subject. I would recommend that if this anthology is revised, it should include a section on sites of this type. I would certainly recommend the book for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses in archaeology, as well as for teachers and researchers in the fields of Eastern U.S. Native American archaeology and ethnology.


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Many populations within contemporary Papua New Guinea are in difficult circumstances, frequently as a result of the incursion of foreign or capitalist forces, but the Yonggom of Western Province, described by Stuart Kirsch in Reverse Anthropology, must be among the most seriously disrupted by the deleterious effects global powers. As one of Kirsch’s informants remarked, “mipela kisim tupela punis,” which translates as “we’ve been punished twice” (p. 175). This book is about how the Yonggom interpret these “punishments”: the devastation of their environment as a result of the Ok Tedi mining operation and the influx of refugees fleeing Indonesian forces across the border from West Papua. Sorcery and reciprocity are two deeply intertwined aspects of the world that are critical in their attempts to analyze these events and their consequences.

Kirsch’s approach to exchange is heavily influenced by Marilyn Strathern, especially in viewing exchange as a kind of social analysis. His ethnographic focus on reciprocity includes the transactions at regional pig feasts, marriage, and death, but he stresses the importance of exchanges that fail, what he calls “unrequited reciprocity” (pp. 79–80). In a sensitive and nuanced discussion of Yonggom emotions and morality, he effectively illustrates that Yonggom identify sorcerers by examining human emotions and intentionality: “That which makes persons human—social relations mediated through exchange—can also unmake them as persons through unrequited reciprocity and sorcery” (p. 120).

It is through such a lens that the Yonggom not only understand the devastating effects of the Ok Tedi mine but also the way in which they structure their political struggle against it. Although they know that physical pollution has destroyed their land, they phrase their understanding in sorcery discourse and thereby place the effects the mine has had on social relationships in the forefront. The Yonggom challenged the mining operation on this basis, and Kirsch concludes that “the distinction between limited and expanded recognition of social relationships is central to contemporary debates about compensation in Melanesia” (p. 126). The relationships the indigenous people have with land and place are defined very differently than the way in which the capitalist corporation relates to the landscape, and a distortion of these relations is a significant part of the loss that the Yonggom feel. Their compensation claims cannot be understood without acknowledging this difference as well.

In 1984, 11,000 refugees fled across the border from West Papua hoping to escape Indonesian reprisals against the Free Papua Movement and to attract world attention to their plight. Six thousand of these people were Muyu, or Yonggom people living across that border, and despite the stress it put on their hosts, they found refuge in Yonggom villages. In a detailed and sensitive exploration of the sorcery divination following the deaths of two refugees, Kirsch shows that the same frames of unrequited reciprocity and sorcery are relevant. Just as the compensation claims in the mining case were based on sorcery accusations, so the refugee divinations focus their attention on the Indonesian state as the perpetrator of sorcery rather than their fellow villagers.

A variety of related themes are explored in this book. One is the need to approach history through social ties that are mediated by exchange and transaction rather than assume difference and separation. Doing so reveals that populations such as the Yonggom have not been isolated from global currents as is often assumed (e.g., the demand for bird of paradise feathers for women’s hats at the beginning of the 20th century had a profound effect on them). Kirsch’s insights into cargo cults are considerable as well. Furthermore, he argues persuasively for the importance of the anthropologist as both scholar and activist when confronted with situations similar to the plight in which the Yonggom find themselves.

Finally, in his analysis Kirsch explores myth and ritual as a mode of interpretation. The title, Reverse Anthropology, comes from Roy Wagner who, Kirsch notes in explanation, asserted that cargo cults were the “interpretive counterpart to the study of culture, and consequently a kind of reverse anthropology” (p. 3). As anthropologists use their own culture to interpret the culture of their informants, so do their informants use their own interpretive frameworks to make sense of what appears to be the anthropologist’s world and the impacts that world has on them. Encounters with colonial agents depicted in mythology, for example, are treated as interpretations comparable to anthropological analyses of those same sacred stories. It is one of Kirsch’s main goals to illustrate how the insights yielded by indigenous analysis can have significant value in understanding contemporary debates and conflicts.


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The title Waiting for Wolves in Japan is not misleading, exactly, for the organizational structure of the book does parallel its title: Only at the very end is the wolf taken up at large and in detail. Yet the reader will find both title