

markers in the objectification of tradition and the politics of identity.

Rich in examples and intriguing juxtapositions, the book commences with challenges to an (ostensible) standard anthropology. Some of the challenges are less radical than they might initially seem. There is a tension in the book between the author's emphasis on the particular, multiple, unpredictable nature of entanglements in Pacific history, and his interest in "intermediate level theory," a concern to delineate comparative regional types and (at least partial) causal explanations. While rejecting a fixed contrast between gift and commodity societies, Thomas plays with more particular Pacific regional typologies, suggesting them, sometimes even relying on them, but not committing himself to them. As he puts it, "[I] could notionally have mapped a variety of societies onto a continuum with the Umeda, perhaps, at one end, and Fiji or New Georgia at the other. But my interest in all this is not classificatory; it emerges from the use of these distinctions in a more historical and processual analysis" (81). Similarly, while in chapter 1 he warns of the dangers of essentialism in characterizing societies in terms of cultural logics, in the ensuing narrative cultural specificities become crucial to understanding the agency of Pacific people in the real, complex colonial entanglements of which Thomas writes. These comments notwithstanding, the strength of the work is in its ability to illuminate these complex, entangled histories.

An engaging and creative contribution to the study of material culture and exchange systems, *Entangled Objects* is also essential reading for

anyone interested in comparative studies, colonial encounters, typology, and Pacific history.

MARTHA KAPLAN
Vassar College

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Samoan Planters: Tradition and Economic Development in Polynesia, by J. Tim O'Meara. Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology. Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1990. ISBN 0-03-022847-6, xvii + 242 pp, maps, figures, tables, photographs, bibliography, index. Paper, US\$12.50.

The Holt, Rinehart & Winston monographs are familiar to anyone who has taken—or taught—an introductory anthropology course in the United States in the past twenty-five years. Edited by George and Louise Spindler of Stanford University, the series has long offered an extensive selection of short, readable, and inexpensive ethnographies suitable for undergraduates. In the effort to describe societies holistically, earlier monographs tended to present social life in neat, standardized compartments—subsistence, politics, social organization, worldview, and the like. The tendency was also to present societies as timeless isolates, disconnected from the "modern world." The series has matured along with the discipline, however; while still affordable, recent additions are refreshingly problem oriented, less predictable in their format, and very much concerned with each society's status in the modern global context. Tim O'Meara's *Samoan Planters* is one of the best of these.

Well written and enlivened with

engaging personal anecdotes, *Samoa Planters* is indeed an excellent choice for undergraduate readers, but it is also much more: an important study of economic and cultural dilemmas common to many Pacific Island societies.

O'Meara presents an impressive array of original and significant data on land and household economies, making this book a "must-read" not only for students of Samoa, but also for anyone who would understand the complexities and paradoxes faced by contemporary Pacific Islanders. As an indication of the work's fundamental soundness, it is worth noting that *Samoa Planters* received enthusiastic endorsements from both Derek Freeman and Bradd Shore, anthropologists who have clashed publicly over issues in Samoan ethnography.

Based on fieldwork in Western Samoa during the early 1980s, *Samoa Planters* addresses in shortened form the problematic of O'Meara's excellent 1986 doctoral dissertation, "Why Is Village Agriculture Stagnating?" Simply put, O'Meara's thesis is that "the aspirations of Samoan planters are not fundamentally different from those of Americans or other Westerners" (14). O'Meara particularly seeks to debunk the notion that Samoans do not produce more because of "the dead weight of tradition." Neither "communalism," cultural conservatism, indolence, nor an incapacity for rational evaluation prevents Samoans from investing more effort in cash cropping. Citing his field data, O'Meara argues persuasively that the answer to Samoan underdevelopment is deceptively simple: current agricultural market conditions are so bad that it just does not pay to spend more days

in the plantation. Samoans are actively engaged in the "search for money," but wage labor and remittances are more productive income sources than agriculture.

O'Meara's most original and significant research contributions are the land tenure study in chapter 5 and the year-long household income survey detailed in chapters 6 and 7. O'Meara painstakingly mapped village lands and interviewed holders on the source and type of their tenure. He documents the emergence of a new system of individualized land ownership and inheritance, coexisting with the older pattern of communal holding by extended families. My only quibble is that Mālama Meleiseā's work on the Land and Titles Court should have been cited in this context. The household income survey, begun after O'Meara had been in the field for eight months, is a major achievement. Pacific specialists know that collecting household income data is a necessary precursor to the analysis of island economies, but field-workers also know that this material is notoriously difficult to gather and validate. Describing his methodology in some detail, O'Meara convinced this reader that he succeeded.

In disproving Samoans' attachment to a "cult of custom," O'Meara debunks many ideals long cited as characteristic of Samoan society: that authority over land goes with a chiefly title; that most land tenure is communal; that households within the 'āiga 'extended family' pool income; that a host family is "broke" after a major ceremony; that Samoans are not concerned with acquiring money. O'Meara's informants explicitly tally up their expenditures and returns in

ceremonial exchanges. If they profit from such events, it is largely because of monetary gifts from urban and overseas relatives whose contributions are not reciprocated.

Samoa Planters does a good job of introducing Samoa, and anthropological field work in general, to the undergraduate reader. Scholars may object that the writing style is at times so simple as to suggest high-school level, but perhaps O'Meara's editors have lowered their estimation of undergraduate ability. The organization of the early chapters seems unmotivated; the short, episodic sections are apparently intended to be easily digested, but they end too soon, raising tangential issues but not adequately addressing them. One will find no quandaries here about dilemmas of representation or narrative authority. Although O'Meara is dedicated to debunking many received notions about Samoa, he seems to accept other idealizations. In the "golden years of village life"—the 1950s and 1960s, he writes, "Samoa traditions were much stronger than they are today" (67). O'Meara then details a series of contrasts between modern Samoa and life "a generation ago."

Repeatedly reminding the reader that Samoans are just like us, O'Meara emphasizes their capacity for economic calculation, unabashed self-interest, even avarice. After several such reminders, I found myself troubled by the implicit dichotomization of cultural ideology and economic rationality as motivations for behavior. To strengthen his thesis, O'Meara seems compelled to reject the possibility of any cultural behavior not founded in political-economic self-interest, at least

nowadays. In the modern context Samoan cultural ideology about *matai* 'chiefs' and ceremonial exchange appears as an empty shell, a set of meaningless protocols that people use to pursue their advantage.

Like a number of junior scholars in recent years, O'Meara works in a gibe at Marshall Sahlins's 1963 "Big-Man, Chief" article, calling Sahlins's cross-cultural treatment of Polynesian chiefly ethics a "caricature." O'Meara does not address the pertinent ideology/practice issue, nor does he consider whether Samoan chiefs might have approximated Sahlins's portrayal more closely in former times, particularly if, as O'Meara asserts, Samoan life "a generation ago" was radically different from today. Similarly, the question remains whether the expectation that a family would be "broke" after an exchange event might have been truer in the pre-mittance era; such is certainly the implication of O'Meara's analysis. If so, was Samoan past cultural behavior oriented toward political-economic advantage to the same degree as it is today? Or have the Samoans only recently become "just like us"?

JOCELYN LINNEKIN
University of Hawai'i

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Ola, by Albert Wendt. Auckland: Penguin Books, 1991. ISBN 0-14-015763-8, 347 pp. Paper, NZ\$34.95.

Ola, Albert Wendt's most recent novel and his only one with a female protagonist, appears to be an attempt by the author to redeem himself for past alleged negative portrayals of women