cal groups to redress economic inequalities through theft and vandalism. New wealth has also brought greater access to illegal guns, in turn causing increasing intergroup violence: clans that might before have sought nonviolent resolution to disputes now feel superior gun power will help them accomplish their goals through warfare. Furthermore, possession of guns—some of them from homemade pipes and hardwood—has widened the scale of warfare; groups with fewer guns extend their network of alliances to protect themselves from the superior gun power of their enemies. A second destabilizing factor is the presence of new government and church institutions that have weakened the authority of indigenous political and ritual structures. In one case, for instance, a man successfully resisted community pressure to pay compensation in a dispute by threatening to take the case to a higher level court that everyone suspected would not uphold the local consensus. Similarly, people avoid exchange obligations by becoming members of Christian churches that oppose such exchanges. A final factor contributing to the escalation of intergroup conflict is the national political system. Hageners have embraced electoral politics with a vengeance, turning elections into yet another contest between clans. But electoral districts involve more people than did traditional forums for intergroup competition and so create new contexts with the potential to erupt into large-scale violence.

In short, *Voices of Conflict* provides rich case material, which Strathern uses to reach useful conclusions about the logic of disputing among the Melpa and, by implication, in other Pacific societies. The most valuable contribution of the book lies in enhancing understanding of the recent outbreaks of violence in Highlands Papua New Guinea and in other areas of the country, and of the impact of recent changes on rural New Guineans.

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The Massim, a collection of remote island communities off the southeastern tip of Papua New Guinea, has long been recognized by anthropologists as a cultural region where the status of women is high. Aware of this reputation, Maria Lepowsky was drawn to the Massim island of Sudest—known locally as Vanatinai, literally “motherland”—on the outer reaches of the Louisiade Archipelago, to study gender relations across the life cycle of both men and women. Conceiving her project as a “holistic, old fashioned ethnographic study” (x), Lepowsky was primarily interested in the material and ideological foundations underpinning egalitarian gender relations and social organization.

Embarking on fieldwork in the late
seventies (1977–1979, and later in 1981 and 1987), Lepowsky was heavily influenced in her research concerns by the feminist anthropological debates prominent at the time about the universal subordination of women, male dominance, and gender equality. Within this intellectual climate, she sought to establish whether the theoretical analyses of male dominance and sexual inequality offered by feminist anthropologists such as Ortner, Rosaldo, Lamphere, and especially Sanday, were relevant to cross-cultural gender studies of power and equality. In this sense she imagined her project as a comparative analysis of gender relations—a comparison that extended beyond the Massim to include large-scale industrial societies such as the United States. By choosing to research a previously unstudied, matrilineal community she hoped to broaden and expand existing ethnographic knowledge of the Massim. Acknowledging the work of anthropologists who had gone before her, most notably Malinowski, she placed mortuary ritual and exchange relationships at the center of her broadly focused study of Vanatinai social life, cosmology, and ritual.

Lepowsky’s study of Vanatinai sociability and gender relations begins with an evocative account of her initial contact with the island and its people. By detailing both the circumstances of her arrival and her associated thoughts and feelings, she employs a familiar narrative convention in ethnographic writing. But her presence in the text is not confined to the preface or the introductory chapter, unlike many traditional ethnographies. Grounded in thick description, her study is punctuated throughout by personal anecdotes, both her own and others’ retold. These anecdotes remind the reader of the historical and biographical contexts of this study. They enliven the text, locating the study in real people, time, and place. Yet they remain experiences taken from an undifferentiated ethnographic past—a past that, for Lepowsky, spans a decade. Apart from her initial encounters in the field, scant attention is given to her changing experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of Vanatinai, its people, and her role as ethnographer across the three periods of her fieldwork. This issue aside, the text shifts easily between reflexivity and detached description and interpretation. By positioning herself as “subject” in the text, yet writing primarily in the third person, Lepowsky attempts to reinforce her “ethnographic authority,” regarding this as a “worthy objective in anthropological writing” (xiii).

Moving beyond her initial “Island Encounters,” Lepowsky outlines the theoretical ideas and influences underpinning her ethnography before presenting a detailed description and overview of “Island Lives” across the life cycle. Subsequent chapters focus on “Ancestors and Other Spirits,” “Sorcerers and Witches,” mortuary rituals, and custom. Emphasis is given to the ideological construction of gender roles and practices in these spheres of Vanatinai social life. In presenting this ethnographic material, Lepowsky is at pains to demonstrate the “generally egalitarian” “philosophy and practices” associated with Vanatinai sociability and customs (281). Believing,
along with Sanday, that male dominance “combines material and ideological dimensions” (32) that emphasize women’s exclusion from political and economic decision-making, Lepowsky attempts to highlight the variety of ways in which dominance of this kind does not exist on Vanatinai. Women’s involvement in domestic food production, island and interisland exchange relationships that confer prestige, their equal participation in mortuary rituals, and their “equivalent [personal] autonomy and control over their own actions” (281), are all cited as evidence of a basically unchanging egalitarian form of social organization. Although aware of multiple, contradictory gender practices and ideologies, particularly women’s disproportionate involvement in domestic labor, their underrepresentation in prestige-making exchange activities, and the more recent impact of patriarchal church hierarchies, Lepowsky glosses over such issues, deemphasizing their significance.

Fruits of the Motherland represents a valuable contribution to a growing body of ethnographic literature on the Massim. It is one of at least four recently published works based on fieldwork initially conducted during the 1970s. Broad in scope, it provides a wealth of material for those who follow. While the study is informed by contemporary postmodernist debates within both feminism and anthropology—debates that have called into question singular gender roles and ideologies, as well as bounded societies and cultures—it remains wedded to the political and theoretical issues surrounding its conception. Preoccupied with equality, it seems at times reluctant to elaborate on contradictions, conflicting beliefs and practices, and confusing gender ideologies. By presenting Vanatinai as a society that valorizes personal autonomy and gender equality—a society that demonstrates that “the subjugation of women is not a human universal” (306)—Lepowsky not only subdues discussion of the cultural relationships that militate against personal autonomy and gender equality, but more important, she fails to adequately theorize social change. The impact of western education, fundamentalist christianity, patriarchal church hierarchies, national and provincial social policies, and the cash economy on gender ideologies remains underexplored. In stating this I am well aware that inclusion of this material would necessarily mean sacrificing some ethnographic details. This proposal may be at odds with Lepowsky’s obligation to the people of Vanatinai, who, wanting a record of their traditional customs and beliefs, instructed her to “write it down properly” (xviii).

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