

Introduction: Revaluing women's wealth in the contemporary Pacific

Anna-Karina Hermkens and Katherine Lepani

A thick verdant swathe of freshly cut coconut leaves composes a wall of green at the top of the fashion runway. Ten small newly woven coconut mats are placed at equidistance on the runway like a resilient green spine, a measure of movement across space and time but grounded in accustomed purpose. At first sight, this evocation of Pacific plant life and the objects of daily labour seem oddly juxtaposed on a platform of modern fashion. But the aesthetic meshing of culture and style, of traditional knowledge and contemporary design, stirs anticipation in the overflowing venue as the audience waits for RUNWAY2015 to begin.

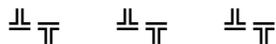
A unique fashion event highlighting eight Papua New Guinea (PNG) designers, six women and two men, RUNWAY2015 was staged at Gateway Hotel in Port Moresby, the nation's capital, on 9 August 2015. The event evolved out of the success of *Stella*, the 'thinking woman's magazine', celebrating its third year of publication covering fashion, design, art, health, travel and life in the contemporary Pacific (Spark 2014, 2015). One of the featured designers of RUNWAY2015, Florence Jaukae Kamel, widely known in PNG as the *Bilum Meri*, had recently returned from New York where one of her exquisite dresses created with the *bilum* (string bag) technique of weaving had been featured in the spring runway show. Her designs, at once elegant, playful and practical, exude a storied aesthetic enlivened by the creative energy of the women whose skilful labour turns the looping of fibre into contemporary fashion.

The lights dim and soft electronic riffs of PNG music announce the commencement of the show. From behind the coconut screen, an older woman emerges onto the runway. She wears a black *meri* blouse and *laplap*, and carries a bunch of coconut fronds. She walks steadily on

bare feet to the far end of the runway, where in one graceful motion she sits down on the mat and begins to rhythmically weave the fronds into a basket. Her labouring presence on the runway establishes the source of creative inspiration, the embodied connection between design and purpose—quick and proficient plaiting for immediate utility, a basket to carry produce from the garden—and between design and enduring value—the transformation of measured labour into an object of beauty with gifting in mind.

Then from behind the screen the models begin to emerge, one by one and in twos and threes; a steady progression down the runway. They glide around the woman on the mat; their gentle gait distinctly PNG, hinting of traditional dance moves from the coast, the islands and the highlands. Each designer's collection is heralded in turn by another woman dressed in simple black and carrying coconut fronds, who again walks gracefully down the runway to the next mat in line, sits down cross-legged and begins plaiting a basket. The steady rhythm of nimble hands sets the pace for the runway models; the embodied knowledge and practice of weaving underscores the textures and colours, the motifs and patterns, and the shape and flow of the garments.

The designer showcase is crowned by a spectacular finale. The models reemerge in steady procession from behind the coconut screen, now dressed in loosely draped black fabric, hair adorned with leaves and flowers, each carrying or wearing an object of PNG cultural wealth—baskets, *bilums*, shell necklaces, breastplates, headdresses, barkcloth, drums, flutes, carved shields. Joined by the women weavers carrying the baskets they have made, the choreographed movement on the runway transitions seamlessly into a traditional dance—lilting steps and voices singing in unison. The overall effect is immediate and resounding: contemporary fashion is multilayered, sustained by the value of deep cultural knowledge and grounded connections to purpose and place.



Everywhere in the Pacific, objects made by women—string bags, fibre skirts, barkcloth, pottery and mats—are used to decorate, wrap, cover, protect, contain and carry the human body. They are used as exchange valuables and commodities; they are critical for land claims and as indices of social relations; they are the embodiments of gender and clan identity and ancestral power. For the Ómie people living in Oro Province,

Papua New Guinea, barkcloth (*nioge*) is intimately associated with the beginning of time and the first ancestors. Ómie myth tells of the first mud-dyed barkcloth, which symbolises the female ancestor's menstrual blood and her capacity to produce children. From these origins, every new generation of Ómie women continues to make and paint barkcloth (Thomas 2012: 484; Modjeska 2012; National Gallery of Victoria 2009; ReDot Gallery n.d.; Thomas 2013: 20). These cloths now travel the world as highly valued objects of 'tribal art', displayed in modern art galleries and museums in Australia, Europe and the United States, and they have become an important source of monetary wealth for the painters and their communities.

As illustrated in the RUNAWAY2015 epigraph above, barkcloth and other fibre arts, such as string bags and fibre skirts, are a vital inspiration to contemporary Pacific artists and designers. Wendi Choulai, one of the Pacific region's most acclaimed textile designers, drew inspiration from the ritual, dance and skirts of her Papuan heritage and extended family. A publication dedicated to her corpus of work reveals that the late artist 'returned again and again to the grass skirt as a textile garment, an icon of ritual and a means of conveying her ideas' (Kinnear 2008: 11). Choulai saw the skirt as a multilayered metaphor that 'incorporated traditions and, through interaction with her clan, provided opportunities for legitimate innovation, the past and the future, inseparable and cohesive' (Kinnear 2008: 11).

The deep, intense and affective nature of fibre arts made by women is revealed through the perspectives and experiences of the Ómie and Choulai, and through the work of other contemporary Pacific artists and designers. There is an enduring dialectic between the sensuous nature of these objects—often intimately intertwined with the body, reproduction, motherhood and social identity—and the artistic and the economic values they are ascribed (see, for example, Addo 2013; Hermkens 2013; Lepani 2012; Veys 2017; Young Leslie and Addo 2007). Animated by women's agency, these precious objects travel across Pacific ethnoscapes, are carried into diasporas, and are creatively remixed with new ideas and new materials. Yet apart from the success and international appreciation of contemporary Pacific fashion, such as that showcased in RUNAWAY2015, and the work of contemporary artists such as Choulai and the Ómie women, the genealogy of Pacific women's creative productivity has received far less attention and validation, especially in the western world. What becomes apparent when considering the historical

and current validations of objects such as *bilums*, barkcloth and clay pots are the pervasive colonial legacies that have privileged the ‘western sensorium’ (Edwards, Gosden and Philips 2006: 1), or a Eurocentric aesthetic perspective and preference. These legacies continue to accord greater value to objects made by men, while devaluing and overlooking objects made by women.

This volume engages critically with debates about wealth and value, materiality, relationality and the social life and agency of things (Gell 1998; Kopytoff 1986), but specifically through a gender lens by bringing woman’s creative productivity to the fore. The chapters draw on ethnographic material from the Trobriand Islands and Oro Province in Papua New Guinea, and Tonga, and from diasporic Tongans and Cook Islanders living in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through a comparative perspective and by situating women’s work and their lives in the *longue durée* of Christian conversion, colonialism, commoditisation and globalisation in the Pacific, from the nineteenth century to the present, the chapters in this volume question, explore and engage in debate with each other about how ‘women’s wealth’ is defined, valued and contested in current exchanges, church programs, sustainable development projects, art and tourist markets, and the challenges of living in diaspora. We celebrate the multilayered sources of inspiration and identity and the connections between deeply held cultural knowledge and contemporary art and design.

Interlocking domains of value and devaluation

Telefol women know the value of their skills, but do not idealise their bilum making tasks. The contexts in which they spin and loop, and the manner in which they pass on their knowledge to one another, reflect the very qualities of the looping itself, in that they are open, flexible and unpretentious (MacKenzie 1991: 108).

Value—or the differential regard, importance and worth attributed to something—is a central concept in our contemporary world of ever-expanding capitalism. Value is also a culturally mediated category that finds various expressions in different social contexts. Moreover, it is foundational to academic scholarship and how we, as social researchers,

focus on specific aspects of value that we think are worth exploring. The projection of value onto ‘things’ and into ‘actions’ is essential in all these processes.

David Graeber, in his influential *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value*, identifies three major streams of thought that converge in the term value. These are:

1. ‘values’ in the sociological sense: conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life
2. ‘value’ in the economic sense: the degree to which an object is desired, particularly, as measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them
3. ‘value’ in the linguistic sense, which goes back to the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (1966), and might be most simply glossed as ‘meaningful difference’ (2001: 1–2).

Graeber’s work revisits previous attempts to come up with a theory of value and, while trying to retain a fundamental link between relativist conceptions of value, such as described by Nancy Munn for the Gawa people of Milne Bay in PNG (1986), and a more universal source of value (Miller 2008), Graeber ultimately recasts value as a model of human meaning making.

Starting with Marxist definitions of consumption and production as universal processes, Graeber introduces Marcel Mauss’s idea of ‘objects that are not consumed’ and posits that most human practice consists of activities that cannot be separately categorised as either consumption or production. Graeber writes:

One cannot hope to understand circulation of valuables in a ‘gift economy’ ... without first taking into account more fundamental processes by which the human person is created and dissolved. And that when such general principles as action and reflection, or the movement between abstract potential and concrete form do appear—which they generally do—these too are always aspects of persons before they are aspects of things (2001: 167).

In short, Graeber argues that the core process of value making involves the creation of people (142). Value emerges from the actions of individuals aimed at reproducing social persons, relations and structures, and it

provides the basis for comparison and regulation. In a similar way, Terence Turner argues that values ‘constitute the most general purposes of social action and the most important qualities of personal identity’ (2012: 501).¹

While acknowledging the quest for a universal source and definition of value, our approach in this volume resonates more directly with Marilyn Strathern’s (1988) work and her emphasis on the local. We each start with an ethnographic concern for what value means and does in particular societies and for particular people, instead of conceiving of value as *a priori* based on labour, or looking for a foundational basis for value (see also Miller 2008). We see our work as consonant with Maureen MacKenzie’s exploration of Telefol string bags (*bilum*), which, as she argues, highlights that objects are not just valued because they derive from secret knowledge, as has sometimes been argued in the context of men’s ritual objects and practices. Value also, and perhaps especially, lies in the physical creation of meaningful objects. MacKenzie observes, ‘Women create cultural value by extending their repertoire of looping technology to make more functional, more aesthetic and more culturally powerful objects’ (1991: 105). The intimate encounters with women and their objects of ‘wealth’ that we describe in this volume all show that value is ultimately about creating meaning; thus, we move beyond viewing value in mere economic terms to emphasise how value is generated in embodied practice.

Recently, value has become the subject of renewed scholarly interest (Angosto-Ferrandez and Presterudstuen 2016; Narotzky and Besnier 2014; Otto and Willerslev 2013a, 2013b; Turner 2008, 2012), with several studies taking up Graeber’s quest and debating whether it is useful or even possible to develop an anthropological theory of value (Miller 2008; Otto and Willerslev 2013a: 19). While there exists ambiguity about the possibility of developing such a theory, the debate has elucidated the most prominent questions related to value creation. These questions ask how value is created in processes of exchange, how different value systems and hierarchies operate, and how value and action are interlinked (Otto and Willerslev 2013a: 19; 2013b). Such themes also pervade the chapters of this volume, although our quest is more directly concerned with issues of gender, power and change. While engaging with anthropological debates on value and with value as a theoretical and analytical tool, we foremost consider value as being part of the way people make sense of

1 Michael Lambek (2013: 149) considers any form of human action from the perspective of value creation.

their own social practice. The chapters in this volume aim to shed light on the processes through which ‘economic’ and ‘cultural’ dimensions of value are intertwined and mutually constitutive within contemporary Pacific worlds. But we also look at how objects made by women are part of the ‘strategies communities use to materialize their social relations, desires and values’ (Bell and Geismar 2009: 3).² The processual focus reveals how values (cultural, social, religious and economic) are materialised in objects as well as created in the very acts of their production and circulation; hence the focus on ‘materialisation’ (Bell and Geismar 2009: 3) rather than just objects per se. This perspective allows us to move beyond classificatory distinctions between art and artefacts—objects of symbolic, creative value, and objects of daily utility—that have been valued differently in time, not only by local and international agents but also by the gendered perspectives of observers, whose differential valuations have been amplified by the passage of time and historical change (Jolly 1992). When we place women and their work in the *longue durée* of western imperialism, we can see several interlocking domains of devaluation.

Devaluation by colonial agents, missionaries and art collectors

Importantly, objects have been attributed and denied different forms of value (Henry, Otto and Wood 2013: 34). Women’s artefacts have historically been given less attention in western valuations; colonists, missionaries and traders, at times each participating in the collection of ‘primitive’ art, attributed more value to the material objects made by men. Nicholas Thomas observes, ‘artifacts produced by women were often neglected by the early collectors, and subsequently by the tribal art market, partly because they were classified as craft rather than art’ (1995: 132). These hierarchical categories reflect outsiders’ valuations of the relative importance of representation, aesthetics and authenticity when

2 Tim Ingold (2012) suggests we differentiate between things and objects. A thing is a process of becoming, while an object is standing over and against its perceiver, with value being created in the ‘very tension or contradiction between flow and fixity, thing and object’ (Henry, Otto and Wood 2012: 34–35). In this volume, we move beyond categorical differentiations according to process and/or perspective. What our material suggests is that objects are always social things, whether static or in motion, concealed or revealed, hidden away in the rafters, carried proudly, or animated through being worn in the public sphere.

validating what constitutes 'art' in the viewed objects, which are informed by the 'western sensorium' with its emphasis on five autonomous senses and preference for the visual.

Especially in the past, collectors of nonwestern material objects have tended to place emphasis on iconographic meaning when evaluating artefacts as art. This means there has been a strong preference for mimetic and representational objects and images (Errington 1998: 87). This preference is based on what Dutton calls, 'ethnocentric aesthetic absolutism' (1995: para. 8), the view that naturalistic (western) art is more developed or sophisticated than nonnaturalistic art with origins outside the European oeuvre. Significantly, the preference for naturalism determines the market value for ethnographic art. 'The most desirable tribal carvings in the Western market for such art continue to be renderings of the human form' (Dutton 1998: para. 5), which in Oceania are objects predominantly made by men.

Several scholars have raised the problem of cross-cultural aesthetic understanding in evaluating ethnographic objects (Danto 1988; Dutton 1993; Errington 1998; Price 1989). Alfred Gell argues that 'the desire to see art of other cultures aesthetically tells us more about our own ideology and its quasi-religious veneration of objects as aesthetic talismans, than it does about these other cultures' (1998: 3). Instead, he describes art as a system of action that is meant to 'do' something. Thus, the visual complexity of Trobriand canoe prows is made to captivate *kula* trading partners and stimulate them to give more valuable exchange goods than they initially intended (Gell 1998: 68). In a similar way, the colourful and shiny appearance of Maisin dancers (Hermkens this volume) is meant to evoke a particular response from the audience. However, it is not just the dancers' visual appearance that is a significant modality. The strong fragrance of the flowers, other plant decorations and the dancers' abundantly coconut-oiled glistening skins, the rhythm of the drums and feet shuffling, and the balanced composition of the dances all come together in a sensory experience that is meant to overwhelm the audience. With the ancestors embodied in each dancer through clan ornaments and designs, the sensory efficacy of the dancers and their performance displays the degree of strength and support of the ancestors. If the performance is strong, it induces their hosts to give them an abundance of food. If their visual and physical performance is weak, the dancers may receive little in return; their hosts may even ridicule the dancers, as well as their ancestors.

The valuing of objects (carvings, canoes, barkcloth and body ornaments), in terms of western aesthetics, risks overlooking indigenous sensoriums, intentions and validations. Contemporary collectors of tribal art tend to value ‘authentic’ objects (see Shiner 1994); that is, those objects made before major social change took place. The enigma of ‘tourist art’ signalled the demise of the authentic (Errington 1998: 99, 118, 128). As such, aesthetic and commercial valuations of Pacific material culture seldom take recent developments and creative productions into account; in effect, contemporary material culture is devalued. Consequently, ‘Western connoisseurs’ determine what ethnic art should be, how much it is worth (Price 1989: 69), and whether it should be collected and displayed in museums and art galleries.

Within this hierarchy of foreign validations, textiles hold a unique position as works of art and of utility, as material sources of sacred ancestral power and as instruments of Christian conversion. Thomas observes that barkcloth (*tapa*) ‘has long aroused the interest of Europeans’ (1995: 132) and, consequently, has been collected abundantly by missionaries, art collectors and anthropologists. In fact, Margaret Jolly (2014: 429, 431) argues that *tapa* and other textiles have been intimate partners of Christianity in Oceania, especially as icons of conversion. Jolly makes the case that it was the affinity between Oceanic and western textiles as women’s creations that was recognised by early missionaries. However, while they noticed the sanctity of male-created images of ancestors, which were then burned, buried and collected by missionaries as ‘idols’, they failed to register the sanctity of Oceanic cloths, such as *tapa* and pandanus and banana leaves, in protecting *mana*, wrapping the dead and honouring rank (Jolly 1996).

While barkcloth stirred the interest of colonial agents (see also Hermkens 2014), like many other indigenous fabrics it was often quickly replaced by western-style garments, and missionary sewing classes replaced indigenous techniques of making cloth (see Lepani this volume). This is viewed by some as proof of conversion, whereby Oceanic people have succumbed to western models of gender and sexuality through the experience of colonisation (Jolly 2014: 429). Yet, as Jolly demonstrates, such a view ignores how both indigenous and introduced objects of gendered labour, including creolisations, are ‘saturated with values of indigenous sanctity and rank, anticolonial resistance, cultural pride, women’s collectivities, national identities and transnational connections in an increasingly

globalised world' (433). In this volume, we acknowledge that these deep layers of value, meaning and agency are inherent in cloth and other objects made by Oceanic women.

Significantly, the historical interest in and commodification of tapa by missionaries and other colonial agents continues to influence local valuations of this object. This is revealed in Elizabeth Bonshek's chapter on the barter exchange of clay pots for tapa in Collingwood Bay. Here, recent attempts to commercialise tapa have unintentionally redistributed or recalibrated values that were previously coequal. This shows how the value and materiality of objects are not only situated in contemporary local and global power relations but are part of the historical processes in the *longue durée* of imperial interaction and exchange (Ingold 2012: 434). Moreover, Bonshek's chapter points us to the fact that in many places, mass-produced items, such as plastic containers and cloth, have replaced objects locally made by women. As Bonshek observes, today most women do *not* make pots, as pottery making has declined significantly in the context of social and economic changes.

Similar transformations are noted in Jane Horan's chapter about the Cook Island diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand, where women are making fewer *tivaivai* quilts for ceremonial gift giving and purchased duvets are becoming acceptable substitutes. Horan argues that the value of these commodities resides in their social meaning rather than in the female creativity embodied in the mats and *tivaivai* that women have made in the past. Earlier substitutes, such as calico and quilts, were still linked to women, but through more Christian notions of women as mothers. Horan's example is an indication of the way that recently introduced commodities *replace* the objects of women's wealth. But does this also mean that the value of gift exchange is rendered gender neutral? Commensurate measures of value continue to frame gift giving in gender-specific ways. Transactions retain the gendered nature of the gift along relational lines and through the work of women in organising and staging ceremonial events. Whether gifts are purchased commodities and envelopes of money, or objects that have come into being through women's creative labour, the coherent value in meaning making is still legitimated by gender.

The processes, dialogues and tensions by which commodities gain commensurability with or replace women's wealth are also detailed in the chapters that deal with *doba*, the banana fibre skirts and bundles of dried banana leaves made by Trobriand women. Michelle MacCarthy

considers how people simultaneously engage in different ‘spheres’ or ‘regimes’ of value in their daily life (Appadurai 1986; Bloch and Parry 1989). She invokes Dumont’s (1980) hierarchy of values to understand how Trobrianders reconcile values ascribed by the church in relation to values embodied in *gulagula*, or the manners and customs associated with the ancestors. If the more individualistic discourses advocated by the church, particularly the emerging evangelical denominations, assume ascendancy over *gulagula* with respect to women’s domestic labour and economic productivity, the result is not only a change in the orientation of values but also a change in how both objects, such as *doba*, and actions are assigned value, increasingly in more economic and monetary terms. Katherine Lepani deals with similar issues in her chapter on the enduring material value of *doba*. While the incorporation of cloth, cash and introduced commodities has produced an efflorescence of new forms of exchange (Gregory 1982, 2015), this has not supplanted the importance of *doba*, which continues to comprise the central transaction in mortuary distributions. However, both chapters reveal that some people complain about ‘women wasting their time’ with *doba*, and that it diverts women away from more appropriate forms of work. The effects of these shifting regimes and valuations of women’s work are especially significant in relation to the current emphasis of development policy on women’s empowerment and economic participation, a theme that we consider later in this introduction.

Academic regimes of value

The categorical division between art and craft promulgated by western valuations has not only informed colonial collecting practices but has had a continuing influence on the visibility and valuation of objects made by Pacific women in the contemporary global economy. The preoccupation with classifying objects as either art or artefact has also influenced anthropological analyses of indigenous objects and subsistence economies. The earlier work of anthropologists generated theoretical claims that not only the modern western world but also ‘primitive man’ makes a distinction between craft and art, wherein craft, such as weaving and pottery, is relegated by indigenous men to ‘inferiors’ (i.e. women), while arts such as sculpture are reserved for men (Fraser 1962: 13). Douglas Fraser also argued that indigenous values were attributed differentially to craft made by women and art made by men. While objects of craft are deemed ‘practical and secular’ and thus easily replaced, the highly valued

works of art made by men are not mundane and can only be parted with 'if properly despiritualized' (Fraser 1962: 13). It is obvious that Fraser's perception and definition of 'primitive art' is grounded in a decidedly masculinist value system. Moreover, it is grounded in the western sensorium (Edwards, Gosden and Philips 2006: 1), which recognises (only) five autonomous senses, with vision ('reading') elevated to the highest position (Hamilakis 2011: 210).

The result of this gendered differentiation and emphasis on the visual, instead of on touch, taste, hearing, smell, or a juncture of these or other modalities such as balance (Hamilakis 2011: 210), is that objects have predominantly been approached from aesthetic and functional viewpoints. The 'anthropology of art' field has often used semiotics and structuralism to explain objects of 'art' as profoundly cultural phenomena (for example, Boas 1927; Forge 1979; Gerbrands 1990; Layton 1991, 2003; Morphy 1994; Price 1989), whereas studies of objects classified as artefacts have focused mainly on form, style, technology and function. Examples of such latter analyses are found in museum and archaeological studies. However, since Nicholas Thomas's *Entangled Objects* (1991) and his more recent works (for example, Thomas et al. 2013), much has changed in the way ethnographic and also archaeological collections are examined. Contemporary academics working in museum contexts, such as volume contributors Elizabeth Bonshek, Elisabetta Gneccchi-Ruscone and Fanny Wonu Veys, have pointed out that they are 'unpacking the collection' and engaging in 'assemblage analysis', which means exploring the origins and provenance of the collections, as well as collectors' and indigenous motivations. As Bonshek stresses, we are looking for signs of indigenous agency in museum collections. Many museum projects, such as Thomas's most recent *Pacific Presences Project*, are about creating connections between museum objects and the descendants of those who created these objects. In addition to the 'anthropology of art' field and museum studies, anthropology has traditionally placed emphasis on the cultural significance and economic value of objects, concentrating in particular on exchange values (for example, Jeudy-Ballini and Juillerat 2002; Mauss 1990).

Importantly, the categorical and hierarchical valuations of material objects as art or artefact are replicated in anthropology's traditional focus on reciprocal exchange (see Myers 2001). This comes to the fore in Annette Weiner's (1976, 1980 and 1989) critique of Bronisław Malinowski's (1922) work and his focus on what men do in the context of Trobriand

kula exchanges. While Malinowski defined Trobriand women's fibre skirts and banana leaf bundles as crafts and obscured them from his analyses, Weiner's work was critical for establishing an anthropological focus on the significance of women's objects in local cosmologies and subsistence economies. Weiner's ethnography of Trobriand mortuary exchange, *Women of Value, Men of Renown* (1976), firmly established the concept of 'women's wealth' and provided an ethnographic benchmark for interpreting the meaning and value of objects produced by women, and the investments of women's productivity in processes of social reproduction and reciprocal exchange.

Anthropological thinking about objects and exchange also involves the distinction between gift and commodity. These ideas are grounded in the important theoretical contributions of Karl Marx and Marcel Mauss, which have influenced concepts of value and understandings of the relations of production and consumption, reciprocity and nonreciprocity, and equality and inequality. In his influential book, *Gifts and Commodities*, Chris Gregory (1982: 19) brings together Marx's critique of the capitalist system of commodity production and consumption, and Mauss's perspective on reciprocity in gift exchange, with the premise that commodity exchange establishes a relationship between the objects exchanged, whereas gift exchange establishes a relationship between the subjects. Gregory further defines gift exchange as an exchange of inalienable things between persons who are in a state of reciprocal dependence (1982: 19; 2015). The main purpose of the gift is to establish and maintain social relationships. Commodities, on the other hand, represent relations between 'aliens', or strangers, by means of alienable things, with the main purpose of exchanging things of commensurate value. In short, Gregory (1982: 41) advocates a firm relationship between personhood and modes of exchange, stating that 'things and people assume the social form of objects in a commodity economy while they assume the social form of persons in a gift economy'. Gregory (1982: 23) acknowledges that empirical reality is much more complex and diverse; for example, a single object can assume different social forms depending upon the context (see Godelier 1977: 128). Moreover, people themselves may not draw such clear distinctions between these forms of exchange, and their attributed social contexts may differ from those ascribed by western scholars (Firth 1959: 138). In fact, the possibility of distinguishing between gift and commodity exchange, and the extent to which their social implications can be determined, has been strongly contested (for example, Appadurai 1986). Further, 'their

widespread copresence demands careful revelation of how these forms of exchange mutually articulate and how they crystallise and engender different dynamics of sociality and agency' (Morgain and Taylor 2015: 3).³

The ambiguity in distinguishing between objects and persons, and the copresence of gifts and commodities, as for example in bride-price exchanges (Jolly 2015), is visible in Anna-Karina Hermkens' chapter. Hermkens details the significance of women's objects and their shifting roles in gift, barter and commodity exchanges, and the tension between local and international valuations of these objects and women's work and activities. Her chapter reveals the importance of local definitions of value and exchange, and how value is intimately intertwined with exchanges—the 'invisible chains that link relations between things to relations between people' (Gregory 1997: 12). Accordingly, value is not an abstract, independent entity; value has valuers who judge and determine what is good about specific ways of living together (Gregory 2009; Sykes 2013). All the chapters in this volume make visible the power relations and gendered agency imbued in the objects that women produce, which register differential degrees of value through networks of exchange.

Yet anthropological theories of exchange continue to skew and delimit the scope of what is made visible along gender lines. Weiner observed that 'exchange theories reveal strongly enhanced gender biases because the relevant subject matter remains what males exchange between one another' (Weiner 1992: 12). In general, theories ignore female-produced objects and exchanges performed by women; this exclusion suggests that women's objects do not have the qualities of gifts (or 'art') and that their forms of exchange do not play a significant role in social life (see also MacKenzie 1991: 21–22). Weiner (1992: x) argues that exchange theories that segregate women and men into domestic and political spheres respectively are at the heart of this distorted view (see also Strathern 1988). The emphasis on public, male-dominated activities is clearly visible in the anthropological focus on gift exchange (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992). Yet types of exchanges embedded in daily social practice, including practices of sharing are often overlooked. Consequently, women's objects, such as mats and string bags, which are typically described as utilitarian

3 See Gregory (2015) for a reflective essay on various theoretical debates subsequent to the initial publication of *Gifts and Commodities*.

by collectors and anthropologists alike, and women's roles and actions in these different spheres of production and exchange, appear to have lesser value.

Weiner's work demonstrates that Trobriand women's banana leaf bundles and skirts, neglected by earlier anthropologists including Malinowski, are in fact important aspects of men's exchange, including the complex transactions of the *kula* trade (Weiner 1980, 1983). Her ethnographic accounts predominantly focus on the economic properties of bundles and skirts in mortuary exchanges; she argues that these female objects represent women's wealth and power in the cosmological domain of Trobriand matrilineal society (1983: 20). However, Weiner's emphasis on universal cosmological power positions women's reproductive agency, and the objects they make, outside of historical processes (Jolly 1992; Strathern 1981). Her analysis fails to address how women's power results from 'the relation between the interior world of the Trobriands and the exterior world in which it is situated' (Jolly 1992: 57). That women control the production and distribution of textiles and other material objects of exchange does not confer positions of high social status and economic power unequivocally. Weiner later acknowledged:

[Women's] power may be skewed in particular ways ... but the extent of the symbolic density in cloth and women's involvement in its production and control are a measure of how this gender-based power is organized (1994: 397–98).

Weiner's focus on women's wealth inspired other scholars to focus on the gendered dimensions of materiality, productivity and exchange. This work (for example, Addo 2013; Bolton 1996, 2003; Ewins 2009; Hermkens 2013; Kaepler 1980, 1995; MacKenzie 1991) has contributed significantly to our understanding of the importance of, for example, fibre arts in Pacific societies. Lissant Bolton's work illustrates the interconnections between women, pandanus textiles and landscapes, elucidating their central position on Ambae Island (1996, 2003). Here, the production of plaited pandanus textiles is intertwined with women's knowledge, notions about *kastom*, and agency (2003). Christian Kaufmann (1997: 146) credits Bolton, as well as Annie Walter (1996), for having 'rediscovered plaited mats made by women', thereby acknowledging the importance of these objects for ni-Vanuatu people. Earlier, in her study of highland Papua New Guinean string bags, Maureen MacKenzie (1991) emphasised the ontology of string bags as a complex social construction

and product. She acknowledged that both men and women contribute to their production and social significance. By tracing the social life of a string bag, MacKenzie showed how this object is a material model of the social dynamics of gender relations and helped men and women explore and comprehend their coexistence, and understand their respective roles in society.

In this volume, Elisabetta Gnechi-Ruscone equally explores the social and cultural significance of the string bag, but among the Korafe people living on the northeastern coast of Papua New Guinea. She shows how the mundane string bag expresses different values in various contexts, exploring its entanglement with diverse fields of action, as well as with gender and gender relations. The gender of women's 'wealth' is also addressed in Fanny Wonu Veys' chapter on Tongan textile wealth (*koloa*). She argues that Tongan women and their work are complemented by men and the work of men. *Koloa* are, like the women themselves, valuable, while *ngāue* (objects made by men) are, like men, powerful. The differentiated qualities of these gendered objects do not simply represent the division of labour, or ideas about what it means to be a woman or a man in Tongan society. *Koloa* indexes the *mana* of Tongan women by virtue of the work and love they have put in it; it is not solely a category of objects made by women. In fact, both *koloa* and *ngāue* are values that take different meanings depending on the context in which they are circulating.

The chapters in this volume show that although it is important to bring women's work to the fore of scholarly attention, we also need to include a theoretical emphasis on gender, and gender relations, to elucidate the intricacies of objects, and their fluctuating uses, meanings and values. This was the focus of Strathern's epic work *The Gender of the Gift*, which revisits and synthesises her own and other ethnographic studies on political economy and gender relations in Melanesia. Strathern (1988: 7–8) rests her analysis upon what she calls binary 'fictions'; for example, the us/them binary of 'the West' and 'Melanesia'; 'commodity' and 'gift' distinctions; and 'individual' and 'dividual' notions of the person. Strathern's innovation was to view gender as 'much more than the existence of male and female as sociological categories' (Jolly 1992: 137), rendering persons, objects, events and sequences as gendered relationally between male and female and other markers of difference. Indeed, gender can be viewed as being a relational value (Eriksen 2014). Strathern's work, as well as that of other scholars, reveals that objects come into being with specific identities, names and histories, that they have their own social

biographies (for example, Hoskins 1998), and that they are animated through the relational value of gender. With this volume, we build upon this work and aim for a critical intervention into anthropological theories of value, exchange and local economies by exploring and comparing local gendered processes of production and consumption, and the value attributed to women's work and the objects they make and transact.

The value of women's work in development discourse

Cultural, social, economic and hierarchical forms and materialisations of value are all interlinked with people's livelihoods and the social relations that make possible the production and circulation of objects. In the contemporary context, the expansion of the capitalist market system as the dominant mode of resource allocation and distribution is a powerful metonym of the global economy (Narotzky and Besnier 2014).⁴ Especially in the Pacific, a large body of anthropological work has been devoted to how value is created and contested through different types of local, regional and international exchanges, including participation in commodity markets and monetary transactions.⁵

Increasingly, women's labour and productive capacity are gaining attention in relation to the issues of rights and equity of opportunity in the global economy. The current emphasis of development policy on women's empowerment is focused not only on educational attainment and political leadership, but on economic participation, particularly in the formal employment sector and in entrepreneurial and business enterprises (Klugman et al. 2014; Jolly et al. 2015). Yet development discourse is infused with market valuations that regard the labour invested in the materialisation of objects such as tapa, string bags, mats, pottery, fibre skirts and banana leaf bundles, and in the acts of exchange that animate their value, as incommensurate with wage labour or the production of market commodities. Consequently, the material objects made by women

4 Susana Narotzky and Niko Besnier (2014) investigate the economy in terms of focusing on social reproduction, that is, continuity and change of human collective life-sustaining systems. This focus is also present in our volume, with all of the papers focusing on social reproduction in different but significant ways.

5 Among the many scholars focusing on exchange and market transactions in Oceania are: Cecile Barraud, Daniel de Coppet, André Iteanu and Raymond Jamous (1994); James Carrier (1991, 1992); Frederick Damon (1978, 1980, 1983, 1989, 1993, 1995); Jane Fajans (1993a, 1993b); Robert Foster (1985, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1995, 2008); Alfred Gell (1999); Maurice Godelier (1977, 1986, 1996); Christopher Gregory (1980, 1982, 1983, 1996, 1997, 2009, 2015); John Liep (1990); Nancy Munn (1986); Marilyn Strathern (1984a, 1984b, 1988, 1992); and Paige West (2012).

are themselves ascribed less economic value; wages and manufactured goods take precedence over 'traditional' objects in the hierarchy of values propagated by modern individualist capitalism. Women's work is relegated to the domestic sphere and the informal sector, where it becomes invisible and where the services and products of women's labour are deemed to have minimal economic value in the global market.

Our volume tackles these issues and the hierarchical and gendered projection of value over women's objects, and we articulate our perspectives in relation to the current development discourse and policy focus on women's economic empowerment. For example, in her chapter on the values of Tongan fine mats and barkcloth (*koloa*), Ping-Ann Addo asserts that even in the capitalist economy of the Aotearoa New Zealand diaspora, notions of wealth do not necessarily index the success of individuals in securing the financial means to purchase and display material commodities. Rather, the tangibility of wealth is made apparent through the material adornment of valued social relations. In her chapter on the Cook Islands hair-cutting ceremony, Horan illuminates how cash is imbued with value beyond its monetary worth through the public honouring of social indebtedness and obligations. These examples show the limitations of the dominant capitalist development perspective, and its inherent devaluation of women's labour and work. Indeed, one of our aims is to provide ways of rethinking economic empowerment that better resonate the forms and values of women's contribution to the sustainability of informal economies and the prospects they hold for improving opportunities for participation in larger spheres of exchange and for shared prosperity in the global economy (Jolly et al. 2015). We resist valuations that divide domestic and public spheres and informal and formal economies, and look instead at the embodied practice of women's productive and creative labour which links these spheres in complex ways. Following Karen Sykes, we endorse critical analysis of the contexts and conditions within which different regimes of value converge, where 'women's esteem comes to the foreground and dignity becomes a key issue in posing the value question' (2013: 98).

The complimentary show bags given to audience members at RUNWAY2015 included an information flyer from the Australian High Commission in PNG, one of the event's major sponsors, about the Australian Government's aid policy priority for supporting private-sector development in PNG and women's economic empowerment, with the objective to create income opportunities and greater participation in

formal markets. One of the key initiatives of the policy is the PNG Bilum Pilot Project, with funding of AU\$1.8 million over the three-year period from 2013 to 2016, which ‘supports rural women to utilise traditional knowledge and create new markets for *bilum* products’ (Australian High Commission in Papua New Guinea 2015). To echo MacKenzie’s insights on the contexts of Telefol women’s *bilum* making (1991: 108), we see the potential in such initiatives as expanding the values of inclusivity and flexibility, and creating resilient pathways to new avenues of wealth that are grounded in respected purpose and embodied practice.

The conceptual design for the staging of RUNWAY2015 suggests that the devaluing of women’s objects in the global economy of goods and ideas has little purchase in how contemporary Pacific designers and artists source their inspiration and empower their creativity. The sinuous, or the intricate, supple material objects that women produce through their labour—coiling, weaving, stitching, looping, pounding, painting—are the very things that create, sustain and hold together social relations; securing the future by staying connected to deep genealogies of creative practice. We argue that the move towards commercialisation of value in the global marketplace as the avenue for women’s greater economic participation must not displace the enduring social value of the objects that Pacific women create.

Gender and the value of things in the contemporary Pacific

While seeking to contribute to wider and more generalised debates on gender, objects and value, the individual authors in this volume are all careful to foreground the specific social, cultural and economic contexts within which their research and analyses are based. Each of the eight chapters offers a closely observed ethnographic account of the embodied practices of value making, and conveys the individual and collective perspectives of people involved in the production and exchange of ‘women’s wealth’, and the social events in which meaning takes tangible expression. The chapters are paired and clustered to invite direct comparison of distinct geographical and cultural areas, and to invigorate dialogue on key themes and questions. The first pairing represents a return to the beginning of the women’s wealth debate, with both chapters situated in the Trobriand Islands in Milne Bay Province, PNG. This is followed by a cluster of chapters on the cultural objects made by women from the coastal villages

of Maisin, Wanigela and Korafe in Collingwood Bay in Oro Province, PNG. The final trio focuses on the endurance of cultural knowledge in Tonga and among the Tongan and Cook Islands diaspora communities in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. The volume is wrapped up with an epilogue by Margaret Jolly. Woven between the sections and the epilogue are three creative reflections on women's wealth—a poem about Trobriand fibre skirts and dried banana leaf bundles, a poem about Fijian barkcloth, and a poem about *urobs* (Pohnpeian women's skirts).⁶

The chapters by Katherine Lepani and Michelle MacCarthy explore the social life of *doba*, the bundles of dried banana leaves and fibre skirts made by Trobriand women for *sagali*, or mortuary distributions, with questions about the endurance and transmutability of *doba*, and how Christianity provides a frame of reference for changing materiality and economic valuation. The chapters convey how the symbolic and tangible value of *doba* is activated in response to death, when women's investments of their labour into *doba* production signify matrilineal reconstitution and regeneration. Both chapters signal how the value of *doba* is analogous to the value of yams in Trobriand society, and the attendant relations of exchange and regeneration that men's cultivation and distribution of yams involves.

The starting point for Lepani's chapter about the durability of *doba* is not Weiner's (1976) classification of women's wealth to theoretically assert women's social and economic status and make claims about the universality of female reproductive power. Rather, Lepani situates *doba* in relation to the deep sedimentation of Christianity in Trobriand women's value making by tracing recollections from the early years of the twentieth century when pieces of cotton fabric were first introduced into mortuary distributions at the Methodist mission station. Lepani further traces the material transformations of mortuary exchange and the translocal dimensions of value creation in the ways Trobriand women continue to work for *doba* in urban settings. The commensurability of banana leaf bundles and cloth raises the question of the inevitable replacement of one form for the other through the increasing commoditisation of exchange, and what this signals about the position of women in the Trobriand regenerative economy.

6 Creative writing offers an important means for understanding and celebrating the value of material objects created by Pacific women. For example, the publication *Twisting Knowledge and Emotion: Modern Bilums of Papua New Guinea* (Garnier 2009) includes numerous poems and creative prose about the value of *bilums*, written by students at the University of Papua New Guinea.

MacCarthy's starting point is a vivid description of the embodied work of *doba* in the frenzy of *sagali* distributions, deeply symbolic of matrilineal strength and vitality. She explores the meaning of 'proper Trobriand womanhood' as redefined by evangelical Christianity, and the contestations among Trobrianders about changing cultural values and the changing value of material culture as people accommodate the influences of capitalism in their daily lives. Some Trobriand women are asserting the power of their productivity in ways that articulate directly with the market economy—providing food for their families by having more immediate access to cash through the production and sale of baskets and mats. The debate compels difficult questions about the perceived wastefulness of *doba* as an investment of women's time and labour in light of the demands and desires of modernity and the moral edicts of Christianity. To what extent do identity and kinship hinge on the materiality of *doba*, and the labour and exchange relations that *doba* signifies in *sagali* transactions? What might the devaluation of *doba* mean for women's status?

The trio of chapters on Collingwood Bay, by Anna-Karina Hermkens, Elizabeth Bonshek and Elisabetta Gneccchi-Ruscione, also explore the tensions between enduring cultural forms and changing valuations as the pathways of women's wealth take new directions, particularly as objects produced for commercial sale in the context of sustainable development projects. Hermkens opens her chapter on the moral economies of Maisin tapa, or barkcloth, with a stirring vignette of an Anglican Church festival that shows how the value of tapa is animated in ceremonial dance. The chapter explores the embodied value of tapa through gendered space and time—the intimate exchange of women's bodily substances in the making of tapa, and how once imbued with women's regenerative powers tapa carries clan identity into broader networks of exchange. Hermkens elucidates the mental and physical investment of individual women's labour in creating material and aesthetic value, and in reproducing gendered knowledge and personhood. She considers how tapa contributes to the moral economy of *vina*, or the principle of reciprocity, where people are compelled by the desire and necessity to give as the means to define and sustain social relations. Further, Hermkens observes how exchanges between men are amplifications of women's labour, but with important repercussions for gender relations and women's workloads when tapa transactions are controlled by men in the market economy. In such contexts, tapa no longer registers as the material embodiment of

individual women's labour and their family and clan identity; rather, the value of tapa is assessed as a generic, genderless commodity in the global tribal art market.

Bonshek's chapter examines the changing context of pottery production and use in Wanigela since the arrival of the first Christian missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century. The chapter reveals how these highly desirable objects have assumed multiple values in complex sets of transactions, including in regional exchange networks where pots now command a monetary price. As commodities with price tags, no longer are pots valued foremost as material expressions of cultural life and social relations. Bonshek chronicles resistance to the commoditisation of women's objects as she joins five senior women potters on an expedition to exchange pots for barkcloth with the neighbouring Maisin. She describes the unexpected effects of a Greenpeace sustainable development project established to prevent logging of timber in the region, and how the desire for monetary gain through the production of barkcloth, as an alternative to the wealth promised by destructive logging, has upset longstanding exchange relations between Wanigela and Maisin people and established regimes of value.

Gnecchi-Ruscone's chapter challenges the usefulness of the concept of 'women's wealth' in understanding gendered productivity and value, whether the focus is on highly symbolic, ceremonial objects or mundane, everyday utilitarian products such as mats and bags. She argues that ordinary objects also assume extraordinary value in communicating social identity and connections as they become activated through production, performance and exchange in the course of their life histories. Gnecchi-Ruscone provides an in-depth account of the biographies of objects, including the intimate rapport between makers, materials and the objects as they come into being. These biographies illustrate how value registers differently depending on context, whether expressed in the making, in everyday use, in ritual contexts, and informal and ceremonial exchange, and how these transformations maintain internal integrity within diverse fields of action.

The final three chapters in the collection explore the endurance and efficacy of cultural values in Tonga and among the Pacific diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand. Wonu Veys' chapter brings us to Tonga where we are introduced to the sensuous world of *koloa* (Tongan textile wealth). Wonu Veys shows that Tongan women and their products bring

human life into the world; they nurture life, protect it and accompany it on its journey out of the world. This cycle of nurturing is more than physical; it spiritually embeds a person within culture, and by doing so incorporates them into society, thus generating and reproducing social and cultural life. Moreover, by participating in rituals and contributing with their products of labour, women ensure that the transitions in a person's life are appropriately facilitated.

Ping-Ann Addo's chapter guides us from Tonga to the Tongan diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand. We are brought into the world of Kalo, a revered elder and focal woman in the Tongan community who provisions members of her extended family with *koloa*, the fine mats and barkcloth produced for ceremonial exchange. The close portrait of Kalo provides unique insights on the domestic spaces and relations of intergenerational transference of cultural values and knowledge throughout the life course and in anticipation of death. The chapter evokes the integral ties between cultural wealth, women's productive energy and the church, and explores why it matters that particular forms of wealth are valued differently as they change hands, contexts, generations and locations. Of significance is that the tangibility of wealth is made apparent through the material adornment of valued social relations. Addo's chapter as well as the final chapter by Jane Horan, describes in intimate detail how the exquisite material objects made by women—barkcloth, mats and quilts—inextricably link people to their place of cultural origin, and adorn social relations with value and meaning.

Adornment as a measure of respect, and as a performance of identity, is powerfully conveyed in Horan's chapter on the Cook Islands hair-cutting ceremony—a young boy's rite of passage into manhood, which involves the display and draping of *tivaivai* quilts on the initiate. The materialisation of cultural identity is palpable—layers of *tivaivai* embellish the young boy while cohering the values of community belonging and cultural connectedness. Horan poignantly illuminates how the hair-cutting ceremony articulates with the capitalist economy in the diaspora; the layered quilts not only signify the relational ties of nurture and support but they dignify the gifting of money. Cash is imbued with value beyond its monetary worth through the public honouring of social indebtedness and obligations.

Horan's and the other chapters elucidate the complex and sometimes contested nature of processes of commodification, commensurability and alienability. All contributors emphasise that creations made by women not only embody their labour, but have value in exchanges precisely because female creativity has engendered in them a constant relationship to the maker. But what does the alienability of some objects mean for their valuation? How mass-produced items and money gain commensurability with the value embodied in women's objects such as tapa, pots, quilts or banana fibre skirts is the question here. And how might environmental pressures be recalibrating scales of value where the organic materials for creative production are becoming harder to source, cultivate and sustain? The chapters herein offer a range of different perspectives on these questions, but consistent throughout this volume is the observation that the relationality at the core of women's gift giving confers commensurate value and meaning in exchanges, whether the objects are created through women's embodied labour or purchased and transacted as commodities. Women preserve and activate the value and meaning themselves.

As such, this volume is a tribute to Pacific women whose creative innovations of cultural objects at once reinforce attachments to place, even, and perhaps especially, in diasporic contexts, while projecting to the world the material and social value of local resources and deeply connected knowledge of the land. The incorporation of new commodity forms and manufactured materials in the production and exchange of cultural objects registers relational value as well, illuminating how the aesthetic, social and moral value of relationships is at once transformed, reinforced and sustained. The objects made by women are not classified as aesthetic objects, or as pure disposable commodities, but as practices that engage the local and the global in potent and valuable ways.

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