

David Robie, *Blood on Their Banner: Nationalist Struggles in the South Pacific*. London: Zed Books; Sydney: Pluto Press, 1989. Pp. 313, bibliography, index, notes. A\$19.95 paperback.

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The title and cover of this book proclaim its stance: "The South Pacific is no longer pacific. Nationalist struggles against colonialism, indigenous claims for sovereignty and superpower rivalry have turned it into a zone of growing tension. . . . The policies of France, Indonesia and the United States pose the greatest threat to the stability of the region."

After more than a decade of committed journalism in the region, David Robie has drawn together here accounts of various recent problems and struggles. The most substantial part of the book deals with the struggle for Kanaky; there is also a briefer account of nuclear testing in Moruroa and the opposition to the French presence there. Indonesian repression is discussed in a chapter on Irian Jaya and East Timor, while the United States' involvement in Palau completes the trilogy of threats. By contrast Vanuatu appears intermittently and prominently as the lone Pacific nation that has taken "a remarkably courageous independent stance for an economically vulnerable nation" in its championship of nuclear-free and independent Pacific. a

Robie is at his best, as a good journalist, on the front line, notably in New Caledonia. By contrast the historical analysis is relatively thin, entirely from secondary sources and descriptive rather than analytical. A significant part of the bibliography is unused; Robie lists Hempenstall and Rutherford's excellent *Protest and Dissent in the Colonial Pacific* (Suva, 1984), but he makes no use of it, and appears unaware of Mamak and Ali's *Race, Class, and Rebellion in the South Pacific* (Sydney, 1979). Both provide wider perspectives that would have enabled contemporary struggles to be seen as something more complex than merely conflicts with colonialism and neocolonialism. The range of examples of crisis and violence discussed by Robie cannot simply be attributed to variants of these twin peaks of oppression.

In the accounts of Palau and New Caledonia especially, there is little attempt to understand the manner in which traditional divisions (based on ethnicity, language, or social structure) were related to accommodations with colonialism. In the case of New Caledonia, the most prominent Melanesian opponent of the struggle for independence, Dick Ukeiwe, is quoted as being a "lackey Kanak" and a "puppet" (pp. 96, 138), but there is no attempt to explain why around 20 percent of all Melanesians supported his position. For Palau, no mention is made of social organization oriented around principles of opposition. Indeed, it is only in Fiji that divisions among Pacific islanders really surface since it is in Fiji that nationalism has apparently departed from the preferred script. But "nationalism" is here an undefined and elusive term, which manages to incorporate both the Fiji Labour Party and the Taukei Movement as variants of the search for domestic legitimacy. a

Consequently, this book presents a relatively simplistic analysis of colonialism (and neocolonialism) in the South Pacific, exemplified in Robie's assertion, "Both France and the United States have refused to surrender even the smallest part of the South Pacific--except under

duress, as in Vanuatu" (p. 17). Yet Vanuatu is exceptional precisely because it is the only Pacific state where violence has accompanied the emergence of an independent nation. In New Caledonia violence occurred because the ballot box was (and remains) no vehicle for independence. Independence was not denied either French Polynesia or New Caledonia; it was denied to the minority who sought it. (This is, however, not to say that France has almost always sought to defer any possibility of independence, as the recent Matignon Accord has so obviously done; attempted to sow the seeds of division within independence movements; or killed and imprisoned prominent supporters of independence.) Similarly, none of its "colonies" has sought independence from the United States; it defies the imagination to envisage an independence movement in American Samoa (as long as migration is possible and transfer economy in place). The Northern Marianas especially, but also the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia, have negotiated long-term and wide-ranging political and economic links with the colonial power and Guam debates a stronger political tie. While colonialism may pose psychological and political problems, it simultaneously generates welfare provision and wages beyond those of most independent island states. In these contexts, and elsewhere, immediate economic issues have triumphed over the more nebulous rewards of confrontational nationalism.

Ultimately Robie argues that the insurrections in New Caledonia, the gangland-style "execution" of the Palau president, and the coup in Fiji mark a "turning point" for South Pacific island states--the loss of "geopolitical innocence" (p. 14). But that loss occurred long ago, when Pacific islands were incorporated into the periphery of the world capitalist system. It may be, as Bruce Knapman has suggested for eastern Fiji, that their size, limited resources, and remoteness often spared the islands "the journey through hell" that occurred in areas closer to the centers of the capitalist world. If this was so in eastern Fiji it was certainly not the case in Banaba or Nauru, Samoa or Pohnpei. Invariably the most rapacious forms of colonialism were firmly opposed (as they were in nineteenth-century New Caledonia) while, in other places, islanders made their own accommodations to the outside world through various forms of dissent and ultimately a degree of acquiescence. In global economy the issues that now trouble the Pacific island states are often those of incomes, wages, education, and health--based around continued authority over land-- rather than the achievement of an independent and nuclear-free Pacific that so beguiles outside observers. This pragmatism, apparent in the Fijian context, alongside wider

acquiescence to the neocolonial world--especially in the cultural arena --is lacking here. As recent events in Bougainville demonstrate, however, the South Pacific is too complex for easy generalization.

There are troubling features of this book. The large number of typographical errors and spelling mistakes should have been corrected; so too the sloppy footnotes and bibliography. But these are mere quibbles. More serious are the number of quotations that are unattributed and the several instances of apparent plagiarism (for example, see *Islands Business Pacific*, June 1991, 5). This is most unfortunate since many of the quotations that Robie includes from his own work are revealing and useful additions to the documentation on contemporary dissent in the region. In this he has done himself a disservice in what would otherwise have been a useful addition to political journalism on the South Pacific.