She examines the reaction of the audience, noting that it was certainly not unitary, but that Asians could be, through indigenous performance, exoticized. This is an unusual personal observation for an anthropologist in the early days of fieldwork.

Doerr continues by noting that the reaction of the community permitted distance between Pakeha in this community and Asia, at a time when politicians were determined to invoke links and alliances. In a very interesting section of the book, Doerr contrasts this to the Maori students’ performance of the *kapa haka* (chanting and movement used to mark ceremonial occasions) at the school. Maori and Asians never performed together, and thus Maori performances could reassert the identity of those in the audience as members of a comfortable, for the moment anyway, bicultural Aotearoa/New Zealand.

This book will be of interest to those following struggles for sovereignty and autonomy, for scholars interested in educational reform, and to Maori specialists.

*Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, USA*  
KAREN SINCLAIR


Despite an abundance of evidence to the contrary, the notion persists that indigenous Pacific Islands arts survive mainly through the “kindness of strangers,” whether tourists purchasing small decorated bark cloths at a kiosk at Nadi airport or government grants sponsoring innovative Maori compositions at Te Papa Tongerewa (the National Museum of New Zealand). This viewpoint is a corollary to the equally persistent “fatal impact” narrative: the story of Oceanic cultures destined to be crushed beneath the juggernaut of the global economic system, their signature aesthetic forms degraded into cheap curios or mined by individual artists nostalgic for a past largely lost to them. Rod Ewins’ comprehensive and richly illustrated study of the changing significance of *masi* (barkcloth) produced in a Fijian community effectively counters the common narrative of post-contact artistic decline.

Lying 30 kilometres south of Viti Levu, Vatulele Island is one of the two major *masi* producing communities in Fiji (the other is Moce Island, in the eastern Lau group). Over the course of several visits to the island between 1980 and 1995, Ewins was impressed by the importance the small population of around 1,000 places upon *masi* production. Much of the garden land was given over to paper mulberry plantations and most women
devoted six days of the week to pounding and printing barkcloth. While jokingly referring to themselves as “factory workers,” the women expressed great pride in the quality of their product, a pride shared with the men and young people. This contrasted with Ewins’ experiences elsewhere in the country, where the producers of indigenous art forms “seem to have a pessimistic view of themselves as a dying breed” (3).

The growth of a tourist market for Fijian handicrafts accounts for some of the surge in masi production on Vatulele. Yet islanders insisted that they sold most of their bark cloth to other Fijians—an observation confirmed by Ewins’ research. The evolution of an internal market for masi and other forms of traditional wealth in modern times has much to do with the changing ways Vatulele islanders and other Fijians perceive their collective identity. Ewins’ claim in brief is that the secret of masi’s success lies in the desire to “stay Fijian.” That desire is based less on nostalgia for a receding past than the social pressures of the present: such things as governmental interference with local life, dependence upon jobs and money, the inappropriate behaviour of tourists, or the indifference of young people to customary protocol. “Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis,” Ewin observes (20)—although in Fiji’s case, the crisis has arguably been building for a century and a half. Over time, Fijians have become more conscious, selective and assertive of practices that mark their distinctive cultural identity. The emergent identity is deeply syncretic, mixing indigenous with introduced elements (notably Christianity). More specifically, being Fijian in the present requires participation in a wide assortment of local rituals, many of which, in turn, require exchanges of signature cultural valuables. Vatulele women thus find themselves fully occupied meeting the insatiable demands of their own kin for masi as well as the greater Fijian market.

After a brief overview of the main themes, the book launches into a detailed chapter reviewing historical transformations in Vatulele and Fiji more generally since European contact. This is followed by a relatively brief and focused discussion of the role played by tourism in the decline and/or reinforcement of indigenous culture, including the arts. The central three chapters, making up nearly half of the text overall, deal with the more symbolic associations of masi. Following a mainly theoretical discussion of academic treatments of indigenous art, Ewins launches into a comprehensive review of ascribed and inscribed meanings. Among other things, he discusses masi in relation to other iconic ritual objects, such as yagona (kava), tabua (whale teeth) and mats; as a marker of spirituality and rank; and in terms of aesthetics and design. Chapter 6 presents a detailed overview of rituals performed in Vatulele, including descriptions of particular rituals, the role of gift-giving, and the play of politics, among other topics. The final three chapters, including the conclusion, deal broadly with the economic dimensions of Vatulele masi. Chapter 7 presents
an analysis of the cultural aspects of *masi* production and distribution as a “sanctioned good” (*i-yau*) entailing gendered associations and moral obligations with exchange partners. This is followed by a straightforward description of the place of *masi* in the local economy, including an important discussion of women’s labour and cash income. The conclusion briefly reviews key themes of the monograph, but also introduces an important (and frustratingly sketchy) consideration of the threats to the sustainability of the *masi* industry.

Within the broad compass of the theme of “staying Fijian,” Ewins presents a remarkably comprehensive treatment of Vatulele barkcloth. This turns out to be both a weakness and a strength. The early chapters move between a wide range of topics, including extended discussions of classification and theory. The discussions are interesting—one cannot help but be impressed by the range of Ewins’ knowledge of Fiji and academic debates—but the sheer scope of his interests sometimes eclipses rather than illuminates the reader’s understanding of Vatulele or *masi*. There is also a matter of balance. Much of the ethnographic detail of life on Vatulele is scattered or relegated to the final chapter, making it hard to get a feel for the island. Most oddly, only the briefest information is provided on the practicalities of making *masi*. On the positive side, Ewins has written by far the most thorough and sophisticated work yet to appear on Oceanic barkcloth. *Staying Fijian* demonstrates better than anything I’ve read the vitality of “traditional” arts in contemporary Oceanic society, opening many promising avenues for further thought and investigation. It is both a tribute to the Vatulele people and required reading for any serious student in this emerging field of study.

*The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada*  
**JOHN BARKER**


When I began research in Fiji in the 1980s I was identified as a Canadian, but after some time I let it slip out around the grog bowl that I had actually been born in England. Overnight my prestige went up noticeably. Subsequently when I visited villages for the first time my British origin would sure to be mentioned, and jovial comments made about the British Lion, and the glories of the empire. Yet this was in the one region of the country to have rejected British colonial rule by force of arms only a century before. It seemed to me that, despite independence, Fiji was still in some sense a colony, not of the real Britain, but of a mythic one that Fijians seemed reluctant to abandon.