

Moore, Clive. 2022. *Honiara: Village-City of Solomon Islands*. Canberra, Australia: ANU Press.

Clive Moore's history of the pre-World War II capital of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, *Tulagi: Pacific Outpost of British Empire*, published in 2019, was a compelling study of life in a small colonial settlement in the centre of the chain of islands that comprise the Solomons group. Just three years later, Moore has completed another hefty volume, *Honiara*, a history of the post-WWII capital up to the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Moore explains in *Honiara*, the old capital at Tulagi had been destroyed during the war and, rather than rebuilding in the small island group of Gela, the British colonial administration decided to take advantage of the infrastructure at Camp Guadal, a vast military base that the US forces had built during the war on the north coast of the large island of Guadalcanal, some 39 miles south from Tulagi across the Solomons Sea. Not only was the site 'a readymade town based on American wartime facilities' (p. 191), but it offered space for expansion and a nearby airfield. By mid-1945 Camp Guadal came to be known as Honiara, a name based on an indigenous Tandai placename, *Nahona'ara*.

In ten substantive chapters, Moore provides a history of the capital starting with the disposition of the area of land in the decades before Honiara was established (Chapter 1). He then provides a fine account of the Japanese and Allied invasions (Chapter 2) before tracing the formation and development of Honiara up until it became the 'sprawling Melanesian city' (p. 18) of the second decade of the twentieth century.

One of Moore's main organising theses is that Honiara comprises four or five changing, parallel though intersecting spheres or 'worlds', each with their own social identity, have operated in Honiara during any decade. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the establishment of the British administrative headquarters in 1940s and 1950s. Alongside this administrative world several other worlds were simultaneously shaping Honiara: a Solomon Islanders one, a Chinese one, and one formed by people from elsewhere in the Pacific, principally the Gilbert Islands and Fiji. In these early years, Moore finds that people from the island of Malaita form their own world distinct from that of other Solomon Islanders. Moore refers to these changing worlds throughout the book and, in so doing, gives the reader purchase on the complex history of the capital. Importantly, it enables Moore to trace the increasing dominance – in social, economic, and political terms – of the Malaitan world.

Moore uses the term 'village city' to encapsulate the way that the indigenous Solomon Islands world (including the Malaitan world) actively incorporates social and spatial practices of village life in the provinces. And, whereas many expatriate visitors have expressed negative views of Honiara as dirty and overwhelming, Moore has a much more positive, though not rose-tinted, perspective; he celebrates the city's vibrant and 'hybrid' social practices that give it a distinctive character. 'The argument put forward here', he writes in Chapter 4, 'is that over decades Honiara has become a hybrid society that has many village-like characteristics' (p. 161). Thus, the Honiara that emerges in this volume is not an imitation of a first-world city of the sort that is often found in ill-judged planning documents, but a vital and distinctive Pacific city with rhizome-like roots extending throughout the country.

Moore's approach thus offers much more than a spatially circumscribed history of Honiara. His discussion of the development of infrastructure in the 1960s and 1970s in Chapter 6 traces how Honiara was transformed from a town into a city. At the same time, his illuminating histories of the Central or National Referral Hospital, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, the national port at Point Cruz and inter-island shipping services, air transportation, and media and communication all necessarily engage with the history of the Solomon Islands as a whole. Chapters 7 and 8 likewise focus on the capital while offering an account of the building of the nation and the development of a diffuse national consciousness.

If the British had favoured Honiara because of its capacity for urban expansion, they could not have anticipated the rapid expansion that was to occur in the last decades of the Twentieth Century. This growth, especially into squatter settlements, and its consequences are among the issues Moore addresses in the final two chapters, which concentrate on the years after Solomon Islands independence in 1978.

A lack of economic development in Malaita Province, a steady flow of Malaitan labour to Honiara, Guadalcanal people's discontent with the lack of development throughout their island, and population overflow on to Guadalcanal land surrounding the capital all fed into the violent civil tension that broke out in 1998-2003. Moore's short account of the Tensions provide the context for his more detailed discussion of the Australia-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands that sought to 'restore law and order and shore up government processes' (p. 417). Arriving in mid 2003, RAMSI quickly established its own 'world', which remained until it withdrew fourteen years later. Moore offers an even-handed assessment of RAMSI's successes and weaknesses.

In Moore's judgment 'the authorities must [still] come to terms with squatter settlements, villages, and cultural hybridity' (p. 438) if they hope to avoid future problems. Yet, this fascinating history, aided in part by the many colourful photographs that illustrate it, leaves us with a view of Honiara as it was on the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic: 'a sprawling, booming, vibrant Pacific city' (p. 438); one full of possibilities and potential for 'future success' (p. 485).