

Book and Media Reviews

L'ONU, la France et les décolonisations tardives: L'exemple des terres françaises d'Océanie, by Jean-Marc Regnault. Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires d'Aix-Marseille, 2013. ISBN 978-2-7314-0886-7; 250 pages, preface, acknowledgments, bibliography, annexes. □16.00.

In a historic decision, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution on 17 May 2013 to reinscribe French Polynesia on the UN list of non-self-governing territories. The resolution, sponsored by Solomon Islands, Nauru, and Tuvalu, was adopted by the 193-member assembly without a vote. France's UN ambassador had boycotted the session, and other colonial powers objected to the consensus resolution.

The reaction from Paris was ferocious, with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs declaring: "This resolution is a flagrant interference, with a complete absence of respect for the democratic choice of French Polynesians and a hijacking of the decolonization principles established by the United Nations."

At the same time, the French government has grown to accept UN scrutiny of the decolonization process in New Caledonia following the 1998 Noumea Accord. A UN monitoring mission first traveled to New Caledonia in 1999, and the governments of France and New Caledonia even hosted a regional seminar of the UN Special Committee on Decolonization in Noumea in 2010. Another UN mission traveled to Noumea in March 2014, in the lead-up to crucial elections for New Caledonia's provincial assemblies and Congress.

Why does France hold such different attitudes toward self-determination for the Kanak people of New Caledonia and the Maohi people of French Polynesia? Many answers can be found in this important study by French scholar Jean-Marc Regnault, who teaches at the University of French Polynesia in Tahiti.

Regnault is a prolific author, in French, on the politics and history of French Polynesia, including the process that led to the establishment of the Centre d'expérimentation du Pacifique (Pacific Nuclear Testing Centre). He has written fascinating biographies of Pouvanaa a Oopa, the charismatic Tahitian nationalist metua (leader) who was falsely accused, jailed, and exiled as France began preparations for its nuclear-testing program at Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls.

Regnault's books are based on extensive archival research in Paris, Papeete, and Noumea, and this latest study is no exception. In 2011, the Assembly of French Polynesia under Speaker Jacqui Drollet commissioned Regnault to prepare a report on French attitudes toward decolonization. Between September and December 2011, Regnault burrowed through the diplomatic archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He focused on papers relating to France's relations with the United Nations between 1986 and 1995, from the height of the Kanak uprising to the final years of nuclear testing.

This book, the result of that research revised and updated, provides a detailed and compelling picture of French government attitudes toward self-determination and decolonization in France's Pacific dependencies.

Part 1 contrasts the fundamental differences between French law on self-determination (as outlined in article 53 of the 1958 French Constitution) and UN principles and practice regarding decolonization. Regnault charts French attitudes toward decolonization since the founding of the international body and especially since the key decolonization resolutions in 1960–1961.

He cites an internal note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in November 1986, at the height of diplomatic battles over New Caledonia's status at the United Nations: "We have never accepted resolutions 1514 (xv) and 1541 (xv), for which we abstained. . . . We have never accepted the legitimacy of the Special Committee on Decolonization, as directed by resolution 1564 (xvi), to propose the inscription of territories on the list of non-self-governing territories" (69–70).

Part 2 of the book looks at the debates leading to New Caledonia's reinscription on the UN list of non-self-governing territories through UNGA resolution 41/41 on 2 December 1986. The election in mid-1986 of conservative French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac and his Overseas Minister Bernard Pons soured relations with the Pacific Islands Forum. Australia and New Zealand joined their Melanesian neighbors to lobby in support of the Kanak independence coalition, the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS).

In fascinating detail, Regnault charts France's diplomatic maneuvers and efforts to ignore, delay, and then derail the 1986 UN resolution. Citing unpublished government memos and diplomatic cables, he shows how

France used its political and economic weight to encourage countries to abstain or oppose the resolution.

Cuba, although a member of the Decolonization Committee and the Non-Aligned Movement, was promised a soft ride at the next UN Human Rights Commission. Tunisia and French-speaking African nations were wooed based on solidarity with "francophonie" (people who share the French language and appreciate a similar culture). Newly independent Vanuatu was threatened with aid cuts, while Argentina was lobbied with offers of support in their dispute with the United Kingdom over the Falklands/Malvinas Islands.

French diplomats recorded the dilemma facing the United States, which "must take account of both French preoccupations and the much greater sensitivity of the friends whom we count on in this region" (99)—a reference to ANZUS allies Australia and New Zealand, who reluctantly supported the reinscription bid, concerned about perceived Soviet and Libyan advances in the South Pacific at the time.

The final section of the book follows the same debate over French Polynesia, comparing and contrasting the attitudes of successive French governments toward the two Pacific colonies. In January 2010, during a speech in Reunion, French President Nicolas Sarkozy stated that France's overseas territories "are French and will remain French." He stressed that for French Polynesia, there is "one red line that I will never accept should be crossed: that of independence."

These chapters culminate with an account of the successful 2013 cam-

paign for UN reinscription for French Polynesia. Maohi independence leader Oscar Manutahi Temaru and Senator for French Polynesia Richard Tuheia mobilized diplomatic assistance from Forum Island Countries and the Non-Aligned Movement, in the face of reservations from Canberra, Washington, and Paris. France's ambassador to the United Nations, Gérard Araud, worked hard—but unsuccessfully—to derail the effort by Pacific diplomats, believing “the question raised by Oscar Temaru must remain a franco-French affair, and the United Nations should not interfere with French political life, because France recognizes the right of people to self-determination. France challenges the legitimacy of the Decolonization Committee, as it has done since its creation in 1961” (77).

Today, the importance of international scrutiny of France's colonies is highlighted by a December 2013 UNGA resolution calling for a UN mission to study the environmental, health, and social impacts of thirty years of French nuclear testing.

The great strength of this book is the use of archival material and government documents to outline the perceptions of the French government as it engages with critics of its nuclear and colonial policies in the Pacific. As New Caledonia moves to a new political status, with a referendum on self-determination proposed before 2018, this analysis of French perspectives is all the more important.

There are occasional errors in dates and names (for example, it should be Ratu Sir Kamisese [not “Kimisese”] Mara) and the odd grating reference to “Anglo-Saxons.” But these minor problems are overshadowed by the

wealth of detailed analysis and compelling archival evidence.

Regnault's studies on nuclear testing, Tahitian nationalism, and French policy in the region deserve a wider audience in the anglophone Pacific. A translation of this book into English would serve scholars, policy makers, and the indigenous peoples who are seeking to end French colonialism in the twenty-first century.

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Tax Havens and Sovereignty in the Pacific Islands, by Anthony B Van Fossen. St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland ePress, 2012. ISBN 978-1-9219-0222-2; xi + 411 pages, map, references, index. eBook, A\$38.50.

Once viewed as pathways for former island colonies to create economic growth, tax havens in a post-September 11th world have increasingly been critiqued for their links to money laundering, corporate bankruptcies, fraud, political corruption, tax evasion, drug and arms shipments, and terrorism. But who do tax havens benefit and why do so many countries in the Pacific host them? Anthony Van Fossen provides a comprehensive, methodical account of how tax havens and offshore financial centers (OFCs) have proliferated across the Pacific region since the 1960s, arguing that they have “transformed the Pacific Islands” in which they are located. Van Fossen provides a new vision of the Pacific Ocean, dotted with tax havens and ships bearing flags of convenience, existing in a virtual space