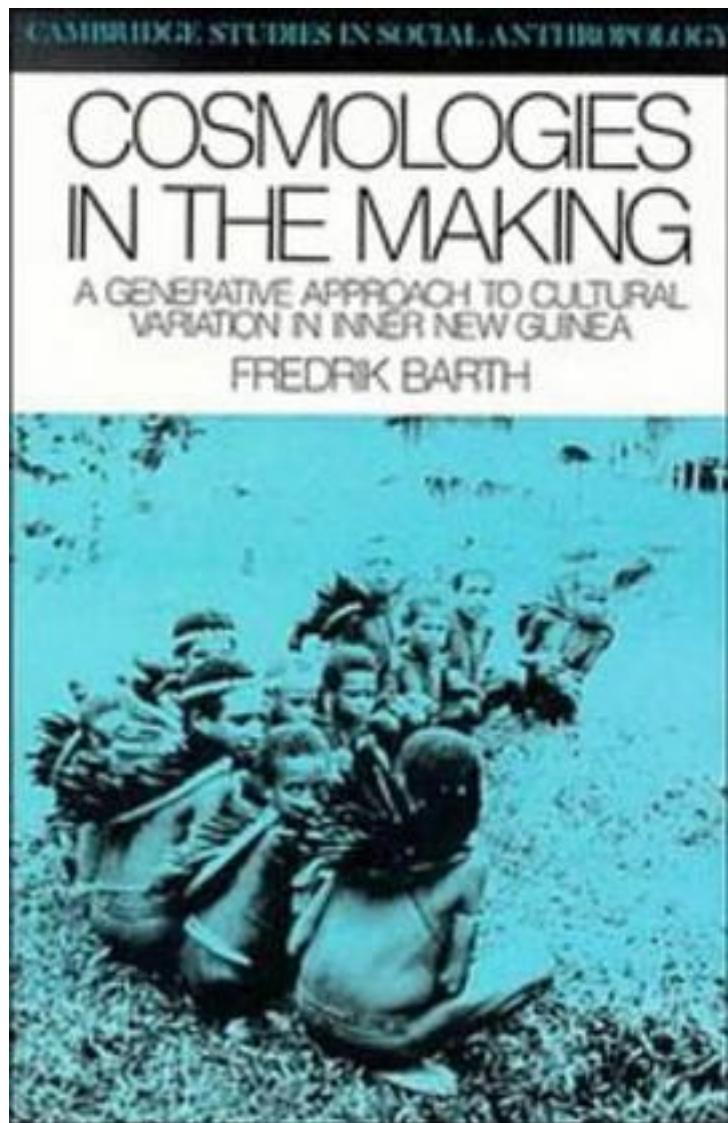


Cosmologies in the Making



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All culture, particularly that of non-literate traditions, is constantly being recreated, and in the process also undergoes changes. In this book, Fredrik Barth examines the changes that have taken place in the secret cosmological lore transmitted in male initiation ceremonies among the Mountain Ok of Inner New Guinea, and offers a new way of explaining how cultural change occurs. Professor Barth focuses in particular on accounting for the local variations in cosmological traditions that exist among the Ok people, who otherwise share similar material and ecological conditions, and similar languages. Rejecting existing anthropological theory as inadequate for explaining this, Professor Barth constructs a new model of the mechanisms of change, based on his close empirical observation of the processes of cultural transmission. This model emphasises the role of individual creativity in cultural reproduction and change, and maintains that cosmologies can be adequately understood only if they are regarded as knowledge in the process of communication, embedded in social organization, rather than as fixed bodies of belief. From the model he derives various theoretically grounded hypotheses regarding the probable courses of change that would be generated by such mechanisms. He then goes on to show that these hypotheses fit the actual patterns of variation that are found among the Ok.

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