

## Preface

This is a book about the nature of Pacific Island politics under colonial rule. By the late nineteenth century and the partition of the Pacific among the European Powers, violence and conquest were established features of cultural contact. Colonialism was a dirty business, even to contemporaries who believed in the white man's burden. The Governor of German East Africa told the Reichstag candidly in 1905: '*Kolonialpolitik* has always been the politics of conquest, and nowhere in the world does the occupation of a land by a foreign people succeed without conflict'. Governor Albert Hahl in German New Guinea frequently took exception to press reports sensationalising acts of violence because, as he pointed out, they were simply part of the inevitable conflict between 'culture' and 'savagery'. Colonial settlers in general worked and lived on the assumption that 'the natives' were constantly waiting for the opportunity to murder the white people and seize their treasures. Many believed that Pacific Islanders would not accept foreign domination, that when a foreign flag went up over their islands the people would be ready to rise up against it and must be stopped from doing so, if necessary by force.

In this book I have endeavoured to correct these assumptions, which have found their way down even to fairly recent histories of the Pacific Islands. The study deals with a whole range of political and economic activities which were characterised as resistance by fearful administrators and settlers. It sets out to show that, for the German Pacific empire, violence was not automatic nor always the prerogative of the Islander, and that resistance to Germans and their policies, when it did occur, was a great deal more subtle and limited than contemporary German colonists, and indeed a long line of later historians, were prepared to accept. Over all it demonstrates the power and ability of Pacific Islanders to make their own adjustments—of interest and of ideology—to the demands of a foreign regime and to the social changes that followed.

While the Islanders play the leading roles in these pages, I have tried also to provide a wider and deeper understanding of colonisation as it

was perceived and practised by the German rulers of the islands. Consequently, there is much in the book that relates to German colonial attitudes and policy, to their methods of administration and control. This by no means amounts to an exhaustive analysis of German administration in the Pacific. My main interest was in the demands that the Germans made on the Pacific Islanders and the way in which German officials handled conflicts between the two communities.

The book is divided into two parts. The first consists of 'case studies' of Germany's three colonial areas in the Pacific, Samoa (now Western Samoa), New Guinea, and Ponape in Micronesia. If the treatment of Ponape, an island only some 334 square kilometres in area, seems to exaggerate its importance within the Pacific empire, that is because its people became the most serious threat to imperial domination within Micronesia, perhaps within the whole Pacific. For this reason it is also a convenient basis for comparison with Samoa: both were the scenes of large-scale, open opposition to German policy which required a massive response from the Reich in order to overcome. There are other reasons for comparison: both presented similar problems of scale to the German administrations, with relatively small, homogeneous populations enjoying comparable economic standards; both had superficially similar cultures; both could boast of well-developed political systems which had a long history of familiarity with European civilisation. The small size and isolation of Ponape and Samoa from metropolitan centres meant also that the character of German rule on both islands bore very much the imprint of their individual chief administrators.

German New Guinea provides a special case study. In its geographic size, in its diversity of population groups, of cultures and languages, New Guinea represented a different sort of colony from the comparatively small islands of Samoa and Ponape, indeed from any other colony in Africa or the Far East. The history of contact here is of a unique quality, for the German period was one largely of discovery and exploration, and much of the contact with local inhabitants was desultory and fleeting. The records on German New Guinea are impressionistic, of whole populations rather than of individual people, except in the areas of dense white settlement. To avoid too uneven a treatment, therefore, I have concentrated on three areas within the protectorate for which there was an abundance of evidence about the changing pattern of colonial rule. These are the Gazelle Peninsula in New Britain, Madang and the Astrolabe coast on the mainland, and the Huon Peninsula, also on the mainland, south of Madang. As an area

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of subsidiary interest the Admiralty Islands, Manus especially, have been touched upon because they afford a special insight into changes in traditional leadership structures brought about by German rule.

The seven chapters of Part I are intended to be analytical as well as descriptive, providing genuine histories of change and resistance in the islands. Part II of the book is an attempt to draw the three studies together in order to define what Pacific Island opposition was all about. I have not attempted to construct an abstract model about social relationships which would have universal validity whatever the historical context. Models are useful research tools and they do have explanatory value but, at least in history, they do not have a life of their own which will reduce human actions through time and over several societies to a predictive formula. Instead, I have used the case studies as a framework for interpreting and explaining 'resistance' in all its manifestations in the German Pacific, proceeding on the assumption that research on the Pacific has reached the stage where a comparative approach would help to underline cross-cultural regularities and enlarge our understanding of island societies under varying conditions of political and social stress. History may deal in the vagaries of human behaviour and the so-called uniqueness of events, but this behaviour and these events contain common elements which make them amenable to generalisation. There are sufficient similarities and differences between Samoa, Ponape and German New Guinea to provide the raw material for a serious comparison of the experience of Pacific Islanders under German rule.

Having laid out the ground plan, let me enter a caution about the book's pretensions where the history of German New Guinea is concerned. The problems of field research, of interpretation for the entire range of New Guinean societies under German rule, or even for the three areas chosen, were in the end so overwhelming that I have relied mainly on European documents (as wide a range as possible) supplemented by a large body of anthropological research, both latter-day and contemporary, in which German New Guinea is fairly well served.

However, I am aware that these sources alone fail to do justice to the whole history of Papua New Guineans. Many events, conflicts and interpretations which Papua New Guineans themselves consider important have been neglected, while the bald account of colonial rule over large areas of German New Guinea lacks the sense of regional identity which helps to stamp and explain the relations of one group

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of New Guineans with another and with European governments. Nonetheless I have been persuaded to publish the account of New Guinea under German rule with all its deficiencies, because basic information about the German period is still very incomplete. It is imperative to present Papua New Guineans, indeed Pacific Islanders in general, with as much information about those early times as possible so that they may refine and balance the interpretations from their own store of social knowledge and oral tradition. The work is offered in this spirit: that it may serve as a useful building block in the construction of a proper, Islands-written history of the Pacific. In the final analysis, only the Pacific Islanders can capture the full dimension which they give to their own past, and to time and change.

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