

Review of *Pacific, Regional Order*, Dr. Dave Peebles 2005.

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(The views are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer, the Government of Papua New Guinea)

As a Pacific Islander, I am most grateful to Dave Peebles for writing this Book to further promote public debate and exchange of views on future direction of Pacific Islands development and the issue of regional cooperation. The title of the book “Pacific Regional Order” is subtle but brazen and the author, been a lawyer, could be forgiven for couching his views with essentially legal underpinnings. The Author’s work is consistent and his contributions to Labour’s Party’s Pacific policy reflects this consistency.

As I interpret it the author’s, line of thinking moves the current debate emanating from the Pacific 20/20 Plan for Pacific Islands Forum countries and associations and numerous other publications with the 5 goals of:

- Sustainability
- Security
- The Rule of Law
- Democracy
- Integration

to what he terms the Oceania Community modeled on EU with objectives of:

- A Common Market
- A Regional Commitment to inflation targeting
- A Monetary Union
- A Security Centre with a standing Peace monitoring Group
- A Human Rights Commission
- A Regional Court
- A Regional Parliament

And actively seeking out integration with other states in the wider pacific

He sees the Oceania Community similar to the evolution of the debate on EU with two related but differing definitions. There are the Institutionalists or Neo-functionalists (EU as a nascent super-state, or in some cases as a federation) and on the one, hand and the Inter-governmentalists (EU as about cooperation between a group of nation –states) on the other. He errs on the side of inter-governmentalists to move PIF towards Oceania Community. Then he goes on to explain that under this rubric of intergovernmentalism, Pacific States (**though some are not fully matured states, my emphasis**), could embrace a confederation similar to but more developed than the UN and its member States, and sharing sovereignty in particular areas-ie; allowing these areas to be governed

by regional agreements and institutions – without the need for separate nation-states to merge into one.

I defer to the author's legal expertise that all this can be achieved, though I am still befuddled with the idea of "sharing sovereignty" as against "sharing of functions or even powers of governments."

I thought the current debate on regionalism and the book itself does not pay enough attention to existing working and convenient arrangements. I refer to the last of the objectives of the Oceania Community. The call for Pacific Island States *to actively seek out integration with other states in the wider pacific* certainly has been going on, on a bilateral basis between most small Pacific Islands States and the metropolitan powers bordering the Pacific Islands. The issue here is the nature and quality of this integration.

This issue is crucial but did not receive sufficient attention in the book in my view. The issue of labour mobility is at the heart of this issue and must drive the debate on Regional cooperation going forward. Increasingly over the last 3 decades since Pacific Island countries became politically independent, migration of people from these Island countries and the remittances to their home Island countries have become significant contributors to sustaining and improving human welfare in those countries. The Malenesian countries for some reason or other, have been deprived of this opportunity in the main. While the *Human Development Index* is not the author's making, as a Papua New Guinean I have voiced my serious reservations about the voracity and honesty if I may be so brave to put it that way, of the Index.

To put it bluntly, small Pacific Island countries with a substantial proportion of their population enjoying benefits of modern health and education services and industrialized country standards of infrastructure in New Zealand and Australia and indeed in West Coast US, cannot be reasonably compared to people of Papua New Guinea's health and education services and standards of infrastructure. There should be appropriate weightings that take account of physical terrain conditions and accessibility of peoples from these islands states to metropolitan countries' social services before this index can be taken as an appropriate and even a correct measure of development effort by governments of Pacific Island countries.

The last of my main observations on the book again is to ensure when instituting agencies and functions to carry out regional policies that care needs to be taken and I note the author alludes to this, that where international and national agencies are already performing these functions, then the proposed Regional Body does not duplicate these functions to save costs.

With these few reservations and comments, I highly commend the Book and thank the author for his commitment and the energy and enthusiasm in his efforts to take Pacific regional cooperation issue and development forward.

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