

many pages as the text, a statistic that testifies to the exhaustiveness and thoroughness of the author's long labours. While historians have known of and awaited this book for many years, the achievement shows among other things that good scholarship is best not hurried. This book will tower as the standard reference for a very long time to come, not just because the scale would daunt most would-be competitors, but mainly because it bears the stamp of authority and deliberation. In every sense, it is monumental.

Ian Campbell
Division of History
University of the South Pacific

Decolonising the Mind: the impact of the University on culture and identity in Papua New Guinea, 1971–74, Ulli Beier, Pandanus Books, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, 2005. 248 x 170 mm, xviii + 174 pp., b & w and colour photographs and reproductions, glossary, bibliographies of select publications of Ulli Beier and Georgina Beier. ISBN 1-74076-137-5 (pb).

Intellectual vogues spawn their own red-rag tags. In the second half of the twentieth century, 'decolonisation of the mind' became one of them, so it is with some trepidation that one approaches this finely presented book of memoirs bearing such a polemical title. Will it be one more strident harangue using a grain of truth and a ton of emotion? Fears are somewhat allayed by the subtitle: Australia—the coloniser grappling with its own cultural cringe—as a decolonising agent, through its home-style (i.e. English–Scottish inspired) university, is too delicious an irony. Ulli Beier is quick to characterise his previous university in Nigeria, and by extension universities in any colony, as 'instrument[s] of colonialism' 'designed to overawe the students with the masterpieces of a foreign civilisation' (2). Yet his proffered alternative is somewhat problematic: the merits of substituting creations of African and other non-British imaginations—as near as may be, one would have thought, to foreign products—are not interrogated.

In a sense, 'colonisation of the mind' may be seen as the price the species pays for the ostensible blessing of having in the survival kit the wondrous capacity for language and culture. In that sense, 'colonisation' of minds is what every generation of humanity does to its successor

generation, the guarantee of cultural production and reproduction. Within a society, the process is appraised positively in such terms as cultural transmission, socialisation and education (or, when done by other groups, disparaged as indoctrination, brainwashing and propagandising). But when it becomes entangled with the imposition of an 'alien' culture on a vanquished people—over the top of their own socialisation processes—then it is anathematised as mental colonisation. Fortunately, the complex interplay of inheritance, experience and environment in these processes is such that no culture/society has yet succeeded in completely stamping out all signs of divergence, individuality and non-conformity. People *are* to some extent programmed by the situations in which they grow up, yet as they mature they exercise ever more choice about what they will accept from the programming process, their cumulating experience and their continuing negotiations with the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Beier confronts this paradox largely by ignoring it, beyond a low key and rather disingenuous discussion of creative writing as a university option with which he opens the chapter 'Finding their own voice'. By 'colonisation', he refers only to that unequal politico-economic relationship that accords superiority to every aspect of the 'master' culture and seeks to bestow largesse on the 'subordinate' culture by offering some chances for people to become inferior copies of their masters, understanding that they will never quite measure up to the original though they will be a little ennobled by the doomed attempt. For UPNG, he proposed offering literature courses transformed by being grounded in Papua New Guinea traditions and concerns relevant to the students' own lives and problems (2). He would not, however, cast aside the possibility of offering other (more 'equal?') models for PNG citizens—such as English-language literature from Africa, India, the Caribbean and Aboriginal Australia, culminating in some exposure to Modern World (i.e. non-English but in translation) Literature, a selection mirroring his own extensive knowledge, experience and tastes, as well as a goodly swathe of the sites of European imperialism. Why this is not also a form of colonisation of the mind he does not explore, beyond speaking of it as the means of breaking down the colonially imposed isolation from the rest of the world. In its place he would concentrate on widening his students' outlook (3) or giving 'another window on the world' (140). This, then, is the working definition of decolonisation of the mind underpinning the book.

* * * * *

In September 1967 the Beier family joined the community at the infant University of Papua New Guinea. The 'baggage' they brought with them

included (as well as the baby in the basket) adult lives embodying their belief that life should be filled with creative activity, that people should be encouraged to express their own feelings and aspirations in their own way. Language and other techniques are among the necessary tools; enslavement to the 'superior' canons of another culture is not. The primary good is creative expression and the immediate corollary is that it should be channelled through the creator's own imagination. Their baggage also included their rare gift of being able to respond and relate immediately to people as they find them, whoever they are. This warmth and openness had afforded them a rich experience of Nigeria and they had already, between Brisbane and Moresby, struck a lasting friendship with (Albert) Maori Kiki, which was to prove emblematic of what lay ahead.

Practising what they preached, Ulli and Georgina had, in their years in Nigeria, stimulated a luxuriant flowering of creativity—a crucial experience of individual and national identity formation in the crowded years cushioning the transition from colonialism to independence. By the time they arrived in Papua New Guinea it had become clear that independence would be achieved there, too, sooner rather than later, and without sufficient regard for the national state of readiness. The Beiers did not hesitate.

In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ulli fondly recalls significant encounters with wantoks and the astounding harvest of their first plantings in creativity not necessarily tied to utilitarianism, tradition or colonial values. The couple's areas of expertise complement and interact seamlessly, and Ulli is always the first and warmest in acknowledging his artist wife Georgina's contribution. He also attributes a formative role to UPNG, readily acknowledging the unwavering support he received from John Gunther, Frank Johnson, Ken Inglis and others. Institutionally, his own role was critical in the mentoring of a small band of creative writers and dramatists—several of the latter group flourishing in the extracurricular dramatic activity orbiting around Peter Trist, whose nostalgic foreword provides the fitting overture to this book. Art development in the early years took place at the Beiers' campus home, though it was not formally a part of the university's programme nor was Georgina formally a staff member. 'Discovered' artists were drawn not from the student body but from among the labourers who had become an important part of the urban demographic. The earliest and most enthusiastic supporters included many UPNG staff members. So although the arts awakening may to many have seemed extraneous to the institution's 'real' purpose, there is no doubt of the somewhat subversive impact of the university in the identity formation that was occurring.

Readers who were there for those years will relive the excitement of being in the slipstream, as Beier reminisces in characteristically warm, personal

eloquence about the first writers—Kiki, Eri, Kasaipwalova and other poets, Hannett, Waiko, Namaliu, Takaku, Jawodimbari—many of these names near forgotten or more recognisable now because of later political engagement—even the sad little tale of the poet *manqué* Allan Natachee. The artists' roll-call includes Tiabe and other painters at the Laloki mental hospital (comment enough on the perils of transcultural adjustments), Akis, Kauage, Marie Taita Aihi (another who could not sustain a break from cultural conventions and expectations), Ruki Fame, Wanamera and a few others. Illustrations of some of their work enrich the book.

These are very short lists, given that the country is populous and diverse, and they represent a very small slice of time; the intensity of the mentor–individual artist relationship of necessity limits the numbers who can be fostered. For most, the hour of glory was brief and the possibility of supporting themselves by their arts limited, as too has been the support and understanding from their countrymen. Subsequent fellow travellers have been few: sustaining the movement has been a faltering enterprise. Perhaps its initial success depended less on a 'decolonised' home market than on a small, generous and open-minded transient or overseas market whose minority tastes run to that sort of thing. Secondly, it is not really possible to assess how colonised these minds were at the starting line, so setting them up as decolonised minds may be a 'straw man' argument. Presumably the university students, having forged through the schooling experience with some success, were the most colonised of all and they certainly do not seem to have rejected outright writing in another language and or using foreign art forms—all cultures use narratives, but not all produce novels. Yet many of them vindicate the belief in the value of widening the range of exposure to outside influences. Arguably the least colonised were the artists, not burdened with years of schooling or thorough immersion in the colonial language, not even strongly bound by traditional artistic conventions, yet fortunate enough to be able to produce images on paper or other media that catch the fancy of others. Thirdly, the products of this cultural upsurge are very much reflective of the Beiers' tastes in expression and of the quality of the personal 'chemistry' between them and their protégés. But when everything came together just right, as it sometimes did, the result was heady. For Papua New Guinea the Beiers were catalytic, and Ulli has put together a gentle testament, splendidly produced by the late lamented Pandanus Press venture at ANU, that captures the magic of the moment.

Barbara Han'ofa
Suva