

I fundamentally disagree with Herdt when he asserts: “To interpret ritual secrecy as a lie or hoax, or primarily as a sham or game, was to underrate the wonderfully terrifying complexities of Melanesian precolonial life” (220). Those accused of this sin (Barth, Hogbin, Tuzin, and Read) have produced some of the richest ethnography of men’s house cultures. Herdt cannot accept ethnography that documents the ambiguous and ambivalent nature of public secrecy, the nature of the complicities (and the complicity with complicity) that made social life possible. All Melanesia is assimilated to his Sambian model of ritual secrecy as progressively disclosing truths. Here Herdt suffers from the sin he projects onto those he accuses of having “ignored the social contradictions of these sociocultural systems, so rich and intricately layered in public and secret subjectivities and practices” (220). Herdt briefly touches on what other anthropologists were tapping into, namely, a pride and pleasure by men in successfully staging ritual secrets, but this homosocial pleasure in male artifice is never ontologically explored. Why couldn’t this self-reflexive pleasure in one’s ability to stage and produce a virtual world not also imply an ontology of the need for fictions, of the generative power of lies, and of folding women back into relations of complicity with what they originally created—artifice? To treat ritual as a lie is not necessarily to say it is empty, as Herdt often assumes. Instead it can entail an analysis of the ontological dimension to a social order built on lies created in a mythological past from the procreative powers of

women. The myths linking initiation rituals with secrecy and the procreative powers of woman are, as Herdt and Bamberger point out, partly about men’s secret appropriation of women’s powers of reproduction, but they may also be about the procreative nature of secrecy and fictions.

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*Raiding the Land of the Foreigners: The Limits of the Nation on an Indonesian Frontier*, by Danilyn Rutherford. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003. ISBN 0-691-09591-4, xxii + 296 pages, figures, maps, photographs, glossary, notes, references, index. Paper, US\$25.95.

The western half of New Guinea—West Papua, Papua, or Irian Jaya, depending on your political taste—tends to fall between the two chairs of Pacific and Southeast Asian studies; closed, politically, to most scholars of the Pacific, but also somehow alien to Southeast Asianists. The Indonesian state’s often-harsh repression of West Papua calls for autonomy or independence has seen the province closed to scrutiny by foreigners, including researchers, for much of the past forty years. This ambitious and theoretically sophisticated ethnography of contemporary society on the island of Biak, which lies off the north coast of the main island of New Guinea, is the product of one of the rare windows of research opportunity that opened during this period.

Danilyn Rutherford has supplemented eighteen months' field research on Biak during the 1990s with extensive archival research and interviews over the course of a year in the Netherlands to produce an account of Biak life under the New Order regime (1965–1998) that is quite unlike anything previously published on West Papua.

Rutherford's central goal is to find a way to account for Biak "resistance" to New Order Indonesia (and to all previous foreign impositions), which is seemingly at odds with their embrace of the modern and of the trappings of the New Order, as Biak has long supplied much of the elite administration under both Dutch and Indonesian rule. She builds her case carefully, working through a series of core structural principles of Biak society to demonstrate the manner in which prestige is produced through the relationship between sisters and brothers, with the latter traveling in search of foreign wealth. Once redistributed locally through mothers and sisters, this foreign wealth is then converted into domestic renown, with the names and deeds of brothers kept alive by their sisters' children. The potency of the foreign is explained in terms of its capacity to surprise, to generate novelty, and Rutherford explores this capacity with reference to fishing magic and to skill in the local genres of *wor* (songs) and *yospan* (dances). Texts—the Bible foremost among them—supply the most striking instances of the authority accorded to foreign words and to writing more generally, and a comparison of the views of three Biak historians illuminates a continuum

from apparent submission to the foreign as the source of authority and the origin of knowledge, through to a more subversive reading of foreign wealth and authority as an indigenous Biak production.

The inspiration for this latter inversion derives from the Biak tradition of Koreri myths, in which the old man, Manarmakeri, is rebuffed by his bride's family and departs for the west, taking with him the source of wealth. Successive messianic Koreri movements, which may date as far back as the mid-sixteenth century, have called on Biaks to remake themselves by renouncing their pursuit of prestige. The utopian attraction of these movements derives equally from their promise of release from social competition and affinal obligations, and from the anticipated recovery of Biak capacity to generate wealth independently and thus to truly become foreign themselves. Accordingly, Rutherford locates the inspiration of Biak "resistance" in a mutually subversive tension between the modern and the messianic, in which Biak access to a desired modernity hinges on the tradition of Koreri and its message of a Biak origin of wealth. For the modern (or the foreign) to retain any enduring value on Biak, it must be domesticated, put into local circulation, given local meaning—and this is ultimately an arena over which Biaks retain some mastery. Government attempts to revive and domesticate Biak tradition, in the form of *wor* and *yospan*, illustrate this potential for subversion through the affirmation of Biak claims to inventiveness and potency. The intended messages of the New Order government are

repeatedly reworked for local consumption in a strategy that effectively prevents “other [non-Biak] scripts from making sense” (237).

There is a great deal in Rutherford’s argument to admire, and, as with all good arguments, much to take issue with. Her area studies allegiances tend to reproduce the nationalisms of New Guinea’s colonial boundaries (Biak’s position is clearly signaled in the subtitle of the book). Despite her claims to be looking east as well as west for analogies, this is an account of Biak society oriented very much toward Jakarta and Indonesianist ethnography, and sometimes strangely detached from historical or ethnographic contexts elsewhere in New Guinea. Given the excellence of her ethnographic and historical research, one might also call into question the author’s willingness to attribute potency to “foreign” theorists (Foucault, Kierkegaard, Derrida, and Spivak among them), whose capacity to generate domestic wealth in the form of expanded insights into Biak ethnography is not always evident. But there is considerably more depth and sophistication to the arguments of *Raiding the Land of the Foreigners* than a brief review can compass, and perhaps the strongest recommendation to prospective readers is that it opens up contemporary West Papuan society for analysis and understanding in a way that should banish the simple narratives of resistance and marginality from future accounts.

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*Under the Gun: The Small Arms Challenge in the Pacific*, by David Capie. Wellington: Victoria University Press, in association with [the] Peace and Disarmament Education Trust, Department of Internal Affairs, 2003. ISBN 0-86473-453-0, 160 pages, tables, appendixes, notes. Paper, US\$24.95.

It was the kind of thing one might expect in a Schwarzenegger blockbuster, but not in downtown Port Moresby. In December 1999, a gang of gun-toting men hijacked a commercial helicopter and used it to land on the roof of a bank. Armed with military rifles and grenades, they stormed the building in search of the vault (91). The operation failed, and police shot the helicopter down into a busy street, leaving all five men either dead or fatally wounded.

Staggering, first of all, is the sheer audacity of the crime. The incident, after all, took place in broad daylight and was carried out by individuals by the barrel of a gun. What was perhaps even more startling, however, was the police’s reckless response. Killings of this nature, where suspects are shot while committing an offence, contribute to an escalating succession of retributive violence. Although the most extreme incident of its kind to date, this event, among others, has sparked talk of a new “gun culture” in the Pacific.

Unlike many press reports on the Pacific’s deteriorating law and order problems, which are often keen to deploy anecdote rather than evidence, David Capie’s book, *Under the Gun: The Small Arms Challenge in the Pacific*, carefully deconstructs the