

New Zealand's Twentieth-Century Pacifics

MEMORIES AND REFLECTIONS¹



FOR MOST NEW ZEALANDERS this century, 'the Pacific' is not so much a place as a set of ideas and images. If it has a geographic setting, it is the islands of the Pacific Ocean, and specifically the islands of Polynesia rather than Melanesia or Micronesia. Notions of what constitutes Polynesia are highly varied, but in general New Zealanders think of it in terms of the main tourist destinations — Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, the Cook Islands, Tahiti and Hawaii. There is little real appreciation of their respective locations relative to each other, or indeed to New Zealand. Geographic location is confounded by the continued use of ancient terms, such as 'the South Seas'. Across the century, tourist brochures of these different islands are largely interchangeable. There is also little awareness of their respective cultures, histories, characteristics, or the realities of island living. A Pacific island is imagined typically as small, tropically luxuriant, its Polynesian inhabitants benign if unenterprising. All islands and islanders are considered pretty much alike. It is a culturally remembered world, ostensibly about 'there' but really about 'here'. What is offered is completely self-referenced, in the sense of being *different* from everyday New Zealand life. That is why island holidays are invariably marketed as 'the great escape'. The promise is of leisure, indolence, abandonment, a strong hint of sexuality, in a warm climate with blue skies, azure seas, shimmering white sand, foaming coral reefs, stunningly coloured lagoons, waving palm trees, exotic fruits and flowers. There is no wind and rain. There are no crowds. There is no work. There are no responsibilities. There is absolutely nothing to worry about. The islands are physically and culturally safe. There are no dark, disturbing jungle hinterlands, no threatening inhabitants. The islands offer restorative and redemptive possibilities. They are a state of mind.

New Zealand's geographic and cultured definition of the Pacific uniquely coincides with a generalized Western 'Dream of Islands'.² While sharing elements of that same generalized dream, an Australian definition of the Pacific

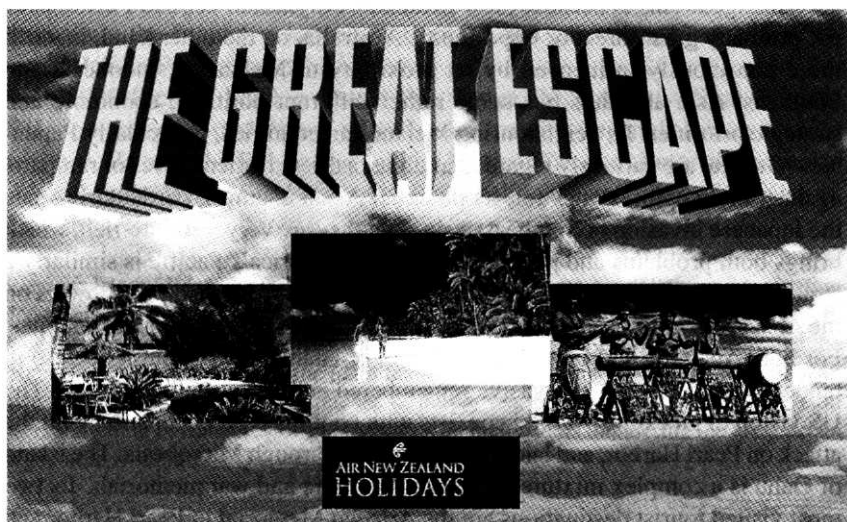
1 I thank Hugh Laracy for useful comments and references, and Hank Nelson for providing me with some of his unpublished conference papers.

2 Gavan Daws, *A Dream of Islands. Voyages of Self-discovery in the South Seas*, New York, 1980.

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more specifically means the south-western sector of the Ocean which includes Melanesia and particularly Papua-New Guinea, or at least its non-Indonesian eastern half. Australia's Pacific has been a rather more disconcerting region, with its large 'black' Pacific populations as nearby neighbours as opposed to New Zealand's more distant, smaller and 'brown' populations to come to terms with, a consideration that has profoundly influenced both New Zealand's and Australia's respective perceptions of themselves in their distinct Pacific locations.³ Australia became colonial master to three million Papua-New Guineans. Even at the time of Papua-New Guinean independence in 1975, neighbouring Queensland's population was only two million. New Zealand's island Polynesian subjects, mainly in Western Samoa and the Cook Islands, numbered less than 100,000.

In North America, the term 'Pacific' does not commonly conjure up images of islands and islanders at all, but the major countries on the Pacific Ocean's rim — China, Japan, Korea, Russia and the Americas. A classic example is a *Time* magazine feature on the world's new 'Pacific age'. Stylized maps push the west coast of North America to lie alongside the Asian coastline, obliterating the entire ocean and its islands.⁴ It is no coincidence that academic journal titles devoted to 'the Pacific' reflect these different definitions. New Zealand's *Journal of the Polynesian Society* is self-explanatory. Australia's *Journal of Pacific*



3 Hank Nelson, 'Frontiers, Territories and States of Mind', paper presented at Pacific History Workshop, Australian National University, Canberra, December 1998.

4 *Time*, 22 November 1993. For an argument about the focus of the world's economic power moving from the 'Atlantic' to the 'Pacific' (rim) region, see Simon Winchester, *The Pacific*, London, 1991.

History defines its region as 'the Pacific Islands (including Hawaii and New Guinea)'. Interestingly, New Zealand is not specifically listed, but it is not excluded. California's *Pacific Historical Review*, and Canada's *Pacific Affairs*, do not normally publish articles on the Pacific islands at all, but rather on places like California, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Japan, China and Southeast Asia.

New Zealand consists of islands in the Pacific Ocean, but most New Zealanders over the past hundred years have not regarded their country as a 'Pacific island', or even as an integral part of Polynesia. The perceived differences are not only climatic, geographic and cultural, but historical and psychological. New Zealand considers itself as an 'advanced' nation, hailed as the birthplace of the twentieth century for its welfare legislation and state regulation by 1900, and now acclaimed by some as the birthplace of the twenty-first century for its exemplary deregulation and privatization. But island societies, in tropical rather than temperate zones and therefore beyond the pale of large-scale European settlement, are deemed to occupy a much lower level of development, commonly described a hundred years ago as stone-age, and now as members of the 'third' or 'underdeveloped' world.

New Zealand is in the Pacific Ocean. Indeed it may even have some acknowledged Polynesian heritage through its Maori population, but it does not consider itself fundamentally of it. New Zealand's mainstream external social, cultural, economic, political and military interests this century have usually lain further afield, quite beyond the Pacific Ocean.

New Zealand's concept of an ideal Pacific has been untroubled and unchallenged. This is because New Zealand's Polynesian-centred Pacific does not pose any great threat or opportunity. Australia, on the other hand, is much more consciously influenced by its proximity to Melanesia, Indonesia and Southeast Asia and thus has some rather different political, economic and strategic priorities. Its neighbouring Melanesian countries, particularly Papua-New Guinea, are variously regarded as either a threat in themselves or ramparts against, or stepping stones for, its potential Asian enemies, particularly since the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia. And they are very resource-rich, which brings both problems and possibilities.⁵ North America's Pacific is similarly a strategic construction which focuses on the potential dangers of the powers on the Asian rim, initially Japan and then China and Russia, the cold war enemies. For both Australia and the US, the 'Dream of Islands' exists, but it does so in tandem with an equally pervasive remembered and very troubled history. The US vision of an exotic Waikiki coexists with continued preoccupation with the attack on Pearl Harbor, and later dreadful battles through Micronesia. The island of Oahu is a complex mixture of plastic Polynesia and war memorials. Its two most visited tourist destinations are the *Arizona* Memorial in Pearl Harbor and the Mormon Church's Polynesian Cultural Centre at Laie. The US also has a long shadowy post-war history of massive nuclear bomb testing and cultural

5 Hank Nelson, 'The Enemy at the Door: Australia and New Guinea in World War II', paper presented at Tsukuba University, Japan, July 1998.

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imperialism in Micronesia.⁶ And the Kakoda trail through the dark malarial jungles of Papua-New Guinea is the recurrent flip-side of any Australian Pacific island ideal. Papua-New Guinea is Australia's Gallipoli of World War II. Both Australian and American tourism in Melanesia commonly feature former battle sites.⁷

Thus the 1942–1945 war in the Pacific is both a major defining moment for differing regional self-perceptions, images and interests, as well as a reflection of them. The Australian and American preoccupation with the Pacific war, then and now, contrasts with the relatively low priority accorded by New Zealand, still rather more single-mindedly focused on military operations in Europe and North Africa. Australia committed a greater proportion of its military to the Pacific theatre than did New Zealand, a source of some dissatisfaction in Australia. In part this was operational and geographical — New Zealand was never attacked by the Japanese, who did bomb Darwin and Pearl Harbor. The more common New Zealand war memories are set in Italy, Greece, and North Africa, and relatively fewer in the Pacific.⁸ Moreover, there was no fighting in Polynesia — except the attack on Pearl Harbor. By contrast, Australian and US war memories include and feature their respective Pacific island campaigns in Melanesia and Micronesia amongst their more traumatic and glorious World War II battles. But it is perhaps also the case that New Zealand was always, and perhaps still is, more emotionally and strategically attuned to an Anglocentric world. Republican sentiment is low. Christmas cards in New Zealand's high summer still commonly feature incongruous yet culturally comfortable snow scenes. New Zealand's ideal Pacific — its Polynesia as Paradise — has lasted throughout the century, relatively untroubled and unchallenged by any of its actual Pacific/Polynesian experiences.

In 1900 Richard Seddon visited Fiji, Tonga, Niue and the Cook Islands. Seddon was keen to push New Zealand's long-standing imperial claims to Pacific territory. He took the Polynesian scholar Edward Tregear along with him as a cultural guide. Where Seddon exemplified a political perspective of the islands, Tregear viewed them through a romantic haze:

Were the Isles of Eden better or worse than my dream? Better. No dream, no imagination does them justice . . . No flies or mosquitos soft warm nights & days — exquisitely kind affectionate people — how I love them . . . it was Heaven. Heaven to watch the tropical stars blazing through the palm feathers . . . The largeness of it filled me with awe & delight — the infinite stretches of purple sea, the great palm groves, the atoll reefs stretching beyond the power of vision with their rollers thundering the great ocean organ note — Lambton Quay was very far away.⁹

6 For example, David Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia. Discourses Over Development in a Pacific Territory*, Honolulu, 1998.

7 Charles de Burlo, 'Islanders, Soldiers, and Tourists: the War and the Shaping of Tourism in Melanesia', in Geoffrey M. White and Lamont Lindstrom, eds, *The Pacific Theater. Island Representations of World War II*, Melbourne, 1990, pp.299–325.

8 New Zealand's military operations in the Pacific are surveyed in Oliver A. Gillespie, *Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945. The Pacific*, Wellington, 1952.

9 Tregear to Reeves, 14 July 1900, 'Letters written, from 1895 onward, by Men of Mark in New Zealand', MS Micro 182, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

Tregear was expressing a simple Western cultural ideal, but one with an ancient and complex pedigree. Notions of a terrestrial paradise go back to the beginnings of Indo-European societies. Such images were much later applied to the Americas by the Spanish, who also imported them to the Pacific islands from the sixteenth century. These imaginings continued to about the time of Cook's first voyage, though they had as many detractors as supporters. But the Pacific paradise has not had a subsequently continuous history. For most of the nineteenth century, the Pacific islands were commonly reconceptualized as wretched places, characterized by danger, poor living conditions, sickness, tropical torpor, degeneration, and sometimes death for 'whitemen' as well as for the indigenous inhabitants who, considered fundamentally biologically degenerate, were deemed to be dying out — either because of Western contact or in spite of it. Explanations for these views are to be found in actual Western experiences in the Pacific, and in environmental and evolutionary theory wherein Culture was deemed subservient to Nature, which was in turn conceived as fundamentally pernicious, above all in tropical regions.¹⁰

Tregear's sentiments were both old and new. From the end of the nineteenth century, the Pacific island paradise was fairly rapidly recreated as a generalized Western cultural site, as the importance of Culture over Nature was reasserted. Among the many explanations for this paradigm shift was the extension of Western imperial control to most parts of the globe, thanks in large part to technological development, especially in weaponry and communications, reaching its peak in the early twentieth century. This essentially tamed the indigenous 'other', and also engendered a sense of control over Nature.¹¹ In the Pacific islands, the discourse of tourism deliberately and radically helped to reshape its hostile nineteenth-century image. Tourism in the islands was dependent on plantation economies, the growth of shipping, undersea cables, radio waves, and eventually air transport.¹² But what was even more fundamental was imperial control. By 1900 virtually every Pacific island was incorporated into someone's empire, and painted the appropriate colours on maps. British subjects gloried in 'the Red Route' to and from the Pacific.¹³ Thus came a growing sense of psychological control over the Pacific island world, a sentiment shared in New Zealand, and confirmed by its Cook Islands possessions and its League of Nations mandated responsibility for Western Samoa.

By the turn of the century, there was a decline of imperial racial fear. The natives of the Pacific islands, particularly, were deemed loyal, civilized and Christianized, and, at worst, were considered in awe of colonial authority. Tourists were safe from the dangers of 'uncontrolled' island societies and any

10 K.R. Howe, *Nature, Culture and History. The 'Knowing' of Oceania*, Honolulu, 2000.

11 *ibid.*

12 Useful sources on Pacific tourism are: Ngaire Douglas, *They Came for Savages. 100 Years of Tourism in Melanesia*, Lismore, 1996; Norman and Ngaire Douglas, 'Tourism in the Pacific. Historical Factors', in Michael C. Hall and Stephen J. Page, eds, *Tourism in the Pacific. Issues and Cases*, London, 1996; Anna Steven, ed., *Pirating the Pacific. Images of Travel, Trade and Tourism*, Sydney, 1993.

13 John Wear Burton, *The Fiji of Today*, London, 1910, p.34.

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untamed shores. Indeed, not only were most Pacific island societies now regarded as tamed, but in the last analysis, they were deemed to be dying out. The early twentieth century saw the climax of depopulation theory in the Pacific. Islanders were thus depicted in ubiquitous postcards, the principal vehicles for 'visualising' the island cultures, as a wistful, gentle, vanishing culture. Former 'cannibals' and 'warriors' were romanticized as they posed armed but harmlessly for photographs. Native children became ambivalent objects of innocence, semi-naked native women objects of male colonial eroticism.¹⁴

The earliest tourist handbooks and guides to the South Seas, which appeared after the turn of this century, tried to counter much of the negative nineteenth-century mythology about the islands. They highlighted the islands' safety, especially where colonial political and commercial controls were greatest, which coincided with regular and reliable shipping and the telegraph cable.¹⁵ They also emphasized the healthiness of the climate, a reflection of the more general early twentieth-century reconceptualizing of the outdoors as potentially restorative, and specifically the Australasian development of a sunbathing and beach culture.¹⁶ This in turn was an antipodean reflection of a North American urban-based back-to-nature movement, which was 'part therapy and part nostalgia'. There could now be 'ecstasy in non-intellectual adventure' when hunting, fishing, camping in the great outdoors. Nature was increasingly rendered as Benevolent Mother capable of reinvigorating a physically deteriorating urban post-frontier race.¹⁷ And what better location for refuge, healing and redemption than a Polynesian island paradise. Union Steamship Company copywriters, echoing Spanish Pacific explorers' rhetoric, typically described an island: 'Here perpetual summer reigns, and the fragrance of flowers unceasingly fills the air. The wealth of tropical vegetation, the abundance of fruit, the waving palms, the wide acres of sugar cane, the happy natives, and the sea breaking in long rolling waves over the coral reefs . . . all these make up a picture that combine to emphasize the novelty and augment the charms of this Paradise of the Pacific.'¹⁸

There was also an early twentieth-century re-ennobling of indigenous populations, especially in Polynesia, and more than a hint of a dominant colonial male view. The Union Steamship handbook waxed lyrical about Samoans, for example: 'What magnificent people they are! How handsome with their gold-

14 For example, South East Museum of Photography, *Picturing Paradise. Colonial Photographs of Samoa 1875 to 1925*, Daytona Beach, 1995; Gordon Maitland, 'The Two Sides of the Camera Lens. Nineteenth Century Photography and the Indigenous People of the South Pacific', *Photofile South Pacific*, 1988, pp.47-60.

15 T.W. Whitson, ed., *The Tourists' Vade Mecum (Illustrated) Being a Handbook to the Services of the Union Steamship Company . . . Together with an Index Guide*, Dunedin, 1912. See also *The Commercial Directory and Tourists' Guide to the South Pacific Islands 1903-1904*, Sydney, 1904.

16 Douglas Booth, 'Healthy, Economic, Disciplined Bodies. Surfbathing and Surf Lifesaving in Australia and New Zealand, 1890-1950,' *New Zealand Journal of History* (NZJH), 32, 1 (1998), pp.43-58.

17 Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature. The Arcadian Myth in Urban America*, New York, 1969; G. Altmeyer, 'Three Ideas of Nature in Canada, 1899-1914', *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 11, 3 (1976), pp.21-36. See also Gunther Barth, *Fleeting Moments. Nature and Culture in American History*, Oxford, 1990.

18 Whitson, p.147.

bronze skins and yellow hair . . . The Samoan girls have long been celebrated for their loveliness and charm, and the traveller is sure to look with interest on the many graceful feminine forms that pass up and down the main street of Apia.¹⁹

Visual images of the Pacific islands, particularly in Polynesia, were not only transmitted through postcards, but by Australian and American film-makers, who exploited notions of the expected paradise from the earliest and pre-war days of the movies. Alluring island women (generally played by Anglo-Americans), dashing white male heroes and evil villains acted out fanciful plots of romantic adventure and treachery set against a backdrop of waving palms and shimmering coral sands.²⁰

The islands of Polynesia had become a playground for the recreational sailor, traveller and tourist by the mid-twentieth century, most of whom cavorted in sea and sand and wrote books around the theme of adventures in paradise. Unlike America and Australia, New Zealand imaginings of the Pacific were scarcely altered by the Pacific war. The war's most notable immediate impact on New Zealand was, rather, the arrival of US servicemen in large numbers, happily coinciding with the absence of the New Zealand 'boys' on the other side of the world.

New Zealand's ideal Pacific world was further entrenched with the return of commercial tourism after World War II, at first with shipping, and then with aircraft. Lengthy and sometimes uncomfortable sea passages to the islands quickly gave way to the speed and luxury of air travel, which enabled passengers literally and metaphorically to rise above the island world, to come and go immediately at will, like voyeurs, without engaging in island life for too long. The early aircraft were flying boats, which had the romantic capacity to land in remote lagoons, or handy to commercial centres. New Zealand's Tasman Empire Airways Limited (TEAL) commenced its legendary Coral Route from New Zealand to Suva, the Cooks and Tahiti in 1951. At one level the Coral Route was a part of New Zealand's attempt to sustain notions of the old Red Route by developing its international air routes in an effort to get closer to England as 'Home'.²¹ But it was also about promoting New Zealand's Pacific paradise. In contrast to tourist destinations for Australians and Americans in Melanesia and Hawaii, New Zealand's Polynesia remained largely untainted by painful memories of the war. 'Only 6½ hours [from Auckland] by TEAL Solent to restful Fiji! A short flight in a fast, luxuriously appointed flying boat and there you are. It's so easy by Solent. You land at Lauthala Bay, right in Suva. En route you enjoy all the comforts that have made TEAL Solents famous — fine food service, every attention from Flight Stewards and Stewardesses. Relax in one of Solent's seven lounges as you dream to your winter holiday in restful Fiji.'²²

19 *ibid.*, p.137.

20 Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, "The Hollywood Native". *Hollywood's Construction of the South Seas and Wartime Encounters with the South Pacific*, *Sites*, 27 (1993), pp.15–29.

21 Stuart Lusk, 'The "Red Route" and New Zealand's Aviation Policy 1935–1953', MA thesis, Auckland University, 1998.

22 TEAL advertising pamphlet, 1950s, Ephemera G 155, Auckland Institute and Museum. See also Nancy Phelan, *Pieces of Heaven. In the South Seas*, St Lucia, 1996.

Akaiami in the Cook Islands was the notable stop, and it frequently formed the centrepiece in TEAL's promotional literature: 'a jewel of an island three kilometres long, with dazzling white sand and coconut palms on the edge of a turquoise lagoon. The warm, shallow water was perfect for swimming or snorkelling, and airline staff thoughtfully handed out togs to passengers who had forgotten to pack their own.'²³ TEAL constructed its own jetty there and an 'airport building'. It was 'a native-style thatched hut . . . sited behind the fringe of coconut trees so that it could not be seen from the shore. In this way, the romantic image for the alighting passenger stepping onto an "unspoilt" Pacific island, was preserved.'²⁴

But flying boats were eventually phased out as airports were built on the islands and jet travel commenced. The last Solent flew from New Zealand to Tahiti in 1960. For a time, however, most aircraft travelling between New Zealand and the US needed to land in Fiji or Tahiti and Hawaii for refuelling; this necessity provided the basis for the modern island tourist industry. Now aircraft fly across the Pacific Ocean non-stop, and smaller planes fly to dedicated island destinations.

Not only has transport revolutionized visits to the islands, but the physical world of the islands themselves was, and is, selectively constructed or modified according to the idealized images expected by Westerners. Some tourist destinations are now designed for the mass market, and offer what sociologists of tourism call 'pseudo-events' and 'staged authenticities', most notably Hawaii's Waikiki, the Polynesian Cultural Centre, and the Kodak Hula Show.²⁵ Large hotel complexes provide pools, coconut groves, carvings, 'native village' architecture, and all the usual iconography of 'Polynesia' indoors. Club Meds throughout the Pacific also cater to a mass audience in search of a more hedonistic outdoor paradise of tennis, scuba-diving and jet-skis. There is also a great deal of niche tourism, often targeting nationality and generation. These sites too are often physically constructed, planted and manicured so that their postcard lagoonside settings bear little relationship to their more general and often degraded island environments. They are also usually set well apart from indigenous community life. Certain resorts in Tonga and Fiji cater for New Zealanders, who tend to bring their children, like prepaid buffet eating, and indulge in a multitude of outdoor activities. Travellers from Europe are often attracted to smaller resorts where children are less welcome, dining is more elegant and prepared by chefs from Europe, and jet-skis are banned.

Island tourist destinations are fundamentally modern Western cultural sites. They are a world that is pleasurably and successfully anticipated. The sites are prepackaged, sanitized, controlled and safe. The visitor's experience of the local culture tends to be little more threatening than sleeping in a thatched hut, eating

23 'Flying Boats', *New Zealand Geographic*, 40 (1998), p.125.

24 Alastair Shephard, 'The Coral Route Story. A History of TEAL's Flying Boat Service in the Pacific 1950-1960', MA thesis, Auckland University, 1994, p.13.

25 Andrew Ross, 'Cultural Preservation in the Polynesia of the Latter-day Saints', *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life. Nature's Debt to Society*, London, 1994, pp.21-98; Elizabeth Buck, *Paradise Remade. The Politics of Culture and History in Hawai'i*, Philadelphia, 1993.

local fish from the menu, and perhaps attending a floor-show. Islanders are happy and eager to serve with a smile, and strum guitars. The island experience is brief and a return to the normal world is guaranteed.

Pacific island tourism remains a colonialist activity, not just in social and economic terms, but in its intellectual/imagining processes, even in these so-called postcolonial times. Island resorts are not remote and unfamiliar. They consist of powerfully organized information which is already known and can pleasurably be anticipated. Imagining or visiting the islands is not about discovery, but it is about confirming expectations. And the traveller returns bearing photographs validating the promises of the travel brochures, thus completing a cultural loop.²⁶ The reality of life on many Pacific islands — poverty, aid dependency, absent remittance populations, political corruption, international money laundering, pollution, environmental destruction through mining, deforestation, nuclear testing, radioactive dumping and drift-net fishing — is not part of the deal. Indeed it is almost obscene to mention these things in the context of thoughts about coral lagoons and tropical flowers. A whole series of real and imagined Pacific safe havens have been created to reflect inner needs. Apart from tourist advertising, this idealized Pacific island is continually represented for tourists and non-tourists alike in an endless stream of books of breathtaking colour photographs.²⁷ Non-islanders and islanders continue to contribute to a popular artistic tradition that dates from Paul Gauguin and earlier.²⁸

Running parallel with this idealized postcard Pacific, there has also been a set of 'political' or 'real' Pacifics that by contrast have changed considerably over the century — from apparent certainties to complex uncertainties. But in New Zealand's case, unlike that of Australia and North America, any 'real' Pacific has been at worst unpleasant or a nuisance, rather than a serious threat to New Zealand's perceived well-being. The idea of a Polynesian paradise has not been compromised in New Zealand eyes.

If Tregear epitomized the beginnings of the twentieth-century romantic view of the Pacific islands, Seddon epitomized a more political outlook. Continuing New Zealand's nineteenth-century aspirations, he wanted a New Zealand empire, one that offered resources as well as the responsibilities that signalled the maturity and right of New Zealand to rule over lesser others, offering them hope and comfort. Typical expressions of this view can be found in his speeches to island leaders on his 1900 tour. As he told the 'King' and citizens of Niue, 'Now, though I should be away from you, I shall be ever thinking of you . . . and I shall be able to help you. There is now a tie which will help to keep us together;

26 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze. Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, London, 1990, pp.139–40.

27 Most notable are the many publications of photographer Jim Siers. A recent example of the genre is Evan Smith and Graham Lay, *The Cook Islands*, Rarotonga, 1998, containing 'Over 200 stunning colour photographs [which] brilliantly reveal the unique beauty of one of the loveliest, least spoilt countries on Earth'.

28 For example, see Sean Mallou and Pandora Fulimalo Pereira, eds, *Speaking in Colour. Conversations with Artists of Pacific Island Heritage*, Wellington, 1997; Claudia Pond Eyley and Robin White, *Twenty-eight Days in Kiribati*, Auckland, 1987; Peter McIntyre, *Peter McIntyre's Pacific*, Wellington, 1966.

Queen Victoria is now your protector, and her protection will save you for all time.²⁹

The administrators' early twentieth-century paternalism, whether the colonial Pacific authority be French, German, British, Australian or New Zealand, tended to be based on the assumption that indigenous Pacific peoples had some sort of future under an imperial wing. In short, they more often than not believed they had a mission to save and civilize.³⁰ This was not a view then widely shared. Anthropological theory underpinned an overwhelming body of opinion by the end of the nineteenth century that Pacific islanders were doomed to extinction, either because of their inherently flawed biology and poor life skills, or because of pernicious Western impact, or a combination of both.³¹

This near universal belief offered a potential human void in the Pacific. This void was to be filled with a new race of Pacific men — the Britons of the south, that is, the European peoples of Australia and especially New Zealand, who, from the 1880s, regarded themselves as an advanced reinvigorated version of their Old World forefathers, and represented the 'coming man'. John Macmillan Brown was amongst the more prominent advocates. 'Nature', he proclaimed in the 1920s, 'seems to have marked us out amongst the nations of the great British Commonwealth as the torchbearers of British civilisation and the British spirit in the Pacific Ocean.' New Zealand had an 'Oceanic destiny'. It was, said Brown, 'in the forefront of the world and will fully realise the prediction of its epithet "The Britain of the South"'.³²

But twentieth-century depopulation theory and expectation was mostly (if not entirely) abandoned by the 1930s. Many island societies were suddenly deemed to be increasing in numbers, a phenomenon generally attributed at the time to the success of colonial paternalism, a triumph of the West's mission to salvage and civilize. Yet if there were no longer fears of the biological demise of island societies, the longstanding trope of the 'fatal impact' — prevalent since the days of Cook — still continued, but was now refocused on the idea of *cultural* genocide. A huge popular literature developed on this thesis, giving an added complexity, and obvious contradiction, to the ideal of the islands as paradise — a paradise for whom?

New Zealand's Pacific colonial rule was in actuality a mix of economic opportunism, especially with advantageous deals for Nauruan phosphate brokered by Massey at Versailles,³³ and a relatively mild, if often inept and

29 Quoted in [Edward Tregear], *The Right Hon. R.J. Seddon's (The Premier of New Zealand) Visit to Tonga, Fiji, Savage Island, and the Cook Islands*, Wellington, 1900, p.424.

30 For example, T.R. St Johnston, *The Islands of the Pacific, or the Children of the Sun*, New York, 1921, pp.11–12.

31 For example, George Henry Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers, *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races*, London, 1927; W.H.R. Rivers, ed., *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia*, Cambridge, 1922.

32 John Macmillan Brown, *Peoples and Problems of the Pacific*, London, 1927, I, p.175; II, p.242. On Anglo-Saxon destiny in the Pacific see also H. Stonehewer Cooper, *Coral Lands*, London, 2 vols, 1882. Echoes of the sentiment lasted until the 1940s, see Paul McGuire, *Westward the Course. The New World of Oceania*, Melbourne, 1942.

33 Barrie Macdonald, *Massey's Imperialism and the Politics of Phosphate*, Palmerston North, 1982.

ignorant, paternalism. There was relatively little opposition to New Zealand's rule. The exception was the Mau in Western Samoa, which emerged in the 1920s. Contrary to what is now popular opinion, the Mau, certainly an expression of Samoan 'nationalism' and thus, per se, an anti-colonial expression, was far from sharing many of the characteristics commonly attributed to anti-colonial movements elsewhere in the world. A recent revisionist view claims that it was stimulated by New Zealand's relatively 'liberal' rule rather than being a response to alleged New Zealand 'repression'. In this argument, emphasis is placed on the Mau's uniquely Samoan characteristics, especially the very complex interplay of 'half-caste' businessmen and chiefly élites within the context of domestic Samoan affairs.³⁴ The Mau was never single-mindedly organized for the violent overthrow of New Zealand's rule. While it embarrassed New Zealand in the League of Nations, and helped to ensure that more notice was taken of Samoan aspirations, especially when the Labour party came to power in New Zealand in 1935, it was overall of relatively little consequence to New Zealanders.

Island produce was always a minor item of the New Zealand economy. New Zealand, in economic terms, has always meant far more for the islands than vice versa. The relative mildness of New Zealand's colonial rule was less a product of its humanitarian spirit and skill at administering natives (because of its long history of skilled benevolence towards Maori, a common claim of the time³⁵) but because there was never any significant extractive economic activity. There was no mining on the major populated islands, no large-scale government controlled or supported plantations, unlike the situation in Melanesia, and especially in French Indo-China. New Zealand's colonial subjects were of slight economic significance and so, for much of the time, were left to get on with their existence, rather than being forced or cajoled or otherwise enticed into any large-scale colonial labour force. What plans administrators may have dreamed of for radical economic 'advancement' were also dashed by the Depression. Administrative interventions were probably more subtle and potentially disruptive in their fiddling with local government infrastructure and in areas such as health, housing and education — interventions based on well-meaning but often inappropriate European values.³⁶

The relative lack of hostility towards New Zealand's administration determined the nature and pace of its post-war decolonization programme. The same was true for Britain and Australia. By world terms, the decolonization of the Pacific islands, where it occurred, was late, not getting underway until the 1960s and 1970s, and in some cases even later. This was mainly because most island countries are small and were economically dependent on their colonial

34 Ian C. Campbell, 'New Zealand and the Mau in Samoa. Re-assessing the Causes of a Colonial Protest Movement', *NZJH*, 33, 1 (1999), pp.92–110.

35 E.g. see M.P.K. Sorrenson, 'Polynesian Corpuscles and Pacific Anthropology. The Home-made Anthropology of Sir Apirana Ngata and Sir Peter Buck', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 9, 1 (1982), p.18.

36 For a broad overview of New Zealand's relationship with the Pacific islands see Angus Ross, ed., *New Zealand's Record in the Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century*, Auckland, 1969; and R.M. Alley, ed., *New Zealand and the Pacific*, Boulder, 1984. For a most useful general survey of modern relationships see Ron Crocombe, *Pacific Neighbours. New Zealand's Relations with Other Pacific Islands*, Christchurch, 1992.

rulers. If winds of change howled through Africa in the 1950s, those that reached the Pacific a decade or more later were but gentle trade winds. Thus, there was generally no great demand for independence; indeed, smaller potential nation-states feared it. Unlike many other parts of the world, the decolonization processes for most Pacific islands came about peacefully and co-operatively. There were no revolutions, no wars of national liberation. Political control slid easily from colonial authorities to existing indigenous élites. New Zealand's colonies made constitutional changes even more easily than most. Western Samoa became independent in 1962, the Cook Islands in 1965, and Niue became self-governing in free association with New Zealand in 1974. Tokelau remained a dependency until self-government in 1995. There was also much optimism for the future.

After World War II, New Zealand's foreign-policy makers were forced to reconceptualize the nature of New Zealand's strategic Pacific location. In so doing, they had to consider what was meant by New Zealand's interests and role in the Pacific. Clearly no longer able to rely on promises that the Royal Navy could defend them, New Zealand and Australia sought a range of defensive strategic treaty arrangements with the USA. A key part of this process was reflected in the concept of regional security, but whose region? Regionalism became the new delimiter, but in so doing it also became a 'site of differing, and often contesting, discourses of identity making, and identity making is also boundary making'.³⁷ Constructs such as the Pacific region, the South Pacific region and the Asia-Pacific region all became 'different sites of practice';³⁸ and 'different regions for different occasions'.³⁹ New Zealand and Australian perceptions were sometimes in conflict with each other, and with those of the US. Critical for Australia and New Zealand was the establishment in 1947 of the South Pacific Commission, a kind of colonial club. It created a new regional territory called the South Pacific, an age-old term but one now given a precise political as well as geographic boundary. The new South Pacific region was created to promote stability and order within the district, and to exclude possible cold war and other potential enemies by a policy of strategic denial. But in the changed world of the 1970s, when there were many newly independent Pacific island nation-states, who wanted a say in what happened to their 'region', the South Pacific Forum was established. Its conceived coverage and interests again amounted to a redefining and recontesting of boundaries and identities as well as purposes, which in turn shifted 'from economic and physical aspects to social and human' aspects.⁴⁰

The ending of the cold war, combined with the globalization of finance and investment, led to further shifts in New Zealand's Pacific. The 1990 Defence White Paper argued for a move from an intensely regional outlook, since 'The South Pacific States are viewed as being of limited significance to New Zealand,

37 Maureen Kattau, 'Whose Regional Security? Identity/difference and the Construction of the South Pacific', MA thesis, Australian National University, 1992, p.1.

38 *ibid.*, p.57.

39 *ibid.*

40 Mary Boyd, 'Introduction', in Mary Boyd, ed., *Pacific Horizons. A Regional Role for New Zealand*, Wellington, 1972, p.13.

accounting for barely 3 percent of her trade'.⁴¹ At the same time, a prime ministerial task force, set up to consider 'coming to terms with our neighbourhood, and New Zealand's place as one of a community of Pacific Island countries', recommended that it was 'no longer appropriate to refer to our regional neighbourhood as "the South Pacific"'. New Zealand's place should 'extend north of the equator' to include Micronesia. The suggested new term was the 'Pacific Island region'. New Zealand, it argued, was an integral part of this larger area, but its main interests were deemed to extend far beyond, since New Zealand must always 'maintain global interests'. A wider Pacific identity for New Zealand would establish a 'secure base' for these relationships, since a 'well disposed and prosperous environment serves New Zealand's economic and security interests'.⁴²

In even more recent times there have been renewed attempts to redefine New Zealand's Pacific as the Asia-Pacific region. This notion was pushed by those who saw the hothouse Pacific rim Asian economies of the early 1990s as providing major economic opportunities for New Zealand through trade and investment immigration, and as being role models for New Zealand's own economic 'reforms'. The subsequent collapse of most of these Asian economies and the ineffectiveness of still-trumpeted organizations such as APEC has, at present, dampened attempts to reorient New Zealand's Pacific to embrace Asia. If some Australian politicians now refer to their country as a part of Asia, it is a sentiment seldom heard in New Zealand.

The common thread running through these post-war permutations of New Zealand's Pacifics is the belief that what really matters to New Zealand happens far away, in another hemisphere. All New Zealand wants, and all it can really get from its immediate neighbourhood of islands, is peace and quiet, and, at best, perhaps a measure of respect, influence and moral leadership.

If the ongoing debate over the nature of New Zealand's post-war regionalism has excited foreign-policy makers and academic commentators, it has generally been of no concern to the public. Perhaps the only time this century when there was a brief moment of genuine popular interest in Pacific island affairs was the early 1970s. The reasons for this interest were many and varied, but in general the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s was a time of conscious public reflection on the nature of New Zealand's identity (as happened in the 1890s and the 1940s). It was led by the post-war baby boom generation, which was more attuned to international popular culture and politics, and was influenced by issues such as the Vietnam war, decolonization and indigenous aspirations. That generation's protests against New Zealand's social, economic and cultural constraints imposed by its parents' values contributed to a reimagining of what was New Zealand and its place in the world. It was a time of the modern Maori revival and the first serious challenges in a century to the monocultural values that underpinned government and society. Britain finally joined the EEC, which created an economic and emotional awareness of fundamentally changed relationships from those that had underwritten the New Zealand economy and

41 *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, (Dec 1991/Jan 1992), p.11.

42 Report of the South Pacific Policy Review Group, *Towards a Pacific Island Community*, Wellington, 1990, pp.1, 231-2.

psyche for a century. The Captain Cook bicentennials in New Zealand and Australia also heightened awareness of a Pacific historical heritage. Cook and the *Endeavour* appeared on coins and bank notes. French atmospheric nuclear bomb tests at Mururoa and Fangatafa contributed to a sense of New Zealand's Pacific location, as well as fuelling a growing concern about environmental issues. Air New Zealand painted the koru, a symbolic prow of a Polynesian voyaging canoe, on its aircraft tails in 1973. 'Pacific History' became a trendy new university subject in New Zealand (and Australia) and attracted large numbers of students. The Kirk Labour government initially had a deliberate Pacific orientation. Kirk's first official visit overseas as prime minister was to the Pacific islands, an unprecedented act. His government sent a frigate to protest against atmospheric atomic bomb testing at Mururoa, and began legal proceedings against the French in the International Court of Justice. It also made an attempt to establish a nuclear-free Pacific. It funded a shipping line to serve the region. New Zealand's aid to the Pacific islands was increased threefold. For the first time in New Zealand's history, a large number of Pacific Islanders were actively encouraged to New Zealand to live and work in the booming economy. New Zealand's role in the new Pacific Forum, together with its moral and financial contributions to a host of new Pacific island nation-states, helped to impart a sense of New Zealand being more conscious of its identity and role in a Pacific setting.

But it was a false dawn. The oil shocks, which began late in 1973, highlighted New Zealand's economic dependency, fragility and financial indebtedness, so beginning an economic rethinking and reprioritizing of the role of the state that was eventually taken to extremes after 1984. New Zealand's new Pacific role of the early 1970s was rapidly subverted by economic downturn, and by National's racist cartoon advertising in 1975, which blamed Islanders for living off the state, taking up places in schools, and soaking up scarce bank-loan money. There were crass attempts by the police in 1976 to 'round up' island 'overstayers'. The Auckland acting chief of police warned people who spoke with a 'non-Kiwi accent' and who did not 'look' as if they were born in New Zealand to 'carry a passport'.⁴³ Island immigrants found a less than welcoming social and economic environment, although their numbers in New Zealand increased dramatically, more than doubling in the period 1971–1981, from 50,000 to 104,000.⁴⁴ Where Pacific Islanders' presence in New Zealand has created artistic, cultural and multicultural inspiration for many non-Island citizens,⁴⁵ there are many more who have adopted a negative, sometimes hostile set of stereotypes wherein Islanders in New Zealand are assumed to have poor education, health, housing and behaviour, and to be welfare dependent.⁴⁶ So ingrained is such negativity that even 'official' attempts to give an up-beat, optimistic assessment

43 *Auckland Star*, 22 October 1976.

44 Pacific islanders in New Zealand numbered 8103 in 1956; 14,340 in 1961; 26,271 in 1966; 40,918 in 1971; 61,354 in 1976; 104,262 in 1981; 130,293 in 1986; and 167,073 in 1991.

45 For example, Graham Lay, *Pacific New Zealand*, Auckland, 1996; Herbert Ypma, *Pacific Island*, London, 1996; David McGill, *The Other New Zealanders*, Wellington, 1982.

46 For example, Paul Spoonley and Walter Hirsh, eds, *Between the Lines. Racism and the New Zealand Media*, Auckland, 1990; Paul Spoonley, David Pearson and Cluny Macpherson, eds, *Nga Take. Ethnic Relations and Racism in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Palmerston North, 1991.

of Islanders' roles, such as the media supplement put out by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, entitled 'Pacific Vision — Navigating the currents of the new millennium', still rehearse in some detail the low socio-economic and educational status of Islanders.⁴⁷

If Maori have a suppressed history in New Zealand, the Island immigrants and their descendants have an even less acknowledged role in New Zealand, which belies the numerical size of their presence and their actual contribution to New Zealand. In the 1996 census there were over 200,000 Islanders in New Zealand (101,000 Samoans, 47,000 Cook Islanders, 31,000 Tongans), well over half of them New Zealand born, and most residing in Auckland, compared with a total Maori population of 520,000.⁴⁸ Islanders outnumbered Maori in the Auckland urban region by 1991.⁴⁹ If, in crude terms, the combined 'Polynesian' proportion of the total New Zealand population is 20%, the social, economic and political influence of that group has yet to have a major impact on mainstream life in New Zealand. To suggest any potential homogeneity of New Zealand's Polynesian population of course denies fundamentally distinct cultural identities, histories, differences and conflicts. Yet, for some purposes, a pan-Polynesian, pan-Pacific identity is sometimes cultivated, whether it be for cultural festivals, or for those Maori and indigenous Hawaiians finding common cause in their anti-colonial struggles. And it is worth noting that just as non-Islanders have constantly constructed and reconstructed 'Pacific' regions and boundaries, so too have Islanders in their various quests for pan-Pacific identities.⁵⁰

Islanders' visions of their homelands are much more complex than any Western stereotypes, if only because the Pacific paradise is a Western construct, and because very large numbers have chosen not to live there. Their 'great escape' has been from their islands. More than seven times as many Niueans and almost three times as many Cook Islanders live in New Zealand as in their islands; 38% of all Western Samoans and almost 25% of all Tongans live in New Zealand.⁵¹ What is an island paradise for some cultures, is an economic prison for others. There is a generational shift too. Initially Islanders' migration to New Zealand from the 1960s was an economic and educational preparation for a later return home. Now a generation or more of New Zealand-born Islanders have economic and educational situations that effectively prevent them from ever returning to live permanently in their ancestral lands. Associated value shifts are also apparent, ranging from one extreme of trying to recreate island

47 *New Zealand Herald* (NZH), 27 July 1999.

48 For further details see Statistics New Zealand, *Samoan People in New Zealand*, and *Tongan People in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1998.

49 NZH, 12 December 1991.

50 For example, Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific. A Journal of Island Affairs* (CT), 6,1 (1994), pp.147–61; and Hau'ofa, 'The Ocean in Us', CT, 10, 2 (1999), pp.392–410. See also Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau'ofa (eds), *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, Suva, 1994.

51	Island populations	Islanders in New Zealand (1996)
W. Samoa	161,298	101,754
Tonga	97,446	31,389
Cook Is	17,400	47,172
Niue	2,532	18,474
Tokelau	1,577	4,917

culture and society, through to seeing church and traditional social structures and gender values as outdated restraints in a new country.⁵²

Apart from the background of New Zealand's major economic problems since the mid-1970s, as well as the ideological revolution after 1984, which diverted New Zealand's brief focus away from the Pacific, the Pacific islands themselves have generally become more problematic places. By the 1980s and 1990s, the euphoria and optimism of constitutional independence for the new island nation-states had become distinctly muted. Revealed instead have been a range of difficult issues such as contradictions between constitutional independence and economic dependency, tensions between regions and superimposed nation-states, and conflicts between Western constitutional traditions and indigenous values.⁵³ Events such as the Fiji coups, political unrest in New Caledonia, civil war in Bougainville, continued French nuclear testing, the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior*, and the Cook Islands' Wine Box Affair, have increasingly led to an image of a less than benign region. In addition, the Pacific Ocean is a notable site of debates about pollution, dumping of waste, drift-net fishing, undersea mining, whaling and global warming. None of these things has managed to challenge the ideal images of New Zealand's Polynesia, but collectively they ensure that the 'real' Pacific islands are often depicted in negative terms, ranging from popular doomsday sentiments about ongoing cultural destruction and rising sea levels, through to academic pessimism and crisis models of island nations and their MIRAB economies.⁵⁴ All these issues, combined with New Zealand's newly globalized economic and other concerns, has led to a significant level of popular disinterest in the 'real' Pacific islands.

Yet New Zealand is geographically set in the Pacific Ocean. Large numbers of Pacific Islanders now live in New Zealand. But the course of New Zealand's twentieth-century history has been little influenced by Pacific island events or situations. As a consequence, the commonly held Polynesian Pacific ideal has remained unchallenged and uncompromised. The 'real' Pacific might be seen as a more troublesome place than perhaps formerly, but it does not materially affect most New Zealand citizens. Most people in New Zealand still readily accept the proposition that the Pacific = Polynesia = Paradise, and, in so doing, reflect a still-comfortable colonialist memory and seat of desire, one born of a complex mix of geographic isolation and a continuing and as yet unchallenged cultural and emotional dependence on worlds beyond the Pacific Ocean.

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52 For example, Jemaima Tiatia, *Caught Between Cultures. A New Zealand-born Pacific Island Perspective*, Auckland, 1998; Vasantha Krishnan, Penelope Schoeffel and Julie Warner, *The Challenge of Change. Pacific Island Communities in New Zealand 1986-1993*, Wellington, 1994.

53 For an overview, see K.R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste and Brij V. Lal, eds, *Tides of History. The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century*, Sydney, 1994, Part Three; and Donald Denoon, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, Cambridge, 1997, Part Two.

54 MIRAB is an acronym developed in the mid-1980s to describe Pacific island economies characterized by Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy. For a retrospective view see Geoff Bertram, 'The MIRAB Model Twelve Years On', CT, 11, 1 (1999), pp.105-38. For an argument about the consequences for the islands of outsiders' doomsday views see Greg Fry, 'Framing the Islands: Knowledge and Power in Changing Australian Images of "the South Pacific"', CT, 9, 2 (1997), pp.305-44.