

two really comparable? After all, the earlier work, while also multi-authored, dealt with a different range of subjects and was written when the Empire was slowly being transformed into a Commonwealth; the present book tries to cover 'empire' in Australian history from many disparate perspectives.

What some readers will inevitably ask is whether this is just another history of Australia with the idea of the British Empire as its 'angle' or 'hook'. Regardless, it will be admired by historians and many of its chapters will be referred to in the profiles of any number of university courses in Australian history. One might quibble about how comprehensive it is and argue about the desirability of Australian higher education's mania for 'collaborative studies', but its principal faults are that it is too ambitious and the general reading public is not going to find all of it readily comprehensible.

MALCOLM SAUNDERS

University of the South Pacific

Tell It As It Is: Autobiography of Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Kenilorea, KBE, PC, Solomon Islands' First Prime Minister. By Peter Kenilorea. Edited by Clive Moore. Center for Asia-Pacific Area Studies, Research Center for Humanities & Social Sciences, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, 2008. xxxvi + 516pp. Taiwan price: \$NT700.00. ISBN 978-986-01-4498-7.

TELL IT AS IT IS IS THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY of Sir Peter Kenilorea, a senior statesman of the South Pacific with a long and distinguished career. As the Chief Minister of Solomon Islands (1976–1978) Kenilorea was a central figure in the preparation of this culturally and linguistically plural archipelago for independence from Britain in 1978. He was the chief negotiator and head of the Solomon Islands' delegation to the independence talks in London in 1977 and was the main architect of the Solomon Islands Constitution. He held the post of Prime Minister of Solomon Islands immediately after independence (1978–1980) and also on two subsequent occasions (1980–1981, 1984–1986). Since leaving politics in 1991, he has served as Director of the South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency (1991–1994), acted as the Solomon Islands Ombudsman (1996–2001), and since 2001 has been Speaker of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands.

The book is divided into three sections. Section I relates Kenilorea's early life and education. Section II, the main body of the book, addresses his public service, engagement in national politics and participation in regional organizations. In the brief final section, Kenilorea concludes by describing his children's education and careers and outlining his philosophy of parenting. The book has two appendices. The first lays out Kenilorea's genealogy, and the second constitutes a highly useful historical reference tool, including comprehensive lists of Solomon Islanders who served on the advisory and legislative councils of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, as well as lists of the highest ranking colonial officers and national leaders since independence.

Kenilorea's narrative of his birth and earliest education is alive with the compelling combination of human agency and contingent events. His mother, according to a now near-legendary account, went into labour just as the villagers of Hiruware in the Are-are region of southern Malaita Island came under mistaken American aerial bombardment in 1943. Although his panic-stricken mother hid him in an ant-infested bamboo cluster, Kenilorea survived this unfriendly welcome into the world. His earliest education was equally hit or miss. A local Are-are man in a nearby village happened to open up a small school that, in 1955, enabled Kenilorea to pursue a strong desire to learn English. He was frustrated, however, by the lack of structured instruction at the school. Then, in the following year, colonial officials visited his village and prompted his teacher to select

him, in a manner he experienced as entirely random, to be sent for formal schooling at the King George VI School (KGVI).

Kenilorea's account of his time at KGVI School (1956–1963) is of particular historical value because many of the early leaders of Solomon Islands were his peers at this government-run school. The chapters about this period of his life are much more than a collection of personal anecdotes; they provide real insight into the formation of a sense of national unity among students who came from different parts of the archipelago. Many of these students went on to form an administrative, professional and political elite in the Solomons. With a cohort of age-mates that included George Hiele, Henry Manuhea and Mostyn Habu, as well as Solomon Mamaloni (another three-times Solomon Islands Prime Minister), KGVI was in those days, as Kenilorea puts it, 'a quite remarkable hothouse that educated the early leaders of the nation' (p.69). Through personal recollections of camaraderie on the sports field, incidents in the classroom and the politics of the schoolboy prefecture, Kenilorea conveys a palpable sense of the shared experiences that produced common cultural reference points and life-long social networks.

Responding to abstract models of the role of the imagination in nation-making, scholars of decolonization have recently called for studies that trace the careers of those involved in decolonization, explore the effects of 'race' discrimination in late colonial contexts, and examine the ways in which individuals represent communities in political dialogue. Section II of Kenilorea's memoir provides valuable data about precisely these kinds of processes. Kenilorea has emerged as an extremely successful politician, but along the way he encountered a variety of setbacks and obstacles. Of particular interest, for example, is his claim, based on both memory and supporting archival material, that during his years in Public Service (1971–1976) a clique of racist colonial officers blocked his advancement because they read his demeanour as denoting lack of respect for his superiors.

Similarly, for scholars interested in the comparative study of democracy and new nations, the work offers a unique window onto the human and social realities of nation-making, both pre- and post-independence. Few people are better placed than Kenilorea to tell the inside story of the making and ongoing transformation of Solomon Islands as a modern nation-state. He has been a key figure in virtually every major development and event in recent Solomon Islands history: negotiating independence, crafting the constitution, becoming the first Prime Minister, chairing the Townsville Peace Accord in 2000, and intervening to stop the rioting after the 2006 General Election. The book is much more than an autobiography; it is also the most substantial social, economic and political account of the Solomons from the late 1960s to the present day.

Less obvious may be the importance of this book for scholars interested in the history and practice of global Christianity. Kenilorea writes as a committed Christian and lay preacher in the non-denominational South Sea Evangelical Church. The Bible has been a constant resource for decision making in his public as well as personal life. His memoir is a testimonial to his faith and a meditation on his understanding of the Christian life as a life of service. As such, it is an important and unusually sustained expression of a personal theology that contributes to our understanding of the ways in which Christianity is shaping all aspects of life in the postcolonial Pacific.

Sir Peter and Professor Clive Moore have collaborated to achieve a beautifully produced, thoroughly documented and engagingly written work that will be welcomed by a large and diverse readership among students of decolonization and newly independent states, constitutional historians, anthropologists and scholars of religion, as well as Pacific historians.

MICHAEL W. SCOTT

London School of Economics and Political Science