ment as well as the bank), the bank’s reputation, and, perhaps, internal Papua New Guinea politics apparently fueled perceptions and accusations that it was a privatization initiative.

In sum, however, this is a valuable book of immediate relevance. It has important things to say about and to the people of Papua New Guinea and a message about the larger question of class. I hope it inspires vigorous discussion and additional research on this vital issue.

M I C H A E L  F R E N C H  S M I T H
LTG Associates, Takoma Park, MD

Much has been written about inequality in Papua New Guinea. Its impact on politics has been visible as local leaders look to capitalist entrepreneurs and the educated elite to satisfy desires for greater material consumption among their more “traditional” supporters, and national leaders walk a tightrope between satisfying competing local constituencies and supporting policies that promote the economic development of the country. Its impact on social relations has been evident as young men of means contribute to higher brideprices and exchange payments resulting in bachelorhood for many men from less developed areas, greater incentives for urban migration, and participation in development schemes that promise high incomes but ultimately result in environmental destruction and the loss of subsistence; in the negative shifts in the conjugal relations of women “paid for” with exorbitant brideprices; and in the unequal relations of family members who must work for more prosperous siblings or children who have taken charge of family lands and destinies through their success in the new economy. Now, in their excellent ethnography on class in Papua New Guinea, anthropologists Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington show the often denied but inevitable consequences of long-term economic and educational inequality in a free society: class and its ugly stratification of individuals as “upper,” “middle,” or “lower.”

Gewertz and Errington’s book draws on their many years of field research in different locations in Papua New Guinea. Its ethnographic focus is on Wewak, however, one of Papua New Guinea’s larger towns, and the lifestyle of those middle-class civil servants, politicians, professionals, and business persons who frequent Wewak’s elite clubs and organizations. The authors immersed themselves in this exclusive world in 1996. They spent a year doing participant observation as members of the Wewak golf and yacht clubs and the more exclusive Wewak Rotary Club. They attended local churches, formally interviewed 88 of the more affluent of Wewak’s middle class (56 men and 32 women), and worked in other contexts such as Wewak’s International School, where they volunteered as English-language reading tutors and interviewed many of the children and their parents. They also lived in a middle-class home complete with chain-link fencing and other security measures, none of which prevented them from being robbed and gaining yet another insider’s perspective.

Armed with such insider knowledge of the workings of social class, Gew-
ertz and Errington show the ways in which differences of status are being created, experienced, and justified among the new elite. They also convincingly demonstrate the felt injuries of class exclusivity among the new lower class, who are more and more on the outside looking in rather than being part of “the party.” In chapter 1, “The middle class—the (new) Melanesian way,” the authors describe the workings of the Wewak Rotary Club and how its members incorporate the ideology and organizational practices of Rotary International. Members support one another in practicing a diffuse noblesse oblige toward the larger community and wantoks, dedicating themselves to “self and service,” assuming the role of “chiefs” in the new society, dispensing select charities and service to the grassroots while educating demanding wantoks of their (the new elite’s) special consumption needs and priorities. A shared concern among the Rotary Club members and others in the new middle class is the fear of being brought down to the grassroots level by exorbitant demands for “reciprocity” and economic investments in their circle of wantoks.

Chapter 2, “How the grass roots became the poor,” is chilling. Here Sepik Women in Trade (swit) is introduced, a private organization begun by middle-class women in Wewak in 1996. The avowed aim of swit is to assist impoverished women living primarily in Wewak’s squatter settlements to market their handicrafts in order to help them earn money to help satisfy their families’ basic subsistence needs and school fees. This seems an admirable goal, but one is quickly disenchanted on learning that the leaders of swit convince the poorer members that the way to improve their economic chances is to save their earnings in order to attend an international trade fair in Jayapura, Indonesia. The expense of this “opportunity” in relation to the relative meagerness of many of the women’s earnings and the pressing needs of their families is obscene. Nonetheless, most of the women are convinced of the “future benefits” that can be gained from their attendance at the trade fair, and when many fall short of the needed fare, they internalize their “own failure” in the capitalist market. Part of the obscenity, of course, is that the trade fair is presented in the way of a “cargo dream,” promising more than is likely to come out of such a venture, and blaming those who don’t go or who come away empty-handed for not having enough faith in the new system to be successful in it.

In chapter 3, “The realization of class exclusion,” and Chapter 4, “The hidden injuries of class,” class is viewed through the eyes of two of the authors’ long-term informants—Michael Kamban and Godfried Kolly. According to the authors, it was at the Wewak Golf and Country Club where they found a clear constellation of “processes constituting middle class life worldwide: commodity consumption by individuals within nuclear . . . families” (60). Around the margins of this context of sociality they found the constellation to be clearly, if unsuccessfully, challenged. One challenger was Michael Kamban, waiting doggedly on the margins for his parliamentary representative to come to the course, hoping to be repaid for the time and support he and other villagers
had given during the representative’s reelection campaign. More than money, however, Kamban had wanted an ongoing and reciprocal sociality that was being denied him. Without such social recognition, and made to wait outside near the club parking lot where poorer townspeople sat hoping to earn money as caddies or to sell snacks to the members, Kamban felt “rubbished” and increasingly angry. In like fashion, town dweller Godfried Kolly’s hopes were dashed when the sports jerseys and special brand sports whistles he so arduously acquired from overseas (with the help of the authors) in order to sell them to fellow referees in the largely middle-class East Sepik Referees Association did not result in greater respect and acceptance.

The remaining chapters focus on “The problem(s) of the poor” and “Class and the definition of reason-ability.” Chapter 5 describes how middle-class fears and expectations of grassroots resentment and violence against them are expressed in a rhetoric in which crime and class are conjoined and how it is up to “re-asonable” people—primarily middle class—to act in order to insure social order. The relationship between class and what the middle class considers “reasonable” is further explored in chapter 6. Moving beyond Wewak, the authors relate the story—given wide coverage in the Post Courier and even The New York Times—of how a young highlands girl was included as part of a death compensation given to the relatives of one of two men shot dead by police. The case of the “compo girl” provided the middle class in Wewak (and throughout Papua New Guinea) with a startling difference between the values they were assuming and the values they felt they were leaving behind. Living “modern,” relatively individualistic lives in which women have the same constitutional rights to self-determination as men, the middle class felt itself more separated than ever from those who were living more traditional, more collectively oriented, lives.

In their conclusion, the authors recall what many in Papua New Guinea’s middle class dread “On dark nights of the soul”: that Papua New Guinea’s place in the global economy is shaky and that their hold on this new lifestyle can be wrenched from them in a flash, leaving their children unprepared for life in a village or among the urban poor. Throughout the book, the authors are careful to suggest that crime and domestic violence are not foreign to the middle class. They do such a good job, however, of presenting an insider’s perspective that violence and unreasonableness are largely on the outside trying to get in, that readers wanting to use this book for teaching middle and upper class children wherever they live would do well to balance its familiar perspectives with more general or grassroots ones. The Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea series on domestic violence, for example, suggests a high level of domestic violence among the urban elite in contrast to much lower levels among the urban poor. And articles written for this journal by Sinclair Dinnen and Michael Goddard report both lower and middle class participation in rascalism and the fears of the goodly urban poor trying to create crime-free havens for themselves and their families. Robin Anderson’s and
Bob Connolly’s video, Joe Leaby’s Neighbors (1989), would make an excellent complement to this informative book, providing both middle-class and villagers’ perspectives on inequality and middle-class lifestyles in another part of Papua New Guinea.

LAURA ZIMMER-TAMAKOSHI
Truman State University

* * *

Written by two established academic anthropologists with lengthy publishing records, this book is “our telling of the ways that class inequalities in contemporary Papua New Guinea have been convincingly, and with telling effect, told” (1). In other words, it is an account of what might once have been termed class formation and consciousness, now class happenings and class tellings.

Most of the research for the book was conducted in the country’s fifth largest town, Wewak, with a population of about fifty thousand people. For nearly three decades, most recently during 1996, the authors have visited the town for research. For this book, “88 of the more affluent of Wewak’s middle-class nationals: 56 men and 32 women” were interviewed (19). Gewertz and Errington also “plunged into . . . middle-class life in a variety of contexts” (20). These included Rotary, golf and yacht clubs, churches, law-and-order political rallies, Chamber of Commerce, plus volunteer tutoring at the local, private, English-speaking International School. They also examined the activities of Sepik Women in Trade (SWIT), a small traders’ organization.

In five of the six descriptive chapters that draw on this research, the authors claim to provide an account of how class as inequalities, as “distinctions of incommensurability,” is “becoming lived” (20). Thus, chapter 1 introduces “a template of sociality embraced by Wewak’s affluent as they engage with each other in such (largely) imported contexts as Rotary International” (21). The next four chapters in turn examine how “the grass roots became the poor,” “the realization of class exclusions,” “the hidden injuries of class,” and “the problem(s) of the poor.” Chapter 6 leaves Wewak behind, in an attempt to show how class awareness is becoming widespread in the country.

A driving force behind the account is disgust, at the emergence of a supposed “new Melanesian way,” where class transgresses against a prior egalitarianism. The “new” condition is made more offensive because “nationals” are allowing, even propelling, the happening. Emerging Class becomes, by the authors’ reckoning, “a book which many Papua New Guineans had hoped could never be written” (2).

If class “is emerging” in Wewak and the wider country, how should this be understood? Here the study of class is first considered by way of selective citations of significant works — works that provide signposts, not understanding. Gewertz and Errington’s use of the Marxist historian E P Thompson’s The Making of the English Working Class is particularly instructive, although similar points could be made about their use of others, including Max Weber.

The authors commence by noting with approval Thompson’s proposition that class is a relationship. However they then feel no need to be constrained (informed?) by the Marxist