
**JADRAN MIMICA**

*University of Sydney*

This is a volume in the Carolina Academic Press Ritual Studies Monograph series under the general editorship of Pamela Stewart and Andrew Strathern. Their preface introduces the chapters in this collection, most of which derive from papers presented in a session at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association held in November 1999. The title and subtitle fittingly condense the motley thematic scope as well as the dissonance and variations in thought and scholarship between individual papers in relation to their ethnographic base-material. Both the volume and its original performative context can be taken as emblematic and diagnostic of the condition of mainstream, institutional anthropology.

Sandra Bamford’s introduction, titled “Bodies in Transition” (pp.3-15), and Eric Hirsch’s afterword, titled “Embodied Historicities” (pp.283-93), open and conclude a series of ten ethnographic pieces (Chapters 2-11). These are respectively: Martha Rohatynskyj on the vicissitudes of embodiment and locality among the Omie of Oro Province (pp.17-38); Jerry Jacka’s Foucault-dramatic rendition of the Ipili (western Enga Province) cosmological dynamics (pp.39-67); Tony Crook on “machine-thinking” among the labourers in the Ok Tedi Mine (Min region) in the borderlands of the Sandaun and Western Provinces (pp.69-104); Thomas Strong on the people of the Upper Asaro (Eastern Highlands Province; pp.105-23) who “are creating modernity through the ambivalent evocation of loss” (p.107); John Barker on principally Christian “modalities of modernity among the Maisin” of Oro Province (pp.125-59); Bamford on the effects of mission-induced changes on male initiations and the concomitant sense of self and body among the Kapau-speaking Kamea Angan in the rugged interior of the Gulf Province (pp.161-84); Margaret Holmes Williamson on the notions of nationhood among the Kwoma of the East Sepik Province (pp.185-210); Karen Sykes on “family planning” and “management of procreation” among Mandak speakers of the Lelet Plateau in central New Ireland (pp.211-38); Stewart and Strathern’s treatment of changing images of self-world relationships as expressed in the self-decoration of the Melpa Hageners (Western Highlands Province) and the Duna of South Highlands Province (pp.239-55); and finally, Lamont Lindstrom’s scrutinisation of a range of postcards from Vanuatu that were in circulation mainly between 1975 and 1985, through which he reveals the ideological projections of the gaze which had captured and printed them as the semblances of the “South Seas Natives” (pp.257-82).

The value of this collection derives entirely from its diverse ethnographic information. Every paper offers something genuinely original and poignant as an ethnographic testimonial to the intensities and specificities of changes in the life-
worlds of Melanesians. As for the conceptual aspect, which the title enunciates, I found most papers deficient, principally because such civilisational-historical individualities as “modernity” and “post-modernity”, as well as the notion of “body” and its dynamics are used primarily as a rhetorical currency popular in the current academic discourse. In particular, “modernity” in this context figures primarily as a projection by those who seem to fancy themselves not just as belonging to an altogether different epoch of thinking and being, but also as being clear, as it were, as to what “modernity” and various other “post-” epochal conditions are. As for the “embodiment” of these epochal streamings, apart from its accomplishment in Melanesia by Melanesians, the real issue is whether any of the contributors is demonstrably in a mindful possession of a critically sustainable knowledge about, and understanding of, the subject-matter enunciated in the title.

As the thinkers of “embodiment”, “modernity”, “post-modernity”, and—especially since a purportedly historicist understanding is at issue—as the ethnographers that seemingly cultivate historicist sensibilities, the evidence presented by them in this volume is overwhelmingly negative as to their conceptual abilities to formulate a credible historicist intelligibility of human existence in Melanesia (or elsewhere). If judged just by the sub-title, then the papers are as good as anything else the contributors have already produced, for most of them indeed are the proven ethnographers of “ritual, praxis, and social change in Melanesia”. Accordingly, through these contributions they have successfully reproduced themselves once again as the ethnographers of this region. In this perspective, if there is a locus of the “embodied” epochal self-consciousness, at once “modern”, “post-modern”, or any other “post”-epochal eponym that one may wish to attribute to it, then it surely is that of these and other “critically modern” ethnographers engaged in what is primarily a Western megapolitan academic enterprise of textual post/modernisation of Melanesia. And this context a priori determines the inner and the outer horizons of the purpose and value of all such writings.


SARINA PEARSON
University of Auckland

In Facing the Pacific, Jeffrey Geiger argues that the complex and contradictory ways in which America imagined and represented the Pacific during the 1920s functioned primarily to consolidate its own notions of modern selfhood. He crafts his argument by working through a series of once popular texts such as Frederick O’Brien’s novels White Shadows in the South Seas and Atolls of the Sun, and films including Moana directed by Robert and Frances Flaherty, the film adaptation of White Shadows in the South Seas directed by Van Dyke, and Murnau’s last film Tabu. Through each of these case studies Geiger chronicles how Pacific islands became textual and cinematic spaces onto which American values, particularly those related to race and sexuality, could be displaced, projected, and reaffirmed or subverted.
Geiger begins his project by contextualising American Pacific mythologies, establishing how a tendency toward soft primitivism can be traced back to Enlightenment narratives popularised during 18th century voyages of discovery. He goes on to discuss how the emergence of an American imperial agenda was fuelled by economic and political competition with other prospective imperial powers in the region and symbolised to its own constituents through displays at events such as the 1893 Columbian Exposition. Despite the escalation of American activity in the Pacific and the seeming inevitability of Manifest Destiny, Americans were deeply divided about the legitimacy of their colonial project. This ambivalence was apparent in racial discourses from biologically-determinist models that characterised Polynesians as irrefutably different and therefore inferior to Caucasians, to what Geiger describes as Polynesian “whiteness” whereby Polynesians were ethnologically and often aesthetically constructed as nearly but not quite “white”. Geiger closely examines how these inconsistent and contradictory popular American conceptions of race and sexuality, shaped the production and often the reception of Pacific imagery.

One of the most interesting aspects of this book is how Geiger effectively teases out the personal and creative links between Flaherty, O’Brien, Van Dyke and Murnau. Flaherty’s doomed collaboration with Murnau on Tabu, and the degree to which he vexed Van Dyke during the filming of White Shadows in the South Seas, ultimately serve to cast his own “non-Hollywood” creative preoccupations and processes into relief. Historically Flaherty has been mythified unambiguously as an adventurer artist and the ultimate “auteur”. Geiger’s close analysis of Frances Flaherty not simply as her husband’s helpmeet but as a significant authorial voice in Moana, however, lends strategic insight into the film’s subject matter and its aesthetics. Frances’ primary role in casting the film and her sense of how the film’s masculine imagery would appeal to modern female spectators are aspects of Moana that have been heretofore underdeveloped. The Flahertys’ strategic and innovative use of film stock, which rendered Samoan skin tones “favorably”, not only conformed to Hollywood conventions of privileging light skin tones over dark, but also fulfilled the romantic expectations of American audiences who entered the cinema hoping to glimpse uncanny, impossible images of “themselves” before the corrupting influence of “civilisation”.

Geiger’s rehabilitation of White Shadows in the South Seas, both as an important popular literary text and as a film, is also significant. He characterises O’Brien’s novel as anti-imperialist, with its “going native” narrative and despair at the effects of colonialism’s “fatal impact” on the Marquesas. Despite these potentially progressive or transgressive tendencies, Geiger concludes that O’Brien’s writing effectively reaffirmed American racial and sexual taboos. The Hollywood adaptation of White Shadows achieves similar ends. Despite being MGM’s first sound picture, earning box office receipts that saved the studio from bankruptcy, and winning an Academy Award for Cinematography, White Shadows in the South Seas remains a relatively obscure film. It may be precisely because it was a conventional Hollywood film without art house pretensions that it remains relatively obscure. Nevertheless this film is important because it forms a strategic nexus between Moana and Tabu, both of which received greater critical recognition and are more typically associated with cinema in the Pacific. What makes Geiger’s analysis of this film particularly insightful is his access to letters that Van Dyke wrote to his girlfriend Josephine...
Chippo during production. In them, Van Dyke recounts his virulent dislike of Tahiti, adopting a language of contagion through which he characterises the landscape and its inhabitants as diseased, degenerate, and literally decaying. These letters complicate and complement readings of the film *White Shadows*. Like the novel, the film partially performs an anti-imperialist and counter-hegemonic agenda, but Geiger notes that its racial and sexual politics are ultimately conservative. He suggests that the tension between Van Dyke’s intense troppophobia and the real pressure he was under from the studio to deliver cinematic “paradise” combined to elicit unattractive racial and sexual anxieties that cannot just be dismissed as the ravings of a distressed director, but were more broadly inherent in modern American conceptions of “otherness”.

Although Murnau has a prominent profile in film history, relatively little has been written about *Tabu*, possibly because of his tragic death just before its premiere. Critics have tended to underplay the film’s obvious homoeroticism, in spite of the fact that Murnau’s homosexuality was an open secret. Geiger redresses this omission by explicitly exploring the effects of Murnau’s sexuality, not only on key scenes in the film, but also on the demise of the Murnau-Flaherty collaboration. While his analysis remains largely speculative, perhaps because he has no recourse but to read between the lines of Flaherty’s correspondence, Geiger suggests that ultimately *Tabu*, like *Moana*, is significant because it evokes more complicated American imperial-looking relationships than sit comfortably under monolithic conceptions of the “western observer”.

Although there are tantalising references to the participants in these films, they are fleeting. Readers looking for the “behind the scenes” reality of Pacific locales in this period will be disappointed. At the same time, this book is particularly useful for those readers interested in cinematic representations of the Pacific. Rather than using these films as mere illustrations of an American imperial imaginary, Geiger mobilises cinema-specific paradigms to effectively examine how the complex-looking relations these films embodied and engendered were constitutive of an early 20th century American sense of self.


ANDREAS MIETH
*Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel*

One key factor to understanding environmental, social and cultural development on islands is knowledge about their demographic evolution. Scientists of various disciplines met in 2003 for a symposium on Mo’orea, French Polynesia, and discussed key questions of Pacific island demography. Now, four years later, Patrick Vinton Kirch and Jean-Louis Rallu have published the results of the symposium in this solid book. The 20 authors not only take the reader on a journey to different islands of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia, but also on a fascinating journey
into the methods, problems and open questions of the islands’ demographies. The authors present a set of interesting island case studies based predominantly on new archaeological field work combined with mathematical model calculations and critical evaluations of archival sources.

I would like to draw attention here to three of the book’s strengths. The first is the interdisciplinary combination, and integrated description, of the various methodological approaches within the case studies. The second great strength of this book is that palaeodemographic analyses for culturally and geographically highly diverse Pacific islands have been summarised in one book. Finally, the third strength is that most of the authors discuss not only the advantages but also with the boundaries and weaknesses of their methods very critically and openly.

One issue, on which several of the authors focus, is the size of populations on places such as Hawai‘i or Tahiti at the time of the first European contact. The population sizes at these times are relevant to the question of how strongly contact with the first seafarers contributed to the decimation of the islands’ populations. But the significance and reliability of early historical records is a severe problem as several authors show. In his introduction, Kirch correctly points out that population size at the time of initial contact is certainly an important issue, but it is by far not the only interesting one for Pacific palaeodemography. Research on island demography is not about a snapshot of a population in Year X, but about long-term fluctuations in populations. The calculation of population sizes based on hypothetically-assumed sizes of founding populations and growth rates is also critical. Even the smallest discrepancy in these two parameters alone results in dramatic differences in populations after a few hundred years. But the authors in the book who use such models are aware of this problem and the courage they show in doing so is, by all means, to be embraced. In Chapter 2, for example, Rallu shows that the retrograde calculation of populations using historical sources can be combined with developmental scenarios in order to model plausible population sizes at the time of initial contact.

Archaeological methods take up most of the book. This can be justified by the fact that settlement remains are probably the best proxy data when reconstructing population sizes. But counting houses is also fraught with problems. How many houses or remains of houses still lie buried under sediments and have not been counted? How many house sites have been destroyed by more recent land use? How many people lived in one house? How many houses were present at one time, and were all houses constantly inhabited? Such matters are discussed, for example, by Ladefoged and Graves for Hawai‘i in Chapter 5, by Kirch for Maui in Chapter 6 and by Conte and Maric for the Marquesas in Chapter 9. Radiocarbon dating also delivers important proxy data. If there are enough radiocarbon dates for a specific area, it is possible to combine these to create a temporal distribution curve, which can reflect an image of the relative population development. Kirch, for example, does this for the Hawaiian Islands in Chapters 4 and 6, Hamilton and Kahn do it for Mo‘orea in Chapter 8 and Athens does it for Kosrae in Chapter 13. The authors do not conceal the methodological boundaries even here. The frequency of charcoal at a particular place in a certain period of time reflects not only the size of the population but, first and foremost, the intensity of land use. Since I am an ecologist, I found the observations regarding the carrying capacity of islands
extremely interesting. How many people could be nourished by cultivable land, a valley, or a complete island? The following authors make interesting calculations: Hamilton and Kahn for Mo’orea (Chapter 8), Burley for Tonga (Chapter 10) and Green for Samoa (Chapter 11). In their examples, all authors come to the conclusion that the sizes of populations are generally considerably lower than the capacity of potentially agriculturally usable land would lead us to expect. This means that the carrying capacity of an area can indicate the uppermost, possible size of a population, but it is not suitable for calculating the true population size. Hence, in his introduction, Kirch quite fittingly refers to this methodology as a cross-check method appropriate for validating the data gained using other methods, for example by means of settlement archaeology. Consequently several authors combine their carrying capacity calculations with data from historical sources, radiocarbon dating and archaeological findings. Good examples of this are the articles by Cordy on the Hawaiian Islands (Chapter 7), by Athens on Kosrae (Chapter 13) and by Spriggs on Vanuatu (Chapter 14).

A critical reader will notice the absence of certain issues depending on his or her specific background. I find, for example, that some aspects of the prehistoric modification of land use and the resulting environmental changes are handled too briefly. Such changes may often have had a dramatic impact on population growth even before the first European contact. Furthermore, I would have liked more examination and calculation of labour efforts, such as Spriggs did for the building of gardens on Vanuatu (Chapter 14). Calculations concerning the amount of labour needed to construct houses, gardens and sacred sites can contribute significantly to reconstructing population sizes.

With regard to the design of the book, there is slightly too much repetition of general and methodological introductions at the beginnings of many chapters. This follows of course from the compilation of independent individual publications, which is characteristic of symposium volumes, but better editing might have made for less repetition. At the same time, the book has a shared bibliography and many authors refer to other chapters and authors in the book in appropriate places. Finally, it would have been nice to have more illustrations. Some readers (especially readers who are not as familiar with the region or with this field of science) would probably enjoy finding more photographs or maps of the island landscapes discussed in the book, alongside the diagrams and tables.

Altogether, this book is an outstanding, professional and versatile overview of the current status of research on the palaeodemography of the Pacific islands. Despite what the title suggests, demography is more than “Growth and Collapse”. Instead, the development of populations, especially on Pacific islands, is far more complicated in terms of phenology than those two words suggest, and the authors of the book demonstrate this very well. The editors have succeeded in producing a very valuable book which will become an important tool for future archaeological, anthropological, environmental and socio-economical research on the Pacific islands. In fact, this book belongs in the hands of every island researcher and demographer concerned with (pre)historical topics, even if he or she does research in other regions of our blue planet.

ANTONY HOOPER
University of Auckland

Foss Leach is an archaeologist or, more precisely perhaps, an “archaeozoologist”. He has dug, largely in coastal sites and mainly in New Zealand, and then taken precisely chosen samples from various layers back to a laboratory for identification, weighing and recording of the faunal remains. *Fishing in Pre-European New Zealand* is firmly grounded in this sort of painstaking backroom work. Leach, of course, uses other evidence as well: the accounts of Cook and Banks, as well as those of ethnologists such as Best. But he does not rely wholly on them. His view is that “text-aided archaeology” should be confined to one or at most two standard errors of a radiocarbon date, say 50 to 100 years before the arrival of Cook in 1769. Archaeology is the only reliable source of information about much earlier periods of Māori occupation. Not only does this double-pronged approach allow him to comment on changes in Māori fishing activities, it also lends authority and conviction to his more general conclusions.

The book has an austere and faintly forbidding appearance. There is no enthusiastic blurb about the book’s purpose, nature and merits on the cream and baby-blue dust jacket, nor even the author’s “biodata” and portrait on the inside back fold. There is instead a photograph of him in the Introduction, with his head briefly raised, doing what he has obviously spent a lot of his time doing—sorting fish-bones in the Archaeozoology Laboratory at the Museum of New Zealand.

One must begin, then, with the tangible, observable evidence. There are 368 A4-sized pages, stoutly bound between heavy cloth covers that are 31cms by 22cms. No list of figures is provided, but by my count there are 144 of them—a mixture of black and white photographs and a few colour plates, bar graphs, line drawings, maps, principal coordinates analyses, scatter plots as well as other more arcane (though clear enough) representations. There are also 34 tables and a thorough index. The bibliography is extensive, covering 18 pages of “References Cited”, including 43 papers in which Leach is the senior author, and a further seven in which he appears as a junior author together with others. It is all meticulously edited. I could pick up no typos. But the typography and layout, by Leach himself using Word Perfect 5.1, is unfortunate. I no longer recall what fonts are available in Word Perfect 5.1, but it is surely much more extensive than that which is used here, with the only variations being between Italic and Roman, Bold and Plain, and various type sizes. All in all, the book is no tiddler. It weighs a little over 1.2 kilos, about the size and, eerily, somewhat the proportions of a reasonable John Dory (*Zeus faber*, formerly *Z japonicus*).

In spite of all, however, this is a splendid book, cleverly pitched at the gap between the technical literature on the one hand and the various pretty illustrated “how-to” guides for recreational fishers on the other. It is clearly written and packed with interesting information. What makes it particularly attractive is the attention given
to the methodologies of excavation and analysis; this may be uncompromisingly technical, but is complemented by the clear conclusions which close each chapter. These features make the book a useful contribution to three sorts of discourse. People involved in recreational and commercial fishing all have their own firm convictions about many things—methods, sites, “the old days” and so forth. Leach’s work might settle a few arguments here, but also raise others. Archaeologists and prehistorians will doubtless disagree with much that Leach puts forward, but then they are a naturally disputatious lot anyway. Lastly, there is the New Zealand national discourse on Māori conservation strategies and claims to marine resources. Leach effectively side-steps a lot of these basically political issues by his strictures on “text-aided archaeology” and his concentration on hard, dateable evidence. But he also draws attention to the enormous amount of material on fishing that lies unused in the records of the Māori Land Court. “This”, he claims, “combined with archaeological excavations of proto-historic sites… could form a wonderful chronicle of fishing in early historic New Zealand” (p.306).

Leach begins by castigating both ethnographers of New Zealand and the Pacific as well as many of his archaeologist colleagues. Malinowski and Firth, for example, paid scrupulous attention to kinship, ritual and so on, while almost completely neglecting fishing. And the archaeologists have dealt extensively with artefacts, particularly fishhooks, while ignoring the faunal remains from the middens in which they are found.

Chapter 1, on “The Archaeology of Fishing” deals with what might properly have been done in dealing with those middens. It describes the sieving and sampling that goes into producing all those bags of trash which give archaeological laboratories their air of hopeless, dreary endeavour. Leach also deals, briefly and succinctly, with the identification of different kinds of fish from their skeletal remains, and, more technically, with the various ways of estimating the prevalence of various species and the amount of food they could provide.

Following this there are a couple of chapters dealing with the Polynesian background of the Māori, and a general description of the New Zealand fishery. The latter chapter deals briefly with Māori fish taxonomies, and, much more thoroughly, with the broad marine ecological zones of New Zealand in relation to depths, currents, temperatures, sea conditions and seasonality. Chapter 4 considers the six fish that make up 85 percent of the fish caught in pre-European times. These are, in order of decreasing abundance, barracouta and closely related species (at 25 percent), blue cod, snapper (at 15.8 percent), spotty and related wrasses, red cod and finally greenbone (at 7.4 percent). There are notes on the behaviour of these six fish, and interesting discussion of the variations in their Māori names and their correspondence (or lack of correspondence) with tropical Polynesian names for identical or closely related species.

Chapter 5, on “Fishing Technology and Material Culture”, is one of the longest in the book, dealing in detail with cordage, knots and netting before moving on to hooks and lures. An interesting puzzle here is one that has exercised many modern anglers—why Māori and other Polynesians made hooks with such narrow gaps between point and shank, and how they really work. Leach devotes seven pages to this, citing a quite large literature on the topic as well as his own experiments, finally concluding that we still don’t know exactly how they work.
Chapters 6 and 7 deal respectively with the regional character of fishing and chronological changes. The discussion of regional variation here is somewhat more technical. Leach considers two approaches, the first based on known modern distributions of species, and the second on fish remains, using Principal Components Analyses, Z-scores and multivariate analysis using both “Q-modes” and “R-modes”. The general conclusions are two. Firstly, “pre-European fishermen in northern New Zealand were after snapper, southern fishermen were after barracouta, and those in between were after a much broader range of fish types” (p.165). Secondly, while this may simply reflect relative abundance of the two species, cultural factors were also involved.

Chapters 8 and 9 are also technical and very closely argued. Chapter 8 considers “Fish and other Marine Foods in Diet and Economy”. Again, Leach offers a critique of much previous work on this topic, and instead builds up his own conclusions from consideration of the basic requirements of human nutrition. The evidence points clearly to the fact that no amount of fish in the diet could, by itself, cope with these requirements. Fat or carbohydrates are necessary. The subtropical north had kumara and taro, and the coastal South Island and the Chathams had fat from sea mammals. The middle area, from about Hawkes Bay to Banks Peninsula, had uncertain supplies of both.

Chapter 9 deals with the environmental effects of predation, confronting the issue of whether the influence of pre-European Māori on the marine environment was benign or malignant. The available size-frequency data shows that the present-day inshore fishery is a pale reflection of the bounty that existed in former times. Yet many aspects of this question are complicated by the possible effects of climate change. Māori did not impose a minimum size limit on the fish they took, but they did practice shifting cultivation, leading to new settlements and new marine patches, so that fish could go through cycles of depletion and recovery.

Many aspects of Leach’s methodologies and conclusions are doubtless open to question and debate. That can be left to specialists. However, his general conclusions in the final chapter, “Pre-European Maori as Fishermen”, seem to be both reasonable and well-supported. They are the following. (1) Fish were plentiful in pre-European times, and the present-day fishery is but a poor reflection of how things used to be. (2) Whatever the impact 800 years of Māori occupation might have had pales in comparison to the devastation of the 200 years since the arrival of Europeans. (3) More than 80 percent of all fish caught in pre-European times were taken from inshore waters, defined as less than 50 metres in depth or less than 100 metres from the shore. (4) Māori made few, if any, significant improvements in the technologies they brought from the Pacific. They didn’t need to in order to be very effective and knowledgeable fishermen.

Leach, I’m sure, would be the last to claim that his work is the definitive one. He points to the paucity of archaeological sites from which adequate analyses of faunal remains are available, and the fact that the majority of useful sites are located in middle and southern New Zealand. This is unfortunate, but it is probably owes more to the territoriality of archaeologists than to the distribution of Māori fishing activities. There is much more to be done.
PAUL D’ARCY  
_Australian National University_  

This ambitious and ultimately successful book seeks to outline the background to the conflict, or more correctly conflicts, that divided and tormented Bougainville from the late 1980s. There has been a wealth of books on this period of conflict and on post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction on Bougainville. A host of immediate provocations have been commonly identified with the conflict: large-scale mining at Panguna Mine that was insensitive to local concerns, the island’s population feeling they were distinct from the rest of Papua New Guinea, the national government’s lack of responsiveness to their concerns and its close alliance with the mining company from which they derived so much government income, the influx of workers from elsewhere in Papua New Guinea seeking work with the mine, and differences within Bougainville’s linguistically and culturally diverse community. This book is the first that goes back in time in any comprehensive way to examine the degree to which more longstanding features than those listed above were also at play.

The multifaceted and wide-ranging approach to the historical, economic and cultural roots of a modern conflict contained in _Bougainville Before the Conflict_ is a model for others to follow and develop further. The book covers 30,000 years of history viewed from the perspectives of history, anthropology, archaeology, economics, geology and political economy, and of indigenous and external participants. There is a problem with such a comprehensive approach however. Conflicts that either require or serve as catalysts for studies like this are rarely predicted and those charged with securing peace need the information rapidly. It takes time and effort to build up the expertise of the contributors, and more still to coordinate and edit their information. The past and imminent retirement of the generation of Pacific experts who lived through the decolonisation of the Pacific Islands, and the decline of teaching programmes in Australian universities, means that compiling a book like this might soon not be possible for many parts of the Pacific. The book is therefore both a tribute to its editors and perhaps a boundary marker in Pacific scholarship.

The collection arose from a three-day conference in Canberra in August 2000 that brought together most leading academic authorities on Bougainville, as well as community leaders and mining company representatives. The result is 30 chapters by 23 authors, six of whom are Bougainvilleans. The book is attractively produced by the now defunct Pandanus Press. The editors have deep bonds with Bougainville. Anthony Regan is a Fellow in the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Research Centre at the Australian National University and was a prominent advisor in the Bougainville peace process. Helga Griffin has a research interest in Bougainville dating back 30 years. In assessing the historical background to the crisis, the central question the book seeks to address is “Was Bougainville somehow inherently different in the combination of its mini-cultures? Or was it just another slice of Melanesia, a microcosm that reflected the ethnic diversity of Papua New Guinea and the wider
region?” (p.xxviii). The book’s answer is both yes and no. Bougainville’s make up and history are distinct, and this distinctiveness influenced the course of the conflict. At a more general level, however, the problems leading to the recent conflict can be found in many other similarly diverse post-colonial fragmentary states. The book advocates more the former than the latter position. The implications are profound and far reaching for those interested in the stability of Melanesian states or other regions composed of a myriad of previously autonomous stateless societies brought together by colonial boundaries and given a somewhat shallow coherence based on the application or threatened use of coercive force by colonial authorities.

The chapters are organised into five sections. The first surveys Bougainville’s history up to the imposition of colonial rule. It contains four chapters on the archaeological history of the island and its geology, the linguistic profile, the cultures of the island, and the biological make up of its peoples. This section emphasises the relative isolation of Bougainville’s population after initial colonisation, and its cultural and linguistic diversity and broad similarities.

The second section deals with the colonial period until the Second World War. It consists of eight chapters outlining the construction of Bougainville’s colonial boundaries, German rule, the pacification of southern Bougainville, the Catholic Church in this era, the Australian take-over from the Germans in Kieta, the role of plantations, colonial administration, missions and anthropologists on the history of the island, Bougainville during the Second World War, and finally an assessment of sources available for this period.

The third section outlines economic and social change since the Second World War. The contributors to the seven chapters are a mix of academics and locals from varied backgrounds. They discuss post-war economic reconstruction, cocoa and copra production, the Panguna Mine, the Torau response to change and modernisation, secessionist sentiment in the 1960s and 1970s, the influence of Catholic seminary education, and the indigenisation of the Catholic Church.

The fourth section describes Buin, Haku, Nasioi and Nagovisi societies, and focuses on how they have responded to changing circumstances. The two chapters of the following final section focus more on the conflict and knit it into the historical roots discussed in the rest of the book.

*Bougainville Before the Conflict* reveals the depth of the island’s retrievable history and the importance of history and culture for understanding conflicts. It also shows how multi-disciplinary approaches to understanding conflicts enhance our vision of what are usually complex, multi-faceted disputes. This book deserves a wide audience, both within and beyond Pacific Studies. It partly diminishes its potential impact by not always tightly knitting background information to aspects of the modern conflict. A more detailed outline of the course of the conflict and its ongoing resolution is perhaps needed as the timeline of the conflict and brief references to it in various chapters are insufficient for non-Pacific specialists. This is perhaps understandable, however, given that the book already runs to over 500 pages. It is an ideal companion to other works focused on the conflict itself, and is also a major advance on most other accounts of conflict zones in terms of its depth and breadth of historical coverage of background influences.