BOOK REVIEW FORUM

Kirsch, Stuart. *Reverse Anthropology: Indigenous Analysis of Social and Environmental Relations in New Guinea*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2006. Pp. 296. 2 figures, 2 illustrations, 2 maps. ISBN 0804753415 (cloth), US$60.00; ISBN 0804753423 (paper), US$23.95.

West, Paige. 2006. *Conservation Is Our Government Now: The Politics of Ecology in Papua New Guinea*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2006. Pp. 352. 25 illustrations. ISBN 978-0-8223-3712-6 (cloth), US$89.95; ISBN 978-0-8223-3749-2 (paper), US$24.95.

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The books reviewed here both concern local Papua New Guinean attitudes toward outsider projects. These projects involve novel uses of what in Western parlance is the "natural environment," but is perhaps better thought of by local people as the world of everything—their landscapes and surroundings. Both books refer to the bird of paradise, the contemplation of which points in many directions: historical connections, both global and personal, and a beautiful, naturalized and threatened world. Each book claims to be a "different kind of ethnography," illustrating distinct anthropological approaches of either "reverse anthropology" or transnational/multisited ethnography. Finally, each book comes to an end without directly taking on the subject of desire for and lack of money—there is not enough, it is unequally distributed, and there is no good way to get it. Of course, the books deal with many other interesting subjects, but I will confine my comments to those I have listed above.

In Kirsch's book, outsiders play the part of destroyers of the Yonggom world; they polluted the Yonggom world almost by carelessness, it seems, when the tailings dam at Ok Tedi collapsed and chemically tainted sands were introduced into the river. The Yonggom on the opposite side of the border between West Papua and Papua New Guinea (known as the Muyu) assumed the status of refuges in Papua New Guinea when they lost their homeland after fleeing Indonesian violence, *transmigrasi*, and resource extraction. In West's book, it is local people—the Gimi—who are positioned (by outsiders) as a destructive threat, and who therefore must be discouraged somehow from using their world. A bargain was struck with conservationist nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and a large piece of Gimi forest was set aside from ordinary uses for biological research. In return, the Gimi believe they were promised "development," which in their view has yet to appear. West explains the views of NGOs and in short, the two sides do not see eye-to-eye.

The question arises as to how people will cope without having access to their world. Gimi, for their part, are willing to give up their old life if a new and better one with wages and services eventuates instead. But so far it has not. Yonggom have been the apparent beneficiaries of part of a large out-of-court settlement for tailings damage which pledged a seemingly large amount of money. With time, it has become evident that however large the figure appears to be, it is not enough to conclude the matter satisfactorily. In fact, and this may be significant, it is only in Western kinds of thinking that relationships can be ended at all. In Papua New Guinea they tend to go on forever. Thus, both the damage and the flawed payment are species of "unrequited reciprocity," an outcome of human interaction which dehumanizes the losing partner in Yonggum thinking.

So both books convey a similar message of discontent, but for different reasons. The Yonggom have gotten things they do not want (a ruined river, flooded gardens, and insufficient financial compensation), and the Gimi are not going to get what they want (wages and services, i.e., development) from conservation. The coup de grâce for the Yonggom is the science that says the river will not recover its pristine state until an estimated hundreds of years after mining ceases. Therefore, local people are actually forced to support continuing mining and continuing pollution so that money for future payments will be earned. Living off lawsuits or pollution compensation is an increasingly significant side-effect of mining in Papua New Guinea. Indeed, there is some indication that people have given up on the environment. Rex Dagi and Alex Maun, the plaintiffs in the case against mining, say that the landscape no longer matters, since the river has destroyed everything that was meaningful in terms of travel, stories, and events (Kirsch 2000).

Both authors refer to the bird of paradise as a key to their stories. The bird of paradise motif points to many things: the centuries-old trade in bird skins from New Guinea and the Moluccas to Europe and then the Neo-Europes, and the naturalizing of the exotic world of Papua New Guinea. We may juxtapose the local use of feathers in adornment for religious practices with Neo-European hats, which were adornment of another kind advertising gender and class. Not only historical connections are evoked, but personal ones: Kirsch's ancestor worked in a millinery shop in New York. Western concern for the slaughter of birds led to some of the earliest conservationist societies with global concerns. Birds of paradise make Gimi think of their family's past; scientists see the bird and think of future loss. The bird is the natural environment, while the paradise is the virgin world where despoliation is imminent. The bird of paradise also belongs in New York, the city that has everything in the world. It can be a fund-raiser—something elites should care about—or a window display to sell shoes.

Kirsch is a scholar-advocate. In addition to his work on Papua New Guinea mining gone awry, he has conducted other studies of world-destruction, notably advocacy for Marshall Islanders at the Nuclear Claims Tribunal. In the work under review, he relies on materials from his doctoral research in the 1980s, and subsequent visits in the next decade. Kirsch has been inspired by Roy Wagner's take on cargo cult, which he has called "reverse anthropology." Indeed, the phrase has a place of honor as the title of Kirsch's book. According to Wagner, reverse anthropology is a play on anthropology's task, and is the interpretative counterpart to the study of culture. Cargo cult is the application of indigenous thinking to the vexing problem of Western culture—how white people get so many material goods so seemingly effortlessly.

Since Yonggom do not have an articulated version of how they might think of Western life, Kirsch regards their myths and their ideas about sorcery and other behaviors as holding the key: he calls them analysis. To me, analysis has to be somewhat more self-conscious and involves taking actions apart; this is not what Yonggom appear to do, but rather what Kirsch does. He takes the way people behave and what happens in their important myths to be social analysis.

The recurrent theme he sees in myths and behaviors has to do with "unrequited reciprocity." In Yonggom, it is dehumanizing and can cause creditors (so to speak) to become animals or sorcerers. Although massive pollution was requited by a large financial settlement, as Kirsch wrote in a paper on partial victory in 2000, it is not sufficient money to make things okay again (Kirsch 2000). The problem is now "unrequited."

I would hazard a guess that unrequited reciprocity is apt to be the grounds for bad feelings in many parts of the world. Certainly there are similarities to default or tort in Western law. But for Yonggom, there has surely never been a customary action which is comparable to the total destruction of the traditional environment: there is no way to reciprocate; all acts toward that end will be insufficient and therefore "unrequitable." Since the Western economy does not operate by reciprocity, there are many acceptable ways of settling difficulties (bankruptcy, write-offs, bail-outs, damages, etc.). Our laws allow severance of responsibility, which is why we in the West have to get over things rather than resolve them, and why many of us have been convinced that enough money is good enough.

Gimi are dissatisfied with the "development" that has occurred, and NGOs have hurt feelings that people are neither grateful nor willing to work for free. Gimi have not gotten rich or adequately been provided with public services, and the conservationists think the Gimi are greedy and importunate. Gimi wanted to turn caring for the forest into an income stream for all people. They envisioned winning something like monetary awards (e.g., a grant from the Japanese government is mentioned), for their effort or forbearance and considered it unjust that the money, in this case, went to the NGO office in Goroka. There are claims that photos of the forest and its animals had been sold overseas for millions of *kina*. They are disappointed rather than encouraged by small successes. Indeed, West shows that the amounts earned from "conservation" activities—being guides to biologists and assistants, providing labor and food, and making net bags—are small compared to income from coffee production. But she also details unappreciated improvements by NGOs.

The conservationists and the Gimi disagree on important implicit understandings as well. Gimi are willing to give up the "past," but retain ideas of exchange and the desire to enter into relationships with conservationists. Outsiders want Gimi to "develop" by doing things by themselves, not in partnership with white people.

Gimi were first convinced that religion would bring development when the Seventh Day Adventists arrived. Conservation came next, with plans to regulate hunting, to set aside some land, to have committees, to make up rules, and to get development. Now, some evolués, like Mr. Kayaguna, a well-respected local entrepreneur who has lived through the various stages of promises, favor gold mining as the catalyst to development. West mentions that people threaten to invite oil drilling as well.

West's book deals with the difficulties of conducting transnational and multisited work. Her book describes the scene at Crater Mountain with its large cast of characters and geographical and temporal reaches. She studied not just the Gimi, but the scientists and NGOs as well. It is evident that

multisited studies involve rather different sorts of data. Instead of the sense of immediacy of eating a sweet potato for breakfast or witnessing a brawl, there may be acronyms and abbreviations which take more than a page to list. This sort of research could be called "multicultural," if that phrase had not already been taken to mean something rather different. There are difficulties in conveying the NGO/conservationist position, due to numerous workers and organizations over many years. Gimi believe they all promised development. There is much in West's book to show how at ease she felt with the Gimi and they with her, but some NGOs thought West's opinions meant she "wanted conservation to fail." This suggests conducting multisited work is a difficult balancing act.

Although this term "multisited" is often presented as something new, I would be more inclined to say that it is an old anthropological given. Things outside of indigenous culture and society were simply not foregrounded in previous ethnographic writing. This suppressed presence of outsiders may have contributed to degree of a sympathy and identification with local people that was oftentimes unreflective for having been unacknowledged. I recall in my first fieldwork of more than 40 years ago times of most intense discomfort in the presence of local white people. They expected you to share their little jokes about the cussedness of the natives, and yet these outsiders were strongly attractive for their possession of a kind of Western comfort—for example, hot showers, cold beers, discourse in the English language, even the ability to obliviously be themselves. I came to see some as exotically wound up in their own views of things, and as obstinately ignorant of local ways of doing things, as any so-called cargo cultist. I even half-seriously asked my graduate adviser if I could write about the "expatriates" instead of the "indigenes," in the language of the day. The indigenes had come to seem utterly normal and unproblematic to me compared to the expatriates.

In conclusion, I would raise one last subject: money and how to get it. The place of money in the white world was of interest when I did my first fieldwork. People wondered if every human transaction that white people make involves money. I was asked if we had to pay my mother when we went to visit her. A tertiary school student was certain that we would get rich off of our monographs. But recently, people wanted more than discussion: they want to get some money from me. In 2000, I was charged a special "white" price for the sweet potato and Coca-Cola I bought at a food kiosk in Buka. I was quoted a higher price at the waterfront for my boat trip down the west side of Bougainville (my mentor intervened on my behalf so I paid the same as everyone else). In the village, my ex-husband's namesake asked me to send him a certain kind of shirt. The president of the local government council rather forcefully told me to get him a grant.

I was asked to fund a primary school building for 4,000 kina and presented with a detailed prospectus or proposal, with all the sums estimated.

In Melanesia, cargo cult is a venerable element in any discussion of money, material wealth, the West, and local aspirations. Numerous versions of cargo cult have been documented for more than one hundred years. Accusations of cargo cult mentality have become an insult that white people use to dismiss Gimi concerns. By contrast, as noted above, Kirsch, following Wagner, maintains that cargo cult could be a reasonable framework for understanding capitalist economy from the Papua New Guinea standpoint. In the case of the Yonggom, Kirsch extends this idea to develop a related point of view.

In a very broad sense, cargo cult, or cargo cult mentality, might mean that white people have money, and there has got to be a way to get some of it (Macintyre and Foale 2004). In Papua New Guinea, people have dabbled in cargo cult, pyramid schemes, and even have given away their irreplaceable worlds of everything to mining and logging, but nothing has worked. A subtext in both these books is the idea that people of Papua New Guinea, if they follow instructions from those in the know, have been told that they will be able to make money and will receive services such as roads, airports, schools, and health care. This, as has been amply attested, has simply not happened and seems, in fact, not to be true. Is the real cargo cult the idea that there could be "development"?

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Reverse Anthropology: Indigenous Analysis of Social and Environmental Relations in New Guinea by Stuart Kirsch and *Conservation Is Our Government Now: The Politics of Ecology in Papua New Guinea* by Paige