
REVIEWS

Judith A. Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons: A History of a Pacific Archipelago, 1800-1978*. Pacific Islands Monograph Series, No. 3. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987. Pp. xxvii, 531, photographs, tables, maps, figures, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$35.00.

Reviewed by Lamont Lindstrom, University of Tulsa

Judith Bennett resurrects the title of a jingoistic, 1910 *Sydney Sun* celebration of the economic potential of the Solomon Islands for her narrative history of these islands. The book is a revised version of her 1979 Ph.D. dissertation, which was subtitled "A History of Trade, Plantations, and Society in the Solomon Islands, 1800-1942." This has been expanded temporally, to encompass events between the outbreak of World War II and Solomon Islands' independence in 1978, and also topically. Although economic history remains the book's focus and also its forte, the volume traces political, mission, and social history as well.

Wealth of the Solomons is based on extensive archival research and also on oral histories that Bennett collected on Guadalcanal, Malaita, San Cristobal, the Shortlands, and New Georgia. To compile and arrange the history of a culturally diverse people who speak over eighty languages and who live on six large and many smaller islands, Bennett builds on three general themes: islanders' various and changing relationships with their environment; the enlargement of local political identities and organizations; and the penetration and transformation of traditional society by powerful, external political and economic forces.

Bennett follows the current pattern in Pacific historiography in that she is concerned with the mutually determining relationship between the capitalist core and the colonized periphery. She documents local environmental conditions and cultural practices that to some degree blunted or deflected the thrust of capitalist penetration. She also traces

islander reaction to imposed economic and political regimes as well as their occasionally successful manipulation of hapless traders, missionaries, and colonial officials. Her discussion of the ways islanders organized politically and economically in reaction to the global depression of the 1930s is perhaps the highlight of the book.

This remains, however, colonial history; a chronology of alien actors and external forces and events forms the framework of the volume. After a reconstruction of Solomon Islands' social life as it may have been in 1800, Bennett follows, chapter by chapter, the progress of capitalist penetration from whalers, to traders, to the establishment of the Protectorate, the development of plantations and cash cropping, the Great Depression and its effects, World War II, and, finally, the lead-up to national independence.

Aside from a mild economism Bennett uses to account for why people made particular choices and decisions, the book is bare of theory. There are a few, spare citations of Wallerstein and one quote from Marx at his least materialistic. I believe the absence of an assertive theoretical apparatus is one of the book's strengths. One can read through this well-written, narrative account without losing oneself along the way in the thorny thickets of theoretical byways. For those whose proclivities run to dependency theory, or to world system theory, there is enough data in the book to fuel any sort of theoretical approach. The volume is crammed with information arranged in its eight appendixes (naval history buffs, look here), in its many figures and tables, and in its excellent maps. For those concerned with women's history, the author, perhaps, did her best as women pop up here and there along the way. On the whole, however, men—both European and islander—dominate the story. This is apparent in the appended list of the more than 178 people Bennett interviewed. Of these, only twenty-three were women.

The book is handsomely produced and well edited for its size. I counted four typos only. Concluding her preface, Bennett hopes "that other histories of the Solomon Islands will follow and that Solomon Islanders will be among the historians. To you especially, I offer this book as a gift and as a challenge. Take it as you will." Most of the rest of us will take it with pleasure. Until those future histories are written, this book will be the standard history of the Solomon Islands.