Book and Media Reviews

This highly original and analytically diverse collection of essays on contemporary Papua explores narratives and experiences of inequality through the lens of their constitutive spatiotemporal dimensions. The titular “real-time” refers to the temporal immediacy of digital technologies of connectivity (eg, mobile phones, social media, or laptops) and, at the same time, glosses a globalized modernity. Real-time imagines networks of coevals linked through contemporaneous, shared experience, while also supplying the possibility of a temporal other: that of the “stone-ager.” An evolutionist conceit, the Stone Age is, however, still very much entangled in real-time, and these myriad entanglements in Papua are, in large part, the subjects of the essays in this volume. Editors Martin Slama and Jenny Munro frame the volume in terms of three themes: temporalities, mobilities, and religiosities. As the plurality in each of these guiding themes makes clear, the constituent essays deal in multiplicity. Temporalities include those of the real-time and stone-age, but also clear is the idea that real-time is itself iterative and, much like Papua itself, perennially being remade. Mobilities refer to movements in time or space, of capital or goods, and across social hierarchies. Religiosities point to relationships between Papuan spirituality and ethnonationalism, historicity, and cosmology.

The theme of Papuan mobilities, and the shame that can arise in mobility’s wake, figure centrally in both Munro’s and Leslie Butt’s contributions (chapters 7 and 9, respectively). Munro’s essay reveals how experiences of shame make legible the evolutionist hierarchies and racial stigma that follow Papuan youth, even as they assume privileged roles as university students in North Sulawesi. Butt’s discussion of male migration and HIV looks at the understudied experiences of men who return home to Papua seeking care and treatment. Desires for social continuity and a return to normal life confront the strictures of stigmatizing disease and community expectations. For both Munro and Butt, the promises of mobility—of persons, ideas, and technologies—refract through the endemicity of racism and discrimination.

Slama provides a fascinating analysis of how the concept of the Islamic frontier, understood in spatial rather than temporal terms, offers an alternative to the evolutionist imaginary of frontier Papua (chapter 10). It is ultimately, however, a vision that cannot entirely escape inflections of Indonesian Islam and center-periphery social and political hierarchies. Rupert Stasch shows how the Korowai people actively engage these very hierarchies through intentional practices of “self-lowering,” understood as modes of relation making that are informed by Korowai ethics of egalitarianism, kinship, and exchange (chapter
As Stasch explains, the Korowai perform a self-understood primitiveness to propel themselves into asymmetrical relationships of power, which highlight unexpected attractions and dependencies with state institutions. As Stasch explains, performances of a self-understood concept of the primitive propel the Korowai into asymmetrical relationships of power, which highlight unexpected attractions and dependencies with state institutions.

Henri Myrttinen offers insight into an unreciprocated affinity for a different foreign entity, here, Israel (chapter 5). Excavating its symbolism in aspirational narratives concerning Papua’s future of merdeka (freedom), he finds Israel to evoke multiple referents: political ally, spiritual link, and biblical metaphor. Sarah Richards analyzes how Papuans negotiate the moral terrains of American hip-hop amid its growing popularity and influence among Papuan youth (chapter 6). While supporters and detractors situate hip-hop differently in relation to ethnic identity and political landscape, both express moral positioning through the idioms of Papuan pride and authenticity. In chapter 4, Jaap Timmer analyzes three distinct Papuan historical narratives, each of which demonstrates a desire to “straighten history” (99), that is, to supplant Indonesian renderings of Papua’s place in national history with authentically Papuan accounts steeped in religious and nationalist discourse.

Danilyn Rutherford, building on her previous seminal work on sovereignty and audience, examines how Dutch colonial-era technology demonstrated consolidated the colonizers’ fantasy of the stone-age Papuan (chapter 2). Budi Hernawan’s harrowing essay draws further on the concept of audience to argue that the efficacy of torture as a Foucauldian mode of (Indonesian) governance hinges on a circumscribed public (Papuan) audience (chapter 8). Perpetrators of violence, in this case the Indonesian state security apparatus, imagine this audience as distinct from the audiences of real-time technologies, referring to torture victims in racist, evolutionist terms (e.g., monkey, primitive, or stone-ager). In both chapters, public displays perform a kind of sovereign (Dutch and Indonesian, respectively) power.

The volume does not seek to distinguish the everyday from the political but rather to marshal ethnographic and archival methods to demonstrate the politics of the everyday in Papua. While nationalist politics may motivate the production of Papuan historical narratives in “pure form” (119), the contributing essays pluralize Papua, disrupting the facile notion of Papua as a “discrete, politically distinct space” (221). The multiplicity of experiences and narratives conveyed across this collection serves as its own kind of corrective to stagnant, evolutionist depictions of stone-age Papua, introducing ambivalence and uncertainty to the meaning of Papuan authenticity. In so doing, the book contributes to the richness of real-time as both analytic and multiply lived experience, while leaving space for future work to further consider how technologies of real-time might explicitly mediate a different temporal consciousness.

Real-time technologies are material tools of possibility that allow users to experience the present elsewhere and
imagine a future otherwise. A young Papuan mining employee can log on to a social media platform and geographically tag herself as vacationing in Jamaica (or Israel), while eating lunch with friends outside Timika. Digitally contoured communities and audiences mediated by group messaging technologies offer new opportunities to belong (but also to be surveilled) at a distance. The spatiotemporal flexibility of real-time casts epistemological frames that suggest alternative modes of knowing and writing the past as well as alternative dimensions through which to live and inhabit the present. At once ephemeral and permanent, real-time technologies contemporaneously convey and archive meaning, leaving digital impressions that concretize the “realness” of spatiotemporal imaginaries. The realness of these imaginaries and the politics enacted through technologies of connectivity have the potential to either upend or further sediment the spatiotemporal hierarchies so thoughtfully explored throughout this volume.

As several authors note, projections of the Stone Age are likely to persist for some time, particularly as the pretense of development reaffirms Papua as a space of the temporal other. Migration to Papua brings new affective attachments, spiritual affinities, and configurations of kin, intensifying the politics (and the problem) of claims to authenticity. Infrastructure projects like the Trans-Papua Highway increasingly imprint the state’s physical and symbolic claims to Papua’s natural landscape, positing translocal mobility as a harbinger of progress. Rutherford closes her contribution to the volume by writing, “Essays are technology demonstrations, and while our status as their authors is fictive, our responsibilities are real” (55). The essays in this volume speak to those responsibilities, illuminating what is at stake as the space of Papua as a place for Papuans is increasingly mired in the promises and threats of a pluralizing “real time.”

CLARE C CAMERON
University of California—San Francisco and Berkeley


From 23 February to 17 March 2017, the Modern Māori Quartet (mmq) joined the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra for their annual Summer Pops Tour. The tour included twelve performances throughout Aotearoa, taking place in venues such as Auckland’s Town Hall, Wellington’s Michael Fowler Centre, and Dunedin’s Town Hall. Audiences were treated to both cover versions of popular songs and original songs by the quartet, with orchestral adaptations by seven arrangers: Mahuia Bridgman-Cooper, Claire Cowan, Robbie Ellis, Matthew Faiumu Salapu (aka Anonymouz), Gareth Farr, Chris Gendall, and Mark Dennison.

The promotional material for the Summer Pops Tour clued audiences in