OCEANIC SOCIALITIES AND CULTURAL FORMS

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Ethnographies of Experience

Edited by
Ingjerd Hoëm and Sidsel Roalkvam

Berghahn Books
New York • Oxford

First published in 2003 by **Berghahn Books**
www.BerghahnBooks.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Oceanic socialities and cultural forms : ethnographies of experience / edited by Ingjerd Hoëm and Sidsel Roalkvam.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical reference and index.
ISBN 1-57181-558-9 (alk. paper)
1. Ethnology--Oceania--Methodology. 2. Ethnology--Research --Oceania. 3. Social structure--Oceania. 4. Oceania--Social life and customs. I. Hoëm, Ingjerd. II. Roalkvam, Sidsel.

GN662 .O257 2002
305.8'00995–dc21

2002025596

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library
Printed in the United States on acid-free paper
ISBN 1-57181-558-9 hardback

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Preface

This work is in more ways than one indebted to the unique Norwegian institution called *The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture*.[1] The Institute was founded in 1918 by a parliamentary decision. This decision was secured mainly through the efforts of one man and his response to developments in the scientific community in Europe caused by the First World War. The founder of the Institute, Professor Fredrik Stang, was a man of vision and practical intelligence. Stang realised that the Norwegian neutrality during the war made it possible for Norway to provide a meeting ground for scientists, to ensure continuation of the flow of communication that had been disrupted due to the war. At the same time, to do so could serve to gain Norwegian academia a much-needed access to the international scientific debate within the field of humanities and that which later became the social sciences. The activities of the Institute were to be funded on the premise of the psychic unity of mankind, and this premise to be explored though an empirically oriented comparative approach. Stang's vision, or rather, the premise of mankind's psychic unity, was conceived as an antidote to future wars, and research was instigated in the areas of customary law, comparative historical linguistics, history of religions and comparative ethnography.

This approach which advocated the development of theoretical perspectives informed by field-work, and which set the study of ways of life over the study of conventionalised 'high culture' in a diffusionist perspective, is still with us today and has proved very fertile. From the very beginning, researchers were invited to give lectures and the Institute also supported publishing activities. Among the early lecturers at the Institute were Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski and Marcel Mauss.

The Second World War made it difficult for the Institute to continue its policy of inviting French and German speakers together, as Norway's stance of neutrality had been broken. After a short period that concentrated only on Nordic research, international guest lecturers such as V. Gordon Childe and Ralph Linton were again invited. During the 1970s, due to changes in the Institute's financial situation and also as a result of the growth in international activities instigated by the University of Oslo, the

lecture series was discontinued. In its place Professor of Social Anthropology Fredrik Barth suggested a concentration of field research in areas where cultures were confronting radical change and/or were threatened by extinction due to the forces of modernity. In 1978, the Institute Board (with representatives of Norway's four universities) at the suggestion of Professor of Linguistics Even Hovdhaugen, made a decision to channel its resources for research into prioritised geographical areas, where research would receive financial support for periods of four years. Prioritisation of areas were to be made on the basis of lacunae in research supported by the Universities, with the additional condition that original research could be carried out in the region. In other words, the Institute was to take on an instigating function, and has continued to do so. In this way the Institute has provided a much-needed support for so-called free (that is not programme-oriented) research. This support has been of particular importance for social anthropology in Norway, where a number of long-term field-works have been made possible through the Institute's funding. Equally important in this respect has been the very generous intellectual and moral support of Professor of Social Anthropology Axel Sommerfelt.

The second area that was chosen as a field of study was Oceania. The Institute supported field-work in this area from 1985 to 1990, and students and scholars from social anthropology, history of religions and linguistics came to participate in this programme. The area of Oceanic research was practically non-existent in Norway when the programme was introduced, apart from the early work of Johannes Falkenberg in Australia. Professor Torben Monberg was invited from Denmark together with Professor George Milner from England as advisers in the introductory phase.

The seminar of which this volume is a result was held in Oslo 1996, and received financial support by the Institute. By this time, the group of scholars working in Oceania had become numerous. At the department of Linguistics at the University of Oslo, an Oceania group instigated by Professor Hovdhaugen had been given a prize by the Norwegian Research Council 'for Excellence in Research' for work carried out in Polynesia. Part of this prize has gone into financing work on this volume. At the Department of Social Anthropology, a group of young scholars had conducted a seminar on the problem of cognatic kinship for some years. Based on their varied field-work experience from Tonga, Aotearoa

New Zealand, Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Tokelau they decided that the time had arrived to come together in the spirit of Stang, that is, to compare their respective projects. Some of the results of this endeavour are contained in this volume.

All contributors to this volume have benefited from generous funding by the Institute that has enabled them to do extensive field-work in their respective communities. Field-work experience and an ability to work closely together over a period of some years have fostered a common focus on the formation of lived worlds. All chapters in this book thus maintain a perspective on social worlds as lived experience. The theme uniting our approach is that people do not only perceive their world – they live in it. Lived-in worlds are moral communities in which experience is organised. People do not simply discover the world when born into it; they are taught it. They do not come to it simply by cognition but also through values. In the course of everyday life, a meaningful order is not only an unselfconscious inheritance of culture, but also a self-conscious perpetuation of ideas, values and morals. Our common focus is thus on collective action itself. We wish to pinpoint relational activities, in which people act, mobilise resources, labour, seek influence and talk; in short make their world happen, so to speak. The relational activities discussed in this volume, such as the walking of paths, the making of sides, feeding and being fed, are not only representative actions of a social order but are constitutive acts that hold premises for the future. Within this approach cosmology does not stand in a relation of representation to the social but is an essential constituent of the latter.

Thus our discussion concerned with socialities of experience harbour a critique of an anthropology that reduces culture and society to objects, rules and principles, or even to symbols and texts. Our comparative approach, therefore, is not of the kind in which a relationship, a principle of organisation, a structure or a model pertinent to one place is held to be applicable elsewhere. Rather our perspective on the nature of social worlds as lived experience allows us to bring forth certain continuities of conceptualisation between the diverse communities presented in this volume. If these societies can be compared by reference to the conceptualisations they hold in common, it is precisely the necessity of collective action as constitutive acts holding premises for the future. In this energy of collectivity they generate forms of relating that indeed also are distinctive. It is our hope that this

volume may represent a fitting tribute to all those who have worked and still work to make it possible to maintain an interest in other ways of life.

Ingjerd Hoëm and Sidsel Roalkvam
Oslo 31.12. 2002

Notes

1. The volume *Instituttet for Sammenlignende Kulturforskning 1922 – 172*, by Leif Amundsen, Universitetsforlaget: Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø, has been used as a source of reference.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Jonathan Friedman

I first came into contact with the chapters in this book at a seminar in Oslo, which I found quite exciting, for here a group of researchers all specialised in the Pacific had been working together for some time and coming up with a perspective on social life that, while present in anthropology, was not consistently developed in the context of a single regional specialisation. There is something new and important in this collection of papers from a truly exciting seminar. There is a consistency in their attempt to achieve a new kind of ethnographic description. Most ethnography has been constructed out of a set of assumed categories that have been understood implicitly to be necessary to a proper understanding of other people's behaviour. These categories divide the practical field into persons, things, relations between such persons and things, subjects, roles, rituals and a whole series of other objectified and separable terms that can be used to identify and tag phenomena in the experience of the ethnographer. The ethnographies that result from such premises reveal differences in the way people conceive of the world which can be rendered in terms of explicit models, rules and principles of organisation. They may describe the relation between representatives of named groups as an exchange relation in which transactions can be enumerated and classified appropriately. A gives to B and receives from B, A and B being distinguishable units and parties to the exchange. Thus Radcliffe-Brown could describe alliance as a relation established between already extant groups. The structuralist critiques of Dumont and Lévi-Strauss were quite incomprehensible for this empiricist for whom the elements of theoretical models were abstracted from observable realities. For

structuralists the observable realities were to be generated by more abstract models. Dumont, explicitly, questioned the applicability of the kinds of categories employed by structural functionalism in understanding other kinds of social order. His well-known argument is that the structure of caste organisation could not be understood in terms of Western categories of stratification such as class or estate. Caste was a total order in which the sacred is inseparable from the social, in which the nature of any one social group could be only in relation to a larger whole. In a similar way, he claimed for the Australian Aboriginal societies studied by Radcliffe-Brown, that local group structure was a mere product of an encompassing structure of alliance. But what has structuralism got to offer in this context? I shall suggest, contrary to usual understandings, that there is a significant relation between structuralism and phenomenology, one that is clearly demonstrated in the chapters of this book.

The continuity can be witnessed in the way Dumont's analysis is deepened in Kapferer's comparison of national identity in Sri Lanka and Australia. Here the implicit argument is that the way in which social relations are constituted involves subjects in the immediacy of those relations so that no understanding of the latter can be achieved without a grasp of the way social experience is structured. This is certainly far from Dumont's juridical approach, but it harbours an important continuity. This lies in the attempt to uncover other forms of relatedness and not to assume that our forms are applicable to the understanding of others. The practice of caste divides the world differently from the complex of relations that generate class. The relation between the individualist body and modern class formations forms a whole of a different kind than the holistic whole of Indian civilisation in which the body is structured into the larger social sphere via a hierarchy of increasingly inclusive microcosms. If there is an apparent contradiction between structuralism and the phenomenological approach it lies in the fact that the former tends to treat structure as constant and organising rather than as a product of practice itself. However, this contradiction is resolved in the realisation that structure is immanent in practice. The issue of structure and practice has, of course, been discussed for years in anthropology as in sociology, although the two terms have never been treated as aspects of the same reality. Instead it has usually been assumed that they are diametrically opposed to one another. This kind of reification reduces structure to *habitus*, institutional order, and value systems while practice refers to the field of action itself. In this more holistic approach, structure refers to the

systemic properties of practice. It does not lie on the same plane of reality but is accessible only by conjecture and hypothesis. Structure is the model of the life process, not a bundle of organised objects that enters into such process.

Many of the authors of these chapters refer to the work of Wagner and Strathern who have both tried to apply some of the insights of phenomenology to the ethnography of Oceania. They have stressed the necessity of understanding the way in which worlds are constituted as experiential wholes and here we are on common ground with the authors referred to above. Other studies leading in this direction are that of Csordas whose work is very much inspired by Merleau-Ponty and J. Weiner, a Melanesianist, whose inspiration is Heidegger. Then, of course, there is the new work by Kapferer (1997) which tackles the nature of social life in terms of intentionality, developed in a powerful way out of the work of Husserl.

Structuralism and Phenomenology

In many of the chapters we are confronted with a situation of highly structured relations that are at the same time generative, creating numerous homologous domains that are structured by specific kinds of practice. How this occurs and what it is that provides the high level of consistency or homology that appears to unite the many domains of social experience of these Pacific peoples, is the question which remains to be addressed in this kind of approach.[1]

In order to reinstate the value of a structuralist perspective, I would like to submit an argument concerning the ontological status of structure in the work of Lévi-Strauss that has been marginalised in the British and American discussions of his work. It has usually been assumed that structuralism is about abstract rules or principles and this is indeed a possible interpretation of structuralist analysis. It has even been institutionalised in the British version of structuralism in which structure refers to mental categories and their interrelations, rather than to actually interacting people in concrete circumstances. The oppositions between structure and practice, between mental and material, between category and behaviour have guided much of the discussion, so much so that when culturalist- and practice-oriented approaches came to the fore in the 1980s, they did so largely at the expense of and in opposition to structuralist understandings. Bourdieu's renowned critique of L-S is an important and interesting exploration of the issues, but it does not really overcome

the problem that it sets out to solve. That exchange can only be properly understood as a potentially unstable relation which gains its structure from politically strategic choices to avoid conflict and reinforce local power, and is surely an important point to make against a notion of reciprocity as a politically unproblematic principle or rule to be applied to the organisation of social relations. L-S has himself accepted this criticism, but he has rejoined that this does not subtract from the fact that such structures have properties that are not reducible to their political cores. These are the so-called structural properties of social relations, which can be deduced from the latter, their logic, so to speak. Structure then is about the properties of social relations, more specifically, the non-intentional or deducible properties of such relations which themselves form vast networks of great consequence that cannot simply be ignored. In a series of lectures, to my knowledge unpublished, in which L-S addressed some of the critique of his original work on Australian kinship systems, he tried to show that there was a rather indeterminate relation between actual control over people and their movement and the resultant structures of exchange which could be identical, irrespective of the authority relations within which they are embedded. Thus 'mother-in-law bestowal' could indeed be a form of relation between groups which had second cross-cousin marriage as its consequence, but the structural properties of the exchange remain identical, i.e., no matter who is in charge of the actual transactions. On the other hand, it might be argued that the formal properties of the exchange tell us nothing about the actual lived qualities of that exchange, and here L-S would, again, certainly agree. The fact that relatedness is a concrete practice which contains a great many cultural and existential properties does not contradict the structuralist model as such. The opposition between phenomenological and structural approaches is a product of assuming that they are alternative approaches to the same phenomena. They are, in fact, complementary aspects of a potentially larger project of understanding the nature of the social order.

In *La Pensée Sauvage*, Lévi-Strauss discussed, at length, what he then referred to as the 'totemic operator'. It might seem odd that this ultrastructuralist book might be used to argue for a more complete phenomenological understanding, but such an argument can be made. On the surface the totemic operator is a mere combinatory schema, a formalism that divides the cosmos into distinctive species, subspecies and body parts, and then recombines them at the lower end to form specific individuals. In formal terms, the individual is thus completely individuated, i.e., different from all other

individuals insofar as he or she represents a unique combination of properties. On the other hand, a particular combination is a specific set selected from a common pool of properties that link the individual to the larger totemic group and ultimately to a position in the totemic universe; but there is more! Individuals are created via the attribution of names, and the names are themselves specific combinations of attributes so that the description of a child via the totemic operator is a description of the person's personality, life history, etc. The person is thus totally embedded in his particularity within the larger universe of totemic beings that can be said to account for the entire social world. Personhood and cosmos are thus inextricably tied together at the same time as the flexibility of individuation is made salient. Lévi-Strauss's understanding of the totemic world can be said to open the way for a phenomenological analysis of the constitution of the social world, even if his own analysis does not move in this direction.

It should be noted in this respect that the study of personhood as a socially constituted experience which could take forms very different than Western individualism, was developed very early in France, in the work of Mauss and, in a different way, in Léenhardt, and in the series of works on the constitution of the person in Africa and Southeast Asia (less known) that led to the important work of Augé (1975) and Héritier (1981). All of this preceded by many years the so-often cited work of Marilyn Strathern (1988) as well as the work on Personhood and experience in the United States.

The Chapters

Many of the chapters in this volume focus on a complex of relations including terms such as path, feeding, making sides, as strategic and generative forms of sociality. They describe the way in which relations have to be fed, the way in which their substance needs to be maintained constantly. Exchange relations are not simply implementations of a set of rules. They are acts of the constitution of the social and they are multivalent in their significance, creating and replicating relations of space, gender, hierarchy and equality. The oppositions are not merely categorical differences but social conflicts. But ultimately the origins of these practices must be investigated and here we enter into the difficult area of historical continuities. The usual suggestions concerning commonalities in Oceanic social structure stress dualism, people of the land versus people of the sea, chiefs versus commoners, male versus female. This dualism is usually reduced

to a kind of mental or cultural structure that can be said to organise behaviour. *This is inadequate to an understanding of the immediate nature of a practice of making sides which does not seem to be a product of a cultural model, but a immanent form of interaction related to the contradictions between practising hierarchy; equality, locality versus exchange.*

Rune Paulsen's analysis of the relation between hierarchy and equality among the Iwam links the cosmological pair forest/clearing to disorder/order contradictions of maintaining social structure by means of a steady 'feeding' and maintenance of flows in the right direction. He shows how Iwam sociality organises relations to nature in an integral cosmology that is simultaneously an ontology. The dark humidity of the forest is contrasted to light of the clearing as decomposition and death to growth and life. This contrast is a dynamic relation of contradictory forces rather than a mere symbolic opposition. It can be said as many of the other articles also argue that these highly meaningful categories are the constitution of the social rather than their reflection. The marking of social status, the making of social distance and social hierarchy are struggles against decay. Within this framework, the unstable relations between generations and sexes, the struggle for individual independence and the stress that it engenders resonate with the larger experience of forest and clearing. The fact that before *Pax Australiensis,* the Iwam lived in large warring villages may say something of the tensions involved in their social existences. In fact, it is the headhunt ritual that eradicates all conflicts, caused by difference, in the name of the achieved equality of the hunt, and that the new Peace may have created an imbalance in the relations between hierarchy and equality.

Ingjerd Hoëm provides a clear praxis-oriented approach such as that outlined above to a classic issue in Polynesian anthropology, the various forms of social dualism opposing male:female, chief:commoner, sea:land. Kinship is not a mere structure but a performance in which new materials can be introduced without altering the basic nature of the practice. The basis of making sides is 'feeding' which expresses authority and obedience, and which is linked to control over land and other resources. Thus sides of an individual's family can refer to Tokelauan versus Samoan or Western or X and these sides are in their turn part of the interpretation of a person's characteristics or status. Siding over time is expressed in the form of paths, the genealogical constitution of group and personal position. Here again the opposition of egalitarian and hierarchical appears in the difference between competitive yet 'unserious' relations in which hierarchy is not

established and open to competing claims, in the political relations between groups, and the hierarchical siding built into formal meetings, *fono*, within the kin group. This might be related to the historical vicissitudes of political dominance among competing atolls.

Arve Sørum's chapter on the Bedamini of Papua New Guinea provides an argument central to many of the other chapters. He shows how social relations are imbued with cosmological properties as concrete aspects of reality, how the world is conceived as a process of confluence that is not an image of the natural world, but a major process in the formation of social relations. The sharing relation as the major constituent of kinship/alliance relations expresses in the form of feeding or sharing of food where eating is a crucial metaphor in which seniority, gender and the like, are embedded in the formation of a unity. The merging of persons is the principal process involved in sharing. What is shared is substance, and even if the relations are asymmetrical, they are simultaneously complementary, thus forming a totality. Thus Bedamini social life is organised by a series of replications of similar forms of relating, providing a consistence that links the social and natural in a single unity.

Edvard Hviding's chapter on New Georgia, more specifically, Morovo Lagoon, focuses on what has commonly been known as cognatic kinship. It explores the ways in which the practice of side and path provide a rationale for the complexities and apparent incompatibilities of the latter. The discussion of the nature of cognatic kinship in the Pacific has been a subject in its own right, often dealt with as if it were another kind of structure or rather non-structure along side of a more highly structured unilineal descent. Hviding demonstrates elegantly the way in which the forms of sociality, understood internally or emically, put kinship in its place within larger strategies of relatedness. The kin groups are associated with *puava* or territories bearing the same names and the latter are crucial resource bases for the functioning of the kin groups. His analysis of the *butubutu* indicates that what might first appear as a cognatic group is in fact more flexible and that groups may display clear tendencies to patrilineality or matrilineality, depending upon political position related often to geographical position. Patrilineal tendencies are related to chiefly, i.e., political and coastal position where matrilineal tendencies are related to the inland and to locality. The making of sides in this complex concerns basic political strategies in a social order that structures spatial, political and gender relations. It appears that the coastal/inland relations of exchange and tribute are organised

around a coastal dominance that might itself be related to 'path', to the external alliances and trade- monopolised by coastal leaders. Hviding suggests here a crucial linkage between the regional systemic and local organisational properties of these societies. While his approach to the issues is based on a notion of indigenous theory rather than phenomenological analysis, he arrives at conclusions that are largely congruent with those of the other contributions.

Arne Perminow's chapter on Kotu Island, Tonga, explores the shared experience space of Tongans and the structures that it generates as well as the way such structures articulate with Western institutions and concepts. This represents an important contribution to the critique of 'inventionism' in Anthropology. The formation of an opposition between a Tongan and a *palangi* way is not a Western borrowing but an internally orchestrated articulation of the Western presence. Opposition between Tongan order and Western disorder, between inland pre-Christian disorder and darkness and seaward light and order are Tongan ways of assimilating their relation to the larger world into their own existences. This diametric dualism is contrasted at the same time to a less salient concentric dualism in which movement from the periphery to the centre of the village is associated with a movement from loudness, playfulness and intimacy to seriousness, formality and control. These are themes that are found throughout Polynesia and are clearly echoed in the chapter by Hoëm, in a different context.

Another aspect of the confrontation between local worlds and the foreign is taken up in Jorun Bræk Ramstad's discussion of an urban Maori woman's homecoming experience. The chapter focuses on the misunderstanding created when the woman in question demonstrates her strong style in generosity that makes reciprocal understandings difficult to maintain. Her *aroha*, 'love' is not denied but her style is overbearing in relation to the necessity of maintaining equilibrium in an equality of sharing, so that no 'sticking out like a sore thumb' is appropriate. The analysis makes use of the model of the social drama to accentuate the way in which a particular good-willed performance of generosity clashes with the forms of sociality which demand constraint. The reintegration process occurs by identifying the person's behaviour with another tribe and by accepting it as useful in certain circumstances. Much of the discussion, which is applicable to other Polynesian examples is related to the dependency of one's identity on the 'gaze of the other', so that social control is achieved by means of what the literature sometimes calls 'shame'.

Astrid Anderson's chapter on the Wogeo concerns the way space is socialised by the practice of social relations, one that structures the world into places and paths between them. This is not a mere metaphor for descent and alliance, but rather an alternative means of conceptualising such relations, one that stresses movement, flow and the fact that both place and path are products of action rather than fixed institutions. Here again, the major argument is about the way in which the organisation of concrete spatial relations that are infused with the history of the society are not symbolic of other social structures, but the very organisation of such structures. This returns us to the relation between the structuralist and phenomenological approaches, the argument being that the structuralist analyses the properties of a larger social reality which is contained in its lived form in the organisation of sociality. Social structure is not, thus, a reality which can be represented by more concrete forms or metaphors. It is that which can be abstracted from such forms.

Sidsel Roalkvam analyses the notions of pathway and side in Onotoa in Kiribati. Her material is remarkably similar to the other Polynesian examples, and even to some of the Melanesian examples. Path is both spatial and temporal insofar as it is constitutive of genealogical relations to faraway points from which ancestors have come and which are not merely traces but living channels along which powerful forces move. Powerful magic and objects of prestige are identified in terms of their paths and the latter are also constitutive of political relations among groups. Making sides is a practice of identification as well, one that defines the constitutive parts of a larger whole, the social relation. Sides are in another sense the local manifestation of different paths that come together in a place. The entire social organisation can be understood as a flow of life forces structured into a specific hierarchy that is itself defined by the points of origin that are distributed in the larger land- and seascapes and which are ranked with respect to their relative power.

The Themes

The chapters are informed by closely related approaches that take as their focus the nature of sociality, of experience and strategic form of intentionality that can be said to sculpt socially meaningful worlds. These worlds must be maintained by human investment of energy since they are inherently unstable and susceptible to fragmentation and collapse. Social structures are not innate objects but the continual product of a social- relating

process that generates its own internal contradictions. One theme that unites all of the chapters is that cosmology does not stand in a relation of representation to the social, but is an essential constituent of the latter. Another complex which is common to the chapters on Tonga, Kiribati, Tokelau and Wogeo, concerns the specific constitution of the social; the combination of what might be called concentric and diametric dualism, in the making of sides and the use of path in the definition of status, origin and identity. These are shown to be lived concrete realities rather than abstract structures. The linking between male/female, outside/inside, foreign/local, chief/commoner is a common set in Western Polynesia, Micronesia, Melanesia and even in Eastern Indonesia (not included in this volume). While this is not the place to speculate, it might be suggested that a historical understanding of the regional exchange and political structures of these areas might throw a good deal of light on the formation of certain forms of relatedness that today may take a greater variety of forms than in the past. Two of the chapters, on Tonga and the Maori, deal with the articulation of internally organised sociality and Western or Westernised influences. In both of these cases it is made clear that whatever the historical transformations of the local that may have occurred as these areas were incorporated into the world system, they still generate forms of relating that are distinctive. A phenomenological approach deals with the formation of lived worlds and here it harbours an implicit critique of an anthropology that reduces culture and society to objects, rules and principles, or even symbols and texts. It is the experiential nature of such worlds that dictates against the notion that the introduction of foreign elements implies the formation of a new foreign-based culture, and the invention of a new form of existence. Finally, the chapters on Papua New Guinea thematise the way in which sharing and exchange are forms of merging of selves as well, in a world organised around the contradiction between the making of hierarchy and difference and the forging of equality. These seemingly more basic issues also appear in the other chapters where the practice of fusion is a pivotal aspect of the maintenance of social relations (e.g. Maori). In my own work in Hawaii (Friedman 1998) the theme of fusion is found in many transactions where the differentiation caused by exchange is negated by inverted generosity of the form 'come and take' reciprocal taking, which does not in any way eradicate balance, but makes it all the more implicit and potentially dangerous as well, since its absence causes great pain and withdrawal, i.e., the fragmentation of the larger unity. As the literature on Hawaii made use of the usual

transactional models of exchange, I was unprepared to find what seemed to be something very different. The discussions of sharing in these chapters reinforce my own understanding of the Hawaiian situation and indicate to me the wide distribution of this phenomenon.

The importance of these chapters is that they establish a dense ethnographic approach in research on Oceania that should make a strong impact in the field. They consolidate an argument for a phenomenological ethnography that is compatible with structural understanding. They avoid the postmodernist dead ends of fragmentary description and the objectivist textualising of a previous trend in American anthropology. They maintain a perspective on the nature of social worlds as lived experience that enables them to deal with numerous problems in the understanding of structures of meaning as they relate to forms of sociality. They also demonstrate the degree to which the societies of Oceania are integral and not invented, part of the modern world, but organised in strongly localised ways. The integral here is also the basis of integrity in face of the disintegrating forces of the global system including intellectual forces that would reduce the native to a figment of Western imagination.

Notes

1. This kind of process is of course detailed in some of the early work of Bourdieu (1980), but here we have and shall be stressing the existential coherence or resonance of the structuring process which is in his work reduced to the production of structure alone. Giddens is even more extreme in his notion of structuration which contains none of the phenomenological properties of sociality that we have stressed here.

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Chapter 2

Sociality as Figure

Bedamini Perceptions of Social Relationships

Arve Sørum

Food is a medium through and around which relationships shape themselves; its giving and sharing is a privileged social idiom. Exchange and sharing are general features of existence and general vehicles of understanding. The production, distribution, sharing and consumption of food also have a central position in Bedamini life.

In the evening, there is usually a common meal in the sense that everybody is cooking and eating at the same time. If there is a period when many people sleep in the longhouse, a 'happening' unfolds which at first I found pretty weird. Lots of whooping men run around each other, handing each other bananas and other garden produce. They end up with fewer bananas than they started out with, and mostly eating everybody else's bananas. It amounts to a generalised distribution of one's own food to others, and reception of food from everybody else. The women do the same among themselves, although more discretely, and the 'give and take' also crosses sex boundaries outside the family in cases where that is appropriate. A generalised sharing of the day's collective harvest follows that distribution. These happenings are explicit and moving examples of the fundamental role of foodstuffs in the expression of social relationships, and in the necessity of their continual confirmation.