

been deployed by locals to build their own community as a “system of constructing and maintaining relatedness” (213), (as a local ideology, we might say!); and, by extension, for the purposes of self-governance. Perhaps it could be extended even further, by pointing to how just like elsewhere in China, local tradition also notably coexists with and coopts the roles and functions imposed by the Chinese state – which Wellens calls “secular,” suggesting a distinction between secular and religious that is probably misleading here, considering the demands for worship and confession that are made in the name of the modern Chinese state – and the profound parallels between the “civilizing projects” at work here to impose control from afar.

On a different but related note, Koen Wellens makes no comparative reference to Wang Ming-ke’s highly relevant work (cf. “The Qiang Between the Han and the Tibetans. A Historical-Anthropological study of a Chinese Frontier.” 2003), which is based only some distance farther to the north in Sichuan. Wang probes the Qiang’s ambivalent status in the Tibetan-Chinese borderlands, and the problem of how ethnic hierarchies are made and managed in these contexts. For a further theoretical perspective on such dynamics of the edges of empires, one could draw on Jonathan Friedman’s “System, Structure, and Contradiction. The Evolution of ‘Asiatic’ Social Formations” (1998; originally 1979) – a classic work intended to dismantle Edmund Leach’s more famous “Political Systems of Highland Burma,” itself also a discussion of these problems concerning the making and transformation of total ethnic systems in this same region of the world.

And yet, even though these could be called omissions, Koen Wellens’ deeply serious book on the Premi clearly is a marvellous contribution to the study of precisely these wider issues of how people on the margins of civilizations negotiate their forced incorporation into imposing state machineries, including especially in terms of religious and administrative institutions – which they may adapt and manipulate, so as to preserve something of themselves in the process.

Magnus Fiskesjö

**Were, Graeme:** *Lines that Connect. Rethinking Pattern and Mind in the Pacific.* Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010. 205 pp. ISBN 978-0-8248-3384-8. Price. \$ 38.00

Were’s “Lines that Connect” is a bold attempt to retheorise social life in the Pacific in terms of pattern. This is the kernel of an excellent idea that deserves considerable attention. The book itself, however, fails to live up to its promise.

Were begins with the ethnography of Nalik people from New Ireland. In the first section of the book, he explores the significance of *kapkap*, a well-known but previously unstudied valuable made up of a white shell disc overlaid with an incised turtle-shell plate. These striking objects are in use as items of display and ceremonial throughout island Melanesia in different forms.

Surprisingly, *kapkap* are little understood and Were makes it his mission to explicate what these objects mean

and how their patterns are implicated in social life. This takes him on an interesting journey through the history of missionisation and social change experienced by Nalik people since the nineteenth century, culminating in an analysis of Nalik adherence to Baha’i religious practice. Throughout, Were attempts to show how pattern has served as a mediator of social relations and a thread of continuity in Nalik social and cultural life.

Continuing its exploration of pattern and social change, the book then turns to consider how indigenous Melanesians co-opted and made use of imported cloth during the colonial period. Were argues that Melanesians did not simply imitate European clothing, nor did they passively respond to missionisation, but actively appropriated textiles to their own purposes. Finally, Were turns to his other field site in Tonga, where he analyses developments in Tongan women’s corded textiles such as crochet.

One of the main failings of this book is that it is simply too short for everything that it attempts to undertake. This is Were’s first single-authored monograph and curiously, he uses the opportunity to make a cross-cultural analysis of artworks rather than to develop either of the two ethnographic projects that he has undertaken in detail. The exploration of *kapkap* alone would merit a book of twice this volume’s 180 pages. Unfortunately, in a book of this length, Were inevitably proceeds through suggestion and assertion rather than patient ethnographic exposition. Similarly, the discussion of colonial Melanesian history and Tongan textiles are too brief and in the former case almost wholly speculative.

Conceptually, “Lines that Connect” is rather a muddle. At the heart of this book is a very good idea: that human life might be rethought in terms of patterns. Pattern is, as Were points out, fundamental to a vast range of human activity. Indeed, drawing on the geometric logic of patterns – their potential to engender new patterns through their own transformation – Were suggests how the idea of pattern as a *relational* form might come to supplant the notion of culture, which he regards as founded on difference rather than relations. It is in this guise that his claim that pattern is a “meta-media” is most convincing – an assertion that he bases on Alfred Gell’s now famous discussion of Marquesan designs in “Art and Agency” (Oxford 1998).

The fruitfulness of this idea is immediately apparent. The location of pattern in geometry and the logic of mathematical operations offers to make of pattern what Lévi-Strauss made of incest. That is, pattern might serve as the form to bridge the gap between logical and social relations as the geometry of patterns passes from the leaf and the snail-shell to barkcloth and shell valuables. Indeed, this is clearly what Were intends, when he suggests that pattern, *because of its geometric logic* “transcends any specific incarnation” and therefore (he cites Piaget) plays a role in the formation of specifically human intelligence.

The remainder of the book, however, does not live up to this headline promise. Central to the argument regarding the Nalik material is a formal exploration of *kapkap*. Were draws on Gell’s analysis of Marquesan patterns to suggest that the patterns of *kapkap* can logically be generated from one another. He suggests that the “prototype”

pattern is an anthropomorphic form. However, as with so much in this book, there is not enough material: this central discussion is contained in some half a dozen pages and leaves the impression of a gesture towards Gell rather than an actual analysis. Moreover, the artifact Were analyses and which shows the anthropomorphic pattern he dwells on is admittedly unusual: recognizable figures are not a normal feature of *kapkap*. Puzzlingly, the anthropomorphic nature of the design then vanishes from the analysis, to be replaced by the vague assertion that social relations and designs are cognate or analogous forms.

This problem is compounded by a sloppy definition of what constitutes a pattern. In his introduction, Were suggests a number of examples of patterns, which focus on plastic and graphic arts and performance. Yet having invoked pattern as a logical meta-medium, these and the concrete examples in the remainder of the text seem needlessly prosaic. It is unclear (and unexplored) what separates a humanly created pattern showing a “trace of consciousness” from a naturally occurring one, such as a crystalline formation – or where this line might be blurred, as in the mathematical models that he also alludes to. Indeed, there is no mention of language, or of the pattern which necessarily forms a part of *all* intelligible acts, beyond a passing reference to Benedict.

Shying away from these issues, the text often abandons a deeper exploration of pattern to focus rather narrowly on objects which are rather unproblematically “patterned” in a limited sense – although it does reserve a stronger use of the term to incorporate ideas and arguments that would otherwise fall outside its schema in a weaker version. Hence, where his argument is strongest and most interesting, Were is concerned with the idea of pattern as a geometrical figure whose logic implicates it in other patterns, both extant and potential. However, at other points in the text, pattern appears simply as a decorative feature of objects.

Hence, chapter 6 is concerned with transformations of clothing across Melanesia and chapter 7 discusses innovations in Tongan textiles. In both these chapters, the fact that the objects in question are patterned appears to be rather incidental – certainly “pattern” does not operate at a conceptual level to integrate the argument. Indeed, while the objects in question do indeed mediate social relations in extremely interesting ways, there is no evidence that they are able to do this because of the patterns that they embody. Rather, pattern is subjected to a familiar cultural analysis of appropriation and resistance. Some conceptual role for pattern is hinted at in the concept of a “pattern system.” However, this term remains unexplained, is not listed in the index and must be understood as a placeholder for culture – unfortunate considering the notion of pattern was introduced as a means to displace heuristics of difference.

The result of all this conceptual confusion is that Were’s book suggests a powerful, indeed compelling conceptual framework which is unfortunately at odds with much of the material he wants to cover. A great deal of that material is extremely interesting and would merit further publications. It is therefore sincerely to be hoped that

this disappointing volume represents the beginning of a longer programme of research and publication to develop the obvious potential of its component parts.

Will Rollason

**Wilkins, Katharina:** *Holy Water and Evil Spirits. Religious Healing in East Africa.* Berlin: Lit, 2011. 289 pp. ISBN 978-3-643-11179-1. (Beiträge zur Afrikaforschung, 47) Price: € 29.90

In “Holy Water and Evil Spirit” Wilkins explores religious healing and ritual practices in the context of the “Marian Faith Healing Ministry” in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, which is based on the tenets of the Catholic faith and offers Catholic healing rituals under the patronage of the Virgin Mary. The Ministry is rejected by the Tanzanian Episcopal Conference due to the practice of performing healing prayers and formal exorcism. Despite this fact the “Marian Faith Healing Centre” of Dar es Salaam is growing as public awareness of it rises. At the Centre meetings are offered every day for communal prayers held in Swahili consisting of four parts: Eucharistic exposition, the rosary, the “water service” and Mass. The founding Father, Felicien Nkwera, began his healing ministry in 1969, the same year he was ordained and when receiving a message from the Virgin Mary through one of his very first patients. Nkwera was told to heal human suffering and fight all evil in this world including evil influences on people, society, and the political system. Wilkins’ book contains four parts and eleven chapters in all. Part 1 introduces the Ministry and its national background focusing its present location, medical and religious pluralism characterizing the region as well as the Ministry’s ritual practices. Part 2 provides a presentation and discussion of the teachings and writings of Nkwera up till 2006, emphasizing his views on affliction regarding human beings, society, and the larger political system. Part 3 introduces the members of the Ministry and the pluralism characterizing their views on medical and religious healing and their understandings of the message. While Nkwera remains connected to global discourses and a network of Marian Martyrs such as those surrounding Fatima and Medjugorje, the followers tend to base their identity on the idea that Virgin Mary is there to help Tanzanians with their specific problems. Moreover, the followers see healing within a framework of personal salvation incorporating understandings from various belief-systems. Wilkins approaches the heterogeneity by looking at the individuals and how they ascribe meaning to certain teachings and ritual experiences. Their views are diverse and often contrast with the orthodox teachings of Nkwera. Part 4 deals with conceptual and ritual aspects of religious healing and with tensions between norms and individuality and how the rejection of Nkwera, his Ministry, and his followers by the Tanzanian Episcopal Conference becomes a crucial identity marker holding the group together. Hence ritual efficacy is found in explanation of affliction as a test of faith from God, the possibility to turn illness into a positive experience as well as social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and group solidarity. The monograph ends