Book and Media Reviews
Flores and Vince Reyes about the development of a Chamorro arts movement in Guam offer differing but complementary perspectives. Flores presents a general introduction to Chamorro crafts and visual arts while Reyes provides new insights from the perspective of a practitioner, teacher, and prominent proponent of Chamorro cultural dance. Reyes’s succinct essay resembles a cultural arts survey and offers a potential model for those interested in reconnecting with and promoting cultural dance in communities where interest has waned.

The essays, reflections, and interviews by artists and practitioners that make up the final chapters are unique and insightful contributions that reflect on and respond to the professional challenges that artists in the Pacific Islands confront. The late Jim Vivieaere’s interview with his friend and colleague Shigeyuki Kihara is a reminder of what so many adored and respected about Vivieaere as an artist, curator, and pivotal figure in the Pacific arts community. The dialogue delves into Kihara’s background, inspiration, and strategies and reminds readers that Pacific artists are inspired by and engaged with global art communities in addition to local and regional associations.

Overall, the large format feels like a textbook with the advantage of more space for the numerous color images, which include a balance of well-known and unfamiliar art works. Although I was distracted by typographical errors, editorial inconsistencies, and even inaccuracies, the collection pulls together a wide variety of information and perspectives on subjects that deserve even more consideration.

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Jean-Marc Regnault has been a prolific historian at the University of French Polynesia since 1984. He also helps to organize conferences and edit their proceedings, including a 2003 collection on the era of President François Mitterrand in the Pacific and a forthcoming collection from the March 2011 conference in Noumea on comparative political statutes in Oceania. This review focuses on (1) the English edition of proceedings from a conference held in Paris in 2008 that addressed the twentieth anniversary of the 1988 Matignon-Oudinot Accords and the tenth anniversary of the 1998 Noumea Accord and (2) a collection
Today, both Kanaky/New Caledonia and Ma’ohi Nui/French Polynesia have statutes that accord them political autonomy, a vague term (like free association) whose negotiated contents can vary depending on the time and place. The territory of New Caledonia had received a form of ministerial self-government in the 1950s, but President Charles de Gaulle took that away in the 1960s in order to maintain control over local nickel mining, which he regarded as a strategic resource. Such a unilateral regression led to the rise of an anticolonial movement for independence that culminated in the 1980s Kanak revolt. The uprising forced Paris and local settlers to the negotiating table after 135 years of French rule by decree. The 1988 Matignon-Oudinot Accords created three provinces, enabled indigenous Kanak to control two of them democratically, and promised economic “rebalancing”; the 1998 Noumea Accord officially recognized Kanak identity and custom and institutionalized increasing self-government with a possible referendum on independence to be held between 2014 and 2019.

The 2008 Paris conference assembled political actors and scholars to reflect on the outcomes of the two agreements. *New Caledonia Twenty Years On*, the English version of the proceedings, includes valuable discussions among the participants. The overall tone was festive—unsurprisingly, given its state financing. Michel Rocard, the prime minister who helped to negotiate the Matignon Accords, felt relieved (as a socialist) that the current struggle in the territory was not one of ethnic violence but rather of labor unions battling for social justice, which he saw as “spectacular progress toward modernity” (26). He suggested that since France had given up its own currency and defense to the European Union and NATO, New Caledonia should not take on those “reserved powers” but leave them to France. He also raised the issue of the weakest local identity formation in the triad—that of the Caldoches, or settlers, whose ties to France are changing under an autonomy that enshrines Kanak as the indigenous people. The two peace accords ascribed “double legitimacy” to the two communities, but loyalists to France live between two worlds, metaphorically, which are located on opposite sides of the globe, in Oceania and Europe.

Rocard cautioned, “One must be wary of excessively brutal words. What we wanted to achieve there was a partial and progressive change in sovereignty” (27). Kanak speakers such as Déwé Gorodé, Rock Wamytan, and Caroline Machoro gave the audience a history lesson, reiterated the goals and sacrifices of the Kanak struggle, including the 1983 Nainville-les-Roches agreement that settlers refused to sign but in which Paris recognized the innate right of Kanak to independence. Gorodé, a longtime activist and vice president of the territorial cabinet in 2008, said the accords were based on trust, which “grows and is strengthened, one day at a time, through acts and deeds” (43). French Overseas Territories Minister Yves Jego said the causes of the 1980s Kanak revolt were “obscure” (35), but Machoro, who signed the 1988
accords in place of her assassinated husband, called the massive wave of immigration in the 1970s “a new colonization” that shattered New Caledonian autonomy and harmony (49). Wamytan, who is now president of the local congress, added that the former Kanak deputy to Paris, Rock Pidjot (his grandfather), had said that the revocation of autonomy after a 1958 settler riot in Noumea had interrupted preparation for independence, which had to begin again after the Kanak leadership was “beheaded” by assassinations in the 1980s (57). Wamytan was a key negotiator of the Noumea Accord.

Pain, distrust, and missed opportunities in New Caledonia linger on in remembered pasts. Alain Rollat, a journalist who wrote about martyred Kanaky President Jean-Marie Tjibaou, recalled that Djubelly Wea, who killed Tjibaou after the independence leader signed the Matignon Accords, had felt humiliated after being imprisoned for the 1988 Ouvea uprising and not being allowed to participate in the negotiations, much as Yann Uregei had felt humiliated in 1975 when Paris political leaders refused to hear his call for restored autonomy (95). Jean-Yves Faberon, a legal scholar at the University of New Caledonia, argued that since the peace accords, New Caledonia has a relationship with France of “double federalism,” in that the three provinces each have a degree of internal autonomy, as does the territory, externally, from Paris. The sui generis entity, however, can neither be “completely married” to France nor “absolutely divorced” from it if it seeks a “common destiny” for all the local communities, as prescribed by the Noumea Accord (128). Gaby Paita, a venerable leader in Kanak politics, observed that Kanak had offered recognition to the settlers as fellow “victims of history” in 1983, without success, and that federalism was originally proposed by his party in 1980, so he was now happy to hear it endorsed (129). These are just some of the dialogues contained in this useful volume, as the country’s leaders negotiate a decision on future political status in this decade. The forthcoming proceedings of the 2011 Noumea conference on the latter topic should also prove informative. Toward the end of that recent event, co-organizer Regnault observed that France still does not adequately understand its overseas territories (Destins des collectivités politiques d’Océanie, by Jean-Yves Faberon, Viviane Fayaud, and Jean-Marc Regnault, vol 2, 778 [2011]).

That critical perspective emerges in Regnault’s 2006 book, La France à l’opposé d’elle-même, although it is published only in French. Regnault’s scholarship is well researched, and he updates his interpretations when he finds new evidence, for example, on the trumped-up arrest of Tahitian nationalist Pouvanaa a Oopa in 1958 (Pouvanaa a Oopa: Victime de la Raison d’État, 2003), or on local independence/autonomist politics (Tai: Oscar Temaru, Gaston Flosse; Le Pouvoir Confisqué, 2004). The essays in his 2006 collection address French colonization in Tahiti and the post-World War II attempt by de Gaulle to revive national prestige by implanting his movement and starting nuclear testing in the French Pacific. In his introduction Regnault argues that since 1791, republican France has failed to apply
its own principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity to its overseas possessions; in fact the French constitution of that year specifically excluded colonies from its jurisdiction. In 1885, under the Third Republic, Premier Jules Ferry said frankly that the “civilizing mission” justified the right, even the duty, of “superior races” to rule “inferior races” who had not asked for French authority (10). The book’s title, “France opposed to itself,” addresses the failure of France to live up to its self-image in its colonies, particularly in the Pacific, where the French nuclear testing program in the Tuamotu atolls near Tahiti began after the United States, Britain, and Soviet Union signed a treaty to cease above-ground atomic blasts. Only recently has France agreed to pay compensation to military personnel, workers, and residents for medical problems arising from the 1966–1974 time period, but not, thus far, from the underground testing in those atolls from 1974 to 1996.

But Regnault also examines French colonization before the atomic-bomb-testing era, mainly in Tahiti and surrounding islands but also in New Caledonia. In the first part of the 2006 text, he reveals the machinations of Free French implantations in the French Pacific territories during World War II. Gaullist agents tried to graft themselves onto settler desires for autonomy, until indigenous nationalists appropriated that goal and Paris consequently reversed course, most notably in New Caledonia. He shows, as Kim Munholland has also done (Rock of Contention, 2005), that Gaullist officials in the latter colony did not get along well with US military leaders during the war, much as de Gaulle himself clashed with US and British allies and even with elements of the anti-Nazi resistance in France. Regnault, as a supporter of Temaru’s independence movement today, suggests that postwar efforts by Françoise Mitterrand to nurture Tahitian allies in favor of decentralization led inadvertently to an alliance between Gaston Flosse’s autonomists and metropolitan Gaullists that remained dominant for over a generation. Some critics have suggested that perspective is metro-centric because it ascribes too much influence to outside actors, but Regnault does highlight some revealing political connections.

The second part of the book, on the nuclear issue, predates the passage in Paris of the 2009 compensation law for nuclear radiation victims of the 1966–1974 aboveground testing era. He reprints the article that was translated into English for the Dialogue section of The Contemporary Pacific in 2005, with some updates that go beyond standard French claims that Labor parties in New Zealand and Australia, as well as Protestant churches, stirred up antinuclear sentiments among indigenous peoples in the South Pacific and that the region is fortunate today that France chose to remain and prevent the “instability” in Melanesia and other parts of Oceania due to globalization. Regnault notes that the Oscar Temaru presidency raised the nuclear contamination issue again in 2004 and that French scientists were also voicing concerns, although in this 2006 essay he suggests that climate change and sea-level rise are perhaps more imminent problems. In a follow-up essay, Regnault
urges further scholarly research to replace emotional concerns with more “Cartesian” analysis, saying that nuclear accidents clearly occurred but Paris has not been transparent on the issue. He even proposes a French Polynesian version of the Noumea Accord, to rectify the silences and shady actions of Paris, for example in the case of Pouvana’a’s trumped-up imprisonment.

In the final section of the book, Regnault examines the search for an appropriate country name for French Polynesia. Because of the political and cultural differences among its five archipelagoes, Regnault asks whether an internal federation is in order. He presents an overview of fluctuations in French policy toward the territory since 1842, from military conquest through tight control to a glimpse of autonomy to retrenchment after 1958 (as in New Caledonia, this time due to plans for nuclear testing). Restored autonomy has evolved since 1977, but French state interests remain paramount in policy making (as in Paris’s criticism of Temaru’s trip to the United Nations in 2011 to promote independence). In his concluding reflection on France in the region, Regnault retains his opening critique of Parisian views of indigenous peoples: “We teach them that universal suffrage is the best of all things, but we defeat the [electoral] result in authoritarian ways—when we have not twisted it—if it displeases the French authorities. . . . How can we find ourselves again and make colonizing nations loved?” (222).

Based on my knowledge of Jean-Marc, I would suggest that final sentence starts off sincere and then turns partly sardonic, perhaps expressing a hope for better relationships in the future. Although a French state employee, Regnault is also a historian worth listening to because of his hardworking scholarship, even if we might not share all of his interpretations.

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The underlying and timely theoretical question of Steadfast Movement around Micronesia is how cultures integrate and interpret mobility on their own terms. In Micronesia, where societies are commonly matrilineal—that is, social, political, and economic life and identity are focused foremost on female lines of descent, their land holdings, and named homesties—it seems that women stay and men move to provide labor for their own and their wives’ lineages and clans. Altogether, Bautista argues, the question of mobility has been obscured by anthropologists’ depictions of these small island societies as being immobile (45). Consequently, this book provides us with an invaluable case study of “[h]ow people from Chuuk move about, and their cultural interpretations of movement itself” (2).

Bautista first encountered Chuukese