

expansion of British influence in the Pacific. By concentrating on the theme of the moral high ground adopted by a number of naval officers, the wider relationships may be blurred or diminished. Even so, against interpretations of imperial expansion that ascribe policies and predetermined agendas to nations, politicians, consuls, and merchants (and even naval officers), there is value in a reminder that expansion was a complex business, especially in the shadowland of informal empire that preceded annexations, with seldom a clear set of goals and intentions on either side of the imperial frontier.

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Changing Their Minds: Tradition and Politics in Contemporary Fiji and Tonga, by Rory Ewins. Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, 1998. ISBN 1-877175-15-3, xxvi + 298 pages, glossary, bibliography, notes, index. NZ\$12.95.

The aims of this book, a revised doctoral thesis by an Australian National University-trained political scientist, are perhaps not wholly achieved. Nevertheless, the study should be of great interest to scholars of the Pacific. Much of the material was derived from a series of interviews the author held with politically active people in Fiji and Tonga in the early to mid-1990s. The presentation of primary sources through long quotes from the interviews is refreshing. Valuable insights arise also from the comparison of the two neighboring countries.

Both these aspects of the author's approach are not always found in contemporary studies. This study thus complements Stephanie Lawson's 1996 study, *Tradition versus Democracy in the South Pacific: Fiji, Tonga, and Western Samoa*, by serving, if incidentally, to flesh out her largely structural account with what elites actually say, thereby portraying vividly the complexity of forces at work when people travel widely and engage in many different fields of influence. The technique results in statements that reflect flux, and change, although the idea that the apprehension of change might not always be reflected in the political behavior of the very people who made the statements appears not to have been considered.

The author has a light, engaging style that makes the book easily accessible to a wide audience. The innovative nature of his enterprise, however, gives rise to difficulties in the achievement of his stated aims. The focus is broad, the primary data limited, and the wider social and political context largely overlooked in the interpretation of the interview materials presented. The discussion of the sources of possible changes in mindsets regarding tradition rather wanders in search of an argument that will link it to politics in any direct way. The author also eschews history as a source of political explanation on the grounds that people's own awareness of it changes over time (xxii). This reader faltered at the author's vaunted confidence in taking an ahistorical position, when following swiftly upon it is the assertion that the Tongan monarchy was established

barely more than a century ago by the great-grandfather of the present king, Tupou IV. In fact, Tupou I established it considerably more than a century ago, in 1845. He was several more generations removed from the present monarch because his successor, Tupou II, was his great-grandson. A changing awareness of history cannot change all that.

The interesting, discursive, and impressionistic study goes some way toward fulfilling the first of its goals, which is to provide a document of contemporary Fijian and Tongan opinion on matters of tradition and politics. Some sixty-one interviews were conducted with “politically active members of the Fiji . . . and Tongan communities” (xx). At the end of each quote, they are identified by reference to their occupation, which may or may not bear any meaningful relation to their social status in what are after all still essentially small-scale, highly personalized, face-to-face, societies. Nevertheless, the author maintains of the speakers: “While it would be a mistake to consider them wholly representative of their societies, it would also be unjust to consider them unrepresentative” (xx). Without an analysis of the bias inherent in each of the political systems that promote certain people and not others as “politically active,” nor a social “placement” of the speakers and, hence, of the viewpoints they provide, it is hardly possible to make this judgment. Their comments stand as sixty-one sets of unrelated and uncontextualized opinions, each derived in an hour or less of taped interview. The opinions are not contested or juxtaposed in such a way as to form any kind of meaningful dia-

logue, and ironies arise. For example, are readers really to take at face value the words of a Tongan “chief” (a noble?), when he remarked of his senior civil service position, “I tell [people] it’s coincidental that I happen to be of chiefly rank. I hold this position because I happen to have the requisite qualifications”?

An analysis of the social stratification in each country and its relation to political process might have yielded more pertinent questions than the ones that apparently were posed; for example, what did people understand by the term *tradition*? (39). Given its open-ended nature, it understandably elicited a wide range of not-very-focused responses that form the bulk of chapter 2. Far from providing “definitions” of tradition, as the chapter heading promises, the responses and the author’s commentary present an array of ideas that slide from the general to the particular between various contexts and levels of analysis without a clear referent. A working definition that distinguished between the interviewees’ notions and those of the author would have helped in the ensuing discussion.

Although it purports to be an examination, tradition is given the explanatory role from the outset. Ewins writes, “The more I studied Fiji and then the rest of the Pacific, the more tradition appeared to be the key to understanding political events where race and class, while obviously not insignificant, were not the most important factors at work” (xvi). Others might well disagree. However, the value of concentrating on the rather nebulous concept of tradition at the expense of other factors can be

shown only by the illumination of the analysis it provides. How well is it able to meet the author's second and third goals of the study? These are no less than "to establish that tradition plays a central role in the contemporary politics of Fiji and Tonga, and to discuss how it does so," and "to show how various social forces at work in both countries are affecting tradition and thereby promoting and reinforcing political challenges to traditional authority" (xxiv). The questions of what tradition is being adduced and in what ways it is central, in terms of either political institutions or the established mores and lifeways of the common people, are hardly considered. The assumptions about, rather than the exploration of, the relationship between tradition and politics hardly allow for the play of various traditions within the political arena, or the way in which the same tradition may be brought into play by different people as an ideology in defense of separate and even opposing interests. The whole notion of the representation of different interests, which might be thought central to the discussion of politics anywhere, is largely absent from this study.

Without further analysis of the societies and an evaluation of the factions, frictions, and social cleavages in their constituencies, it is hard to appreciate many of the Islanders' observations. Wise, witty, and insightful though many of their comments are, they do not add up to nor substitute for an analysis of politics. The distinctive flavor of political relations and process in each of the two countries eludes the fragmentary presentation of interview material. Despite all the author's provocative attempts to

draw them together in a web of wider theories that range from psychological reductionism to postmodernism, the Islanders' observations remain disparate, disembodied opinions and, finally, as such, pretty much weightless on the political scale. Changing their minds about the nature of leadership or the political and economic structures does not lead inevitably to political change; only political action does. The effects of the 1987 military coups in Fiji are a salutary reminder of this. So, too, are the years of talking about democracy in Tonga, which to date have not led to structural change. There, change will occur quickly if only one person, the monarch, who is now the highest traditional leader, changes his mind about the present system. As Fijian and Tongan history teaches us, that is a highly traditional thing to do.

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Common Worlds and Single Lives: Constituting Knowledge in Pacific Societies, edited by Verena Keck. Explorations in Anthropology. Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998. ISBN cloth, 1-85973-164-3; paper, 1-85973-169-4; vi + 417 pages, notes, bibliographies, index. Cloth, US\$57.50; paper, US\$22.50. Distributed in North America by New York University Press.

This edited volume is a thought-provoking collection that touches on several fundamental long-term concerns of the discipline of social anthropology. It comprises sixteen chapters by individual contributors