

Review: From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive: The Social World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea

By Paige West

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West, Paige. *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive: The Social World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012. 315pp. ISBN 9780822351504 US \$25.95, trade paperback

In *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive: The Social World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea*, Paige West provides a detailed ethnography of the people of Papua New Guinea and their relationship to coffee production. She starts by presenting marketer “Mr. Nebraska” who outlines the supposedly stark contrasts between generations of coffee drinkers (31-8). She then explores the history of Papua New Guinea in relation to coffee. Her examination covers the importance of interactions as relationships in Papua New Guinean coffee production. West then broadens the scope of the examination to discuss expatriates in Papua New Guinea and by discussing the national and international impacts of coffee production. She shows how marketing viewpoints such as Mr. Nebraska’s impact coffee consumers in countries such as Germany, England, Australia and the United States.

The author provides rich detail about the people living in Papua New Guinea. She does an excellent job of framing the role of the anthropologist today and addressing the misconceptions about and changes in anthropology in recent decades (181). While the book’s scope is broad in that the impact of coffee production on Papua New Guinea must take into account the interconnectedness of coffee drinkers and producers around the world, the focus is clearly on understanding coffee in the context of Papua New Guinea. Those interested in the marketing of coffee from Papua New Guinea to coffee drinkers in the countries such as the U.S. or England may find the chapter on international coffee of interest; however, the text is clearly intended for those who are knowledgeable about Papua New Guinea and wish to expand their understanding of the impact of coffee on the people. Those who are not knowledgeable about Papua New Guinea may find the work initially intimidating. Maps may assist such readers as the work assumes knowledge of the geography of Papua New Guinea. However, West makes the book accessible to non-specialists in her summary of colonial history and independence. This book offers those who are not experts on Papua New Guinea a greater understanding of the area.

West is highly successful in providing a detailed and revealing ethnography and answering many questions. Her analysis of the creation of a primitive view of Papua New Guinea and the marketing nuances surrounding selling coffee are insightful. She also provides a detailed examination of the certification of coffee primarily focusing on the intricacies of Fair Trade and Organic certification.

The intended audience is the specialist of Papua New Guinea (such as graduate students and established scholars) eager to learn more about the impact of coffee production. One suggestion for future editions or similar works is to be more direct in challenging the creation of the primitive. It is clear that the author disagrees with the marketing creation of Papua New Guinea as primitive; however, it would be more accessible to undergraduates and those not specializing in Papua New Guinea to have clear statements early on of why and how this view is inappropriate. These statements could then be further clarified by the research the author has conducted.

West provides an excellent ethnography that covers a wide variety of issues regarding coffee production in Papua New Guinea. Her analyses are complex and her research detailed. This work is of great value to increasing our understanding of Papua New Guinea as well as the creation of the imagined primitive in order to sell coffee.

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