

that Huli courting houses “encompass a wide range of relationships and desires” on the part of male and female participants (194), and that there is disagreement among her older informants as to what role sexuality played in the courting houses of the past. What interests me, most, however, is how institutionalized courting houses for older men and women belie some anthropologists’ view of “traditional” societies as societies made up of “dividuals,” totally encompassed in their relational roles to one another. In reality, there are always persons who for one reason or another (sickness and death, tribal war, demographic quirks, personality, and so forth) do not quite fit into the system and so may be conscious of their individuality, however fearsome that may be. Wardlow’s book gives us much to think about when we consider concepts such as “incipient individuality” and how it may (or may not) be one result of people’s engagement with modernity and all that entails. Wardlow’s passenger women are so alive and individual in circumstances and choices that it is difficult to see them simply as the passive victims of society their name implies. And that is what Wardlow intended by calling them “wayward women.” They are women who, “if only momentarily,” escape or resist social encompassment (24).

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Our Wealth Is Loving Each Other: Self and Society in Fiji, by Karen J Brison. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007. ISBN 978-0-7391-1488-9, xix + 150 pages, bibliography, index. US\$60.00.

Many scholars would agree that “tradition” and “modernity” are cultural categories through which people evaluate, and sometimes attempt to shape, unfolding social action. Tradition and modernity are invoked as oppositions, each constructed against the other, but in practice they are often not neatly separable. In this regard, one of the delights of Karen J Brison’s *Our Wealth Is Loving Each Other* is reading the personal accounts of indigenous Fijian women who use both of these categories strategically, and sometimes simultaneously, positioning themselves both as vanguards of the new and defenders of the old. Brison argues that tensions of traditional versus modern are often configured in Fiji as sociocentric versus individualistic orientations: that is, being traditional means working for the social order, whereas being modern means looking out for oneself. The women who tell their life stories in this engaging book have figured out how to be both traditional and modern through “casting communalism as an individual achievement” (10). They insist on their own autonomy, but frame their autonomy as something they exercise for others’ benefit.

The key ethnographic term in the book is *vanua*, a complex Fijian domain encompassing chiefs and their subjects, land, and traditional practices including ritual exchanges

and kava-drinking ceremonies. The vanua, in indigenous Fijian discourse, invokes passionate senses of belonging to a specific place that has deep roots in the past. One belongs to one's father's village, and to the chiefdom of which it is a part; Fiji, as a nation, belongs inalienably to indigenous Fijians (so the reasoning goes) because the Christian God gave it to them. In these senses, the vanua is something of which many Fijians are intensely proud. In vanua terms, one always has a role to play: one is a chief or a commoner, a member of a certain clan, with rights in particular lands and certain ceremonial obligations. These obligations can be rather onerous, especially for women and non-chiefly men. Brison's interlocutors face the challenge of defining a place for themselves within the vanua that they find satisfying, even as the vanua imposes many constraints and obligations that force people to subvert their individual desires.

After the introductory chapter, in chapter 2 Brison considers the ceremonial speech of *isevusevu* presentations. In *isevusevu*, guests and hosts present kava plants, from which a narcotic (and extremely popular) beverage is made. The speeches depict the vanua as sacred and ranked in a precise hierarchy, although Brison observes that many villagers are privately critical of this idealistic view. The heart of the book is chapters 3 through 5, in which women's life narratives are used to illuminate the broad topics of Christianity, sociocentrism, and modernity. In chapter three, Brison notes how the Methodist Church is often seen as the denomination closest

to the vanua, whereas evangelical churches are considered to be globally oriented institutions that challenge (or ignore) the power of local chiefs. In the next chapter, she presents the stories of four women, all of whom give an "account of a properly sociocentric self" (68) by presenting themselves as acting in the best interests of the vanua. The following chapter contains two more life stories, again showing how women depict themselves as both autonomous and community-minded—modern subjects who appreciate tradition. After these core chapters, Brison gives two men's life stories in chapter 6, and concludes in chapter 7 with an analysis of children's senses of identity, focusing on their ideologically framed use of different dialects and languages.

Although it is not an explicit topic of the book until the last chapter, Brison makes sharp observations about language ideology in earlier sections, noting how vanua events are often marked by the self-conscious use of local dialects whereas speakers in church tend to use the national standard variety of Fijian, called "Bauan" because it is based on the dialect of Bau Island. English is often used to display one's sophisticated awareness of the wider world, but it can correspondingly be seen as alienating and aloof, distant from the vanua; Brison notes that when Fiji's president addressed the nation on television during the coup crisis of 2000, he spoke English "probably . . . sending a message that Fiji was a multiracial nation," she writes, "But this use of English struck a sour note with my neighbor, convincing her that

[the president] was not a true Fijian” (117).

Considering her observations, it is somewhat disappointing that Brison does not explore the implications of conducting her interviews in English (see 93n1). Because English is the language of education and internationalism, it is configured, to some extent, as a language of critique; by interviewing women in English, Brison may have helped set the women’s stances as critical observers who would aspire to certain ideologically “non-Fijian” ideals. For example, she mentions how one woman frames the story of her marriage in terms of romantic love even though she had been pressured into marrying a man she barely knew. Brison concludes, “Sera’s attempt to construe her marriage as one based on love and caring reveals the importance of these ideas for her” (79). It is equally likely, I suggest, that her story is a product of her understandings of the sentiments that English is used to communicate.

One of the book’s strengths is Brison’s sense of balance: she emphasizes the fact that individual experiences vary widely while she also acknowledges that “most rural indigenous Fijians are distinctly stuck in one place and have limited possibilities for re-imagining identity in an environment that makes autonomy difficult and keeps people dependent on bonds of kinship and village” (137). She also avoids jargon, and makes abstract issues of tradition, modernity, and personhood accessible through the use of vivid life histories. For these reasons, *Our Wealth Is Loving Each Other* is an ideal introductory text for many

anthropology students and a welcome contribution to the ethnography of Fiji.

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Grassroots, Ceux qui votent. DVD, 85 minutes, color, 2007. Director: Éric Wittersheim. Producers: Éric Wittersheim and David Quesemand, with support from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre. Languages: Bislama and French, with subtitles in Bislama, French, English, and Spanish. Distributor: Association Philux. Information for ordering can be obtained at <http://philux.org/DVD/grassroots.html>. €15.00.

Throughout the past two decades a growing number of scholars have explored the complex interplay between emerging state structures, local senses of belonging, and concepts of national leadership that have informed the postcolonial history of Vanuatu. A recent addition to this roster is French anthropologist Éric Wittersheim, whose research about postcolonial politics and anthropological representation in Vanuatu and Kanaky (New Caledonia) first began to appear in the late 1990s and stresses the importance of approaching the apparent contradictions of Melanesian political systems as normal and inherent to local engagements with universalist models of governance.

With the presentation of his first documentary film, the subtitle of which translates as *Those Who Vote*,