thus obliged to critique authority and seek “to improve the current social order” (733). Unfortunately, however, mainline churches in Oceania today have generally failed to live up to their moral obligations to the distressed communities they serve. Ernst ends the book with a passionate plea for mainline churches to embrace a “liberating theology” that will directly confront the evils of globalization.

It is not hard to poke holes in Ernst’s analysis. The statistical data that form the empirical basis for tracking changes in church membership are uneven, often unreliable and difficult to interpret. As Philip Gibbs points out for Papua New Guinea (148), people shift their allegiance between churches for a vast variety of reasons most of which have little obvious connection to globalizing forces. In the country studies, it is not hard to find examples of denominations that do not fit into Ernst’s overly neat distinction between the two Christianities: mainline church leaders who embrace fundamentalist positions or conservative groups that marry a salvationist theology with an embrace of community values. As opposed to the individual case studies (including his own), Ernst’s general assessment of conservative Christian groups, in particular, too often comes across as hostile and heavy-handed.

To pursue such criticisms very far, however, is to miss the point. Despite the sociological trappings, there is a prophetic quality to the book, especially in the concluding chapters where Ernst’s rhetoric assumes the form of a “jeremiad” (after the biblical prophet Jeremiah): a lamentation on the failings of the mainline churches, tied to a warning of a dark future should they not reengage with the serious problems besetting Oceanic communities. While perhaps too generalized and too closely associated with the concerns of one (albeit large) faction of Christian churches, Ernst’s analysis raises profoundly important questions about the current reshaping of religion in the Pacific Islands. In the national surveys especially, the volume makes an enormous contribution to knowledge and will remain an essential resource for scholars, believers, and the merely curious, for many years to come.

JOHN BARKER
University of British Columbia


The year 2006 was a stellar one for the anthropology of Papua New Guinea. Major publishers produced monographs that demonstrate the continuing ability of Melanesianists to produce important and original works. Conservation Is Our Government Now is a fine example of this trend; detailed and yet accessible, it is an excellent book that deserves to be widely read by anthropologists, students, and development and conservation professionals.

Conservation examines the Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area,
a biodiversity project that was active in the late 1990s. The argument could easily go down the well-worn path of examining the “impact” of “global” forces on “local” people. Instead, West chooses the more ambitious goal of examining how Crater Mountain is imagined as a place by multiple stakeholders, and how that imagination affects the political economy of Papua New Guinea.

West’s approach is shaped by work in political ecology, the critical geography of Neil Smith and David Harvey, and, most surprisingly, Vincent Crapanzano’s literary-philosophical anthropology. In my opinion, much of this literature hinders rather than helps the work of understanding what are already extremely complex issues. However, West makes the best out of what might not be the most promising literature. For this reason Conservation will be of great interest to those concerned with issues of scale-making discussed in the literature on economic and political geography.

West’s grasp of the literature in her field is excellent. The bibliography of Conservation is remarkably deep and demonstrates a thorough knowledge of dissertations and the published literature as well as the enormous “grey literature” of reports, conference papers, and unpublished studies that are so central to contemporary conservation. However, most of the citations, along with technical notes, are relegated to footnotes in order to keep up the pace of the narrative. This is a kindness to nonspecialists, but academics will want to be sure to consult the end matter closely since it often contains important parts of her argument.

Although the theoretical stakes of this work are high, the strength of Conservation is its ethnography. West’s writing is itself an example of the activity she examines, and issues of reflexivity are inescapable. Additionally, she speaks to multiple audiences: other anthropologists (including the senior scholars who have worked in her area), her Papua New Guinean informants, and conservation biologists. This problematizes any easy ethnographic authority. Luckily West avoids narcissistic postmodern reflection and solves the problem by adopting a simple, almost confessional style.

In her remarkable opening chapter, for instance, West cuts across time and space recounting episodes of her life in order to demonstrate the multiple connections between Crater Mountain and Manhattan. Here West manages to downplay her expertise while quietly demonstrating a sure-handedness with the data that leaves no doubt as to the extent and depth of her knowledge. She also minimizes her own authority by quoting at length. At one point when West’s husband visits her in the field, she receives advice from her adopted mother about the importance of observing menstrual taboos—a speech that is printed verbatim. The end of the book also includes an appendix featuring the demands of dissatisfied residents of Crater Mountain, a move that allows West to keep her promise to them to make their voices heard.

This is a difficult line to walk and West’s prose is not particularly sophisticated or literary—this is Hemingway, not Henry James. At times West’s heart-on-sleeve style threatens to veer into naïveté, and I suppose not every
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reader will be charmed by the picture of her and her informant recreating scenes from the 1975 documentary, The Ax Fight. On the whole, however, I think this sort of thing is delightful and opens the ethnography up to the reader.

In sum, Conservation Is Our Government Now is a timely, well-written book about an important topic that deserves to be widely read and taught. It is accessible for nonspecialists. Despite the importance of its theoretical contributions, the book’s greatest strength is its ability to bring to life the world of contemporary grassroots Papua New Guineans.

ALEX GOLUB
University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa

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This book comprises a collection of eight essays that focus on the dynamics of relationships and their significant value in construing contemporary claims to ownership in Papua New Guinea. The essays are based on detailed ethnographic case studies from contemporary Papua New Guinea, and they give attention to the transactions inherent in the claims rather than to the objects that are the subject of the claims. This book is a great resource for lawyers, policy makers, legal and sociocultural scholars, and researchers both in and outside of Papua New Guinea. Edited by Lawrence Kalinoe and James Leach, this volume includes contributions from anthropology and law.

In chapter 1, Marilyn Strathern provides an excellent introduction to the collection wherein she gives a brief summary of each chapter and how the chapters are connected. Strathern also offers an introduction to aspects of Papua New Guinea’s customary law and legal system that are fundamental to understanding transactions associated with contemporary claims to ownership.

In chapter 2, Eric Hirsch draws the reader’s attention to entification, a local process of making entities. Hirsch suggests that entification is not new, but rather a local process used in claims to ownership, whereby persons present themselves as visible and powerful. Entification is possible through the use of narratives, and the knowledge of narratives indicates connection to persons and place. In his case study, Hirsch shows how the creation of new entities arises because of the proposed boundary to the mining extension in the Udabe Valley of Central Province.

In chapter 3, Melissa Demian takes the reader through two types of disputes. The first involves disputes over injury to property, which is seen as analogous to injury to a person; this type of dispute is dealt with by the village magistrate. The second involves a dispute over claims to land; this is dealt with through the land magistrate. Demian discusses how both types of disputes focus on the public exhibition of relationships that are