

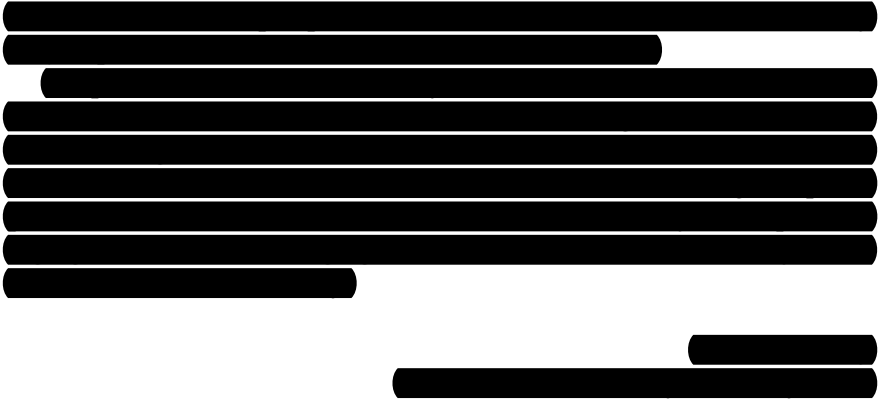
BOOK REVIEWS

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Michelle MacCarthy, *Making the Modern Primitive: Cultural Tourism in the Trobriand Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), xiii + 276 pp., ISBN: 978-0824855604, \$65 (hardcover).

The great classical monographs in anthropology have been criticized because their authors often concealed the presence of other “foreigners” in their fieldwork sites, hereby “seeking to remove the influence from or interaction with foreign-ness in any manifestation” (34). This was also the case with Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the founding fathers of the discipline. A century after his groundbreaking work on the Trobriand Islands, Michelle MacCarthy delivers an engaged ethnography that deals with the cultural encounters between Trobriand Islanders and international tourists. Tourism is defined here as “a materially mediated embodied practice, permeated by divergent interpretations of symbolic objects and actions, experienced individually but made meaningful through interactions” (229).

The author presents the points of view of four key groups: governments and tourism officials, tour operators, Trobriand Islanders, and tourists. In the prologue MacCarthy clarifies that she is merely using tourism as a means to study the appropriation and manipulation of concepts fundamental to

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anthropological theory, namely culture, tradition, custom, and authenticity. Especially the last notion is well developed in the book, with attention to objectivist, postmodern and constructivist approaches (chapter 2). The main part of the book is taken up by “an examination of four identified sites of intercultural encounter and exchange” (218): formal cultural performances—mainly dances—and festivals (chapter 4); informal village visits (chapter 5); souvenir shopping (chapter 6); and tourist photography (chapter 7). Chapter 8 focuses on “what money is and does in the context of touristic exchange in a largely gift-based, non-market economy” (193). Particularly in this context, the “making the modern primitive”—to which the title of the book refers—clearly comes to the fore, with tourists “projecting fears of modernity” (208). MacCarthy builds nicely on and expands the anthropology of exchange, illustrating how the commodity status of tourism products and experiences is being downplayed in order to enhance (cultural) authenticity. One idea that, somewhat unexpectedly, is not developed in the book is how the notion of “hospitality”—both in the traditional and in the commodified tourism sense—is at play in the described cultural encounters.

Is this a book about tourism? The answer is probably double. On the one hand, the reader learns a lot about “cultural” or “primitivist” tourism in a very “exotic” destination (one that only receives an average of ten visitors per month). The refined descriptions of various types of intercultural encounters and the use of ideas about culture, authenticity, and primitivity by all parties involved nicely illustrate how “*both* tourists and Trobrianders are made more self-aware, and try to make sense of their own view of the Other” (218). On the other hand, the dialogue with and use of tourism scholarship remains somewhat limited. It is surprising to read an anthropologist arguing that there are few in-depth ethnographies of tourism (32) or that tourism studies have been too focused on studying tourists rather than receiving communities (32–33, 219). After all, the anthropology of tourism has been booming since the start of the new millennium, and this subfield of the discipline started off by investigating the impact of tourism on host communities. It is good that MacCarthy offers a balanced view of the tourism encounter by giving equal weight to “hosts” and “guests”; however, it would have been even better to go beyond this traditional binary, which has been criticized for a long time, and to make clearer distinctions between Trobriand Islanders who provide tourism services (broadly defined) and those who are only tangentially confronted with tourism.

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Regarding methodology, one wonders how the author interacted with the tourists she encountered. In the beginning of the book MacCarthy recognizes that language learning has never been her forte (24). How did she interact with the non-English speakers (among others, Germans, Swiss, Austrians, Belgians, and Russians)? And, in light of the diversification of tourists, were there no non-Western tourists at all? From a stylistic point of view, I missed concluding sections at the end of each chapter. Why is it that the book itself ends with an epilogue rather than a conclusion?

Despite the reservations made above, this is definitely a book worth reading. It is written in a way that is accessible to the interested general reader as well as the expert scholar. The “thick” ethnographic descriptions (based on long-term fieldwork) make the intercultural encounters under study very palpable. Moreover, bringing tourism into the picture adds an important element to the life of the Trobriand Islanders the world got to know through Malinowski.

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David H. Mould, *Postcards from Stanland: Journeys in Central Asia* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016), xiv+301 pp, ISBN: 9780821421772, \$25 (paperback).

With its rich culture, religions, and ethnic groups and standing at the crossroads of various empires, Central Asia has been an extremely important geographical region of the world throughout history. Over the past two millennia numerous tribes and nations have contributed to its rich culture. For example, the Silk Road, first constructed during the Roman times, vitally impacted the region’s geopolitics and culture and shaped the political, cultural, and economic geography of the region. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, five Soviet Republics of Central Asia were for the first time faced with the prospect of existence as independent states. Then world powers