

least during the next decade. It is to be recommended as first reading to all those wishing to acquire a sound knowledge of the pre-European history of the peoples of Oceania.

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The People Trade: Pacific Island Laborers and New Caledonia, 1865–1930, by Dorothy Shineberg. Pacific Islands Monograph Series 16. Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies and University of Hawai'i Press, 1999. ISBN 0-8248-2101-7; xxiii + 309 pages, tables, figures, photos, maps, appendix, notes, references, index. US\$45.

In 1967 Dorothy Shineberg's *They Came for Sandalwood: A Study of the Sandalwood Trade in the South Pacific, 1830–1865* marked one of the earliest academic publications in Pacific labor history. It became a foundational text on Pacific labor and more generally within Pacific historiography. Over thirty years later, Shineberg has again significantly contributed to the advance of Pacific labor history with this richly detailed study of Oceanian migrant laborers in New Caledonia between 1865 and 1930. Very little has been published on the labor history of the French territories in the Pacific. Shineberg's research fills a large part of this gap and indeed the serious lack of scholarly publications in English on the French territories in the Pacific.

This book is a shining example of excellent historical research and writing. *The People Trade* is a clear, schol-

arly, and meticulous narrative but not given to sweeping theoretical analysis or accusatory condemnation of past actors. Shineberg still overwhelmingly presents a grim and damning assessment of the labor trade and the exploitation of workers in colonial society. She is careful not to apportion blame to any nationality. Here is a glimpse of how nineteenth-century practices foreshadowed the present-day transnationalization of shipping in the Pacific. Unscrupulous shipping and labor operators evaded national legal jurisdiction by flying foreign flags. The labor trade was transnational and flourished during a period of national rivalry between Britain and France. Although several examples of worker "agency" can be found throughout the book, Shineberg's focus tends to be on the constraints workers faced, and in great detail she discusses the disparities between state regulation and employer rule, evidenced with both brute violence and the alarming extent to which workers were cheated of their wages. Before reading chapter 12, titled "Perpetual Theft," I assumed the content would be about worker theft or resistance, but instead it lays out the crimes committed by employers.

To the extent that it is possible with archival evidence, Shineberg provides some sense of the real people behind the labor trade statistics. As she urges, scholars must build on her groundwork and explore (as has been undertaken in other Pacific contexts) the social history of migrant laborers in New Caledonia through the oral histories of participants and their descendants. The book provides a valuable foundation for this work, particularly through the discussion of women and

children migrants. Shineberg refutes “the woman problem” so frequently raised as a cause of the complaints against the labor trade. While not invoking discourse such as patriarchy, she emphasizes “cross-cultural male solidarity” in women’s recruitment. She also calls for further research in Pacific labor historiography concerning the commercial trade of Pacific Islands women for sexual services. The book provides one of the few historical insights into indentured child labor (indeed, any “paid” child labor) in the Pacific. Shineberg paints a highly exploitative record, especially as during the early recruiting period children could be recruited from the age of six years (much younger than in other colonies) and their indentures could be enforced virtually until they reached legal adult status. Their work, as indeed the work of all Oceanian migrant laborers, was highly varied, including agricultural, mining, shop, service, and domestic work. Here is another new contribution to Pacific peoples “without history”: that of domestic workers. This analysis with regard to economic production, consumption, and social status is only touched on and requires more elaboration. Shineberg also teases out here the somewhat contradictory position Oceanian laborers assumed in the French colonial hierarchy, as “buffers” between their employers and the convicts, *libérés*, and indigenous Melanesians. Further research into ethnic and class identities and dynamics of the French colonial Pacific societies is needed, especially where it is grounded in workplace experience.

Labor trade historians will undoubtedly ask where the analysis falls with respect to the now well-

established debates over kidnapping, voluntarism, coercion and compulsion, and migrant workers’ agency. Shineberg does not take a strident position but depicts the nuances and shifts in recruitment throughout the long historical period she covers. She critiques the assertion that the growth of Islanders’ awareness of migrant labor refutes the kidnapping thesis, by giving evidence that experienced and aware Islanders were still kidnapped (possibly because they knew the power of the gun). She rightly asks questions about the compulsion or obligations within the migrants’ home society and explores these entanglements with recruitment on the beach. More so than other scholars, Shineberg emphasizes the demand for breech-loading rifles as an incentive for indigenous leaders to release young men to migrate abroad. But Shineberg reviews these issues much further than the recruitment phase. She follows the ships to New Caledonia, the workplace, and communities there and indeed, as far as the archival records allow, back to the New Hebrides (whence about 90 percent were recruited). In the process she strongly reminds readers that although, legally, indenture was not slavery, it was never a free contract between equal parties. Pacific Island migrants provided a substantial part of the labor on which New Caledonia’s development was based, leaving a still-to-be-explored legacy for the donor communities and the descendants of the survivors, who labored under extremely restrictive and often arduous conditions.

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