

in schools and universities in the region, as elsewhere. I trust others will do the same, because,

today i wonder  
 what the difference is  
 between one sea and another  
 or how to recover morning  
 and conquer doubt  
 the pulse of our separate  
 brains has the answer  
 it is in our becoming  
 that we are one

Brains and Paddle, *Kakala*, 1993, 35

KONAI HELU THAMAN  
*University of the South Pacific*

### References

Teasdale, R, and J Teasdale. 1992. *Voices in a Seashell: Education, Culture and Identity*. Suva: UNESCO and Institute of Pacific Studies.

Thaman, Konai H. 1988. *Ako and Faiako: Cultural Values, Educational Concepts and Tongan Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role*. PhD thesis, University of the South Pacific, Suva.

———. 1993. *Kakala*. Suva: Mana Publications.

———. 1995. Concepts of Learning, Knowledge and Wisdom in Tonga. *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education* 25:723-734.

\* \* \*

*Gender Rituals: Female Initiation in Melanesia*, edited by Nancy C Lutkehaus and Paul B Roscoe. Routledge: New York and London, 1995.

ISBN 0-415-91106-0 (cloth), ISBN 0-415-91107-9 (paper), xix + 265 pages, tables, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$59.95; paper, US\$18.95.

This volume, originally organized as a symposium under the auspices of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, adds significantly to knowledge about female initiation throughout Melanesia and the rest of the world. It contains substantive chapters on eight different cultural groups in disparate locations in the area (although there is a heavy tilt toward the Sepik region), and every chapter not only contributes interesting data but advances theoretical and analytical understandings of ritual process in general.

Most impressive are the introduction, "Feminist Anthropology and Female Initiation in Melanesia," by Nancy C Lutkehaus, and the conclusion, "'Initiation' in Cross-Cultural Perspective," by Paul B Roscoe. These two end pieces do precisely what introductions and conclusions are supposed to do: provide the reader with a context within which to understand each chapter and its relevance to the ethnographic and theoretical aspects of the topic. The reader understands how and why these contributions are important. In her introduction, Lutkehaus frames the chapters that follow by exploring their main themes (eg, power, agency, and person) and by examining the intersection of three

related factors: data from Melanesia, anthropological analysis and theory, and feminist scholarship. Her exploration of the intersection of these elements is especially enriched by consideration of the impact each has had on the others (eg, she argues that Melanesian data challenge the analytical categories employed in much feminist analysis). Roscoe's conclusion addresses the implications of the fact that most anthropological analyses of initiation have been based on male initiation data; what happens to our approaches and conclusions when we shift to female initiation? Of special interest is Roscoe's discussion of comparative anthropology, appropriate here because male initiation has been historically important in anthropological comparative analysis. While acknowledging its shortcomings (eg, it often leads to the imposition of inappropriate categories), he argues that some questions we might want to answer can only come from comparison. His contrast between comparative analysis and interpretive analysis is an important contribution to anthropological theory, not just ritual analysis.

The two papers in the first section ("Defining Women: Gender Images in Female Initiation Rites") both focus on sociological comparisons in the Sepik River area of Papua New Guinea. Brigitta Hauser-Schaublin, in "Puberty Rites, Women's *Naven*, and Initiation: Women's Rituals of Transition in Abelam and Iatmul Culture," asks why Abelam have female rites while the nearby Iatmul do not. After a detailed comparison, she concludes that among the Abelam, "female 'initiation' is . . . about the meanings and

values attached to *modes* of subsistence, and culturally specific ideas about the different forms of procreative powers that men and women possess" (47). In comparing the Abelam first-menstruation rites with the Iatmul *naven*, she concludes that the two are, in fact, not comparable at all: "in sum, to subsume the content, function, and meaning of these ceremonies under a single label, 'initiation,' is simply wrong" (52). Roscoe continues the Sepik comparison in "In the Shadow of the Tambaran: Female Initiation among the Ndu of the Sepik Basin" by comparing the Iatmul, Abelam, and Yangoru Boiken. The Iatmul have essentially no female initiation rite, and the Abelam have a single-stage puberty rite, while the Yangoru Boiken have an elaborate three-stage female initiation that is articulated with male initiation. Roscoe asks why these differences exist. His conclusion is that the motivation for these rituals is to equip individuals with the attributes necessary to achieve political-ritual renown, and there will be more elaborate rites for females wherever women are important players in political-ritual arena. Among the Iatmul, women participate little in the political arena and among the Abelam they are only peripherally included, while they are central among the Yangoru Boiken.

The next section, entitled "Achieving Womanhood: The Life Cycle as Cultural Performance," groups papers centrally concerned with personhood. Kathleen Barlow, in "Achieving Womanhood and the Achievements of Women in Murik Society: Cult Initiation, Gender Complementarity, and

the Prestige of Women,” wonders if anthropological descriptions and analyses of women’s rituals adequately reflect the categories and meanings that the women themselves have. After comparing the local and the anthropological perspectives, she concludes that “these rites for women express a unitary concept of person in Murik culture that is enacted differently for each gender” (86). Deane Fergie challenges any simple definition of initiation ritual, and, in “Transforming Women: Being and Becoming in an Island Melanesian Society,” concludes that we must interpret the ritual surrounding a woman’s first childbirth experience (in a group she calls the Babae) both as part of a larger ritual sequence and as a cultural performance. The third chapter in this section, entitled “Mythic Images and Objects of Myth in Rauto Female Puberty Ritual,” by Thomas Maschio, contains an attempt to push our analysis of these rituals and events beyond the kind of analysis espoused by Geertz, by situating them and our analysis of them, as Leenhardt attempted to do, in a mythic dimension.

The final series of chapters, “The Female Body and Life-Cycle Rites as Metaphor,” focuses on the ways and contexts in which female bodies are used as metaphors for aspects of the social body. Patricia Townsend’s “The Washed and the Unwashed: Women’s Life Cycle Rituals among the Saniyohiyowe of East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea” explores the way in which rituals surrounding widowhood are in critical ways a reversal of women’s initiation rituals. Townsend includes insightful analysis about the

political dimensions of these rituals. “Gender Metaphors: Female Rituals as Cultural Models in Manam,” by Nancy Lutkehaus, contains an analysis of how male and female sexuality must be culturally produced, promoted, and controlled in Manam. The final ethnographic chapter, Lorraine Sexton’s “Marriage as the Model for a New Initiation Ritual,” examines the way in which the ritual of marriage serves as a model for initiating new *wok meri* groups (women’s development organizations) in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Sexton’s analysis reveals that “‘initiation’ rituals for adolescent males and females have different goals and are not functionally equivalent rites of passage” (206).

Altogether, this is an impressive collection of data illuminated by rich and provocative analyses. The volume is a “must” for anyone interested in ritual or Melanesia, but I recommend a much wider reading. All who have an interest in ritual, feminist analysis, gender, or contemporary anthropological theory will be well served by this collection.

NANCY MCDOWELL  
*Beloit College*

\* \* \*