

TEENA BROWN PULU

## Forget China: No Shark Trade in Tonga. Yeah Right



### **Abstract**

In the South Pacific winter of 2013, Michael Brassington reported from Tonga that “China is now the South Pacific’s most valued VIP.” The Australian journalist was interviewing Pesi Fonua, longstanding Tongan publisher who commented: “They are definitely calling the shots. Whatever they want they can negotiate or take it.” Referring to China, he ranked this

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regional power as a twenty first century precursor for South Seas debt, diplomacy, and indebtedness.

By Fonua's description China was the debt stress killer. In 2014, Tonga would start repaying Chinese soft loans worth 40% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) spent on buildings, wharfs, bridges, roads. Ordinary people in this small island developing state were worried the government might default on loan payments. Then what would happen? Would China own Tonga?

What have *Pakeha* New Zealanders' perceptions of Pacific Islanders got to do with any of this? Reconfiguring South Pacific relations with China as a contending power sparked off anxiety for the United States, Australian, and New Zealand governments. The question was how did political unease shape strategies to control the region? For Tonga's national affliction of debt distress, did New Zealand's regional engagement consider how an age old attitude towards Pacific Islanders weighed down this country's excess baggage carried over from the 19th and 20th centuries, nudging them closer to China?

### ***White settler nation***

*Remember, remember always, that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from immigrants and revolutionists.*

***Franklin D. Roosevelt***

When the 32nd President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt remarked this on April 21st 1938, he was addressing white American women who traced their ancestry to Europe (Hardman, 1944, p. 262). He wanted their vote. By no means was Roosevelt speaking to me and my kind, Pacific Islander women living in the Southern Hemisphere. I am the first generation born in New Zealand, a small settler nation at

the rear end of the Pacific Ocean which was colonised by and swept into the 19th century British Empire.

New Zealand during the post-1960s era when I was born presented an opening for South Pacific labourers on the international job market. This was the first time New Zealand immigration policy recruited temporary workers from the Pacific Islands for factory production lines, many arriving with little or no English.

Largely Polynesian men and women from the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Samoa, and Tonga (Spoonley and Bedford, 2012), this initial wave of migration caused permanent change to the white New Zealand ethnoscape (Appadurai, 1996). At the time, not one New Zealand sociologist, anthropologist, or demographer prophesised that notable ethnic clusters of South Pacific Islanders staying on and having more children than the average *Pakeha* family of two would consequently colour, complicate, and confuse the country's colonial fabric.

In the present day, descendants of Pacific Islander migrants born in New Zealand are the fastest growing sub-population under 30 years of age. The state demographic prediction is that by 2020, one in four primary school children will claim Pacific Islander ancestry. The twist is the identity category of young Pacific people in New Zealand is associated with being the poorest, the least educated, and the most susceptible to unemployment and social and health conditions (Shuttleworth, 2013; Tanielu and Johnson, 2013).



***My three eldest children born in New Zealand have Maori, European, Tongan, Samoan ancestry, reflecting the young Pacific Islanders' demographic which is increasingly mixed-blood, multiple ethnicity, multi-cultural. Hybridity in the New Zealand Pasifika context resonates historically with the creole, mulatto, mestizo, categorisations of mixed-race (Foner, 1970; Mosadomi, 2000).***

New Zealand Samoan anthropologist Melani Anae noted there were shrewd power differentials at work when capturing Pacific Islanders as a culture. Gazing at Pacific Islanders as a spectacle of churches, celebrations, festivals, and feasts of fatty foods entrenched social stratification. Anae's argument confronted race and class. "What is there to celebrate?" she asked. Probing the state politics of closing your eyes to "social-economic indicators" on Pacific peoples' poverty in New Zealand, she questioned how ignorance compounded an unwillingness to recognise institutionalised racism as a root cause of inequality (Anae, 1997, p. 131).

*The Pasifika Festival held annually in Auckland is a case in point. What is ironic is that Pasifika promotes this pan-Pacific ideology of the Pacific Way, as well as reducing culture to aesthetic, traditional elements represented in music, dance and fashion mixed with modern globalising influences producing the 'hybrid' model... This celebration happens at a time ... when national statistics show that Pacific peoples are the most unemployable, most uneducatable, poorest, most likely to be criminals, most state-dependant (even lower than Maori), most unwanted sector of the New Zealand population. They are at the bottom of the heap in all demographic, socio-economic indicators in New Zealand. What is there to celebrate? (Anaë, 1997, p. 131).*

In 1966 my parents migrated individually from the Kingdom of Tonga. Not knowing one another in the islands, they met in Dunedin. They were from different social groups; my mother being half-European with a father of British citizenship, and my father being from a modest Catholic rural family. My mother travelled to Dunedin to do a diploma in shorthand typing at Otago Polytechnic. My father was sent there by the Government of Tonga on a trade training apprenticeship with the New Zealand Railways. She was an office clerk and he was a tradesman. Together, they were a migrant marriage of averageness and ordinariness.

Hardly revolutionists, my parents crossed the boundary that made them separate classes in Tonga to pair up in New Zealand as a particular type. Conformists working their migrant lives as state bureaucrats, and immigrants from a poor Pacific Island country, my mother and father adopted white New Zealand ambition becoming members of the materialistic middle-class in pursuit of financial mobility. By assimilating into Western state and society, they shook off

Third World shackles of poverty coupled with aid and remittance dependency. For this I am conflicted in feeling gratitude and guilt.

I say gratitude because my parents did not keep up Tongan custom. Growing up, I had similar social and intellectual freedoms afforded to my white school friends. My mother and father did not attend church, nor did they make me. Neither spoke Tongan to me, or expected that I learn. My parents never forced me to dress in Tongan costume, nor were social gatherings where culture and church were on display such as funerals, weddings, and birthdays, compulsory attendance. At high school I played sport, was in the senior debating team, won English speech competitions, and socialised in the weekends.

I considered myself to be a well-rounded Kiwi kid preparing through my school years to leave home at age eighteen for university and independence. Once I graduated, I would move into a specialist job, a middle-income salary, and a life where I made decisions as an individual, had financial purchasing power as a consumer, and took control as an adult. At primary school I knew I would go to university because my parents said I would, often telling me to study law. To them it was a respectable profession. By the time their only child completed high school, I was a confident public speaker with a high-level of English literacy, and they assumed lawyers made a considerable amount financially.

In actual fact I had life choices because my mother and father had a comfortable standard of living. It helped, giving me a material advantage, confidence, and security to enter university and adult life. I knew I could fall back on them if I ran into hard financial times. But what might have happened if my parents were not in a stable position to provide monetary help to their only child? Realistically, would I have achieved my education and career goals *if* they were low-income and poorly educated Tongan migrants expecting I contribute money to supplement their household expenditure?



***AUT and USP Fiji workshop held in Auckland, New Zealand, from 29 April to 3 May 2013 for seven Samoan, Tongan, and Fijian student researchers enrolled in Masters and PhD theses. Publishing student essays on field research in a special edition of Te Kaharoa: The e-journal on Indigenous Pacific Issues was the gathering's purpose.***

The hard-to-swallow truth is that I was no more gifted than many Pacific Islander young people my age born to parents who could *not* afford to pay for their children's education and career dreams. This is where guilt squatted on my conscience. Guilt omitted a foul stench leaving a distasteful reminder Michel Foucault had convincingly argued that in any given society power produces knowledge; and power could be systematically narrowed down to wealth and skin colour (Foucault, 1980; Siolkas, 2012).

Foucault was astute to observe that those who have power define knowledge over and about those who do not. Edward Said was justified to testify as a Palestinian Arab that the

dominant power in the world, the West, meaning America and Western Europe, control what is believed to be *real* knowledge, or the truth about non-Western countries and cultures (Said, 1978, 2003). And Hawaiian educator Manulani Aluli Meyer was resolute to state that “truth telling is a higher frequency than the accumulation of facts” (Meyer, 2010).

If truth telling, as Meyer averred, takes more “than the accumulation of facts,” but rather, is subject to interpretation, the sense making of complex circumstances, then it is scientist Stephen Jay Gould’s inquiry which is relevant here. He described Foucault’s power and knowledge predicament using the example of the popular tribute that Albert Einstein was a genius. Gould recounted the scientific capacities of “Einstein’s brain” did not provide a measurement of human intelligence (Gould, 1980). The historical fact is many “people of equal talent” have never had the opportunity to pursue scientific careers like Einstein because structural discrimination worked against their class and race origins (Gould, 1980). The question then is how does power prevent some from, while support others to, being producers, authorities, and gatekeepers of knowledge?

*I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein’s brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweat shops. (Gould, 1980).*

### ***Unsettling the settler nation***

Entrenched in the present-day politics of New Zealand universities which are funded and monitored by the state is a standard policy on achieving equity in the tertiary system. Equity by New Zealand’s estimation lays emphasis on retaining Maori and Pacific students through to qualification completion. Presented as a burdensome task which constructs Maori and Pacific students as a social problem, the difficulty is how to get a vulnerable group identified foremost



by race, and secondarily by class, through the Western English-speaking qualifications system. Funnily enough the equity answer is not entirely aligned with liberal education, but can be traced to free market economics. Exemplifying this point was New Zealand's education and Pacific Island affairs minister, Hekia Parata, a Maori woman, who underlined the equity and economy link.

In this context, Parata exclaimed that "too many were Maori and Pacific Island students and too many were boys, brown boys" (Fea, 2013). She was referring to the archetypical New Zealand student that fell under the national standard for graduating high school with adequate credits to enter university. The minister's solution was "to raise the academic achievement of its Maori and Pacific Island students to match those of Pakeha [white] students" because "New Zealand needed only so many doctors and lawyers. No economy could operate without tradespeople such as plumbers and auto electricians." Clearly she thought "too many brown boys" in her country could be moulded and moved into the workforce as New Zealand's tradespeople (Fea, 2013). Deep-seated discrimination lay in the insinuation that "brown boys" were not of sufficient human intelligence to be "doctors and lawyers."

Hekia Parata, New Zealand Minister for Education and Pacific Island Affairs highlighted the equity dilemma of managing young Pacific peoples. Historically New Zealand was a white settler nation, a former colony of the 19th century British Empire which in the latter half of the 20 century reinvented itself as a modern multicultural nation to accommodate labour market changes. A notable social transformation was seen in the post-1960s influx of Pacific Island migrants, many who settled in New Zealand and raised two generations of New Zealand born descendants (Strickson-Pua, 2013). In the twenty first century, however, New Zealand struggled to adjust its settler nation psyche to cope with the country's fast-changing demographic. The reality that Asian

and Pacific peoples, added alongside the indigenous Maori population, were growing at a rate that indicated in the near future they would be the largest ethnicities and cultures of New Zealand stirred social anxiety.

What would happen to the dominant *Pakeha* culture? Importantly, what would happen to the dominant position of *Pakeha* in the New Zealand economy? The fact that *Pakeha* New Zealanders were an aging population in contrast to an increasing youth bulge of Maori and Pacific peoples was viewed as an economic pitfall. Pessimism took hold of the social climate in that some did not believe Maori and Pacific peoples possessed the education and employment capability to sustain New Zealand's developed economy and standard of living.

On New Zealand's high rate of Maori and Pacific unemployment, Hone Harawira, Maori parliamentarian and leader of the Mana Party challenged Steven Joyce, the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment. In the House, Harawira repeatedly pressed Joyce to admit that the National coalition government had worsened the economy by demonstrating a "total lack of commitment to reducing Maori and Pacific unemployment rates" (Harawira, 2013).

*Does the Minister agree that even more appalling than the unemployment rates is the fact that only half of all Maori and Pacific Island people living in New Zealand actually have jobs, and does that mean that National's promise of a brighter future and an inclusive economy with jobs for all does not actually include Maori and Pacific Island people? Listening to the Minister blame the global financial crisis; yes he did. Does the Minister agree that the global financial crisis has nothing whatsoever to do with the racial mix of the unemployment statistics here, and that those truly appalling statistics are, in fact, the result of his Government's total lack of commitment to reducing*

*Maori and Pacific unemployment rates? (Harawira, 2013).*

Perhaps unintentionally, Harawira's pressing on "Maori and Pacific unemployment rates" pierced a festering sore on the New Zealand political landscape. Melani Anaë had argued Pacific peoples were the "most unwanted sector of the New Zealand population at the bottom of the heap in all demographic, socio-economic indicators" (Anaë, 1997, p. 131).



**Scottish cartoonist Al Nisbet's depiction of Maori and Pacific adults abusing the New Zealand government's breakfast in schools policy; Marlborough Express published Nisbet's cartoon on 29 May 2013.**

Lumping Pacific Islanders together with Maori highlighted a marginalised and increasing critical mass where it was assumed that half were out of work, were not financial contributors to the economy, and were supported by state assistance deducted from working people's taxes. New Zealand's gloomy economic forecast compounded by a constricted job market made Maori and Pacific peoples an easy

target for racism and the prejudiced belief that Polynesians are poor, uneducated, devious parasites living off state hand-outs and misusing the system (Shuttleworth, 2013).

In the New Zealand winter of May 29th Al Nisbet, a Scottish cartoonist and migrant to Christchurch, got published in the *Marlborough Express*. He drew a racist impression of Maori and Pacific adults taking advantage of breakfast being provided for students in some, not all, New Zealand schools (Radio New Zealand, 2013b). Nisbet's brown-skinned, obese, thick lipped, and bulgy eyed figures looked deceitful and repulsive (Edwards, 2013).

Characterised was a grotesquely fat Polynesian male commenting to a fat female: "If we can get away with this, the more cash left for booze, smokes and pokies" (Nisbet, 2013). The message projected that adults of Polynesian race would abuse the state funded programme. It was believed the money saved from getting free food would be used by Maori and Pacific adults for alcohol, cigarettes, and gambling.



***The Press, which along with the Marlborough Express is a Christchurch newspaper, published Nisbet's second cartoon on 1 June 2013.***

In addition to this, a second cartoon similar in its derogatory depiction of Polynesians was published on June 1st in *The Press* which along with the *Marlborough Express* was a Christchurch based newspaper. Nisbet's first cartoon appeared in the *Marlborough Express* two days after the New Zealand coalition government announced it was "putting \$9.5 million over the next 5 years towards the KickStart Breakfast programme in schools" (Bennett, 2013; Radio New Zealand, 2013b).

Paula Bennett, the Minister for Social Development and Employment, stated in parliament that "this is in partnership with Fonterra and Sanitarium, and will be matched in value by them" (Bennett, 2013; Fonterra Communications, 2013). But she slid back on explaining why the school breakfast programme was a social development priority in New Zealand. Instead, the minister held the judgement that "ultimately it is parents who are responsible for their children, but we cannot ignore the fact that some children turn up hungry and cannot learn on an empty stomach" (Bennett, 2013).

Paula Bennett's omission of reason, the unsaid triggers for child poverty, the silencing of structural inequalities which manufacture greater unemployment and lower education achievement for Maori and Pacific populations was harmful to New Zealand race relations. The fact there was an absence of ministerial leadership to opposing racism and discrimination against poor families unmasked a government that appeared *not* to know how to address poverty's root causes inside its own borders.

A tell-tale sign of antisocial behaviour, Al Nisbet denied his cartoon racially discriminated against Maori and Pacific peoples by stigmatising children in poverty and accusing brown-skinned adults of being dishonest, drunken, fat, irresponsible, and lazy. Failing to take ownership for the consequences of his derisive words and actions when feeding the white imagination, he shrugged off racism (Mills, 2000). According to Nisbet, "drawing stereotypes is all part of

cartooning. How else can various ethnicities be depicted? I'm often asked why I draw so ugly. It's because that's what I see. The human race is ugly and it does ugly things" (Nisbet, 2013).

Contrary to the reason for having a Race Relations Commissioner, the New Zealand government's new appointment, Susan Devoy, failed to mediate expertly on public complaints made against Nisbet's cartoon caricatures and racist overtures. On May the 30th, Devoy gave a press statement closing down discussion on how cartoon caricature racism was irresponsible and detrimental to defenceless and at risk groups. She was certain "that the cartoons did not breach the level considered to be racist under the Human Rights Act" (Gillies and Quilliam, 2013; Microsoft Network New Zealand, 2013). Her judgement was black-and-white. She did not advocate for the complainants who felt victimised by the published material.

Devoy paraded her ineptitude for performing an integral function that the role set out to accomplish. Basically, she was incompetent at identifying and naming racism. Former Race Relations Commissioner, Joris de Bres, was swift to signal this: "It may not be illegal, but it is certainly racist" (de Bres, 2013a). de Bres' observation cut to the bone of contention. While Devoy was resolute that "you have to look at what, under Section 61, will incite racial disharmony and that won't do this" (Radio New Zealand, 2013e), it did not appease the reality that a denigrating representation of the Polynesian race were the cartoons and the cartoonist's signature. On this point, de Bres was astute.

*Al Nisbet in the Dominion Post: "They [complainers] always point at the dark figures. They never look at the white ones." Haven't heard the word dark in this context since Paul Holmes used it on Kofi Annan. And anyway, why should Al be surprised people notice the former when they are drawn ten times the size of the*

*latter and smack in the middle of his cartoon. It may not be illegal, but it is certainly racist. (de Bres, 2013a).*

de Bres discussed social responsibility pointing at the editor's role in the media industry. Questioning the "freedom of expression" argument in the context of racial inscriptions about Maori and Pacific Islanders produced by white commentators, his stand was unwavering that "racist cartoons" should *not* be endorsed by editors and publishers (de Bres, 2013b). "Just because you have the right to say something, doesn't mean you have the right to have it published," de Bres announced (de Bres, 2013b). Here was the counter argument to "freedom of expression" in that racist publications "feed bigotry" to the public. Uncontrolled prejudice and intolerance therefore results in discrimination against "whole classes of people" (de Bres, 2013b; Dally, 2013). And the people targeted are made inferior in a society, a political economy, a media industry dominated by white people, white culture, and white values, tastes, and canons (Said, 1978; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Bradbury, 2013).

*I keep hearing Voltaire quoted this week: "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it." I never took this to mean that mainstream newspaper editors should publish racist cartoons. Just because you have the right to say something, doesn't mean you have the right to have it published in the Marlborough Express or the Christchurch Press. What is at issue here is the editor's decision to publish, not the cartoonist's decision to draw, racist pictures. To provoke discussion? No, to feed bigotry and denigrate whole classes of people who already suffer disproportionate barriers to full participation in society and fair representation in the media. And to cause more grief to them. Don't come at*

*me with freedom of expression, try thinking about editorial responsibility instead. (de Bres, 2013b).*

***I am the coloniser said no Pakeha ever***

*Being Pakeha means being invisible  
It means I am the starting point  
The mirror holder but never the reflected  
The square one  
An invisible marker from which every other  
is measured more or less than*

*When I turn on the TV  
it is my eyes through which the world is shown  
“Bloody land stealing, tax evading Pakeha”  
is not written between the lines of every newspaper article  
helpfully highlighting my own representation  
in the highest socio-economic status  
and how few of my kind there are locked up*

*“I am the coloniser” said no Pakeha ever  
I don’t get coloured with the same broad brush  
because I am the painter  
and nobody bothers to question  
that the page is so damn white  
it’s invisible  
It’s so invisible that I really do believe  
that we all start on the same page  
That same fresh blank page  
that hasn’t been coloured by the pages before*

*Being Pakeha means that I never ever  
have to be made aware of being so damn Pakeha  
And that is the most privileged thing of all*  
**Sacha Norrie**



Verses from Sacha Norrie’s poem stress the invisibility of *Pakeha* or white privilege in New Zealand society. Norrie is not suggesting that the effects of privileging one race, class, and culture is imperceptible to peoples who are *not* white. To the contrary; what the poet means is that as an insider of *Pakeha* culture it is a given, a taken for granted belief that the superior positioning of white people in the politics, society, and economy of New Zealand is normal.



***The New Zealand High Commission in Tonga’s capital, Nuku’alofa, is a New Zealand assembled high-security building which resembles better quality and condition than the Government of Tonga offices.***

Privilege goes unchallenged as Norrie notes by saying “being *Pakeha* means that I never have to be made aware of being so damn *Pakeha*” (Norrie, 2013). This is the danger of willful ignorance; that is, the predicament in which one is not expected to, nor has pressure put on them to be mindful of, the circumstances which construct and favour their privileged position in a social and economic hierarchy (Bradbury, 2013).

Not grasping *why* peoples who are not white are not afforded equal benefits incubates a singular view of the world

and one's place in it. Singularity grows inequity by becoming a standard measurement of all others, where all others fall short of the standard. In the case of New Zealand, certain social conditions reared disparate power relations between a dominant *Pakeha* population and Maori and Pacific peoples representing the underprivileged. It was the country's financial uncertainty, complicated by a global centering of neoliberal strategies that downsized the public sector and deregulated the economy to increase private sector business, which framed vulnerable groups as an obstruction to state progress (Tanielu and Johnson, 2013). By this, I mean that Maori and Pacific peoples provided a convenient scapegoat to blame for why the New Zealand economy was frail and faltering.

"I am the coloniser said no Pakeha ever" was not confined to inside the New Zealand border (Norrie, 2013). Instead it contained an attitude, a mindset, which *Pakeha* New Zealanders carried outside to the Pacific Islands through expatriates in regional business, and high commissions equipped with the NZAID programme. For the Kingdom of Tonga, diplomatic exchanges between the Tongan state and the New Zealand High Commission to Tonga set the stage of actors from which to interpret *Pakeha* or *Palangi* thought and behaviour. This very government to government relationship was a directory on power in the South Pacific, indicating which countries were jostling for supremacy in the region, and to an extent, gesturing that China as an aid donor presented a problem to the Western stronghold.

The Tongan state and citizens were by no means politically naïve and uninformed. In actuality, Tongans were media savvy and sensitive to the West-East power struggle in which the United States, Australia, and New Zealand had upped their collective might throughout the South Pacific for self-preservation; that is, to prevent China from getting a financial and strategic upper hand over them in an ocean terrain that was historically an extension of Western influence. In terms of

regional polity, the twenty first century was proving different and distinct from the twentieth.

A significant detail overlooked by researchers and political analysts was *not* the overdone story that the United States, Australia, and New Zealand were having difficulty managing China's presence in the South Pacific. But rather, it was the manner by which the Tongan state had adapted to West-East tension which provided valuable insight. Tonga had learnt to manoeuvre around the politics of rivalling world powers, and intuitively knew to massage aid donor egos in attempting to push local development agendas past the inescapable global order dictating what rich countries want with poor ones.

### ***Propaganda purposes***

The public filter feeding the masses key messages on Tonga's aid donor relations was the Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC), a state owned radio and television network with an Internet website and YouTube account outflanking in resources and reach, independent news providers. The Government of Tonga and aid donors from the USA, Australia, New Zealand, China, and Japan gave speeches of thanks, pledged partnership, shook hands, and posed with forced diplomatic smiles on the airwaves. Considering Tonga's 2013 and 2014 budget estimates drew from TOP \$35.7 million for budget support and TOP \$50.3 million for development projects in aid donations and bank grants, high commissioners and foreign ambassadors with copious contributions made the public broadcaster's important news (Government of Tonga, 2013; Radio New Zealand, 2013h).

Perceptibly, the state development project receiving media coverage both locally and regionally in Australia and New Zealand was the laying of Tonga's underwater fibre optic cable, 826 kilometres in distance from Fiji (Tonga NZ Net, 2012; Australia Network News, 2013). French submarine fibre optics company, Alcatel-Lucent, was the contractor. When the cable ship *Ile de Re* arrived at the Tonga cable landing station in

Sopu near Nuku'alofa on June 11th the *Tonga Government Portal* declared: "The long awaited Fibre Optic Cable landed in Tonga today to joyous celebrations led by the Hon Prime Minister of Tonga, Lord Tu'ivakano" (Ministry of Information and Communications, 2013; Tonga NZ Net, 2013). None were more joyous than the government bureaucracy, Tonga's largest employer and consumer of the Internet. Paula Ma'u, chief executive officer at the Ministry of Information and Communication saw that Tonga getting broadband meant the Internet was "not only faster and bigger capacity but it will also be cheaper for the people, for the businesses, and for Tonga" (Palu, 2013).

*We have been waiting for this technology for a long time and now it's arriving on our shores so I think it's a blessing like the Prime Minister has said this morning. It's a momentous occasion for Tonga; the very first time a cable [is] arriving [on] the shores. (Palu, 2013).*

"The Tongan community" profited from broadband Internet because it would "improve lives," publicised Lord Tu'ivakano. How "communications technology" guaranteed a better standard of living for people below the poverty line in developing countries, the speechmaking of Tonga's Prime Minister did not explain. How poor Tongan people could afford a "more accessible internet," the Premier withheld from comment. Besides, it was unlikely the poor had called a public meeting to tune into the Prime Minister's announcement broadcasted on *Radio and Television Tonga News*. His audience was the state bureaucracy, businesses, schools, tertiary institutes, and working adults with regular income capable of paying one of Tonga's two Internet companies for a "cheaper price" connection in their homes (World Bank, 2013).

*Cheaper price and more accessible internet will maximize the power and versatility of communications technology, to accelerate development and improve the lives of the Tongan community. (World Bank, 2013).*

World Bank information and communication technologies (ICT) policy specialist, Natasha Beschorner, shared the Prime Minister of Tonga's optimism that a faster connection ushered in advantages "for the Tongan people." The people would gain "new job opportunities" (World Bank, 2013). Elaborating on the trickle-down theory in which newfound jobs got to people on the financial fringe did not appear in Beschorner's wisdom. The World Bank press release celebrated its US\$17.2 million donation alongside the Asian Development Bank's US\$9.7 million grant that plugged broadband Internet into a small island developing state. It was not about filling in ICT consumption and production details.

*High speed internet promises significant benefits for social and economic development, and new job opportunities for the Tongan people. (World Bank, 2013).*

My argument is that for Tonga it is *not* media freedom by way that the state shuts down independent reporting, which subverts constitutional civil liberties guaranteed to all citizens – noblemen and commoners, rich and poor, men and women. Rather, it is the adoption of information communication technologies (ICT) as well as social media by the Tongan state that can place under surveillance, and silence, social criticism and activism. What has evolved is a democratised state grafted to an authoritarian structure and frame of mind. The machinery of government has found it useful to appropriate the Internet as an everyday tool to expand and embed its "propaganda purposes" (Morozov, 2011, p. xiv).

It comes as no surprise the Tongan state governs over Internet use, and proposes a law to police and regulate it. Additionally, the state is the wealthiest and largest organisation using the Internet to publish, communicate, and disseminate information. Here, I have borrowed Evgeny Morozov's theory on *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side Internet Freedom* (2011) to counter argue that broadband Internet is *not* a conclusive social equity tool affording development to an entire population in a small island developing state. Digital communication exhibits the proficiency to worsen wealth divisions between class, gender, and age groups, excluding the impoverished, the most vulnerable from Internet access and acquisition.

As Morozov recounted; "the role of the Internet penetrates and reshapes all walks of political life, not just the ones conducive to democratization" (Morozov, 2011, p. xiv).

*Failing to anticipate how authoritarian governments would respond to the Internet, cyber-utopians did not predict how useful it would prove for propaganda purposes, how masterfully dictators would learn to use it for surveillance, and how sophisticated modern systems of Internet censorship would become. Instead most cyber-utopians stuck to a populist account of how technology empowers the people, who oppressed by years of authoritarian rule, will inevitably rebel, mobilizing themselves through text messages, Facebook, Twitter, and whatever new tool comes along next year. (The people, it must be noted, really liked to hear such theories). Paradoxically, in their refusal to see the downside of the new digital environment, cyber-utopians ended up belittling the role of the Internet, refusing to see that it penetrates and reshapes all walks of political life, not just the ones conducive to democratization. (Morozov, 2011, p. xiv).*



***Keep Vava'u Green is a non-profit environmental organisation of community volunteers, based in Utah, USA, and led by 'Eseta Schaaf. The organisation sponsors the rubbish and recycling bins pictured here at Lupepau'u Airport in Vava'u, Kingdom of Tonga.***

In name, the Government of Tonga wielded the Internet for engineering greater transparency to the Tongan public. But a crucial inquiry on social equity and participatory democracy remained to be asked; that is, how would community activists voice dissent to state development programmes by use of Internet media? A situation emerged where government messages reposted everyday were symbolic of Tonga's ICT landscape. Moreover, advertising the government's Internet campaign through social media pages such as *Radio and Television Tonga* on Facebook had indoctrinated Internet users to uncritically read the script as development and progress.

Therefore, how realistic was it to mobilise grassroots movements aimed at empowering and educating the bottom of the economic ladder through ICT? Given that household costs

for fast Internet kept the lower tier out of the information loop, how could rural villages and outer islands seize ICT? Was it conceivable to contest the digital power, ownership, and authority of the state bureaucracy to advance community development outside of government surveillance and control?

The Government of Tonga Internet campaign was *not* about social equity. It was, for the most part, an execution of social control (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Presented was an extensive and all-encompassing system of digitally centring the state as the organising point on which the nation, the people, revolved (Australian Network News, 2013). A simplistic American-driven formula for equity was at work in which it was thought that everybody would have a chance at obtaining fast Internet, opening up widespread opportunities for employment and education. Contrarily, a doubtful scenario took shape because as Christopher Emdin mentioned: “Equity is *not* about giving everybody the exact same thing” (Emdin, 2012). To recap, equity is *not* about making everyone the same by a universal one-size-fits-all prescription. In this context, Emdin spoke on the practice of equity.

*Equity is not about giving everybody the exact same thing. Equity is about hearing somebody’s voice about what they need, and providing them with that. (Emdin, 2012).*

By Emdin’s estimation, equity meant recognising difference and diversity. Ideally, although all people are equal in humanness, humanity, and being human, the fact is everyone is *not* the same; nor should citizens be forced by the state to think, behave, speak, and aspire to sameness. For Tonga, a small, insular, and hierarchical society transitioning towards state democratisation, convention and conformity were highly valued principles underpinning national cohesion.

Equity had gotten tangled up with equality blurring the boundary between state and citizen. Consequently, the



government seemed undecided if its role was the regulator for national development across all sectors, or a facilitator for communities to pursue development priorities of their choosing and informed consent. Amidst confusion the state attempted both, concocting an insipid process by which progress was calculated by homogeneity and standardisation.

Paulo Freire's classic text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, discussed "dehumanization" as a "historical fact," a systematic process where human beings oppressed by the state are objectified as things, categories, groupings, classes, rather than being treated as people. To Freire, this "engenders violence" in the way that the structure and process controlling and containing oppressed peoples requires the establishment of an unjust order, which in turn, the oppressor believes is the status quo (Freire, 2006, p. 44).

*The struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed. (Freire, 2006, p. 44).*

It is clear-cut to see how Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006) resonates in the historical treatment of Pacific Islanders in New Zealand (Minto, 2013). In particular, the present neoliberal climate cultivates *Pakeha* racism against Maori and Pacific peoples, which is accepted by conventions of dominant white culture as normal (Mason, 2013; Mayeda and Sobieski, 2013).

My interest is how a system of "dehumanization" has been replicated by the Government of Tonga's national development agenda. The countless empty references to "the Tongan people" and "the Tongan community" evoked by the Prime Minister, cabinet ministers, government officials, aid donors, and international banks have produced hollow echoes.

Historically, Tongan communities were not directly involved in decision making for national development projects reported by the Tonga Broadcasting Commission as beneficial to the people. Community partnerships were not part of the government's vocabulary. The state equals the authority, the controller, the appraiser. Expressly, the Government of Tonga has come to know how to mimic Western development partners from the USA, Australia, and New Zealand when performing public speeches on camera. Party to its own dehumanization process, the state eats, excretes, and believes its political propaganda.

The query I have is straightforward; how do community activists take social action firstly, to confront the Government of Tonga on change they want carried out, and secondly, to gather support from the affected communities they affiliate to? Related to this, how relevant is ICT for organising and achieving social action in criticism of the state?

***I don't hobnob with the powerful***

*I don't hobnob with the powerful ever. The only interaction I have with powerful officials is chasing them somewhere. My hope is that people use the book as actionable intelligence. I want it to be actionable intelligence to work toward a democratic process of confronting our own fear and also holding those in power accountable. I think all of us should be defined not by the public pronouncements of politicians, but by what we do in response to the actions they're doing in our name. And that's the spirit I wrote this book in.*

***Jeremy Scahill***

The excerpt by American journalist Jeremy Scahill is from an interview with a television reporter Amy Goodman, as well as renowned academic Naom Chomsky (Goodman, 2013). Scahill was discussing the motivation for publishing his

second book, *Dirty Wars: The World is a Battlefield* (2013). His field research gave an in-depth political commentary on American military activity in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, inside what is prevalently coined by Western media as al Qaeda or rebel insurgent territory.

The revelation of *Dirty Wars* ruptured the popular belief among Western ally countries, of which Tonga is a military ally serving in Afghanistan, that the United States of America represent the good guys (Scahill, 2013). Scahill's field interviews with American special operations forces including central intelligence agents (CIA) and mercenaries uncovered alarming facts. A double war was going on through American drone strikes and night raids on defenceless villages and families, some who were United States citizens targeted by their own government.

Scahill forwarded an inquiry for public consideration: In a democratic system is it *ever* tolerable for a government to murder innocent people including its own citizens? His answer was evident in the reference to "actionable intelligence" as a means to "holding those in power accountable" (Goodman, 2013). "Actionable intelligence" was social justice in practice; publicly exposing information sufficing legal and moral action to ensure "democratic process" was meaningful, answerable, and responsible to citizens.

For Tongan communities, the idea of "actionable intelligence" conveyed a chequered history (Goodman, 2013). Before people could advocate social justice causes to their government, they were first required to navigate safely through a political minefield without getting blasted. The state was permanently on the defensive because a hazardous torrent of accusations and court actions between 'Akilisi Pohiva, the parliamentary leader of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands and successive governments had allowed heavy-handed politics to tarnish grassroots advocacy (Pacific Media Centre, 2013; Radio New Zealand, 2013i; Radio and Television Tonga News, 2013). In reality, national-level politicking

between the opposition and the government of the day, seldom, if ever, spoke for a community-based rationale from various constituencies.

Alternatively, a principle for Tongan community activism through social action could be seen in Scahill's proclamation: "I don't hobnob with the powerful ever" (Goodman, 2013). This was the least treacherous tactic compared to "actionable intelligence" for attaining social justice. Social awareness was expressed among community researchers, advocates, and writers (Goodman, 2013). By this, it became comprehensible that the powerful in Tonga, whether they were traditional leaders, politicians, clergy, the highly educated, or business people, shared a common characteristic: They commanded power over the masses, the kind of islander muscle that was domineering, overbearing, and stifling to speak up to.

Tongan academic Siosua Lafitani saw that "religion and morality should be both critically adjusted" so they are attuned in concept and practice (Lafitani, 2013). Lafitani viewed Tongan society in a state of rapid moral decay, and that there were contradictory forces at work when a devoutly Christian nation possessing a high number of doctorates has an "increasing rate of violence in all aspects of life" (Lafitani, 2013).

*The main moralities of Tongan society and people at large are in chaos with no clear-cut solutions. This is one main reason for increasing violence in any society. So what are we going to do? I mentioned this point on TV Tonga in my interview with Viola Ulakai early this year. Too many religious activities, but moralities are very low. So we have to seriously do something right now. If not, the consequences will triple and get worse than what we're now experiencing. Religion and morality should be both critically adjusted. In Tonga and among Tongans overseas in general, there is violence at an increasing rate in almost all aspects of*

*life. Why does it happen? After all, we're very religious and one of the top countries with the highest rate of Masters and PhD achievers. It doesn't match. (Lafitani, 2013).*

Lafitani posed a conundrum: "Why does it happen?" Not simply motioning to the rise of violence and violent crime in Tonga, the quandary he alluded to was why the mismatch? If Christianity and education were highly valued by Tongans then why have religious principles and intellectual thought had little effect on resolving social degeneration? Lafitani's examination expounded that social action had to be modified and improved because past practices missed the mark.

Different to church dogma and academic convention, a new type of community activism gathered momentum. A younger generation of Tongans resident overseas were collaborating with grassroots organisations in the homeland. Research questions were harder. Answers avoided a bargain basement mentality of cutting-and-pasting models from other countries that did not fit the local people, nor suit the surroundings.

And the Tongan state was decoded as a maze of tangled relationships. Subjected to USA and China tension, community activists *knew* that Tonga's development was done through trade-offs, shifting alliances, and unceasing adjustment to the temporality and instability of impermanent grants, funding, loans, and income sources. The *only* constant factors the Tongan state seemed to know were change and uncertainty.

***My name is 'Eseta Schaaf***

*My name is 'Eseta Schaaf, founder of the organization Keep Vava'u Green – based in Salt Lake City, Utah and working to raise awareness on social media about the most pressing environmental issues facing Vava'u*

*today. Three weeks ago, I visited Vava'u to see some of the grassroots projects put on by various community groups. Three months prior, I was informed by sources in Vava'u that shark fins were seen hanging outside the Chinese-owned Neiafu Shopping Centre, however, no pictures were available. On May 14 during an afternoon walk in Neiafu, I saw – indeed – shark fins hanging outside Neiafu Shopping Centre. Upon inquiry, a staff member told me they were acquired from local fishermen and divers. I took photos and recorded a clip with my camera phone before going inside the shop to ask for more information. A Chinese female cashier told me the store owner's name was Siaki Wong and gave me his phone number. I later called many times unsuccessfully – each to a busy tone.*

***‘Eseta Schaaf***

On June 1st 2013, ‘Eseta Schaaf published a public notice on a Tongan news website *New Zealand Kaniva Pacific*. She alerted readers worldwide to shark finning taking place in her island homeland of Vava'u, the Kingdom of Tonga's northern group (Schaaf, 2013). Live shark finning was not outlawed in Tonga and it was uncertain whether the dorsal fins had been lacerated from live sharks.

Twenty five days after sighting shark fins laced across scaffolding at the back of Neiafu Shopping Centre, Schaaf received a digital photograph from her colleague Aunofu Havea on June 8th. The picture showed the Chinese shop owner had removed the supply from public view. Where the Chinese delicacy had been moved to, Havea and Schaaf did not know. “They're a pretty closed off bunch” Schaaf remarked, stressing that different to New Zealand, Australian, and American expatriates whom Tongans were accustomed to interacting with in public, the Chinese were guarded, cloistered, and kept to themselves.

Between 1983 and 1991 the Government of Tonga sold illegal passports to largely Hong Kong and mainland Chinese nationals, manufacturing a political era which irreversibly altered the twenty first century landscape (Robie, 1991). Travel writer David Stanley observed, “The number of Chinese operated hotels and restaurants in Nuku’alofa indicates where many of the buyers ended up” (Stanley, 2000, p. 374). Chinese owners of shops, hotels, and restaurants overshadowed Tongan businesses in the present, and although there was disquiet among locals, open hostility for the larger part was kept under wrap (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2013; Coutts, 2013a; Radio New Zealand, 2013a, 2013d).



***June 8th 2013, Aunofo Havea took this digital photograph at the back of Neiafu Shopping Centre in Vava’u, Tonga, to show the Chinese shop owner had removed the shark fins that were strung on the scaffolding to dry.***

'Eseta Schaaf's publicity about shark fins hanging outside a Chinese owned shop in Tonga probed at the rawness of two cultures in a head-on collision (Anderson, 2012; Hill, 2013b). She exposed the reality of ordinary people's lives; an angle from which to see the world that Tongan media passed over, favouring top-heavy news about the monarchy, nobility, government, parliament; stories of men in leadership, rarely ever women. The strategy of confronting the Chinese shop owner on what Schaaf and her supporters saw as a transgression was not, by any means, a Chinese method for conflict resolution. No direct communication occurred but instead, the stash was removed from public sight indicating the shop owner knew of complaints, and perhaps, that Schaaf had made inquiries with police and the fisheries division about whether the state protected sharks.

Schaaf and Havea were not so naïve they expected the shark trade to stop in their Native islands because of their community activism through Internet and social media, Radio Australia, Radio New Zealand, Radio Tonga, as well as an online petition to the Minister for Fisheries (Schaaf, 2013; Coutts, 2013b; Latu, 2013; New Zealand Kaniva Pacific, 2013; Tonga Broadcasting Commission, 2013; Radio Australia, 2013; Radio New Zealand, 2013g; Tonga NZ Net, 2013). Significant, however, was the usefulness of Tongan community Internet media for working across an ocean distance, Schaaf in Salt Lake City, USA, and Havea in Vava'u, Tonga, to get public support for an outer island cause. These Vava'u women led their own non-profit community organisations; *Keep Vava'u Green* was based in Utah and *Kalauni O Tonga Voyaging Society* in Vava'u. Community leaders of their generation, they felt a social responsibility to advocate for shark conservation by raising local and international awareness, and speaking up to the Tongan state (Ife, 2012).

Representing a story about our people, our islands, our times, it was one that did not feature on front page Tongan newspapers, or receive prime time radio and television



coverage. Adrian Stevanon, Pacific Islander reporter for *Native Affairs*, a Maori Television documentary programme, criticised New Zealand media for “failing to cover the Pacific region properly” (Hill, 2013a). Stevanon’s solution was to recruit Pacific Islander journalists to work in newsrooms (Small, 2013; Sergel, 2013).

But what of Pacific countries like Tonga where the islanders in newsrooms are dwarfed by public funded commissions and buy-into state “propaganda purposes?” (Morozov, 2011, p. xiv). Realistically, is independent, critical, investigative, and community oriented reporting plausible under political conditions of self-censorship? In the islands, reporters, researchers, and publishers exercise caution in what they think, write, and speak because they *know* state surveillance is watching.

### ***The real shark***

The real shark story was the United States. America put Pacific Island countries under no pressure to institute laws banning the shark trade inside their territories and regionally to the Hong Kong market. Without the weight of Western aid donors, especially America, to weaken China’s grip as the leading importer of shark fins, Tonga as a small island developing state had little self-motivation to prohibit shark trading in its waters.

Despite environmental truths that live finning was a cruel practice, and sharks were ruthlessly depleted from overfishing in the Pacific Ocean, if the aid donor hierarchy did not itemise this for discussion at high-level international meetings then the Tongan political radar did not pick up the signal (Garrett, 2013; Goldin, 2013; Islands Business, 2013; Radio New Zealand, 2013c; Radio New Zealand, 2013f; Strahan, 2013; The Permanent Mission of Fiji to the United Nations, 2013). Clearly, Tonga’s national development was *not* defined by its people; end of story.

American ocean environmentalist, Angelo Villagomez, explained that the United States federal government had proposed regulations for the Shark Conservation Act that could overturn laws prohibiting shark trading in American states and territories, such as Hawai'i (Hill, 2013b).

*But it also includes some language about pre-emption. This is when there's a perceived conflict between federal and state law. Sometimes the federal government can pre-empt and basically overturn a state law. Since then, it's two and half years since the Shark Conservation Act has passed there have been ten states and territories that have passed the shark and trade ban. It's mostly the Pacific states, it's the whole western coast of the United States, Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam and then Northern Mariana Islands. The way this rule is written it would pre-empt and overturn these ten shark and trade bans which are more restrictive than the federal law. (Hill, 2013b).*

In the final analysis, development was about trade; countries that could trade to capacity developed over countries that could not. But this did not mean that developed countries ahead in world trade demonstrated greater intelligence and ethics in how they went about their business. This is what Siosuia Lafitani hinted at: How could we forfeit intelligence and ethics to become second-rate cartoon caricatures of Western society? Pacific Rim cities were settlements Tongan people migrated to, often finding themselves marginalised and appreciating the small islands they descend from. Overseas life gave them an experiential understanding that there are certain qualities about Tonga that cannot, and should *not*, be up for sale (Komai, 2013).

My analysis as a university lecturer is the hardest lesson to teach Tongan postgraduates born in New Zealand and wanting to research dissertations and theses is the function of

social criticism in the origin homeland. In my idealism, I want to believe the role of the social critic is fundamental to national development, integral to asking rigorous questions of state and society, vital to testing and strengthening civil freedoms and democratic principles (Mills, 2000). “But this is Tonga,” as my father has frequently informed me; an instinctive reminder that it might not work there the way it does here, which it does not.

Therefore, what use is criticism to Tongan society? In the future, will the state appoint social critics to e-publish Internet stories monitored by the Ministry of Information and Communications and Tonga Broadcasting Commission? Understandably, New Zealand born Tongans elect to research Tongan development in New Zealand *not* Tonga; the cost of self-censorship and loss of intellectual and social freedom too taxing. If I am the *only* one choosing to research the homeland over New Zealand, my place of birth, then it is because I will *not* accept critical thinking has no purpose in my ancestral islands.

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### **Glossary**

*Pakeha* Maori language reference to white person/people.

*Palangi* Tongan language reference to white person/people.