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978-0-521-62737-5 - Bodies and Persons: Comparative Perspectives from Africa and Melanesia

Edited by Michael Lambek and Andrew Strathern

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Large-scale comparisons are out of fashion in anthropology, but this book suggests a bold comparative approach to broad cultural differences between Africa and Melanesia. Its theme is personhood, which is understood in terms of what anthropologists call embodiment. These concepts are applied to questions ranging from the meanings of spirit possession, to the logics of witchcraft and kinship relations, the use of rituals to heal the sick, “electric vampires,” and even the impact of capitalism. There are detailed ethnographic analyses, and suggestive comparisons of classic African and Melanesian ethnographic cases, such as the Nuer and the Melpa. The contributors debate alternative strategies for cross-cultural comparison, and demonstrate that there is a surprising range of continuities, putting in question common assumptions about the huge differences between these two parts of the world.

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tions des Archives Contemporaines, 1996, and forthcoming in English, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997).

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