
BOOK REVIEW FORUM

Robert Aldrich, *France and the South Pacific since 1940*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993. Pp. xxii, 413, notes, bibliography, index, maps. US\$38 cloth.

Stephen Henningham, *France and the South Pacific: A Contemporary History*. South Sea Books. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991. Pp. xvi, 292, notes, bibliography, index, illust. US\$17.95 paper.

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PROFESSOR ROBERT ALDRICH from the University of Sydney is one of the best connoisseurs of the French presence in the South Pacific. He has edited several books on the topic and the present one under review is the continuation of his *The French Presence in the South Pacific, 1842-1940* (London, 1990), which is, to my point of view, the best historical summary of French Oceanic colonialism and imperialism. Aldrich is a true historian in the sense that he not only provides facts of history but also constantly formulates probing explanations, making the logic of these facts understandable. The abundant footnotes and references support all his arguments, which never try to accredit any particular political standpoints.

France became a colonial power in the Pacific by the mid-nineteenth century in an effort to reinstate the grandeur affected by the 1789 French Revolution and the following Napoleonic wars. She came late in the Pacific by comparison with Great Britain, which had acquired the two largest land

masses in the region: Australia (in 1788) and New Zealand (in 1840). France, like Great Britain, had a world vision for the constitution of her empire in the nineteenth century. She needed *points d'appui* (support bases) for her navy with a chain of islands allowing refueling stops on maritime routes linking the Americas and Asia, where France also had imperial outposts. Other purposes combined with these military and commercial goals: religious, agricultural, securing minerals, establishing colonies for convicts and settlers among others.

Oceanic France was largely neglected in Paris up to the Second World War; Asians had been recruited as indentured laborers: Chinese in the present French Polynesia, Vietnamese and Javanese in New Caledonia, who outnumbered white settlers in the 1920s. The local populations had been converted and "either integrated into the lower levels of the workforce or kept on the outskirts of settler society waiting for what some Europeans thought would be their eventual extinction" (Aldrich, p. xxii). In Wallis and Futuna, which became an official French protectorate in the 1880s, the French Catholic church had imposed a theocratic rule over the three traditional kingdoms that still exist in the archipelago today.

Aldrich's book really starts with the Second World War, which was to bring drastic changes in French Oceania. The presence in all French possessions of tens of thousands of American and other Allied troops to stop the Japanese invasion and eventually to win the Pacific War transformed all levels of life: economically with the massive influx of dollars, mentally with the American way of life, politically and socially with black GIs and officers who demonstrated possibilities of another racial *rapprochement* to marginalized local and pressured imported populations. Aldrich shows quite well also the internal tensions between European tenants of the Vichy regime and the Gaullist party in all four colonies. His analysis of the effects of this American prosperity on the archipelagoes is enlightening and explains the newly emerging context or the turning point that forced Paris to reconsider the roles for the colonies in postwar France.

Paris was forced to take into account the new political and mental atmosphere present in her Oceanic possessions, which had been cut off from the metropole for five years during the war. The colonial order was thus to be modified as well as the underdeveloped state of these colonies, which surprised so many visitors from abroad during the 1940s and the 1950s. Aldrich demonstrates this point in providing written accounts from informative authors of the time. Quickly said, the French colonies were then poor, underdeveloped in all spheres of everyday life, and a rethinking in terms of national policy was needed as far as they were concerned. Full citizenship was to be granted to their local populations and, with time, to the imported

ones. Had they not fought during the war with the Allies? In doing so, they were entitled to get access to full French citizenship. Moreover, as other colonies in Indochina and Africa were striving for independence, wasn't it time to foster a new constitutional framework for all French colonies? A "Gallic version of the Commonwealth" was to be provided after the war (p. 68), putting to an end forced labor for Kanak populations. Later, in 1956, a law was enacted to promote new relationships between Paris and the French colonies in Africa and the Pacific to pave the way towards new constitutional frameworks.

Aldrich is an economic historian and the elements in the third chapter of his book, "The Economic History of the French Territories" (pp. 76-116), reflect very well his scientific specialty. He shows how eventually France decided to develop her overseas Pacific territories, not only to respond to criticisms of having been a reactionary and passive colonial power before the Second World War, but also to use these overseas possessions to attain full recognition as a major power on the world scene by holding a nuclear deterrence capability as well as possessing strategic metals such as nickel. Even Wallis and Futuna, which does not export any commercial products, has a higher GDP today than Tonga and Fiji based solely on French financial transference. Only New Caledonia with its nickel mining was--and still is--able to generate economic wealth, but not sufficient to live in autarchy. "The advantage [for these territories today] is to have a wealthy patron, and the political ties between these territories and France create a moral imperative for French aid" (p. 116).

When Aldrich deals with "Populations and Societies of the French Pacific" (pp. 117-157), he provides an interesting sociological account of the 350,000 people who live in these three French Overseas Territories. Not only does he deal with demographic growth, ethnicity, religion, identity and culture, language, education, and the role of women, but all these topics nurture new reflections on the socioeconomic and cultural components of these three particular entities. It is refreshing and presents clear pictures of people's realities and aspirations in their confrontation with traditional and modern worlds, which often creates ambiguities and cultural destabilization.

From the end of the Second World War to 1980, New Caledonia and French Polynesia went through political turbulences, a lot more so than Wallis and Futuna, which remained during that period under the realm of the Catholic church and the three customary kingdoms. Aldrich explains quite well what was at stake on the Parisian level: the continuity of nuclear testing in Moruroa and, thus, the maintenance of the status quo as far as constitutional links with metropolitan France were concerned. Although African colonies gained their independence in the 1960s, France was to

retain the remnants of her empire in the Pacific for strategic reasons. As the three territories were perceived as a whole in Paris, none of them could accede to independence as it would have represented a menace to French interests. The important political roles played by Pouvana'a O'opa in Tahiti and Maurice Lenormand in Noumea are carefully analyzed by the author, who shows how Paris kept the situation under control against autonomist aspirations. It was a period of internal contradictions and divisions amid ethnic, religious, and political polarizations.

France shared with Great Britain from 1906 to 30 July 1980 the joint colonial management of the Condominium of the New Hebrides, now the Republic of Vanuatu. This bizarre arrangement between London and Paris produced an odd situation for the colony, which had two school, medical, and administrative systems, among others. The author describes with illuminating examples the inhabitants' situation, be they local people, French or British settlers, or other foreigners (*optants*) who had to choose under which regime they would be treated in terms of justice, for example. Mutual systemic antagonism resulted in all aspects of everyday life and Aldrich provides an excellent comparative account of all the contradictions soon to appear from these two opposing systems of colonization. He also relates in detail the move towards independence once Great Britain decided to retire from the New Hebrides, as it had done previously, since 1970, in her other Pacific colonies, while France, afraid of this move as far as her other territories might be concerned, tried to resist or at least provoke or help separatist movements in the French-speaking island of Espiritu Santo with Jimmy Stephens and Youlou. The positions of emerging political leaders on both sides, such as Lini and Leymang, are examined as well as the stances of different governors or French ministers at the time of moving towards the new statute and after it was achieved. Aldrich, with probing arguments, provides a clarifying explanation of the development of the past and present situation of Vanuatu. This chapter is a must for anyone trying to get an introduction and understanding of the Republic of Vanuatu's political arena.

The political development in the New Hebrides and then Vanuatu influenced political life in New Caledonia in the 1980s. Aldrich summarizes this decade of utter violence, which tortured New Caledonia by dividing its population into two major communities defined by their respective political standpoints: *indépendantistes* versus pro-French. He recounts the assassinations and the bombings against which Paris sent more and more troops to the territory with the hope to reinstate calm, eventually culminating in the Ouvea massacre in April 1988 while presidential elections were being held in France. He also examines the role played by journalists and scientists during that period of violence and analyzes quite well how the debates on

New Caledonia versus Kanaky fed a more general debate on French national politics as it was the case at the time of the decolonization of Indochina and Algeria. Aldrich is very careful and never, unlike all the authors he refers to, declares himself on one or another side's cause. He relates the succession of the events, explains what appears important to him for the understanding of these events, and provides supplementary elements for his readers to make their own judgments if necessary. Aldrich is a scholar in all senses of the term. The Ouvea massacre is certainly at the origin of the Matignon-Oudinot agreement signed in Paris under the aegis of the then French prime minister, Michel Rocard, by Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Jacques Lafleur, the two outstanding leaders of the antagonistic communities. New Caledonia, up to 1998, will remain largely under French state control even though the three provinces will get more and more autonomy to manage the development priorities they each choose for themselves. France is favoring by all means socioeconomic equilibrium, but the weight of the past remains very heavy as well as the opposition between the customs that reign in the two Kanak provinces and those in the Southern province with the mainly European, modern, and industrialized Noumea. No one can say what the future status will be at the time of the 1998 referendum, if it occurs then on that very question.

Violence, but of a more political than physical nature (although some assassinations made the headlines in the Tahitian media), occurred also in French Polynesia. In the 1980s the nuclear question remains central. It biased the financial health and employment capacity of this territory, which rested upon the continuation of the testing programs. French Polynesia was granted some self-government in 1977 and a full statute of self-government in 1984. Political debates during the decade turned around independence or a state in free association for the future. The preeminent political leader, Gaston Flosse, being the only politician "to co-ordinate a major political party efficiently and to recruit mass support successfully," had to tackle "unsolvable social problems, notably unemployment coupled with inequalities among the territory's population, aggravated by inflated salaries for public servants and the lack of an income tax," which "threatened to widen cleavages between different groups [wealthy *demi*, half-castes, and poor Polynesians] and to become points of political discontent and possibly conflagration" (pp. 296,297). In the usually forgotten archipelago of Wallis and Futuna, the 1980s saw an important evolution both of a political and unionist nature. The confrontation between traditional leaders supported by the local Catholic church and an emerging trade unionist movement created political turbulence. The introduction of a television channel in Wallis forecasts deep changes in the people's mentality, as nothing can resist the pene-

tration of new ways of thinking brought by this individualizing instrument of modernity. Aldrich's last chapter deals with French nuclear policy and the history of testing in Moruroa and Fangataufa since 1963. It analyzes military, strategic, and international issues related to the French nuclear-testing program as well the geopolitical strategy envisaged by France in Oceania.

Stephen Henningham's book, *France and the South Pacific: A Contemporary History*, is full of factual information and also provides a comprehensive overview of French Oceania since 1945. Black-and-white photographs are inserted in the different chapters, and these photographs are more interesting as such than the unsubtle commentaries that often go with them. If we have to compare these two authors' approaches--and the exercise is not easy according to the excellence of these two books--we could consider their respective viewpoints, which seem to fundamentally diverge.

Aldrich does not interfere with historical facts. He provides them in their context and, when possible, makes comparisons with other comparable situations not to justify or criticize but only for the reader to understand the logic of history. In doing so, he follows what the *Ecole des Annales* in France with Fernand Braudel or Emmanuel Le Roy-Ladurie have done among other historians to revolutionize historical studies in profitably taking into account other social sciences like sociology, economics, women's studies, culture, and so on. In other words, his books will long be considered classics on Oceanic France.

There are a few spelling mistakes in his text when he deals with French words (which must be due to the typist or publisher, as Aldrich is perfectly fluent in French)-- *certificat d'études primaires* for *primaires* (p. 144), *conseillers* for *conseillers* (p. 242)--or with Tahitian words: Ti Tiarama for Te Tiarama (p. 295). That is nothing.

Robert Aldrich does not focus at all on a prospective line. This is the central point according to which his book differs from Stephen Henningham's. Henningham is more familiar with the internal political evolution of the three French Pacific territories than Aldrich. He was deputy consul general in Noumea in the early 1980s, and we can feel in reading his exposes on New Caledonian or French Polynesian politics that he fully mastered all details of them. His book is more of a political nature; it is in fact mainly political history of the French Pacific from 1945 to 1990 to which are added elements of analysis that comfort this political history. This is not a negative comment, as this book is of the highest value for someone who wants to understand politics in French Oceania. Everything is taken into account: statistical data, politicians, political parties and their intricacies, and so on. If we compare Henningham's complete chapter on Wallis and Futuna (pp. 178-192) with Aldrich's (pp. 297-301), we can see that the former used

to write comprehensive, detailed diplomatic telegrams or notes while the latter does not consider Wallis and Futuna to add more to his proposition. In this case, Henningham offers better than Aldrich.

In fact these two books are complementary to each other on all issues at stake. Aldrich has not been willing to develop the future of French nuclear tests as he thought that they would stop. Henningham, taking into account diverse French declarations in the early 1990s, was persuaded that they would be carried on. The decision to suspend the testing program--indefinitely?--was taken in May 1992 when Bérégovoy became the seventh French prime minister of François Mitterrand. The new French president, Jacques Chirac, just recently decided to start it again for eight tests.

There is one point not altogether correctly developed in either book: the murder of Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yewene Yewene. This murder was committed by Djubely Wea, a former reverend, who had never accepted that Tjibaou did not take into account his own wish to intercede at the time of the Ouvea massacre. He was not a young lad and was not arrested after the murder, as Aldrich claims. He was shot by Tjibaou's bodyguards a few seconds after he had killed the two Kanak leaders. Henningham claims that they were killed by militants traumatized by the outcome of the Ouvea hostage-taking and opposed to compromise with France. The details relative to these tragic deaths are unimportant, what only matters is the disappearance of Tjibaou and Yewene.