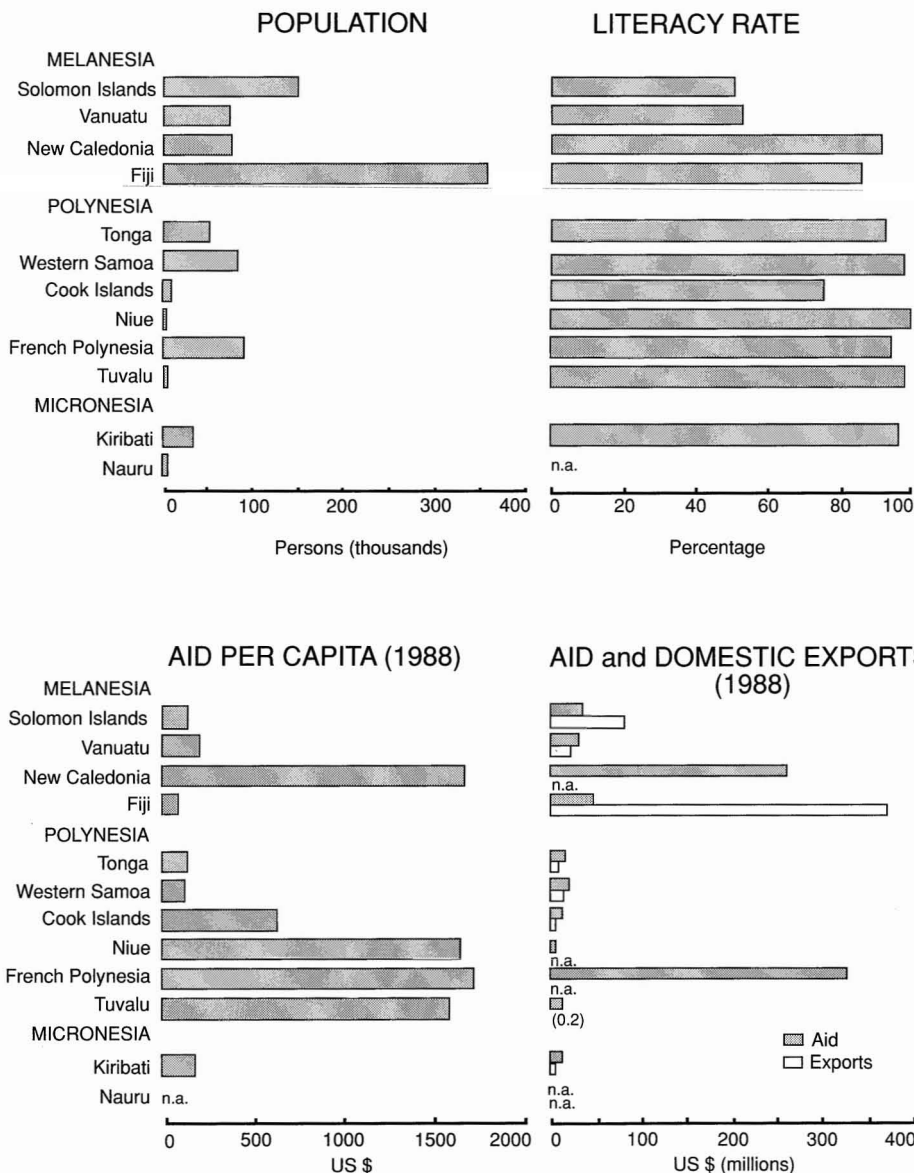


FIGURE 1. Population, literacy rates, aid, and domestic exports. Data from *Pacific Economic Bulletin* 4(2), December 1989; and 6(1), June 1991.

CHANGES IN TRANSPORT

In the nineteenth century small trading vessels operating out of Auckland, Sydney, San Francisco, or Honolulu made landfalls and contact at a multitude of points around island coasts directly from, or en route directly to, metropolitan ports. Freight rates were generally uniform to all loading points. Uniform cost of access to many points in an archipelago was the norm. Colonial governments then established official ports of entry, reducing the number of islands with direct links to rim countries. The number of ports of entry in most larger island countries has been reduced as ship size increased. One or two official ports of entry is now the norm. Goods for export must first be sent by small vessel to the major port and there transshipped, making relative costs higher for the residents of outer islands. Despite government subsidies for freight services, a copra producer on an outer island in Fiji must produce 50 percent more copra than one located on the main island, in order to buy the same basket of goods (Bayliss-Smith et al 1988). Spatial disadvantage in economic and social life has increased for large parts of every island country (Figure 2).

In the mid-1950s Fiji, Tonga, Niue, and Samoa had a scheduled passenger liner and freight connection to New Zealand every two weeks. In the first two of these countries the ships called directly at two ports. The banana trade of the countries depended on this regularity and frequency of service. Flying boats provided a supplementary but high-cost passenger service for some countries. Then came the DC4s and DC6s. Airfares fell and airlines captured the passenger trade. Liners ceased to call regularly, and banana exports collapsed partly as a result. Countries like Niue and the Cook Islands lacked large airfields and had insufficient demand. Their external links were largely cut away. In the extreme case, lonely Pitcairn Island was almost totally isolated when the trans-Pacific liners ceased to operate. In the 1960s a number of South Pacific islands were less well served by overseas shipping than they had been in the previous decade.

In the 1970s internal air services began to provide feeder services to main centers that were financially accessible to some Islanders. But these air services in turn took passenger traffic from the interisland ships, and the sequence was repeated as outer islands had fewer freight services. Core areas of each country, usually the island where the capital stood, were increasingly advantaged, and other areas disadvantaged.

The process has continued in a variety of forms. Containerization is

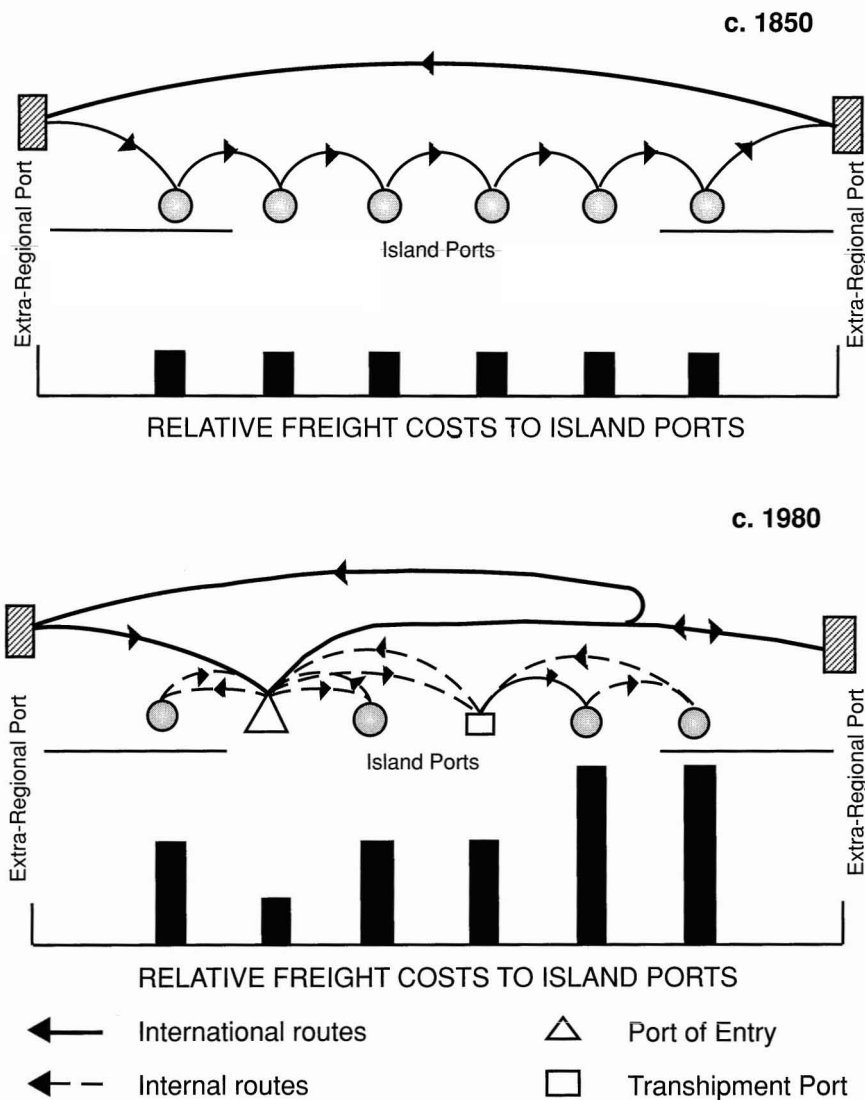


FIGURE 2. Model of shipping routes from extraregional ports to island ports, and relative freight costs to island ports, circa 1860 and 1980.

now the norm for ocean services. Large fast container ships offer considerable economies of scale, but time in port is costly. Some island countries require relatively few containers each month, or even each year. It is scarcely economical for the large vessels to stop. Fortunately there has been a surplus of container-ship capacity for much of the last fifteen years,

so such ships have continued to call to drop or pick up a few containers at island ports on trans-Pacific routes from, say, Japan to New Zealand, or California to Sydney. They may do so at little more than the marginal cost of a few hours in port. The Pacific Forum Line, owned by the South Pacific Island governments, also provides international services from South Pacific countries to Australia and New Zealand. Once ashore, containers must be unloaded and goods transferred to small vessels for onward shipment within the island country. The break of bulk, which would not affect a large importer located near the port and taking full container loads, does affect most island importers, particularly those distant from the major port of entry. Comparative spatial advantage and disadvantage are again increased.

For airlines similar principles apply. Wide-bodied and long-range jets now overfly the island countries to an increasing extent. Mass tourism bypasses most South Pacific Islands. Smaller and often older aircraft with higher costs, and hence higher fares per mile, operated the regional and internal services through the 1980s. The market is often too small for economies of scale to operate. The tourists, and the economic benefits they bring, cluster around the capital or in a few accessible enclaves.

LOCATIONAL ADVANTAGE

The increasing differential in locational advantage affects many aspects of the economy. As agriculture has become reoriented from a subsistence to a commercial activity and become more dependent on the export of produce and the import of weedicides, fertilizer, or mechanized equipment, the reshaping of the geography of locational advantage has become more and more important in shaping land use patterns and determining what it is profitable to grow where.

The process has been reinforced by the spread of formal education. High schools or tertiary institutions are located in the major centers, to which students must migrate or commute. More recently the establishment of secondary industry, including that encouraged by free-trade zones or other incentives such as tax holidays, has been concentrated in or close to the main centers and export gateways. The greater part of the growth of public service employment, fueled by aid payments, has been in capital centers.

The natural partner of this spatial polarization has been rural-to-urban

migration, whose details differ from country to country. In Rarotonga, Tahiti, Tongatapu, Tutuila, Upolu, and Efate, commuting and a degree of on-site urbanization have occurred rather than migration as such. Villages up to twenty miles from the capital have become suburbanized.

Such internal migration, commuting, and commitment to wage labor are all age and gender selective, and age structures in rural areas are often distorted inversely to those of the towns. Villages with high dependency ratios are common. With a shortage of men, the burden on women is often increased, and they take on tasks formerly in the men's domain. There may be a growing proportion of elderly or very young, sometimes including pensioners now retired from urban and public service jobs, and children of urban couples sent back to the village for primary education to avoid the higher costs of life and education in town at that level. They mirror the rural children sent to towns for high school education. All represent dislocated families and social groups, and all, in Kerry James' words, create "ambiguities . . . in the socialization of the children involved" (1991, 2). What will be the longer term social consequences of these dislocations? One might hope that education would provide a new and coherent form of socialization, but to date there is little evidence to give hope that this will happen.

Relative locational advantage crosses national borders, as do the migration chains. International migration from the South Pacific Islands is very obvious in Honolulu. Emigration has kept population increase in island Polynesia low. Over the intercensal years 1981 to 1986, the population of Western Samoa increased by only 0.7 percent (WSDS 1986, 15). Since 1980 the populations of the Cook Islands and Niue have declined, and that of Tonga has increased by less than one percent per year. Only one-third of ethnic Cook Islanders now live in the Cook Islands; only one quarter of Niueans are in Niue; almost one quarter of Tongans live in New Zealand, the United States, or Australia (pers comm, Dr John Connell, 1988). But people in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands have no easy emigration avenues, and populations there are increasing at rates higher than 3 percent per year.

The consequences of emigration are wide ranging. Many Polynesian families have transnational household economies, blending subsistence food production on traditionally held land with urban wage labor and the earnings of, and remittances from, family members in New Zealand or the United States. Family members and gifts of money, food, or consumer

goods move back and forth. In the case of Tonga, containerloads of secondhand goods are shipped from California to relatives in Tongatapu, there to be sold at local "fairs" (James 1991, 7). In 1989 Western Samoa's domestic exports were valued at about US\$12 million. Remittances (or private transfers) totaled almost US\$38 million—three times the value of exports. Aid grants of over US\$13 million also exceeded exports.

ECONOMIC PROSPECTS

These macroeconomic figures are important clues to the present socioeconomic situation in a number of countries. Where remittances—or wage labor generated in significant measure by aid grants—offer easier forms of income than hard agricultural work in the sun, it is not surprising that agricultural output for export has declined and the sector is generally stagnant. Low world prices for copra and other products have contributed. Decisions made by farmers, or potential farmers, are economically rational. Except for a few crops, such as taro for export to the Polynesian populations in New Zealand and the United States, the returns to labor are unattractive if any alternatives are available. The market for taro is limited. Wage labor and, for some, remittances provide those alternatives, but many see their best choice as emigration. In Kiribati, a maritime training and employment scheme allows more than one thousand I-Kiribati men to work on German merchant vessels around the world.

Smallholder commercial agriculture is stagnant in much of the South Pacific, although probably not to the same extent as in parts of Micronesia where it seems almost dead. This said, the importance of subsistence agriculture in Pacific Island economies must not be underestimated. In Western Samoa about 60 percent of total agricultural production is consumed by the producing households (ADB 1990). In Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Tuvalu about 75 percent of households are dependent primarily on subsistence agriculture (pers comm, E. K. Fisk, Nov 1991). Given the sluggish economies of most of the countries, it has been the subsistence sector that has maintained basic food supplies and kept people from absolute poverty. However, it cannot provide prosperity in the form of the consumer goods people desire. Alternative routes to prosperity are few.

In Kiribati and Tuvalu the area of land suitable for agriculture is too small and the soils too poor for the existing populations to depend on export agriculture and obtain the level of material welfare to which many

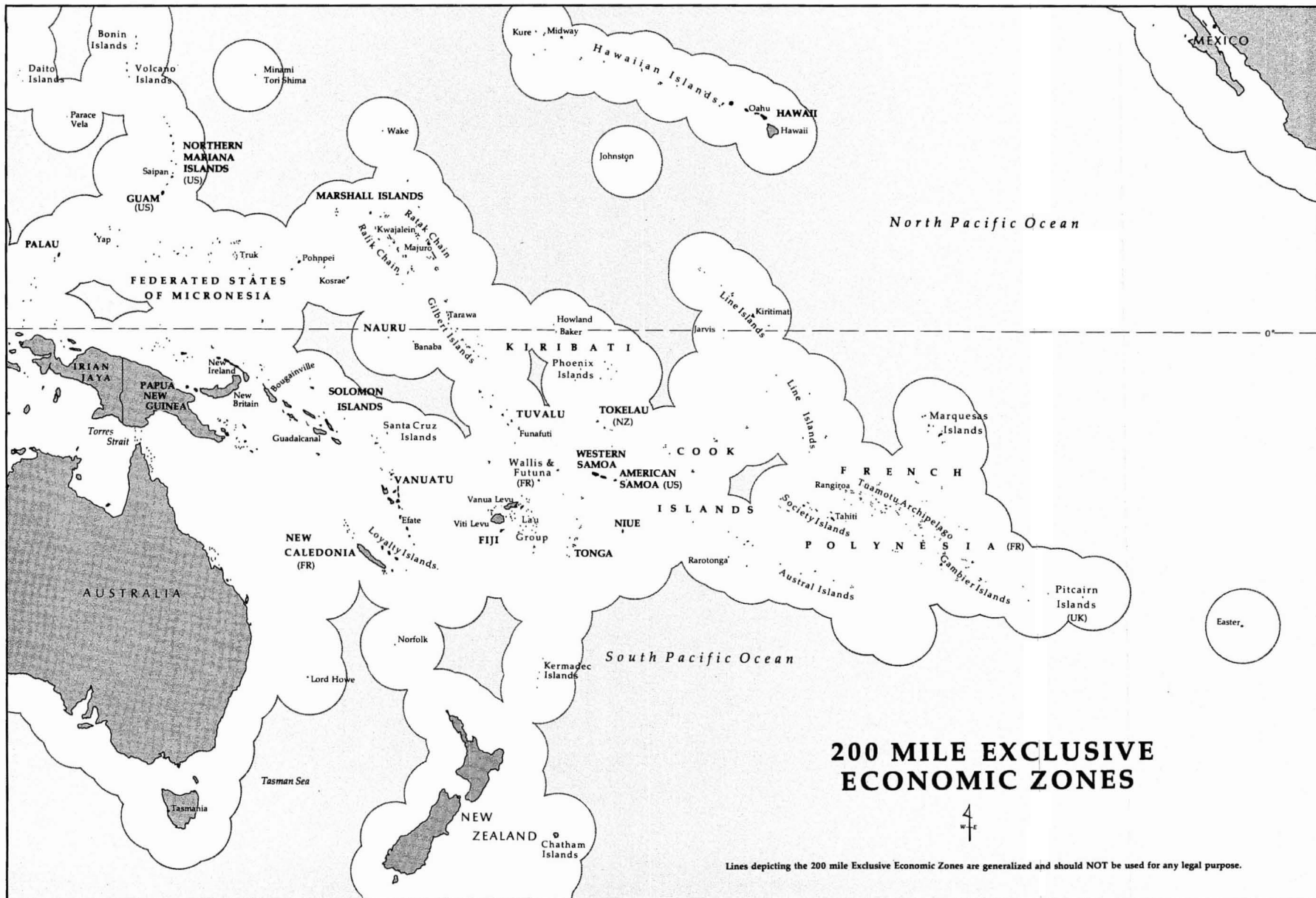
aspire. Coconuts can only provide a modest income per hectare, and they are almost the only option for atolls and islands with infrequent shipping links.

Elsewhere in rural areas the best chance for a renewal of agriculture lies in a return to more sophisticated agricultural systems. I say "return" because nineteenth-century food production systems were often very sophisticated in use of water control, terracing, drainage, crop sequences, storage, or composting. The disintensification of agriculture in the region has left an impoverished skeleton. If it is to be restored for the twenty-first century, it will have to be done through the use of modern methods—good research, effective extension, new techniques and management, and careful marketing. The potential to develop these methods exists in places such as the agricultural campus of the University of the South Pacific at Alafua. It is worrying that the island countries make little use of this potential. The future lies in education and good application of research. Yet secondary-level education remains weak in several countries, especially in Melanesia.

The success of Tongan smallholder cooperatives in exporting squash to Japan, or in producing and exporting vanilla, shows that particular market niches can be established and maintained. So does the revitalized fresh ginger industry of Fiji in the late 1980s (McGregor 1989). Success requires strong management in marketing to maintain quality control and regularity of supply. It also requires location close to an airport or export port. Perhaps prosperity for well-located areas could be attained if these features were adopted more widely. Nevertheless, there must be doubts about whether the level of returns for the majority would be sufficient to maintain commitment in the face of alternative opportunities.

The most commonly cited advantages of the Pacific Islands are their exclusive economic zones. Conventional wisdom foresees rich returns from fishing and seabed minerals. Seabed mining lies in the future, and how the island states will benefit depends on the international regime established and their success in negotiating as a group with those possessing the capital and know-how. Island countries are like a school of sardines facing a number of hungry sharks. Like the sardines, if they do not swim together they will be eaten.

One must be cautious in assessing the potential of fisheries for providing employment and helping the economies. The United States fishing industry in the region has not prospered in recent years. Purse seiners have



been laid up in ports. The Soviet fishing company found that catches in the Kiribati region did not justify renewal of their fishing agreement at the price asked by Kiribati. Kiribati's own fishing venture has collapsed. Fiji's Ika Corporation has had troubled times. The most successful operations have been those using the waters of the Solomons, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu, where the shallow seas carry more nutrients than the waters of the wider and deeper Pacific. For these countries there are fair prospects. But the Pacific covers a vast area, and one cannot extrapolate from one part to another.

The artisanal fisheries of reefs and coastal waters have been the mainstay of the subsistence and internal market fisheries. Some such fisheries are under pressure from overexploitation, the destruction of mangroves which are the breeding areas for some species, and the use of explosives and weedicides in fishing. Without good fishing statistics one cannot be certain what is happening to catches, but in Western Samoa new data from an FAO project show a dramatic fall in catches in the last five years (pers comm, Dr Leon Zann, Oct 1991).

At present the one area offering prospects for expansion of wage employment is secondary industry. The case of Fiji since 1987 is notable. The country had a severe economic downturn after the May 1987 coup. Tourists and investors stayed away and more than sixteen thousand people fled, including many skilled artisans and professionals. In response, the interim government introduced trade, tariff, and tax-reform programs, corporatization of certain government enterprises, and an active program to attract investment, including very generous tax holidays for investors. A significant increase in economic growth and paid employment followed. Tourist numbers rose to precoup levels and above. The garment industry expanded rapidly, helping to create 38.5 percent more jobs in manufacturing in 1989 than existed in 1988 (World Bank 1991, Table III.2). But the postcoup shortage of skilled personnel remains a problem.

So successful were some of the clothing manufacturers that by early 1990 Fiji had captured a significant share of the nightwear market in the United States. The then Fijian opposition leader, Adi Kuini Vuikaba Bavandra, described Fiji as "the pyjama republic." Although success led to quota restrictions by the United States, the lesson from Fiji is that opportunities do exist for successful manufacturing export industries under certain conditions, including those of market entry, investment security, and wage rates acceptable to employers.

The importance of this last point was illustrated during the passage of United States minimum wage legislation in 1991. The tuna cannery firms threatened that, if American Samoa were not excluded from the proposed minimum wage rate of \$4.25 an hour to be applied in other United States jurisdictions, they would move operations to some lower-wage location (North 1991, 54). With few alternative sources of employment, American Samoa's own representatives supported the exclusion and helped to keep wages down. The fact that "most of the workers" are Western Samoan citizens and have no vote in American Samoa (or, as absentees, in Western Samoa for that matter) was probably a key point (North 1991, 57).

Other countries have moved tentatively toward encouraging export manufacturing. Tonga has its small industries area, and under the SPARTECA agreement Australia and New Zealand have given easier access to their markets, albeit subject to conditions governing the proportion of local content in the goods produced. Only Fiji has taken an aggressively reformist and export-oriented policy. Recently a plant was opened in Western Samoa to make simple components for cars made in Australia. It already employs more than five hundred people, mostly women, and could become the country's biggest private-sector employer. If successful, it may show the way for others, and only a few such plants could quickly reshape the paid employment structure of small island countries. Will this be the pattern of the future?

IMPACT ON CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Migration, wage labor, and the imperative of the factory clock combine, with greater emphasis on commercial than subsistence agriculture, to undermine key elements of the so-called traditional social systems. Obviously the process is not new. It started with the earliest contact with Europeans. Most island societies have not been truly "traditional" for over a century. Nevertheless, the last thirty years have seen major changes.

Changes in land tenure are particularly important because the systems for allocating, validating the use of, and transferring the rights to land lie at the core of South Pacific social systems. They are basic to much of the political and governmental structure of the region. Yet most island governments seem not to have recognized the implications of the changes for their own power structures.

Studies in which I was involved in the late 1950s in Western Samoa (Farrell and Ward 1962; Ward 1962) and Fiji (Ward 1965) indicated that a few

individuals were using communally owned land in markedly individual ways. They were establishing relatively large holdings. Planting of long-term tree crops enabled them to retain use rights for much longer periods than under shifting cultivation. Some employed wage labor rather than depending on kinship links to mobilize help. Some retained the cash proceeds within their immediate family instead of sharing them more widely with kin and fellow villagers. Along with individualization of tenure was a withdrawal from some or all of the normal customary community obligations. Those who depended on wage labor for their own farm requirements did not want to be distracted from commercial purposes by the untimely demands of kinship or community obligations.

This trend, which would lead to the emergence of what have been described as "big peasants" in Asian and African contexts, has a simple base. Under customary practices in many areas, if one clears land from forest it remains under one's control as long as it continues to be used. If abandoned to fallow, it would gradually revert to the common pool, perhaps to be reused by the same kin group in the future—or perhaps by another group. In the new context, simply by keeping the land in use, for example by fencing it for extensive grazing, one could retain authority over it, and have what might be almost permanent tenure. Traditional mechanisms were being used for nontraditional purposes.

A number of recent studies show that these processes have accelerated dramatically. About 20 percent of Fijian farmers now operate as individuals outside villages. Large areas of customary land have been cleared for pasture in eastern Viti Levu where they are now occupied as individual holdings and grazed at low intensity as if the main purpose were to retain tenure rather than engage in profitable farming (Ward 1985). In Western Samoa, it was reported at a Forest Conservation Seminar in May 1991 that 7 percent of the country had been cleared from forest in the previous three years. Certainly 20 percent has been cleared of forest since the mid-1950s (WSDEC 1991, 9; Fox and Cumberland 1962, 186). Clearing continues, although much land closer to roads and villages lies idle. The process looks like a land grab. People are trying to secure customary land quickly for long-term family security. Anthropologist Tim O'Meara (1990) has shown that within Samoan villages a high proportion of land is no longer farmed under the *pule* 'authority' of the *matai* and within the *aiga* or extended family organization. Instead, nuclear families are the key units. Three years ago O'Meara's work was discounted by some leading

Samoaans—that was not the Samoan way, so it did not happen. This year the government has set up a cabinet committee to examine the whole question of land tenure. The changes are now too obvious to ignore.

It is now reported to be difficult to get *aiga* members to work without cash payment on “plantations” other than those of their own nuclear families. The wages expected are close to the government-determined minimum wage. This is a long way from the customary practices of *fa’a Samoa* and raises doubts about the continued strength of the whole basis of Samoan social organization.

The processes outlined for Fiji and Samoa have also been noted in Papua New Guinea (eg, Grossman 1984) and Vanuatu (Rodman 1984). In Tonga, a revolutionary system of individual holdings that was formalized in 1882 has come under the pressures of commercialism. There is now insufficient land to provide the 8¼ acres to which every adult male is entitled under the constitution. At the same time the attraction of profits from larger scale farming of watermelons, taro, or squash for export has led to some farmers obtaining much larger holdings by a variety of means. The pressure on land for urban purposes has created an informal, and possibly illegal, land market. Once again a system that was based on equity is helping to create greater variation in wealth and is undermining the social structure.

The key change in all this has been the removal of the functional links between the allocation of land, the means of mobilizing labor, and the social structure. Nayacakalou argued that “there can be no structural adaptation between social forms whose principles of organisation are contradictory” (1975, 135). The changes in tenure, the individualization of lifestyles, and related processes, mean that the principles under which much of the economy of the islands now operate are contradictory to those of the customary society. In those countries with stratified societies, the sociopolitical hierarchy is now dislocated from its economic base. Can the society and polity change to keep up? The need to change is not widely or publicly recognized by politicians, yet changes are being reflected in political developments.

The introduction of universal suffrage in Western Samoa in 1991 demonstrates readiness to adjust to the forces of change. The relatively polite debates in Tonga between the commoner members of Parliament and the nobles has brought tensions into the open. The coups in Fiji can be interpreted as a demonstration of unwillingness to recognize the inexorable

processes resulting from the economic changes the government and the people have been keen to foster. If that interpretation is correct, then the words of one leading Fijian politician may be prophetic—"it will take them [the proponents of the coup] ten years to find out that what they sought was impossible."

Changes of the type outlined often lead to societal stress. Furthermore, in many parts of the world, tensions between ethnic groups have become common. The relative homogeneity of the Polynesian countries has limited such internal divisions, except where communities from different Polynesian countries now live side by side. Outbreaks of violence have occurred between island communities in New Zealand.

The situation in western Melanesia is different. Here, lack of larger political groupings in largely unstratified societies; linguistic diversity; and the small size of the individual precontact communities that regularly interacted through trade, marriage, or political linkages, have all contributed to unstable social and political situations. People with no kinship, linguistic, or sociopolitical ties or moral cohesion as groups, are thrown together in urban areas. Groups may feel that their government is dominated by strangers, if not outright traditional enemies. Many have little sense of identity with the state. The difficulties of creating such an identity, and the whole new suite of social responsibilities toward strangers across great cultural diversity and social distance must be one of the southwest Pacific's greatest dilemmas. I'm not sure that anyone, there or anywhere in the world, has an answer.

It is not surprising that ethnic, or tribal, unrest has emerged as a growing problem in the postcolonial era. It was of course present in the colonial period but the external power held a real power dominance and could, and often did, put down unrest. Furthermore, the *pax Britannica*, or *pax Australiana* had temporary advantages not shared by independent governments. Colonial governments were not answerable to voters. By their very foreignness, mystery, and little-understood power and material wealth, they enjoyed for a time an almost supernatural aura. Independence did not see this aura transferred to the new administrations. Furthermore, the imposition of peace between groups by external power temporarily reduced some of the main causes of conflicts. Land situated within the dangerous marchlands between tribal groups had often lain idle. With local warfare banned, it became safer to move into these areas and alleviate population pressure. A key cause of tribal conflict was

removed, or reduced for two or three decades. Population pressure later reemerged, both directly because of population growth, and indirectly because of the demand for Western goods that motivated people to plant increasing areas in cash crops. The vacant frontier lands had often been occupied by the time of independence. Traditional rivals were now face to face across much narrower frontier zones.

Transport also paved the way for tensions. New roads and airfields gave access for commercial agriculture, but also provided the routes by which contacts with strangers and enemies were extended. The human and fragile qualities of the rulers and government power were revealed. Without the introduction of a new sense of national identity or civic responsibility toward people other than one's own kin or *wantok* group, the situation is ripe for intergroup strife.

The last few years have seen the dangers realized. The people of Bougainville feel a strong sense of ethnic difference to the "redskins" of the rest of Papua New Guinea, and some feel they have been unfairly treated by both colonial and postindependence governments. Attempted secession, a three-year crisis, great suffering, and economic hardship for both the Bougainvilleans and other Papua New Guineans have resulted, with many deaths in clashes between the army and Bougainvilleans.

Similar tensions exist elsewhere in Melanesia, though fortunately none has erupted into similar levels of bloodshed and suffering. The potential remains. Jimmy Stephens, who led the rebellion on Espiritu Santo against the newly independent government of Vanuatu in 1980, and who was released from jail in 1991, was reported in November 1991 as saying he was returning to Santo to take up the cause again. Others in Vanuatu remain in uneasy allegiance to the state.

In Solomon Islands, tension between people from different islands sometimes flares. The people of Guadalcanal and the Western Province resist migration to their islands by people from Malaita and elsewhere. The complex systems of provincial and national governments in both Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands reflect the ethnic realities and complexities of the countries. They aimed to decentralize decision making but have not proved very efficient either in governing or in creating a stable polity.

The years of unrest in New Caledonia prior to the Matignon Accord included important ethnic elements. The Melanesian Kanaks are outnumbered by the combined population of Europeans and Polynesian migrants

from Tahiti and Wallis and Futuna; together, these three elements make a volatile mix.

There can be little doubt that Melanesia will remain socially unstable for years to come. Recently the fragmentation of states along ethnic lines has almost become respectable after four decades in which it was anathema in the former colonial world. Perhaps there could be as many as eight states in Melanesia by the end of the century.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Changes in transport technology have reshaped the locational geography of the region, disadvantaging many islands. Agricultural economies have stagnated and will only be revived if much higher levels of organizational skill are applied. Aid has fueled wage employment and urbanization and drawn people away from the disadvantaged areas. But aspirations are not fully met in the islands, and those people who have the opportunity frequently migrate to metropolitan countries. Sociopolitical structures are being undermined by the forces of socioeconomic change. Islanders' lifestyles in both the home islands and the rim countries are evolving quickly, but at different rates. The change is away from custom, toward a consumer and commercial society, and toward a different form of pauperism—one in which dependence on foreign cultures becomes an established condition. To keep pace with the material wants of individuals and their nuclear families, and to retain the valued elements of island culture, is a major intellectual challenge. It requires the tools of the new world—education of quality; books and libraries; research and its application; understanding, not only of traditional folkways, but of how to use knowledge drawn from the whole span of human experience to preserve the core, and the best, of island cultures for active use in the twenty-first century.

If the smaller South Pacific Island cultures are to be viable entities, their survival may be as dependent on former Islanders who live in Pacific rim countries as on those who remain in the islands. Those living in the rim countries have much better access to the necessary tools. But long-term cultural viability may also be problematic for larger Polynesian and Melanesian communities. For example, will those who, in New Zealand, *Once Were Warriors*, to borrow the title of Alan Duff's powerful novel, be able in sufficient numbers to recapture the key features of Maori society, blend them with what is essential for twenty-first century existence,

and turn them into something of strength and value to all of that country's people? Will this happen for Samoans, Tongans, Cook Islanders, Niueans, or Micronesians whether they live in the islands or in New Zealand or the United States? Will they retain a real island identity? Or will the island cultures wither and stagnate? Will remaining Solomon Island and Vanuatu cultures survive simply because there is no migration outlet?

Duff, in an Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio interview about his book, stressed the need to take on and effectively use the power of education and literacy to enrich Maori culture through self-help, and thereby permit Maori people to participate fully in the broader society, but from a strong and respected stance as Maori. If they and the other Pacific Island peoples do not, then his biting comment may prove sadly prophetic for the South Pacific Islands—"If you have a peasant culture, you will have a peasant outcome."

In my view, "peasant outcomes" will not satisfy the majority of Pacific Islanders beyond another generation. The biggest dilemma may then stem from the fact that a large number of South Pacific Islands will not support more than a peasant outcome in resource, locational, or economic terms. It seems almost inevitable that the flows of migrants will continue as individuals and families make their choices about where their material, and perhaps social, welfare can best be found. They may choose material prosperity elsewhere, rather than accept an image of paradise or a form of aid-dependent pauperism within their home islands.

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Abstract

Technical changes in air and sea transport since the 1950s have had differential effects within the Pacific Islands region. Many islands are now disadvantaged in relation to a few main centers and core areas. Social, political, and economic changes have occurred, in part as concomitants of transport changes. New patterns of locational advantage for agricultural and commercial activity, education, and aid dependence have fostered internal and international migration, which has been accompanied by considerable social disruption.

Overall economic prospects are limited, but the possibilities for niche manufacturing for export are demonstrated by recent Fijian and Samoan experience. Economic and spatial changes have led to modification of de facto land tenure and labor arrangements that may undermine the bases of sociopolitical systems. The implications for indigenous cultures tend to be overlooked by politicians and customary leaders. Education and modern intellectual tools have not been used effectively to understand the cultural changes or to strengthen the viable components of customary ways. Unless this occurs, emigration and the weakening of island cultures may continue, and a form of aid-dependent pauperism may become entrenched.

KEY WORDS: Pacific Islands; transport; social change; land tenure; cultural change