

La tradition et l'État: Églises, pouvoirs et politiques culturelles dans le Pacifique, edited by Christine Hamelin and Éric Wittersheim. Cahiers du Pacifique Sud Contemporain 2. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002. ISBN 2-7475-1926-0; 250 pages, figures, maps, notes, bibliographies. €21.35.

This collection of essays focuses primarily on contemporary issues of anthropological interest in Vanuatu and the Bismarck Archipelago of Papua New Guinea. It is a direct outcome of a postgraduate seminar offered annually by the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), in Paris. Under the direction of Alban Bensa, anthropologist, and Jean-Claude Rivierre, linguist, the seminar series is motivated by an explicit concern to move beyond the geographical confines of New Caledonia, where both have undertaken significant scholarly research for over twenty years, to embrace the larger Oceanian realm. It is also concerned to promote, within France, the kind of anthropology that focuses on transformation and change, thereby vigorously rejecting the static, binary views of tradition/modernity that remain current in certain scholarly circles. Logically, both objectives are achieved through sending a new generation of scholars to work first in Vanuatu, where there is a long tradition of French scholarly research and close institutional relations with New Caledonia, and then on into "deeper" Melanesia. The editors of this second volume in the Cahiers du Pacifique Sud Contemporain series, Christine Hamelin and Éric

Wittersheim, following earlier research in New Caledonia, are clearly exercising such a mandate. Their strategy has been to invite experienced scholars from other countries to contribute to the seminars. This fact is a defining characteristic of *La tradition et l'État* in the sense that, apart from the introduction by the editors, four of the eight articles were written originally in English by North American or European scholars—Bronwen Douglas, Ton Otto, Lissant Bolton, and Jonathan Friedman—and can be considered to be largely syntheses of work already published in that language. In other words, they represent exercises in translation of existing material from one scholarly community to another, thereby nourishing a new and welcome scholarly initiative in France.

Douglas (Australia) shares some of her concerns about gender issues in Vanuatu, notably in the context of the contemporary institutions of the Church and the State. Otto (Denmark) explores the different ways in which power is exercised on the island of Baluan, Manus Province. Bolton (United Kingdom) reflects on the role of radio in redefining kastom in Vanuatu. Friedman (Sweden and France) is alone in moving beyond the confines of Melanesia to explore the oftentimes tense debate between anthropologists and Natives with respect to indigenous Hawaiian identity. The pertinence of his discussion extends far beyond the Pacific realm, in a context where the definers of scholarly knowledge tend to focus on matters of "authenticity," while those they judge are actively concerned to delimit territories within which they can assure some degree of collective material and spiritual survival.

In addition to these four exercises dedicated primarily to interlinguistic “sharing,” the collection comprises three essays by French scholars of Melanesia: Brigitte Derlon on social change and intercommunal conflict in New Ireland, Monique Jeudy-Ballini on the effect of mission-derived Christianity on traditional beliefs among the Sulka of New Britain, and Wittersheim on the marginalization of customary chiefs in postcolonial Vanuatu. In addition to these three, a paper by Alban Bensa draws on his wealth of experience in pure and applied anthropology in New Caledonia to reflect on the circumstances leading to the creation of a Kanak “cultural space” as a part of, but distinctively apart from, the Centre Culturel Tjibaou in Nouméa. The explicit reason for this Kanak initiative is that the building and its contents are seen to epitomize the institutionalization of culture while the separate “cultural space” evokes the experiencing of culture. In their introduction, Hamelin and Wittersheim offer a brief overview of the interactions between the three arenas of authority in Oceania, namely customary leadership, the State, and the churches. They point to the fact that the cultural policies of many of the newly independent states of the region have, in sapping the authority of the churches, led to a resurgence of interest in tradition and a reassessment of its intrinsic value and importance, and hence to radical change in many local communities.

If one paper merits particular attention, it is undoubtedly Brigitte Derlon’s “You, the White People,” by virtue of her capacity to demonstrate how disparate worlds intersect in small Pacific Island communities. This is expressed

as much in the circulation of information as in the movement of people and the interplay of the various seats of power: villages on the coast and in the interior, the Church, evangelical movements, the town, the State . . . and sojourning anthropologists such as herself. In weaving a deft path through this minefield of change and often tragic disarray, she demonstrates how the transcending value of tradition is being reassessed and how ambivalence to “Whites” (the western world) intensifies. While essentially a “local” story, limited to four “bush” villages in the interior of New Ireland, the issues that are raised—of the questioning of the authority of the Church by the State, of a progressive assimilation to the West marked, at the same time, by a loss of faith in it, and hence of an overwhelming sentiment of revolt—all evoke the larger forces of violent change that are currently sweeping through Melanesia.

Notwithstanding the title of the collection, it is as much the Church, and the effective challenging of its authority through the emergence of the postcolonial Melanesian State, that is the focus of attention in this volume. While the newly independent states of the region often effectively revitalized tradition at both local and national levels, two or three decades further down the road they have atrophied. More or less simultaneously a multitude of evangelical movements are challenging the authority of the established churches and are often imposing a degree of hitherto unknown intransigency with respect to culture and identity. Does this emerging reality which, regrettably, is only alluded to in the contents of the collection, account for the edi-

tors' choice of a striking painting by Ralph Regenvanu, director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, to adorn the front cover of the collection? Entitled *Las kakae* (The Last Supper) it depicts twelve red, stylized, split drums, upright and in disarray (vainly protesting?) behind a long table with, at the center, a much larger blue-black drum, a crown of thorns on its head, looking with empty eyes out of the painting. Behind it, across the calm waters of the bay (Port Vila Bay?), and slightly above and to the left of the drum's head, three white crucifixes sit quietly astride a hilltop . . .

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Alchemies of Distance, by Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard. Honolulu: subpress, Tinfish; Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 2001. ISBN 1-930068-10-7; 77 pages, photograph. Paper, US\$12.00.

Born in American Sāmoa, raised on military bases and in colleges in the United States, and now teaching literature at the University of Hawai'i, Caroline Sinavaiana has a name long familiar to readers of Pacific literature, though mainly through individual poems encountered in journals here and there. It is a real pleasure to have her work now available in a compendium prefaced with her "ficto-critical" autobiography.

The work she has been coediting (*Women Writing Oceania: Weaving the Sails of Vaka*) suggests some of her concerns and key images: the mixing of contemporary feminist activism with celebration of traditions, of

domestic weaving with the history of Polynesian voyaging. The search for belonging amid a life of travel, coupled with the colonial problematic of living in a home that is also not home (whether it be one's birthplace returned to after twenty years, or the imperial homeland, neither racially nor culturally sympathetic to its labor force, gathered from the four corners of the globe) provides the governing concern of the collection. Sinavaiana protests against the forces separating and downgrading people, but she is also able to bring together elements of the multiplicity of disparate experiences in remarkably productive ways. Her essay, for example, is one of the few instances of a personal syncretism encompassing Samoan "talk story," Salinger, Kamau Brathwaite, Sufi verse, Bruce Chatwin, and Tibetan Buddhism that doesn't end up sounding coldly contrived or fancifully New Age.

Sinavaiana's combination of personal warmth, political anger, and lyrical intelligence, plus the eclectic range of references, makes for some lively verse engaged with contemporary issues and grounded in Samoan traditions. As with village orators, the writer establishes "a kind of genealogy," linking creation myth to travel via the image of the Tulī bird, and exploring the concept of *vā*—the space between things that produces relationships and lets everything breathe. In poetic practice, this finds its avatar in Charles Olson, while the activist voice comes from the declamatory style of Bob Dylan and Black writing. It discovers its image in the Samoan war goddess, Nafanua, whose voyaging "opens a pathway for crossing the divide of loss" (25) and provides a counter to "the colonial poison of