

Radio Happy Isles: media and politics at play in the Pacific

Robert Seward, 1999, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, ISBN 0 8248 2106 8, pp.x + 234, US\$45 (hardcover), US\$24.95 (paper).

Imagine the Pacific not as a big blue ocean with specks of land—consider, instead, a full space of overlapping radio voices.

Travelling throughout the region over six years, Robert Seward was beguiled by the magic of radio. He calls it a form of telephone open line that carries tribal memories: 'For the most part, Pacific islanders do not read about themselves in the news, nor do they watch themselves in the news—even in their own media. The media is a sea of sound where people are tuned to radio' (p.195).

As an outsider, a professor of International Studies in Tokyo, Seward has an eye and ear for the unique elements of Pacific radio where people can start to describe themselves in sound. The nature of music and voice means this description can be scattered and fragmented. Often it is blended with American music and Western forms for presenting news. The interest is in how the Pacific transforms the formula from mass communication to something which is local and familiar.

One example is the use of radio for personal announcements. For less than US\$10, stations in places such as Solomon Islands and Tonga will read messages on air. Someone who puts a parcel on the ferry for relatives on an outlying island can pay for a message so the ship will be met. An employer can send a message to an errant employee: 'Tavake, I gave you two weeks' vacation but you have been away for four; if you don't come back by next Friday, you are fired' (p.24). On any one day, the messages run into hundreds on Radio Tonga. On Mother's Day, there are thousands of notices. Radio figures in slang terms for gossip or word-of-mouth

networks: 'coconut wireless' or 'radio 32', an allusion to the number of teeth in the human mouth.

The music heard is often local, with the tapes on air also on sale in the general stores. In Melanesia, Seward finds forms of reggae, calypso and Pacific country and western which is 'a real shock when you first hear it, but the ballad-like quality is unmistakable. Vocals are in a mixture of Pidgin and English but heavy on the Pidgin or other local language' (p.30).

The core of the book is how Pacific stations have been transformed away from the BBC public service model, and the pressures Pacific governments apply to sparsely resourced newsrooms. The departing colonial powers left most island countries only one radio station, usually under a form of direct state control. Tight budgets mean the public broadcasting tradition has been eroded by corporatisation or privatisation. A PNG broadcasting manager is quoted describing corporatisation as a 'system which is eating the Pacific'. One tension is that governments do not want to pay for the radio services but wish to maintain political control, especially over news. National radio must become commercial enterprises but without private ownership.

Seward captures some of the day-to-day realities. When the air-conditioning is being temperamental, the studio door will be propped open: 'Because of the open-door policy, street sounds may occasionally reach the radio audience, and a few words from passing conversations too. Around the station you have to step lightly and be careful what you say' (p.128). The tape recorder becomes an emblem of the battle facing Pacific radio. In a salty, humid climate, the gear has a short life and is expensive to repair or replace. Broadcasters are encouraged to dub-edit tapes, not cut-edit. Cut editing is more precise, but the splices weaken tape and mean it can not be reused as often. Commitment and

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imagination can stretch radio dollars. With a staff of only half a dozen people, a radio station can keep going in ways that would be impossible for television.

You do not have to spend long in Pacific newsrooms to discover that issues of government control and power are inescapable. Journalists face a distasteful choice: embrace self-censorship or face direct pressure from their management and government. The habit of the late Prime Minister of Samoa, Tofilau Eti Alesana, was to review 'sensitive' news material and rewrite copy before it was broadcast. Sensitive was defined as anything that might reflect poorly on majority politicians (p.143).

Radio executives must duck and compromise to hold on to their positions as governments change. One general manager, when asked how he kept his position through a succession of governments, replied, 'I was related to the first prime minister, but I worked my way up from accounting to general manager. And my wife is related to the current prime minister so I retained my job as GM'.

A couple of chapters are devoted to a truly regional element of Pacific broadcasting over the past decade, the development of the news exchange, PACNEWS. Radio stations send in their best news stories each day and PACNEWS sends back a series of regional bulletins. Since PACNEWS sprung to life in Suva in 1987, the technology used for the exchange has undergone a series of evolutions: through radio telephone, telex, fax and email.

In PACNEWS, bad news about the region does not chase out the good. To that extent, the intraregional exchange of news has 'succeeded in decolonising information'. The flow of contributions can be haphazard, even idiosyncratic, depending on the time or willingness of individual newsrooms to send in material. And it is ironic that PACNEWS ability to decolonise

information, to break the usual North-South flow of news, has depended on the support of a German development foundation, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).

The FES training programs in the Pacific helped create the climate for the news exchange, responding to the needs expressed quietly by islands broadcasters in the face of antagonism from their governments to an independent service. One hero of this story is an indefatigable German broadcaster, Hendrik Bussiek. He'd put together the equipment needed for the news exchange as part of the training program based in Suva.

A workshop for Pacific editors in September, 1987, brought PACNEWS to life. It was a fine Pacific synthesis; a long period of talking produced an informal consensus which led to an act of almost spontaneous creation. One of the editors present remembered the mood of exasperation: 'Let's not talk about it any more; let's just do it'. The participants agreed that two of the news editors would stay in Fiji to begin the service the following Monday. PACNEWS was only days old when the second coup hit Suva, emphasising the reality of a dark period for media freedom.

Fiji officials were suspicious of the news exchange and Bussiek was eventually expelled. PACNEWS was forced to move to New Zealand in 1990 while it searched for a new island home. The service subsequently shifted to Solomon Islands, then Vanuatu, and has finally returned to Fiji. The travels and travails of PACNEWS have been caused as much by money worries as government pressures. Its continued life is testament to the flexibility and resilience needed to be a Pacific broadcaster.

Seward set off on his regional journey with a store of Western media theory in his luggage. Like many before him he was captured by the people he met and different storytelling traditions. Here is Seward

describing Mele Laumanu Petelo, the controller of news and current affairs at Radio Tonga

Petelo's on-air persona has the quality of control. The news is read in a superb voice, power veiled in understatement and not oversold. The controller of news, an unfortunate title, is also a singer and has performed with her own group. For the most part, her singing is a private matter, reserved for the church choir. She doesn't sing or preach the news, but there is clear resonant authority, a pacing for secular radio with a hint of lauds (p.129).

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Multiculturalism and Reconciliation in an Indulgent Republic—Fiji after the coups, 1987–1998

Robert T. Robertson, Fiji Institute of Applied Sciences, Suva, 1998, vii + 260pp, ISBN 982-301-012-9, F\$10 (Available from USP Book Centre, PO Box 1168, Suva, Fiji).

Another Way: the politics of constitutional reform in post-coup Fiji

Brij V. Lal, History of Development Studies 7, NCDS Asia Pacific Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, 1998, xiv + 223pp, ISBN 0 7315 2381 4, A\$29.95.

The 1987 Fiji coups, like the 1975 Australian constitutional crisis, generated a large literature as analysts sought to explain and (mostly) condemn these apparent aberrations. Among these 'instant histories'

were Robbie Robertson and Akosita Tamanisau's *Shattered Coups* and Brij Lal's *Power and Prejudice*. Robertson and Lal have now published sequels which, in their different ways, are welcome updates—although what Robertson means by an 'indulgent republic' is anything but clear.

Multiculturalism and Reconciliation is a political history of Fiji since the coups and it fills a definite need, given what else is on offer. Ratu Mara's autobiography (see review this issue) is too self-serving to carry much authority, and the local collection *With Heart and Nerve and Sinew* (ed. Arlene Griffen) contains some solid contributions but has too much chatty reminiscence. Robertson has met a pressing need for a sustained and systematic analysis—one that largely eschews the class-driven interpretation of *Shattered Coups*, which denied the obvious centrality of race.

His account is one of post-coup mismanagement, scandal and crisis-control that often had everything to do with communalism and antagonism rather than multiculturalism and reconciliation. It is a lucid account of a government struggling to come to grips with the negative consequences of its own actions, made more difficult by the externally-driven need to embrace a brave new world of economic rationalisation, privatisation and globalisation. Overall, Robertson has provided a sound and lucid account of the last dozen years of Fiji politics, although the constant focus on Prime Minister Rabuka is perhaps overdone. Moreover, it is not good practice to recount parliamentary proceedings without consulting *Hansard* itself. Although some of the protagonists have been interviewed, Robertson has been overwhelmingly reliant for his sources on Fiji's print media—in itself an indication that the media in Fiji are alive and well. We can be grateful for more reasons than one that attempts in certain quarters of the governing SVT party to impose Malaysian-

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style media restrictions in late 1995/early 1996 were headed off.

Much of *Multiculturalism and Reconciliation* makes depressing reading but the last chapters offer a ray of hope in pointing to the reservoir of goodwill that struggles to break out. In particular, the Citizen's Constitutional Forum is praised for its vision of a multicultural Fiji where equality and justice will prevail, and in places Robertson comes close to being their spokesman. Another ray of hope, which Robertson briefly discusses, lies in the area of constitutional reform. The 1990 Constitution was frankly racist and discriminatory; but a Constitution Review Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Paul Reeves (a former Governor-General of New Zealand) was established in 1995. The other two members were Tomasi Vakatora (representing the Fijian community) and Brij Lal (representing the Indian community). They produced a report of nearly 800 pages and Lal has now published his account of this exercise in constitutional reform, and its antecedents. The title of his book, of course, is a dig at Rabuka's account of the coups, *No Other Way*. Lal combines the advantages of being a trained historian involved in the making of history. He provides a succinct account of the events leading to the appointment of the Commission. In the first chapters he describes its work and rationale. The second half of the book comprises a series of key contemporary extracts, followed by a summary of the Commission's recommendations and a useful series of statistics.

Another Way is compelling reading. Among other things, we are treated to the extraordinary spectacle of a government who systematically set out to undermine, and indeed to sabotage, the Commission that it appointed with a constant barrage of criticism and denigration, culminating in a totally intransigent submission by the SVT. The Prime Minister led the charge when he stated days before the Commission

convened that the only acceptable changes would be ones strengthening the Fijians' position. In the event, the Commission pressed for racial harmony and national unity and recommended, among other things, that multi-ethnic governments should be encouraged through power sharing, that communal representation be phased out, and that the new constitution be premised on the principle that the rights and interests of all communities be protected: while the paramountcy of Fijian rights would be maintained, this would be on the understanding that it 'does not involve the relegation of the interests of other communities'.

One gets a sense that Lal is moved by expectation as much as by hope. He did, after all, strike up an extraordinarily fruitful yet seemingly improbable partnership with the redoubtable Tomasi Vakatora—an amazing meeting of minds between an indentured labourer's grandson and a hardline Fijian nationalist. Without pushing the analogy too far, I keep being reminded of the equally remarkable partnership in the 1920s between Gustav Stresemann and Aristide Briand and their attempts towards a lasting peace in Europe. But the diplomacy of the Frenchman and the German moved too far ahead of opinion in their own countries, and on this very rock Fiji's 1997 Constitution might founder as a basis for multiculturalism and reconciliation. A political culture of communalism will not be changed overnight, especially when much of it is institutionally entrenched. But at least the 1990 constitution has been superseded and the foundation for better days is in place. That alone has been a major achievement.

There is irony in the way things have turned out. Lal pinned high hopes on a Rabuka/Reddy alliance and a coalition between the SVT and the National Federation Party (NFP), in the interest of cross-communal power sharing. This forms the basis of Chapter 4 ('New

Foundations'). In what was to many a completely unexpected outcome, in the May 1999 elections the Fiji Labour Party won an absolute majority of seats and the SVT and the NFP fared poorly, to put it mildly. The Fiji Labour Party has gone into a coalition with the Fiji Association Party and so there is power sharing, although not in the manner envisaged by Lal. Yet, at the time of publication of *Another Way*, Lal's prescription seemed eminently sound, and few would have challenged it.

Robbie Robertson and Brij Lal have produced timely and valuable accounts that will inform the political dialogue of contemporary Fiji and serve the causes of racial harmony and national unity. They equally deserve a wide readership outside Fiji.

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The Pacific Way: a memoir

The Right Honourable Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 1997, pp xvi, 280, ISBN 0-8248-1893-8, US\$15.

For anyone interested in the political and economic development of the Pacific Island countries in the second half of the twentieth century, this book has a great deal to offer.

Ratu Mara was born on a small island of the Lau group in 1920, and at the time of publication of this book he was President of Fiji. He was born into high-ranking chiefly status, the responsibilities of which were a major influence throughout his career.

His education was long and varied. From 1937 to 1945 he was a medical student in Fiji and New Zealand, but in 1946, at the behest of his uncle, the great chief Ratu Sukuna, he regretfully gave up his almost completed medical studies to go to Wadham College in Oxford where, in 1949 he earned a degree in modern history.

In 1950 he joined the Fiji civil service and gained experience in various posts as District Officer, District Commissioner, and as Deputy Secretary for Fijian Affairs. The account of this early part of his career is of interest for the light it throws on many aspects of life and administration in Fiji in the 1950s.

However Ratu Mara's real career was in politics, with a modest start in 1953 as an appointed Fijian Member of the Legislative Council. In 1956, in response to an Indian call for electoral reform, Fijian leaders formed the Fijian Association, of which Mara soon became chairman. Then in 1963 he became a member of the Executive Council of Fiji as Member for Natural Resources and Leader of Government business. He was an active member of the first Constitutional Conference in London in 1965.

Under the new Constitution he became Chief Minister in 1967, and Prime Minister after independence in 1970. Apart from a brief hiatus in 1977, and another in 1987, Mara continued as Prime Minister until 1992, when he became President of the Republic of Fiji. For three decades Ratu Mara has been at the centre of political power in Fiji, and his account of this period gives a fascinating and authoritative account of the politics of Fiji. Of special interest is his account of the events leading to his reinstatement as Prime Minister by the Governor General after his party lost the election in 1977, and again of the manoeuvrings after the loss of the election in 1987 and the military coups of Colonel (later Major General) Rabuka, leading to Mara's appointment as Prime Minister of the interim government from 1987 to 1992.

But Ratu Mara was more than a Fijian political leader. He also played an important role in the affairs of the British Commonwealth. This commenced after his appointment as Chief Minister in 1967 when he did a tour of recently independent Commonwealth countries, where he met political leaders in Jamaica, Trinidad,

Guyana, Malaysia, India and Singapore. His comments on the personalities and situations he found on these visits are interesting.

Over the years he took part in eight Commonwealth CHOGRM meetings, in many of which he played an influential part, and he also chaired the Regional CHORGAM in Suva in 1982. His accounts of these meetings throw an interesting light on the development of the Commonwealth, and on its leading personalities during this period.

In the Pacific his influence and leadership extended across the region and he played an important part in the activities of its regional institutions, such as the South Pacific Commission (SPC, now known as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community). He was one of the founders of the South Pacific Forum and a formative influence in the establishment of the Pacific Islands Development Program.

The overall account of Ratu Mara's career shows several important influences that played a key part in his life.

One is the importance he attached to his chiefly status and its responsibilities. There have been people who have criticised his re-appearance in the role of prime minister after the loss of the elections in 1977 and 1987, and after the two military coups of Rabuka. There have been suggestions of a kind of 'Vicar of Bray' quality in his re-emergence on these occasions. However, he saw himself on these occasions as merely fulfilling his chiefly duty of leadership when it was most needed.

Another continuing influence was the importance he attached to the links of Fiji with the British Crown. This was something that he tried his best to sustain, even at times when it was most difficult.

A third was his dedication to the cause of multiculturalism in Fiji. It might be argued that he went too far, or too quickly, on this path, and that not sufficient was done during his prime ministership to

push the Fijian villagers into the advanced sector of the economy. However, Ratu Mara himself clearly does not agree.

It is clear that Ratu Mara was very well served by Mr (later Sir) Robert Sanders, a member of the Fiji Civil Service who served for many years as his secretary to cabinet, and who accompanied him on many of his overseas travels. Sanders later came out of retirement to help Ratu Mara with the writing of these memoirs.

The book as a whole is well written and eminently readable. Those interested in the region and its personalities will find the narrative of sustained interest—except, perhaps, for the rather specialised first short chapter which deals with the chiefly lineage of the author.

Ratu Mara was an acute observer and his account of events in his wide-ranging career over more than three decades contains a wealth of anecdotes, observations and vignettes of significant events and personalities. There is a useful index that will assist the reader who prefers to dip into the book in pursuit of specific interests.

E.K. Fisk

Narratives of Nation in the South Pacific

Ton Otto and Nicholas Thomas, (eds), *Studies in Anthropology and History*, Vol. 19, Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, 1997, xv + 256 pp, bib, refs, illus, figs, index, ISBN 90-5702-085-8, A\$93 (hardcover), ISBN 90-5702-086-6, A\$39 (paper).

Narratives of Nation in the South Pacific is a result of 'The Politics of Tradition in the Pacific' Project begun in 1990 at Macquarie University and later supported by the Australian Research Council.

Developing ideas first expounded in a collection of essays in *Mankind* (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982), the influential

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Invention of Tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 1983), the collection seeks to remove the discourse of nation in the Pacific from the dichotomy of colonisers and colonised in which the 'agency and competence of the latter' are emphasised and 'responsible self-rule' prefigured—a tendency which the authors believe has dominated Anglophone scholarship since the 1950s (p.4). Post-colony, *Narratives of Nation* seeks to supplant this opposition with 'a far messier array of local divisions, relating...to precolonial antagonisms...the simultaneous exacerbation of conflict... uneven development, and corruption' (p.4). Containing essays by some of the leading thinkers on Pacific identities, including Jocelyn Linnekin, Margaret Jolly, Michael Young, the late Jeffrey Clark (to whom the collection was dedicated), Ton Otto, Jeffrey Sissons, Stephanie Lawson and an epilogue by collection editor Nicholas Thomas, *Narratives of Nation* is largely successful in its mission, and offers some tantalising digressions along the way.

The major themes of the collection are, that while the creation of nationhood 'transforms traditional attachments in favour of new identities' and calls for 'a reaffirmation of authentic cultural values culled from the depths of a communal past' (p.133), these projections are utilised to mask undemocratic behaviour and the entrenchment of state élites (Lawson); are challenged by regional and religious identities (Young and Clark); are open to reformulation depending on the fortunes of national élites (Sissons); and the evocation of tradition often conceals gendered assumptions about social roles (Jolly).

Yet, these tendencies do not amount to the 'end of nationalism'. As the editors point out, people may 'perceive themselves as members of a nation, and as essentially similar to other nationals, without necessarily possessing a loyal or civic consciousness' (p.1).

Four of the contributions deal specifically with the project of creating national identity by state élites. Lawson opens on the politics of tradition and the ease with which the imagining of community based on 'tradition' can be deployed 'to entrench the interests of an indigenous élite at the expense of other interests' (p.18). I was troubled by Lawson's comparison (not contrast) between the decentralist tendencies in the Pacific and atavistic nationalisms in Europe, especially in the former USSR and Eastern Europe. Although Bougainville and, to a lesser degree, the Santo rebellion in Vanuatu loom large in questions of the salience of the idea of nation in the Pacific, Lawson's emphasis hazes the fact that while centrifugal tendencies exist, they do not usually inspire violent separatism.

Otto offers a lengthy exposition of one 'imagining of community': Bernard Narakobi's conception of a 'Melanesian Way', which was formulated at a time when Papuan separatism appeared likely to initiate the dissolution of the new state of Papua New Guinea. Narakobi inverts the perception that Melanesian societies were incapable of becoming nations because of their intense specificities by insisting that 'Europeans came and divided us' (p.55). The unifying ethic of the 'Melanesian Way', however, is in stark contrast with the salience of regional identities demonstrated in the chapters by Clark and Young.

Jolly and Sissons provide instances of the perversion of such an inclusive notion by narrow sectional and gendered interests. In the instance of Vanuatu, Jolly demonstrates that the potency of traditional values (*kastom*) simultaneously differentiated the fledgling state from the colonial order and reinscribed male domination of women, post-colony. If indeed the national culture is reformulated to facilitate national emancipation, why, Jolly asks, is the primacy of men made sacrosanct? (p.155)

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Sissons reminds us that in the Cook Islands the creation of nationhood was 'a project of organisation and control, power and propaganda' (p.163) which entrenched the Henry family and was tied to its fortunes.

The chapters by Clark and Young are a high point in the collection. Both disentangle modernity and nation by juxtaposing master narratives of nation with equally modern, but localised identities. Clark demonstrates that the national mission in Papua New Guinea falters in the face of salient Highlands identities which were not subject to the modernistic projects of nation-building in any coherent sense. The result is post-modern nationalisms in which local and regional membership subvert that of nation and result in identities substantially different to those which emerge in (Western) Europe and the New World (p.70).

It has been argued elsewhere (Foster 1995) that Christianity has provided the central bulwark of state and nation in the thoroughly Christian Pacific. Yet Young demonstrates that while Christianity is 'enmeshed in political activities concerning economic development and foreign aid' (p.92), the veneration of Dr W.E. Bromilow in Dobu (Papua New Guinea) and Thomas Smaill in Epi (Vanuatu) as missionary heroes created identities too specific to be coopted by the state to the wider whole.

Linnekin's chapter seeks to trace the 'emergence of a culturally unified 'nation' as a political centre in Samoan historical discourse' (p.189). Linnekin analogises the conception of '*o le atunu'u* (the country)—defined in contradistinction to Tongan bondage—with that of Samoa—defined both by and in contradistinction to European colonialism. The centring project benefited both indigenous élites and Europeans who found '...the absence of an enduring central government...a fundamental deficiency requiring paternalistic intervention' (p.193). Yet Linnekin perceives a tension running through both centring projects between the

development of centred identity and the centrifugal tendencies of local custom and precedence.

Underscoring the collection is pessimism regarding the success of the national project in the Pacific. Thomas concludes the volume with a wide-ranging discussion that draws together some of these themes and suggests some future directions of nation and identity. The nation in Western Europe is increasingly subverted beneath appeals to 'Europeanness' and by ethnic fragmentations. Thomas leaves us with the tantalising thought that while this is occurring, 'Pacific societies apparently possess no national identities that need to be forgotten...and appear already equipped with modes of identification demanded of Europeans' (p.219). Yet, surely supra-nations in the Pacific would be subject to the same tension between centring and decentering that has affected nations?

Narratives of Nation successfully differentiates itself from 'evolutionary narratives' which prefigure the emergence of 'nation' as natural and inevitable. The twofold strength of the collection lies in depicting the tension between the centripetal project of 'nation' and the centrifugal tendencies of smaller localised identities, and disentangling the strategic nature of national projects at élite levels.

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Bridging Mental Boundaries in a Postcolonial Microcosm: identity and development in Vanuatu

William F.S. Miles, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu. 1998. xxiv + 271 pp. ISBN 0 8248 2048 7, US\$47 (hardcover), US\$22.95 (paper)

Vanuatu is unique in the South Pacific in that it experienced both French and British colonialism simultaneously, for prior to gaining independence in 1980 it was known as the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides. Almost twenty years have elapsed since that time, and like other small Pacific island states which were former colonies of European powers, Vanuatu has had to contend with its postcolonial legacies as it forges its own national identity and wrestles with the economic realities which it must confront in a context of development in an environment of ever expanding globalisation.

Bridging Mental Boundaries in a Post-colonial Microcosm is a timely book, a sympathetic enumeration and evaluation of the competing and cross-cutting groupings which operate in Vanuatu today and their historical antecedents.

Miles carried out his research in Vanuatu during two stays in 1991 and 1992 and enjoyed close access to a number of the major political players, particularly the late Father Walter Lini, the first Prime Minister of Vanuatu and 'father of the nation'. Although the politics of Vanuatu have changed from majority government to a series of rather unstable coalition governments since 1991, the competing forces examined by Miles, some inherited from their former colonial masters and some indigenous, have remained

boundaries which have rendered the task of forging a national identity a delicate one in a nation of 113 indigenous languages, bound together by a single lingua franca, Bislama or Melanesian Pidgin, in which the languages of education are English and French.

At the outset Miles defines the major thesis of the book, when he states that mental boundaries imposed and internalised during the colonial era persist beyond formal decolonisation, but that at the same time new mental boundaries of more indigenous origin are gradually erected in their place. Later, when discussing the role of kava in Vanuatu society he adds another dimension when he claims that the reality is one of blurred boundary lines between the paradigms of the 'modern' with the 'traditional'.

Bridging Mental Boundaries in a Postcolonial Microcosm begins with a discussion of boundaries, the first of which is territorial, making the point that decolonisation does not require the dismantling of international boundaries, but rather requires the bridging of mental ones. To set the scene for his discussion of the major mental boundaries to be crossed, linguistic, religious and cultural, Miles provides a brief history of Vanuatu and its contact with the outside world, through World War II to present-day politics.

Then follows a description of the Anglo-French Condominium (1906–80) and 'condocolonialism', which he defines as 'a process of divided and divisive domination'. The author quickly moves to the central question of the link between Church, education and language, and the cleavage between English-educated Protestants and French-educated Catholics and the mind-sets that this rivalry engendered in colonial and postcolonial Vanuatu.

Miles moves from this to an examination of how emergent political leaders used *kastom* (or perceived traditional

lifestyle) in an attempt to kindle and develop a sense of nationalism, first of all against their colonial masters, as *kastom* was equated with reclaiming land, and later as the foundation of independent Vanuatu national unity and identity. He cites the popularisation in post-independence Vanuatu of the drinking of kava, pig-killing ceremonies, *kastom* dress and string band music as manifestations of the use of *kastom* to foster the development of a ni-Vanuatu identity and a sense of nationalism. He is not duped, however, recognising that some of this *kastom* is a reconstruction and that it is just as much a boundary marker as a force for unity.

In the latter half of the book, Miles returns to the themes of religious boundaries and the none too surprising fact that nearly all of the political leaders at independence were closely associated with the churches, the primary dispensers of Western education in Vanuatu until the early 1970s. There follows an interesting anecdotal discussion of post-independence syncretism in the churches, a kind of blending of *kastom* and orthodox Christian beliefs, an important feature of Vanuatu society today.

Questions of language, education and the role of Bislama, the Vanuatu pidgin English variety, in the development of a national identity bulk large as Miles expands his parameters to include other boundaries such as gender, race and socio-economic status.

He concludes that the ultimate boundary for ni-Vanuatu to bridge is no longer that between rival villages, between *kastom* and Christianity, between Anglophones and Francophones, or between competing islands. It is between being a *manples*, a person rooted in and defined by the soil of his or her birthplace, and *man blong ol wol*, a citizen of the world.

Bridging Mental Boundaries in a Postcolonial Microcosm is in general a well-researched book, although there are some suggestions that Miles' acquaintance with

Vanuatu is a mite superficial, a feeling reinforced by a number of surprising errors and inconsistencies, such as his reference to the Joint Naval Commission (p.32), which strangely becomes the Joint National Commission (p.33), Bauerfield Airport, Santo (p.83), instead of Pekoa Airport, Bauerfield being in Vila; he also refers to Graham Kalsakau (p.212), late chief of Ifira Island as a former Chief Minister, when it is common knowledge that it was in fact his younger brother, George Kaltoi Kalsakau.

Notwithstanding these somewhat incongruous slips, Miles has produced a book which will interest not only political scientists and Vanuatu watchers, but will undoubtedly be an approachable and stimulating commentary for modern ni-Vanuatu readers as they struggle to cope with the many conflicting tensions which exercise them as they come to grips with the pressures of economic reform and increasing globalisation at the dawn of the third millenium.

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Money and Banking in Papua New Guinea

Bank of Papua New Guinea, Bolton Inprint, Cairns, 1998, ISBN 9980-85-265-9, Pp. xv, 270pp.

Money and Banking in Papua New Guinea was commissioned by the Bank of Papua New Guinea to commemorate its 25th anniversary in November 1998. It was written by Paul Morling, with the assistance of Dr Jakob Weiss and Sali David. In the Foreword, the Governor, Morea Vele, noted that it had been written in order to explain the role of the Bank and review the part it has played in the country's economic progress since its creation in 1973.

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Chapter 1 deals with demography, geography and background. For those looking for reasons for the 'lack of progress' or 'constraints to economic development' in the country, this chapter also provides some explanations.

Chapter 2 describes the characteristics of the economy between 1973 and 1998. During the 1960s and 1970s, the 'basic needs' approach to development was adopted where focus on provision of health and education services was given prominence. Growth hardly featured in Papua New Guinea's development objectives. It is noted that 'government's development philosophy and objectives shape its policy framework but the options available to pursue its aim are strongly influenced by three fundamental attributes of the economy – its size, openness and resource endowment' (p.22).

The conduct of monetary policy by the Bank of Papua New Guinea is examined in Chapter 3, including discussions on credit and debt management policy. The Bank has responsibility for monetary policy and advises the government on these and related economic matters. In this context, the Bank clearly spells out that

[t]he principal objective of monetary policy in Papua New Guinea is to provide sufficient liquidity and credit to support sustainable medium term growth of economic activity in the non-mineral private sector... Essentially the concerns of monetary policy, internal stability, external balance and supporting economic growth, correspond to the ultimate goals of economic policy ... The most important contribution monetary policy can make to economic growth in the long term is through the maintenance of macro-economic conditions conducive to investment. By attaining stability, the Bank of Papua New Guinea is also able to achieve the subsidiary objective of encouraging confidence in the kina and credibility in interna-

tional financial markets and institutions (pp.55–56).¹

Chapter 3 also discusses the interaction between monetary policy and fiscal policy, including government debt and the exchange rate regime. Of particular interest is the reference that

Papua New Guinea invariably has most of the characteristics for which a floating exchange rate regime is regarded as inappropriate. Floating rates are regarded as inappropriate for open economies with thin foreign exchange markets and underdeveloped financial markets because of their potential to exacerbate exchange rate fluctuations stemming from the effects of transitory supply or external shocks. The size and seasonal variations in the trade transactions that dominate the foreign exchange market are a further potential source of volatility (p.87).

This is an interesting observation and one which warrants further analysis and debate.²

The legislative framework of the Bank of Papua New Guinea, including the supervisory roles of commercial banks and savings and loan societies and issues of accountability and relations with commercial banks and the government are covered in Chapter 4. As an institution, the Bank has an important role to play in financial and economic management of the country.

The Bank of Papua New Guinea is the government's principal adviser on matters relating to the financial and banking system. As an integral part of the financial system, the Central Bank is in constant communication with other financial and economic institutions. This close association enables it to develop a degree of specialist knowledge on monetary and economic matters, which contributes to the design and implementation of its own policies and to the independent advice it provides to the government (p.97).

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The independence of the Bank of Papua New Guinea is a key feature of its role in the financial and economic management of the country. The IMF has questioned the independence of the Bank in relation to recent economic events.³ As an economic institution tasked with the supervision of financial institutions and providing economic and financial advice to government, the Bank must maintain its independence in all matters of policy and dealings with government and other institutions.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine the financial system in the country focusing on commercial and merchant banks, including savings and loan societies, and other non-bank institutions. The financial system in Papua New Guinea comprises four separate tiers, with the Bank as the source of reserve money as its base.

Commercial banks form the second tier, finance companies, merchant banks and savings and loan societies as third tiers. Non-bank financial institutions comprising investment and pension funds, insurance companies, stockbrokers and the Rural Development Bank form the fourth tier. Because of the absence of a separate institutional network to deal with non-banking institutions in general, this task is being performed by the Bank of Papua New Guinea. Perhaps in future, supervision of non-bank institutions should be performed by an institution specifically set up for this purpose, with the Bank having only a monitoring role.

In relation to its role in promoting economic development, it notes that

[t]he Bank of Papua New Guinea was not only created to assert independence in the monetary and economic spheres but also to be an active instrument of economic development. It is this additional role, in promoting or facilitating development initiatives, which often distinguishes central bank practices in developing countries from those of industrialised countries (p.94).

In this context, it may be necessary for the Bank to collect and produce better employment statistics than is presently the case with its quarterly survey of selected firms in major centres. A key role of the Bank of Papua New Guinea is ensuring the necessary economic conditions for the maintenance of internal and external balance, and in this case a sustainable employment level is a major element of this equation. If one were to use employment levels as a scorecard for the performance of the Bank of Papua New Guinea, it falls far short and there is certainly need for improvement in this area. It was also noted that government initiatives on savings mobilisation have been few and almost negligible (Chapter 5). What then should the Bank of Papua new Guinea do about savings mobilisation in the country?

For those interested in the intricacies of monetary policy and monetary management in Papua New Guinea there are ample discussions in this book. It discusses aspects of the external and domestic shocks the Bank of Papua New Guinea has had to deal with in the 1990s. The authors have avoided the use of 'financial crisis' and used 'fiscal difficulties' instead. It would have been useful to describe fully how the Bank handled the 'financial crisis' of 1994. The role of the Bank in bringing about economic stability, beginning in 1995, could have been better explained, especially in the context of subscribing to the conditions of the structural adjustment program imposed by the World Bank and IMF. In this context, the book made reference to the deregulation of the labour market as a significant step in the structural adjustment program (p.38). It must be noted here that the deregulation of the labour market was made possible by the Minimum Wages Board Determination of 1992. The maintenance of a deregulated labour market was later incorporated as a key condition of the structural adjustment program.

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From a policy perspective, it would have been helpful to have a concluding chapter where the independence of the Bank of Papua New Guinea in terms of policy advice, and freedom from political interference were discussed. General policy constraints relating to such issues as investment incentives and tax policy, which the Bank is unable to influence directly could also have been discussed. Though some of these issues are discussed briefly, their importance warrants a fuller discussion. Despite these shortcomings, *Money and Banking in Papua New Guinea* will be useful for those interested in the evolution of economic and financial policies in the country over the last 25 years. The statistical appendices will be a 'treasure box' for research students and policy analysts alike. In general, the Bank of Papua New Guinea and the authors must be commended for a book that will capture the interest of economists and other social scientists following closely economic developments in Papua New Guinea.

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References

- Duncan, R., Chand, S., Graham, B. and Lawson, T., 1998. *Exchange Rate Policy in Papua New Guinea*, Institute of National Affairs, Port Moresby and National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University.
- Papua New Guinea. *Central Banking Act*, Chapter No.138, Government of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby.

Notes

- ¹ These roles are consistent with the *Central Banking Act* which noted
- Within the context of the general framework of the policy objectives of the Government, the Central Bank shall, within the limits of its powers,

(a) ensure that its monetary and banking policy is directed to the greatest advantage of the people of Papua New Guinea; and (b) direct its efforts to promoting monetary stability and a sound and efficient financial structure (*Central Banking Act* Chapter No.138, 4(3) (a) and (b)).

- ² In a study by Duncan et al. (1998) it noted that a floating exchange rate regime would appear to be the best long-run choice for Papua New Guinea.
- ³ The *Post Courier* (p.1) and *The National* (p.1), both of 11th March, 1999 made reference to the concerns by the IMF.

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