State Society and Governance in Melanesia

DISCUSSION PAPER

POSTCOLONIALISM, NEO-COLONIALISM AND THE "PACIFIC WAY": A CRITIQUE OF (UN)CRITICAL APPROACHES[1]

ABSTRACT

When Fiji's first Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, first used the term the "Pacific Way" during an address to the UN General Assembly in 1970, its specific referent was the smooth transition to independence of Fiji and several other Pacific island states that had thus far gone through the decolonization process. The "Pacific Way" was soon used to denote a collective political identity for the island states of the Pacific region in the postcolonial period and, together with the "Melanesian Way", developed the characteristics of an anti-colonial discourse — something that had been noticeably lacking in Mara's original formulation. During much the same period, Edward Said's critical study, *Orientalism*, began to make its mark, especially in terms of its critique of the nexus between power and knowledge and the way in which this supported colonial hegemony. This in turn provided an important stimulus for the development of postcolonial theory as an anti-hegemonic discourse critical not just of colonial history but manifestations of neo-colonialism in the contemporary period. In this paper I suggest that although the "Pacific Way" is generally presented as a counter-hegemonic discourse, in some manifestations it provides support for other kinds of hegemony. This is because it has so far evinced very little concern with the hegemonic practices of local elites. At the same time, it continues to invest in the overarching West/non-West bifurcation of the world, which also produces quite simplistic images of contemporary regional politics that mask a much more complex set of social, political and economic relations.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1970, Fiji's first Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, delivered an address to the UN General Assembly, characterizing the experiences shared by Fiji and some other Pacific island states in achieving a smooth path to independence as the "Pacific Way". This term soon came to denote a collective political identity for the island states of the Pacific region in the aftermath of independence, one which claimed a unique Pacific character as based on broadly shared social and political values. It also came to acquire a strong anti-colonial resonance, comparable in some ways to the *négritude* movement of postcolonial Africa as well as the later development of discourses about "Asian values" and the "ASEAN Way" in East and Southeast Asia, all of which sought a reaffirmation of local ways in the aftermath of colonial rule.

The Pacific Way was later joined by a more specific assertion of a sub-regional identity in the form of the Melanesian Way. This was a more profoundly anti-colonial articulation of identity from the start.[2] Alongside the regionalist discourses also sit a number of nationalist formulations such as such as *anga fakatonga* (the Tongan Way), *fa'a Samoa* (the Samoan Way) and *vaka-viti* (the Fijian Way). While focusing on more tightly bounded notions of local indigenous identities, these nonetheless resonate with aspects of the broader regional articulations and contribute to their substance.

In one way or another, all these discourses are manifestations of postcolonial thinking — a style of thought which is generally critical not simply of the colonial past but of the continuing effects of that past in the present. Thus the Pacific Way and cognate discourses have persisted into the present period, often as undertones but sometimes more explicitly in debates about relations between Pacific island states and their regional neighbours, especially Australia and New Zealand, countries which often stand accused of neo-colonial attitudes and practices. At the centre of these debates are broad issues of governance, security, aid, development and dependency, which in turn raise questions of accountability, responsibility and sovereign rights as well as the efficacy and legitimacy of "Western" modes of governance vis-à-vis local institutions and practices. The latter have often been defended through invocation of the Pacific Way, the Melanesian Way and/or the narrower national formulations.

The Pacific Way idea has had a variegated political career in the postcolonial period. One commentator notes that in its early years it reflected a romantic euphoria about a Pacific renaissance which could embrace modernity while fostering a unique Pacific identity shared by all island states, or more especially, by emergent Pacific elites "who saw themselves as founders … of the new postcolonial Pacific order". (Ratuva, 2003: 247). While the Pacific Way idea has sometimes prompted cynicism, especially to the extent that it has been perceived as serving the interests of those elites rather than Pacific people as a whole, it still has much positive currency. Thus despite its elitist orientation, as well as the fact that it is often "embarrassingly clichéd", it remains a popular way of representing the region collectively. (Meleisa, 2000: 76).

The framework for analysis in this paper takes its point of departure from postcolonial approaches which have been so influential in framing the terms of debate about the colonial experience and its aftermath. The paper therefore looks first at some of the main assumptions of postcolonial theory and then the specific circumstances in which the Pacific Way was first articulated, as well as the meaning with which it was imbued. Here we see that although the Pacific Way has since acquired many of the characteristics of a postcolonial discourse in the critical sense in which this term is generally understood, it was anything but in its original formulation. Accordingly, the next section traces some of the shifts in meaning and application as it developed over the next few years, especially through the voice of academic interlocutors. Taken together, these two sections illustrate a significant transformation in meaning, thereby demonstrating some interesting contradictions and tensions.[3] We then consider the issue of neo-colonialism with specific reference to democracy promotion

as part of the broader "good governance" agenda. Here we look at several critiques of Australian policy in particular, and the way in which debates about Australia's relations with the Pacific islands has been framed. To the extent that these critiques embrace the principles of postcolonial analysis they also embrace some of its shortcomings. The concluding section therefore suggests that good critical scholarship, if it is seriously to address problems of hegemony in the Pacific islands, needs to avoid adopting the more simplistic postures of postcolonial analysis that has limited its scope to date.

POSTCOLONIALISM

Edward Said's critical study *Orientalism* (Said, 1978), is widely regarded as the founding text in the genre of postcolonial studies. It is a study in comparative literature, but at the same time is much more than that, setting out a scathing political and social critique of key aspects of European colonialism. Said's notion of Orientalism consists in a discourse through which Europeans have historically represented the "Orient" as an exotic space occupied by an inferior "Other" (the Oriental) against which positive images of Europe and the European self have been constructed. These claims are embedded primarily in a critique of colonial power relations and, in particular, the links between power, representation and knowledge. A recent text proposes that postcolonial critique emerges as the product of resistance to colonialism and imperialism and therefore identifies primarily with the subject position of anti-colonial activists (Young, 2001: 15, 19). Postcolonial analysis is therefore associated largely with forms of resistance to European or Western imperialism and colonialism, the body of ideas which supported it, and its ongoing effects.

The intellectual impact of both Said's original work and the wider field of postcolonial theory developed over the past few decades has been considerable, spreading well beyond the confines of academia. Some would argue, however, that its insights have not spread far enough and that it has yet to penetrate the thinking, or perhaps "unthinking", of various politicians, journalists, bureaucrats, consultants and other experts located in metropolitan centres far from the everyday lives and experiences of Pacific islanders (Fry, 2000). Postcolonial approaches themselves, however, are scarcely beyond criticism, especially to the extent that they remain concerned with issues of cultural identity at the expense of pressing issues of political economy which are, for many, a matter of life and death. Arif Dirlik and Aijaz Ahmed, in particular, have also take postcolonial theorists to task for abandoning or at least playing down class as a category of analysis (Dirlik, 1997; Ahmed, 1994). As for postcolonial theory's concern with unmasking historical ideas which supported colonialism, even sympathizers such as Michael Hardt see a need to move on, arguing that "the residues of colonialist thinking are not the central pillars of contemporary forms of domination".(Hardt, 2001: 248). To these critiques it may be added that postcolonial approaches often have a strong tendency to gloss over cases involving forms of local (non-Western) domination and subordination because they do not fit the particular normative framework of the postcolonial genre which has been set up largely as a critique of "Western" practices.

This paper therefore takes issue with postcolonial theory's claims to constitute a counter-hegemonic discourse. I argue that while it has certainly contributed a great deal to the critique of (Western) colonialism and its mechanisms of oppression and control — which I have no intention of defending — it often relies on a normative framework based on overly simplistic images of oppressors and oppressed. This produces a two-dimensional view of the world which tends to evade confronting other hegemonic practices, especially those of indigenous or local elites either during the colonial period or in its aftermath, including the contemporary period. The next section illustrates some of these points through a close study of the initial emergence of the Pacific Way concept which was anything but anti-colonial in its original manifestation. This also highlights

some of the ironies of its later appropriation or reconstruction as a postcolonial discourse.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE PACIFIC WAY

When Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara first publicly enunciated a version of the "Pacific Way" before the UN General Assembly in October 1970, its specific reference point was Fiji's very recent transition to independence. In contrast with other parts of the former colonial world, Mara remarked that this had been achieved without great drama or political turbulence.

> … But this is nothing new in the Pacific. Similar calm and orderly moves to independence have taken place in Western Samoa, the Cook Islands, in Nauru, and in Tonga. We like to think that this is the Pacific Way, both geographically and ideologically ... (Mara, 1997: 238).

Since the application of the phrase was at this point limited to those island states lying largely within the central Southwest Pacific which had thus far acquired independent status, it was scarcely an all-encompassing term. However, as prefigured in the speech, it was soon to gain much broader currency and capacity as other commentators and interpreters expanded its ambit and reinterpreted its message. The most prominent was a New Zealand-born academic, Ron Crocombe, who, five years after Mara's original speech on the subject, composed a pamphlet of some fifty pages in length in which the Pacific Way was invested with a great deal more meaning Crocombe, 1976). More will be said about Crocombe's work shortly, but for the moment Mara's thoughts are worth exploring further. His memoirs published in 1997 under the title, *The Pacific Way* may seem a promising starting point but despite the title, we find little on the substance of his Pacific Way. Despite this, the memoirs provide valuable insights into Mara's personal attitudes, especially towards Fiji's colonial past, and so we have some access to his original understanding of the Pacific Way and related issues. One important speech, reprinted in this volume, delivered at the conclusion of negotiations at Whitehall on the new constitution for an independent Fiji in early May 1970, and therefore almost contemporaneous with his UN *Pacific Way* speech, illustrates his attitude to Britain and its political institutions.

> Today marks a long journey … close on one hundred years … Through it all, we have had the help and guidance of the United Kingdom. Many of her traditions are firmly grafted, not only on our political institutions, but on our whole national life. The rule of law, parliamentary democracy, respect for the rights of minorities, a sense of fair play, give and take, are all taken for granted in Fiji, but they are, in a very real sense, a legacy from the British. Should we ever wish to forget the British — which God forbid — it would not be possible. Your ways and your ideas are too much part and parcel of our own. … (Mara, 1997: 104).

Several of Mara's remarks about the UN's Decolonization Committee are also worth noting, for they reflect long-standing attitudes among Fiji's indigenous elites to the prospect of independence. On a number of occasions, Mara comments negatively on forces within the UN during the 1960s that were pushing decolonization for remaining colonies: "In 1962 Western Samoa had become independent and Nauru was on the way. In Fiji we were trying to stem the tide of independence whipped up by agitation at the United Nations." (Mara, 1997: 170).

At least some other authors have largely ignored such sentiments or provided distorted accounts of Fijian attitudes. Michael Haas, author of a substantial work on the Pacific Way as a regionalist enterprise, asserts that; "In the context of the eventual attainment of independence in the South Pacific, Fiji's Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara … began to give a series of addresses concerning the Pacific Way based in part on the views of Ratu Lala Sukuna, who struggled for Fijian independence until his death in 1958". (Haas, 1989: 9). The latter part of Haas's statement is a

serious misrepresentation of the historical record. Neither Sukuna nor any other of Fiji's chiefly elite "struggled" for independence. If anything they resisted for as long as they could. Indeed, it is possible to read many parts of the colonial historical record as one of cooperation between British colonizing agents and the eastern Fijian chiefly elite who saw many advantages in the colonial arrangement. Class identification must also count as a factor since the upper levels of the British colonial service, when encountering strongly hierarchical structures of authority with paramount chiefs at the apex, were very much inclined to see the self in the other, and vice-versa.(see Lawson 2010b; Cannadine, 2001). Those most strongly supportive of independence were in fact Indo-Fijians — a group almost completely excluded from the ambit of the Pacific Way.

It is easy enough to pick out many statements illustrating a close relationship between the British colonial authorities and certain indigenous elites in Fiji, but it would be misleading to suggest that all aspects of the relationship between the British colonial administrators and Sukuna, Mara and other Fijian leaders were entirely congenial. Of course there were serious differences over policy matters from time to time. There were also several dissident movements among indigenous Fijians during the colonial period, although some of these were as much opposed to the chiefly elite as to the colonial regime. And clearly the experiences of colonialism elsewhere in the Pacific as well as in other parts of the world were often very different. This is why one needs to be careful about making any grand generalizations about the colonial experience or its legacy.

To summarize, Mara's original articulation of the Pacific Way can scarcely be considered "postcolonial" in the critical sense outlined above. The fact that it was put forward as an object lesson in model behaviour by both the former colonies *and* by the colonizing powers reflects very different sentiments from those assumed by postcolonial critiques which often see nothing but the dynamics of domination and resistance in colonial relationships while sweeping aside the convergence of class hierarchies and empathies

in conservative ideologies that are certainly evident in Fiji's colonial record, if not elsewhere. The transformation of the Pacific Way into something resembling a more genuine postcolonial discourse, and which therefore lent itself more readily to a critique of neo-colonialism, was left to a prominent expatriate academic commentator on Pacific affairs whose work we consider next.

FROM MARA'S WAY TO CROCOMBE'S WAY

Ron Crocombe's interpretation of the term Mara had first coined appeared in a fifty-page pamphlet, *The Pacific Way*, published six years after Mara's speech. Crocombe's pamphlet noted the extent to which it had been taken up around the island Pacific, "probably because it satisfies both psychological and political needs, in that it helps to fulfill a growing demand for respected Pacific-wide identifying symbols and for Pacific unity" and because "effective unifying concepts can reduce the extent and intensity of neo-colonial dependency of the islands countries [sic] on the richer Pacific borderlands". Crocombe, however, targeted not only neo-colonialism, but the broader history of colonialism in the Pacific, stating that: "The colonial experience left a common unpleasant taste in the mouths of islands people: a common humiliation, a common feeling of deprivation and exploitation". (Crocombe, 1976:13). Although this may have been how some Pacific islanders felt, nothing could be further from the sentiments embodied in Mara's original formulation and in his other statements which form the broader context.

Crocombe's analysis, however, was not altogether uncritical of indigenous pratices, and he noted the potential for the Pacific Way idea to operate in the service of elite privilege. He also identified a core of island elites from Fiji, Tonga and what was then Western Samoa for whom the Pacific Way had particular significance. He therefore suggested that the Pacific Way applied primarily "to an inner group of English-speaking, tropical islands of the *south* Pacific; and only secondarily and with less intensity of involve-

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ment or meaning to all other Pacific islands". Crocombe further proposed that the chiefly ideology emanating from the core island groups exhibiting strongly hierarchical sociopolitical structures had considerable strength and influence over the broader region , at least to the extent that "the idea of chieftainship had become an accepted part of the Pacific Way … ". He went on to suggest that in the Pacific Way discourse, the differences between these highly stratified hereditary hierarchies on the one hand, and the "bottom up" egalitarian systems of societies in other parts of the Western Pacific — namely Melanesia — on the other, tended to be minimized, "for the development of Pacific unity necessitates a playing down of internal differences and a maximizing of similarities". (Crocombe, 1976: 11).

Crocombe also noted that the model prevailing in the core group, with its strongly hierarchical sociopolitical structures, had considerable strength and influence over the broader region, at least to the extent that "the idea of chieftainship had become an accepted part of the Pacific Way, even though there is some vacillating between valuing privilege and valuing its opposite — equality". But he warned that if the Pacific Way became too closely identified with an elite or with the older generation, it may well lose the capacity to appeal to a broader cross-section of Pacific people. (Crocombe, 1976: 12).

Crocombe's treatment of the Pacific Way thus differed significantly from Mara's formulation in two important respects. First, while Mara's contained no hint of hostility to colonial rule in terms of his own personal experience, Crocombe's emphasized that colonial rule was a source of humiliation for all those subject to it — whether they realized it or not. Second, Mara infused the Pacific Way, at least implicitly, with the values of traditional chiefly rule. Crocombe incorporated these in his expanded version of the idea, but sounded some clear warnings about the potential abuse of elite status. Where Mara and Crocombe did tend to converge was on the theme of neo-colonialism, although this is much more explicit in Crocombe's work. I suggest that it is this, more than the colonial past, that has been a principal driver of the

Pacific Way discourse since at least the mid-1970s.

NEO-COLONIALISM IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

"Neo-colonialism" refers generally to a situation in which relatively more powerful countries tend to exercise economic, cultural and/or political power over weaker or smaller countries. The latter may have formal independent status but sovereignty is seen as heavily compromised by continuing relations of dependence on either the former colonial power, or on other powers with interests in them, or both. The term "neo-colonialism" was first articulated by the Ghanaian leader, Kwame Nkrumah, who also advocated a form of pan-Africanism as a means of resistance. (Nkrumah, 1966). To the extent that it was a regionalist discourse which sought to bring African states under a single umbrella of identity, it shares many similarities with the Pacific Way. A major difference between Nkrumah and Mara, however, was that the former was a left-leaning intellectual strongly influenced by Marxism. Mara could scarcely have been more different. His was a thoroughly conservative outlook which projected a very different perspective on the colonial past, although he was wary enough of a neo-colonial future. Another major point of difference was with respect to the role of indigenous elites which Nkrumah saw as perfectly capable of selling out the interests of the masses. This is not a subject with which Mara engaged much, if at all. Indeed, with respect to his own country, Mara expended much effort in defending elite indigenous institutions as essential to the preservation of Fijian identity in the face of alleged threats posed by the immigrant Indo-Fijian community.

This section is primarily concerned with how the promotion of democratic politics within the island states — something which directly challenges the power of traditional elites in the core island states of the Southwest Pacific — is often regarded as a manifestation of neo-colonialism against which the Pacific Way and cognate concepts have

been deployed. While there are a number of important players in the region, including the European Union, the US, Japan and, more recently, China and Taiwan (in a rivalrous relationship), it is Australia and New Zealand which are most commonly targeted as engaging in neo-colonial practices. Both are members of the Pacific Islands Forum themselves and therefore more closely involved in the politics of the region.

"Democracy promotion" has become closely associated with the activities of the US, especially in the Middle East, with significant negative consequences for the regard in which it is held as a foreign policy strategy.[4] The manner and extent of "democracy promotion" engaged in by Australia and New Zealand with respect to the Pacific Islands is scarcely in the same league, but it has nonetheless raised concerns about the degree to which it represents neo-colonial interference in the sovereign affairs of island states as well as reflecting notions of superiority and overbearing attitudes generally.

Democracy promotion itself is multifaceted with one of the most prominent and widely criticized aspects being associated with the World Bank's "good governance and anti-corruption" agenda. While the stated aims of the agenda are hardly objectionable, directed as they are towards poverty-reduction and raising standards of living for the world's most under-privileged people, its association with neo-liberal political economy is another matter. The latter is geared towards privatization, deregulation and the hollowing out of government capacity in the delivery of social goods, and has attracted much-deserved criticism for undermining state capacity. Indeed to the extent that states are sometimes seen as "failed" or at least "failing" we are entitled to ask whether certain neo-liberal impositions linked to the good governance program as well as to the broader dynamics of globalization are themselves a factor. These aspects of "good governance", however, are not the main concern here. Rather it is the problem of instituting and/or sustaining basic democratic institutions in which governments may be held to account — not simply to Western donors but to their own people.

A major catalyst for discussions surrounding democracy in the Pacific islands and the role of Australia and New Zealand in promoting democratic values was the coup in Fiji in May 1987 when Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka marched into parliament accompanied by armed soldiers, rounded up and incarcerated members of the elected government at gunpoint, and declared himself in charge. This government had only weeks before defeated the Alliance Party led by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara at general elections conducted under the very constitution that Mara had worked to develop together with Indo-Fijian leaders and the former colonial power. But the constitution had not guaranteed perpetual power for Mara's party and, in the face of considerable political disunity among indigenous Fijians, the Alliance lost government after 17 years in office. It was a loss that he and the party did not take well.

The coup was justified in terms of the rights of indigenous Fijians vis-à-vis the "immigrant race" of Indo-Fijians, under which rubric the value of indigenous ways, and by implication the Pacific Way, was asserted very forcefully over and above "alien" institutions such as parliamentary democracy and all that it entailed. Given the prominence of chiefly classes in Fijian politics to that time, chiefly systems and the values associated with them such as consensus decision making were valorized as authentic expressions of indigenous identities. These were contrasted explicitly with the inauthenticity of liberal democratic values said to promote dissensus and conflict and which were therefore contrary to the Pacific Way's core value of consensus (see, generally, Lawson, 1991).

Similar debates about the merits and demerits of democracy have marked processes of political reform in Samoa, especially in relation to the extension of voting rights to all Samoans in the early 1990s, and in Tonga which is presently experiencing the most thoroughgoing changes to its constitutional structure in more than 130 years.[5] In both countries, political reforms have sought to provide greater opportunities for participation by ordinary citizens — that is, those without chiefly or "noble" status — by at least voting for their own representatives

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or, in the case of Tonga, by having more than just three "commoner" representatives in the parliament at all. These reforms have been pursued in the face of opposition by conservative chiefly figures who, not surprisingly, have sought to preserve their own political status and privileges. But by far the most significant point to emerge from all this is that the pressures for democratic reform in both Samoa and Tonga have come largely from within. Neither country has been subject to serious external pressure to institute reforms.

In Tonga the reform process has been instigated almost entirely by its own home-grown pro-democracy movement which has campaigned for decades for some form of parliamentary democracy to enhance accountability. The reaction of many members of the royal family and nobility over the years has ranged from disparaging comments about the abilities of commoners to participate in important matters of policy to overtly repressive measures such as the incarceration of pro-democracy figures and the closing down of critical media. It is under such circumstances that the Pacific Way has often been invoked to support authoritarian practices and to brand those with the audacity to question their leaders as "un-Pacific". (Ratuva, 2004; see also Roberston, 2005).

Where statements of support for the pro-democracy movement have come from countries like Australia and New Zealand, these have rankled deeply with the establishment. In a previous article, I noted a familiar condemnation by the then king's youngest son and Prime Minister, Prince Ulukalala Lavaka Ata who accused outsiders critical of the Tongan establishment of simply not "understanding" Tongan politics and society. Addressing Westerners at large who, he said, wanted to impose their (democratic) values on Tonga: "You don't see things as a Tongan … You see things as a Westerner. So it's very hard for you to understand". (cited in Lawson 2006a:100). This de-legitimation of outsiders as incapable of "understanding" is one thing, but if the autocratic system under which Tonga has been ruled to date truly reflected widely shared Tongan values, the question then becomes one of why so

many (commoner) Tongans have pushed for democratic reforms. The answer can only be that commoners, who surely do "understand" Tongan politics and society, actually reject certain key aspects of *anga fakatonga* that support the existing system.

Established elites within the islands, however, have not been the only ones to denounce external criticism. One New Zealand business leader (a member of the board of the New Zealand Pacific Business Council), commenting on political crises in the region in general and Fiji's latest coup in particular, suggested that instead of expecting Pacific islanders to conform to "so-called "western-style" democracy", Australian and New Zealand political leaders, as well as the media, needed to adopt a more sensitive approach. And rather than impose sanctions, they should concede that the Pacific Way may be a superior way of resolving Pacific disputes (Flanagan, 2007). What exactly he thought this entailed, however, was not altogether clear, although it seemed to mean that "traditional society, culture and values", which he said had functioned satisfactorily in the past, ought not necessarily to be replaced by "Westminster-style" democracy which, it was further asserted, had taken over twenty-five centuries to evolve. Apart from being a grossly inaccurate reading of the historical development of parliamentary democracy in the UK, it shows very little knowledge of how "introduced" political institutions have actually been adapted in the region. Tonga's constitutional monarchy, defended (by conservative elites) as the very essence of the Tongan-ness, is based substantially on the British model as it existed in the mid-nineteenth century.

While most of Fiji's constitutions resemble the Westminster model in some respects, its most important provision — namely those concerning elections and eligibility for office — bear almost no resemblance to contemporary Westminster practice. There is certainly nothing in the latter that supports racially designated seats and constituencies. Similar points can be made about Samoa's constitutional set-up. Further, none of the constitutions have simply been "imposed" from outside. They all represent negotiated

political settlements with local conditions very much in mind. Thus, as Peter Larmour suggests, too much can be made of the foreignness of the state and its institutions (Larmour, 2003: 24). It must also be emphasized that calls for democratic reforms have come largely from within rather than from outside the societies concerned. These issues aside, the same commentator also point outs that if Australia and New Zealand make too much of a fuss about democracy and human rights then Asian countries, which have no concerns with such matters, could displace them both economically and geopolitically. For Australian and New Zealand business elites, this is probably more to the point.

As mentioned above, the role of Australia and New Zealand in pushing for reforms in both Samoa and Tonga has been low-key. With respect to Samoa's reforms, these were simply welcomed as enhancing democratic politics in the country by providing for greater popular participation. With respect to Tonga, New Zealand government figures have made critical comments from time to time — often depicted as "hectoring", and these have usually been met with predictable defensiveness on the part of the Tongan elite who of course reject New Zealand's right to "interfere". But practical action such as even a threat to suspend aid has not been contemplated. Indeed a suggestion by Tongan pro-democracy leader, Akilisi Pohiva, in 2008 that New Zealand aid be suspended until the country had become properly democratic was flatly rejected by the then New Zealand Foreign Minister, Phil Goff (reported at <http://www.rnzi.com/ pages/ news.php?op=read&id=10681>, accessed 26/10/08).

None of this means that aid programs have not been, or would not be, suspended in other circumstances. Some forms of aid to Fiji have been suspended by both Australia and New Zealand — and some other Western donors — following the coups. This has angered the various coup leaders through the years who have consistently cited external "interference" in their internal affairs as unacceptable and, at certain times, as a manifestation of neo-colonialism. There are of course alternative sources of aid, and the rivalry between China and Taiwan in particular has seen a substantial increase in aid flows in the Pacific islands as they vie for recognition and influence. China's increasing presence in the region, in particular, has caused some consternation in Canberra and Wellington where the no-strings-attached aid packages are seen as undermining good governance programs, especially in the area of corruption. One report cites a US$25 million package to Solomon Islands provided by Taiwan, ostensibly as aid to victims of ethnic violence, as going straight into the pockets of officials, militia leaders and police. Other projects funded by China to build infrastructure, such as new government buildings, use only Chinese architects, engineers and labour on the sites, and so underemployed local people are left out. The report recommended that China co-ordinate its aid effort with countries like Australia to ensure that funds go to where they are needed most. Interestingly, the report noted further that this might remove some of the bargaining power from Pacific leaders "who are skilled at playing aid donors against another". (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2008). This latter remark suggests that there is more to the aid game than a simple model of relations of neo-colonial dependency between donor and recipient suggests.

To return briefly to the issue of democracy and the coups in Fiji, the latest coup leader, Frank Bainimarama, has of course been subject to the same condemnations from Australia and New Zealand as have previous coup leaders, and he has reacted with the same accusations of neo-colonial arrogance and "lack of understanding" that his predecessors have. He has been particularly vociferous in his criticism of Australia and, after expelling both the Australian and New Zealand High Commissioners in late 2009, also expelled Australia's Acting High Commissioner in July 2010. This followed the deferral of a meeting of the Melanesian Spearhead Group which had been scheduled to meet in Fiji but which Australia had lobbied against (reported at <http://www.abc.net. au/news/stories/2010/07/13/2952502.htm>, accessed 14 July 2010). Bainimarama's

immediate predecessor, Laisenia Qarase, who Bainimarama was instrumental in appointing as interim prime minister in the caretaker government after the 2000 coup, was at that time also critical of suggestions that Fiji should follow "Western" democratic norms (BBC, 2008). After his own ousting, however, his support for "Western" democratic elections and constitutional processes strengthened dramatically.

Numerous other instances could be cited to illustrate the point that political actors will almost invariably support democratic institutions when they deliver desirable political outcomes — desirable, that is, from the point of view of their particular interests — but often condemn them as "culturally unsuitable" when they don't. Similarly, criticisms from Australia and New Zealand can easily be dismissed as neo-colonial arrogance and interference when it suits various political actors, but those same actors may prove only too ready to accept (neo-colonial) aid packages or benefits on other occasions. On the other hand, both the Australian and New Zealand governments are often content to deal with undemocratic regimes as long as they are stable, secure, and don't present a threat to broader regional security. Tonga and Samoa are hardly models of liberal democracy but, as we have seen, they have not been subject to "neo-colonial intervention" beyond occasional critical remarks during times of political unrest.

POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUES OF NEO-COLONIALISM: MISSING THE MARK?

Pacific islanders involved in coups or other distinctly undemocratic practice are not the only ones to accuse Australia and New Zealand of neo-colonial propensities. A number of academics and other commentators, located in a variety of metropolitan settings, have weighed in with more serious and penetrating criticisms. Of these, Greg Fry's essay on "Framing the Islands" represents a thoroughgoing attack on certain Australian neo-colonial attitudes and practices in

government and the media which came to prominence in the 1990s and which painted a "doomsday" scenario for the islands — unless island peoples remake themselves by abandoning certain local practices and taking some "hard decisions". Fry's own analysis is framed very explicitly in a post-colonial mode of analysis which takes as its point of departure Edward Said's articulation of "Orientalism" which, says Fry, is highly relevant "to other contexts in which people are grouped together and represented by outsiders who wish at the same time to manage, control, or prescribe for the peoples they are depicting". (Fry, 2000: 29-30). But no mention is made of island elites who are also implicated in framing and representing Pacific islanders in ways that reflect their own positions of power, their own particular constructions of "knowledge", and their own interests in social control. This includes not only political figures but conservative church leaders, business people and so on.[6]

The invocation of "outsiders" implies its essential opposite, "insiders", which brings into question the problematic notion of "the native point of view" as a singular category.[7] Given that "native societies" of Pacific island states are often highly pluralistic, it seems obvious that there are multiple ways of being "a native" and therefore seeing as "a native". The insider–outsider dichotomy has any number of further ramifications, at both regional and national levels. With respect to the latter, Malama Meleisea has argued that the objectification of Samoan-ness through *fa'a Samoa* is a common defence against "outsiders" (Meleisia, 2005: 86). Much the same can be said about the Tongan and Fijian variants while the Pacific Way provides a broader defence against what Borofsky describes as "Outlanders" (non-Pacific Islanders). He further suggests that opposing Outlanders offers a ready way to mobilize Islanders — silencing the differences within and becoming a call to action against "others"[8] (Borofsky, 2000: 13). None of these considerations enter into Fry's analysis.

Another critique of Australian approaches to the Pacific islands offered by journalist and writer Nic Maclellan concerns the period after "9/11", the Bali bombing and the war

in Iraq, when issues of transnational crime, immigration policy and national security, have been accompanied by rhetoric about a regional "arc of insecurity" and failed or failing states in Australia's Pacific neighbourhood. As a consequence, he, says, less attention has been paid to pressing concerns in the more mundane field of human security and development for ordinary Pacific islanders in their everyday lives. He offers a particularly stringent critique at the "Pacific solution" devised by the Howard government for detaining asylum seekers from the Middle East and elsewhere in Pacific island locations rather than having them interred on Australia territory (Maclellan, 2003: 1). This "solution" resonates uncomfortably with the US practice of detaining suspected "illegal combatants" offshore in Guantanamo Bay and has been widely — and rightly — condemned by human rights groups. This particular critique, however, does not point out that Pacific islands have themselves cooperated in this "solution". Once again, Pacific Islander leaders are depicted as having no agency, no role to play in such policies. Yet it is the President of Nauru, home to one of the Howard government's detention centres, that sought very proactively to be considered for a new regional processing centre for refugees under the Gillard Government's plan, and was looking to sign up to the UN's convention on refugees to enhance its chances (see <www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/07/13/2952623.htm>, accessed 14 July 2010).[9]

Another study by Hawaiian based academic, David Chappell, looks at recent crises in Melanesia — including coups, civil wars and other crises — and roundly condemns the "new wave of criticisms of indigenous regimes and cultures by metropolitan aid donors and security experts" (Chappell, 2005: 286).[10] The article argues that Australian neo-colonialism has challenged self-government in the Pacific island states, especially in Melanesia, where it has "organized military interventions and policing operations in the Solomons and PNG, placed inspectors in local finance ministries to see that aid money is spent the way Australia wants it to be spent, and engineered the election of an Australian as head of the regional Pacific Forum (sic), despite indigenous opposition". (Chappell, 2005: 316).[11] While not denying that large countries are very often overbearing vis-à-vis smaller, weaker, aid-dependent countries, such analyses lack nuance. The Solomons intervention was invited, not forced, and consisted not simply of Australian personnel but contingents from Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga (Shibuya, 2006). The Australian who headed the Forum from 2005 until his death in August 2008 was strongly supported by a number of Pacific island leaders, and was awarded posthumously the Cross of Solomon Islands for his "outstanding contribution" to the Regional Assistance Mission there (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2008).

A fourth critique also takes explicit aim at neo-liberal/neo-colonial elements of Australian intervention, suggesting that the Australian state and investment groups have clear imperial ambitions in the region. Noting the link between aid and good governance, it is further suggested that the good governance agenda promoted by Australia faces "immediate confrontation with the post-colonial aspiration of "self-governance", only recently attained in all the island states". (Anderson, 2007: 13–14). The paper also notes that the demand for open markets has been accompanied by a repression of public capacity building. A more serious accusation is that security interventions, for example in Solomon Islands and Timor Leste, are accompanied by powerful political interventions, although Australian interventionism, is constrained by the Portuguese presence in Timor Leste and a growing Chinese presence in the region generally (Anderson, 2007: 13). No comment on whether these also constitute neo-colonial ventures, however, is offered.

All these critiques, and others like them, make valuable points about Australian government policies with respect to its Pacific neighbours, as well as asylum seekers from further abroad, some of which have been short-sighted, ill-informed, self-interested and morally reprehensible — at least according to "Western" human rights standards. But like

Said's original condemnation of "Orientalism", such critiques are too often unidimensional. Said constructed Orientalism as a critique of European colonial and other practices that was highly selective and which ignored other aspects of European social and political thought that did not always frame "others" in the terms he described.[12] Nor did his work investigate complexities introduced by considerations of class or gender.

The limited scope of Said's analysis therefore left him open to a range of criticism, including the extent to which his work was infused with an implicit Occidentalism — a way of representing Europe or "the West" in terms at least as simplistic and essentializing as his construction of Orientalism. It also tended to depict native people as passive victims of imperial depredations. In a subsequent work, Said stated that he had not meant to suggest such passivity and acknowledged that there had always been elements of resistance (see Said, 1993). Even so, his observations on the dynamics of colonial relations did not go beyond categories of domination and resistance — a binary that has over-simplified a much more complex field of interaction which included not only opposition but collaboration and cooperation in the colonial project as well. Furthermore, the latter strategies are hardly absent from the contemporary sphere of postcolonial politics where islander agency at all levels is alive and well. To suggest otherwise is indeed to belittle the dynamism of politics and society in the Pacific islands.

To summarize this section, there is little doubt that aspects of the foreign policy behaviour of Australia and New Zealand can be cast in neo-colonialist terms, especially since both are important aid providers and both have used aid conditionality in the broad context of democracy promotion and "good governance" more generally. However, consideration of other factors surrounding democracy promotion and the quest for domestic security by groups within the islands, as well as those outside, reveals a more complex story.[13] These complexities are missed in postcolonial analyses which too often seek only to critique the behaviour of outside powers, aid agencies, corporations, media and the like in their dealings with the islands. As mentioned earlier, while much postcolonial analysis presents as a counter-hegemonic discourse — and often shrouds itself in an aura of moral superiority in the process — it rarely subjects the hegemonic practices of indigenous elites to anything but superficial scrutiny.

CONCLUSION

From the time of its original articulation, the Pacific Way idea has undergone some interesting transformations. Initially conceived in terms of the orderly political transitions experienced by Fiji and its immediate neighbours in the Southwest Pacific in the process of decolonization, and at that stage lacking any hint of critique with respect to the colonial experience itself, the Pacific Way idea nonetheless evolved into a regionalist discourse with strong postcolonial resonances. In the course of this transformation, the colonial past and many of its legacies came to be treated much more negatively and critically. More importantly, however, perceptions of a neo-colonial present have become dominant themes in Pacific Way discourses, especially in the context of "good governance" agendas promoted by a variety of actors including Australia and New Zealand.

The alignment of these agendas solely with an instrumental neo-colonialism, however, is unsustainable. Among other things, it suggests that Pacific islanders do not value good governance and that corruption, non-accountability and non-democratic forms of politics are acceptable to significant sectors of the population. Having said that, it is certainly the case that other aspects of the good governance agenda concerned with the promotion of neo-liberalism, including deregulation and the hollowing out of state capacity are matters of genuine concern (and are by no means defended here). There is therefore a need to adopt a more nuanced approach to critiques addressing the broad idea of good governance and what it means in the contemporary Pacific.

On the more specific question of democracy promotion, it is certainly the case that

liberal/Western forms of democracy do involve competitive elections and are therefore adversarial in character. Further, to the extent that the Pacific Way embraces "consensus" as a core value, aspects of democracy do indeed appear to clash with this particular value. But it would be a mistake to say that the value of consensus is absent in democratic systems. It is actually essential in supporting the legitimacy of those institutions which provide not merely for elections but also for changes of government by constitutional means. The idea of "consensus" as a core elements of the Pacific Way or any of the "national" ways mentioned here is, in any case, scarcely unproblematic. In terms of local politics, it has been closely associated with conservative chiefly leadership where "consensus" may mean little more than conformity with the wishes of that leadership. This has in any case been extraordinarily difficult to achieve at national leve (Henderson, 2003: 229). Furthermore, if consensus has hitherto characterized relations between Pacific island nations in regional fora, then it is because contentious political issues have usually been avoided, at least until recently.[14]

Critiques of Australian/New Zealand neo-colonialist policy and practice in the Pacific islands also tend assiduously to avoid negative assessments of indigenous actors. One exception is the kind of regionalist discourse promoted by Epeli Hau'ofa in his notion of Oceania as a "sea of islands". In this there is no shortage of criticism of former colonial powers and "the belittling views of indigenous cultures" purveyed by Europeans from the earliest years of interaction, and which continues to this day. But as Hau'ofa goes on to point out,

> Europeans did not invent belittlement. In many societies it was part and parcel of indigenous cultures. In the aristocratic societies of Polynesia parallel relationships of dominance and subordination with their paraphernalia of appropriate attitudes and behavior were the order of the day. In Tonga, the term for commoners is *me'a vale*, "the ignorant ones", which is a survival from an era when the aristocracy controlled all the important knowledge in the society. Keeping the ordinary folk in the dark and calling them ignorant made it easier to control and subordinate them (Hau'ofa, 1999: 28).

This is the kind of critique that is able to go beyond at least some of the familiar but often misleading binaries found in so much postcolonial analysis: Western/non-Western, oppressors/oppressed, bad guy/good guy, and so on. Maintaining these dichotomies do not serve the cause of serious critical political, social or historical studies. If critical scholarship is to do its job in addressing the general problem of hegemony in human relations, and the variety of forms that domination and subordination take, then it must look to exposing hegemonic practices wherever and whenever they occur rather than confining such investigations to a single set of relations posited in a simplistic oppositional format that limits the scope of genuine critical analysis.

AUTHOR NOTES

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ENDNOTES

1. This an abridged version of a paper originally prepared for presentation at the 18th Biennial Conference of the Pacific History Association (PHA); 8–12 December 2008, Suva, Fiji. Some of the more historical aspects of this longer paper have been reworked in a different article forthcoming in the *Journal of Pacific History* (December 2010), " 'The Pacific Way' as Postcolonial Discourse: Towards a Reassessment". The present version was prepared for presentation to the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program (SSGM), The Australian National University, 4 February 2010. I'm grateful to the audiences at both the PHA conference (including the late Ron Crocombe) and the SSGM seminar participants for their helpful comments and insights. Thanks also to Karin von Strokirch and the anonymous readers for the SSGM Working Paper series for very helpful feedback on the topic.

2. This form of regional identity is dealt with in another paper (see Lawson, 2010b).

3. The material in these sections is a brief summary of the more extensive treatment of these issues in the forthcoming article in Lawson (2010a, forthcoming).

4. For a broad overview, see Carothers (2004). Democracy promotion has also formed an important part of the EU's foreign policy strategy, coming under the terms of its "normative power" mission. For a recent commentary, see Sjursen (2006).

5. The reform roadmap is set out on the government website <http://www.pmo.gov.to/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=194&Itemid=135>.

6. A later paper, equally critical of Australia's bid to assert regional hegemony, does acknowledge very briefly that challenges by NGOs, sovereignty movements and women's groups, among others, sometimes challenge state elites in the islands. See Greg Fry, *Whose Oceania? Contending Visions of Community in Pacific Region-Building*, Working Paper 2004/3, Canberra: The Australian National University, 2004, p.5.

7. For a pertinent discussion of the politics of "the native point of view" see Teaiwa, 2005, pp.15–36.

8. For a pertinent discussion of the reactive objectification of culture in different historical contexts, including processes of oppositional reification and inversion, see also Thomas (1992).

9. Had the Liberal–National Coalition under Tony Abbott won government, the "Nauru Solution" would have gone ahead.

10. The title refers to an earlier article (Reilly, 2000) in which recent troublespots in the region are highlighted and compared directly with the poor performance of sub-Saharan African countries across a range of political, economic and social indicators.

11. The appointment of an Australian as Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum is also criticized in Fry, *Whose Oceania*, 2004, p.11 where it is stated that the appointment flew in the face of efforts by a generation of Pacific islanders to decolonize South Pacific regionalism.

12. For specific illustrations of this point see Lawson (2006b) and Porter (1994 esp. p.159).

13. One careful study of the Solomon's intervention is critical of both Australian policy and its motivations on the one hand, as well as that of local actors, and therefore provides a well-balanced and ultimately more useful critical study. See Kabutaulaka (2005).

14. The adoption by the Pacific Islands Forum of the Biketawa Declaration in 2000, and the Pacific Plan in 2005, however, have both signaled a new preparedness to consider matters of internal politics among member states, thus moving away from the rigid doctrine of non-interference which featured in earlier Pacific Way discourses. See Urwin (2005).

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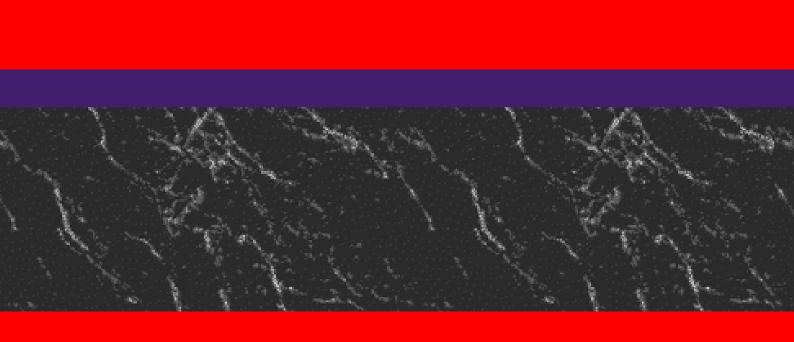Young, Robert (2001), *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell.

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