

idioms and values and focuses instead on diagnostic issues. As well, it opens the way to theorizing, as it were, in the vernacular. In her introduction, Strathern encourages a focus on agency in regional gender studies—"The hope was that a newish term would give scope to slough off assumptions and premises which might obscure our grasp of indigenous presuppositions about social action" (25). Indeed, agency is a topic most of the contributors, in one way or another, take up. Displacing "the concept of intentionality with an encompassing definition of the ability to act" (24), Strathern advocates determining "not how individuals construct and spin meanings out of situations, but how social and cultural systems allocate responsibility . . . or capability" (24). Treating "society" as a field of action within which various categories of actors become differentially empowered, Strathern brings into association gender, power, and exchange, along with indigenous notions of agency and fields of social action. If pursued, areal studies could become the source of a theoretically refurbished gender studies as feminism and anthropology redefine their relationship. Strathern's own *Gender of the Gift* is a sustained experiment in the use of regional ethnography for such purposes.

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The Religious Imagination in New Guinea, edited by Gilbert Herdt and Michele Stephen. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989. ISBN

0-8135-1457-6, 262 pp, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$48; paper, US\$16.

Anthropologists working in the Pacific have devoted much attention recently to how people manufacture ethnic identities, refashion histories, and create new self images through narratives. The best of these studies do two things—they illustrate how people actively *shape* the cultural systems they share, and they convey some sense of the actual experience of individual actors. By exploring the creative role of fantasy and imagination in Papua New Guinea religious experience, the contributors to *The Religious Imagination in New Guinea* achieve both objectives with subtlety and clarity.

The book is perhaps better described as a collaboration than a collection, for all five contributors successfully frame their independent ethnographic analyses around the editors' new psychological concept: the "religious imagination" of the book's title. It refers to the religious expression of a creative, largely unconscious, mental process that "serves to adjust and harmonize" (230) inner desires with social demands. It produces the symbolic material for dreams, visions, and fantasies animating religious thought.

Indeed, the book's coherence owes much to the editors' theoretical vision. Gilbert Herdt and Michele Stephen offer not only a jointly authored introduction, a conclusion (by Stephen), and two ethnographic chapters (one by each), but also two additional chapters devoted to theory. They take what could have been a hopelessly murky

concept like "imagination" and create an innovative model for addressing experience cross-culturally. Herdt sets the stage by noting that relativist studies of self experience lack a language for addressing "defensive and creative" (21) mental processes, while psychological reductions tend to have little regard for constitutive cultural influence or creative innovation, seeing self experiences as "reflections of deeper mentalistic elements, especially unconscious drives" (24). He argues that we need "a middle ground" of conceptual thinking (25) that recognizes deep psychological forces and cultural influence while also appreciating the role of individual creativity in self-definition. Herdt sees potential in object relations theory and self-psychology, where attention has been drawn to the use of cultural symbols and "the imaginative process" to "fashion an inner world," as part of the complicated process of distinguishing self from other (27-29). In "Spirit Familiars in the Religious Imagination of Sambia Shamans," his ethnographic chapter, he shows effectively how shamans use cultural beliefs about familiars to tap into "a variety of religious imagination that permits them to express through their familiars the desires of the self" (119). The concept of the spirit familiar enables each individual, in a distinctive way, to actively negotiate the boundaries of self and other.

The Sambia shaman's personal view of his spirit familiar is a product of his "autonomous imagination," a process explored explicitly by Stephen in her theoretical chapter and conclusion. She suggests that human beings are always unconsciously engaged in a special

mode of imaginative thought that synthesizes new experiences with existing emotional and cognitive configurations. This process has creative products ("autonomous imaginings") that are accessible through dreams, visions, hallucinations, and other related mental states. It is "autonomous" in that its products have a character that seems alien to the self. Dreams, for example, give the impression of being "an external reality [one] had no part in creating" (43). Cultures may define the ontological status of dreams differently, but the alien character of the dream world is universal. Indeed, Stephen notes, "certain inner states seem universally marked as alien to the self" (42).

Stephen contrasts the autonomous imagination with Freud's dynamic unconscious, where thoughts are repressed because they are objectionable. For Freud, "the products of the unconscious were essentially infantile and inferior" (182). In contrast, the autonomous imagination is therapeutic, helping people come to terms with—not escape from—psychological conflict. But the contrast with Freud is overdrawn. It is not the case that Freud "gives no credence to the positive aspects of unconscious fantasy," as Stephen contends (183). Freud wrote often about the tremendous creative potential of primary process thinking—witness his studies of jokes, artistic invention, creativity in dreams, and his portraits of figures like Leonardo and Dostoevski. Also, Freud would be the first to affirm therapeutic effects of imagination. Further, Stephen's emphasis on "positive" aspects of religious belief tends to ignore psychologi-

cal defenses. For her, witchcraft, sorcery, magic, healing, and so on "can all be seen *not* as symbolic disguises of unconscious desires but as culturally developed techniques to deal with these forces" (228, my emphasis). For instance, in "Dreaming and the Hidden Self: Mekeo Definitions of Consciousness," she stresses that the Mekeo sorcerer's soul concept "reveals to the self wider knowledge of . . . inner mental processes" (184). Such beliefs likely have defensive components as well. The Mekeo sorcerer's rhetorical assertions about his own experiences with his soul may suppress alternative views. It is perhaps better to suggest (as Freud does) that religious idioms both reveal *and* disguise. Nevertheless, Stephen's original and well-formulated concept is the most important contribution to this book. It offers a compelling anchor for future studies of the imaginative process.

Bruce Knauff, in "Imagery, Pronouncement and the Aesthetics of Reception in Gebusi Spirit Mediumship," gives a sensitive analysis of the performative and imaginative process behind night-long Gebusi divination séances. The male Gebusi medium, in order to identify a murdering sorcerer, goes into trance and is possessed by a beautiful spirit woman. In a curious juxtaposition of symbols, "she" weaves her sorcery verdict into elaborate songs of sexual ribaldry and longing, to the delight of the all-male audience. Knauff's careful analysis of the songs' texts reveals the significant symbolic tie (for Gebusi) between frustration from sexual longing and frustration from anger and longing after a death. The medium's ability to tap his imagination

helps the Gebusi grapple with powerful psychological feelings and yet retain the ambiance of "good company" at the séance.

In "Mortal Insights: Victim and Witch in Nalumin Imagination," Eytan Bercovitch shows, following William James, how religious beliefs provide insight into hidden or unacknowledged aspects of self and experience. The imagined figure of the witch, who kills out of revenge or anger for perceived wrongs, negotiates between the overt world of good will and the hidden world of secret enemies. While no Nalumin admits to being a witch, there is a collective understanding that everyone is responsible for the persistence of witchcraft. Because of witchcraft, one man says, "we are not a good people" (144). Thinking about witchcraft forces people to "look more closely at their relationships with each other" (145). The imagined witch allows the Nalumin to acknowledge and deal with "essential but rejected aspects of the community and individual selves" (146). Bercovitch offers an original and powerful view of the way witchcraft beliefs articulate with the social experience of a New Guinea people.

Donald Tuzin's essay, "Visions, Prophecies, and the Rise of Christian Consciousness" deals with the too-long-neglected topic of Christian experience in a Melanesian society. His analysis is distinctive for its emphasis on both the constructive, creative aspects of religious imagination and its defensive components. Creativity does not supplant the psychological defense system. Tuzin explores with insight how one remarkable Ilahita Arapesh man was able to transform himself from mar-

ginal individual to central religious prophet by displaying powers through visions and healing techniques. Underlying the prophet's imaginative process is a struggle over the traumas of dependency needs, the death of a father, and marginal social status. Despite his success, he shows evidence of not really coming to terms with conflicts over his father's death. He suffers from an apparently hysterical crippled condition; he denies feelings of guilt, yet expresses tortuous relationships with God and battles with the devil.

Stephen's conclusion skillfully draws out the central themes of the ethnographic essays, showing how in each case individuals use culturally sanctioned autonomous beings (like souls, familiars, witches, and spirits) to come to a deeper understanding of themselves. In all the essays, we catch a glimpse of what specific people really think and feel—a treat that is still too rare in anthropological studies.

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A Continuing Trial of Treatment: Medical Pluralism in Papua New Guinea, edited by Stephen Frankel and Gilbert Lewis. Dordrecht, Holland: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989. ISBN 1-55608-676-X, 334 pp, illustrations, references, subject index. Cloth, US\$89.00; Fl165; £53.50.

This book explores the position of biomedicine in the contemporary health care strategies of Papua New Guinea. Contributing authors were invited to frame their studies around

questions of continuity, change, and pluralism, and to interpret how the personnel and materiel, and at least implicitly the conceptual bases, of biomedicine have been received by different societies throughout the country. The marked geographic and sociocultural heterogeneity of Papua New Guinea offer no end of variety across such factors as settlement size and density; subsistence and diet; communication within and among diverse populations, including colonizers; floral and faunal complexity, including infectious agents, vectors, secondary hosts, and items that can be exploited for disease prevention and treatment; variations of water, soils, and other resources. All of these affect perceptions of health and the circumstances and treatment of illness; as the studies compiled here illustrate, the experiences of biomedics and biomedicines in Papua New Guinea are as varied as the ethnographic contexts into which they have been introduced.

In an introductory chapter Frankel and Lewis summarize the history of (biomedical) health services in Papua New Guinea and note some key issues in the interpretation of medical pluralism. They emphasize the biobehavioral character of all aspects of human health and illness and remark on agents of change; the influences of varying social, cultural, and environmental circumstances on epidemiology; issues of compliance and dependency; the elements of medical decision making; the influence of biomedicine on indigenous therapeutics; and the interaction of religion and medicine.

These issues resonate throughout individual chapters. For example, Car-