

T. J. Macnaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience: A Study of the Neo-Traditional Order under British Colonial Rule Prior to World War Two*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1982. Pp. 203. \$14.95.

The British governance of Fiji began in 1874 with a degree of idealism in the ethic of trusteeship which doctrinaire critics of colonialism are reluctant to believe. From its title, one might expect this book to be an analysis of that experiment in colonial trusteeship, which has been such a rarity in the history of domination. The theme has great possibilities, especially considering the repeated pronouncements about guided social change from a tribal organization, economy, and value system to that of a modern state: an exercise in simultaneous protection and development; a massive experiment in education. The experiment fell rather short of the ideal image, and the history of that divergence during the ninety-six years of colonial rule should be one of enormous interest.

Macnaught's treatment of his subject, however, lacks the continuity of this theme. His book is not a history of colonial Fiji, nor is it a study in colonial theory and practice. Neither can it be "a study of the neo-traditional order" without being these other things as well. Consequently, a reader wishing to gain a comprehensive knowledge of Fijian affairs during the colonial period will not get it from this book. That is to be regretted all the more because he will not get it anywhere else either.

Instead, what Macnaught presents is a comparatively static picture of Fijian society at some ill-defined time in the first half of the twentieth century. His portrait of colonial Fiji is constructed by the presentation of a succession of themes, presented in such a manner that each chapter is virtually a self-contained essay. Each essay is interesting in its own right, but has only a tenuous connection with the others. Thus the reader will look in vain for a framework of periodization, and in consequence, the discussion is apt to become confusing. For example, in treating the Fijian discontent with British rule, Macnaught implies that the agitations of Apolosi Nawai kept the villagers in ferment for a quarter of a century rather than merely for a few months in 1915. Similarly, the technique of discussion by themes leads to distracting repetition: the question of the reform of land tenure in the first decade of the century is discussed in chapters one and two, and is broached again in Chapter Eight, "Compromise for a Multi-Racial Society."

In not providing a continuous narrative, the author has had to assume that the reader is well acquainted with Fijian twentieth-century history, on which so little has been published. Familiarity with names, circumstances, and developments--in short with the whole context of this study--is taken for granted. At the same time, those readers with a specialist knowledge of twentieth-century Fiji will probably find the book disappointing for the lack of aggressive, persistent analysis of the themes it broaches. The method of analysis is on the whole anecdotal and exemplary, and while this may be understood as possibly reflecting the nature of the sources, it is nonetheless true that the reader does not acquire a comprehensive, detailed knowledge of the subject. The book thus falls between two categories, satisfying the needs of neither the specialist nor the nonspecialist.

Readers with particular interests will find parts of the book useful; however, on matters of emphasis and interpretation (with which they might disagree) they will not find the exposition sufficiently comprehensive to allow an evaluation of Macnaught's interpretations. For example, what is one to conclude on discovering that the author's Fijians

are rational, sensible people--or at least that their actions and motives are comprehensible--but that his Europeans in Fiji behaved in ways that were wrongheaded and inexplicable?

The book encompasses the following subjects: the attempts by Governors O'Brien and Im Thurn to reform village life and the land tenure system; Im Thurn's attempts to undermine the hereditary nobility in the interests of democracy and administrative efficiency; the continued political awareness and machinations of aristocratic officials; village life (which sounds like a structural-functionalist ideal model); the career of Apolosi Nawai as a nationalist revolutionary ahead of his time; the Fijian discontent with their colonial and undeveloped status (which fits badly with the portrayal of village life); the failure to develop a truly multiracial society (oddly called "Compromise for a Multi-Racial Society"); and experiments in transforming Fijians into a people who would apply the development ethic more pertinaciously. Unfortunately, it is my opinion that none of these issues is dealt with in sufficient depth, nor with sufficient attention to the broader context of Fijian affairs. Macnaught's best chapter is his epilogue (which actually falls outside the scope of his study) surveying the major developments and themes in Fijian history after 1940. The usefulness of all chapters is further impaired by the absence of an index.

It is nearly forty years since Derrick's history of Fiji in the nineteenth century was published. That book remains un superseded. Derrick did not achieve his goal of writing a sequel for the colonial period, and unfortunately the subject still awaits its historian.

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