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BOOK REVIEWS

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MATT TOMLINSON, *In God's image: The metaculture of Fijian Christianity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. Pp. xiii, 249. Pb $21.95

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Matt Tomlinson's engaging account of how Fijians on Kadavu Island understand and talk about the Christian church as a key element of their culture represents an important contribution to the ethnography of Fiji as well as to language oriented anthropological theory more generally. His work also demonstrates, as a case study with wider implications, the value that historical and cultural anthropological analysis brings to a tempered understanding of the role of religion in volatile and potentially explosive contemporary politics.

While Christianity has not been neglected by anthropologists writing recently about Fiji, Tomlinson goes more deeply than previous writers into the historical, theological, and social structural processes that constitute Fijian Christianity. As in many other Pacific Island societies, Christianity has been thoroughly appropriated and domesticated by Fijians. Tomlinson's account depicts the indigenized church not as a smoothly integrated element of social life, however, but rather as a font of discourse continually articulating structural tensions that energize political and cultural creativity at village, regional, and national levels. This is not to say, of course, that pre-Christian, indigenous religious establishments did not also figure in the structural contradictions that drove political activity. Tomlinson's focus on expressions of Fijian metaculture—explicit references to the character and dynamics of their own culture by Fijians themselves—reveals an active picture of culture as continual construction. Based on historical as well as contemporary data, Fijian cultural institutions appear to be arrayed in a "checks and balances" mode in which, for example, the legitimacy of a chiefly title, which is the corporate property of a specific lineage within a political community, is conditioned by a mandatory ceremonial installation, which is the jealously guarded corporate prerogative of another, non-chiefly, lineage. Installations can be blocked for generations as the balance of power between *turaga*, the chiefly office, and *vanua*, the subject people who embody the land, is contested.

Another balance, one that Tomlinson is mainly concerned with, is between *lotu*, religion embodied as the church, and the other elements of the vanua, here a polity encompassing sacralized physical territory, the people and chiefs that live in it, and

the regime of traditional custom that governs it. In other words, the vanua encompasses the totality of church, chiefs, subjects, land, and customs, and it can also be counterposed as a constraint against any one of its constituent elements that attempts to exercise power.

While the introduction of Christianity and colonialism overwrote the traditional balances, which varied regionally, among chiefs, subjects, and priests and their attendant offices and titles, it did not erase them. The British, who took possession of Fiji as a colony by a deed of cession in 1874, reinforced the powers of the chiefs for purposes of indirect rule and ratified the core concept of the vanua—the fundamental unity of the people and land—by defining Fijian land legally as communally owned and inalienable. And while Christian missionaries might have intended to eradicate the old gods, Tomlinson shows that traditional religion survives as a suppressed but vital antithetical element within the complex contemporary lotu.

The relationship of ancient gods and ancestral presences to the modern church is illustrated in the working out of a major theme that Tomlinson identifies in his analysis of Fijian metaculture, namely a persistently asserted scenario of degradation and decay over time, from a powerful past to a weak present and future. Tomlinson documents the resonance of this metacultural critique in a variety of speech settings, and the coming of Christianity is almost unique in enjoying the attribution of the opposite path of cultural change—from weak to strong. That is, the pre-Christian era is spoken of as a time of darkness, replaced by enlightenment with the coming of the Wesleyan Methodist church. The metacultural storyline of decay and loss of power reasserts itself even here, however. In discussions, sermons, prayers, joking, and other forms of talk that Tomlinson analyzes, the strength of the Christian church itself is depicted as declining from the times of its missionary advent, and in some versions of Fijian history the apex of Christian power is set even higher and further back. In such expositions Jesus, Jehovah, and other figures are identified as Fijian ancestors and gods, so the decline from those ancient times is even steeper. Furthermore, the ancient gods and ancestral spirits are often depicted as very powerful—consistent with the ascribed power of Fijian culture generally in former times—and still capable of dangerous interventions, such as unexplained illnesses and misfortunes. The modern, Christian lotu must exert itself to the maximum to fend off the ancestral powers, and this contest between the church and the ancient traditions of the vanua is played out in the arena of language. Tomlinson's ethnographic account of the institution of chain prayers is particularly interesting in this regard. The chain prayer is an organization of participants, under the authority of the pastor, into teams that combine to exert against illness and misfortune the power of prayer deployed across stations in space and through sequenced relays in time and addressed both to the Christian God and the ancient powers of darkness.

Tomlinson argues that a language- and discourse-centered approach to ethnographic research is particularly appropriate to the study of religion in Fiji. While nonverbal media are important, Tomlinson observes that religion is heavily invested in verbal performance and interaction. Sermons, prayers, hymns and chanted

scripture are central to religious expression and to the church as social activity. Also, language itself, its powers and effects on non-language reality, becomes a focus of debate and discussions that reveal the on-going process of assembling social reality. The church as a discursive formation regulates the allocation of authority to speakers and validates knowledge, and Tomlinson delineates the intricate hierarchy and paths of socialization within the Methodist church that position the speech, including sermons, prayers, and informal discussion, of supervisory clergy, pastors, catechists, lay preachers, and church goers. A dramatic life history of one catechist demonstrates the potential for individual advancement within the church, overcoming social stigma, and achieving higher status. The story provides a counterpoint at the level of the individual to the broader structural scenario of degradation and decline in Fijian social life.

Stories *vakabalebale*, with a deeper meaning, such as the catechist's ascent from crime and addiction to spiritual authority, can be told not only in sermons in church but also in the everyday kava drinking sessions that take place elsewhere in the village. Kava drinking provides an important venue of talk that is closely allied to the Fijian Methodist church but is clearly differentiated from it by its deep identification with the pre-Christian indigenous traditions of the vanua. Tomlinson finds kava talk a rich source of metacultural data, and political events such as national parliamentary elections—and in recent times the momentous tumult of military coups—provide highly stimulating content for kava commentary.

Before 1987, Fiji had seemed to be a stable biracial country comprising indigenous Fijians and an approximately equal population of Indo-Fijians, whose ancestors had been imported from India as plantation workers by the British in the 19th century. But in 1987 Fiji and the region were shocked by a sequence of two military takeovers led by a Fijian army colonel, Sitiveni Rabuka. After a period of apparent return to democracy under a new constitution, political chaos erupted again with the unsuccessful ethnic Fijian putsch of 2000 fronted by George Speight. That attempted coup was put down by Commodore Frank Bainimarama, Fiji's top military commander, who since then has given and taken back control of the government several times. Tomlinson provides a valuable perspective on this current troubled era in Fijian history by documenting the role of lotu, specifically the Methodist church, as the era has been—and continues to be—unfolding. Political rhetoric of Fijian ethnic nationalist politicians has often been dramatically metacultural, invoking the place of the Christian lotu in Fijian cultural and national identity. As Tomlinson recounts, factions within the church hierarchy itself have also been sorely divided on issues of religious tolerance and church/state relations, a crucial point given that Indo-Fijian citizens by and large are not Christian.

One can argue that the current lingering and intractable crisis in Fiji involves a structural disjuncture of the four colonial pillars of indigenous Fijian identity: land policy, chiefly authority, the Fijian Wesleyan church, and the army, which is almost exclusively an indigenous Fijian (i.e., not Indo-Fijian) institution. Each of these basic structural members was crafted from traditional Fijian raw materials—a

rich mélange of thriving practices, values, and ideology—and molded by colonial governmentality into a uniform and authoritative set of institutions. Although previous coup leaders invoked all four, the current strongman, Commodore Bainimarama, has contested the authority of the church and the chiefs, equivocated on land policy, and relies heavily only on the army. While Tomlinson's book is not *about* contemporary politics directly, his metacultural, language-centered analysis of Fijian Christianity offers valuable insights, confirming the relevance of solid academic work to critical social problems.

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J. CLANCY CLEMENTS, *The linguistic legacy of Spanish and Portuguese: colonial expansion and language change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xix, 256. Hb. $90.00l pb. $34.99.

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In this collection of essays, Clements takes a linguistic ecological approach to the study of several Spanish- and Portuguese-based contact varieties, past and present. Using an emergentist and usage-based paradigm, he compares a widely divergent array of linguistic and ecological environments, with the goal of demonstrating how pidgin, creole, and other mixed languages are formed and evolve. The book consists of nine chapters, an appendix, and a comprehensive bibliography.

The introductory chapter sets forth Clements' views on language processing and language change. Linguistic structure is created by routinization, which in turn is frequency-dependent; notions of universal grammar and innateness play no role in the following chapters, which provide a fine-grained analysis of specific contact-induced varieties of Spanish and Portuguese. Clements also embraces the metaphor (shared by such scholars as Croft and Mufwene) of language as species, which then places speech communities in the role of actively interbreeding populations defined by the species. In this "phylogenetic" approach, species and speech communities are defined not principally by inherent linguistic traits but rather by their shared history, and by the linguistic equivalent of interbreeding, namely the extent to which speakers consider given linguistic codes as belonging to the same or to different languages.

Following a brief chapter that outlines the social history of Spanish and Portuguese, from the Roman Empire period through the era of Spanish and Portuguese