

Corbett, J. (2015). *Being political: Leadership and democracy in the Pacific Islands*. Honolulu HI: University of Hawai'i Press, hbk, xii +243pp. ISBN: 978-0-8248-4102-7. US\$54.

Jack Corbett has produced a high quality work which takes its cue from an interest in political biography and life-writing, combined with an interpretive approach to political analysis. The choice of Pacific island politicians as subjects for analysis stems from his personal interest in, and connections with, the region. The result is a keen insight into the very human aspects of the professional life of politicians in some very challenging settings, as well as the personal motivations that drive them to seek public office. This insight provides the reader with an appreciation of the difficulties facing politicians at different levels: from the demands placed on them by constituents, as well as by other politicians, to the sacrifices of personal time with family and friends; and, not least, the financial costs involved in pursuing a political career.

The author deals with important issues, such as corruption among politicians; while doing so, he neither excuses occurrences on cultural grounds nor issues any judgemental condemnations. Rather, Corbett explains the pitfalls and temptations confronting politicians and locates these within the context of the demands made on them. What emerges is not a portrait of a grasping, self-interested class of men and women who enter politics for what they can get out of it (an all too common assumption among general publics), but a much more nuanced and sympathetic assessment of people who feel a genuine commitment to public service and who want to 'make a difference'. The fact that they so often fall short of achieving such aims is a source of frustration, above all else, for the politicians themselves.

This is a highly original work, also because there are no other books of its kind, or at least not in the Pacific island region. It therefore adds a new dimension to existing life studies from the region. The latter consist of many individual auto/biographies about some of the better known Pacific politicians; but there is no other study of the kind presented by Corbett. The book is also original in being based on personal interviews with numerous Pacific Island politicians. All interviewees have been guaranteed anonymity, and so what they have to say almost certainly provides more insights than would formal, named interviews. It also offers an analysis of the 'anti-politics' phenomenon, as well as a rich source of material for further comparative work on politicians and politics both in the Pacific and elsewhere.

Corbett's book will appeal to academics and students of Pacific politics, policy-makers in and around the region and politicians themselves. It will also appeal to scholars working with political biography and in comparative politics more generally. The style is very clear and accessible and the material is well organised under various themes. One thing that could have been added is more of an overview of the region: its people, its history and its political systems in particular. But: even without this information, which is useful rather than essential, and more so to the reader without much previous knowledge of the region, this book is an excellent work which makes a very valuable contribution to Pacific studies and small state studies more broadly.

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