

Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons
<http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/dspace/>
This is the author's preprint version of this article.

Under the Volcano: The Story of Bali. Cameron Forbes. Black Inc., 2007.

Review by Gillian Dooley for *The Adelaide Review* 14 September 2007, p. 28.

Cameron Forbes is an award-winning journalist with a distinguished career as a foreign correspondent. In *Under the Volcano* he has set out to look beneath the myth of Bali as tropical paradise, and expose the violence of its past and the uncertainty of its present.

Forbes goes back to prehistory, and works through history to the coming of the Dutch and the colonial era, which, he argues, set the scene for post-colonial ethnic conflict in a similar way to the Belgians in Rwanda by privileging a minority. They also hardened and perpetuated the caste system and imposed a false and static concept of ‘genuine’ Balinese culture. But after this introduction, most of the book concerns the post-colonial era.

His prose is competent and correct, and he rarely indulges in sensationalism. The stories of individual Balinese are often introduced in an attempt to personalise the narrative, but whether because of the difficulty with unfamiliar names and titles, or the lack of depth in these personal accounts, *Under the Volcano* never really takes off and becomes an engaging read. Perhaps it is revealing that the most involving section concerns the Bali Nine and their predicament. Schapelle Corby is given fairly short shrift, but Forbes’ sympathy is clearly engaged by Scott Rush’s family, and Renae Lawrence.

Forbes draws on parallels from all over the world in his discussion of Bali’s history – the genocide in Rwanda, the drug trade in Afghanistan under the Taliban, Malaysia’s treatment of foreign drug dealers – leaving no doubt of his impeccable research and breadth of knowledge. International comparisons are certainly

instructive, but too much of the book is directed away from Bali. *Under the Volcano* is an ambitious, well-researched book, but ultimately it suffers from lack of focus.