

## *The Pacific: A Poisoned Nuclear Lake*

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*Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, by Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson. Ringwood, VIC: Penguin Books Australia, 1986. xv + 323 pp, maps. A\$9.95.

*Nuclear Playground*, by Stewart Firth. South Sea Books, Pacific Islands Studies Program. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987. xii + 176 pp, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. US\$15.95.

*American Lake: Nuclear Peril in the Pacific*, by Peter Hayes, Lyuba Zarsky, and Walden Bello. Ringwood, VIC: Penguin Books Australia, 1986. xiv + 529 pp, maps, tables, figures, photographs, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. A\$14.95.

These three impressive books complement each other very well. Each is centered on the same human-made disaster: the transformation of the Pacific Ocean into a nuclear lake where the United States and Britain used to explode nuclear devices, and where France still does; where three of the nuclear powers (the United States, the Soviet Union, and China) continue to test missiles; and where the United States and the Soviet Union are prepared for the possibility of nuclear war. Why is this so? In the search for an explanation, let me list and reflect on some of the issues raised in the books.

Basic to an understanding of the modern nuclear predicament is an awareness of the United States' partici-

pation in the Pacific War of 1931-1945, the war Americans tend to think started on 7 December 1941. Historically, the war followed America's westward, primarily naval, expansion of the nineteenth century that led to the "opening" of Japan, Korea, and the Ryukyus and the annexation of Hawai'i, Guam, and the Philippines. Japan, an emerging rim power with an expansionist agenda of its own, overreacted; the United States earned an old-fashioned victory. The war gave the United States total control of the Pacific basin, and the resultant feeling of entitlement must have been considerable, particularly as the war was not fought on the principal combatants' homelands, but in a region populated by numerically and militarily inferior island peoples, who were easily subjugated, colonized, even annexed (as had happened in Hawai'i). The United States saw itself as a liberator, preempting the efforts of a rival power, much as Japan had seen itself in the western Pacific relative to the classical European colonizers. The Korean War and the related graduation of Japan from the status of vanquished foe to anticommunist ally, a role the conservative Japanese leadership assumed easily, served to cement the pattern of American dominance.

Second is the nuclear finale to the Pacific war. Inscribed in the nuclear ashes and the deaths of hundreds of thousands (some after microseconds, others after years of great agony), the war's epitaph changed everything. The victims, in addition to being presum-

ably hostile civilians of an enemy nation, shared three major characteristics. They were unable to retaliate, having no nuclear capability of their own; they were comfortably far away, so that the secondary effects (fallout) would not affect the deliverers of the bombs; and—perhaps most significant—they were of a different race. In my opinion, these three features—defenselessness, physical distance, and racial difference—remain the prerequisites for using nuclear weapons. But the nuclear arsenals are for threat rather than for use, because their use is simply too risky, a fact that some Third World countries seem to understand. The result has been the proliferation so deeply deplored by the nuclear nations, particularly the United States. Proliferation makes nuclear retaliation possible, if not by using costly, easily observable missiles (that may even be interdicted), then by smuggling warheads into target countries such as the United States. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have established a precedent; other nations and groups want the ability to issue nuclear threats.

Third is the persistence of residual colonialism in the Pacific. Almost all territories remaining under some form of colonial rule are found in the Pacific, more particularly among the South Pacific islands (if we do not count Hawai'i). The reasons for this are disturbingly clear: these are small entities scattered over a sparsely populated ocean and unable to mobilize independence movements strong enough to impress a colonizer. There is some difference between holding onto India and holding onto Christmas Island, or

between maintaining control over Algérie "française" and "French" Polynesia, but the moral issue is the same. It is simply obscene to arrogate to oneself the right to exploit another's land, ocean resources, and even population, for a variety of purposes—especially for nuclear testing or as potential nuclear battlefields.

Fourth is the power of money to bolster colonialism and its remnants. To some extent, all people can be bought, one way or another, through the unwritten rules defining our jobs, or even our citizenships. When we are thus deprived of basic human rights, we speak of bribery, not denying that bribery sometimes works to the advantage of our national interests, as we perceive them. But the costs of bribery are proportionate to the size of the population bribed. Only rich countries can afford it—the capitalist West rather than the socialist East—and the targets are almost always small nations. Puerto Rico, "American" Samoa, and most South Pacific islands can be bought off; Cuba and most South American countries cannot. Negative economic power can also be exercised in the interests of the nuclear powers, as when France forced a partial capitulation of the Lange government in the *Rainbow Warrior* affair by threatening a boycott of New Zealand not only by France but by the entire European Community.

Fifth is the profound and total contempt of the colonial powers for the peoples of the region and all aspects of their history and culture. That Islanders are clearly seen as less valuable in the human hierarchy than white Euro-Americans is at the root of the eloquent

silence that greets the key question, "Why not do the testing at home?"

Underlying the silence are the assumptions that indigenous peoples do not suffer as much as Euro-Americans would; life in the islands is both cheap and abundant; the people are used to diseases, and to moving and being moved; given something to play with they will remain smiling, happy Islanders unless troublemakers from the outside intervene.

Sixth, the United States started it all. The other two Western powers followed suit, with France, in particular, overdoing it. The justification that the Soviet Union had bases in Vietnam was not valid until 1978; by then the United States had been in the nuclear business in the area for more than a generation. A glance at a map shows very convincingly which of the two has the more forward, offensive posture and which the more defensive. What the United States is complaining about is not rivalry, but the loss of its monopoly.

Seventh, the complexity of the nuclear issue in the Pacific is largely unrecognized outside the region, not because the basic facts are unknown, but because the full political impact is poorly understood. Eurocentrism causes Europeans and most Americans, North and South, to focus on the Atlantic theater, disregarding the fact that the major East-West wars since 1945 have taken place in the Pacific hemisphere, in Korea and Indochina. Whereas in Europe the situation is highly structured, with numerous popular movements capable of reporting and protesting, in the Pacific the nuclear powers feel much less constrained. Close encounters, such as

near or real collisions between submarines, are more likely to occur here.

Eighth, some of the world's potentially most troublesome areas, where fires of conflict continue to smolder, are located in the Pacific. East-West conflict in Europe has withered away, with a whimper, since the Helsinki accords were signed. No dispute worth a war remains between the major European power blocs. Sources of potential conflict exist only within the major alliances (Ulster, Greece-Turkey, Romania-Hungary). Even the conflict in the Middle East is probably approaching a slow dissolution, with the move toward the formation of an independent Palestinian state. In the Pacific hemisphere, however, two extremely difficult issues are still far from being solved, in Korea and the Philippines. A flare-up on the intra-Korean border, or a replay of the Cuban Revolution in the Philippines could have dire, far-reaching consequences, given the inability of the United States to assess such events in a more historical and culturally specific perspective.

Ninth, the only positive aspect of the situation involves the dialectic of action and reaction. Press hard, and you get counter-pressure in the end. Antinuclear and antimilitary movements are found all over the world, tightly linked to movements for political and economic independence and cultural self-assertiveness. The United States and France see these movements as highly problematic, especially since Britain has wisely withdrawn from asserting any residual colonial powers. Why did the first serious blow to the American system of alliances, after de

Gaulle's actions in 1965–1966, come from a small nation in the South Pacific—New Zealand? Precisely because the situation is more precarious and the nuclear powers are even more arrogant in the Pacific, where, seeing it as empty, they behave like tank commanders in the Libyan desert during the Second World War. The nuclear free zones and antinuclear policies that have been declared as a result may be more or less effective, but they definitely constitute a departure from apathy, complacency, and acquiescence. Ultimately, nuclear colonialism carries the seeds of its own undoing—the only question is *when*.

These themes are found, in one way or another, in each of the three books. The authors differ in style, but they all write with the passion of people deeply identified with the region. The Daniels-sons' focus, in the words of the subtitle, is on "French nuclear colonialism in the Pacific," particularly Polynesia. In sixty-two chapters, the history of French deceit and conceit is spelled out, written in a terse, passionate style, not without a certain biting humor. Regardless of one's political affiliation, the incredible arrogance of the French government is very well described and documented, although the usual apparatus of index, references, and end-notes would have been useful. The authors' detailed account of exactly how things happened is indispensable. The reader relives the incidents and will probably tend to agree with the conclusion drawn: "As this account of the post-war history of Polynesia shows, the sad truth is that the French government, whatever its political hue may be, always acts, in the first place,

in its own interest. And unfortunately, it is in their interest to continue the nuclear tests at Moruroa and Fangataufa" (319).

That interest is defined by the French *classe politique*, supported by the largely apathetic French media and public opinion. But is it really in their interest to stand out in history as a deeply entrenched, evil empire, foisting nuclearism on people too small to defend themselves? One of the many high points in Firth's book addresses precisely this question, in his chapter "Why the French love the bomb." Of course, France desires to preserve a sense of greatness or at least bigness, even glory, using the land, waters, and even the health of other peoples as instruments of its egocentric obsession. In a period of relative economic, political, and cultural decline, clinging to military power becomes even more important. But what a narrow logic! Carried to its extreme, it led France to send professional killers to destroy the *Rainbow Warrior*. This single act may well mark the beginning of the end of French nuclear arrogance in the Pacific, sadly enough, because it struck at white people in a white nation—New Zealand. As these books amply document, the nuclear powers constantly commit such acts against people of color on far-away small islands, and with relative impunity.

Some people, including the Daniels-sons and Firth, seem astonished that a French government led by a socialist party can support nuclear colonialism. This astonishment results from a widespread misunderstanding. The French "socialists" bear little or no similarity to the social democratic or labor par-

ties elsewhere, and would be better identified by the term *étatistes* 'statists'. They believe in the primacy of the state. But the state is also the major perpetrator of colonialism and nuclearism. The French socialist party can certainly be accused of lacking solidarity with other peoples, of being utterly nationalistic, but they cannot be accused of being inconsistent in their policies. It is just naive to expect anything else from them. And since the communists also believe in nuclearism (only it has to be symmetrical, directed against both the United States and the Soviet Union), not much room is left for what to the French is the "left" politically. The peace movement, consequently, is minuscule.

Firth also offers a fine analysis of the Australian case of "wanting to please," an attitude fostered in a state of dependency, first on Britain, then on the United States. But Australia is not dependent on France, so there are more teeth in Australian protests against French policies. However, I am still looking for a good explanation of why the much smaller country of New Zealand dared to go it alone, and why the Lange government was reelected afterward.

Whereas Firth's book gives an excellent introduction to the overall picture of the nuclear Pacific, Hayes, Zarsky, and Bello do for the United States what the Danielssons do for France: each looks at the facts behind the rhetoric. In their heavily documented book, based on skillful use of the Freedom of Information Act, Hayes et al present a lucid picture. The beginning of the book is particularly intriguing. Part 1,

entitled "Manifest Destiny," leaves no doubt about the consistency of American policies throughout the Pacific hemisphere: a military *pax Americana*, the ability to fight local wars far away from the American heartland, economic penetration, political hegemony, and a general cultural diffusion of American life styles and attitudes. In these policies, the Americans are similar to the French. Unable to achieve the last three objectives, they cling to the military ones. Whether that makes them more or less dangerous remains to be seen. Part 2, on "Pacific Arsenals," gives the general picture of the present situation. Two chapters, with information not easily found, analyze the Soviet contribution to the predicament and see the Soviet stance as essentially defensive, in the sense of being reactive and not forward based. But that, of course, does not exonerate the Soviets.

Both Firth and Hayes et al end their books with scenarios for a nuclear war that essentially starts in the Pacific. Both are worth reading. Hayes et al make skillful use of existing texts from near-war situations. They also provide samples of military jargon, such as this one: "This is reporting activity at Echo Victor Whiskey with actual immediate NUDET report. Field Three, Wheeler Air Force Base 1930 hours airburst. Acknowledge? Out." The last word is actually meaningful. Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, most of O'ahu are precisely that—out. We need to be reminded of the potential extent of destruction again and again, but that should not make us blind to the damage already done to the environment, and through

the twisting and thwarting of human rights. We do not need the threat or—as these authors suggest—the near certainty of nuclear holocaust to realize that the situation is untenable.

Hayes et al add a positive vision to their gruesome scenario. Their final chapter, “Charting a New Pacific,” is based on three components: “zones free of all nuclear-capable and offensive conventional forces”; “non-intervention zones, in which all forward-deployed foreign forces would be excluded”; and “capping and reversing the global nuclear arms race” (394–395). Fine goals, and difficult to disagree with. Yet I have three objections.

First, I think anything like a reduction of the destructive potential will not come about unless there has been a solid process of conflict resolution, especially in Korea and the Philippines. Even if such a resolution is accomplished, it will be years before the hardliners recognize that the situation has changed, that old patterns of legitimizing lethal deployment no longer sound convincing to anybody, including the advocates. I can see basic conflict resolution occurring in Korea after a new generation, capable of putting the horrors of the 1950–1953 war behind them, has come into power on both sides. I have greater difficulty in seeing conflict resolution work in the Philippine case, which has arisen not from one traumatic, seismic schism, but from an ongoing structural pathology. A solution might be found if an enlightened American leadership were to one day wake up and see that it is in the interest of the United States to withdraw from its bases there. But this would require

assurances from the Soviet Union that it will not move in, as well as a willingness to let history run its course against the entrenched powers of landowners, church officials, military leaders, and business interests.

Second, I do not quite share the belief of Firth and Hayes et al in the likelihood of a nuclear holocaust, because it is too risky, even for the initiator. Moreover, the situation is already bad enough. People have been dying since nuclear testing started in the Pacific; psychologically they have been living under the nuclear threat for a generation.

Third, I have a terrible suspicion that we may for some time have been deluding ourselves in seeing nuclear war as the major threat. Only a handful of people write and talk openly about the vast offensive potential of Star Wars, a weapon that leaves no radioactivity behind, that is much more precise than nuclear explosions, that is less likely to lead to massive ecological destabilization, and that can be delivered at the speed of light. In fearing nuclear war and working for nuclear peace, I hope we are not allowing the real threat to develop unattended.

But, leaving these concerns aside, read the books. They should be obligatory reading all over the region, and particularly in the political science classrooms of that absentee landlord, Paris. They should be discussed everywhere. The facts presented in the books should be contested, although I suspect most of them will stand up rather well. More details should be forthcoming on the nuclear powers’

display of arrogance and contempt and outright inhumanity. The alternative is clear: the Pacific for the Pacific, in both senses of that word.

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*The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, by James Clifford. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. xii + 381 pp, photographs, footnotes, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$30.00; paper US\$15.95.

James Clifford knows a *lot*. Not since Kenneth Burke was producing torrents of work in the 1940s and 1950s has such a wide-ranging perspective been brought to bear on contemporary social questions. There is a cost, of course; by the time I finished *The Predicament of Culture* every reference book I own had been dragged from the shelf to my desk. And I'm still puzzled by his use of certain terms and phrases, such as "relational," "essentializing," "topos," "privileged armatures," "post-symbolist poetics of displacement," and "redemptive metahistorical narrative." Since the book is a collection of essays written originally for a very broad range of audiences, I suspect that readers from other fields will scratch their heads over phrases and concepts that gave me no trouble whatsoever.

For students of the contemporary Pacific, I think, the significance of Clifford's work lies in his illuminating, and sometimes disturbing, accounts of culture as a living, throbbing creation, and of the peculiar ways in which

scholars try to mount it in museum cases and the pages of ethnographic treatises.

There is a considerable body of resistance to modern culture theory among one wing of Pacific scholarship. These meat-and-potatoes types want to see the hard evidence of political economy, demography, and geomorphology. While they may find themselves a bit uncomfortable with Clifford's style, many will nonetheless enjoy his dissection of anthropological mannerisms in the chapters titled "On Ethnographic Authority," "Power and Dialogue in Ethnography," and "On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning."

In the first of these, he explores the means by which "the predominant mode of modern fieldwork authority is signaled: 'You are there . . . because I was there' " (22). In the second he portrays the extraordinary arrogance of Marcel Griaule, who bullied and cajoled and expropriated his way across the Sudan, and generally exemplified the European presumption (which Clifford uncovers again and again as he shifts targets) that collecting accounts of people's lives is of far greater importance than the lives themselves. In the third we learn how Malinowski and Conrad used their experiences in, and visions of, the tropics in order to convert themselves from expatriate Poles into proper Englishmen.

Another wing of Pacific studies (for whom, I suspect, I am writing this review) will be quite comfortable with the hermeneutics, discourse analysis, and deconstruction Clifford employs. While others might read "On Ethnographic Authority" as an exercise in