

cians are mostly corrupt, self-serving, and on constant offer to the highest bidder. Yet Siaguru offers no real solutions to the present Westminster system, which he obviously believes has failed the nation. He is not alone. Countless other prominent Papua New Guineans believe the entire political system is working only for a very small elite, while the whole nation is deteriorating quickly. Every major reform undertaken since independence has been unsuccessful.

Papua New Guinea has now joined the select ranks of nation-states commonly referred to as “failed states.” Siaguru’s weekly ruminations give us a unique window into workings of a failed state. He ultimately reminds us that failed states can continue to move along, deteriorating little by little, without actually falling over the cliff.

JAMES CHIN

University of Papua New Guinea

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The West New Guinea Debacle: Dutch Colonisation and Indonesia 1945–1962, by C L M Penders. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press; Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2002. ISBN 0-8248-2470-9; viii + 490 pages, tables, map, glossary, abbreviations, notes, bibliography, index. Paper, US\$39.00.

Following the fall of President Suharto in 1998, there was a burgeoning of separatist sentiments in the outer islands of Indonesia. In East Timor this culminated in a vote for independence. In Irian Jaya/West Papua, too, where the Organisasi Papua Merdeka had maintained a low level of insur-

gency for almost thirty years, there was an upsurge of nationalist feeling and new demands for independence, or at least autonomy. After some loosening of Jakarta’s grip over the province—with the Indonesian government eventually accepting its renaming as Papua—central authority has been reasserted and a policy of repression has been resumed.

Amid the briefly revived international interest in West Papuan claims to a separate state, there was some looking back to the messy history of the Netherlands’ reluctant decolonization, and the circumstances that resulted in the so-called Act of Free Choice (popularly known as the Act Free of Choice) by which West Papua was formally incorporated into the Indonesian Republic in 1969.

The West New Guinea Debacle, by Dutch-born Australian scholar Chris Penders, is thus timely. It surveys the genesis of the West New Guinea/West Papua question in the period before and immediately after the Second World War, details the processes of decolonization and nationalization across Indonesia between 1950 and 1958, provides a detailed account of the international dispute over West Papua from 1949 to 1962, and concludes with a chapter appropriately entitled “The Papuans Betrayed.”

The West Papua story is a sad tale of initial colonial neglect followed by the nurturing of unrealistic expectations of sovereignty on the part of the Dutch colonial government; of bloody-mindedness on the part of Indonesia’s post-independence leaders, who made it clear that they would not allow the mandated vote on the future status of West Papua to yield anything

other than a vote for incorporation into the republic; and a shameful disinterest on the part of international actors, who (apart from a small group of former French African nations) ultimately saw more to be gained from appeasing a noncommunist government in Indonesia than from supporting the claims of the West Papuan people to self-determination, and who were prepared to ignore the clear evidence that West Papuans had been denied a real choice in 1969.

Others have written about Dutch decolonization in Indonesia and about the West New Guinea question, but Penders' account is the most detailed study available, making extensive use of Dutch archival material. It makes an important contribution to the literature on decolonization and will be an invaluable source for students of Indonesian, and West Papuan, history.

RON MAY

Australian National University

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Melal: A Novel of the Pacific, by Robert Barclay. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8248-2591-8; viii + 300 pages, map, text art. Paper, US\$14.95.

Barclay is a first-time novelist who simply got it right. *Melal* is an archaic Marshallese word: playground of demons; not habitable by people. As a member of the editorial board of the University of Hawai'i Press, I first learned of Barclay's work when his manuscript was evaluated for publication. In her review of the manuscript, Teresia Teaiwa, Pacific Islands Studies, Victoria University at Wellington,

wrote that *Melal* is a "rare and precious gift to all humanity." Byron Bender, a University of Hawai'i linguist who has devoted much of his career to the study of Marshallese language and culture, described *Melal* as "an extraordinary work that defies categorization . . . a political and social treatise disguised as a novel."

Teaiwa and Bender are not alone in their assessments. Barclay has been named as the recipient of the Harriet Goldsberry Award in Hawai'i and was a finalist for the prestigious 2002 Kiriya Prize for fiction. (Two of Barclay's competitors for the award were Booker Prize finalists.) Barnes and Nobel selected *Melal* for its Discover Great New Writers program and has promoted the book in its stores throughout the United States. *Melal* has received critical acclaim in Honolulu's leading daily and weekly newspapers. Author Patricia Grace's enthusiastic endorsement on the novel's back cover concludes with the note that *Melal* is "an important book."

Barclay is now a doctoral student and lecturer in the English department of the University of Hawai'i, and *Melal* served as the thesis for his MA degree in that department's creative-writing program. Barclay first became acquainted with the Marshall Islands as a nine-year-old boy when his father took a job at the US missile range facility on Kwajalein Atoll in the early 1970s. Kwajalein is one of the twenty-nine coral atolls and five single islands that make up the Marshalls. Many of the islands, including Kwajalein, were devastated when American forces invaded and defeated the Japanese during World War II. After