

Women of the Place: Kastom, Colonialism and Gender in Vanuatu, by Margaret Jolly. *Studies in Anthropology and History* 12. New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994. ISBN 3-7186-5453-9, xvi + 306 pages, figures, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. US\$54, ECU45, £35.

Toward the end of her chapter on the gendering of persons through kinship and marriage, Jolly has a marvelous phrase for the way in which the diverse destinies of men and women intersect. One should not think of "lines" of men tracing links between fathers and sons but of "layers" of men, fathers versus sons. For father and son are distinguished from one another in terms of where their mothers came from and life-long debts owed maternal kin. As a consequence, collective life is not dominated, she argues, by "men in groups," by relations between clans and lineages; rather, male identity is found in the "layers of brothers" created by the mothers of each generation. Succinctly, she cuts through accumulated layers of arguments about so-called "matrilineal" elements in "patrilineal" systems. In doing so Jolly connects her study to a handful of other important contemporary re-thinkings of social formation in a part of the world that has challenged theorists since the beginning of the century. She also has the reader keep constantly in mind relations between men and women.

This is a substantial ethnographic monograph about the Sa speakers of South Pentecost, Vanuatu, in the best anthropological tradition. Both comprehensive and detailed in its account

of Sa life, it also makes a significant comparative contribution to recent research in Vanuatu. It is an anthropology that will draw a wider audience. Jolly's thoroughgoing commitment to "historical anthropology" means a close attention to both time and place, so that the conventions she describes (eg, the payments and obligations mentioned) are concretely located; this gives the account a welcome directness.

Based on work first carried out in the early 1970s, the writing spans two decades of academic paradigms. First, Jolly is concerned to clarify the nature of group organization, in an area notorious for its social complexity, keeping in mind some of Michael Allen's concerns with solidarity, leadership, and associational groupings. There is excellent observation of male grades. Pigs that are the principal vehicle of payments to maternal kin can also be used by men to enhance status through taking rank, in which they make prestations to sponsors. While men may assume "(pro)creative" roles in this way, the fathers and sons who go through rituals together may convert themselves to "brothers" yet continue to be differentiated by their maternal debts. Jolly's comments here on "making kinship" bring her to very late twentieth-century concerns.

Second, feminist anthropology was emerging at the period of her fieldwork, and she was an early publisher in this field. Although she says that her stance at the time was less than thoroughgoing, she keeps to the forefront the disposition of relations between sexes and the character of male domination. The importance of pigs on

South Pentecost leads her to examine the conjunction of production and reproduction in men's claim to both property rights and symbolic identifications. She debates several issues to do with inequality between the sexes, including exploitation, women as objects of male exchanges, and the effects of commoditization, which have preoccupied feminist commentary, and at which, with this fresh ethnography, one might want to look back with fresh eyes.

Third, the theme that culminates in the epilogue is *kastom*, especially in the postindependence era and in the context of colonialism and its aftermath. *Kastom* feeds among other things into western expectations about people "naturally" striving for identity, more specifically into the island-based identities constructed by colonizers. Jolly refers to an indigenous self-conscious amplification of difference through language, with its precursors in local conventions about knowledge and habits that could be purchased. She suggests that official national discourse has nonetheless reified "what was once a living tradition." Here her account engages directly with contemporary Pacific discourse about the place of tradition—and traditional accounts—in understandings of change. This is of course such a western duo ("continuity and change"), as is the western anxiety about reification on which she comments, that one wishes some of these later themes could have been brought forward into the account about kinship (continuity and change of another kind) and the purchase (reification) of grades. She touches but does not expand on the

latter. If through bridewealth and payments to maternal kin men acquire rights in women as though they were objects, perhaps the elaborate protocols that accompany grade-taking indicate their own objectification too.

The book is clearly written and a pleasure to read. If I have a complaint it is that at several points the arguments were *too* succinct, and would have benefited from more extended discussion, but some of that is to be found in other writings. I protest at its weight (two pounds of thick covers and heavy pages).

Women of the place? The reference is to the way Sa speakers ground themselves in particular locations, and the gendered nature of that grounding. Jolly was able herself to act sometimes as a man, sometimes as a woman, but in either case knowledge of language and *kastom* bound her to the "place." More than that: in a world where men now travel beyond the islands, Sa idiom these days keeps women on what is emerging in a domestic sense as "home ground."

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