The primary purpose of this book is to produce an explanation of the rebellion, even if historians and social scientists are bound to read it in search of one. Quodling’s main intent is to “set the record straight” about the role of his company in the history of Bougainville and Papua New Guinea—for the benefit of an Australian audience that might otherwise be misled by what Quodling would certainly regard as mischievous left-wing propaganda. Much of the book is taken up with a recitation of well-known facts and figures, and the appendixes are largely devoted to the reproduction of various reports and articles that have at least excused, if not exonerated, Bougainville Copper Limited from the charges of exploitation and oppression. In this respect Quodling is taking part in a debate where attitudes toward the Bougainville rebellion appear to be polarized between those “leftists” who think that multinational corporations are wicked uncles and all their opponents (including Francis Ona) are therefore heroes, and those “rationalists” who think that multinational corporations are good citizens and all their opponents (including Father Momis) are therefore villains. This polarization does not make a great deal of sense in Papua New Guinea, where attitudes toward the Bougainville rebellion have now largely been separated from attitudes toward the multinational corporation, and where the struggle between organization and disorganization is far more significant than the battle between capitalists and socialists. Perhaps Paul Quodling’s corporate and political loyalties in Australia have largely prevented him from telling a much more interesting story about his personal experience of Bougainville and the Melanesian Way.

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Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s deserved reputation as a statesman, climaxied by the irony and tragedy of his death at the hands of a disaffected member of his own Kanak independence movement, ensured his post-mortem cult status. It also guaranteed a rash of instant publications of the “I knew Jean-Marie” variety. Happily, Helen Fraser’s book is not one such, though Tjibaou’s determined, funny, reasonable presence looms ever larger in her account of living and working as an Australian journalist in New Caledonia from 1982 to 1985. By adopting an explicitly autobiographical mode, she largely avoids the snare of name-dropping, though there are hints enough of privileged access to the highest councils of the FLNKS (Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front) and personal friendship with its leaders.

Helen Fraser arrived in Noumea early in 1982 as correspondent for Radio Australia, the Melbourne Age and Pacific Islands Monthly. She had a knowledge of French and sympathy for radical causes, but was young, inexperienced, and largely unfamiliar with the territory. I saw her often at the end of that year and thought her lonely, naive,
and badly shaken by the unrelenting personal hostility that her commentaries inspired in some European anti-independence extremists. Two years later, though under severe strain during an often-violent political crisis, she had taken the measure of the job, become far more assured, and enjoyed resident expert status among the foreign journalists who flocked to the territory at this time.

*Your Flag’s Blocking Our Sun* sets Fraser’s experiences against a backdrop of stirring events: the invasion of the Territorial Assembly by anti-independence activists in 1982; the killing of two gendarmes and a young Kanak in 1983; the formation of the FLNKS followed by the escalating confrontations of 1984–1985. Election boycott, roadblocks, the siege of the east-coast township of Thio, and deaths on both sides culminated in the horrific murder of ten Kanak at Hienghène. Early in 1985 the death of a young European provoked a weekend orgy of riot and destruction by anti-independents in Noumea, which Fraser and her young son Christopher endured in hourly terror of attack. While Noumea burned, the Kanak leader Eloi Machoro and his lieutenant were killed by elite gendarme sharpshooters in the bush near La Foa. Not long afterward the Frasers quit the political pressure-cooker of Noumea for Australia, where Fraser became the founder and editor of the respected newsletter *Pacific Report*. In an epilogue she describes the assassination and official funeral of Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene in 1989.

The book is informed by no great political or social insight, but the tale it tells is gripping and sometimes touching. The author strikes a nice balance between affairs of moment and mundanity. She captures beautifully the supercharged emotions, the brooding violence, the uncertainty, the missed opportunities, the frustrated goodwill, the developing culture of crisis, fueled by rumor, punctuated by riot, and orchestrated by briefings and rival demonstrations, that became familiar to all who knew New Caledonia during the 1980s. Use of an autobiographical style permits her deftly to interweave public affairs with a more personal dimension: Christopher’s growing-up; a canoe trip from the Isle of Pines to Noumea; hilarity and sorrow shared with Kanak women friends; the solemnity and farce of cricket played by another culture’s rules; journalistic camaraderie, despite editorial political differences.

This entertaining book aptly conveys the physical and political flavor of contemporary Noumea. However, there is little mention of the Polynesians, predominantly Wallisians, who constitute nearly 20 percent of the territory’s population and are a formidable element in the anti-independence armory. The author’s constant recourse to sweeping labels limits the subtlety of her political analysis, particularly of anti-independence groups—“the Caldoches,” “the right,” “the extreme right,” even “the Kanaks” (which should be “Kanak,” since the word is invariable in number and gender)—despite the fact that she herself was keenly, and often thankfully, aware that individuals do not always act according to the stereotypes we lump them under.
I found few errors, typographical or otherwise, but the following should be noted: Belep comprises not one, but two islands (24, 78); "Melanesia 2000," (not "Melanesian") (64); Paicî and Cèmuhi are separate languages, rather than a single language (154); the massacre of 5 December 1985 occurred in the Hienghène valley, not the Tiendanite valley (176); "colonade” pines should be “columnar” (179); Jacques Chirac was not “President of France” (212).

The Kanak struggle for independence during the 1980s has spawned numerous books, many by journalists. Helen Fraser’s personal account makes fewer pretensions than most to definitiveness and political objectivity, and is all the more convincing for it.

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This recent publication from Stanford University Press is remarkable for the tight focus and integration of the contributions. Each of the ten ethnographic papers analyzes a “disentangling” activity that occurs within a Pacific community, and despite the considerable variation between these activities the authors’ focus on discourse and context allows considerable scope for comparison. This is further facilitated by the common theoretical perspective of the contributions, which seek to integrate contemporary linguistic and psychological anthropology. Indeed, the introductory chapter is for the most part a detailed comparison of the various disentangling events, first in terms of the shared ethnopsychological understandings of persons and emotion that frame them, and second in terms of the social structural forces that produce and are reproduced by disentangling activities, particularly in relation to power and social hierarchy. The authors of the ethnographic case studies are also careful to refer to one another’s papers, and other relevant publications, to maintain this focus on regional comparison.

The editors explain that they prefer the metaphoric term “disentangling” to “conflict resolution” or “dispute management” because it “points to elements of local meaning that organize and guide the activities we examine” (351). “Disentangling”, like “straightening”—another metaphor that recurs in these studies—is concerned with the process rather than the outcome of these activities. Outcomes are of course considered in these studies, but the main focus is on the activities themselves and in particular on the “situated conflict talk” that occurs at disentangling events (4). All but one paper are based on transcripts of recorded discourse, and eight of the ten ethnographic papers provide partial transcripts as appendixes. Half provide vernacular transcriptions with the English translations, while the others give only the English version.

After the introductory chapter that constitutes Part 1, Part 2 contains four