

Robert J. Foster, *Social reproduction and history in Melanesia; Mortuary ritual, gift exchange, and custom in the Tanga islands*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, xxii + 288 pp. ISBN 0.521.48030.2 (hardback), 0.521.48332.8 (paperback). Price: GBP 60 (hardback), 20.95 (paperback).

TOON van MEIJL

Melanesia is one of the most fascinating areas in social anthropology. It is characterized by a cultural and linguistic diversity that is unparalleled elsewhere in the world, and it was not explored by Europeans until the final phase of colonial history. Anthropological research in Melanesia has made great strides since the 1960s, but there is still much scope for more, and an impressive number of interesting monographs on the region continues to be published. In many cases these are of interest not only for regional specialists, but also for the purpose of comparative research. This book too, a revised version of a PhD dissertation defended at the University of Chicago in 1988, provides an ethnographically rich and theoretically sophisticated account of social reproduction and change in the Tanga Islands, New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea.

In Tanga the process of social reproduction is achieved in and through mortuary rites, which the author unpacks as total social phenomena of Tanga social organization. The sequence of mortuary rites can be divided into two phases. The first is focused on the disposal of the corpse and includes all other routines of mourning, while the second involves the construction of a new men's house. This may last up to ten years, and is characterized by large-scale feasts and exchanges that collectively 'finish' one or more deceased members of a lineage. Foster provides a very detailed account of all the different feasts connected with the construction of a men's house, and shows that feast-giving is a form of collective action through which individual agents define relations of similarity among themselves while simultaneously differentiating themselves from others. The condition of similarity is essential for the main purpose of the mortuary rites, which Foster describes with two glosses as 'replacing' (*pilis*) the dead with the living, and displacing or 'finishing' (*farop*) the dead. The outcome of these activities is what may be labelled Tanga social organization.

Foster's ethnographic analysis is inspired by two different theoretical perspectives, which he intertwines into one by emphasizing both the differences between Melanesian and Western forms of sociality and the shared history of colonialism and commerce in Melanesian and Western societies. This paradoxical combination of theoretical orientations is undoubtedly the main

strength of the book. On the one hand, the ethnographic analysis of Tangan mortuary feasting and exchange practices is situated in a historical perspective on commodification in the region. This enables Foster to trace the emergence of *kastam* (custom) as a cultural category and how it came to refer specifically to mortuary ceremonies at the level of matrilineages, as contrasted with the new and foreign practices of *bisnis* ('business') in the household, the new social institutions for commodity production and consumption. In spite of this socio-economic transformation and the attendant changes in conceptualization, observable forms of mortuary feasting and ceremonial exchange seem to have remained relatively unchanged since the 1930s if not earlier. Foster refers to the approach that has guided his analysis of continuity and change in Tangan mortuary practices as the 'New Melanesian History'.

The second strand in Foster's theoretical analysis is inspired by what he defines as the 'New Melanesian Ethnography', a genre shaped mainly by the work of Marilyn Strathern. The aim of this approach is to replace the static, morphological notion of society as a bounded collection of individuals with the alternative notion of sociality, understood as the process of constituting social relationships, not between individuals, but between composite persons. In this view a Melanesian person is understood as a composite form of relations with a plurality of other persons. Melanesian persons, in other words, do not simply have relations, but are relations. The notion of composite person also implies a notion of agency as activation which differs radically from that associated with the concept of autonomous and free individuals. These innovative interpretations of personhood and agency also open up the way for a thorough rethinking of Melanesian exchange practices. Exchange, in the new approach, is no longer seen as a means of accumulating debt and credit, but instead as an action whereby persons externalize their internal composition. By the same token, exchange value is not conceived as a measure of the objects that are exchanged, but as the specific relationship between persons as manifested through the exchange of objects. Along similar lines it can be argued that relationships between composite persons are characterized by both differences and similarities, and that exchange practices may highlight distinction and interdependency at once.

In the final chapter, Foster contrasts Tangan social reproduction with the manner in which social organization is constituted in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. In Tanga, sociality is produced through the circulation of valued objects; Foster describes this as 'replication', since the potential of exchange in expanding sociality is not optimally exploited; instead, the emphasis in this practice of 'keeping-while-giving' is on securing the return of valuables into circulation. In the Highlands, by contrast, exchange practices are characterized by a logic of dispersal, and the associated process of

social reproduction, since it emphasizes the proliferation and expansion of social relationships, is referred to by Foster as 'multiplication'. This brief but compelling comparison between exchange practices, processes of social reproduction, and forms of social organization in Tanga and the Highlands of Papua New Guinea makes an excellent book complete. *Social reproduction and history in Melanesia* deserves to be read widely.

---

Douglas Kammen and Siddharth Chandra, *A tour of duty; Changing patterns of military politics in Indonesia in the 1990's*. Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1999, 98 pp. ISBN 0.87763.049.6.

J.A. de MOOR

This modest, but well-researched and interesting study analyses the changes in military command and politics in Indonesia from 1990 up to and including the fall of president Suharto in May 1998 (the profound changes which have subsequently affected the military are not covered). In the 1990s, it was clear to any observer of the Indonesian army that accelerated personnel changes and reshuffles were taking place in military commands. Top officers were transferred to new functions and ranks much more quickly than before, and the composition of the top brass seemed to have become entirely volatile. Explanations for this were most often sought in political and ideological factors, ranging from the personal influence of Suharto to the turmoil caused by regional and municipal elections and other political tensions. The authors of *A tour of duty*, however, argue otherwise, emphasizing the internal dynamics of the officer corps itself.

The first part of the study attempts to put the perceived trend toward more rapid command transfers on a statistical basis. Kammen and Chandra calculate that the average tenure of Kodam, Korem and Kodim commanders (altogether about 330 officers) fell from three to four years in the early 1990s to between 12 and 18 months after 1995. For an explanation, the authors go back to the early days of the National Military Academy in Magelang, which was established by the recently deceased general A.H. Nasution in 1957 and produced its first graduates in 1960. Classes were initially huge, resulting by the 1970s in a congestion of promotions in the middle and higher ranks of the officer corps. After 1975, however, class size was substantially reduced, and from the early 1980s onward the number of graduates was correspondingly smaller.