Epilogue

Towards the end of his unpublished autobiography, 'The World, My Oyster', Cilento claimed that his views on the recent history of the world were akin to those of Albert Schweitzer, the Alsatian doctor and theologian who worked in Africa during the 1920s and 1930s:

> Schweitzer says that if there were any sort of possibility that primitive people could live by and for themselves, we could leave them to themselves, but as things are world trade which has reached them is a fact against which both we and they are powerless and he goes on to point out that it is true, but tragic that the interests of colonization and civilization are often in direct opposition. He concludes that the best thing for primitive peoples would have been that, in such seclusion from world trade as is possible and under intelligent administration, they should rise by slow development from being nomads and semi-nomads to be agriculturalists and artisans, permanently settled on their own soil. He affirms that this has been rendered impossible because these people will not now let themselves be withheld from the chance of earning money by selling goods or materials to the agents of world trade.[1]

Cilento here conceded that paternalistic imperialism had developed untenable contradictions between a desire to quarantine 'primitive' indigenous peoples from the effects of international capital while inevitably absorbing colonial labour and resources into a global economy. In other words, the common ideal of rooting nations in their own soil was becoming impossible in the face of mobilising people, goods and capital on regional and global scales.

Yet Cilento could not shake the feeling that really distinct peoples existed within a hierarchy of races that ought to live separately. In the context of the Australian Labor Party's abandonment of 'white Australia' and increasing

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1   Raphael Cilento, 'The World, My Oyster,' Ch. 10, p. 4, Cilento Papers, UQFL44, Box 1, Item 4.

Asian immigration in the 1960s, Cilento again became involved in right-wing politics. In a lecture delivered in his absence to the Australian League of Rights in the early 1970s, he warned of the threat to health and social order posed by the 'dilution of our RACIAL blood'. Gesturing to the racial politics and violence of postwar Britain and the United States, he reasserted that peaceful multiracial societies were impossible.[2] Violence and conflict, Cilento argued in apocalyptic tones, were the inevitable results of racial mixing that must be prevented. That Cilento remained committed to such views underscores the extent to which he failed to adapt to changing political and social realities.[3]

Cilento was a product of imperial networks of education, public service and research. He moved through colonial spaces alongside scientific literature, epidemiological data and ideas about public health practices, while pathogens continued to make their own way through the islands scattered between Malaya and New Zealand. Much of his thinking about the nature of health took shape in New Guinea and Malaya before reverberating throughout the reforms he promoted in Australia. His career thus highlights the dynamic exchange of public health ideas and practices between colonies in South-East Asia, the Pacific Islands and Australia.

At the same time, Australia has been the centre of gravity in this story. A range of material and cultural connections drew the Pacific Islands together, but Cilento's imperialism sought to orient them towards Australia. This particular expression of the Pacific region, in other words, imagined power relations as resting on the dissemination of expert knowledge from institutions, such as the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine (AITM). On another level, Cilento always folded his experience and understanding of the Pacific into his work in Australia. Cilento proposed applying techniques of categorisation and institutional segregation used in New Guinea to Aboriginal people and disease in Queensland. In fact, he compared his ideal situation in the Australian tropics with systems for managing indentured labour in the Pacific. In discussing the significance of public health reform in Australia, Cilento invoked not only the prospect of war in the Pacific, but also discursively incorporated sickness and decline among Pacific Islanders into his representations of white Australian health and illness. As Pacific history, therefore, this book has

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2   Cilento, *Australia's Racial Heritage*, p. 8.
3   Finnane, 'Cilento, Sir Raphael West (Ray) (1893–1985).'

been concerned both with health and government in the Pacific Islands and with how Cilento's colonial imagination incorporated the Pacific into the national settler-colonial politics and discourse of health in Australia.

When he was appointed to the United Nations, Cilento brought an imperial vision of world order to postwar international civil service. He hoped that the United Nations' Advisory Social Welfare Services would be part of a wider effort to maintain 'backwards' peoples and territories in a relationship of tutelage to the 'civilised' world. Rather than diplomatic negotiation of borders, Cilento argued, these interventions in standards of living and social 'evolution' were what would ensure peace in the midst of rapid population growth, economic development and cultural transformation. The structure of the program reflected the postwar system of sovereign and increasingly decolonised nation-states. It was, however, the enthusiasm for industrialisation among postcolonial states, the United Nations and other development agencies in the late 1940s that prompted Cilento's disillusionment with postwar internationalism. Newly independent states in Asia and the Middle East, Cilento asserted, were not ready for the transformations of industrialisation and statehood. Indeed, Cilento would later declare that the postwar world rested on edifices of human rights and racial equality that were fundamentally mistaken.

As successive Australian governments dismantled the White Australia Policy in the late 1960s and 1970s, Cilento began repeating old claims about the inevitability of conflict in a mixed society. These sentiments were the latest expression of his awareness that different political and moral norms were changing the world around him. The atmosphere of postwar Karachi, the development of Cold War antagonisms and the flowering of human rights and anticolonial discourse in the UN General Assembly were to him all signs that his ideals and certainties would no longer govern the world. This did not mean, of course, that racism ceased shaping social policy and discourse or international relations. Development regimes and institutions established after World War II at least partially preserved imperial relationships of power, while decolonisation was a protracted process across Africa and the Pacific. Many of the Pacific Islands remain formal or informal colonies of France or the United States. Despite Cilento's fears, the dominance of national development and welfare meant that collective ways of framing rights largely overshadowed human

rights until the 1970s.[4] The institutionalisation of Indigenous people also persisted in Australia long after the war and its effects still linger in the present. National borders remain important as racism and imperial legacies continue to shape regimes for the management and exclusion of foreign bodies. The ongoing legacies of colonialism and a reactionary surge in racial nationalism in many parts of the world today, in other words, belie Cilento's own pessimistic belief that the world was moving beyond his ideals.

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4   Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010), pp. 2–4.