

report condemning the excesses of the Native Land Court, perhaps in a study detailing the economic marginalizing of Maori. If not, I think he is deserving of a more sympathetic analysis of a life lived in a time when, as Goldsmith puts it, the 'Maori world was changed forever'.

DANNY KEENAN

Massey University – Palmerston North

Worlds Apart: A History of the Pacific Islands. By I.C. Campbell. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2004. 360 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-908812-99-X. *A History of the Pacific Islands*. By Steven Roger Fischer. Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2003. 304 pp. NZ price: \$62.95. ISBN 0-333-94976-5. *A History of the Pacific Islands: Passages Through Tropical Time*. By Deryck Scarr. Curzon Press, Richmond (UK), 2001. 323 pp. UK price: £45.00. ISBN 0-7007-1291-3.

THERE ARE PERHAPS MORE GENERAL HISTORIES of New Zealand per square metre of land, and proportional to population, than any country. In recent years, historians of the Pacific Islands have been mounting something of a challenge. Among the more ambitious texts are *Tides of History: A History of the Pacific in the Twentieth Century* (1995) and *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders* (1997). There is also the secondary school textbook *Culture Contact in the Pacific* (1993). All are multi-authored enterprises. Among the sole-authored texts are successive editions of Douglas Oliver's *The Pacific Islands* (1951, 1962, 1989), which was written in the fatal impact tradition and which reigned supreme for three decades through lack of effective competition. The successor was Kerry Howe's *Where the Waves Fall* (1984), which was written in distinct opposition to the notion that European incursions resulted in a fatal impact for Island cultures. *Where the Waves Fall* was the first general text to emerge from a Pacific historian trained at the Australian National University, where J.W. Davidson pioneered a historiography where the old fashioned imperial history that accorded Pacific Islanders a subordinate role in their own history was displaced by the notion of culture contacts, in which Islanders played a more purposeful role. Several more single-authored general texts have since appeared, no less than three since 2000. It is becoming a crowded field.

The general history is often considered the poor cousin of the scholarly monograph; it was more an extended essay and thus an inferior way of packaging history. Perhaps this was sometimes not without substance. Take J.P. Kenyon's short history of seventeenth-century England, *The Stuarts* (1958). He was asked to write the book and offered £500 down payment and 121/2% on sales beyond the 5000 mark. As he explained, 'I badly needed a car to pursue my social/sexual life, and in 1957-8 you could get a very good car for £500'. So he 'ripped off the thing in six weeks flat' (or about five printed pages per day), and bought himself a Ford Prefect. By contrast, Howe spent six years on *Where the Waves Fall*. That is the difference between the short history of old and the more monographic general history of today. Either way, however, general histories should be considered a specialization in the same sense as general practice in the medical profession is a skill in its own right. Indeed, general histories are not easy to do well, least of all for the Pacific Islands whose cultural diversity and physical fragmentation are inimical to tidy thematic or geographical coverage. It has also become increasingly difficult to synthesize the accumulation of detailed knowledge about the region, which itself is compounded by the increasing emphasis on more contemporary developments. Accordingly, general histories have become increasingly monographic and detailed and less the shorter text given to the broad-brush approach and generalizing comment.

The extreme example is Deryck Scarr's *Passages Through Tropical Time*. This is his second general history of the region. In 1990, Scarr published *The History of the Pacific Islands: Kingdoms of the Reefs*. Despite some overlap, *Passages Through Tropical Time* is quite different in intent. Originally written for Routledge's 'History of the Sea' series, it eventually found another publisher. True to its origins, *Passages Through Tropical Time* takes up nautical themes in ways that other general histories have not. This is all for the good considering that the Pacific's overwhelmingly aquatic environment meant that shipping was the factor upon which much else depended. Not only ships but people occupy the text in abundance. Noteworthy and commendable too is the sheer amount of original research that has gone into the book, reflecting almost 40 years of dedicated commitment to the cause of Pacific Islands history. In addition to being a synthesis of the existing literature, large portions of *Passages Through Tropical Time* have a sound archival basis.

What detracts from a solid research effort is an execrable writing style that transgresses just about every rule of readability. Take this sentence: 'But any Western sail would bring to the smallest island the universal shipboard need for wood, water, women, eatable provisions and general rest and repair, in whalers' case in intervals from so chasing the whale that, by the 1840s, in a curious phrase, the Pacific was reckoned white with canvas actually made dingy by smoke from brick try-works' (p.96). Lack of consideration towards a potential audience defeats one of the fundamental purposes of any general history, which is to make understanding of the topic accessible to a wide readership. It is a contradiction in terms that a general history will only serve as a reference book for specialists, but this is the likely contribution of *Passages Through Tropical Time*.

One turns with relief to Steven Roger Fischer's *History of the Pacific Islands* in the 'Palgrave Essential Histories' series. Fischer is a linguist but that has not prevented him from writing a very respectable general history. It is a variant of what the social anthropologist Martin Silverman has called the 'Oceanic Epic': 'The population adapts to its environment; it has its own history for a while; it responds to a succession of alien forces which are either ripples or waves; it looks forward to an uncertain future.' Actually, this is a rather straightened definition. Pacific Islanders were often in occupation of their islands for centuries, even millennia, before European arrivals. Reflecting this, Fischer's first two chapters deal with the functioning of Pacific pre-contact cultures: the book is one quarter the way through before the first Europeans put in an appearance.

After their appearance, the following three chapters deal with changes to island cultures in response to these 'invaders', but the thrust of discussion switches to the European side of the story — either the European agents (whether they be explorers, traders, missionaries and the like) or processes (such as plantation enterprise and colonial rule). It is not that Islanders cease to have a history of their own, even if a shared history, but they are decreasingly in control of events. Fischer's language is instructive: he uses terms such as 'invasion' and 'trespass' to describe the European 'incursion'. Here, Fischer explicitly addresses the oft-debated point of whether Islanders suffered a fatal impact. He maintains that 'No Pacific Islanders have been eternally passive victims. No Pacific Islanders have been eternally active agents, either' (p.xix). It is clear that, in Fischer's view, Islanders were far more victims than victors (for example, p.167) but there is no over-emphasis.

The final chapters take the story to the present and Fischer follows the pattern of recent texts in dealing at some length with issues of Pacific identity/identities. This has become a somewhat tedious preoccupation that tends to screen out other issues. Some 70% of Polynesians and as much as 85% of Melanesians are rural dwellers; but next to nothing is said about village life beyond the obvious point that rural development programmes are needed to stem the drift to urban centres, which in turn leads to either unemployment or remittances, with the latter serving to increase an unsustainable demand for consumer

goods (p.268). The predominance of rural dwellers also means that most of the people who live in the Pacific Islands do not entertain notions of a wider Pacific identity but primarily identify, often very chauvinistically, with a particular village, locality or small island.

All the same, Fischer's *History of the Pacific Islands* succeeds admirably, although he is unlikely to be allowed to forget his mis-identification of Jonah Lomu as a Samoan (p.280). It does justice to the Pacific's heterogeneity while at the same time making sense of this diversity and providing significant generalization. The problem is its price. For whatever reason, British academic books tend to be very expensive by the time they reach New Zealand and a price tag of over \$60 will unhappily serve to reduce this worthy book's audience.

Ian Campbell's *Worlds Apart* gives far more bangs for bucks — a larger but less expensive book, and an even better one at that. It is a substantial updating of the first edition, published in 1989. Revised versions of general histories are not always successful and sometimes retain uncomfortable reminders of their provenance. Douglas Oliver's third edition of *The Pacific Islands*, for example, was widely perceived as having failed to make the necessary transitions: the revisions were cosmetic and the mindset unmistakably outmoded. *Worlds Apart*, by contrast, shakes off its earlier origins. The revisions and additions reflect recent scholarship, the overall shape of the book is not distorted, and there is no suggestion that an old nag is masquerading as a filly. Some of the sections are outstanding pieces of synthesis, notably the passages on the sandalwood trade in Melanesia (pp.71–73, 119–25) and the political wranglings in nineteenth-century Samoa (pp.111–16). It remains a book of high literary and academic merit. The only negative is that several of the chapters are now much longer and cannot easily be read at a single sitting, so the book is not as reader-friendly as its predecessor. This reflects Campbell knowing more than he did in the 1980s, not least from his original research on colonial administrations at Archives New Zealand. There is also another 14 years of subsequent history to take into account since the first edition.

All this is meant to say that writing a general history poses severe tensions between the requirements of brevity and elaboration — in other words, conveying the big picture in few words. All historical writing is partial in its coverage but the condensed nature of general histories means that selection of material and economy of expression are necessarily drastic. There will always be particular emphases. Conversely, certain lines of enquiry will be subordinated. With Campbell, there is less on the pre-contact Pacific cultures than with Fischer and his chapters on the post-1945 Pacific are political history (although with considerable discussion on health and economic development) rather than what might loosely be termed the cultural-cum-social history of Fischer. *Worlds Apart* is also one of the few general histories to properly acknowledge the importance of missionary activity. One does not have to like missionaries, or approve of their work, or even be a church-goer, to recognize that Christianity has reshaped the lives of Pacific Islanders and must therefore be taken seriously.

Campbell and Fischer share a qualified endorsement of the fatal impact theory. 'The impact of Europe on the Islands', writes Campbell, 'was indeed often fatal. The effect of introduced diseases, firearms, alcohol, land alienation and labour recruitment could hardly be anything else in a great many cases; nor does it give a truer picture to say that failing to assert Pacific Islander agency is bad history' (pp.8–9). This represents a significant historiographical shift from the Islander agency orthodoxy of ANU scholarship, exemplified particularly in Howe's *Where the Waves Fall*. It might come as a surprise, in these circumstances, that *Worlds Apart* is anything but an anti-colonialist tract, although Campbell affirms that colonial rule in New Caledonia was to the great disadvantage of the native inhabitants (pp.217–19). A nuanced picture of variability between colonies emerges and the colonial powers are often depicted as being neglectful, pressures of

circumstance, rather than capricious. New Zealand rule in Western Samoa assumes benign proportions (pp.238–42).

So we have three recent general histories of the Pacific Islands — one flawed, one good and one very good indeed. That perhaps typifies the current state of the historiography. It's not a bad strike rate.

DOUG MUNRO

Victoria University of Wellington

Journeys in a Small Canoe: The Life and Times of a Solomon Islander. By Lloyd Maepeza Gina. Edited by Judith A. Bennett and Khyla J. Russell. Pandanus Books in association with the Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Canberra, 2003. 301 pp. Australian price: \$34.95. ISBN 1-74076-032-8.

ASSISTING 'THE INDIGENOUS VOICE' to be heard in matters pertaining to Pacific Islanders' experience of life, the stuff of what for any people is conventionally called history, is a worthy objective. It is especially so, if not obligatory, for the professional corps of scholars, preponderantly non-indigenous, who study that experience and who presume to comment on it. This is not to say that they cannot do so very well, or should even have the slightest inhibition about doing so. Rather, it simply means that it is a courtesy to provide an opportunity for some of those people whose stories have commonly been told by outsiders such as foreign academics to tell, for a change, their own stories to a public audience. Besides, this may also advance knowledge. The goodwill so earned may ease the way for further research, while extending the range of contributors may yield information that would not have been accessible to a socially detached enquirer. Accordingly, Judith Bennett, a respected authority on the history of the Solomon Islands, is to be commended for undertaking to get the story of an eminent citizen of that country into print.

Maepeza Gina was a public servant during the last 22 years of the British colonial regime in the Solomon Islands, and then the first Speaker of the national parliament. He held this position from Independence in 1978 until 1998. Born in 1935, as a child he experienced the Japanese occupation of the Solomons. He later attended school in Fiji, before embarking on a career that was woven into a crucial period of Solomon Islands history. His story as told in this book was mostly spoken in a mixture of *pijin* and English (his native language is Roviana). This was tape-recorded by Bennett and then laboriously transcribed and rendered into publishable English.

The 'indigenous voice' does not have authority just on account of its indigeneity. It also needs to relate matters of substance if it is to be useful and respected as a source of information about anything other than itself. Like its evidential cousin, the too often unduly cosseted 'oral tradition', it needs to be stringently tested and examined before 'it was' or 'it is' can be distilled from 'I think' or 'they said'. And therein lies a weakness of this book. A personal but generalized narrative, it tends to lack precision and to be light on detail, as well as on analysis and explanation. The pages on family history do little to illuminate local kinship and descent systems; no source is given for the reported conversation between Chief Roni and the pioneer missionary J.F. Goldie (p.9); it is misleading to say that Lloyd's father spent most of the war years scouting for the coastwatcher Donald Kennedy (p.11); the account of investigating the Remnant Church on Malaita in 1964 is largely anecdotal and only marginally augments the anthropologist Ben Burt's article on the movement in *Oceania*, 53, 4 (1983). Even slighter is the account of a visit to the famous cultist Moro of Makaruka. And in relation to government, there are no 'revelations' such as might be hoped for in the memoirs of an 'insider'.