

## Book and Media Reviews

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*The Contemporary Pacific*, Volume 25, Number 1, 189–215  
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“symbols of . . . timeless feeling,” and her analysis dissipates into grandiose comparisons of bowls and canoes with comets and stars, an oddly ephemeral conclusion to such a well-grounded volume (308).

The book ends with chapters by Peter Hempenstall and Aletta Biersack summarizing the volume’s themes. Both are complimentary but offer critical insights and suggestions for future work. For example, Hempenstall points out that a consideration of Christianity’s role in social transformations was “conspicuously absent in any systematic examination” at the original symposium and reflected in the chapters here (321). Biersack concludes her comprehensive overview with a well-considered list of “lessons” from the volume that also point to future possibilities.

The volume’s strength is its vibrant heterogeneity married to sure expertise—here are well-established scholars investigating the depths and nuances of topics they have spent decades thinking about. Its weakness is that by traveling on such well-trodden paths some of the contributors find it difficult to locate new paths, new directions toward unexpected endpoints on our scholarly maps. Or, to put it bluntly: all of the arguments in this volume are worthwhile and valid, but few of them push us to places we haven’t visited many times before. In its own way, the book serves as a double mirror of the anthropological tradition, pointing to the numerous ways that anthropologists’ and others’ attempts to make sense of the “past” have played a role in shaping Pacific pasts even as the book itself attempts to contribute,

once again, to the meanings that tradition is believed to offer.

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*From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive: The Social World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea*, by Paige West. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0-8223-5150-4; xvii + 255 pages, photographs, tables, notes, references, index. Paper, US\$25.95.

In this book, anthropologist Paige West leads us on a global journey from a small Gimi-speaking village in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, through processing plants in Goroka, to the port of Lae, and ultimately to coffeehouses in New York, Hamburg, Brisbane, and Sydney, providing a formidable discussion of insights and ethnographic observations of the Papua New Guinea coffee industry and its place in the larger world of global commerce. In doing so, West helps us see the unexpected complexity of all aspects of the coffee industry: production, exporting, marketing, and consumption.

This book is a rich blend of careful theoretical discussion, academically sound analyses, informal personal reflections on incidents in fieldwork, and the resulting relationships the ethnographer develops. West foregrounds the discussion that constitutes the primary focus of each chapter and then reviews it at the end. At first this rhetorical approach might seem too elementary for such a project—too

much like a five-paragraph essay by a first-year writer—but readers will soon appreciate it for the guidance it gives. So much is happening in this book at so many levels that it is essential to have a quick-witted and patient guide to tell us what we are now seeing. West is that guide.

West uses her years of research and her connections with people in various areas of the coffee industry to help us see her perspectives on many aspects of that industry. In all cases, she cleverly complicates the issues we might otherwise imagine to be fairly simple: certification schemes are shown to be more problematic than some realize, and much of coffee advertising relies on “fantasy formation” about “chiseled warriors in Bird of Paradise headdresses” (39) that suggests an “enforced subsistence primitivism” (60). “These chronotopic fantasies,” she writes, “are grafted onto coffee from Papua New Guinea by . . . people and organizations engaged in specialty marketing. The images and fantasies . . . also endure in, and are perpetuated by, coffee marketing and certification, through the physical and ideological layout of coffee shops across the world, through the discursive production of ‘middlemen’ who are out to rob authentic natives of their income, and in the rhetoric about saving the lifestyles of indigenous peoples living in ‘stone age’ conditions through the helping hand of capitalism (even though it is capital’s evils that are forcing the inevitable march towards modernity)” (64). Thus, West critiques the double-edged sword of marketing strategies that stereotype Papua New Guinea and its coffee producers as exotic, primitive, and

impoverished, and she helps us see the much more nuanced realities of the cultures and economics involved.

In the section “Village Coffee,” West contrasts coffee as a crop with the ubiquitous sweet potato of the Highlands. She shows how sweet potatoes are intertwined with Gimi notions of marriage and of life itself, whereas coffee, much more recently introduced, has no such deep connections to daily life: “Coffee’s planting and then use (as it has no use value for Gimi) [who do not drink coffee] do not work to make a woman part of her husband’s family in the same way as sweet potato cultivation does. Additionally, with sweet potato the (re)productive capacity was female. Now men take part in (re)productive capacity through coffee production” (121–122).

A reader expecting a distant and mechanical discussion of the processes of coffee production and of the social forces behind the global economy will be surprised: like any good ethnography, this book is as much about people as it is about social and economic theories and conceptual frameworks. Within the first few pages we learn about West’s friendship with a Gimi family in Papua New Guinea whose daughter Betsy died of malaria, and we soon hear about West’s grandmother and her coffee habits. Because of the nature of this book, dealing with large corporate entities and potentially proprietary information, some people are not named but are identified as “Mr. Nebraska,” “a Dean’s Beans employee,” and “a London coffee shop owner.” Yet far more prevalent are the personal sketches and encounters with West’s friends:

missionary pilot Les Anderson; Sam of Maimafu who tells tales of the “big city” Goroka; and Atticks, of Goroka, a coffee buyer who was once stuck for three weeks in Maimafu when the weather was bad and no plane could come to retrieve him and the coffee. Her narrative abounds with tales of expatriates such as Ravi and Anu Savarti; Madu Namdu, the Indian manager of an export company in Goroka; and Angella and Shannon, wives of expatriate coffee company employees, whose tales are interwoven with concerns about family safety and racism. Other expatriates include Bruce Matton, Dorian Hempsted, and Ed Johnson, and their stories are told with careful attention to a colonial past. Readers soon share West’s amusement with the ironies of Seventh-Day Adventist missionary pilots (who do not drink coffee) having to explain to their American denominational constituents why an important part of their flying duties in New Guinea involve transportation of coffee beans.

West’s encounter with Patrick Faden, a Papua New Guinea truck driver who jokes that he is Black Irish, leads to a fine example of an ethnographer admitting to a planned part of a study gone wrong. Faden’s refusal to let her accompany a shipment of coffee beans from Goroka to Lae because of his concerns for her personal safety means that her book in one sense is missing the perfect chapter. Yet this honest admission is in fact an even better ending to the story than the imagined one. She must fly to Lae, and there she has a rare experience of being “stood up” at the Nazdab airport. This leads to reflections on

the intertwined community that one develops in years of fieldwork and how “naked” one feels when out of one’s own community.

Clearly, *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive* is not only about the intertwined worlds of coffee production, it is about the process of ethnographic observation and about the human relationships involved in any of these enterprises. This fine study could be useful in anthropology courses, area studies of Pacific culture, and courses on food studies, as well as a satisfying accompaniment to many hot cups of coffee.

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*Sun Come Up*. Documentary, DVD, 38 minutes, color, 2010. Written by Jennifer Redfearn and Tim Metzger; directed by Jennifer Redfearn. Distributed by New Day Films. Available for purchase from [www.newday.com](http://www.newday.com). Institutions: US\$295.00; community groups: US\$129.00; rental: US\$75.00.

*Sun Come Up* tells a story about an attempt by the world’s first climate refugees, the Carteret Islanders of Papua New Guinea. In the absence of state aid, the movie traces their efforts to organize their own resettlement in the context of progressive damage to their ancestral atoll islands by rising sea levels. *Sun Come Up* offers a compelling case study of the Janus-faced nature of capitalism, which, on the pathological side, has produced the greenhouse gases that are causing the sea levels to rise, thus threatening the cultural autonomy of people