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Complexly Gendered Objects: An Analysis of a Piece of *Tevau* Collected by Wilhelm Joest on Nendö

Abstract

In 1897, German anthropologist and collector Wilhelm Joest spent the last three months of his life on Nendö, Santa Cruz Islands, assembling an extensive ethnographic collection. It includes a piece of tevau, or “feather money,” originally used by the islands’ inhabitants to pay bride price or purchase female concubines, among other things. This paper explores this artefact’s various gendered layers of meaning. Used to transform women into the collective property of Nendö men’s associations, tevau was already gendered and charged with sexualised meaning before being collected. This made it attractive to Joest, who had always recorded non-European sexualities with an ethnopornographic voyeurism. The object, I argue, reveals a complexly gendered collecting situation and Joest’s tentative affinity with the men of Nendö based on an (assumed) shared patriarchal outlook. As such, the history of Joest’s collecting is relevant both to the presentation of tevau in Western museums and cultural revitalisation attempts on Nendö itself.

Keywords: *Gender, ethnographic collecting, masculinity, prostitution, Santa Cruz Islands, Nendö, tevau, Wilhelm Joest, Solomon Islands*

In the vaults of the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin lies an object reminiscent of a giant belt covered in feathers. It is a piece of *tevau*,¹ or “feather money,” and originates from Nendö in the Santa Cruz Islands (Solomon Islands; Fig. 1). Over the last century, the feathers’ bright red colour has faded—the natural process of value depletion of this former currency. Yet this *tevau* has lost nothing of its complex gendered meaning. It comes from a place and time when it could be used not only to pay bride price but also to purchase women as concubines. When it was still in use, the *tevau* was a primary building block of Nendö’s patriarchal power dynamics. Its journey into the museum is no less gendered: it was collected in 1897 by German anthropologist Wilhelm Joest, who had his own idealised conception of masculinity. He saw himself as a *Forschungreisender*, a valiant explorer and collector, willing to sacrifice his wealth and health for what he saw as scholarly progress.

Joest did in fact pay a high price for his Nendö collection, falling ill on the island and dying on a steamer on the way back to Sydney. But during his lifetime, Joest was no stranger to patriarchal relationships of sexual exploitation. As his diaries show, he used his wealth and imperial power not only to acquire objects but also women, visiting prostitutes wherever he went. On Nendö, his conception of local women was characterised by both repressed desire and aversion, and his position as an outsider prevented him from gaining sexual access. However, that did not diminish his interest in the inhabitants' sexuality. He was fixated on the topic of concubinage, and on the currency used to uphold it.

In this paper, I want to explore these different contexts as layers surrounding the *tevau* in Joest's collection. I focus on the patriarchal power dynamics on Nendö, on Joest's gendered imperial perspective, and on the collecting process that brought the *tevau* to Berlin. The following three sections are dedicated to these three contexts respectively. In a final section, I will think about the consequences of gendered understandings for *tevau* both on Nendö and in ethnographic museums today. I argue that the *tevau* represents a complexly gendered object, with different gendered meanings amplifying or clashing with each other.² The artefact reveals how the interplay between different kinds of patriarchal systems allowed the transfer of objects and knowledges in a necessarily gendered collecting encounter. Robert Welsch has shown how "most collections reflect simultaneously the subtle interplay between the indigenous and collector agendas."³ In this sense, I argue that the *tevau* in the Ethnologisches Museum is revealing in three regards: the context in which it was created and used, the ideas and desires of Joest as its collector, and the ways in which these spheres interacted.

The Use of *Tevau* on the Santa Cruz Islands in the Late Nineteenth Century

My paper is based on archival research on Wilhelm Joest and his collection. I have never been to Nendö and hence the first part comprises a summary of the valuable work of other scholars, most notably Salome Samou, Elizabeth Bonshek, and William Davenport. Some nineteenth century accounts indicate that the use of *tevau* is a relatively novel practice, originating in the mid-nineteenth century during the gradual incorporation of the Santa Cruz Islands into the European sphere of influence.⁴ At this time, the islands had not yet been officially claimed by a European empire—they became part of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1898. However, they had been integrated into trading and missionary networks, as well as into the circuits of Pacific slavery, or blackbirding, since the middle of

the century.⁵ It is unclear whether the rise of European influence affected the establishment of *tevau* as currency.



Figure 1. *Tevau* from the Joest collection (VI 16005). Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Peter Jacob. Courtesy of the Museum

Samou relates a mythical origin of *tevau* in which forest-dwelling beings called *lemwurbz* are the originators of the techniques necessary for its creation. In one version of the story, they give their knowledge to a man in need. In another, the man clandestinely watches them to learn the secret of their wealth.⁶ In both cases, the knowledge of how to make *tevau* was kept within certain families so that only a limited number of people were able to create the currency. This mythical origin indicates that while *tevau* was primarily used as a medium of exchange, it also held spiritual meaning.⁷

The creation of *tevau* was labour intensive and required three specialists. The first would trap cardinal honey-eaters (*Myzomela cardinalis*) to acquire their feathers.⁸ The man wanting a new piece of *tevau* would then buy these feathers and bring them to a platelet maker, who first glued together feathers of grey Pacific pigeons (*Ducula pacifica*) into platelets, then added red honey-eater feathers on one side.⁹ These platelets would then be brought to the third specialist, the binder, who used bark strings to bind the platelets into long coils of about nine meters in length.¹⁰ Finally, the coil would be finished by adding amulets made from different materials such as wood and bone, ensuring the continued wealth of the coil's new owner.¹¹ The creation of one piece of *tevau* required between 500 and 600 hours of work and the feathers of up to 300 birds.¹² Importantly, all the specialists involved were men, and *tevau* were considered men's objects. Even in the twenty-first century, Samou reports having felt uncomfortable touching them when visiting a museum storage area.¹³

The value of a new piece of *tevau* would be rated according to a system of between ten and fifteen value categories depending on the amount of red feathers used. A *tevau* of a higher category could be worth twice as much as a piece in the category below it.¹⁴ Over time, the red feathers would lose their shine, despite the meticulous care that is typically taken in storing and handling them. Accordingly, pieces of *tevau* would decrease in value, sinking through the value categories until they had no value. For the value system to work, new pieces of *tevau* needed to be made constantly. *Tevau* were used for all kinds of exchange transactions, and generally moved from the villages where they were made to other parts of Nendö and to the Reef Islands and, from there, to the Duff Islands.¹⁵ One of the most important status symbols that could be bought with *tevau* were *tepuke*, sea-going outrigger canoes. Of such an exchange, Arthur Pycroft writes:

An ocean-going canoe or tepuki, five to six fathoms in length and capable of carrying three tons, would cost at the present time about four coils of good quality red money, whereas the one coil of the money known as *nopamur* [the highest quality grade] would easily have bought the same tepuki.¹⁶

While the use of *tevau* in such transactions resembles the use of money, there is some debate whether *tevau* should in fact be considered “currency.” On the one hand, it held value independent of its owner or creator and could circulate freely, purchasing a variety of ordinary and prestige goods. On the other hand, *tevau* had spiritual and ritual significance—which, of course, could also be said about

Western currencies. What sets *tevau* apart from other currencies is its limited group of users: it is unclear whether outsiders such as Joest would have been able to pay in *tevau*, and it is certain that women were not even allowed to touch it. If *tevau* was a currency, it was one thoroughly based on gender. Whether this would exclude it from the category of currency or should, rather, be an impetus to broaden the definition of currency—with a critical eye on gendered meanings—cannot be explored here. I leave these two positions in tension for now and follow Samou's local perspective in her continued use of the word "currency."¹⁷

Tevau could also be used to acquire the rights to a woman, either as bride or concubine.¹⁸ Bride price consisted of one *tevau* of each value grade and was often paid by the extended family of the groom, or by wealthy sponsors, to the family of the bride.¹⁹ The children that came from the union would then be named after the sponsors: the first-born after the man who had given the highest-grade *tevau*, the second-born after the second highest, and so on. Daughters would be named after the sponsors' wives. Throughout their life, these children would be closely connected to their sponsor and, if wealthy enough, they would eventually pass on their name to the next generation.²⁰ Bride prices were paid in *tevau* until the 1970s, when the feather currency was replaced by dollars, which are still used today.²¹

Women could also be exchanged for *tevau* in a system that could be termed concubinage, prostitution, courtesanship, or sexual slavery. All these terms introduce moral connotations not necessarily present on Nendö and hence cannot fully describe the practice. However, to underscore my point that there were indeed commonalities between Nendö's and Europe's forms of patriarchal exploitation, I have decided against using one of the local terms for the practice—*tiela* or *selz*—and instead opted for "concubinage." This term places emphasis on the structural oppression of women sold into the system, as well as their social differentiation from women who are properly married.²²

The concubinage system was clearly differentiated from that of bride price payments. While brides on Nendö could come from either Nendö or the Reef Islands, concubines were always Reef Island women. Concubines were sold for ten times the number of *tevau* provided for bride price, a substantial amount of wealth. Samou suggests that women were selected to become concubines because they had disgraced their family, a highly gendered concept in itself.²³ Sometimes, men's associations would pool their resources to purchase a concubine, and sometimes a single individual would become rich enough to buy a concubine on his own. William Davenport, whose main informant had owned a concubine in

his youth, writes that “owning a *tiela* was the highest personal achievement a rich man could obtain.”²⁴

After being purchased, concubines would lose all their social ties and name. They would be called after the *noali*, the pole used to hang *teva* during transactions that was dedicated to an ancestral spirit, or *dukna*.²⁵ A newly acquired concubine would spend her first night sleeping alone under the *noali*, thus giving first sexual access to the *dukna* that had enabled the purchase.²⁶ Concubines had to be sexually available to their owners at all times and could also be lent out to other men for profit. Samou describes the process like this:

She lived in the clubhouse and was hired out to junior association members and visitors for a price in feather-money. The owners’ objective was to achieve wealth in feather-money by making a profit from her sexual services. When the chief of the association felt that he had made good his investment, he then passed the courtesan to the second most senior member who slept with her and hired her out in order to achieve the same. This continued until all the members had all their investment returned, after which time she was sold to another association.²⁷

All children born to a concubine were taken from her and adopted by her owner. In extreme cases, a concubine could be killed without fear of retribution from her former family. More commonly, concubines were kept healthy to make sure the investment would eventually pay off. They did not participate in the women’s work on the fields and instead spent most of their time in the men’s clubhouse that was forbidden to any other women.²⁸ The practice ended in the 1930s when it was suppressed by Christian missionaries and the British colonial administration.²⁹

Wilhelm Joest and his Ideal of Imperial Masculinity

From the situation on Nendö in the late nineteenth century, I will now turn to Wilhelm Joest and describe his background. When he reached Nendö in August 1897 as part of a Pacific expedition, he was forty-five years of age and an established anthropologist and collector in Germany. His most successful publication, *Tätowiren, Narbenzeichnen und Körperbemalen*, was a comparative study on tattooing and he planned to collect material for a second edition.³⁰ In addition, the

Pacific had always fascinated Joest; he had failed to reach it in 1884 due to illness, and he now wanted to make his life-long dream come true.

His fascination with the *Südsee* was not only based on ethnographic curiosity about the region. Throughout his life, Joest had used his travels to collect objects and to have sex with women of colour. For both, Joest could rely on the power structures of empire to give him access. Pete Sigal, Zeb Tortorici, and Neil L. Whitehead have called this entanglement of an ethnographic and sexualising gaze “ethnopornography,” highlighting the underlying similarity in the desire to access the ethnographised Other, on the one hand, and the sexualized female body on the other.³¹ Joest’s earlier diaries are filled with remarks on his visits to prostitutes of colour, some of them violent. At some point, Joest stopped recording explicit sexual encounters and unsuccessfully tried to cross out all references to them in his earlier diaries. He nevertheless continued to write about women of colour in sexualised language, often describing their (supposed) sexual behaviours in detail and attempted to see them naked.

In this context, Joest’s desire to travel to Oceania is not surprising. The region had been at the centre of European imaginaries of uninhibited sexuality since the eighteenth century. The complex sexualities of Pacific societies were reduced to a paradisaical ideal of sexual access for White men and descriptions and images of Pacific women were heavily sexualised.³² Accordingly, Joest constantly tried to get visual access to women of colour during his journey, using the same materials in trade as for purchasing artefacts. The following excerpt from San Jorge, Solomon Islands, is a good example: “Inside were some women + children. After some persuasion + tobacco, they emerged; the young girls completely naked, the mothers with palm skirts.”³³ This sexualised writing was not limited to Joest’s diaries but reappeared, in slightly more euphemistic form, in his published accounts, as this excerpt from an article on Ambonese music and dances shows:

I hear and see them before me, the girls of Ambon, of Haruku and Saparua, how they smile promisingly, how they dance and sing; I feel them devoutly embracing the dancer, not refusing him any favour; and to this image that arises in my mind's eye, first softly, then more and more clearly, sounds and melodies that I thought I had long forgotten, songs whose meaning I hardly understand any more.³⁴

In Joest's ethnopornographic vision, ethnographic observation, the acquisition of objects, and access to women merged into a coherent whole, defined by his power as a White man.

While Joest might have been unusually open about his ethnopornographic desires, he was in no way an exception. He often visited prostitutes together with other agents of empire, and in fact he learned this behaviour from his older male peers. These actions represent an ideal of imperial masculinity defined by racism and based on dominance ranging from paternalistic goodwill to brutal violence.³⁵ Nowhere did Joest's behaviour cause a sensation and the structures to provide him with prostitutes were already in place wherever he went, just like the manifold stores selling "curios." Joest's practices of acquisition, vis-à-vis objects and women, are firmly rooted in the structures of empire.³⁶ And hence all of Joest's anthropological work, his collecting and writing, need to be understood as both clearly gendered and defined by exploitative power dynamics. Joest looked at the world ethnopornographically, and his stay on Nendö is no exception.

Gendered Collecting

Joest's stay on Nendö was rather unusual. Normally, following the directive of his mentor Adolf Bastian to collect what could be collected and then move on, he never stayed long in the places he visited. On Nendö, however, Joest followed a new plan: here, he wanted to stay and observe. While he was not quite "pitching his tent in the native's village,"³⁷ but rather living with the trader Actaeon Forrest, he was engaging in close observation and exchange with the men of Nendö about twenty years before Malinowski's mythologised visit to the Trobriand Islands.³⁸ This stationary research—not quite participant observation, but also no longer solely based on collecting—resulted in a flurry of notes in his diary that were posthumously published by his friend and colleague Arthur Baessler (Fig. 2).³⁹ However, in their raw form, they did not receive much attention and were quickly forgotten. Returning to Joest's fieldnotes today, many of them turn out to be surprisingly precise, resembling the observations made by anthropologist William Davenport in the 1950s. Given the era, Joest seems to have been a good observer, and yet his perspective is still clearly that of a White man. Nowhere does this become clearer as in Joest's treatment of *tevau* and the concubinage system.



Aufnahme von W. Joest.

WILHELM JOEST
AUF
SANTA CRUZ.

Figure 2. Wilhelm Joest and an anonymous man on Nendö. Published in Arthur Baessler's *Neue Südsee-Bilder*, 1900

When Joest first mentions the women on Nendö, he immediately muses about their sexuality and sexual availability. European observers often described women from the Solomon Islands as lacking beauty and allure when compared with Polynesian women, and Joest followed this convention, describing them as unattractive and “beastly.”⁴⁰ At the same time, he notes the impossibility of engaging in sexual activities: “For any suspicion of intercourse with us 3 Europeans, [the women] would be shot immediately (+ we would have to pay a hell of a lot).”⁴¹ These initial remarks paint an ambiguous image. Joest’s denial of desire is followed by his awareness of the consequences of such desire, calling the initial rejection into question. He knew that his position as a White man did not grant him special power on Nendö because the island still was outside the imperial sphere of influence. Hence, his relationship with Nendö’s women is defined by the patriarchal control of the local men. Under these circumstances—being denied something he supposedly did not want—Joest became fixated on these women, and framed them, above all, in terms of sexuality. He ends this first observation by referring for the first time to the system he calls “prostitution”: “On the other hand, there are official prostitutes who also sleep in the clubhouses.”⁴²

Joest first encounters *tevau* on Nendö, noting that “they brought me a piece of the magnificent feather money (belt made from the red feathers of the honeysucker) of which I had no inkling.”⁴³ He then writes one of the longest entries in the diary, beginning with the ambiguous sentence, “There is no slavery on Santa Cruz, unless it is understood to mean the buying of women [Weiberkauf].”⁴⁴ By the European standards of the late nineteenth century, the concubinage system would certainly fall under the definition of slavery, but Joest hesitates to assume this position. Instead of resolving the tension in this initial sentence, he moves to the use of *tevau* and describes the purchase of concubines as a kind of financial investment, stating that among the buyers “the earnings are distributed as a dividend according to the contribution to the share capital.”⁴⁵ Joest’s language creates the image of rational actors behaving according to a European financial logic, something that he denied most other non-European peoples. In this framing, the use of concubines is only logical because it is profitable. The following sentence introduces another explanation: “This custom can only be explained by the fact that adultery + fucking young girls means certain death.”⁴⁶ Here, Joest uses an idea of masculine desire he shared as well—that men will always need more than one sexual partner and that a monogamous society hence requires other outlets for this desire. Instead of rejecting it on moral terms as slavery, Joest depicts concubinage as both economically logical and naturally necessary.

Joest pursues this narrative further by describing the life of the concubines as mostly pleasant. He writes that “the social position of such whores is completely equal to that of decent women, to a certain extent even better, as they are allowed to enter the clubhouses, which means certain death for a non-whore.”⁴⁷ Tellingly, he diverges from later accounts concerning the legal protection of concubines, stating that they cannot be killed and that the whole community would avenge their death. He then describes the festive character of the sale of women and ends with a note on their children, stating that while girls are sold into concubinage again, boys are “occasionally killed on the spot.”⁴⁸ To attenuate the potential moral significance of this practice, Joest adds that children outside the concubinage system may also be killed after birth, for example one sibling in a pair of twins. Again, Joest emphasises the ordinariness of the concubines’ lives.

Hereafter, Joest mentions the concubinage system only one more time, writing that “today, down at the casino, there was again a lot happening with 28-30 guys, because Reef Islanders had brought a whore for auction. She was bought by the *jeunesse dorée* of our village.”⁴⁹ Two days after this entry, Joest’s diary stops because he became too sick to continue writing.

Taken together, Joest’s descriptions show a rather positive image of the Santa Cruz concubinage system, especially given the moralist framing often applied by nineteenth-century Europeans to sexual practices diverging from their own.⁵⁰ However, this may be precisely the point: what Joest is describing is very similar to his own sexual ideals, his own concept of masculinity and desire. Joest identified with the men of Nendö, appreciating their desire for wealth and constant sexual access to women. Joest did not want to find out what the concubines themselves thought about their position and rather imagined them to be content, just as he felt about the many women he had had sex with. Conversely, the wealth of information Joest provides shows that the men of Nendö were apparently happy to share their own perspective with the foreigner.

This shared sense of patriarchal masculinity connected ethnographer and informant and provided the epistemic common ground for exchange. The *tevau* is the material embodiment of this exchange, and of Joest’s fixation on Nendö sexuality. Joest bought at least four pieces of *tevau*, and even though he did not record the price he paid, it must have been substantial. As both Pycroft and Davenport highlight, even lower quality *tevau* were very expensive to buy with Western money.⁵¹ As there was no Western currency in use in the late nineteenth century, Joest had to purchase them with objects from his limited reservoir of trade items, making them even more costly. Both Joest’s detailed writing and efforts to acquire *tevau* show the great import he accorded the artefact and the

social structure it stood for. This sense of value would have been shared by Berlin's academic circles, for one because of the *tevau*'s spectacular aesthetic and relative rarity.⁵² But Joest would have also shared his ethnopornographic perspective with his fellow anthropologists, as he had in various other instances, marking *tevau* as valuable in terms of its sexualised character.⁵³ To Joest, *tevau* represented the resonance between his own sexual ideals and those on Nendö, making them complexly gendered objects.

***Tevau* in the Present**

Tevau's implication in gendered power structures reaches all the way into the present. Samou writes that she and her brother are trying to reinstate *tevau* as the medium for bride price, which at present is only paid in dollars.⁵⁴ Due to the shortage of such currency on Nendö, families trying to marry their sons are placed in precarious circumstances and often have to take some of their children out of school to save the fees. This practice equally follows gendered lines as it mostly affects girls.⁵⁵ Samou advocates for the reintroduction of *tevau* to create a currency system for bride price independent of school fees and completely in the control of the inhabitants of the Santa Cruz Islands. However, this attempt also evokes the gendered history of *tevau*, forcing Samou to make a sharp distinction in her argument between the use of *tevau* for bride price and for buying concubines.⁵⁶ Additionally, Samou's own work on *tevau* shows that there is still an element of transgression in her, as a woman, touching *tevau*. This raises questions about *tevau*'s future gendered meanings and the possible transformations necessary for its revival.⁵⁷ *Tevau*'s gendered history clearly influences its future, inviting both continuities and reinterpretations.

Outside of Nendö, *tevau* are held at many ethnographic museums, including the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin. Out of the four *tevau* Joest collected, the only one surviving is held there, as is the extensive collection of anthropologist Gerd Koch from the 1960s. The *tevau* collected by Joest, decaying and grey as it is, does not seem to have caught the eye of the curators when they assembled the new permanent exhibition in the Humboldt Forum. Instead, an impressive piece from Koch's collection is shown prominently in the Oceania Hall (Fig. 3). A short text describes the feather coil: "*Tevau* are objects of value and prestige that were exchanged in the northern Santa Cruz Islands as late as the 1980s. They often served as bridewealth." This is followed by three more sentences on production methods and the connection between feather intensity and value. The reference

to bridewealth is the only hint that *tevau* have gendered meanings, but even this function remains vague. The concubinage system is not mentioned at all. From a curatorial standpoint, this omission might be understandable—there is a real danger of eliciting a strong emotional and moral reaction from a European audience if the subject was broached superficially. Such a perfunctory treatment might perpetuate stereotypes of “savage” Melanesia, sexualise Nendö women, or hide their past and present agency.⁵⁸ But not mentioning the gendered history of *tevau* at all and instead focusing on a purely material standpoint also robs the object of its meaning and complexity.



Figure 3. *Tevau* at the Humboldt Forum, Berlin, April 24, 2023. Photograph courtesy of Carl Deussen

In my short analysis, I have offered an alternative approach to *tevau*: to show *tevau* as complexly gendered within their original context, while also including the European perspective and fixation onto such objects, and the ways in which different patriarchal systems could interact. The artefacts held at today's museums did not appear out of nowhere; they have specific histories that were often shaped by the gendered ideals of collector and creator communities alike, as well as by the imperial power-dynamic connecting them. Colonial ideals of the Pacific, as a space of sexual excess and a supposedly natural gender order, continue to function in the present, influencing how visitors approach such objects in museums. Additionally, visitors bring their own gender identity into the equation, making the encounters even more complex. These relations of power and identity shape the museum space implicitly. The role of the curator should be to address them and to offer room for (self-)reflection. It might be worthwhile taking the *tevau* from Joest's collection out of storage to learn about his complexly gendered encounter on Nendö and to question one's own ideas about gender and sexuality, both in Europe and the Pacific.

Conclusion

The context of Joest's purchase of *tevau* on Nendö shows the importance of gender in how ethnographic collections were assembled. Whether objects were deemed valuable by collectors and whether they were available to them were both influenced by gendered social structures. This case study shows that collecting was not always a straight-forward relationship but was often defined by various factors stemming both from the collector's conception of gender and that of the original community. In this case, Joest saw his own ideal of masculinity reflected in the behaviour of the men on Nendö and hence became interested in *tevau*. The Nendö men that interacted with Joest equally saw him as a legitimately masculine trading partner—according to Joest, they called him “Me-lö-mgu”, or “our father”—and hence they decided to let him purchase several pieces of *tevau*.⁵⁹

Understanding a collecting encounter as gendered does not mean that there is no “real” exchange of information happening. After all, many of Joest's observations about the concubinage system turn out to be surprisingly accurate. But it does mean that what Joest wrote in his diary and what he collected for a European museum cannot be interpreted without taking gender into account. The gendered structure of the encounter on Nendö was the epistemic foundation that

made this particular exchange possible. Consequently, special attention should be paid to all the perspectives that have not been recorded. Social etiquette probably would have made it hard for Joest to ask the concubines about their view on things, but what matters even more is that he did not feel the need to ask them in the first place. He was content to write down as fact what the men of Nendö told him, or what he wanted to see, or both: the image of a pleasant life for the concubines beyond the routines of daily labour. In fact, all observations about *tevau* that were collected while they were still in use came from men. Hence it is advisable to be cautious when using the knowledge in this article. As Tarcisius Kabutaulaka has pointed out, “after decades of anthropological field research in Melanesia we have come up only with pictures of people who fight, compete, trade, pay bride-prices, engage in rituals, invent cargo cults, copulate, and sorcerise each other.”⁶⁰

I have tried not to hide the patriarchal history of Nendö, and also to make clear how the fixation of European collectors like Joest prevented the emergence of written accounts of “such sentiments as love, kindness, consideration, altruism.”⁶¹ In future research, more importance should be given to searching for and amplifying the voices absent from Joest’s account—that of the women within the concubinage system, as well as those who supported or opposed it. Within the process of revival of *tevau*, now in progress on Nendö, the artefact and its social meaning might be reimagined. And in Euro-American museums, the history of complexly gendered objects like *tevau* can be retold differently as well, calling attention to the imperial circumstances of the collecting encounter and deconstructing the ways we relate to these imperial imaginaries today.

Carl Deussen studied liberal arts at University College Freiburg and museum studies at the University of Amsterdam. He is currently working on his PhD at the University of Amsterdam. His research is directed at the politics of affect in colonial ethnography and decolonisation processes in the contemporary ethnographic museum.

Notes

¹ Feather money has different designations in the various languages of the Santa Cruz Islands. In this article, I use the most common indigenous name, *tevau*.

² For similar case studies on such complexly gendered objects, see, for example, Karen Jacobs, *This Is Not a Grass Skirt: On Fibre Skirts (Liku) and Female Tattooing*

(*Veiqia*) in *Nineteenth Century Fiji* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2019); Bansoa Sigam, “African Cultural ‘Sheritage’: The Case of Akure Metal Necklaces. Missionary Ethnographic Collecting on Women in Colonial Gabon,” in *The Gender of Ethnographic Collecting*, ed. Carl Deussen and Mary Mbewe (Cologne: boasblogs, 2022), 21–26, <https://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/55696>.

³ Michael O’Hanlon and Robert L. Welsch, eds., *Hunting the Gatherers: Ethnographic Collectors, Agents, and Agency in Melanesia, 1870s–1930s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 154; see also Chris Gosden and Chantal Knowles, *Collecting Colonialism: Material Culture and Colonial Change* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Inc., 2001), xix.

⁴ Elizabeth Bonshek, “A Personal Narrative of Particular Things: *Tevau* (Feather Money) from Santa Cruz, Solomon Islands,” *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2009): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1757-6547.2009.00004.x>.

⁵ Oliver Lueb, “Die Macht der Artefakte. Tanzkleidung und -Schmuck auf Santa Cruz, Salomonen” (PhD diss., Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, 2018), 37–38.

⁶ Salome Samou, “Santa Cruz Feather-Money,” in *The Things We Value: Culture and History in Solomon Islands*, ed. Lissant Bolton and Ben Burt (Herefordshire: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2014), 15.

⁷ For example, *tevau* was often displayed during ritual dances. See Bonshek, “A Personal Narrative of Particular Things,” 80–83. For the use of *tevau* during dances in the present, see Lueb, “Die Macht der Artefakte,” 206–7.

⁸ William Davenport, “Red-Feather Money,” *Scientific American* 206, no. 3 (1962): 97; A. T. Pycroft, “Santa Cruz Red Feather-Money - Its Manufacture and Use,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 44, no. 175 (1935): 176.

⁹ Davenport, “Red-Feather Money,” 97; Pycroft, “Santa Cruz Red Feather-Money,” 178.

¹⁰ Davenport, “Red-Feather Money,” 97–101; Bonshek, “A Personal Narrative of Particular Things,” 74.

¹¹ Gerd Koch, *Materielle Kultur der Santa Cruz-Inseln, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Riff-Inseln* (Berlin: Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 1971), 162–63.

¹² Davenport, “Red-Feather Money,” 101.

¹³ Bonshek, “A Personal Narrative of Particular Things,” 85.

¹⁴ Davenport, “Red-Feather Money,” 101–2; Koch, *Materielle Kultur der Santa Cruz-Inseln*, 162.

¹⁵ William Davenport, “Social Structure of Santa Cruz,” in *Explorations in Cultural Anthropology. Essays in Honor of George Peter Murdock*, ed. Ward Hunt Goodenough (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 63.

¹⁶ Pycroft, “Santa Cruz Red Feather-Money,” 179.

¹⁷ For a discussion on the applicability of “currency,” see Bonshek, “A Personal Narrative of Particular Things,” 78. For a broader discussion, see the classic study Nicolas Thomas, *Entangled Objects—Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1991).

¹⁸ Samou, "Santa Cruz Feather-Money," 16; Davenport, "Social Structure of Santa Cruz," 63.

¹⁹ Koch, *Materielle Kultur der Santa Cruz-Inseln*, 164–65. Koch also describes the payment of a second set of *tevau* for the couple's engagement, showing that while *tevau* was used throughout Nendö and the Reef Islands, the precise usage varied.

²⁰ Bonshek, "A Personal Narrative of Particular Things," 83.

²¹ Samou, "Santa Cruz Feather-Money," 20–21.

²² Samou, "Santa Cruz Feather-Money," 16; Bonshek, "A Personal Narrative of Particular Things," 82–83.

²³ Samou, "Santa Cruz Feather-Money," 16.

²⁴ William Davenport, *Santa Cruz Island Figure Sculpture and Its Social and Ritual Contexts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2005), 101–2.

²⁵ Bonshek, "A Personal Narrative of Particular Things," 83; Davenport, "Social Structure of Santa Cruz," 67.

²⁶ Bonshek, "A Personal Narrative of Particular Things," 83.

²⁷ Samou, "Santa Cruz Feather-Money," 16.

²⁸ Samou, "Santa Cruz Feather-Money," 16–17.

²⁹ Samou, "Santa Cruz Feather-Money," 20; Davenport, "Red-Feather Money," 103.

³⁰ Wilhelm Joest, *Tätowiren, Narbenzeichnen und Körperbemalen: Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Ethnologie* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1887).

³¹ Pete Sigal, Zeb Tortorici, and Neil L. Whitehead, eds., *Ethnopornography: Sexuality, Colonialism, and Archival Knowledge* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2020).

³² See, for example, Margaret Jolly, Serge Tcherkezoff, and Darell Tryon, *Oceanic Encounters: Exchange, Desire, Violence* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2009); A. Marata Tamaira, "From Full Dusk to Full Tusk: Reimagining the 'Dusky Maiden' through the Visual Arts," *Contemporary Pacific* 22, no. 1 (2010): 1–35, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.0.0087>; Michelle Erai, *Girl of New Zealand: Colonial Optics in Aotearoa* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020).

³³ Wilhelm Joest, Diary 24, 16. The diaries are unpublished and are held at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Cologne. All translations of Joest's writing are mine.

³⁴ Wilhelm Joest, "Malayische Lieder und Tänze aus Ambon und den Uliase (Molukken)," *Internationales Archiv Für Ethnographie* 5 (1892): 1.

³⁵ For a more detailed analysis of Joest's ideal of masculinity, see Carl Deussen, "Collecting Masculinities: Wilhelm Joest and the Masculinity of the Other," in *The Gender of Ethnographic Collecting*, ed. Carl Deussen and Mary Mbebe (Cologne: boasblogs, 2021), <https://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/55696/>.

³⁶ See, for example, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Routledge, 1978); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and*

Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

³⁷ Victoria J. Baker, "Pitching a Tent in the Native Village: Malinowski and Participant Observation," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 143, no. 1 (1987): 14–24.

³⁸ For other proto-fieldworkers in the Pacific and beyond, see Rainer F. Buschmann, *Anthropology's Global Histories. The Ethnographic Frontier in German New Guinea, 1870–1935*, University of Hawaii (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009); Frederico Delgado Rosa and Han F. Vermeulen, eds., *Ethnographers Before Malinowski: Pioneers of Anthropological Fieldwork, 1870–1922* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800735316>.

³⁹ Wilhelm Joest, "Wilhelm Joest's Letzte Weltfahrt," in *Neue Südsee-Bilder*, ed. Arthur Baessler (Berlin: A. Asher, 1900), 276–403.

⁴⁰ Joest, Diary 24, 60. See Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, "Re-Presenting Melanesia: Ignoble Savages and Melanesian Alter-Natives," *Contemporary Pacific* 27, no. 1 (2015): 115, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2015.0027>.

⁴¹ Joest, Diary 24, 60.

⁴² Joest, Diary 24, 60.

⁴³ Joest, Diary 24, 65.

⁴⁴ Joest, Diary 24, 74.

⁴⁵ Joest, Diary 24, 74–75.

⁴⁶ Joest, Diary 24, 75.

⁴⁷ Joest, Diary 24, 75.

⁴⁸ Joest, Diary 24, 76.

⁴⁹ Joest, Diary 24, 101.

⁵⁰ For example, Fritz Graebner only mentions concubinage briefly in his discussion of Joest's collection. Fritz Graebner, "Völkerkunde der Santa-Cruz Inseln," *Ethnologica* 1, no. 2 (1909): 71–184. See also Lee Wallace, *Sexual Encounters: Pacific Texts Modern Sexualities*, *Sexual Encounters* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Indrani Chatterjee, "When 'Sexuality' Floated Free of Histories in South Asia," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 4 (2012): 945–62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911812001246>.

⁵¹ Pycroft, "Santa Cruz Red Feather-Money," 173; Davenport, "Red-Feather Money," 104.

⁵² For a discussion of the different valuations of ethnographic objects, see Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 57–80.

⁵³ For example, in the case of Japanese vaginal balls, or *rin-no-tama*, in Wilhelm Joest, "Allerlei Spielzeug," *Internationales Archiv Für Ethnographie* 6 (1893): 163–73.

⁵⁴ Samou, "Santa Cruz Feather-Money"; Bonshek, "A Personal Narrative of Particular Things," 87. Such revivals are common throughout the Pacific. See, for example, Tamaira, "From Full Dusk to Full Tusk"; Jacobs, *This Is Not a Grass Skirt*.

⁵⁵ Samou, "Santa Cruz Feather-Money," 22.

⁵⁶ Samou, "Santa Cruz Feather-Money," 23.

⁵⁷ Bonshek, "A Personal Narrative of Particular Things," 86.

⁵⁸ Kabutaulaka, "Re-Presenting Melanesia."

⁵⁹ Joest, *Diary* 24, 70.

⁶⁰ Kabutaulaka, "Re-Presenting Melanesia," 116.

⁶¹ Kabutaulaka, "Re-Presenting Melanesia," 116.