

Living Tradition: A Changing Life in Solomon Islands, as told by Michael Kwa'ioloa to Ben Burt. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997. ISBN 0-8248-1960-8, vi + 169 pages, maps, photographs, notes, references. Paper, US\$22.95.

This book adds to the small number of autobiographies written by Melane- sians with the encouragement and assistance of foreign anthropologists. The author, Michael Kwa'ioloa, comes from the East Kwara'ae area of Malaita in Solomon Islands. His recollections were taped by Ben Burt, who then proceeded to prepare them for publication. Rather surprisingly for someone embarking on this kind of project, Kwa'ioloa is still a relatively young man, completing this account of his life when he was only forty. What makes this a rich and valuable auto- biography is that he has lived through one of the most critical periods in Solomon Islands history, and that he is an exceptionally thoughtful, honest, and articulate storyteller in describing the events he has experienced.

Kwa'ioloa is not a well-known national figure in Solomon Islands; indeed, national politics and national events barely get a mention in his story. There is no mention of Solomon Islands independence, for example, or other changes of that level of signifi- cance. His life, whether in town or on his home island, has been lived prima- rily at the local and regional level where he has been preoccupied with family, church, local government, and kin-based traditional groupings. What makes his story especially relevant to this age is that it spans one of the

major transitions experienced by his generation, the growth of Honiara into a major urban center populated and controlled by Solomon Islanders.

After spending the early part of his childhood on Malaita, living in a remote bush area in a very traditional community, Kwa'ioloa was taken to Honiara when he was twelve, entering the world of formal education, urban squatter settlements, and, in later years, wage employment. He embraced modern life with much enthusiasm, but did so without neglecting the links with his home on Malaita and without forgetting the basic precepts of his ancestral culture taught to him by his deeply tradition-bound father. He mar- ried early and then spent several years back on Malaita before returning to Honiara and working his way up to being a successful building contractor in partnership with his brother and other close relatives. One of the main purposes of writing the autobiography is to show the role that tradition has played in his life. All the main events of his adult years, from the arranged marriage onward, are used to expound and amplify different aspects of Kwara'ae culture.

Much in this story will be of interest to students and observers of modern Melanesia. Kwa'ioloa's strong commit- ment to his family and to wider kin relations, his continuing adherence to obligations of reciprocal care and sup- port, his fundamentalist Christianity, and his constant struggle to meet the changing material demands of his family and a large network of rela- tions, are values and experiences shared by many others at this time. The authoritarian attitude toward

women, portrayed quite vividly here, is also common, especially among the people from Malaita. We are also given some very acute observations about the emerging class structure in Solomon Islands and the kinds of divisions associated with it.

Besides reading this story for its observations on contemporary history, some will find its success as an indigenous autobiography of interest. In his introduction Burt explains the crucial role he played in the whole process, from recording the story through to translation and final editing. In translation, the style is more formal than it would have been in oral presentation, and lacks many of the devices used in storytelling, but there is still the unmistakable feel of a man from Malaita. It is likely that the overall narrative structure owes more to western conventions in writing biography than are found on Malaita and portrays his life more coherently and rounded than it really has been. The book reads episodically and was probably narrated in that way originally. It is also likely that Burt's close association with Kwa'iolea intensified some of the self-consciousness shown about tradition. However, these misgivings did not prevent me from reading this story in the spirit in which it has been presented, as one man's attempt to engage with modern life, drawing constantly on the values and beliefs of the past.

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Rabaul Yu Swit Moa Yet: Surviving the 1994 Volcanic Eruption, by Klaus Neumann. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. ISBN 0-19-554009-3, x + 181 pages, maps, photographs, notes, glossary, index of names. Paper, A\$14.95.

Tavurvur I Puongo: Students' Accounts of the 1994 Eruptions in East New Britain, edited by Klaus Neumann. Vunadidir: Department of East New Britain, 1995. No ISBN; ix + 65 pages, map. Paper, K2.50, NZ\$16.95. (Available from Books Pasifika.)

Imagine yourself on Matupit Island in Rabaul Harbour, the earth constantly shaking beneath your feet, yet the authorities advising over the radio to remain in your home. What do you do next? On the afternoon of 18 September 1994, the locals found these two pieces of information irreconcilable, and a voluntary exodus began that quickly engulfed the rest of Rabaul along the way. Within hours, the authorities were directing evacuees to Queen Elizabeth Park in the heart of Rabaul before organized transport arrived to begin a full-scale evacuation. During the night any form of vehicle was on the roads, and a constant stream of mothers with children and fathers with belongings either walked or drove away from Rabaul. By morning the two volcanoes at the entrance to Rabaul's harbor—Mt Tavurvur to the east and Mt Vulcan (Kalamanganun) to the west had begun erupting. Volcanic ash was to bury or destroy many homes in Rabaul or on the foot-slopes of the two volcanoes.