RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysis of the Rapid Exposure to the World Faced by Southern Pacific Islands and How It Set Them on the Path to Modern Conditions

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine the detrimental effects globalization has had on the Southern Pacific Islands, specifically the rapid exposure to the world that had adverse consequences. The central thesis of this paper contends that the impacts of globalization have been negative. To make this point, the study uses a comprehensive analysis of data found in studies on foreign nations, the cultural erosion of these islands, diseases from the world specifically STIs, and other data illustrating the negative effects. The results indicate that most of the effects shown can be traced back to the quick integration into the world on a global scale which was forced on these islands. We can see how health challenges, cultural erosion, and other socio-economic consequences are shown to be the most significant of these repercussions. To conclude, the research exemplifies the need for addressing the effects of globalization within this area, a different sort of economic assistance, and a more sustainable approach for their integration into our globalized world.

1. Introduction

The South Pacific Islands are a group, scattered in the vast Pacific Ocean, comprising cultures, traditions, and even ecosystems that are unique to each other. Nations like Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, and many others, the Southern Pacific islands have a rich heritage deeply connected with their landscape and surrounding ocean. In the 21st century, however, there has been a profound transformation in the island communities fueled by globalization.

The Southern Pacific Islands are characterized by their geographic isolation due to their dispersion over thousands of miles of open ocean. This gave them a unique environment to develop untouched by the rest of the world for centuries. These ecosystems are some of the most delicate but also valuable to the world. According to data from the University of Hawaii, these islands harbor around 20% of the World's biodiversity but also 50% of the World's threatened species and it accounts for 75% of the known extinctions of species. And yet the islanders that used to value the land so much are using the island's resources without care, disposing of trash wherever they like, oftentimes in the very ocean they used to revere or litter in the environments of their endangered animals.

The islander's culture is becoming increasingly obsolete, their annual salaries are usually less than 20% of what an American makes, STIs are running rampant and with hundreds of millions of dollars of debt how did they get to this point? The South Pacific Islands were introduced to the World with the merciless practice of colonialism. Without care, Europeans pillaged, exploited, and destroyed, most notably with Captain James Cook in the 18th century. Like most colonials these islanders lost control over their way of life being forced to labor, losing island autonomy and land dispossessions leaving a permanent change in the island entirely. The World treated the South Pacific Islands like it was their territory and we continued seeing this treatment even in the 20th century when the USA and the Japanese used the islands as bases in WW2. They did not care about the environmental

destruction they left on some islands and just used them for the war. During colonization, the Europeans forced their way of life onto the islanders resulting in cultural erosion and assimilation which we see the results of today. For example, a large majority of South Pacific islanders are Christian, a religion we know was forced on them during colonialism. As we look at the repercussions of globalization we need to account for their introduction to the world and in this case, it is imperative to understand colonialism in these islands to see the intersections between the history of these islands and their modern conditions.

As we move our perspective to these modern conditions the effects are more pronounced. Rapid technological advancements, international trade, and general heightened connectivity globally have brought about drastic changes to the entire island community. For instance, the tourism industry transformed the economic landscape of the islands. The introduction of commercial agriculture and cash economies has transformed traditional subsistence practices. But these changes come at a cost, the tourism industry has expanded but at the expense of cultural integrity.

This analysis will delve into the delicate dynamics of how this collection of islands, with their unique environment, have navigated the challenges made by the rapid exposure to the globalized world. This examination discusses not only economic shifts but the broader set of changes like the environment, public health, and cultural erosion. In the overarching view of these challenges, this study hopes to provide a comprehensive analysis of the island's journey in globalization, establishing a persuasive argument that many of the modern conditions can be attributed to the negative impacts of globalization.

2. Methodology

To construct a comprehensive understanding of the range of challenges faced by the Pacific Islands, our methodology looks at many diverse types of sources. An extensive review of academic articles and studies related to environmental issues, socio-cultural dynamics, and the impact of globalization on Pacific Island states. In addition, we utilized statistical data from reliable sources like the World Bank to analyze economic indicators, GDP trends, and environmental metrics. We used certain articles to take general themes across papers. Using diverse sources to provide a holistic view of the challenges, we drew conclusions and even proposed strategies to address the problems.

3. Cultural Erosion and Socio-Economic Challenges

In the wake of globalization and climate change, the Pacific region, renowned for its cultural diversity and linguistic richness, confronts profound problems. This section dives into the dynamics of cultural erosion and socio-economic challenges drawing from the studies by Katharina Riehl, Anastasia Riehl, and Karen McNamara. The unstoppable march of globalization, driven by Western cultures and ideals, has reshaped traditional notions of geographical scales. The different articles reveal that intrinsically the interplay of climate change and globalization poses challenges to the society and culture of these islands.

The Pacific islands are at the forefront of the battle against climate change. Since they are the most affected by the ocean increase and are in the middle of where climatic-related natural disasters form. These climatic disruptions, however, have ramifications beyond just the environment. For example, there are hundreds of different languages present in the South Pacific Islands, which if their island becomes unlivable from sea level rising, become obsolete. Since the islanders would then need to learn the language of wherever they relocate to. Other cultural practices like reliance on weather indicators for agriculture or for customary rites become precarious. Altogether endangering the sustainability of these practices, making the dwindling culture more difficult to keep relevant. Another effect of globalization altering the culture is substances. Due to their rapid introduction and the lack of education about the health risks alcohol and tobacco are so widely used in the South Pacific islands they are often prioritized over household needs (McNamara, 2014). In Abaiang Atoll, Kiribati, women revealed how the household income needed for food will often be taken by their husbands to spend on substances. The World Health Survey performed in 2009 on Kiribati's high rates of smoking and drinking provides a statistical source of evidence to back up this socio-economic problem.

Cultural erosion is present due to many other aspects like religion. Articles by Smith and Thompson, discuss specific situations where the adoption of globally popular religions led to a gradual abandonment of the original indigenous religions within this region. Especially since

Christianity is a religion of exclusivity, since if you are a devoted Christian "you may worship no false idols." The uptake of one of these global religions makes the

rites, ceremonies, and even linguistic expression in many cases irrelevant. Since many of these cultural aspects are passed on through language it only takes a generation to lose a significant amount of culture. The introduction to external religions beginning hundreds of years ago but only becoming more prevalent in the world of today shows a nuanced process of cultural erosion. One in which linguistic diversity is a casualty of an evolving religious landscape. Where the interconnection of language, culture, and religion puts them all at risk of being lost forever.

While bringing economic opportunities and making it easier for a tropical island tourism as a major economic driver has significant unintended consequences. Despite being a way to raise the GDP significantly it has had disastrous effects in the tourism hub: of Fiji. In Soso Village, the shift towards a cash economy because of tourism has compromised traditional practices. In 2010 tourism contributed around 35% of Fiji's GDP (Ministry of Tourism, 2012). That same year, world travelers came to see rituals sacred to the island cultures performed for their enjoyment. If the islanders are using these rites simply for the profit of tourism, they are losing the meaning of them.

Food culture is being lost also because of this exposure to the world. Since the islands allow international fishing fleets into their waters there are not enough fish for the islanders to do their traditional subsistence fishing. Creating a paradoxical reliance on canned tuna and processed foods despite their oceans usually having an abundance of resources. This cutoff from their traditional food sources makes their traditional dishes unmakeable, resulting in another cultural erosion. Even worse, their globalized diets are not healthy for the islanders, a study by the World Health Organization in 2010 reveals a general decline in nutritional values of the islands. Which in the islands poses health risks like higher cholesterol and other health risks that came with this dietary transition. This reliance on fishing brings with it significant social repercussions as well. In many South Pacific Islands fishing crews frequently stay on the island, creating a growing business of prostitution (McNamara, 2014). This is best seen in smaller islands that more heavily rely on fishing and have more limited economic opportunities like Kiribati. Poverty, urbanization, and population growth make higher levels of unemployment, especially among the younger generations. This can lead to fathers facilitating their daughters in prostitution to foreign fishing crews for money or even just food. The involvement of young women, often younger than 18, raises significant social and cultural implications for the erosion of these communities. All these different effects of globalization underscore the need for a comprehensive approach that will recognize the cultural erosion and economic shifts.

4. Health Challenges and Environmental Impact

One of the most disastrous effects of colonization that is still prevalent today is its effect on public health. Thanks to the research done by Stuart Dever we can see an overview of the different diseases brought on by the rapid exposure to other cultures and the world. The harsh conditions brought on by the exploitation of resources, disruptions to traditional lifestyle, and overall lack of hygiene created an environment where the transfer of illnesses was inevitable. This problem has only become worse through time, specifically STIs which have had a high prevalence since colonialism. In the modern world, the South Pacific Islands take up around 46% of all chlamydia and gonorrhea cases globally, they have the highest incidence rate of any region globally (Dever). The exposure to STIs in this region specifically leads to many people who have the disease not speaking out because they are not educated enough to realize they have this disease or because of the strong cultural stigma surrounding STIs. As this is a multifaceted issue it is complex and affects a wide range of things. Since women are more likely to receive STIs and the prostitution business on the islands is women, these islands are a breeding ground for these diseases to give to the fishing crews that visit the island. Essentially facilitating more STIs globally.

The effects of colonialism have led to a culture more accepting of exploitation, leading to their continuous environmental exploitation. Beginning in colonialism when their resources were taken and the foreign economic systems were established, it differed from the tribal values in that they preferred profits over preservation. This system has persisted making the islands want to extract and export what little resources they have. Colonial rule left a significant power imbalance where the islands always had the governing power concentrated in external sources.

Altogether it reduces the local community's ability to manage and govern their resources sustainably.

The suppression of their indigenous practices led to a disconnect between the environment and the people. As they were further integrated into the globalized world over time, they were more accepting of external exploitation. Nations dump their trash on the small islands, taking their forests, and overfishing their oceans. These islands are small and as such cannot sustain the large nations that are taking resources from them. Additionally, the islands have experienced the effects of globalization like the implementation of Western values. Western values prioritize efficiency, ease, and an out-of-sight-out-mind mentality. All of this is particularly disastrous since the islands are so much smaller than the USA, so the effect of this waste is much more pronounced. Things like individual-use packaging, or plastics and other non- biodegradable materials quickly fill up the island when people put the garbage in the ocean.

Many of these islands are following globalization and urbanization but this just concentrates the garbage production making it that much worse. We can see in Suva, Fiji that each person on the island produces .44 KG in a day. An alarmingly high amount of waste is made from just one city on this small island. Coupled with poor waste management, it creates a significant problem for the islands.

All this external strain placed on the already strained islands results in irreversible environmental damage. This means deforestation, coral bleaching, and mass extinction for one of the most unique environments in the world. Home to hundreds of species that are located nowhere else on the planet, this environment is as delicate as it is rare. With the highly specialized diets of the animals native to this area it is easier to overcome invasive species. The trees and corals present in this area make up the home for dozens and dozens of species. This is shown well in the bird species, which in the South Pacific accounts for around 90% of all known bird extinctions (Kaufman, 2021). The histor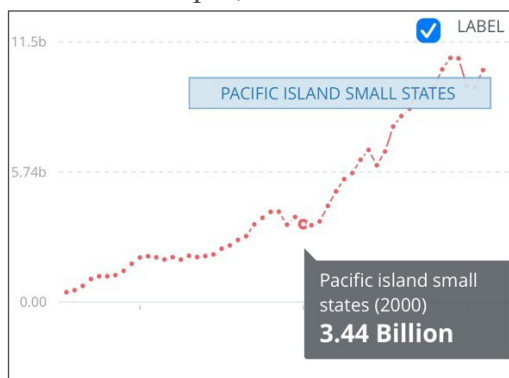ical transformation of landscapes, from the lush native forests to commercial agriculture has had a staggering impact. Over 1500 terrestrial species are listed on the IUCN's Red List of threatened species due to this deforestation and the waste the islanders throw around the island (Jupiter, 2014). River structures sometimes disrupt the only river for a specific fish species crucial for diadromous fish. Downstream runoff from land-based activities, like single-use plastics, contributes to coral reefs and sensitive juvenile fish habitats.

As mentioned earlier this is a multifaceted issue and as such the destruction of the environment and the adverse health effects. For example, things like declining air quality due to elevated levels of pollution are associated with respiratory illnesses. As the Southern Pacific Islands modernized the number of certain respiratory illnesses increased. We can see comparable results from waterborne diseases due to pollution and an inadequate sanitation system resulting in many islanders having to drink polluted water (Johnson). Globalization led to the commercial Western mind which made many of the islanders take up cash crops. This provides context to why the soil is so depleted that there is widespread food insecurity.

5. Oppositional View on Economic Development

Many argue that these modern conditions are necessary, and many nations endured these to become stronger and more involved. Claiming that to become modern and live in the globalized world they need to join this interconnected web. That the environmental destruction and cultural shifts are worth it to benefit the economy. This is a fair point and there is evidence that aspects of the islander's economy are improving. For example, the chart below.

This line graph shows the GDP over time for the South Pacific Islands, and we can see the significant improvements in this GDP that happened over the years. Behind this increase in GDP there is increased

This chart shows the GDP over time of the Pacific Island, and it found on the World Bank Website

trade, foreign investment, and many other economic factors that if looked at alone should be good. There is research showing that the globalization taken on by the island nations should improve the economy which will eventually improve the conditions of the people. For example, in Firth's research, a cultural shift towards embracing global economic norms usually fosters development. Some of the cultural adaptations serve as catalysts for further economic development.

Despite this economic growth, the conditions are not changing in a way that would reflect this data. The prevalence of STIs is growing increasingly worse and yet there is no change in the money put into fighting the STIs. The natural environment is destroyed, the soil ruined for future generations, and the culture is replaced. The money those other nations got when they profited from their environment is not being managed towards the conditions facing the nation. The weak institutional framework and income inequality make it so that the improvements in the economy only help a minority of the population. In addition, culture does not need to always deteriorate for progress. If managed the right way we could integrate the South Pacific Islands into the world preserving their environment, culture, and way of life.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

After analyzing the multitude of issues faced by the Pacific Islands across time due to globalization, there must be new collaborative efforts to fix these problems. Environmental issues highlight the urgent need for the reimplementation of sustainable practices. Ways to achieve this could be international partnerships to enhance technological capabilities around the world, especially since the islands are the most affected by the World's climate change. The nations contributing the most greenhouse gases and waste should be the ones helping to combat the environmental problems it is causing the islands. The implementation of conservation measures, coupled with policies that safeguard biodiversity, is paramount to ensuring the resilience of these delicate but unique ecosystems.

Socio-cultural issues require a highly nuanced approach that values and protects the rich heritage of Pacific Island states. Since many cultures are at risk due to the sea level rising, the nation's contributing the most to global warming should provide the most aid. Policymakers should actively involve local communities' decision-making processes, respecting and involving traditional knowledge in development plans. They need to pass initiatives that empower communities to preserve their cultural identity while still being able to adapt to modern challenges. Education plays a pivotal role in fostering a better understanding of the importance of environmental stewardship and cultural preservation.

When balancing globalization, we need to look at it from different angles. We need to recognize that although economic development is crucial, it should not come at the expense of the environment or the culture. Frameworks are designed to ensure that economic activities are

sustainable and culturally sensitive. This can be done by supporting local industries and fostering entrepreneurship to diversify the economy. Collaborative efforts from international organizations, governments, NGOs, and the private sector all have roles to play. They can provide financial backing, technical expertise and give guidance on policy. To make resilience in the face of globalization, we need to create a safety net for vulnerable populations, ensuring that the policies are inclusive, and we are considerate of local contexts. All these workable solutions should be analyzed in future studies for their effectiveness if implemented.

To conclude, the South Pacific islands are a victim of the rapid globalization faced by their society. Hundreds of years of environmental exploitation and cultural pollution have left them in an extremely poor state in the modern world. STIs run rampant, the cultures are being lost to capitalism and the environment that used to be revered is being destroyed. But they are at a critical juncture where strategic and sustainable intervention can shape a more promising future. By developing a holistic approach that integrates environmental conservation, socio-cultural preservation, and responsible globalization we can protect the islands. The global community responsible for a larger part of climate change needs to be the one to recognize its responsibility to the islands. That their way of life should not be affected by the climate destruction we release. Hopefully, this will ensure a sustainable, equitable, and culturally vibrant future for everyone.

7. References

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