

gated three years later. There are also several misspellings, including the name of the president of the Methodist Church and the name of Dr Bavadra's clan, Werecoakaka.

In this book, Brij Lal has been able to masterfully weave a story around his own personal experiences and perspectives with historical events that have taken Fiji from being another one of the many twentieth-century human tragedies brought on by ethnic conflict to being an example of the building of trust between culturally diverse groups through cooperating ethnic leaders. The unanimity of the commissioners in their report and that of the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee and the Parliament is truly a feat of remarkable proportion.

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The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders, edited by Donald Denoon with Stewart Firth, Jocelyn Linnekin, Malama Meleisea, and Karen Nero. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-521-44195-1 cloth, xvii + 518 pages, maps, index, bibliography, notes, glossary. US\$79.95.

The appearance toward the end of the millennium of *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders* raises many contestable premises about Pacific historiography and representation. If such a comprehensive volume had appeared a decade earlier it would have been greeted with greater accolades than have been published in recent reviews. Maybe this is because the old certainties of region, culture,

and history have been disrupted—theoretically and through actual shifts within postcolonial societies. Although historians were once confident to write grand regional narratives elsewhere, they have been more reticent in the Pacific. Four, among other, impediments blocked an authorized history of the Pacific. These included not only insufficient accessible research, but also a lack of confidence. The new wave of Pacific historians emerging from the 1970s, particularly the “Canberra school,” was usually reluctant to present generalizations about the region, preferring to speak about their specializations. Third, many historians were motivated to write history from the inside out, to revise the imperial school of Pacific history. This emerging reluctance to locate the subject within colonial narratives followed the decolonization of Pacific colonies. By the 1980s historiographical issues of indigenous voices, authenticity, and the kinds of history being published began to be contested. A fourth impediment was the economics of publishing. Pacific Islanders were absent in global histories. This marginality appeared to verify the lack of a market for a regional history.

Donald Denoon and his fellow contributors have therefore taken a brave step in facing these challenges. They have given splendid vent to the accumulated research concerning Pacific Islanders. It is easy to quibble over inclusions and exclusions, but the coverage of existing Pacific scholarship, including considerable ethnographic data, is impressive and usefully summarized in bibliographic essays at the end of each chapter.

First-person and indigenous perspectives are provided in both testimonies (such as Onga's, 97–100) and reflexive contributions from Ruth Spriggs on Bougainville and Vilsoni Hereniko on identities. The selectivity of texts remains problematic, especially when claims are made from the beginning by Jocelyn Linnekin that the volume focuses on the experiences of peoples who did not produce written accounts before the coming of Europeans. This project is, however, equally qualified in this stimulating introduction, which presages how the contributors frequently attempt to straddle contradictory interpretations. They aim to avoid essentialist readings of the past, but this does not get away from making historical generalizations. An example of "having it both ways" from Linnekin: "While we abjure 'fatal impact' analyses . . . Europeans did alter irrevocably the directions in which Island societies developed" (186).

Ironically, the confidence to undertake this project correlates with lessened expectations of grand narratives among academics. The editors stress a reluctance to present a unified voice (as with the juxtaposition of oral narratives, linguistic and archaeological data, and historical interpretation in the chapter on early settlement). Does this multifaceted approach work when the final product becomes a tome endorsed as a Cambridge history? A unilinear approach dominates, despite the thematic essays. The familiar watershed of the Pacific War divides the volume into two sections. Frequently writers try to cover awareness of difference but overall, the reading is of what happened when the Pacific

was colonized, within conventional plots (precontact, contact "waves" of Europeans as beachcombers, missionaries, traders—colonial and postcolonial Pacific) where many of the actors are outsiders. (However, migrant communities, especially Indo-Fijians, are not accorded such attention and continue to be cast separate from "the Pacific Islanders".) There is a strong emphasis on Islander agency (as in Meleisea and Schoeffel's discussion of perceptions of outsiders and Denoon on Islanders' negotiations of modernization and development [chapters 5, 7]) but much of the text reads as a reaction to European projects. Linnekin rationalizes why this constitutes writing a history: "With few exceptions Islanders have been the colonised rather than the colonisers, and this unifying experience is perhaps the most compelling justification for a single-volume history of the region" (6). I agree, but this also begs for a more radical subaltern history in the future.

In the meantime, this volume provides a solid overview containing considerable detail of the political, economic, and ideological restructuring of Pacific societies. It rectifies the neglect of economics in earlier Pacific historiography. Discourses and critiques of development in Pacific societies are discussed by Denoon (chapters 3, 5) and Karen Nero (chapter 11), but future writing might like to further address the complexities of local class structuration. Firth explores the construction of the "native" under colonialism but assesses that there were no class politics that might have given rise to industrial action. Yet there were many strikes in Fiji, especially in 1959, which indicate some

class identity. Although Firth and Denoon emphasize the politics and economics of colonialism, Firth suggests, "Colonialism is perhaps better seen as the interaction of many competing ethnocentricisms, with European racial prejudice forming an overlay" (260). I also wonder how the statement "Political debate is largely about culture and the nature of indigenous institutions" (397) squares with the strong emphasis on the material worlds presented in this history.

The complexities of Pacific identities are given considerable space. Hereniko offers Islanders' frameworks of history and time, albeit from a Rotuman perspective. Lindstrom emphasizes the fluidity of custom, which extends to exchange, buying, and selling. This relates to Nero's conclusion that globalizes identities through the complexities of diasporas, citizenship, and performance. Gender relations are refreshingly interspersed throughout sections rather than forming a token chapter. Original contributions come from Vicki Lukere on the making of the native mother and from Spriggs. Hopefully, future writing will widen women's participation in the Pacific War to more than the horrific paragraph on rape in Firth's excellent chapter. He highlights the centrality of Islanders in the war but challenges assumptions about Islander loyalties. Firth along with Karin von Strokirch provide a significant chapter on the nuclear Pacific. The volume's emphasis on the environment indicates the value of an interdisciplinary authorship.

As in any large collection, there are points that readers will disagree with. For example, the concept of subalter-

nity has been debated at the University of the South Pacific, and not confined to scholars in Hawai'i and Tahiti (31). Errors include Oposisi Papua Merdeka (385) and *tanga te whenua* (470). The exclusion of authorship throughout the text means the reader must frustratingly refer back to the table of contents to check who has written each section.

Despite criticisms, this is an appropriate moment for a history of Pacific Islanders that strides both difference and historical narratives to be published. This rendering is at times uneven—but the authors have not set out to present a sealed official Pacific history. The volume should be seen as open-ended and a stimulus to reading the region's history, even if it is sited within the confines of being a Cambridge history. This "authenticity" brings Pacific historiography in from the margins, but within western historiographical limitations. On the one hand this fits with "anti-isolationist" representations of the Pacific, affirming the contours of spatial, historical, and spiritual connectedness, rather than the sharp lines of center-periphery. On the other hand the latter hegemony remains part of the region's published and academic historiography.

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