

Donald Tuzin, *The Cassowary's Revenge: The Life and Death of Masculinity in a New Guinea Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Pp. xiv, 256, illus. US\$45 cloth; \$18.95 paperback.

*Reviewed by Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart, University of Pittsburgh*

Donald Tuzin's latest book is based on his 1985–1986 return visit to Ilahita, an Arapesh-speaking village in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea. Tuzin had conducted his dissertation work in Ilahita from 1969 to 1972 and had not returned until this visit. His long absence had been interpreted to mean that he was dead and his reappearance was interpreted as his return from the dead as the “lost younger brother” in the Cassowary myth from the past. (We have experienced similar events in which people have seen us enter a field site that Andrew had visited long ago and ask if Andrew was returning from the dead with me [Pamela]. Tuzin discusses related issues [pp. 132 ff.]

Tuzin's presentation encompasses three components: (1) the central event of the murder, by the man's own son, of a male villager, who had been a prime leader in the now-collapsed men's cult; (2) the local people's reflections upon their creation myth, whose central figure is a primal Female Cassowary–Human transformer figure who becomes involved with humans through trickery against her; and (3) Tuzin's reflections on his return to Ilahita and his perceived involvement in the historical changes that took place during the collapse of the men's cult practices known as the Tambaran.

The author deals with themes that are familiar from other areas of New Guinea, such as the role of transformer figures as presented in the Cassowary myth or the alterations in male cults that could be compared to or contrasted with similar situations like the last performance of the Female Spirit cult in Hagen in 1984–1985. His work is a valuable contribution to the literature on historical change in New Guinea. Especially interesting is the detailing of the interplay of Christianity and indigenous religious beliefs in his field area. During his return visit he says that “public life in Ilahita was ablaze with Christian fervor and expectancy” (p. 18). The 1980s in Papua New Guinea were a time in which dramatic shifts to Christianity were taking place and today many Christians there believe that in the year 2000 the world will end or some substantial change will occur, significantly altering their lives. His analysis of Christian movements, like that of others (e.g., Andrew Lattas), provides historical data that can be used to make comparisons with similar movements elsewhere in Papua New Guinea today.

The Cassowary origin myth that Tuzin collected has the element, reminiscent of and perhaps derived from the Kilibob-Manup stories from Madang, that the youngest of the Cassowary’s sons went off to America “where he fathered the white race, and from whence he will someday return” (p. 71). Tuzin’s return to Ilahita was interpreted to be the reappearance of this mythical figure and led to much discussion and expectation of a “cargoistic” kind that was itself destined to be disappointed, placing him in a difficult situation in his fieldwork, and his reflections on it (p. 198).

Although the subtitle of Tuzin’s book refers to the “life and death of masculinity,” it seems that what is described is actually a complex historical transformation encompassing both genders. Male cults are but one example of the “double-gendered” (to use Janet Hoskin’s phrase) nature of sociality that Tuzin presents in his own ethnographical accounts (see, e.g., pp. 71, 115). We might juxtapose his example with the collapse of the men’s cult practices in the Duna area where we work, which did not mean a collapse of “masculinity” or for that matter an increase or decrease in “femininity”—but an altered arena in which these aspects of social life both continued to be expressed. Origin figures such as the Female Cassowary in the Ilahita myth are not always females in other parts of New Guinea; they are male or “double-gendered,” as indeed appears to be the case in Ilahita itself, since Tuzin speaks of her as “phallic.” There is further the point that the Ilahita men decided to reveal the secrets of their cult presumably to secure for themselves the benefits of a new Christian order in which they would continue to play a part. This turn of events is again paralleled in other parts of New Guinea.

Tuzin has infused a great deal of thought and reflexivity into the ethno-

graphic materials for this book, writing in a vivid and involved way that brings Ilahita and its people's dilemmas and concerns sharply to life. At the book's end he seeks to make a bridge between gender issues in Ilahita and in American society, following in the footsteps of one of his original mentors, Margaret Mead, who earlier worked in the Arapesh area. Tuzin, however, presents the discussion in a latter-day context in which he is concerned with the supposed crisis in masculinity set in motion by the same feminist movement that Mead's own work made possible. This bridge-making exercise is admirable in itself, corresponding to Marcus and Fischer's injunction to make anthropology a source of "cultural critique." We may, however, wonder if the phenomena are in fact comparable, and we may want to think further about the perceived crisis in Ilahita. Tuzin's argument is that the loss of ritual power may have led to the exercise of physical violence among Ilahita men. If so, perhaps Ilahita women did not make indisputable gains, either, from the demise of the Tambaran cult; but there may be independent reasons also for an increase in male violence, connected to the tensions of economic and political change. In any case, the author's concern to make a bridge of this kind is interestingly paralleled by the Ilahita people's attempt to fit him into their mythical structures, including their interpretations of the illnesses experienced by himself and his friend Gidion (p. 15) as possibly brought on by the Tambaran.

This is a complex, densely woven book that readers will appreciate both for its substance and its arguments, while wishing perhaps also to enter into a creative dialogue with both.