

disillusioned and enticed by the lure of the natural landscape to express his feelings and emotions. Peter Campbell's problem is that he just cannot see the reality of the predicament created by competing cultural systems. He has to maintain an impersonal state of mind in order to see his subjects objectively. On the other hand, he has violated the space of the Abini by building a modern house in the middle of nowhere and entering the sacred world of men and birds of paradise. Not until the Abini resist Peter Campbell's presence and activities does he come to terms with himself: "he felt its destruction like a long-separated twin feeling a twinge and knowing that somewhere his brother was dead" (218-219).

The Undiscovered Country is disappointing in several ways. Its use of terms and labels does more than damage the already polarized impressions of Papua New Guineans that are littered across its pages. Some Tokpisin words are misspelled and at times are implied without giving the actual words. My observations may be contrary to Gillison's objectives, but there is still a need for improvement in written representations of Papua New Guineans made by non-Papua New Guineans. By now one might have expected that caricatures and helpful local informants would have disappeared in both literary and intellectual representations by westerners. The resurfacing of stereotypes of the experiences of other people, whom we study, write about, and represent, is, one might add, dehumanizing to those who are studied, written about, and represented.

Good writing must also be responsible writing. Gillison's novel does not

depart far from the traditional literature in which representations of cultures and people other than the author's own are given. Peter and June Campbell fight their insecurities and fears through a process of self-justification, yet very awkwardly. If the suggestion is that Taylor Campbell, the child of a new generation, is someone who can absorb and be absorbed by the culture, people, language, and lives of the undiscovered country, then it is rather too presumptuous.

For the pleasure reader, this is a book full of excitement. For graduate students working in other cultures, *The Undiscovered Country* is ideal reading. And for students of Pacific literature, this book is disturbingly beautiful.

STEVEN WINDUO

University of Papua New Guinea

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Islands of the Frigate Bird, a novel by Daryl Tarte. Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1999. ISBN 982-02-0147-0, 206 pages. Paper, US\$18.

Islands of the Frigate Bird brings together Banaban, Gilbertese, Bikinian, and white colonial experiences of the twentieth century in a fictional tale of male travel and survival. Tarte sets up the story as a genealogy that links different characters and events, from the beginning of time, two and a half billion years ago, to the future 2234, and ultimately to a group of voyagers who sailed east from Southeast Asia and landed on Banaba "prehistorically." What follows is a fragmented saga of colonization, mining, world war, nuclear testing, and the woes of

patrolling oceanic exclusive economic zones, all viewed briefly through the eyes of Islander and European male protagonists. It starts in the future with one particular descendant named Ion Itabirik, rewriting his ancestral stories. Thanks to global warming, his roots have been swallowed up by the ocean, displacing many atoll-dwelling folk to countries like Australia where Itabirik now lives.

Though the book is fiction, the linking of individuals from five seemingly separate island groups is useful. In terms of current approaches to Pacific Studies it is important to understand that Islanders are both genealogically and historically connected to each other by their own agency as well as through powerful forces like European imperialism and war. This challenges the idea that islands and ethnic communities are discrete and isolated and can be studied in such a way. Tarte connects destructive processes like phosphate mining and nuclear testing in an innovative way via the location, travel, and epistemological orientations of descendants of Pacific voyagers. This technique illustrates the inevitably cross-cultural experiences of many Islanders in terms of their contemporary relationships, and genealogical and colonial roots. Tarte also highlights an ecological link between Islanders, their environments, and some of the animals that inhabit them, like sharks, tuna fish, and frigate birds.

I read this book while visiting two of the main featured islands—South Tarawa and Banaba. The bloody story of the Japanese-American battle off the shores of Betio was particularly vivid for me, as I slept a five-minute walk from old bunkers and battle

guns. The story was relevant and interesting for my own thesis work on Banaban and Gilbertese historical experiences. It pays tribute to the lives of many central Pacific Islanders who were involved in some of the most profound environmental upheavals of the twentieth century.

Despite its interest for me, I think many readers will find the style of writing dry and sometimes disturbing. Tarte racializes most of the characters in stereotypic form: “I glanced at my young brother Titika and the other two as they stirred from their uncomfortable sleep. They were thick chunky men like me with narrow slits of eyes and dark wavy hair” (18). I don’t think it is an effective narrative strategy to have the Islander storytellers describing each other in the language of Eurocentric anthropology. The Asian visitors go on to view the Banaban indigenes:

A number of short, very dark skinned naked people with crinkled matted hair chattered in a strange tongue & “They smell us,” I whispered. One of the men issued a command, and the whole tribe scattered into the nearby scrub, squealing like pigs. After they disappeared, we went into the filthy primitive encampment & If we were to stay on this island, we would need women. I was sure that the men would only cause trouble. We would have to get rid of them & The attack went as planned. Before the men realized what was happening, we had cut their throats, ripped open their stomachs and clubbed them to death & None got away. (21)

These Asian colonizers were then instructed to stroke the women and children like wild animals to reduce their fear. After a while they became dependent on these men, bore them

children, and learned to weave, sing, dance, and observe the new gods.

This is a beginning straight out of a bad European imagination and does not help set the tone for the rest of the story. It is also disturbing because the one who is supposed to be re-presenting all of this is an Islander of the future. Are we to assume that two hundred years from now education will be so bad that young people will describe their own ancestors as pigs? Or maybe political correctness goes right out of fashion, or Hollywood in 2234 has commissioned Ion Itabirik to write a script for a sensational, loosely historical action film.

In Tarte's story, the Asian voyagers discover the *bangabanga* or water caves. It seems the black inhabitants had no idea these caves existed. This is unlikely because before the phosphate mining company and their water tanks, one could not live on drought-prone Banaba without the water source of the caves, unless, of course, everyone sucked the eyes of the flying fish for years and years during the droughts. The acceptance of the superiority of the voyagers versus the land-bound black people is unhelpful. It sets up a distasteful hierarchy of race that can be read in the present from Melanesia (rooted) upward to Polynesia (voyaging). Many Banabans today still claim their Melanesian

roots. In most oral traditions, as well as in the writings of both Harry Maude and Arthur Grimble, controversial as they sometimes are for both Gilbertese and Banabans, the original dark-skinned inhabitants of the islands possessed magic much stronger than that of the invaders. It is unlikely that they gave up their land or women without a fight or premonition of attack. My final criticism is that the characters, Islanders and Europeans, speak in perfect English aside from the one caricatured American who speaks with a Southern, army-dude accent.

Despite the language and tone of the book, in terms of the field of Pacific literature, this book contributes a temporal structure with multiple subjects that is creative, if somewhat ambitious. It would make an excellent and historically necessary film if Tarte could stretch his imagination enough to include women as active historical participants and rewrite the characters' voices a bit more realistically. What holds the book together is University of the South Pacific lecturer and I-Kiribati Teweiariki Teaeoro's simple yet effective pen-and-ink illustrations. These tell a most intriguing story.

KATERINA TEAIWA

Australian National University