

Maternities and modernities: colonial and postcolonial experiences in Asia and the Pacific

Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (eds), 1998, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, ISBN 0521586143, 230pp, NZ\$100

This book is about changing perceptions of the processes of pregnancy, birth and nurturing in a selection of Asian and Pacific societies, and the effect of these perceptions on the identity of mothers and the way mothers are treated. The chapters rest on a wealth of interesting material drawn from historical reports and contemporary fieldwork. This material alone makes this collection of essays a valuable addition to the literature on maternity. The central concern, however, is much more than simple documentation of birth and mothering; it is the domination of developing societies by developed societies and the imposition of Western values, Western perceptions of health and illness and Western medical technology. The authors argue that the Western approach to maternity denies essential cultural elements and is often detrimental to the identity of women in traditional societies.

This volume is written entirely by women, and has a frankly feminist perspective. The relation of maternity and modernity is cast as one of power and dominance of women—by men and by other women. The underlying issue is the conflict between what Davis-Floyd (1998) and others have termed the 'technocratic' and 'holistic' models of medicine and birthing. The technocratic approach views the body as a machine, and is concerned with achieving the medical objective as efficiently as possible without involvement with the feelings or social linkages of the patient. In contrast, the holistic approach sets healing in a social context. In the case of birthing,

holistic practitioners are responsive to the personal needs of the patient and also to the significance of the process, accommodating social requirements such as ritual. 'Modernity' in the title of this volume implies the technocratic approach and its negative impacts on the institution of motherhood.

The cover of this volume carries the statement 'feminist theories have focused on contemporary, Western middle class experiences of maternity. The present volume brings other mothers, from Asia and the Pacific, into scholarly view.' There are two chapters each about the impact of colonialism on Malayan and South Indian mothers, and chapters about birth in contemporary rural Bangladesh; perceptions of mothering in Fiji and Vanuatu from 1890–1930, and birth and maternity in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. Some chapters of this book were more enjoyable than others because of their simpler style and greater use of fieldwork. The chapters by Rozario (Bangladesh) and Ram (Tamil coastal women) are particularly effective, with Ram having the advantage of writing about her own community. Merrett-Balkos' chapter on the Anganen of Papua New Guinea, and Dureau's description of the changing social contexts of maternity in Western Solomon Islands are also excellent. Jolly's introduction and Ram's conclusion are helpful in mapping the volume and drawing the content together.

Yet despite the cross-cultural focus, and fascinating and informative material which are deserving of a wide audience, this volume is clearly targeted at academics and devotees of the feminist literary style. The elegantly crafted, dense prose, of the first few chapters especially, demands concentration, and liberal use of quotation marks around familiar words and phrases such as 'woman', 'sister', 'women's work', 'natural', 'work' and 'home' might perplex some readers.

There are also some awkward uses of statistics, such as maternal mortality rates expressed as per 1000 rather than per 100,000; fertility change over time documented by unstandardised crude birth rates, which are influenced by age structure; and overuse of decimal places. One surprising error is translation of the Bahasa word *mukim*—a common word meaning ‘district’—as ‘young woman engaging in ‘free sex’’ (p71). A *mukim* maternal health clinic in Malaysia is a very conventional facility, and certainly not targeted especially at young, promiscuous women.

My main reservation about this volume, however, is that some of the authors take a very uncompromising view of the colonial approach to maternity. There are many quotes from missionaries, officials and others who view indigenous women as ignorant and unhygienic, and who have little or no understanding of their social context. Yet it is hardly surprising that nineteenth century colonial administrators and missionaries in Asia and the Pacific were strong advocates of the hygiene and medical technologies which had wrought such spectacular declines in mortality and morbidity in their home countries. Their class consciousness was strong, and their attitudes towards indigenous Asian and Pacific women were probably no more paternalistic than their attitudes to the poor in their own societies. Manderson’s characterisation of colonial intervention to reduce infant mortality in Malaysia at the turn of the century as purely a device to ensure replenishment of the labour supply does seem rather harsh. Even if this were the underlying philosophy, the motives of the many men and women who provided the services in often difficult conditions must surely have been more altruistic. In taking an extremist stand against the imposition of the technocratic approach, some of the writers even find

themselves obliged to ignore the benefits of Western medicine as much as their targets ignored traditional practices. Throughout the volume there is little mention of the very well documented and beneficial impact of Western maternal and child health care practices on maternal and child mortality.

Jolly, one of the editors of this volume, has written elsewhere of the counter-productivity of taking extreme positions ‘The very constructs of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ have been continually revealed as reifications which do not admit the fluidity of past-present and present-future relations’ (Jolly, forthcoming). I agree. This persistence of extreme polarity is not constructive. Feminist writers have a great deal to contribute to our understanding of the social constructs of maternity, but they should be careful not to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

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Japan's Aid Diplomacy and the Pacific Islands

Sandra Tarte, 1998, National Centre for Development Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra and Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, ISBN 0 7315 2363 6, 250pp, A\$25

The conflicting interests inherent in development aid policy and practices have been well documented in the development assistance literature. Previous studies of Japanese aid have focused on either strategic imperatives (Orr 1993, Yasutomo 1986), economic cooperation—*keizei kyoryoku* (Arase 1994) or bureaucratic politics (Rix 1993). Sandra Tarte seeks to combine all three perspectives in her analysis of Japan's aid policy towards the South Pacific island countries and the motivations behind it. This is no easy task as the motives for giving aid are complex and involve a confluence of factors relating to power, development, security and prestige, and which are often difficult to disentangle. The uniqueness of this book lies in the nuances that it distinguishes in understanding the various driving forces behind Japan's aid program. In particular, the sectoral focus on fisheries aid offers insights into how the emerging theme of the environment is creating conflicts as well as linking domestic and international concerns.

The book is designed for the purposes of policy analysis and hence refrains from imposing any overarching conceptual framework. Tarte begins by sketching Japan's policy challenge in trying to meet the development needs of the Pacific island states. Essentially, the author grapples with Japan's failure to meet its declared policy goal of seeking to contribute to the development of the South Pacific island states as envisaged in the Kuranari Doctrine (1987). Analysis

is multidimensional—an historic account documents the twists and turns of Japanese aid policy during the 1980s when development goals were often displaced by the strategic goals of the Cold War, while a bureaucratic perspective provides a detailed account of coordination difficulties and conflicts of power in Tokyo. A third international dimension reveals how not only bilateral but also multilateral pressures, as in the case of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, impact on Japan's aid policymaking process.

The strength of Tarte's analysis lies in its empirical detail—an impressive achievement given the notoriously opaque nature of the Japanese aid decision-making process and the difficulties involved in providing a comprehensive overview of donor-recipient interactions. Chapters 4 and 5, with their focus on fisheries aid diplomacy and access, offer the most interesting insights into Japan's failure to translate economic might into political leverage; and how ultimately Japanese political and diplomatic interests in the region are subordinated to commercial and resource security needs.

Coordination difficulties aside, the main problem seems to be that Japan is caught between its desire for flexibility on the basis of bilateral project based aid and a desire for collective action with other donors and recipients. In the latter case, throughout her analysis Tarte returns to Japan's central dilemma of how to introduce procedural and policy reforms that meet both the demands of other donors and the needs of recipients. Rather than pleasing one side or the other, Japan at times seems to be in the awkward position of pleasing neither—as in the case of its fickle support for New Caledonian independence.

This book begins with a challenge and ends in skepticism. Tarte concludes that while 'Japan's aid diplomacy is

proceeding on several fronts simultaneously', Japan's role as an aid donor in the region is severely constrained by the lack of institutional change in Tokyo. She argues that two fundamental reforms are necessary to release the bureaucratic deadlock: localisation of decision-making power in recipient countries; and centralisation of the aid decision-making process in Tokyo. But the author offers no discussion of how Japan might be persuaded to adopt these measures. She merely hints in the concluding chapter of Japan's growing international pressure to adapt its aid modalities towards donor cooperation and multilateral frameworks. In particular, the global environmental agenda poses interesting questions concerning Japan's future capacity to reinvent its donor image in the name of conservation and sustainability.

In the final analysis, however, any future changes to Japanese aid policy in the region are likely to depend as much on public opinion in Japan as on international pressures. Increasingly, Japan's budgetary constraints will force decision-makers to take into account the views of the public at large when formulating its aid priorities. A second trend, which is generally overlooked in the book, is the recent shift amongst the donor community towards recipient-centred aid as a reflection of the greater importance attached to aid effectiveness. A new strategy to focus on recipient-centred aid was adopted by the Organisation for Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 1996, in part at the initiative of the Japanese government. More attention to the recipient needs and perceptions of the South Pacific islands would have further enriched the analysis.

As it stands, the book is well-written, well-researched and well-organised, and represents a major contribution to our

understanding of Japanese aid diplomacy in the Pacific Islands. It is of value to both policymakers and academics interested in the debate over Japanese aid leadership in particular, and Japan—South Pacific relations in general. The book is also timely in that it serves as informative reading for those concerned with the emerging debate on international environmental resource management.

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New Ideas, Better Government

Patrick Weller and Glyn Davis (eds), 1996, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, pp.xiv + 345, ISBN 1 86448 014 9, A\$24.95

Governments everywhere are being urged to become smaller, to change the way they work, and to become closer to their clients. Public sector reform has become an international movement. International

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organisations such as the OECD, the Commonwealth, and the South Pacific Forum encourage governments to compare themselves with best practice elsewhere and resolve to improve. The ideas are spread through consultancies and symposia, like the one that produced the papers for this thoughtful, and well edited, compendium of ideas about reform in Australia, the United States, Britain and New Zealand, the most radical of the public sector reformers.

The symposium was organised by the Centre for Australian Public Sector Management (CAPSM) at Griffith University, for the Australian Fulbright Commission. The contributors are a mix of academics and practitioners. The star contributor is Ted Gaebler, co-author with David Osborne, of the founding document of the movement, *Reinventing Government*, first published in 1992. The 24 chapters are written in a variety of styles. While Gaebler is inspirational, others reflect on their experience managing reform, or criticise its assumptions. The book is roughly divided into four parts. The first sets out the agenda. The second puts it in an international context. The third, mainly Australian, considers a range of techniques: performance measurement; boundary drawing between sectors and functions; the role of a Senior Executive Service; and the waning idea of public service as a career. The fourth offers more critical perspectives. The editors provide an introduction and conclusions. Overall it is an effective and substantial survey of the ideas and techniques behind the international movement for public sector reform.

The language of public sector reform is shot through with images of contracts. These may be signed between ministers and departmental heads, between legislators and the agencies they create, between purchasers of services, and providers, or between officials and their

clients. Yet Amanda Sinclair, of the Graduate School of Management at Melbourne University finds the new discourse of entrepreneurial government to be as mechanical, and instrumental as the 'celebration of bureaucracy' (p 231) that preceded it. Public sector activity is in many ways constituted by talk and writing—meetings, speeches, memos, drafting legislation. She suggests that the new language of public sector reform crowds out discussion of purposes in favour of technique. Its emphasis on interests and financial rewards fails, she suggests, to respond to the diversity of motivations that people bring to work, particularly in the public sector (though it may suit senior men).

Anna Yeatman contrasts this 'new contractualism' with older ideas of a social contract embodying a shared public purpose. Where the other contributors adopt the lofty viewpoints of the central agencies of government for example, the Department of Finance, or the Senior Executive Service, she turns to some examples of service delivery—domiciliary care, and unemployment—to show how awkward it is to apply the language of 'principal' and 'agent', or of consumers and their preferences to these situations.

The symposium demonstrates CAPSM's ability to bring together academics and practitioners. The chapters show that elsewhere academics have been excluded, or estranged from the processes of reform. This is odd, given how 'ideas', rather than (say) 'experience', feature so strongly in the rhetoric of reform—as in the title of the book. Jonathan Boston's excellent chapter on the history and dissemination of reform ideas in New Zealand finds Treasury officials devising radical reforms from first principles, without much reference to older traditions of research and writing on private sector management and public administration. The UK 'Next Steps' reforms, and the US

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Gore Report both relied on insiders. Are academics too identified with the collectivist, bureaucratic structures the reformers oppose? Are they out of touch? Or do they lack the enthusiasm required of joining a movement?

The academics in this collection tend to be cautious about the claims made for reform. Donald Kettl from the University of Wisconsin warns that the reform movement's checklists do not necessarily add up. His chapter identifies three 'faces' of reform—downsizing, reengineering and continuous improvement. Top-down re-engineering of work processes is quite inconsistent with steady refinement of the quality of existing ones. Both demand resources, and so neither are consistent with arbitrary cuts, externally decided. Attempts to do all three at once, he concludes, are bound to fail. Glyn Davis' concluding chapter offers a different kind of caution. He sympathetically reviews the Public Choice and New Institutional theory that public sector reformers depend on, particularly the work of Terry Moe. But Davis concludes 'there is something in this, but not enough' (p 316) to explain the appeal of reform, and the resistance to it.

So who, or what, is to blame—or be commended? Several chapters cite fiscal crises that precipitated, or provided reformers with the occasion for downsizing. Kent Weaver, from the Brookings Institution, sees élites harnessing popular distrust of government. David Kemp identifies more fundamental trends: greater international economic competition and the 'march of democracy' that he sees embodied in resistance to state monopolies, regulations and rent seeking bureaucracies. Anna Yeatman faults the politics of difference, as much as neoliberalism, for delegitimising an older collectivism (while Boston's chapter on New Zealand shows that official biculturalism can flourish in parallel with contractualism).

The book deals with four countries in the OECD, but there is also material here for readers interested in the Pacific islands. Patrick Weller's introductory chapter begins by questioning the universal claims of the public sector reform movement, and the applicability of their ideas to diverse national circumstances. As in the OECD, fiscal crises have put pressure on developing country governments to downsize, and privatise. There are some extreme examples such as the Cook Islands proposal to cut its public service by 60 per cent. The contracts favoured by public sector reformers have become international, as developing country governments sign agreements with the multilateral banks promising cuts in public expenditure in exchange for loans.

Reformers in OECD countries have tended to be hostile to centralised bureaucratic states, and independent professional public services. They play on popular perceptions of waste and 'red tape'. However, faced with weak or collapsed states, public sector reformers in developing countries often want to restore the professional autonomy of the public service, and to reassert a division between 'politics' and 'administration' that Western administrative theory has largely abandoned. The World Bank's 1997 concedes that downsizing may have gone too far. Rejecting a 'minimalist' approach, and 'one-size-fits all' recipes, the Report recommends a two-step program of, first, matching state roles to capabilities and then, increasing capabilities through 'reinvigorating public institutions' (p3). Recognising the role of the state in the 'miracle' economies of East Asia, the *World Development Report*, published in June 1997, was also prescient about absence of regulation, transparency, and accountability that figured in the meltdown that happened in the following months (p163). Its

conclusion that different kinds of public sector reform are needed in different regions confirms Patrick Wellers' caution about the universal claims of the public sector reform movement.

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The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders

Denoon, D., et al. (eds), 1997, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.xvi + 518 ISBN 0 52144 1951

Since its early days, Pacific history has attracted widespread discussions representing contending views on how the study of Pacific islands history should be approached, who should be the focus, what constitutes the regions history (or histories) and who has the right to store and pass on these histories. Contemporary discourses on Pacific islands history focus on attempting to explore and use the diverse approaches and viewpoints in the construction of histories that are island-centred and islander-oriented. Such exercises create a kind of history that could be identified as unique to the region while at the same time be part of the general discipline of history.

The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders is another addition to that discussion. The book is a manifestation of the multidisciplinary nature and broad spectrum of historical discourses on the Pacific islands. This is a significant shift away from the traditional tendency to view

and attempt to understand the pasts of societies entirely through a historical paradigm. To cater for this interdisciplinary approach the authors of this book are drawn from a variety of disciplines including linguistics, archaeology, political science, journalism, anthropology, education, geography and history. This is indeed an interesting mix of professionals in compiling a product that will, in the final analysis, be identified with the discipline of history. I am certain that on library shelves, especially in institutions conscious about disciplinary divisions, this book will be placed beside other 'books of history' on the Pacific islands region.

The multidisciplinary approach is appropriate, especially in the study of a region where traditionally a society's past could be best understood through a multiplicity of approaches, and there is never a clear distinction between politics, religion, economics, geography and history. These aspects of human existence are always intertwined in a complex interactive cosmology. This is exemplified in this book's exploration of 'indigenous genres' and how these relate to contemporary scientific methodologies in the contemporary scholar's attempts to understand islander interactions with the past.

The book has two parts. These are divided between the period before 1941 and the period after. World War II has been taken as the event determining the point of division between two eras in Pacific islands history. Part One discusses Pacific history from the 'distant past' to 1941. It begins by outlining the contending approaches and views that characterise the study of Pacific history. Here, the kinds of issues that dominate historical and ethnohistorical discourses in Pacific history are explored. Indigenous historical genres as expressed in oral sources are examined. The significance of

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oral tradition is demonstrated by the fact that, for many Pacific islanders, there is always an interactive relationship between the past and the present. Historical legends are important as a form of history as well as for identifying geographical landscapes or what Joel Bonnemaïson describes as 'ethno-geography'. This section exemplifies the complex nature of Pacific history and the diversity of viewpoints and approaches to its study. These approaches and viewpoints are manifested in discussions that vary between indigenous historical genres, colonial histories, the 'island-oriented' revisionists, indigenous post-colonial historians to the now popular discussion of decolonising Pacific history.

It is from this discussion of the contending approaches and diverse viewpoints that the book then goes on to explore the different theories and myths of human settlement of the Pacific islands, drawing from archaeologist, linguists, oral sources. In discussing settlement I am amused by the comparisons between archaeological and oral tradition references to time and dates. While oral traditions speak of 'once upon a time' or 'many years ago', archaeological dates refer to 10 million years ago as the recent past. It is, therefore, fascinating how Pacific history could be used as a means of bringing together differing viewpoints and approaches.

The book's exploration of the period prior to 1941 as intriguing because it takes the reader through different approaches to exploring the distant past. These approaches provide a diverse sense of time and the nature of interactions between the past and the present. Archaeology, for example, takes the reader to the pleistocene Pacific of about 2 million years ago, or the more recent Pacific of 10,000 years ago. On the other hand, there are the indigenous genres such as oral traditions which are not

preoccupied with dates, but rather are more concerned with characters, sequence of events and issues of morality and ethics.

The book acknowledges that Pacific history is not constructed only by events of the past. Rather, it is also influenced by ideologies that influence those who write history and how they perceive of it. Hence, it is appropriate to explore the kinds of myths that influence perceptions of Pacific island societies and Islanders. These myths were, however, not the construction of Pacific islanders, but those of outsiders, especially European scholarship and society. It is important, therefore, to examine the nature of interaction between Pacific Island society and outsiders. The book explores this by discussing the nature and consequences of European contact and the ideas associated with those contacts. They introduce new ideologies such as development as well as new political and economic orders. It was these new ideologies and orders that eventually gave rise to World War II and its subsequent impacts.

Part Two discusses the post-World War II manifestations of the European ideologies and political and economic orders. It is interesting that the editors have chosen World War II as the delineating factor between what could generally be regarded as two eras of Pacific islands development. This is signified by the World War II and the Cold War order which characterised much of the post World War II era. Also, there is the nuclear Pacific era and the material and ideological world remade. What interests me about this delineation is that it signifies a lineal conception of Pacific history from the past of islander genres to the development of European historical scholarship that influences Pacific islands development and history. This in a way denies the continuous

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interaction between the contending approaches and viewpoints about Pacific history.

The book ends by speculating on Pacific islander paradigms for the future, not only of the Pacific islands *per se*, but also their history.

The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders provides a useful map through which Pacific history can be discussed. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the interdisciplinary approach is the most useful way to engage in the discussion of Pacific historiography. There are, however, two major issues that I feel need to be considered when reading this book. The first is the old question of how islander oriented is this 'history of the Pacific islanders'? This question arises partly because, out of 20 authors only 6 are islanders. This, I believe, is not entirely intentional or the fault of editors. Rather, it is partly because Pacific islanders have not emerged to take up responsibilities in the publication of such a book. My second concern relates to the question of whether islanders really make up the central character of this book. In particular, islanders in many other publications are marginalised and the exploration concentrates on the impact of global forces in the Pacific islands. There is no real attempt to explore how Pacific islanders related to these forces. My impression is that this volume is too ambitious and therefore does injustice to the more complex nature of some of the issues it raises. These are not criticisms. Rather, they refer to areas that could be addressed by aspiring Pacific historians.

Despite these concerns, I welcome the publication of this volume. It is indeed a significant contribution to the study of Pacific history. But, then, as the preface says, this could only be 'conceived as a source of information and interpretations, for readers who seek an introduction to

the experiences of the people of this vast and ill-defined region'.

From a student's viewpoint, this is a huge book (518 pages). While it may eventually become an useful text book for studying Pacific islands history, for many Pacific islander students, the size of the book could be intimidating and the price unaffordable. However, once the money found, the book bought and the contents read, I am sure it will be a leap into the whirlpool of Pacific islands historical discourse.

I take my hat off to the authors and editors for a job well done. I am sure Pacific historians of the future will use this as a reference point to further explore Pacific history, its excitements, complexities and joys that make it so worthy of scholarly discourses.

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