

MAIRE BOPP

France retain its antipodean territories? What indeed is the future of French Pacific territories?

The issues are tackled from an historical perspective, but the views expressed are not limited to those of political élites.

Rather, the book outlines the role of a wide range of different people and community groups such as non-government organisations and the churches.

Co-authors, Nic Maclellan and Jean Chesneaux do not pretend to be neutral on the matter, to the disappointment of academics who hope for detachment.

Indeed, the two authors were already committed to the anti-nuclear and indigenous causes when they first met in Melbourne some 15 years ago.

Since then, they put out several publications together. A chapter on "Kanak and the long night of French colonialism" was published in *Politics of the Future* (1989) and the book *La France dans le Pacifique* in 1992 was directed to French speakers. Part of this latter work was translated in and reproduced in *After Moruroa*.

The duo of Jean Chesneaux, French historian lecturing at the Sorbonne in Paris, and Nic Maclellan, an Australian journalist involved in community work for years, is a surprising combination, knowing the antipathy between these two countries

for the past decades.

Maclellan and Chesneaux decided three years ago to write *After Moruroa* to anticipate 1998 which they saw as a turning point for France in the Pacific.

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From a Suva gossip column to Fleet Street

A Hack's Progress. By Phillip Knightley. London: Vintage, 1998. \$A16.95

TO READERS outside the United Kingdom, Australian-born journalist Philip Knightley will probably be best known for his books such as *The First Casualty* and *The Secret Life of Lawrence of Arabia*. In his autobiography, now released in paperback, he talks about some of the more famous stories he has worked on, including the ground breaking series of articles on the dangers of thalidomide which first appeared in *The Sunday Times*.

Knightley's book is self critical, especially about the value of his writ-

ing on the intelligence services during the Cold War and he refers to himself as “the world’s worst war correspondent” for assuring his editor at the *Sunday Times* that there would be no war in the Middle East — on the eve of the Six Day War. For a journalist who has achieved so much prominence for his work as an investigative journalist for the quality British press and his subsequent books, Knightley appears to have been singularly uncertain about what he wanted to do for a living.

After a somewhat peripatetic existence, he eventually — at his second try — made it as a journalist on Fleet Street and from there never looked back. Before then he had tried his hand at everything from making propaganda films for the Indian army to working as a copra buyer for Morris Hedstrom in Suva.

Even after he gained a solid reputation with *The Sunday Times*, Knightley continued to have doubts about his calling and his book contains a number of deep felt reflections on the ethical dilemmas that face working journalists every day.

For Knightley, one of the first inklings that his writing might be causing problems for other people came in Suva when he started writing a gossip column for the *Oceania Daily News*. An article about the drinking habits of some members of the Suva Yacht Club and another about nocturnal indiscre-

tions (“Who was the lady in the red polka dot dress seen emerging from bushes near the Cable and Wireless station in the early hours last Thursday accompanied by Mr R? And did her husband know?”) led to him being thrown off the end of the pier at Ovalau and being invited for a quiet chat at Government House.

Knightley joined the *Oceania Daily News* after throwing up his job with Morris Hedstrom. The *Oceania Daily News* was one of the many papers which have tried to challenge the *Fiji Times* over the years. It was, he claims, from the *News* that the *Times* borrowed the boast “the first newspaper published in the world today.”

The *News* offered readers something quite different to the *Times* (overseas news from United Press, sporting and racing news from New Zealand) and sought to broaden its appeal by translating its overseas news into Fijian. However, like the *Times*’ earlier rival, the *Guardian*, the *News* did not last.

According to Knightley, it all ended when the sub-editor smashed a painting over the head of the editor who had been lecturing him on grammar for half an hour. After a brief strike, which the proprietors solved by sacking everybody, Knightley was once again unemployed.

After a brief stint living in a Fijian village he was ordered to leave Fiji by

PHILIP CASS

the colonial government. He booked a cheap passage to Auckland and from there began the long journey which would eventually lead him to London.

Some extracts:

On the demise of the *Oceania Daily News*:

“Soon afterwards, the editor of the *News* left for a better job in Australia and the paper fell apart. The new editor, another New Zealander, drove Hanrahan, the subeditor, mad with lectures on pedantic points of grammar. Late one night, overcome by the heat and tension, Hanrahan listened to half an hour on the use of the pluperfect, then snatched a painting off the editor’s wall and smashed it over his head. Understandably, the editor fired him. The printers, who had more to do with Hanrahan than the editor, went on strike in his support. The clerical staff, who had more to do with the editor, went on strike in his support. Since I comprised the whole of the editorial staff, I had to choose which picket line to join, and since I was a paying guest in Hanrahan’s house, I joined him.”

On royal tours:

“The visit was almost over when the Royal walkabout made an unscheduled stop and the Queen disappeared inside a large bure... Minutes passed and she showed no signs of re-appearing but nothing important could have been happening because the Royal

party and the press were making their way back to the cars. Bored, I wandered along a path that turned out to lead to the back of the hut where there was a large window, with a palm frond shutter instead of glass. The shutter was propped open, so I thought I’d just take a quick look inside. As my eyes became accustomed to the gloom there was the familiar face of the Queen reflected in the mirror of a dressing table, literally powdering her nose. Our eyes met for a half a second, then I shrank back to the ground and slunk away, wondering if this was a hanging offence or just a life long ban on covering Royal tours.”