

disadvantages and aspirations of the Melanesian community. A spectrum of possibilities remains open, but the prospects for an eventual transition to a form of independence, qualified by strong links with France, are stronger than before. Such a transition could either be achieved via the present plan or follow further mobilization by the nationalist movement.

Connell's argument is that, whatever the political outcome, New Caledonia's narrow resource base, limited economic options, and dependence on France, along with the pragmatic orientation of the nationalist mainstream, will ensure strong socioeconomic and political continuities. But this assessment perhaps underestimates the potential influence of radical ideas and elements in the nationalist movement, the bitterness of many on both sides, and the prospect that renewed unrest and violence could bring about a more abrupt and dramatic denouement. The possibilities include both partition and the departure of large numbers of settlers.

Despite its timeliness, the book has some weaknesses. The synopsis does not do it justice, and the lack of an index is regrettable, especially in a book of over 200,000 words. Instead of a bare list of references, a bibliography, annotated to highlight the patchiness and partiality of the available sources, would have been preferable. On occasion, Connell smoothes over the rough edges of historical debate rather too neatly and uses his sources uncritically. For example, the discussion of Melanesian demographic trends in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is confusing. Although

the book demonstrates the merits of the comparative approach by lucidly situating New Caledonia in its regional and French colonial contexts, it also perhaps underemphasizes the territory's special characteristics.

But let me not damn with faint praise. The book is an important addition to the scant English-language literature on New Caledonia. It is the first major study on the politics of the territory to appear since Myriam Dornoy's comprehensive *Politics in New Caledonia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1984), which ends in 1978, with a postscript to 1982. Connell's study will be an indispensable reference for academic specialists. For the student and the general reader, this reasonably priced book provides a detailed introduction to the history and politics of this beautiful yet tragically divided country.

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*Torres Strait Islanders: Custom and Colonialism*, by Jeremy Beckett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. xiii + 251 pp, maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. US\$49.50.

This book is a welcome addition to a growing literature that may be called the anthropology of colonialism. As "Australia's other indigenous minority" (171), the Torres Strait Islanders' experiences under alien rule provide fascinating material to compare and contrast with the colonial histories of Australian Aborigines and Papua New Guineans. The author's effort to com-

press as much of this material as possible into 235 pages of text creates both strength and weakness in the finished work.

Indeed, there are almost three books here, or at least three themes, each worthy of a book that Beckett could certainly provide. First is the issue of "custom," the more or less self-conscious, continuing creation of cultural forms and practices with which to maintain a people's identity in the face of colonial domination. Genovese, Wolf, and other theoreticians of colonialism, slavery, and domination are invoked in developing this theme, which is most fully treated in Chapters 1, 4, and 8. This consideration of cultural practices developed by Islanders under white rule is particularly enriched by reference to Beckett's earlier publications on Islander songs and stories.

Second, the author presents a colonial history of the islands from precontact times till the 1980s. He does so especially in Chapters 2 (precontact to 1936), 3 (World War II until about 1960), and 7 (1970s and 1980s). These sections, sometimes crammed to bursting with events and dates, may be particularly addressed to a white Australian audience as part of the bicentennial observances. (See the acknowledgment at the very beginning of the book.) Beckett underlines the "gross paternalism" (48) with which protectors appointed by Queensland interfered with Islanders' lives, and points out that, as elsewhere in the Pacific, World War II "military experience gave the Islanders a new sense of competence and entitlement" (61). He then

shows how "welfare colonialism" in the 1970s and 1980s provided Islanders with new room to maneuver, playing off the Queensland and Australian commonwealth bureaucracies against each other.

Finally, there is what the author calls the book's "centre of gravity" (21): a comparison of Badu and Murray islands, where Dr Beckett conducted ethnographic fieldwork for twenty-four months between 1958 and 1961. (This formed the basis of his 1964 PhD thesis, which has never been published.) Here, in Chapters 5 (Murray) and 6 (Badu), he is concerned to contrast their respective strategies in dealing with the colonial situation that had developed up through the 1960s. In these chapters, too, we meet individual Islander leaders as significant actors, especially Marou Mimi of Murray and part-Samoan Tanu Nona of Badu.

In developing these themes, Beckett is consistently informative and insightful, and often provocative. However, much as I enjoyed and learned from the book, I feel that some readers will be frustrated that none of the themes is addressed as fully as they might like. As an anthropologist, I would have preferred a more consistent application of the theoretical points discussed in Chapter 1 to the ethnographic material that follows. Beckett's "Reflections in a colonial mirror" (Chapter 4), which can be compared to much anthropology now being done in the Pacific (eg, by Roger Keesing), cries out for further elaboration. I was particularly tantalized by references to gender relations (see, eg, the footnote on page 220), which are nowhere adequately treated.

On the other hand, readers in search of a conventional history may become impatient with the more anthropologically oriented chapters. They may wonder why the issue, first raised in the 1970s, disputing the border between Australia and Papua New Guinea is simply dismissed (187). And they may even founder in the detail of Chapter 7. No one unfamiliar with Australian political history—and especially the distinctive place of Queensland in that history—will find that chapter easy to follow.

Nothing I have written in the preceding two paragraphs should be read as condemning a book that, in fact, I recommend to anyone interested in Pacific Island affairs. The Torres Strait Islanders, their culture, and their history, are worthy of our attention for many reasons, and they have found a knowledgeable and sympathetic chronicler in Beckett. My criticisms are rather a perhaps circuitous way of expressing the hope that he will continue to publish his insights into the theoretical, ethnographic, and historical concerns sometimes treated all too briefly here. Certainly this book will provide a valuable basis for understanding the continuing struggle of the Torres Strait Islanders to maintain their identity and a degree of autonomy in an increasingly complex world.

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*The Politics of Land in Vanuatu: From Colony to Independence*, by Howard Van Trease. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1987. xiv + 313 pp, photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index. US\$8.

This book, a history of Vanuatu from the 1880s to the 1980s, is “grounded” in land. Struggles over land precipitated both the birth and the death of the former Condominium of the New Hebrides. The Franco-British Joint Naval Convention of 1887 and the subsequent Convention of 1906, which established colonial authority, aimed to regularize and sustain European control of newly alienated land in the archipelago. A hundred years later, this alienated land sparked the movement toward national independence.

In chapter one, Van Trease sketches the several traditional systems of land tenure found throughout Vanuatu. A common principle is the inalienability of land; the rights of landholders can never be completely extinguished. One might say that “land” became a meaningful economic category only as Vanuatu was absorbed within a system of plantation capitalism. Traditionally, people thought more in terms of their “place” than of their “land.”

In the next three chapters, Van Trease follows the history of land alienation. He focuses on the workings of the Condominium’s Joint Court, which was established especially to straighten out conflicting European claims to vast tracts of land and to issue titles. Given the double British and French colonial presence, the court