

home: “Hide the resting place with rocks and branches, hide it so only the birds know where I am, and then leave me. Leave me. Leave me in the breathing, beating heart of my beloved ‘āina. I will lie there quietly in the darkness, and in the darkness I will hear them coming. I will hear the long slow sound of the conch, the steady beat of the pahu [drum], and then the creaking of the mānele [palanquin], swaying back and forth and back and forth. I will feel their footsteps shaking the air, and stretching out, I will see the endless, winding procession of torches, and then the faces of every loved one gone before me. And one will leave the great line and slowly come toward me, and, bending over so softly she calls back, ‘Stop and wait, for here is one of our own, come home to us at last’” (226).

The impact of seeing all three productions returned when rediscovering *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu*, *Emmalehua*, and *Ola Nā Iwi* on the written page. But what cannot be done in the theater could occur with the text in hand; with great pleasure, it was possible to revisit the feverish dreams of an ancient ali‘i, the mumbled guidance of a troubled father after he’d imbibed his home brew, and the turmoil of a young woman who must weigh the responsibility and danger of honoring sacred artifacts.

It seems right to take one of Kneubuhl’s own characters out of context to explain why her work is so very important to us in Hawai‘i today. Alika, the progressive husband in *Emmalehua*, addresses the gathering of engineers with these words, “We are a new generation, with a new style and a new breadth of view. We will

create a new tomorrow” (90). Victoria Nālani Kneubuhl is the dramatic voice of the new generation and has been an important player in helping to forge the new Hawaiian tomorrow. In ironic contrast to the character Alika, she will carry out this noble task with a determination to celebrate the Hawaiian culture and preserve the ways that serve our people well.

Victoria Nālani Kneubuhl will always find a home for her work on the experimental boards of Hawai‘i’s Kumu Kahua, but it is high time that her works are available to an eager readership beyond the intimacy of that stage.

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Unfolding the Moon: Enacting Women’s Kastom in Vanuatu, by Lissant Bolton. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2003. ISBN 0-8248-2535-7, xxxv + 232 pages, figures, map, photographs, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. US\$39.00.

Unfolding the Moon, the title of this book, is taken from a textile design and suggests the poetic resonance of women’s agency as it is expressed through kastom practices embedded in the fabrication and exchange of textiles. In this book, women’s textiles provide a route to understanding the gendered production of knowledge and women’s kastom practices. This beautifully written book has much to say about the relationships between material objects and cultural practices; the articulation of gender and kastom practices; and the inclusionary

and exclusionary practices of *kastom* and nation building in postcolonial Vanuatu.

Bolton, who is now the curator of the Pacific and Australian Collections at the British Museum, was requested by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC) to initiate the Women's Culture Project (WCP) in Vanuatu in 1991. Together with Jean Tarisesei, whom Bolton trained as a WCP coordinator, she developed the Women's *Kastom* Project in Ambae to document and revive the production of textiles (xxvii) as part of the larger project. *Kastom*, according to Bolton, "does not refer to pre-colonial knowledge and practice as a whole system—as 'culture'—but rather to specific items, aspects, of that knowledge and practice" (51). It is from this important theoretical and unique ethnographic vantage point that Bolton considers the idea of *kastom* in Vanuatu—and how and why women were initially excluded from the arena of *kastom*. Following independence, Bolton explains, *kastom* was considered the work of men and national rhetoric about *kastom* displaced women from its public space. Indigenous and exogenous ideas had converged in the conflation of public domains and male spaces (57). However, in developing the project at the island level, Bolton found considerable interest in the idea that "women had *kastom* too" (1). The recognition that "women had *kastom* too" not only linked women to a national context "but significantly altered the status of women in that national context" (155). The Ambae project highlighted the production of gendered knowledge and women's *kastom* practices at local and national levels.

The book is structured as a textile is woven: in the first section, the book addresses ideas about *kastom* in Vanuatu (chapters 1–3), while the second section contains an ethnographic account of Ambae textiles (chapters 5–7). Chapter 4, which concerns practices of place, joins the two sections of the book together (xxxiii). Ideas about place, Bolton suggests, are crucial to the formulation of *kastom*, and the relationship between *kastom* and place is central to the claim that "women have *kastom* too." Bolton seeks ways to create space for women's knowledge and practices in exchange rituals as well as in the realm of everyday life. To that end, she makes a case for paying close attention to the often undervalued material objects that women make. "In making presentations of *maraha*, the most valuable textiles, and *qana*, the less valuable textiles, the women are not only making a gift in exchange but demonstrating their knowledge, skill and labour" (xiii). Textiles also embody women's commitment to the social relationships in which they are enmeshed. Textiles as objects, Bolton argues, are connected to practice: "what is important about the objects is not what they mean but what they do" (129). The book's argument and approach challenge notions of gender hierarchy in Vanuatu, and thus it seems unnecessary to assert that plaiting, an intense social activity, is analogous to men's drinking *kava*, or to be concerned with the various forms the opposition between textiles and *kava* takes (121–122). Locating women's practices in such a framework runs the danger of reasserting the binary oppositions that underpin such hierarchies.

The book offers a valuable and timely analysis of the role of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre in postcolonial Vanuatu. Created in the 1970s, the centre is one of the most important and respected institutions in the country. Always innovative, it created a network of local men to work as volunteers in their own islands, documenting and reviving *kastom*. Bolton and Tarisesei were also instrumental in developing the women's fieldworkers program in the 1990s; their extraordinary achievement has promoted indigenous women's research. The Vanuatu Cultural Centre, with its emphasis on *kastom* and local practices, has also provided a fulcrum for nation building. Bolton's account of the centre, a unique cultural institution in contemporary Oceania, underlines the value of creating a cultural forum at the national level to link islanders in contemporary Oceania.

If the book is about the agency of women in Vanuatu, it is also very much about the agency of Bolton, the anthropologist who came to Vanuatu, under VCC aegis, with the express objective of making changes through the Women's *Kastom* Project. Rather than participant observation, Bolton characterizes her role as "participant engagement" (xv). Bolton's work was undertaken in partnership with key individuals, such as the late Grace Molisa, who passionately articulated the need to enlarge women's participation at both local and national levels (66). Bolton and her ni-Vanuatu collaborators forged dynamic and long-term relationships to produce ethnographic knowledge that privileged women's knowledge and practices. It is in this context that *kastom* can be usefully understood as "the

product of the interaction between expatriate ideas of culture and custom and ni-Vanuatu conceptualizations of their knowledge and practice" (52).

The book's clarity and comprehensive discussion of conventional anthropological concerns (material culture, land, lineage, marriage, grade taking, and rank) as well as contemporary concerns (postcolonial nation building, gender, *kastom*, politics, Christianity, and development) make it valuable for both specialists and non-specialists. *Unfolding the Moon* provokes creative ways of thinking about ethnographic projects and the possibilities of collaboration with indigenous researchers. Bolton's commitment to collaborative research and her emphasis on the practices and enactments of place, person, and objects offer an inventive approach to the production of ethnographic knowledge. It is an approach that creates spaces for agency.

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Akekeia! Traditional Dance in Kiribati, by Tony and Joan Whincup. Wellington, NZ: Susan Barrie, 2001. ISBN 0-646-41554-9; 168 pages, in English and the Kiribati language; photographs, glossary, list of additional readings. Cloth, NZ\$89.95.

"when you are getting ready for the dancing and you have your arms out on the shoulders of two different women and they're tying different things on and somebody's behind you and someone's fixing your hair, it's just building all that excitement and usually I try to kind of close my eyes

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