

A World Without Exchange:

Millennia and the Tee Ceremonial System in Tombema-Enga Society (New Guinea)

Abstract.— Systems of ceremonial exchange in Melanesia are highly resilient, they accommodate changes easily and people resist moves, from both internal and external sources, to abandon these historic systems of reciprocity. This paper examines one such persisting exchange system, the tee among the Tombema-Enga of the Western New Guinea Highlands. On two occasions in living memory however, the tee was suspended in favour of millenarian movements. At these two times, the world was about to end and the Tombema reasoned that tee-making could cease. When in due course, the millennia failed, Tombema returned with renewed vigour to the tee. It is a 'total institution' and this paper demonstrates that without the tee or some total replacement for it, which the millennia appeared briefly to offer, Tombema believe that their society could not continue. Tee and society are co-terminous in Tombema-Enga thinking. [Ceremonial exchange, Millenarian movements, Enga, New Guinea Highlands, Impact of Colonialism]

Systems of ceremonial exchange in Melanesia have, by and large, shown remarkable resilience in the colonial and post-colonial eras. The great socio-political changes wrought by cash cropping, missionization and electoral politics have certainly modified these historic systems, but their tenacity in incorporating changes, yet persisting despite them, is a good indication of their continuing value to the people who participate in them. Nothing in an alien culture can substitute wholly for these ceremonial institutions. Recent work on the *kula* for example reveals that it is thriving (Macintyre and Young n.d.; Leach and Leach [eds.] 1982); the *moka* of the Mount Hagen Melpa has taken the introduction of money and other changes (including the prohibition of warfare) in its stride (Strathern 1979b), as have the Siane,

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