



On the Edge of the Global: Modern Anxieties in a Pacific Island Nation (Contemporary Issues in Asia and Pacific)

Niko Besnier

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Life in twenty-first century Tonga is rife with uncertainties. Though the postcolonial island kingdom may give the appearance of stability and order, there is a malaise that pervades everyday life, a disquiet rooted in the feeling that the twin forces of "progress" and "development"—and the seemingly inevitable wealth distribution that follows from them—have bypassed the society.

Niko Besnier's illuminating ethnography analyzes the ways in which segments of this small-scale society grapple with their growing anxiety and hold on to different understandings of what modernity means. How should it be made relevant to local contexts? How it should mesh with practices and symbols of tradition? In the day-to-day lives of Tongans, the weight of transformations brought on by neoliberalism and democracy press not in the abstract, but in individually significant ways: how to make ends meet, how to pay lip service to tradition, and how to present a modern self without opening oneself to ridicule. Adopting a wide-angled perspective that brings together political, economic, cultural, and social concerns, this book focuses on the interface between the different forms that modern uncertainties take.

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