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The new Port Moresby: gender, space,
and belonging in urban Papua New Guinea
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This book describes the experiences, aspirations and attitudes of relatively educated women in contemporary Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua New Guinea (PNG). It draws largely on interviews with friends and acquaintances of the author, and also includes some commentary on a range of films (both documentary and fictional) that have represented life in the city since the 1990s. Thematically the book is driven by a concern for women's safety and well-being, contextualised in the city's conventional reputation as a dangerous environment. Additionally the author states that her purpose is to expand the scope of research and writing about gendered experiences in Port Moresby (xv). Noting the accelerating development of the city's infrastructure, retail sector and leisure institutions (driven by a resources boom and globalising capitalism), she raises the possibility that women are experiencing greater freedom and autonomy than previously.

After an initial chapter commenting on the gendered aspects of the above-mentioned range of films, two chapters discuss how the author's interlocutors negotiate matters of housing security, working conditions, family responsibilities and other aspects of daily city life, and how they are beginning to feel more 'comfortable' (*passim*) in the city as it develops new commercial and social places (such as malls, cafes and hotels) at the same time as they express concern at the hardship of fellow city-dwellers living in relative poverty. The fourth chapter concentrates more on professional women with transnational experience, and their attitudes to Moresby and its development. A fifth chapter discusses PNG women involved in the development-aid industry, and their experience of commonly demeaning treatment by its foreign representatives.

The author intends the book as a feminist enquiry. An initial anecdote about a female journalist who died in 2017 as a result of her husband's violence provides a dramatic introduction to the author's thematic question about the 'place and perceived value of women in contemporary Port Moresby' (xiv). She argues that over the past half century although professional women 'have been seen as more valuable and appropriate inhabitants [...]

than their non-employed counterparts [...] this view has not protected them from discrimination and violence' (4). Nevertheless, she continues, changes in the city have provided an ability for women to move between and access safe places, thus 'enhancing their opportunities for independence' (4-5).

In the main, the book serves as an informative review of the sociality of educated professional women in a contemporary Melanesian city, and the chapter on the experiences of PNG women working in the development aid industry makes its point well from anecdotal evidence. Overall its most appreciative readers will be those concerned with matters of 'development' and gender. Melanesianist anthropologists, particularly those with urban interests, are likely to find it less fulfilling. As the author is not an anthropologist, I have refrained from criticising what I would have regarded as conceptual lapses by someone in this discipline, which is also my own. The writer readily concedes at the outset that there are aspects of Port Moresby that she is not familiar with. Given the particular socio-economic range and preferred lifestyles of her interlocutors, whose reliable knowledge of the capital clearly goes no further back than the 1990s, rigorous research would be needed to contextualise and critique the anecdotal and interview-based statements they provide. The book struggles with this challenge when it attempts to make reference to the city beyond the immediate experience of its subject women and the author, both contemporaneously and historically. The author relies on a relatively narrow range of academic literature, some of which should have been examined more critically.

In particular the book would have benefited from more intensive and wide-ranging documentary research on the history of the changing town and its population. Port Moresby's post-colonial development has been extremely uneven. To attempt an account that adequately encompasses the rise and decline of a plethora of suburbs, 'settlements' (both licit and illicit), steadily engulfed local traditional villages and the changing characteristics of their inhabitants over the past half-century would be a daunting prospect for any modern historian. The historical horizon implied by the author's interlocutors' discussions of changing conditions is the 1990s. Nonetheless the author herself seeks to go further and contrast the place and agency of women in the contemporary city with the conditions of previous generations stretching back to the final years of the colonial period.

I was surprised, in this respect, by some hasty generalisations in the author's comments about a 'history of exclusion of Papua New Guinea women from the city' (43), along with an assertion that in the 1960s and 1970s PNG

women who lived in Port Moresby were generally present as the wives of men employed in the formal sector rather than because they were pursuing careers of their own, and had difficulty claiming 'ownership of the town either as workers, commuters, or homebuyers' (43). This does not match my own archival evidence or my memories from the early 1970s, when I lived in the fast-growing town (the descriptive term 'city' was not yet colloquial).

At that time Port Moresby was still a colonial domain, administrative-ly and commercially, yet expatriates had become greatly outnumbered by Melanesians, and PNG women were visibly ubiquitous, working as nurses, teachers, secretaries, typists and receptionists, and in retail shops. Groups of women from proximate villages networked expertly to micro-ethnically colonise the latter kinds of work in stores and offices proliferating in the growing town. The main produce market in Port Moresby was dominated by proprietorial female stallholders. Women's community-development groups operated out of a number of the informal housing areas that had been established by migrants in response to a lack of adequate formal housing in the town (the author's term 'homebuyers' needs considerable qualification in terms of Port Moresby's housing history). While very few PNG women were yet in senior executive positions in the twilight of colonialism, they were by no measure 'excluded' from the town, nor did they find it difficult to claim 'ownership' of it, particularly as workers. The book's tendency to retroject the position of women in the city's 1990s urban sociality to the 1960s and 1970s might have been avoided if the author had either restricted her historical discussion to the past thirty years, or broadened the scope of her documentary research.

There are references through the book to theoretical works on topics such as urbanism, development and feminism. However, the analytical and theoretical perspectives involved are treated merely perfunctorily. The author references a number of feminist texts in an early section headed "Feminist geographies" (12–15), and also understands that the situation of women in Port Moresby cannot be understood simply as a matter of them being oppressed by men. In her concluding pages she states that '[t]he situation is complex, suggesting the importance of adopting an intersectional feminist approach in this context' (126). Like others of my generation (women and men alike) whose understanding of feminism was shaped in the 1970s by the literary canon and debates of that time, I have become confused by current demotic discourses of feminism. Moreover, the relationship between anthropology and feminism remains as problematic as it was in the twentieth

century. It is rare for anthropologists researching gender issues in Melanesia, for example, to represent their work as feminist. The book's back-cover summary, which describes it as drawing on feminist scholarship and as taking an intersectional feminist approach, encouraged my expectations of gaining useful insights to the benefit of my own research, but I was disappointed in the brevity with which the author glossed feminist tropes. An exegetical section, perhaps even a chapter, on contemporary feminism would surely have aroused the interest of anthropologists, particularly those of us who have worked in Melanesian urban environments.

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