

HANS FISCHER: Warum Samoa? Touristen und Tourismus in der Südsee.

Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1984. 360 pages, DM 36.80

Without doubt, the islands of the Pacific rank among the dreamlands of many Europeans. Not least because Margaret Mead, the well-known American anthropologist, has characterized the Samoans as a peace-loving and free society, tourists see their craving for a picture contrasting with their everyday life epitomised especially in the Samoan Islands.

In this book Hans Fischer, a German social anthropologist, deals with the problems of this type of culture contact, in the course of which he impressively succeeds in demonstrating the anthropologist's legitimation to devote himself to tourism questions. Besides a thorough analysis of the tourism sector itself he draws a well-balanced picture of modern Samoan society and its central cultural values, thereby revealing the true background of the Samoan's reactions to 'organized tourism'.

Fischer, recognized expert on Pacific cultures and author of several remarkable studies on tribal societies in Papua New Guinea, pursues a twofold objective in this treatise. Trained in the methods of qualitative, open interview he managed to give sufficient hearing both to the tourists and the Samoans. The structure of the book conforms to this bipartition. In part I Fischer analyzes the tourists' motives in visiting Samoa, their desires, ideas and expectations - often followed by harsh disillusion when they realize the dark sides of the supposed paradise. Part II contains the Samoans' view about tourism in their country, being victims and beneficiaries of this process at one and the same time. The author is also able to show that culture contact is something familiar to the Samoans for many decades, and because they have developed elaborate strategies of reaction they hardly run the risk of being overrun by the tourism-wave. However positive this result may be - only very few countries are able to boast corresponding success in restricting tourism to reasonable dimensions - we should never close our eyes to one fact: overcoming the problems caused by increasing masses of tourists calls for an exorbitant price, i.e. cultural arrogance and a feeling of superiority on the part of the Samoans vis à vis all non-Samoans. For this reason the Samoan case cannot be taken as a model of controlled and appropriate tourism, because the world's history shows manifold examples of the harmful effects of an emphatic ethnocentrism. Although he explicitly mentions and criticizes this drawback, Fischer on the other hand seems to take over Samoan prejudices in condemning only one type of tourism as pernicious for Samoan society - the individualistic 'rucksack-tourism'. But this partial criticism doesn't reduce the merits of this sympathetic and instructive study about one of the most drastic mass phenomena nowadays, which - so the disillusioning conclusion of the author - leads to no international understanding of any kind.

Peter Hanser