

SPANZ's real problem was exactly that which has bedevilled other operators of a second national airline. It simply does not pay. SPANZ lost £30,000 in its first year, laid half the staff off, got a government loan, lost £80,000 in 1962, £40,000 in 1963, and £78,000 in 1964. By 1965 it owed the government £85,000 and then expected the government to underwrite or guarantee £600,000 for new aircraft, or else give a subsidy of £60,000 pa. When the company went into receivership in November 1965 its total loss was £382,086, of which £225,000 was unsecured. The constant pleas for government assistance cause a sceptic to suggest that SPANZ merely wished to socialize the risks and privatize the profits. There is a telling point buried in a sidebar (p.106): Mt Cook was able to capitalize on its sole New Zealand owned status compared to SPANZ's tie-up with Ansett; 'how differently it might have been if SPANZ and Mount Cook had co-operated in a joint effort to develop the fledgling tourist industry'. Indeed.

JIM MCALOON

Lincoln University

Nature, Culture and History: The 'Knowing' of Oceania. By K.R. Howe. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2000. 121 pp. US price: \$17.95. ISBN 0-8248-2329-X.

'TELL ME WHERE is fancy bred/In the heart or in the head?' Glossing 'fancy' as 'knowledge', the question raised in Shakespeare's couplet raises large philosophical issues. It points to the ineluctable tension between Idealism and Positivism. It also pertains to whatever it is that constitutes, or what might be accepted as, or what may pass for 'History'. How far, if at all, does the purported object of knowledge have an essence and/or an existence independent of that conferred by someone who chooses to observe it or to comment on it? Is it (following Berkeley) that being is only in the eye of the beholder, or (following Kant) that the historian converts the noumena of human activity into phenomena that are merely vague reflections of more substantial but intrinsically unknowable realities? Such issues, central to the classical discussion of 'the problem of knowledge', provide the context within which Kerry Howe sets an erudite, balanced and wide-ranging discussion of Pacific history.

A short book, but one repaying (indeed, requiring) several close readings, *Nature, Culture and History* is a *tour de force*. It is a lightly reworked version of the Macmillan Brown lectures that Howe gave at Massey University in 1997. The title indicates the themes of the three lectures/chapters. They analyse and trace the development of the main explanatory concepts and processes that have been used by Europeans to fathom the pasts of the Pacific.

In the first chapter Howe considers the ways in which the Pacific, especially Polynesia, has been formatted and formulated to suit changing European pre-conceptions and requirements. The earliest and most enduring characterization of it has been that of an earthly paradise. That is a notion with deep roots in Western cultural memory and one which had come to be associated with islands at least since the time of Columbus. That is, well before the navigators encountered — and romanticized — Tahiti in the late eighteenth century. But in the nineteenth century nature, that is, the primal state of things, commonly began to be seen as less benign. The islanders needed to be converted to Christianity, and lotus-eating white men were likely to 'go native'. The father of anthropology, Malinowski, even borrowed the words of Conrad's Kurtz to express his impatience with his hosts: 'exterminate the brutes'. Then, during the twentieth century, the Pacific steadily became re-romanticized, ultimately becoming a tourist 'paradise'.

Conversely, in the second chapter Howe explores the idea that 'culture' or human contrivance is conditional upon underlying 'nature'. J.R. Forster, the naturalist on Cook's

second voyage, was an early exponent of this with his application of Montesquieu's climatic determinism to explain the character of indigenous Pacific islands societies. Later ethnographic theorists were also influenced by environmental determinism. One outcome of these notions was a tendency to construct a racial/social hierarchy, with the islanders being classified as subject to limitations that did not affect the Europeans. Indeed they were deemed to be destined to die out, a belief that was merely clarified by Darwinism and by measurable population decline from the late nineteenth century. Yet that belief was not indelible. As the twentieth century advanced, submission to nature gave way to faith in the redemptive power and destiny of culture, especially European imperial culture. Under its aegis Margaret Mead went to Samoa in the 1920s, and seemingly affirmed the potency of culture/nurture in the grand scheme of things. Further, in the 1930s the problem of depopulation seemed to be solved, thanks to wise and benevolent policies of colonial governments. If culture could do that, might it not also be able to build orderly, prosperous inclusive democracies in the Pacific? Roll on, decolonization! Not unexpectedly subsequent political troubles in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Solomons came as surprises in many quarters.

In his third chapter Howe discusses how thinking about history and the writing of it are prone to being influenced by culture, that is, by the fashions, enthusiasms and agenda of those who concern themselves with it. Thus, imperial history, that being written up to the 1950s, focused rather narrowly on European activities. It dealt with the islanders, especially the Polynesians, principally as clients, but ones worthy of being supplied with origin and migration myths relating them distantly to the Europeans. The subsequent post-imperial history has brought the islanders and their activities nearer to the centre of interest. However, this extends not only to identifying 'indigenous agency' but also, in certain quarters, to cultivating an image of victimhood. Correcting one imbalance does not confer immunity from other distortions. For example, in New Zealand and Hawaii, history has been deployed with varying degrees of sophistication by the acolytes of angst to complement the politics and rhetoric of indigenous grievance. This is reflected in the revival of the depopulation issue. Terms like 'holocaust' and 'genocide' have, like evidential steroids, been imported in an effort to enhance criticisms of the colonial order. And supporters of Hawaiian sovereignty, blaming European contact for causing an enormous population decline, argue for a base figure of up to 800,000, as opposed to the more orthodox estimate of 250,000–300,000. In which figure is the head speaking?

Kerry Howe has long chided Pacific historians, an assiduous lot, for 'monographic myopia'. By setting their studies within larger contexts, he urges their increases of learning might better contribute to understanding. In this book he leads by example.

HUGH LARACY

The University of Auckland

Pacific Forest: A History of Resource Control and Conflict in Solomon Islands, c. 1800–1997. By Judith A. Bennett. The White Horse Press, Cambridge. Brill, Leiden, 2000. 528 pp. UK price: £75.00. ISBN 1-874267-43-X/90-04-11960-4.

AT ONE LEVEL, *Pacific Forest* is what it claims to be — an exploration of the forests of the Solomon Islands from prehistoric times. But it is also more than that, presenting a major case study of forestry in colonial and post-colonial times, and making a significant contribution to the environmental history of the Pacific Islands. In many ways, too, it is a metaphor for countless forests and forest-dwelling peoples in Asia and