

*Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century*, by Brij V Lal. Pacific Islands Monograph Series 11. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992. ISBN 0-8248-1418-5, xxii + 404 pages, maps, figures, tables, photos, appendix, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. US\$38.

Brij Lal closes his magisterial history of twentieth-century Fiji with a series of "what if" questions, challenging the often told, overdetermined narrative that the coups of 1987 were "fated" to happen, the inevitable outcome of ethnic difference and discomfort within the former colony. He suggests rather a series of moments in which other decisions might have been made and actions taken, where the possibilities of agency were not obviated by an unchangeable scenario of racial division. He argues that Fiji's future need not—and should not—be seen as a fixed continuation of this narrative trajectory.

*Broken Waves* is a remarkable accomplishment on several counts. Written in the wake of the 1987 coups and the new constitution, it necessarily highlights those events, which "ended the 'pacific' era in recent Pacific Islands history" (334). It tells a complex story, one to which the coups are not a necessary end, but in which they constitute a dramatic and transformative moment. While clearly outlining factors and events leading to the coups, *Broken Waves* is not a teleological, outcome-driven account. With care and subtlety, Lal delineates both why the coups were possible and why they were not inevitable.

A second significant feature of

*Broken Waves* is its remarkable even-handedness. Lal's concern is with exploring complex causes rather than assigning blame; he considers and documents the frequent turmoil within the National Federation Party in the years since A D Patel's death, and the tenuous character of the Coalition of the late 1980s, as thoroughly as he does the rise of the Taukei Movement and its implications for Fijian ethnic nationalism and the course of Alliance politics. He also traces the development of Fijian national politics throughout the earlier part of the century in considerable detail, describing and analyzing the colonial history of Fiji with a very subtle sense of their consequences. Such crucial matters as labor conflicts, struggles over the definition and limits of chiefly power, and the complex choreography of the independence negotiations are elegantly illuminated. There are villains in the story, but Lal is consistently careful to locate their motives and perspectives in the broader context that helped shape them.

A third striking feature of *Broken Waves* is the passion that informs it. While evenhanded in his presentation, Lal is also clearly committed to the feasibility of Fiji as a democratic and multiethnic nation. He provides a clear-eyed and highly critical account of the possibilities of sustaining such a pluralistic society that were forfeited through opportunism or political shortsightedness, the introduction of the compelling but potentially catastrophic discourses of identity politics, and the embarrassing ease with which most of the region—and the interna-

tional community more broadly—accepted the coups not only as accomplished facts but as somehow “right.”

Lal's closing questions regarding the future of Fiji foreground some recurrent themes running throughout the book. Central to these is a tension within the Fijian community between sustaining the “traditional” while facing the necessity of dramatic social change; Lal draws very effectively on the works of Nayacakalou, Spate, Belshaw, and other scholars in outlining this ongoing contradiction. In the political arena such tension is most evident in regard to the chiefly system. To Lal's mind, who will succeed the present generation of chiefs, and under what circumstances, are critical questions for the future and have been powerful factors in the course of Fijian history during this century. Certainly Lal's narrative suggests that intra-Fijian debates concerning the future of chiefly power, and the fact that Coalition Prime Minister Timoci Bavadra was not a chief, might well have been as consequential as matters of ethnicity in the 1987 coups.

The historical research is thorough and scrupulous, and the presentation is lucid. Lal brings together a wealth of information, much of it previously unavailable and the earlier available materials often reframed in thought-provoking ways. He relies very heavily on unpublished primary sources, and he provides sufficient texts and documentation to enable readers to draw their own inferences and, perhaps, challenge his interpretations. *Broken Waves* is an open-ended narrative, one with no clear conclusion. Perhaps its greatest strength is that it presents the

history of modern Fiji as very complicated and multifaceted. It invites us to take these complexities seriously and, in doing so, to avoid understanding contemporary Fiji as “the same old story” told once again.

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*The Ngatik Massacre: History and Identity on a Micronesian Atoll*, by Lin Poyer. Smithsonian Series in Ethnographic Inquiry. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993. ISBN 1-56098-261-6, xiii + 298 pages, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$49.00; paper, US\$17.95.

This historical ethnography of Ngatik Atoll is based on Lin Poyer's twenty months of ethnographic fieldwork during 1979–1980. Ngatik, called by its contemporary residents Sapwuahfik, is located 88 miles southwest of Pohnpei, the “high island” of Pohnpei State in the Federated States of Micronesia. While it has become commonplace in the last ten years for ethnographers of the Pacific to pay particular attention to local representations of history in oral narratives, cultural performances, and material objects, Poyer takes this trend one step further in studying the connections between history and the construction of cultural identity. This task is especially interesting because the entire male population of the atoll was massacred in 1837 by the crew of the *Lambton*, under the direction of its master, C H Hart. After this tragedy