

Reviews

Pacific Places, Pacific Histories: essays in honor of Robert C. Kiste

Brij V. Lal (ed.), 2004, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 345 pp. ISBN 0 8248 2748 1

All chapters in this book are well written and interesting; all authors are well-reputed scholars. The book is superbly presented in hard cover, befitting the purpose of honouring Bob Kiste for his enormous contribution as Director of the Centre for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai'i from 1978 to 2004.

The content of *Pacific Places, Pacific Histories* is not as much about Pacific places or Pacific histories as about individual authors. Most chapters are brief autobiographies, reminiscences or nostalgic musings about where that researcher came from and went to, and how they 'came to terms' with people they met—that is, it is more about the social environment than the physical one. Largely, it is about the learning curves of those foreign academics in those communities.

There is the suggestion that the authors' perspective is from the outside dipping in: fifteen of the authors live and work in United States (mostly Hawai'i), Australia or New Zealand; only two in the Pacific islands—Fran Hezel and Jo-Jo Peter, both in the Federated States of Micronesia. Two others (Brij Lal and Teresia Teaiwa) were brought up in Fiji.

Terence Wesley-Smith writes (p.83) of the virtual monopoly of Pacific scholarship by non-indigenous people, and some other authors make similar points, but the book seems to indicate that little progress has been made. Fourteen of the authors are Caucasian, one Fiji Indian and only two are indigenous Pacific islanders. For foreign scholars to monopolise their own stories is fine, but while writing this, the program arrived for an Australian National University conference

on 'Telling Pacific Lives'—in which the speakers are mainly foreigners speaking about the lives of Pacific islanders.

Fifty years ago, when the institutions in Honolulu and Canberra with which almost all the authors are associated were created, they were expected to contribute to decolonisation, but the academic imperium seems reluctant to set that process in motion beyond tokenism.

Historians are the largest category of author, anthropologists next. Most of both have undertaken intensive research over long periods among very small numbers of people. With such small language communities in the Pacific, that is necessary if significant depth is to be achieved. Thus David Hanlon outlines the histories of some people of Pohnpei from the earliest times, and the diverse interpretations those in the community have of them. Mac Marshall describes the people of one island of the Mortlocks and their diaspora over the past half century. Clive Moore gives insight into Malaita through his close association with one family over a 50-year period. Mark Mosko has focused his research life on one Mekeo village in Papua New Guinea, and describes the impact of its sorcery and magic on his life. Hank Nelson writes perceptively of the sufferings of the people of Rabaul from war and vulcanism. Eugene Ogan summarises the radical changes in a series of encounters over 40 years with the Nasioi people of Bougainville who were enmeshed in the mining venture and the civil war. Terence Wesley-Smith also studies a niche in Bougainville, weaving it together with Irish origins, acculturation in New Zealand and immersion in neo-Marxism at the University of Hawai'i.

Of those who stress breadth rather than depth, Kerry Howe shows the value of big pictures and encompassing all factors from the entire world. Since big pictures can only

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be accurate if constructed from many small pictures of greater precision, we need both. Stewart Firth shows the influence of experiences in Port Moresby, Hawai'i and Suva on his perceptions. Anthropologist Mike Rynkiewich spent some years with the Melanesian Institute in Papua New Guinea, as well as in Marshall Islands. Of a Papuan community in which he lived he finds people having to 'construct culture almost daily as they met the challenges of living' (p.320).

The other chapters are more unique, though no less interesting. Gerard Ward, the only geographer, writes of the life-long influence of the rural setting in which he grew up in New Zealand. He is the only author to focus much on the titular 'place', though little on the 'history'. Jo-Jo Peter reminisces on adult memories of an idyllic childhood in an outer island of Chuuk.

Ben Finney, more than any other person, pioneered the resurgence of Polynesian navigation and made unique contributions to its theory and practice for nearly half a century. His chapter outlines the successes and the agonies.

Karen Peacock is Pacific curator at the University of Hawai'i, where she and her colleagues have amassed the world's best collection of Pacific islands materials—a magnificent achievement. She writes on 'collecting the collection'.

Tere Teaiwa is not classified in the book by any academic discipline. She is probably past that form of tribalism. Her chapter is a vibrant mélange of passion and poetry about a great achievement of the East-West Center in Honolulu—the fact that it provided a place where students from throughout the region could learn from each other.

Those closest to peoples and places they wrote about seem most aware of the fact that they were not a fully integrated part of them. Having good relations with people does not make a person one of the community in a

comprehensive sense. Fran Hezel, a Jesuit priest who has spent his adult life in Micronesia, has produced high quality history and current social commentary. He writes of the huge gap between his US culture and that of the Chuuk community he lived in, and the ongoing bridging and mediating of that slowly narrowing gap.

Brij Lal contributes an introduction and a perspicacious chapter on his experience as a student of the University of the South Pacific, opening new vistas for a rural farm boy.

He acknowledges the deep divides between ethnic and other categories at the university—divides that are probably deeper today than when he was a student there.

For students who are about to undertake research in the Pacific (or for Pacific islands students about to do research among Caucasians) this is an excellent book to read. Each chapter is informative about that author and place for those interested in either or both. But with everyone having too much to read and a price of US\$75, it will be inaccessible to many—and almost totally inaccessible to the islanders who are written about.

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***Gun Running in Papua New Guinea:
from arrows to assault weapons in the
Southern Highlands***

Philip Alpers, 2005, Small Arms Survey,
Geneva, 138pp. ISBN 2 8288 0062 8

There is no doubt that guns are an important part of life in Papua New Guinea. The daily reports of the progress of the Guns Enquiry, headed by Jerry Singarok in 2005, contained lurid details of the results of the scourge as it affected the people of Papua New Guinea. There hardly seemed a place that was not affected by the gun culture. The enquiry was