

Wilhelms is an unabashed insider—a scientist writing history. Historians must decide for themselves whether Wilhelms has properly placed Project Apollo in its social and political context. Among the book's most avid readers will be those hundreds of us who participated in the Apollo missions through geological mapping, sample analyses, and geophysical studies. My own friends and colleagues appear throughout its pages, and the chapters teem with fresh insights on the projects we engaged in. Those who pick up this huge and hugely entertaining book for browsing may find that they cannot put it down again in a hurry.

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The Spirit of the Gift

Inalienable Possessions. The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving. ANNETTE B. WEINER. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992. xiv, 234 pp., illus. \$35 or £22.50; paper, \$13 or £8.50.

The making of comparisons in anthropology has often been a matter of stretching concepts derived from the ethnography of particular groups in new directions. In Pacific ethnography such efforts have frequently been concerned with the old dichotomy between Polynesia and Melanesia, the former supposedly connected with hierarchical and the latter with egalitarian political forms.

Annette Weiner is an anthropologist who made her name by working in a society at the intersection of the Polynesia-Melanesia dichotomy, an intersection moreover already made famous through the work of Bronislaw Malinowski, namely the Trobriand society of Papua New Guinea. The strength of Weiner's contribution to the already rich ethnography of these people lay in her stress on the roles of women in the reproduction of the matrilineage and on the importance of their manufacture and exchange of decorated skirts and banana-leaf bundles in

mortuary rituals. More recently she has extended her concern with the significance of material objects for gender relations among the Trobrianders to the broad theme of the importance of women's wealth throughout the Pacific. This in turn has led her to question the supposed overall preeminence of reciprocal exchange as the underlying principle in Pacific cultures and to develop instead a dialectical view that concentrates on what she calls, in one formulation, the "paradox of keeping-while-giving." One way of evaluating her argument is to see how well it applies to the different cases in Polynesia and Melanesia that it is intended to encompass.

The most unequivocally effective analysis Weiner provides relates to some of the classic themes in the earlier literature on Polynesia, for example her reconsideration of Marcel Mauss's work on "the spirit of the gift." The phrase is one Mauss took from an early Maori text, and it has exercised many commentators subsequently, including for example Marshall Sahlins. What none of the commentators, or Mauss himself, appears to have recognized is the association Weiner points out between the category of wealth goods cited, that is, the *taonga* (fine mats or cloaks), and the symbolism of female reproductive powers. "Here," Weiner writes, "is where we locate women's exclusive role: it is in the rituals surrounding human reproduction and cloth production where women gain control over *mana* [sacred power] which, in turn, gives them a domain of authority and power in their own right. And here also, we locate the source of the spirit of the gift" (p. 50).

It is at this point that Weiner pursues her argument in a new direction, stressing not that wealth goods are exchanged but rather that certain wealth goods are not

exchanged but are kept within a particular lineage or group as a sign of that group's identity or "cosmological authentication" (p. 51). This she associates with her idea of inalienable possessions as expressed in the title of her book. The prime case of such possessions, represented in the book's cover illustration, is objects belonging to Polynesian dynasties and passed down in obligatory succession. With regard to such objects the argument is incontrovertible, since they undoubtedly could not be exchanged and were always passed down within a limited social group. They therefore can be described as systemically inalienable in contrast with objects that were produced for trade and exchange.

It is when Weiner extends her argument further, into Melanesia, that difficulties arise. In Melanesian social systems it is more difficult to find clear cases of valuable objects that were systemically kept out of exchanges (although such cases do exist). In the case of the famous *kula* exchange objects, first described by Malinowski, we can see that the whole purpose of these objects (mostly armshells or shell necklaces) was to be exchanged in certain limited circuits among persons of similar rank, thus conferring prestige on every participant who held them. *Kula* objects were thus strategically held on to and released by individuals according to their own aims, but they were not in themselves systemically inalienable possessions. Weiner explains the slow circulation of the most valued *kula* objects as a part of the strategy of individual men to increase their own prestige by attracting famous shells to themselves, and she argues that there is a "vertical movement from private ownership to an inalienable possession within *kula* to becoming an individual player's inalienable possession for many years [which] is the trajectory that the highest shells follow" (p. 135). It is doubtful, however, whether the term "inalienable" can strictly be applied to any of the circumstances involved here because, as Weiner herself notes, "eventually the shell must reenter *kula* exchange" (p. 133). Referring to the situation as one in which the shell is kept for several years "as if it were inalienable" raises the question whether the participants themselves ever have such a view or whether it is imported into the situation by the observer herself. In an earlier book, *The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea* (1988), Weiner stresses the significance of giving rather than keeping and notes that "a *kula* man's fame is created through the circulation of his name in relation to the largest and the most valuable shells that he has obtained" (p. 143). Though the physical object, then, must in a sense be alienated



"At this mortuary distribution of fine mats, women carry the highest-ranking ones to the house where the relatives of the dead person are assembled." [From *Inalienable Possessions*]

from any given person, what remains in fact inalienable to the object and to all those through whose hands it has passed is the fame or reputation that goes with it. In other words, it is not truly the object itself that is inalienable but only the prestige attached to it, which can only be gained through its intrinsic alienability. Reflecting on such points we might conclude that the use of the contrast between alienable and inalienable possessions is perhaps not after all the best way of talking about the phenomena Weiner wishes to identify.

These objections aside, Weiner has given us a very rich reconsideration of ethnographic data from all parts of the Pacific and forces us to rethink the major categories in terms of which Pacific societies have been interpreted. She is particularly strong in the stressing of female roles, female reproductive symbolism, and the role of bonds between cross-sex siblings as against those between spouses in the construction of systems of cosmological authentication. Somewhat paradoxically, her argument is less strong, as we have seen, with regard to its overall conceptualization. There are indeed inalienable possessions in some Pacific cultures, and there is indeed a process of strategic retention and disbursement in



"In 1971, Chief Tokavataliya, a noted kula man from Sinaketa village, showed me two fine kula necklaces that he just received from his kula partner on his voyage to Dobu Island." [From *Inalienable Possessions*]

many Pacific exchange systems, but these features are not necessarily reducible to a single analytical syndrome in the way

Weiner argues. Nevertheless, her book is a monument to her creative rethinking of the analysis of Pacific societies from a female point of view.

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The Greening of Plants

Pigment-Protein Complexes in Plastids. Synthesis and Assembly. CHRISTER SUNDQVIST and MARGARETA RYBERG, Eds. Academic Press, San Diego, CA, 1993. xiv, 520 pp., illus. \$139 or £105. Cell Biology.

A germinating seed that is completely covered by a rock continues to grow for at least a few days. The plant is, however, lanky and pale yellow—that is, etiolated. Exposure to sunlight allows it to develop its usual color, and normal growth frequently follows.

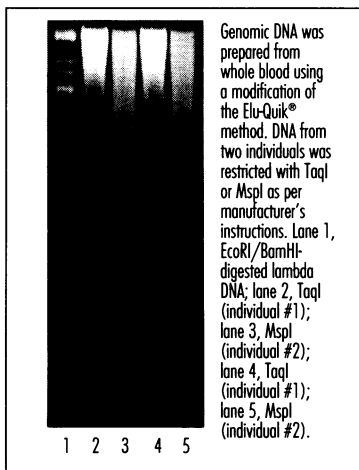
This greening of plants—or, more exactly, the light-induced appearance of chlorophyll- and carotenoid-containing protein



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