women, portrayed quite vividly here, is also common, especially among the people from Malaita. We are also given some very acute observations about the emerging class structure in Solomon Islands and the kinds of divisions associated with it.

Besides reading this story for its observations on contemporary history, some will find its success as an indigenous autobiography of interest. In his introduction Burt explains the crucial role he played in the whole process, from recording the story through to translation and final editing. In translation, the style is more formal than it would have been in oral presentation, and lacks many of the devices used in storytelling, but there is still the unmistakable feel of a man from Malaita. It is likely that the overall narrative structure owes more to western conventions in writing biography than are found on Malaita and portrays his life more coherently and rounded than it really has been. The book reads episodically and was probably narrated in that way originally. It is also likely that Burt’s close association with Kwa’ioloa intensified some of the self-consciousness shown about tradition. However, these misgivings did not prevent me from reading this story in the spirit in which it has been presented, as one man’s attempt to engage with modern life, drawing constantly on the values and beliefs of the past.

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Imagine yourself on Matupit Island in Rabaul Harbour, the earth constantly shaking beneath your feet, yet the authorities advising over the radio to remain in your home. What do you do next? On the afternoon of 18 September 1994, the locals found these two pieces of information irreconcilable, and a voluntary exodus began that quickly engulfed the rest of Rabaul along the way. Within hours, the authorities were directing evacuees to Queen Elizabeth Park in the heart of Rabaul before organized transport arrived to begin a full-scale evacuation. During the night any form of vehicle was on the roads, and a constant stream of mothers with children and fathers with belongings either walked or drove away from Rabaul. By morning the two volcanoes at the entrance to Rabaul’s harbor—Mt Tavurvur to the east and Mt Vulcan (Kalamanagunan) to the west had begun erupting. Volcanic ash was to bury or destroy many homes in Rabaul or on the footslopes of the two volcanoes.
These two books present the story of the 1994 Rabaul eruptions from a largely social impact perspective. The first is Klaus Neumann’s account, which pieces together reminiscences from evacuees as well as those at a distance who provided food and shelter for the evacuees. The second is a compendium of original essays, by schoolchildren who entered a regional competition organized by the Department of East New Britain, edited by Klaus Neumann.

In Neumann’s account, Rabaul Yu Swit Moa Yet, chapters 1 to 7 deal with the history of the Rabaul volcanoes, previous eruptions, and the authorities’ disaster plans. Chapters 8 to 20 provide an account of the 1994 eruption and the evacuation of the area affected by it. Then chapters 21 to 36 are about the aftermath—how different groups coped with the loss of their homes, the government resettlement schemes, and how the locals are rebuilding their lives. The short and snappy chapter format allows one to pick it up and put it down with ease, as one follows a series of themes that make good reading. I found the introductory chapters unfamiliar and some local names and terms unexplained, but once you find the glossary of Kuanua terms at the back a great deal becomes understandable. The author has of course had to make numerous translations into English to make this account possible.

What is most memorable about this book is the record of a public response to an emergency situation before an official evacuation was recommended. The detailed account of how this came about and how law and order became a secondary matter makes this book a unique record of a societal response to a volcanic eruption. The author faces up to all aspects of the response, including a chapter on looting that I found delicately, sensitively, and sincerely written, avoiding the hype one might expect from the media. How the evacuees coped or didn’t cope is all recorded, together with the complex issues associated with resettlement schemes.

I found the book a slightly unusual account, written with an almost personal touch, and one that will occupy a distinct niche in the literature on societal impacts of volcanic eruptions and a must for students of the subject. If I had one criticism it was the numerous location names in the text that do not appear on the maps. For the foreigner this makes following the events and movements that little bit harder to envisage.

The second book, Tavurvur I Puongo, surprised me by its content. Klaus Neumann has done a terrific job of translating many of the original student essays into English and then editing them all into a series of coherent annotated and abbreviated accounts. The innocence and sincerity with which these children record their impressions is so well conveyed it can be emotional for the reader at times. I only hope that some of these children grow up to become professional writers in Papua New Guinea and to develop their innate skills of observation and description. A memorable essay by Michaeline Kuvil is one precious example. It finishes “I feel proud of the people of East New Britain even though I’m from Daru.
and the Duke of York Islands. They experienced pain and hardship but were quiet. They harboured no anger or bad feelings. Although they lost many of their belongings, I have never heard the people of Rabaul complain about their losses. They acted as though these things happened all the time. But, oh Rabaul, will you be what you were before? I'm really hoping. Rabaul, you were so beautiful, colourful, peaceful and loved by everyone in the country."

The competition was a superb idea, and the teachers of the region should be congratulated for encouraging it. Again, one small criticism—the map at the beginning is very poorly reproduced, so that one cannot read the thicknesses of tephra (isopach lines or 'ground falling out of the sky' lines) very well.

Congratulations are due to Klaus Neumann for bringing this information together in an entertaining and informative format. While the volcanological perspective has been and will continue to be covered by other specialists, the societal response has to be recorded at the time or it is lost forever.

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