

Book and Media Reviews

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stone in the understanding of these political developments.

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France in the South Pacific: Power and Politics, by Denise Fisher. Canberra: ANU Press, 2013. ISBN paper 978-1-9221-4494-2; ISBN e-book 978-1-9221-4495-9, xxiii + 342 pages, maps, appendixes, bibliography. Paper, A\$28.00; e-book, free download.

Denise Fisher makes a timely and unique addition to studies of the French-speaking Pacific with *France in the South Pacific*. Working to convey French thinking on the Pacific for an English-speaking audience, she offers important historical context for the forthcoming referendum on independence in New Caledonia and the recent reinscription of French Polynesia on the United Nations' list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Fisher's service as an Australian diplomat in the French Pacific provides a distinctive lens through which she appraises, analyzes, and presents the role of France in past, present, and future Pacific worlds. Her analysis focuses primarily on politics and economics, with close attention to the intersections of France and Australia over the last century and the potential for closer ties between them as two of the larger powers in the South Pacific. *France in the South Pacific: Power and Politics* makes a clear argument that France will be a significant regional player as the twenty-first century unfolds.

The work is divided into three main parts, beginning with expansive coverage of the French Pacific presence before 1996. Fisher broadly outlines the motives for French colonization, the evolution of colonial administration, and the often-ambiguous French policies toward development and local political rights in the colonies. She suggests that French motivations in the Pacific act as a source of thematic continuity as national prestige, national security, and latent commercial ambitions drive French policy in each period. Notably, these policy orientations explain decisions to grant or rescind local autonomy, detonate nuclear devices, bomb the Greenpeace vessel *Rainbow Warrior*, or deploy special forces to storm the cave on Ouvéa to end the 1988 hostage crisis.

The second part of the book follows the end of nuclear testing in French Polynesia in 1996 and devotes most of its pages to the political shifts, debates, and elections in New Caledonia after the 1998 Noumea Accord in anticipation of an eventual vote on independence. This period is characterized by experimentation with new policies on the part of the French state in its shifting responses to autonomy and independence demands from its Pacific territories. Frequently, however, the state's meddling in local politics is argued to have produced mixed results, as attempts to ensure that pro-French political parties remained strong sometimes misfired or backfired. The final section of the book examines the continuing motivations for France to remain in the Pacific: the international prestige of being a global military power and the commercial potential of its vast exclusive

economic zones, submarine resources, and mineral reserves. Fisher asserts that France holds the potential to be a regional leader through its example of good democratic governance; through its ability to provide relief, aid, or expertise; and finally as a pillar of political stability as it resolves complex local issues of autonomy or even independence.

Fisher highlights the changing Pacific context in which France transitioned from an intense imperial rivalry with Great Britain in the nineteenth century, to part of a European brotherhood of colonial powers in the early twentieth, to a colonial holdout in an era of decolonization and independence at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. This transformation has greatly affected France's diplomatic standing in the Pacific. Its reputation has frequently suffered when the state has acted unilaterally as though it was still a dominant colonial power unconcerned with the opinions of Island states or local publics. Fisher attributes this disconnect to the physical and mental distance between Paris and the Pacific. This distance becomes visible in enduring French national mentalities that figure the Pacific as economically insignificant and lightly populated, even though it comprises a geographically substantial part of France's maritime territory. France has in the past acted as a distant government rather than as a regional power. Fisher presents this conundrum as a question of whether France can be said to be "of" the Pacific or merely "in" the Pacific and concludes that while France has so far acted as an outsider, it could become an insider through

greater regional engagement by the metropolitan government and greater autonomy for its Pacific territories to network economically, culturally, and politically with neighboring Island states and territories.

This book provides a valuable and detailed overview of political change in the French Pacific. Fisher's primary focus is often on New Caledonia rather than French Polynesia or Wallis and Futuna, though the latter two entities are addressed in the text. New Caledonia presents as a harbinger for change in the Pacific and for France's larger overseas territories as it prepares for an eventual referendum on independence. Fisher does not see independence as a likely result based on election trends over the past decade, which have continued to lean pro-France. Furthermore, the economic dependency of New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and French Polynesia on France and the high quality-of-life expectations of Island residents make a complete break from France unlikely. Fisher believes France to be a valuable regional partner for Australia, and so its continued presence in the Pacific would appear to be significantly in the interest of Australia. As long as France can manage autonomy and independence demands through democratic and clear means, it will remain a stable bulwark among Australia's Melanesia neighbors.

The book is well researched, presents a thought-provoking summary of France's Pacific past, and raises important questions about its Pacific future. Fisher's high-level connections and her diplomatic experience contribute significantly to the wide range of personal sources she is able to employ.

The author makes a unique contribution to English-language studies of the French Pacific with her analyst's eye and diplomatic perspective on the actions of the French state. Fisher cautions both France and observers of the French Pacific that "the predictabilities of the past are giving way to the challenges of the future" (7). With the twenty-first century, like centuries before, being heralded as the "Pacific Century," as Fisher argues, France is well positioned to play a significant role, though what role that is, remains to be seen.

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Mining Capitalism: The Relationship between Corporations and Their Critics, by Stuart Kirsch. Oakland: University of California Press, 2014. ISBN cloth 978-0-520-28170-7, paper 978-0-520-28171-4, e-book 978-0-520-95759-6, xiii + 314 pages, maps, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$65.00; paper or e-book, US\$29.95.

The world history of mining is drama and disaster ridden. In this respect, the Ok Tedi gold mine in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is emblematic in terms of environmental destruction and degradation, social violence, and the complex legacies of the project's promise of economic development and well-being. As Stuart Kirsch reminds us, "Ok Tedi was the first mining project approved by the postcolonial government of Papua New Guinea, which acquired its independence from Australia in 1975" (19). This book is about how that story turned into a bit-

ter combination of ecological disaster, legal processes, and what Kirsch terms a failed politics of time and successful politics of space. "Although the Yonggom and their neighbors initially welcomed the mine and the opportunity it portended, they quickly became troubled by the impact on the environment and their subsistence practices" (34-35). Actually, the "colliding ecologies" (chapter 1) of local livelihoods and mining activity impacts resulted by the early 1980s in a devastating "micro-economics of resource curse" (30-33).

Mining Capitalism can be read at two levels. First, it is a story of mining disaster and indigenous resistance, which Kirsch follows in multiple places and arenas and of which he has been part (11), notably including his involvement in the Mines and Communities Network studied in chapter 6 (194-198, 258n3). Second, the book provides the reader with an analysis of "the dialectical relationship between corporations and their critics [that] has become a permanent structural feature of neoliberal capitalism" (3). A brief summary of the book's narrative will be useful before commenting on the second level of reading. Ultimately, taken together the two readings raise interesting questions in terms of interpretation, ethnographic method, and the positioning of contemporary fieldworkers in local and transnational capital contexts.

The Ok Tedi story is told in the first half of the book from the indigenous point of view. This telling vividly exposes the strategy developed by mine-affected communities, or more precisely some of their leaders, to build alliances with activists, environ-