

(in terms of its exclusive economic zones). In so doing, Henningham does not seek to condone France but simply to better understand it.

From time to time the author rises above the presentation of a wealth of facts and events to highlight individuals who have profoundly marked, if not indeed determined, the course of history: Jean-Marie Tjibaou in New Caledonia, Pouvana'a a O'opa in French Polynesia, French Prime Minister Michel Rocard. . . . Regrettably, the treatment they receive remains superficial and fragmentary.

So far so good.

Where the book begins to jar is when it gets closer to home. Although France's presence in the South Pacific "provokes controversy," Australia (and New Zealand) have only "good intentions." The pages devoted specifically to their roles are showered with words like "constructive," "moderating," "consensus," "prompt and generous," "welcoming," and so on. Here the perceptive scholar sheds his academic gown in favor of the grey suit and the elusive tongue of the diplomat. Events of the last few years have demonstrated that Australia's hand is heavy indeed in Melanesia, and speeches clothed in gentle words scarcely conceal an unflinching commitment to *realpolitik*. As one ni-Vanuatu remarked to me recently, "They even try and watch us when we go to piss!" The present crisis in relations between Australia and the Solomon Islands, and the recent expulsion of the Australian ambassador to Vanuatu would suggest that the observation is not devoid of truth.

But then we all have our blind spots.

Henningham's failure to predict that the 1990s may well be a relatively calm

decade for France but a tumultuous one for Australia also points to the fact that he has difficulty in rising above his data. In spite of his predictions, France has placed a moratorium on nuclear testing. More important, the second half of the 1980s was characterized by a surge in French research and reflection on the South Pacific as a whole, and this has been translated into acts, notably a diplomatic offensive and a concern to better integrate the territories into the regional community. These gestures, largely ignored by Henningham, have borne fruit. In a part of the world where dependence is a cruel reality, the discovery of a rich and interested France provides an attractive counterbalance for a number of states to a heavy-handed and economically ailing regional power.

Although less than twelve months have passed since *France and the South Pacific* was published, it already merits a substantially modified conclusion. Nevertheless, the treatment it provides of events since World War II is a serious and, ultimately, a generous one. How nice it would be if it spurred a French scholar to do a similar analysis of Australia and Melanesia!

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Silent Warriors, unabridged edition, by Anirudh Singh. Introduction by Tupeni Baba. Suva: Fiji Institute of Applied Studies, 1992. ISBN 982-301-001-3, 108 pp, map. Paper, F\$6.75.

A new "unabridged" edition of a text first released late last year has just hit the bookstands around Suva. The

book, clad in red and black, is titled *Silent Warriors*. It describes the ordeal of Dr Anirudh Singh, a University of the South Pacific lecturer, its author.

More than any statistics, this short text sketches in the human dimensions of the aftermath of the 1987 coups. Singh's story is known now: he was abducted from outside his home on 24 October 1990. After this, he was brutally bashed about the head, and his hands were systematically smashed with a length of metal pipe. Eleven hours later, he was left, apparently "free," to find his way home from Colo-i-Suva.

Silent Warriors is a book by an academic, but in many ways it is not part of the usual academic genres. It does proffer interesting remarks on the "second coming" of the expatriates (like myself). It does speculate on the geopolitical position of Fiji in relation to its wealthier neighbors. And it does propose the rudiments of a class analysis of the military coups (as does Tupeni Baba's introduction to the work). But it is not a polished text; nor does it mount a sharp or sustained academic argument in any of the above fields. The initial account was obviously written swiftly, away from home, over a period of months (and then revised).

The value of this text of life and work lies elsewhere. The anthropologist James Clifford has enjoined us to recognize that "truths" are all partial: partial in the sense that they are at once incomplete (no view is ever "full") and are committed (we all occupy ethnicized, classed, gendered positions). Clifford's suggestion is that we keep this in mind when we write our "histories," that we try to state our "position" as accurately as possible.

Singh's story is a horrific one. His position is obvious: indeed, he has been "positioned" by the interim regime in Fiji (just as he has taken a "position" against his oppressors). This text does not appeal to horizons of "objectivity" or "impartiality": in this sense it is not readily recognizable as an old style "academic text." Yet, it is entirely (if unself-consciously) congruent with a newer style of writing that seeks to foreground the positioning of the writing subject. In this context, *Silent Warriors* stands not merely as a personal chronicle of the turmoil in one person's life that results from abstract events like "military coups"; it also is a meditation on how one is positioned as a subject by these plays of power.

Let me briefly indicate the nature of this process. I begin with the macrostructural level of Fijian society. Even prior to the 1987 coups, the discourse of race was a factor that determined one's subject position. The 1970 constitution, for example, was weighted in favour of "Fijians." When the coups occurred, the discourse of race was accented, and used as a ground of repression. The implicit "them and us" structure was made explicit. At the macrostructural level of Fiji society, therefore, people were forced to see themselves as "Fijians" or as "Indians" (etc).

At the (microstructural) level of constitution of an individual's subject-position, one could simply accept the changes in status, or one could seek to contest them (in more or less major ways). Singh was one of the few who overtly resisted. In a poignant section titled "A Lesson in Human Nature," Singh describes his dismay when he

realized that most other Indo-Fijians were not going to demonstrate against the constitution promulgated in 1990.

I will never forget the lesson in human nature that I acquired later that night—a lesson that I learnt through hard-hitting personal experience. I had expected the news of the promulgation to excite high levels of emotions. . . . But there was no reaction at all! Wherever I went that night, the small-talk centred as usual around daily happenings. The mundane and the trivial were still commanding the entire attention of the Fiji Indians, in spite of their full knowledge of the momentous event that had just taken place. (36–37)

The price of contesting the racially based subject-position imposed by the regime would prove high.

Singh argues throughout the book that he was not the one “starting trouble.” Perhaps a better way of putting this heartfelt conviction would be to see that the process of subject-creation is inherently dialogic: we do not exist in a vacuum; every action has about it the nature of a reaction. In this sense, Singh is contesting the racist designation of the interim regime (just as some of his compatriots were willing to accept it). And the regime’s response to his response was to abduct and torture him.

In this context, *Silent Warriors* is about human dignity, about the micro and macro aspects of the very basics of human rights. This is a book pleading with the oppressed men and women of this country to stand up so they do not “become like a beggar race—a group of lowly creatures willing to barter away their self-respect for the smallest of material favours” (98). And while he

notices that there’s a lesson in human nature to be learned from events like the initial nonresponse to the promulgation of the 1990 constitution, he is also able to speak hopefully of the “brave few who have dedicated themselves to the democratic cause in Fiji” (98).

And, let me say, democracy is a tough business. It’s hard to define, and any worthwhile attempt at it calls for the consideration of the position of others. In the twentieth century, people everywhere have been forced to relativize their views (of others, of themselves). This has occurred not just because of the rise of mass communications technology (television, telephone, etc), but also through the increased speeds of migration and human bodily movements. The fact is, different peoples have different ways of doing things. One’s own way, therefore, looks smaller in a shrinking cosmopolitan world; it looks less absolute (because it exists side by side with other ways of doing things).

One way of dealing with this situation is to reject everyone else’s approach and to try to “close up,” to try to retreat to some mythical past golden age of harmony. Such regressive thinking usually leads to xenophobia and general intolerance. Very often the discourses of “past golden ages” and of “tradition” are mobilized by interest groups willing to use people’s fears for their own political or economic ends. And yes, these discourses (in this case, of racism) are catching, even though it should be obvious that the “price” for speaking them (or allowing oneself to be spoken by them) is high.

Singh’s book is a measure of that

price, a price he has already paid and is continuing to pay. His book is also a measure of the importance that other ways of doing things be found. We might speak different languages, we might have different ways of seeing the world, but that difference can bring vibrance into our personal, political, and economic lives. We *can* live together: that is what this lived and written text says. That is what thinkers

ranging from critical anthropologists like James Clifford to deconstructionists like Jacques Derrida suggest. And that is why *Silent Warriors*, in its personal and experiential rendering of this tragedy that touches all who live in the Fiji Islands, is by far the finest and most haunting of the accounts of the Fiji coups to appear so far.

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