

Yet there is no sense of why this might have been so. Textiles like tapa (bark cloth) and handwoven mats were both socially and ritually important throughout Polynesia before the arrival of Europeans. In many groups (including the Cooks) these older forms have been augmented or replaced by western cloth, which is manipulated and used with island priorities. Are the uses of tivaevae today in the Cook Islands postcontact phenomena, or have the quilts become modern substitutes within ancient practices? Quilting techniques similar to those found in the Cook Islands also exist in other parts of Polynesia. Hawai'i, the Society Islands, and Tonga come to mind. The existence of quilting in Tahiti is touched on in the artists' statements, yet it is not acknowledged in the discussion at the beginning of the book. There is also no bibliography to help direct the reader who wishes to learn more. Some depth of history or breadth of geography, even if limited, would have provided a much stronger background against which to understand the creation of tivaevae in the Cooks. The absence of this context intimates a sense of timelessness, which contradicts the living and evolving tradition about which the artists themselves speak.

The Art of Tivaevae, in spite of its flaws, does introduce the expert in Pacific studies and those generally interested in either Polynesia or quilting to this beautiful art form. The artists' narratives also contribute to the importance of the book. Although *The Art of Tivaevae* should be bought and enjoyed by all who have a love of the Pacific and its cultures, specialists

will find its usefulness limited to the enjoyment of beautiful objects and the sense of place evoked by the words of the Cook Islands women.

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Kula: Myth and Magic in the Trobriand Islands, by Jutta Malnic, with John Kasaipwalova. Wairoanga, NSW: Cowrie Books, 1998. Distributed by University of Hawai'i Press. ISBN 0-646-34617-2; 222 pages, glossary, map, figures, photographs, bibliography, index, appendix. US\$49.00.

Kula: Ring of Power. 51 minutes, NTSC, 2000. Written by Rob Scott Mitchell, Jutta Malnic, and Richard Dennisen. Directed and edited by Michael Balson. Produced by National Geographic Explorer USA, ZDF Germany, Finnish Broadcasting Corporation, and Sky Visuals. Distributed by University of Hawai'i Press for Cowrie Books. ISBN 0-8248-2313-3. US\$30.00.

For almost a century, the Kula exchange system of southeastern Papua New Guinea has been a classic subject of anthropological enquiry. Most of the literature on this complex and ever-adapting subject has been written by researchers who have worked in the Southern Massim. The island of Kiriwina in the Trobriands, prominent since Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), is the ethnographic center of both book and film.

These two publications can be seen

as a postmortem homage to Chief Nalubutau, whose knowledge and mortuary feast feature in the book, and whose last Kula competition (uvalaku) forms the plot of the film. Both book and film are an interesting contribution to the vast literature on Kiriwina, easy to consume but in some parts challenging to understand. A lengthy glossary, an index of names and places, and an additional bibliography (though not referred to in the text) link the book with anthropologists' works. Both book and film provide the reader with beautiful images of Milne Bay Islanders, shell valuables, and Massim scenery.

When Malinowski, in his work on the Trobriand Islands, attempted to "grasp the natives' point of view," the "natives'" voices were hardly audible in anthropological literature. Eighty years later, a Trobriand Islander, John Kasaipwalova, ventures to explain the underlying symbolism and deeper meaning of Kiriwinan Kula from his point of view. He is assisted by the Swiss-Australian photographer Jutta Malnic and a film team that captures Kula moments. In the book, Kasaipwalova explains the fundamental epistemology of a branch of mwasila (Kula-magic) formulae to Malnic, who has been visiting the Trobriand Islands for twelve years. The resulting text is both informative and confusing.

First, it bespeaks a New-Age approach to life rather more than anything that has been previously published on the Kula. For example, Kasaipwalova believes that the shell valuables that circulate in the Massim, mwali and soulava, are subordinate to the general idea of growth and growing; the quality of experience within

the act of "letting go" of a gift matters far more than the actual shell valuable (37): "A Kula experience is like having a new child" (59). The Kula, according to Kasaipwalova, is not about the exchange of valuables but rather an exercise in, as well as an expression of, fundamental ethics, practices, and interactions called "monikikini." This term encompasses five "principles of excellence" (22–29). These are, in brief: "precision planning and approach" (22), symbolized by the Sea Eagle and the eye; quiet persuasion and emotions, symbolized by the Turtle Dove and the ear; clarity of the point one makes, and awareness of the power of color, symbolized by the Rainbow Lorikeet and the mouth; sensuality, awareness, and perception through the skin, symbolized by the Grasshopper and the sensation of touch; and awareness of beauty, allure, and scent, symbolized by a sweetly perfumed flower and the nose. The center of the spiral is called "gum" (essence), and stands for "spiral thinking," or the "presence of the past," which is the backbone of any Kiriwinian magic, as Kasaipwalova explains (142–144). These principles can also be visualized as a spiral on a tiny mollusc (23).

To be a Kula master, like Kasaipwalova's maternal uncle, the late Chief Nalubutau, involves mastering these principles as well as practicing the unity of the universe by meditating on one's intimate connection to the environment. Kula masters can employ their power over the weather and their gardening of yams; they cultivate relationships with "their personal whale" (94); and they have the power to influence their partners' minds on faraway

islands. Kasaipwalova, and other consultants of Malnic, give meticulous details of how such deeds can be accomplished; in fact, Malnic herself is coached to experience the oneness of herself with nature: she has to get up before sunrise and, seated at an elevated spot with great scenery, mentally link her body parts with mountains, sea, and trees (54). This yoga-like practice, in fact, left a strong impression on Malnic: "With time, the sequence of the recital passed to the memory of my hands. I just watched those hands dancing, handing me to the clouds, the grass, the trees. The trees were the best. Under the canopy, trees embrace you, trees are dream-lovers" (59).

Second, the idea of monikikini is linked with other elements of Kiriwinian spirituality, especially to the realm of magic. The book comments on beliefs concerning magical procedures to influence the weather (146–148), success in Kula (151–152), and physical health (152–154). It gives an account of dancing magic that is completed by administering shallow cuts on the skin of a boy (148–151) to give him "lightness of feet and the lightness of hands" (150). In the film, a senior garden magician gives a sample of his art ("the real thing," as Malnic confirms in the book [145]). Kasaipwalova also connects these different features of "spiral thinking" with symbolism as represented in carvings. All of the carvings on a Kula canoe are visual reminders of the formulae and discipline of reciting monikikini, with each detail pointing to specific aspects, such as the Eye of the Sea Eagle, the "personal whale," and the virtue of self-discipline (90–

94). Kasaipwalova also explains the "three important symbols" that are often carved onto "yam houses" (159–161) and relate to the execution of political power, the past/ancestors, and—most significantly—to sincere generosity. Poetic metaphors (103–106) and a selection of myths from the Massim region (162–180) further add to the presentation of Kiriwinian worldview. Interesting ethnographic data are presented in the description of the ritual of fishing for *Spondylus* shells (actually the *Chama* shell, according to Leach) that are used to make Kula "armshells" (120–127). Kasaipwalova gives evidence of his insider's perspective when talking about the importance of women in the Kula (and in Trobriand society in general), symbolized by a principle called "kailagila," that is, "the Three Stones on which the cooking pot rests" (103). In between these elaborate explanations of symbolism, "spirality," and spirituality by Kasaipwalova, Malnic gives brief descriptions of the other islands of the Kula ring. She traveled to all of them, and both book and film present stunning visual impressions of her journey.

While the book focuses on Chief Nalubutau's monikikini and its relevance for a range of affairs, the film puts a stronger emphasis on the Kula "ring" and the exchange of valuables. In the film, a huge Kula ceremony does not take place the way it was planned—in this regard, it is a good representation of what the Kula is like. Although Kasaipwalova tries his best, leapfrogging all around the "ring" of islands and trying to secure as many mwali shells as possible with his modern catamaran (perhaps the

most luxurious Kula ship the “ring” has seen so far), the final display of shells and the end of the competition could not be included in the film. Instead, the film gives some insight into the Kula of Bill Rudd, the sole white Kula-master and winner of the uvalaku-competition shown in the film. His view of the affair, given as he receives a high-ranking valuable, and his comments on some of the rituals associated with it, clearly reflect his western perspective; yet he is a Kula master: “Today, money buys its way into the Kula.” Fortunately, this message is not entirely correct. Rudd and Kasaipwalova might be faster with their privately owned modern boats and they are without doubt attractive to their partners because they can host them more splendidly, but in the long run, they cannot keep up with their rivals who have no money but deeper knowledge, a complex network of relationships, and social skills. The mwali “Kabisawali,” created by Kasaipwalova, for example, became a feared object amongst Kula members, associated with money, envy, and death, and only reluctantly accepted in exchange. Rudd, as I was told during my fieldwork, gave up Kula and returned to Australia in the mid-1990s.

The film is suitable for teaching purposes, for it gives a good impression of the landscape and some features of Trobriand Islanders’ life. It needs additional information, however, since it lacks any insiders’ comments on the actual procedures of the Kula. It shows, for example, a transaction that would not be regarded as ideal or typical: a visitor complains to his host about the slow return of his

gifts and challenges him with further gifts while giving an aggressive speech. Since “the spirit of Kula comes out of the earth,” yam gardening is another focus of the film, complete with milamala harvest ceremonies, wild sexual “Tapioka” dancing, and reference to Malinowski’s report of women raping men. One wonders why these stereotypes had to be included. The beauty of the islands and the ocean gives the film its special flair, but topless girls feature more often than in reality and long shots of sailing canoes suggest that this “traditional” form of traveling is still the norm. The use of diesel-engine boats is pardoned as an emergency measure due to Nalubutau’s deteriorating health although—at least in the southern Kula regions—they are a common means of contemporary Kula transport. The frequent voice-over is often patronizing in tone, and it is a pity that subtitles have been used far too rarely. The music is sometimes inappropriate, in my opinion, and the fantasy mixture of drums, flutes, gongs, and synthesizer, perhaps intended to give a mystic touch to the images, should have been replaced by some of the indigenous sound material available.

Since the “writing culture” debate, we have come to appreciate local voices and this book gives ample space to quotes from Trobriand Islanders. Jocelyn Linnekin has reminded us of the contingency of all cultural representations and their embeddedness in a particular social and political context. John Kasaipwalova certainly is not a typical Trobriand Islander in a Malinowskian sense, but a former university student, entrepreneur, and playwright who has spent much of his

life in Australia and Port Moresby. He has been prominent in Kiriwinan politics since the early 1970s, declaring his vision of communalism and embedding it in the “Kabisawali” movement, which unsuccessfully attempted to combine access to western commodities and amenities with local ideals of cooperation. His perspective comes across as a poetic rendering, an attempt to translate his version of Trobriand epistemology into a western format. Yet he claims to have experienced and fully understood the monikikini principles of a “spiral” worldview: “only after my complete cut-off from logical linear assumptions, thinking and pursuit, I have had this break-through. All of this knowledge that Nalubutau gave me over the forty years has become fully alive” (161). Nice contrasts appear in the text when Malnic frames Kasaipwalova’s explanations with her own experiences, which so obviously entail an outsider’s perspective. She did not learn the language (as she had interpreters on hand at all times) and hence could not understand the rhetorics, the strategies, and the finer points of Kula interaction. She herself may have become part of the machinations and issues involved in the succession that are normal when a chief gets older. Kasaipwalova presents himself as the heir of Nalubutau’s secret knowledge, his magical spells and

practices, as well as the basic understanding of monikikini. I wonder if such knowledge is meant to be published, but this critique must be left for the members of Kasaipwalova’s matrilineage, who may have lost a valuable secret.

In the book, Malnic asks, Kasaipwalova explains, and the reader is left to wonder. After a hundred years of missionizing, schooling, and increased contacts with westerners (not to mention a handful of anthropologists who have spent extended periods of time looking for “inside views”), it is astonishing to learn about a spiritual system of such internal logic and overall relevance to Kiriwina life and death. I have never read of this conception, neither did anyone tell me about anything similar during my intensive fieldwork on Dobu Island. The latter might be due to considerable cultural differences amongst the islands that form the so-called Kula ring, but this fact is nowhere mentioned in these publications. Finally, then, we are left wondering: Whose Kula? Trobriand Kula? Nalubutau’s Kula? John Kasaipwalova’s Kula? It is left to the reader to accept this version of Kiriwinan Kula, or not.

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