BOOK REVIEWS

involve mobilization rather than analysis” (188).

It is a measure of the merit of Colonialism's Culture that it provokes disagreement that cannot be developed within the brief compass of this review. Some serious students of colonialism are still inclined to agree with Nicholas Dirks (Colonialism and Culture, 1992, 175) that the whole efflorescence of colonial discourse studies may have gone so far as to obscure essential historical and political issues. Thomas, to his credit, has created the kind of nuanced argument that can inform even those, like the reviewer, who stubbornly believe that analysis should begin with political economy before proceeding to issues of representation. Whatever one's position on such debates, this book can be highly recommended.

EUGENE OGAN
University of Minnesota

* * *


Historians have made several attempts to narrate the past of the Pacific Islands from ancient times to the present, but this is the first try at a regional overview for this century. As someone who has taught twentieth-century Pacific history for several years, I looked forward to this book's publication for its potential use as a classroom text. The results embody some of the strengths of the field today, and all of its limitations. They also demonstrate the challenges of editing an anthology.

A glance at the table of Contents produces mixed feelings. Of the eighteen contributors, only two are native to the Pacific Islands and only two are women. All but one are based in Australia (8), New Zealand (5), and Hawai'i (4); the sole exception is a Belgian who teaches at the French Pacific University in New Caledonia. Considering that JW Davidson became the first “Pacific” historian at the Australian National University forty-five years ago, those numbers and categories say a great deal about how far the field has “progressed.” Apparently three more indigenous Islanders, including two women, were asked to contribute, but one refused, one dropped out, and another wrote an essay that did not fit the book's format. Although references are cited in the notes at the end of each chapter, it would have been helpful to have a selected bibliography at the end of the book, and the three maps are all of the entire Pacific, not of subregions discussed in the chapters.

Even more dismaying are the chapter titles. Part 1, which deals with “Colonisation,” lives up to its topic by grouping everything according to colonizing powers, in combination with catch-all geographic terms that co-editor Howe, in his preface, describes as “flexible.” Some odd headings are yielded, such as “Britain, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand in Polynesia,” under which Roger Thompson
gamely includes Nauru and the Gilbert Islands. Ironically, Part 2, “Towards Decolonisation,” continues the colonial categories (without even geographic labels this time), except for Hugh Laracy’s chapter on World War Two. Part 3, weakly titled “Uncertain Times,” bravely turns thematic, but this change leads to repetitive overlapping, especially between the economic and social chapters (as is evidenced by Penelope Schoeffel’s referral of the reader to Bruce Knappman’s essay more than once). By the time we get to Lal’s concluding “The Passage Out,” a double-entendre comes to mind.

Lal’s chapter should come first, not last, to make up for the absence of editorial introductions to either parts or chapters. It is no secret that this book was a labor of frustration for the editors—some contributors wrote their essays five years ago—and that at the 1992 Pacific History Association conference in Christchurch, the whole project’s conceptual premise was challenged by postmodernists. While acknowledging the pitfalls of “totalizing metanarratives” on an intellectual level, I still think there is a need for this kind of book for beginning students in this field. The problem is, this book unintentionally lost much of its coherence somewhere along the way. Howe’s disclaimer that “editors get what they inspect, not always what they expect” (xvi) is not satisfying.

The mostly “old hands” chosen to contribute are well known and amply qualified, which is an asset, though the fact that some of them have been writing variations of this material for years tends to deprive the book of a certain freshness that new faces might have injected into the narrative. The most notable exception is Vilsoni Hereniko, whose chapter on “Representations of Cultural Identities” is lively and reflects his background in literature and drama, not history in the conventional manner. His opening image of the castrated coconut trees of Waikīkī is not only an apt metaphor for what outside domination has done to Pacific cultures. Nevertheless, Stewart Firth’s predictable chapter on strategic and nuclear issues generates some passion, and Peter Larmour manages to make the deadly topic “Political Institutions” surprisingly engaging (unlike Richard Herr, who at least had “nationalism” in his chapter heading).

Howe and Lal even provide some historiographic fireworks. Howe’s rather compressed preface links modern “Islander-oriented” studies to the very incomplete and often muted process of Pacific decolonization—which he says produced a “Romantic” emphasis on the precolonial and early contact eras, leaving the current century mainly to social scientists (several of whom are authors in part 3). Lal’s concluding introduction goes further, to make a good case for reexamining colonial exploitation and “fatal impact” alongside indigenous agency. The challenge of doing such “interactive” history is daunting for everyone in the Pacific field, not just the editors and authors of this volume. As Howe admits, “The main organization problem was to balance geographic coverage, chronology, and thematic investigation” (xv). That “balance,” unfortunately, has left agency (historical as well as historiographic) mostly in outside hands. Even Kiste’s chapter
on the United States fails to mention the 1975 Constitutional Convention in Micronesia, whereas Norman Meller's study of that event revealed considerable indigenous initiative.

After Kiste's familiar overview of precolonial times (including a quick synopsis of the late nineteenth-century scramble for colonies), Peter Hempenstall argues for the general "shapelessness" of imperial designs. Neither describes native resistance to colonial takeovers, which is particularly disappointing in Hempenstall's case, because he has written a great deal about the subject elsewhere. He would probably reply that resistance was not his assignment, but it would have made a more interesting chapter. Judith Bennett also avoids model-building in her chapter on "Holland, Britain, and Germany in Melanesia," but there is much more on indigenous response. Thompson includes the New Zealand Maori in his chapter, to his credit, and David Hanlon, in a chapter on Micronesia, gives the only real mention of Hawai'i before chapter 10 (Kiste's second chapter, on the post–World War II United States). Hanlon ably combines coverage of colonial domination (including ceremonies of possession) with native resistance, armed and otherwise. Stephen Henningham reworks material from his 1992 book on France in the Pacific, and Hugh Laracy synthesizes material from the growing subfield of World War II in the Pacific (though he gives the cause of the war short shrift).

Part 2 of this book demonstrates that one can portray the process of decolonization in the Pacific as being almost as outsider-inspired as colonization. Barrie Macdonald's chapter on Britain makes the often-heard argument that London's economizing "east of Suez," more than indigenous initiative, pushed colonies toward independence. Terence Wesley-Smith's chapter on Australia and New Zealand attributes preponderant roles to the United Nations and to Labour parties, though Australia's racial policy made it more reluctant than New Zealand to consider ongoing linkages with its Pacific colonies. The contrast between the "free association" (and outmigration) chosen by the Cooks and Niue, and the continuing struggle for recognition by New Zealand Maori, is striking. The same could be said, in Kiste's chapter, of the differences between the attitudes of American Samoans and Chamorros of the Northern Marianas toward the United States, and those native Hawaiians and the Chamorros of Guam. Paul de Deckker makes a similar distinction between Wallisian loyalty toward France and the relative nationalism of many Kanaks and Tahitians.

Such apparent contradictions cry for thematic analysis, but they tend to lose their salience in the remarkably disembodied chapters that follow. For example, despite her obvious strengths on Samoa and on gender relations (especially using literary evidence), Schoeffel's chapter reads more like sociology than anthropology, and Knapman's economic pessimism is deadening. Still, I shall try this book out on my students (in conjunction with other readings) because, after all is said and done, it contains much useful information. In fairness to the authors and editors, it should be
admitted that writing general histories is never easy and that packaging a region as diverse culturally and historically as the Pacific Islands is a bit of a conundrum. But this effort, sadly, is not what it could have been. Like the single-author pan-Pacific narratives that preceded it, it should inspire us to learn to do better.

David A Chappell
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

* * *


These two books have a lot in common, in their focus on the military in Papua New Guinea, but they are also very different in their approach and style of presentation. Ron May’s book is a brief but comprehensive analysis of an increasingly important issue in Papua New Guinea, the role of the military in the state. He sets out to show that there has been a fundamental change in the role of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and to explain why. The central theme is how the defense force, inherited at independence after a searching debate on whether it should be disbanded, and given an essentially external defense role, came to replace that external role with an internal one. An escalating law and order problem within the country, an increasing realization that it simply did not have a viable external role, and, finally, the Bougainville crisis, explain the shift.

The book has all the usual academic evidentiary appurtenances: copious footnotes, references, appendixes, glossary of acronyms and abbreviations, tables, and so on. The colonial origins of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and its anatomy, structure, organization, regional representation, and funding are covered. On all these, as on military-civil relations, the mission of the force, its civic action work, border operations, and maritime surveillance activities, May is informative, balanced, and crisp. Although he overlooks nothing of significance, he does not dwell very much on the many internal problems of the force, which, as Liria shows, have clearly contributed to the poor performance on Bougainville.

Yauka Liria’s book complements Ron May’s. It is a hilariously funny and entertaining book, despite dealing with such an appalling tragedy. An eleven-page appendix, giving a chronology of important events in the evolving Bougainville crisis from January 1990 to the end of June 1993, is the closest he comes to presenting his materials in the familiar academic manner. The book is simultaneously a reflective and racy personal account of the insurgency and counterinsurgency on the island of Bougainville, where Liria served as an intelligence officer.