

the landscape is losing its enchanted ambience; the spirits (and one suspects the Christian god as well) seem less salient to people than they once did.

The rich chapters in this collection offer the reader much to ponder. The editors are to be commended for holding writers to central themes and for laying out these themes clearly in the overview chapters. Different as the approaches and people are, the chapters read very well together. Read individually, they provide a model of historically sensitive ethnographic writing. Covering familiar ground, the authors also provide a nuanced portrait of changing attitudes toward spirits in several not untypical settings—a topic that is only beginning to receive attention in anthropology and religious studies. I would give this book my highest recommendation.

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Social Reproduction and History in Melanesia: Mortuary Ritual, Gift Exchange, and Custom in the Tanga Islands, by Robert J Foster. Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. ISBN 0-521-48030-2 (cloth), 0-521-48332-8 (paper), xxii + 288 pages, glossary, photographs, figures, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, us\$64.95; paper, us\$29.95.

This book derives from Robert Foster's doctoral thesis (University of Chicago 1988). The main fieldwork for the study was carried out in 1984–1985, with two additional visits in 1992. As the title suggests, the ethnographic focus of this study is on mortuary rituals in the Tanga Islands, New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea. However, Foster is not content with presenting his detailed historical and ethnographic analyses of mortuary feasts in a changing society. He aims also to illustrate how two quite distinct analytical approaches that have emerged in Melanesian studies during the last decade, the “new Melanesian ethnography” and the “new Melanesian history,” may be profitably combined to create a new (Melanesian) anthropology that is well equipped to address issues of both social reproduction and social transformation. Foster uses the term *new Melanesian ethnography*, originally coined by Josephides, to refer to an approach that presupposes a recognition of “radical alterity,” the existence of fundamental cultural differences between Melanesian and western societies. Key repre-

sentatives of this approach are Roy Wagner and Marilyn Strathern; from the latter Foster borrows important analytical concepts such as “sociality” (as an alternative for the static and morphological notion of “society”) and “composite persons” (understood as nodes in a matrix of relations, unlike the western concept of the individual). The new Melanesian history, represented, among others, by Nicholas Thomas, James Carrier, Deborah Gewertz, and Frederick Errington, emphasizes similarities between Melanesian and western social realities, engendered through shared histories of colonialism and commerce. An important analytical tool provided by this approach is the concept of “cultural objectification,” the construction of a cultural domain as an explicit and distinct category of social experience.

The structure of the book follows Foster’s theoretical distinctions. Part 1, “Mortuary Rights as *Kastam*,” is an exercise in new Melanesian history; part 2, “Mortuary Rites as ‘Finishing’ and ‘Replacing’ the Dead,” follows the analytical approach of the new Melanesian ethnography; and part 3, “Toward Comparative Historical Ethnography,” is an attempt to combine both perspectives to create an example of “new Melanesian anthropology.”

Part 1 (chapters 2 and 3) describes the origin and development of *kastam* as an indigenous category of objectified culture. Foster explains the genesis of this domain as rooted in the gradual process of commoditization of Tengan society, rather than in oppositional colonial politics or the efforts of an official elite concerned with the construction of a separate identity. Evolv-

ing conflicts and contradictions in daily life led to the construction of two opposed domains, that of *kastam* and that of *bisnis*. Interestingly, in the early phases of the commoditization process “big men” tried to integrate the competitive possibilities of commodity (copra) production into the dynamics of mortuary feasting. Historical developments resulted in the failure of their project, and the subsequent retreat of the big men from the copra industry gave way to the separation of *kastam*, referring specifically to mortuary feasting, from *bisnis*, which became the field of commodity production. The domain of *bisnis* became connected with the household as the relevant social unit, whereas the reproduction of collective identities in *kastam* remained the task of matrilineages led by big men. Foster’s reconstruction of this historical process is certainly plausible, although I would have liked more discussion of the effects of other cultural domains that also developed in colonial history, such as those of *lotu* (church and Christianity) and *lo* (the law or government). According to Foster, the opposition to *bisnis* was central to the development of *kastam*, but he does indicate that the new role of big men also became defined in opposition to the functions of government (*lo*) and church (*lotu*) leaders (58).

Part 2 (chapters 4 to 7), gives a detailed analysis of mortuary feasts, which form the principal part of the present-day domain of *kastam*. Mortuary rites are a central focus of traditional Tengan life, a “total social phenomenon” in the sense of Marcel Mauss. Their principal function is to

“finish” and “replace” the dead. Finishing refers to dispelling the sadness over a loss and commemorating the recently deceased, but it also involves the final activation of the internal relations that “composed” the dead person. Replacing is filling up the empty “slot” in a fixed set of relations. Together, finishing and replacing amount to an assertion of a particular matrilineage’s identity and a safeguarding of its continuity, in short its social reproduction. Foster provides an intricate analysis of the key concepts, values, and objects that play a role in mortuary feasts. In the gift exchanges a double metaphorical juxtaposition is achieved, thus establishing a relation between objects and agents and a relation between objects. In this way social relations and identities are defined and made visible. The mortuary sequence can be read as a syntagm of evaluations: the lineage members of the deceased person reevaluate themselves from consumers (*en*) to nonconsumers or endure (*fat*) through the mediation of giving (*fen*), of causing others to eat. This transformative reevaluation, in which a lineage asserts its autonomy, is only possible through the cooperation of closely related lineages (*fat kinaf*). Foster calls this the paradox of mutually constructed autonomy. In the long run a relationship of identical exchanges exists between the *kinaf* partners. The chapters in part 2 provide rich symbolic analyses. They aim to reveal the “logic” of the cultural system and therefore privilege the description of a synchronous set of symbolic relations over an analysis of practice and cultural change.

In part 3 (chapter 8), Foster sets

himself the task of showing what a combination of the perspectives presented in the first two parts may yield. He makes an ideal typical distinction between two modes of social reproduction. “Replication,” presented by the Tanga case, is based on a logic of “keeping-while-giving” (compare Annette Weiner) that limits the proliferation of relations (and therefore risks) engendered through exchange. “Multiplication,” on the other hand, involves a logic of dispersal, of increasing the quantity of valuables in circulation, and thus results in the expansion of social relationships. A system of multiplication can be found in New Guinea highland societies such as Melpa, Enga, and Mendi. Foster argues that replication makes a society liable to create an opposition between *kastam* and *bisnis* during the process of commoditization, whereas multiplication appears to encourage a marriage between the two fields. Thus he is able to point to *endogenous* cultural differences (replication versus multiplication) that result in differences in the effects of *exogenous* factors. In his view, this kind of comparison, in which internal cultural complexity is related to specific histories of particular societies, is the proper aim and subject matter of a new Melanesian anthropology.

This is a rich book, providing a wealth of data, analyses, and insights. It is also an ambitious book, engaging as it does two different perspectives. I support the author’s point of view that both approaches are necessary to give a more adequate analysis of social reproduction and social transformation. Part 3 offers a comparative analy-

sis in which Tanga is contrasted with change in a number of other Melanesian societies, yet I find the integration of the two perspectives not completely convincing. As it is, the cultural analysis in part 2 remains quite separate from the description of practice and history in part 1. Although I understand that a proper description of a cultural system—which is a major accomplishment in itself—may require an abstraction from practice, a number of questions remain unanswered (and even unaddressed), questions that concern the integration of a cultural and a historical analysis. Foster remarks that the mortuary rites have remained remarkably stable from 1933, when they were studied by Bell, until 1985, the time of his own fieldwork. However, as his historical analysis clearly demonstrates, the context of the feasts has changed dramatically. In 1985 the rites belong to a constructed domain of *kastam* that is sealed off from *bisnis*, which comprises the economically important commodity relations. What effect does this opposition to *bisnis*, characterized as Foster claims by a completely different sociality, have on the meanings within the *kastam* domain, so brilliantly analyzed? Foster suggests that the process of separation has exercised a conservative force on the mortuary rites (244), but he offers no further elaboration. It would have been helpful if he had given more information about the cultural logic of the *bisnis* domain and the influence of *kastam* concepts in that domain. How do people succeed in keeping these domains separate in their daily practices? Evidently there must be conflicts of meaning and interpretation, for

example in the management of land, which belongs both to the domain of *kastam* (lineages are the recognized titleholders in land) and to the domain of *bisnis* (households exploit the coconut groves). A proper integration of the new Melanesian ethnography and the new Melanesian history would require an analysis of the (changing) practice of a cultural logic, and, in particular, an analysis of competing cultural logics and their mutual effect in the practice of daily life.

Although Foster's study has not, in my view, fully realized its ultimate ambition, this does not detract from it as an important and extremely thorough book that makes an exciting contribution to a new Melanesian anthropology.

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Altering Imagination, by Subramani. Suva: Fiji Writers' Association, 1995. ISBN 982-328-001-0, 264 pages, references. Cloth, US\$30; paper, US\$15.

Subramani's *Altering Imagination* is a collection of essays, reviews, speeches, and narratives; the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In 1974, Subramani left a secure post in the civil service in Fiji to join the faculty at the University of the South Pacific, in part because he was a writer and in his own words "the pursuit of writing was a reality at the University." He went on to edit *Mana Review* and later *Mana Journal* (a regional literary journal), and in 1978 his story "Marigolds" won the South Pacific Association of