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## **BOOK REVIEWS**

**Michael Goddard** (ed.) (2010). *Villagers and the City. Melanesian Experiences of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea*. Sean Kingston Publishing.

With this edited volume, Michael Goddard, a long time researcher of urban Papua New Guinea, shifts our anthropological gaze from its previous focus on rural Melanesian areas, to every day life in Papua New Guinea's capital Port Moresby, or 'Moresby'. Since much of the limited anthropological work on Moresby was conducted between 1960 and 1990, this volume is a welcome showcase of contemporary research in this city.

For many anthropologists researching Melanesia, cities like Moresby, Port Vila, and Honiara are, as Goddard remarks in the Introduction, not at all "alien and threatening transit point[s] on their way to and from the 'field'" (5). Indeed Goddard emphatically stresses the point that Moresby, home to more than 50 per cent of the countries' population, should be more widely acknowledged by both anthropologists and Papua New Guineans as a "real PNG" (5). As Goddard and the other contributors make clear, people's experiences in Moresby are defined by cosmopolitanism and diversity, and there is no sense denying it for a nostalgic view of an 'authentic' PNG. Goddard additionally urges us to acknowledge that Moresby cannot be reduced to an image of squatters and crime.

Three of the seven contributions to this volume, including the Introduction, are by Goddard himself. His first substantive

chapter concerns the Motu-Koita, the original landowners of the area of Moresby. The chapter focuses on the loss of Motu-Koita land to PNG migrants to the area. Through discussion of the native lands commission, a committee set up to reclaim or obtain compensation for land loss, Goddard not only tells the history of Motu-Koita relationship with Moresby as it has developed around them, but also reflects on the invention of this history. Goddard shows how the winners of the land claim, not the Moto-Koita, are rewriting the history of the place by shifting their previously marginal status in the local history to one where they are the original inhabitants of the area.

Goddard's second chapter compares PNG marriage practices in the rural areas to ideas about marriage in Moresby. In the city, bride price continues to be a defining characteristic of formal marriage, and cash bride price payments are categorically distinguished from other monetary transactions. Goddard demonstrates that tensions arise as people negotiate economic relationships through its exchange or lack of exchange.

In her contribution, Deborah Van Heekeren focuses on Vula'a villagers who live 110 km east of Moresby. She discusses Vula'a moral attitudes surrounding their economic and commercial relationships with people living in town. Van Heekeren writes that Vula'a villagers are concerned less with economic development and more with the differing values between town and village economies. Her main point is that both capitalism (influenced by individualism) and gift exchange (influenced by

communal morality) carry their own set of moral values and standards of behaviour.

Masahiro Umezaki's chapter examines the informal and formal economic activities of highland migrants in Moresby. His aim is to understand migrants' survival strategies in town. He concludes that households engaged in the informal economic sector have a higher income level than households where residents are employed in the formal sector. Umezaki writes that people in both the informal and formal economies still maintain kinship relationships and depend on these for food and other resources.

Keith Barber also looks at the livelihood of migrants in Moresby, specifically the 33 per cent of unemployed residents. Like Umezaki, Barber shows that it is not as individuals that people in Moresby survive, but as members of households, and as networks of households within which formal and informal incomes are shared. Kinship patterns and village modes of organisation continue in the urban context.

Lastly, Denis Crowdy writes about musicians performing in Moresby hotels and clubs. Crowdy shows how musicians manage their access to the 'infrastructure' of performance, which includes transport and borrowing equipment and musical instruments. Like Umezaki and Barber, he focuses on the importance of informal social networks for a person's livelihood.

Villagers and the City successfully demonstrates the diversity of peoples' experiences living in Moresby. However, as all the contributions, except Crowdy's, focus on the experiences of PNG migrants, one of the volume's gaps is the experience of people born and who have grown up in

Moresby; the urban dwellers who have diminished relationships with village people and their lifestyles. This gap particularly stands out as Goddard himself notes in the Introduction that many Moresby residents who are villagers living in the city, referred to as migrants, are not migrants at all, but were born and have grown up in Moresby and therefore have a very different experience of urban living.

Additionally, while the chapters in the volume all consider important and interesting urban issues such as work in the informal and formal economies, transforming kinship relationships, managing money in the city, urban households, and negotiating tensions and differences between town and village, a greater analysis of the 'city' itself would have increased the volume's contribution to the emerging anthropology of urban Melanesia.

The strength of this volume therefore is its contribution to the limited literature available on Moresby; the questions it inspires for further research on Melanesian cities, and the interest it ignites for an engagement with an anthropological analysis of the Melanesian city itself.

**Daniela Kraemer**  
University of Toronto  
[D.A.Kraemer@lse.ac.uk](mailto:D.A.Kraemer@lse.ac.uk)

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**Marcio Goldman** (2013). *How Democracy Works. An Ethnographic Theory of Politics*. Canon Pyon: Lightning Sources.

Marcio Goldman's book does not make an easy read, which in this case positively testifies to a complex and very well written book. Originally published in Portuguese

in 2006, its publication in English will bring to a wider audience one important text that can be read in relation with a brilliant group of investigations about the anthropology of politics, or *antropologia da politica*, produced in Brazil.

The book seeks to explain how democracy works. Focusing on a dialogue between native theories and the interpretations of the ethnographer, the discussion aims at generating an ethnographic theory of politics. Goldman elaborates a matrix of intelligibility to provide a better understanding of our own political system and of democracy as part of what he calls ‘Western political Systems’.

The book analyses politics in Ilhéus, a city South of Bahia. The analysis is centred on the involvement on different relations that can be address as political among a group of people belonging to the Black movement and who are part of a Terreiro (adepts of the Candomblé). This is explained by Goldman’s trajectory that involved the study of Candomblé, the production of Lévy-Bruhl and, then, politics. Goldman’s book shows that it is not necessary to study politicians, political parties or movements to address politics.

On the one hand, Goldman looks at theories of social representation. As he is doing ethnography of his own society he is careful to treat ideas, beliefs, practices and actions in a critical way. He also addressed the complexities and differences that exist in this society. This is one of the most important points of the book because he shows the distinct ways in which politics is lived, understood and constructed by different actors. On the other hand, and related to this, he engages in what he calls

becoming-native (see Prologue and pp. 8-9) to address the central issues from the natives’ point of view.

Criticizing the substantivist and formalist theories of politics and in line with mainstream anthropology of politics, Goldman says he has ‘sought to avoid conceiving politics as a specific domain or process, objectively definable from the outside. On the contrary, it was an attempt to investigate phenomena related to that which, from a native point of view, is considered as political’ (p. 19). This does not mean, as he clarifies, that we must become imprisoned by local explanations. What can be defined as political, he argues, is always so in relation to the agents’ lived experiences. For Goldman anthropology should carefully avoid approaches made in negative terms and, he maintains, a true anthropology of politics denies the central distinction between the central and the peripheral.

This perspective allows Goldman to widen the range of analysis to include a group of people who are not dedicated to politics. The principal activity of the Afro-Block is musical; and yet they are involved in politics in many ways. Goldman intention was to take their ideas about politics as seriously as their ideas on music or religion.

While examining politics over a period of fifteen years, the text does not follow a chronological order. There are many flashbacks. This style of writing keeps the reader’s attention and also brings out the complexity of social relations and processes, which of course do not follow a linear path.

‘The history of the Afro-cultural Centre remained at the heart of the

relationship between the black movement and local government for at least ten years' (p. 145). This centrality allows Goldman to start the book in 2002, with the inauguration of the Centre (the books analyse the period 1992-2004). He investigates the negotiations around the centre, campaign events, how changes are promised and negotiated and the groups relationships with politicians are some of the topics that allow Goldman to show the complexity of the political processes under investigation and their relationship with 'other spheres' of life.

Avoiding stereotyping political practices of actors thorough categories such as clientelism, ignorance and so on, the analysis of multiple situations helps us to understand the way in which support is gained, how politicians build alliances or move to a different political party and how groups and individuals vote. This also allows Goldman to analyse the difference between working for someone and voting for him, and the importance of a 'conscientious vote'. At the same time, focusing on the actors' moral values, he looks at the different ways in which people conceptualise politics (for example, as something worth doing or as something dirty) and the obligations involved in political relations. It is important to note the concept of segmentarity which allows Goldman to explain political support and alliances on different levels.

As the book deals with everyday relations among actors in a neighbourhood, the territory is relevant. It is especially important because the analysis deals with a *Terreiro* and with groups settled locally. Here, the space controlled by different groups is the object of dispute and

negotiation; particularly between the black movement leaders and politicians. The territories in which events occur are therefore important; for example, in which neighbourhood a meeting or a presentation of a politician occurs *talks* about the relationship between the politician and the leader of the group. The debate about the site where the carnival, marches and meetings are to take place and where the Memorial of Black Culture of Ilheus would be located play a key role in establishing political relations.

As Goldman says, 'It is irrelevant to argue about what a true democracy really is, or whether this or that particular State (Brazil, for example) is democratic or not. The issue, rather, is one of trying to confer a degree of intelligibility to processes found in national societies which are organized, at least partially, along democratic principles' (p. 159). This is what this complex and interesting book shows.

**Mariano Daniel Perelman**

Universidad de Buenos Aires and  
CONICET

[Mdp1980@yahoo.com.ar](mailto:Mdp1980@yahoo.com.ar)

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**Kuchler, Susanne, Kurti, Laszlo and Elkadi, Hisham** (eds) (2011). *Every Day's a Festival. Diversity on Show*. Sean Kingston Publishing.

This book, edited by Susanne Kuchler, Laszlo Kurti and Hisham Elkadi, is an interesting and rich collection on the shifting role of urban festivals in contemporary Europe and, to some extent, in India. The book engages with ongoing changes in European urban fabrics with respect to the increasing visibility and

diversification of public spectacles, which are witnessing innovative forms of professionalisation, of marketisation as well as of mass consumption.

The analysis develops from the consideration that the existing literature has been more concerned with general assumptions about what festivals ‘aim at’ – that is, about the institutional intentions underpinning the organisation of these events – than with a comparative analysis of the culture of performance. In this respect, the contributions aim at developing a micro analysis of festivals by engaging with the meanings that these events hold in relation to community identity politics (Patel, Lozanovska, Kuchler and Lo Conte), to contested social spaces (Elkadi), to the construction of a specific cultural heritage (Stroe) and to notions of belonging (Beynon).

In the Introduction, the editors make two important and interrelated points. Firstly, they argue there has been a recent move in the meanings of festivals from the traditional function of forging collective forms of remembrance to transcending everyday reality. They note that what is today remembered through public performances is much less important to festival organizers than the investment they actively make in the material cultural aspects of the festival and in the financial and infrastructural dimensions of ‘festivisation’. In this line, the editors refer to an emerging ‘culture of forgetting’ which underpins the public role of contemporary celebrations. Secondly, the editors place their analysis of festivals in the context of the increasing diversity that characterizes urban contexts, and argue the need to consider how the diversity of

festivals’ producers is translated into the diversity of consumers across gender, class, ethnicity and religion. This recognition leads the editors to crucial reflections on the limits underpinning straightforward interpretations of festivals as harbingers of group solidarity. Indeed, the Introduction and several chapters (Patel, Elkadi, Hernandez Sanchez) point out the dialectics of inclusionist and exclusionist logics that respectively enhance or hinder people’s participation and sense of belonging in festivals, and they stress the need to explore how public celebrations both produce and reflect possible forms of ghettoization.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first one contributors explore how the display of contemporary forms of diversity through urban festivals marks a change with respect to past forms of public performances. Of particular interest is the analysis developed by Laszlo Kurti on the post-Soviet Hungarian politics of village festivals. Kurti provides insights on how the progressive obliteration of socialist state festivals in Europeanizing Hungary was replaced by a culture of festivals centered upon a celebrative, and ambivalent, engagement with new religious life, with the reawakening ethno-national sentiments and with the emerging culture of democratic citizenship.

The second part delves into the analysis of how the politics of contemporary festivals talks to the construction and consumption of urban spaces. This part offers a fruitful comparison between, on the one hand, the case-study developed by Elkadi on the role of festivals in Belfast aiming at bridging conflictual identities and contested forms

of access to public spaces and, on the other, the analysis of Kuchler and Lo Conte on the apparently more tension-free and unifying function of London festivals, which is argued to enhance a unity of spirit across different urban neighbourhoods.

The third part aims at moving beyond the analysis of the institutional dimension of festivals to explore also their informal and autonomous expressions. In this light, the work of Hernandez Sanchez provides an additional perspective on the much debated role of festivals in both reflecting and constructing ethnic diversity in urban Europe.

Overall, the book provides us with timely insights on the changes that have occurred in festivals' organisation, meanings and practices in contemporary urban spaces. At the same time, however, two important issues remain at the margins of the analysis, despite the editors' recognition of their relevance. The first is to do with the relation between contemporary festivals and the politics of memory. While the editors claim that there is a decreasing importance of community 'remembrance' at the level of festival organisation and management, only minor reflections are developed – particularly in the Introduction – on how this strategy is received at the level of consumption: that is by those who participate in the festivals. Given the rich ethnographies included in the volume, it would have been useful to include, in the Introduction, a more comprehensive reflection on whether the decreasing importance ascribed by festival organizers to the 'memory work' of public events is effectively met among festival participants, and on how people's engagement with festivals reflects

processes of remembering and forgetting. Recent studies in this field have shown how 'festivisation' in contemporary cities can become a setting for contested memories, which in turn reflect sometimes conflicting identities across ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation or religion.

This brings us to a second consideration; the use, that is, of the concept 'diversity' as an analytical framework. While the editors argue for the need to unpack the ways in which festivals both produce and reflect competing projects of identity, the concept of 'diversity' remains somewhat undertheorised. The editors could have perhaps engaged in a more critical way with recent debates emerging in socio-anthropological as well as geographical literature on the role of religious festivals in diasporic contexts like European, Asian or American cities and on the role of immigration and of increasing ethnic/religious pluralism in the process. Secondly, as ethnicity and migration emerge as a focal point in some of the chapters, it would have been worth engaging with recent debates on growing diversity in European cities; one among many being related to the concept of 'superdiversity'. This would have enhanced the claim of the necessity to locate shifting cultures of festivals within the analysis of 'new' diversity in Europe.

Nevertheless, this remains a timely and interesting collection. It will be of interest not only to scholars and students working in the fields of urban planning, political culture, migration and religion (among others ) but also to practitioners and policy makers working in the fields of

urban planning, migration, religion and public culture.

**Ester Gallo**

Gediz University, Turkey  
[ester.gallo@gediz.edu.tr](mailto:ester.gallo@gediz.edu.tr)

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**Manos Spyridakis** (2013). *The liminal worker. An ethnography of work, unemployment and precariousness in contemporary Greece*. Farnham: Ashgate.

This monograph deals with the lived experience of labour, employment, as well as job insecurity and precariousness through an anthropological perspective. Manos Spyridakis introduces the notion of ‘liminality’ in order to describe and interpret the current regime of labour relations in the context of ‘late modernity or postmodernity’ as he characteristically puts it. The new type of labour relations relate to the transition from an ‘affluent society’ to another, post-Keynesian one, whose dominant features are the constantly increasing insecurity, precariousness and dispossession. To support empirically his argument, the author uses ethnographic case material from three Greek workplaces: the Keranis tobacco industry (Chapter 3), the shipbuilding zone of Perama (Chapter 4) and the banking sector (Chapter 5).

In the first two sections of his study, Spyridakis explains how the classical concept of liminality, as suggested by Victor Turner, may become an extremely useful tool in understanding contemporary labour relations. In the post-industrial society, precariousness is based primarily on a gradual deterioration of labour relations, leading an important portion of ‘white collars’ employees to proletarianization. This process is realized

through flexibility and ‘flexicurity’ policies; both redefine labour conditions and division by creating liminal employees, forced to experience a median between a ‘before’ and an uncertain ‘after’, going into somewhat uncertain, nomadic and precarious employment conditions altering their status and their social and work identity.

By placing the above process in the wider context of neoliberalism’s political economy, Spyridakis poses as central query the renegotiation of the relationship between free market and the concept of rational choice in the field of labour. Moreover, he argues that social reproduction does not follow only economic specific rules but also a variety of incentives which lead to a variety of social practices. In this way through ethnographic examples he attempts to demonstrate that workers adopt attitudes and behaviours that constitute social phenomena mediated, as identified by Marcel Mauss, by specific social, political, economic and cultural dimensions. Spyridakis therefore engages in reviewing the notion of ‘rational person’ claiming it to be a social construction based on formalist type abstractions and stereotyped patterns of behaviour.

The Keranis and Perama ethnographies, which have informed other studies by Spyridakis, are used to understand how people manage the loss of employment and precarious labour relations through the activation of social networks and the pursuit of their own social reproduction. In the case of the Keranis tobacco industry both the organizational culture of the company and the informal social relationships within the workplace were functioning as the broader

social context within which the loss of employment is not merely an economic event for redundant workers but also the loss of one's own social space. However, the intertwining of economic and social levels allows the activation of social networks in the search for new employment, which tends to be occasional, informal and of low-status and with minimal social protection.

On the other hand, employment precariousness in the shipbuilding zone of Perama – a result of 'post-industrial modernization,' as the author calls it using the official term – leads workers to searching informal labour relations, which to a great extent deal with the distribution of information on employment through social networks. Thus, actors make use, in Goffman's terms, of the 'gimmicks' they know in trying to cope with the existing framework of labour relations. Finally the ethnography from the banking sector, which also has informed other studies of the author, is used here to demonstrate that the concept of liminality also applies to cases where workers have not lost their jobs. Specifically, in the current conditions of labour market flexibility and deregulation, Spyridakis deals with the attempt to discipline workers through specific policies, whereby differences of opinion with the bosses' create the conditions for harassment, intimidation and possible job loss. Ethnographic research reveals that, although they seem to obey the existing organizational principles, workers try, in fact, to adjust them to their own needs. In this sense, they manage their 'liminal' condition in a way to allows them to avoid losing their job and, at the same time, get on with the organization.

From the analysis of these different ethnographic cases, the author concludes (Chapter 6) that, although actors inadvertently form part of a framework of alternating uncertain labour regimes and forced destabilization, they do not passively accept this condition but try to adapt to the continuously changing conditions through the activation of a social political and cultural capital.

Spyridakis' monograph is in many ways an interesting ethnographic project. Although based on past field research, the analysis review of the material in the light of the concept of liminality offers a new perspective, especially in the context of the current economic crisis. In this respect, this is both an interesting experiment of archival ethnography and an up-to-date ethnographic approach to the economic crisis in Greece, especially in the urban space of Athens and the Piraeus, where the crisis is experienced more acutely than in the countryside. In this monograph Spyridakis suggests an analysis of the labour insecurity produced by the economic crisis from an anthropological perspective that looks at economic phenomena as total social phenomena. In such a perspective, people are not passive recipients of centralized political and economic decisions, but they adjust their actions by capitalizing their social and cultural experience, proving that they operate beyond the level of 'production factor' as conventional economic theory demands. To a certain extent, this might help to explain Greek society's resistance to the economic crisis.

**Vassilis Dalkavoukis**  
Democritus University of Thrace,  
Komotini – Greece  
[vdalkavo@he.duth.gr](mailto:vdalkavo@he.duth.gr)