

# Women's Studies Journal

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# Women's Studies Journal

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## Contents

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- 5 Editorial
- 9 Embodying ambiguity: Somali refugee women and ethnic boundary 'maintenance'  
*Louise Humpage*
- 29 Mixed-sex rooming and being female: Delving into the complexities of identity and subjectivity  
*Beverley Burrell*
- 43 Book Reviews  
*Poverty, social assistance and the employability of mothers: Restructuring welfare states*, by Maureen Baker and David Tippin, reviewed by Jane Higgins  
*A daughter of Isis: An autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*, by Nawal El Saadawi, reviewed by Nabila Jaber  
*Childfree and sterilized: Women's decisions and medical responses*, by Annily Campbell, reviewed by Jan Cameron  
*Her side of the story: Readings of Mander, Mansfield and Hyde*, by Mary Paul, reviewed by Livia Käthe Wittmann.
- 59 Poems by *Johanne McComish*
- 63 Review article  
*Double vision: Art histories and colonial histories in the Pacific*, by Nicholas Thomas and Diane Losche (Eds), reviewed by Lynne Star
- 77 Bibliographical index  
Women and the Law in New Zealand: Thirty Years of Scholarship  
*Sandra Petersson*



### *Women's Studies Association (NZ) (Inc.)*

The Association is a feminist organisation formed to promote radical social change through the medium of women's studies. We believe that a feminist perspective necessarily acknowledges oppression on the grounds of race, sexuality and class as well as sex. We acknowledge the Maori people as the tangata whenua of Aotearoa. This means we have a particular responsibility to address their oppression among our work and activities.

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## Editorial

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This issue reflects several strengths of New Zealand feminist writing and, by association, of the *Women's Studies Journal*. These are all strengths that feminists, however self-defined, and women in the South Pacific in general cannot afford to lose in these times of what often seems to be shortsighted policy and decisions impelled by immediate fiscal advantage. The first strength is the importance of the solid coupling of empirical research with theoretical and epistemological development, where the central focus is women. Every article in this issue illustrates this quality in abundance. This is not to say that feminist tools, findings or research styles are either perfect or uncontested. However, the unique character and quality of the debates, research and development of models has simply proved to be superior. Complex theoretical and methodological models have been used to understand and communicate in a sensitive, often counter-intuitive, manner the intricacies of women's lives, in an innovative exploration and re-writing of 'female' positionalities and performances. After thirty years of careful thought and endeavour by feminists of many stripes, simply nobody does this so well. Attend any sociology, cultural studies or postcolonial writing conference on the globe and you will instantly notice that this work is not being done elsewhere with comparable delicacy and commitment. Indeed, some scholars seem to be trying to gain careers from re-'discovering' aspects of the feminist canon. As one of our authors, Beverly Burrell, says in her introduction,

a basic and continuing project of feminism is to identify the ways women assert the relevance of being female in situations where gender difference is minimised ... [my paper] examines how certain theories about subjectivity and, concomitantly, agency, may elucidate the relevance of being female where the implications of an 'always already' sexed body are ignored.

The second strength is the challenges made to conventional wisdoms about 'women', including debates among feminists. A good example in this issue is the work of Louise Humpage, whose careful



listening to the accounts of young Somali women breaks a number of received views of both immigrant women and of Muslim women. Louise re-examines the concept of ethnic boundaries in light of the unexpected complexities of empowerment and disempowerment in the New Zealand context (including those adopted by well-intended feminist teachers attempting to promote the interests of young women), and manages to make us think again about what counts as empowerment not only in a multicultural context, but also in the bicultural arena which differentially favours both men and women, and in ways we outsiders to Somali immigrant culture might not be able to imagine.

My own article, reviewing *Double Vision: art histories and colonial histories in the Pacific*, shows what can happen when 'art' and disciplinarity are valorised in an environment that favours non-feminists and élite white men. This, when those attending the conference concerned actually professed as their major objective the demystification, unpacking and disempowering of the parallel positions of power and authority held by the equivalent colonial forebears, and the reclamation of traces of 'indigenous agency'.

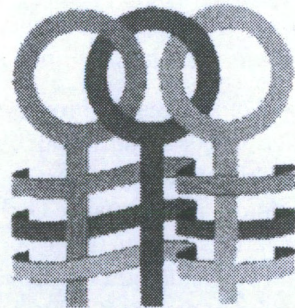
A third merit of feminist scholarship is its valuing of the perspectives and knowledges being developed at its outer reaches, including some we may not immediately recognise or want to own as 'feminist'. This has nothing to do with tolerance and everything to do with a continuing ability to be radically open to challenges, change and innovation. This is an area within New Zealand feminisms which is under considerable strain at the moment. It is exceptionally easy to develop a 'prisoner' mentality within an embattled environment and then to become a little fascist by setting inflexible boundaries. Among the many challenges to mainstream feminisms confronting us at the moment are: the ideas and preferences of young feminists, transgendered peoples and men; the divisions between 'postmodern' and 'structuralist' theory, 'queer' theory and 'gender studies', and the co-option of radical edges of feminism within institutions such as universities and polytechnics; and the feelings of anger and betrayal expressed by many educated Maori women towards feminists. Then there are the frictions being experienced worldwide between feminists from many different cultural backgrounds: the issues of multinational incursions (MAI), environmental desecration, employment, clitoridectomy and the dumping of first world medicines on

'two-thirds world' women, for starters. A journal that continues not to shut out groups just because they fall into some conventionally othered category, or whose messages are experienced by those in gatekeeping roles as raw, offensive or unreasonable, must have merit. This is not just for the sake of human rights, free speech and so on: it is ground hard won by feminists and valued as anti-fascist and emancipatory. I would also not hesitate to say that these are the perspectives that the New Zealand *Women's Studies Journal* can embrace and promote to its advantage, including its fiscal advantage.

Lynne Star  
for the *Woman's Studies Journal* Collective

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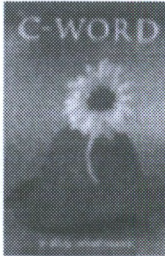
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# Embodying ambiguity: Somali refugee women and ethnic boundary 'maintenance'

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LOUISE HUMPAGE

The issues of migration and resettlement are frequently discussed in terms of international migration patterns and the responses of host societies to migration and migrants. While concepts such as transnationalism and assimilation, integration and pluralism may disclose important global and national power structures, Sorenson notes that they cannot necessarily grasp the cultural complexity of migration processes.<sup>1</sup> In particular, such ideas have tended to minimise the importance of understanding how gender and ethnicity intersect in the establishment and negotiation of ethnic boundaries, especially at the levels of migrant communities and migrant individuals. Yet, the migration and resettlement experiences are significantly different for men and women. By examining the concept of ethnic boundaries this article aims to highlight one way in which gender and ethnicity crosscut the migration and resettlement processes and explore aspects of the complexity and ambiguity inherent in such an intersection.

The leading role in ensuring the reproduction, transmission and guardianship of a culture that women are expected to play reflects one of the key intersections of ethnicity and gender.<sup>2</sup> The 'nation' is often regarded as figuratively female, with women acting as the symbolic bearers of nationhood even if they are frequently denied direct access to national agency.<sup>3</sup> The important position women hold in the 'maintenance' and preservation of national and ethnic identity is highlighted in the African proverb: 'If we educate a boy, we educate one person. If we educate a girl, we educate a family – and a whole nation'.<sup>4</sup> These ideas resonate with the responsibility women have generally had in sustaining social networks and cultural traditions.<sup>5</sup> They are likely to become even more significant in migrant cultures where women shoulder the responsibility for the creation and 'maintenance' of ethnic boundaries.

Commentators have frequently regarded the gendering of ethnic boundaries as inherently oppressive for women.<sup>6</sup> This claim is only partly supported by interview material gathered for a study exploring



the secondary school experiences of Somali refugee adolescents in Christchurch.<sup>7</sup> In particular, Somali women appear to experience greater cultural marginalisation than Somali men. Nevertheless, based on the same research, this article argues that the process of ethnic boundary 'maintenance' in resettlement cannot be considered simply in terms of 'oppression'. There are indicators of active agency and boundary negotiation on the part of Somali women. Evidence also suggests that in some situations Somali women have *gained* from their positioning as ethnic boundary 'markers'. Their academic adaptation is certainly positively influenced by the expectation that young Somali women actively 'preserve' Somali culture. Conversely, male Somali have been *disadvantaged* due to the lack of expectation about their role in cultural maintenance and boundary marking, resulting in considerable cultural confusion.

This article argues that in the case of young Somali refugees in Christchurch the evidence indicates that the experience of ethnic boundary embodiment is not always negative, nor one endured passively by women. Rather, interview data from a Christchurch study demonstrate that Somali refugee women have actively negotiated the ethnic boundaries that they embody. In addition, the positioning of female Somali as ethnic 'markers' has helped young Somali women avoid much of the cultural marginalisation that their male counterparts have experienced. Discussion of these issues highlights the complex way in which gender and ethnicity intersect in the establishment and negotiation of ethnic boundaries, particularly during migration and resettlement. Suffice to say, at this point, that the position of women as the embodiment of ethnic boundaries cannot be theorised merely as oppressive or burdensome, for this applies a simplistic understanding of ethnic boundary 'maintenance' and construction. Full account of the flexibility required in actively performing, re-negotiating, adapting and inventing gender and ethnicity leads to a deeper understanding of the way in which embodiment of ethnic boundaries has both disadvantages and advantages.

### **Maintaining ethnic boundaries**

As a result of the expectation that they hold the majority of the responsibility for reproducing and maintaining culture, women are said to frequently embody ethnic boundaries. These are socially constructed barriers that provide some degree of separation between ethnic groups

and help to preserve ethnic communities.<sup>8</sup> Every ethnic group wishes to give substance to its ethnic label, achieved by highlighting cultural content – such as shared ancestry, common customs and language – which is specific to the group, marking ‘us’ as distinct from ‘them’. Ascription may also derive from external sources that designate membership according to various evaluative characteristics. This often involves one ethnic group emphasising the cultural content of another to ‘protect’ its own ethnic boundaries and culture.<sup>9</sup>

Either way, the maintenance of the physical, social and ideological boundaries that separate a culture from ‘outsiders’ is often more significant in situations where a culture is perceived to be under threat, such as migration to, and resettlement in, a new host society. Boundaries become ‘slippery’ when people no longer dwell inside the confines of their cultural surroundings.<sup>10</sup> This is particularly so for peoples like Somali, who have moved from an ethnically-homogenous country in which virtually all individuals share the same ethnicity, religion and general culture, to Aotearoa New Zealand, a context in which they constitute a tiny cultural and religious minority. However, migrant members of all ethnic groups try to compensate for the emotional and cultural loss resulting from the lack of physical or temporal connection to their homeland and gain a sense of social solidarity through attempts to ‘maintain’ and reconstruct their culture.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the establishment of ‘Kiwi’ pubs and restaurants and the ritualistic celebration of sporting events involving Aotearoa New Zealand teams in London illustrates the way in which New Zealanders have been involved in this process of cultural ‘maintenance’ and reconstruction.

Ethnic boundaries are, however, most often demonstrated through codes of *appearance* – for example, ‘markers’ such as clothing – and through codes of *conduct*, in particular those relating to sexuality.<sup>12</sup> These codes differ between cultures but commonly take on explicitly gendered forms, in which women are charged (more than men) with upholding a group’s culture and identity. As Anthias and Yuval-Davis contend:

The boundary of the ethnic is often dependent on gender and there is a reliance on gender attributes for specifying ethnic identity; much of ethnic culture is organised around rules relating to sexuality, marriage and the family, and a true member will perform these roles properly.<sup>13</sup>



Ethnic maintenance is frequently achieved through three common 'performances' by which 'true' members are validated: the recalling and re-creation of an 'ethnic past'; the monitoring of sexuality, marriage and 'purity', as Anthias and Yuval-Davis indicate; and through the embodiment of cultural 'markers' such as clothing. Each of these 'performances' will be dealt with in turn, although the latter is granted most space, as clothing was a major theme in the interview data.

*Recalling an ethnic past*

Ethnicity is a social construct in which ancestral background and history play a large part. The notion of a shared ethnic past often becomes a form of mythical eulogy to former times, particularly when an ethnic group is under threat. Images of a bygone patriarchal order, or visions of gender complementarity and harmony are common building blocks upon which such histories are developed. This is not to say that patriarchy is something only of the past, but rather that understandings of masculinity and femininity, as well as concern over their erosion or loss, can underpin the ways ethnic identity and history is being currently reworked and reconstituted.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, women have historically assumed the majority of responsibility for, and the accomplishment of, fundamental roles in reproducing the 'traditional' culture stemming from the 'ethnic past' eulogised by immigrant communities. Ebaugh and Chafetz have studied the way in which immigrant religious institutions play a central role in helping new immigrants adapt to a new society and recreate or reproduce a traditional ethnic culture.<sup>15</sup> They found that women predominantly perform the three most important tasks in cultural reproduction: preparing and serving 'ethnic' food for social events; organising and participating in domestic religious practices; and passing on cultural knowledge to children, either formally through ethno-religious classes or informally at home.

Likewise, the Somali community regard the young women I interviewed as the future 'maintainers' and transmitters of Somali culture. They told of considerable pressure upon them to be socialised into the role of a Somali woman, which included learning how to cook 'traditional' foods and pass on other cultural customs. Despite very high unemployment in the Christchurch Somali community as a whole, it is only the Somali *women* who have been involved in

running holiday programmes for their children so that they can learn or retain the Somali language. The expectation that women should play a nurturing role in the family and community situates them as key transmitters of cultural knowledge. Doing both 'gender' and 'ethnicity' simultaneously, it is often difficult to separate out the two identities and the roles each designates for women.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Monitoring of sexuality*

The second common way in which ethnic boundaries are maintained is through the monitoring of women's sexuality, marriage and the expectations of 'honour', 'shame' and 'purity'. Ethnicity is tied to kinship and thus group membership tends to be passed on by parents to children as a birthright. The articulation of issues related to reproduction tends to focus on the female role; it should not come as a surprise, therefore, that women are considered central to the maintenance of ethnic boundaries through both biological and cultural reproduction.<sup>17</sup> Tupuola's 1996 study discusses how the authoritative and hierarchical social structure of fa'a Samoa (Samoan culture) is reflected in expectations of control over young Samoan women's sexuality once menstruation begins.<sup>18</sup> The role of fathers, brothers and other male relations in guarding the 'honour' and 'purity' of such adolescents reflects their desire to 'protect' Samoan culture. Women's embodiment of ethnic culture and its reproduction consequently produces situations where their individual freedom is curtailed in the name of cultural 'preservation' and 'maintenance'.

Periods of transformation in the socio-economic context may strengthen the need for this 'protection' of ethnic boundaries. In her study of a village in Bangladesh comprising Muslim, Hindu and Christian communities, Rozario discusses the implications of the Muslim women being required to enter paid employment.<sup>19</sup> She found that the defining of women in terms of traditional ideologies of 'purity/pollution' and 'honour/shame' intensified as the need to maintain other relations of domination and subordination among religious groups, the rich and poor and certain lineages grew.

The most obvious example of the way in which the concepts of 'purity' and 'shame' control women's sexuality in the Christchurch Somali community is the continued practice of female genital mutilation by some families. The mutilation of young Somali women's bodies affords 'protection' of their status as 'true' members of the



ethnic group and provides a physically hidden, but socially obvious, symbol and ritual of 'difference'.

Less invasive but no less important in monitoring the sexuality of Somali women is the social segregation of women and men over the age of fifteen. Any interaction that does occur between young Somali women and men is chaperoned; there is no 'dating' between the sexes and marriage takes place only after parental consent. 'True' young Somali women are thus those who are either at home or at school or work. As a result of the way in which the female body is expected to signify far more about Somali culture than that of the male, they are offered less freedom than young men to go out alone or with friends. Contact with non-Somali men is discouraged. The modest clothing described below also functions as a way to 'protect' the sexuality of Somali women by covering those body parts considered to be attractive to men, both Somali and non-Somali.

*Embodiment of cultural 'markers'*

The third common way in which ethnic boundaries are maintained relates to the use of cultural 'emblems' or 'markers'. Ethnic features such as language, clothing or food can become 'emblems' of an ethnic group, for they show others – both group members and outsiders – who one is and to what group one's loyalties belong.<sup>20</sup> Kasanji in her study of the Gujarati community in Wellington, emphasises the importance of clothing as a symbol of inclusion and exclusion from group membership and thus of 'marking' the boundaries between cultures.<sup>21</sup> Cultural 'markers' such as clothing indicate that the ethnic group in question wishes to maintain a difference. As a result, the likelihood that members will be treated differently increases; this might not necessarily be positive, for ethnic 'emblems' are often read in the ways that are unintended.<sup>22</sup> It becomes problematic, therefore, when women are expected to embody such cultural 'markers' because they are then at greatest risk of discrimination.

Somali women in Christchurch are expected to wear clothing that acts as a major marker of difference and an emblem of Somali religious belief. It is women who don the 'traditional' clothing of long, colourful gowns, which conceal their arms and legs, and a scarf or head-dress that covers their hair. The Somali men, while usually avoiding short trousers for modesty's sake, wear Western style clothing. Thus, their attire does not act as a distinctive marker of both

'difference' (external boundaries) and 'sameness' (internal boundaries) to the same extent as the women's clothing, although their physical characteristics might.

Discussion with young Somali women highlighted many examples of the way in which their clothing acts to 'exclude' them from the majority culture of Aotearoa New Zealand and non-Somali from Somali culture. Within the school context, the modest attire of young Somali women immediately makes them stand out from the majority of their peers. This is so even at schools where uniforms are worn, because young Somali women have had to get school uniforms made longer, so as to cover their legs, and because the head-scarf they wear is also highly visible.

To the surprise of some Christchurch teachers, many young Somali women are not willing to compromise their modest clothing. A fifteen-year-old described an occasion when a teacher decided that climbing a mountain on a school camp could not be attempted in a long skirt and demanded that the Somali students wear shorts. This young woman has decided not to go to other camps, because situations such as these make her feel very uncomfortable. Her sense of discomfort was exacerbated by the fact that the teacher assumed she must hold her religious beliefs to exactly the same degree as other Somali young women:

And then, it was kind of hard, 'cos, some girls *did* wear shorts and I didn't. And the guy said 'Well, I'm sorry but they are wearing it, you have to, too' / Yeah, 'cos they think 'Oh, she is a Somalian, and she's wearing shorts', and they ask me and I say 'I'm not going to do that, this is my religion, I wear this' and then he say 'Isn't *she* Muslim?' / It was quite hard for that kind of thing, so I decided not to go to other camps.

Sport has been important in cross-cultural interaction for the Somali young men, but the women are not comfortable having to change their clothes for sport and do not want to play games in front of males, so they often just sit and watch. Teachers have viewed the non-participation of the young women as a challenge to their ideals concerning 'gender equality', making culturally-specific assumptions as to what is meant by this concept and how it should be applied cross-culturally. They fail to perceive that by monitoring their own behaviour as regards clothing and sexuality, the young Somali women



participate in an act of cultural maintenance appropriate to them, just as Western woman wishing to protect themselves from unsolicited sexual advances might refrain from wearing short skirts and revealing blouses.

The Somali students also told how modest clothing hindered their older female relatives from obtaining jobs, because their attire is regarded as an impediment both physically and socially. They gave examples of a factory manager suggesting that the long sleeves of Somali dress would get in the way of machinery and of a clothing retailer refusing to employ a Somali women because her clothing might 'scare' away customers. While these excuses may hide other racial prejudices, it is clear that by displaying ethnic 'difference' – in this case, clothing – Somali women are without doubt being treated 'differently' and that in many cases this has resulted in negative forms of discrimination.

As shown by these examples, the messages that clothing or other ethnic symbols represent are often lost cross-culturally, acting as a boundary between cultures. The Kasanji study notes similar cases whereby the religious significance of Gujarati modest appearances has been misunderstood by members of Aotearoa New Zealand's predominantly Christian society.<sup>23</sup> The young Somali women interviewed are tired of explaining their clothes and the religion that requires such modest attire. They told of less positive interaction with their 'Kiwi' peers and some teachers were concerned that female Somali students were obvious targets for abuse or criticism.<sup>24</sup> For example, a school principal described an occasion when a parent called to complain that her daughter could not study in the library because 'those Somali girls make too much noise'. The principal did not believe the Somali students were making any more noise than their 'Kiwi' peers, but that they were more easily identifiable because of their appearance and dress. It is possible that this was a case of 'polite racism' and the reported 'noise' was less of a threat than the cultural and ethnic diversity Somali presented in the school context.<sup>25</sup>

As a result of discriminatory situations such as these, some of the teachers questioned why Somali women continue to wear such clothing, suggesting that: '[w]hen in Rome, do as the Romans do, kind of thing.' They believed that the Somali community could make life less difficult for their young women by relaxing restrictions on

their clothing. The teachers appeared to regard the modest clothing of the Somali women as some form of 'threat', although they were unable to articulate how this might constitute the boundary to another culture.

### **Embodying ethnic boundaries: oppression, agency or ambiguity?**

The concerns of the teachers interviewed echo a common belief that the positioning of women as ethnic boundary markers is highly problematic due to the disadvantage it can cause for such women. Much of the literature is critical of the fact that women are used as carriers of group identity and boundaries in most societies. Research has tended to focus on the maintenance of ethnic boundaries through exclusion and on the external and contrived enforcement of cultural values. The positioning of women as maintainers of what are presented as clearly organised, homogenous and fixed cultural values is frequently regarded in terms of social control.<sup>26</sup> For example, Wilson and Frederiksen stress that:

Women are the bearers not just of children in the abstract, but of children who will grow up to be members of the ethnic group. So it is through controlling women that ethnic boundaries can be kept in place and over time demarcate the juncture between internal cohesion and external difference. This carries critical implications for marriage patterns and the ways women's reproductive capacities are commandeered and controlled by the social group.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to this claim of social control, it has been argued that the gendering of ethnic boundaries serves to maintain the hierarchical structure of an ethnic group – a hierarchy in which men are at the top and women are at the bottom.<sup>28</sup> Crosland, in speaking about refugees, claims that: 'The unequal position that women occupy in their country of origin is intensified in resettlement countries and their lower social status disadvantages them in receiving the assistance they need in adjusting to a new environment'.<sup>29</sup> Rozario adds that the use of women as the 'status indicators' and 'cultural markers' of families, communities and their cultures can hinder women's personal and economic independence.<sup>30</sup> Emphasis is thus placed on the marginality of the women who act as cultural 'markers' and 'reproducers'.<sup>31</sup>

There is evidence supporting this argument in the situation of Somali women in Christchurch described above. However, I contend



that the female embodiment of ethnic boundaries need not always be regarded negatively, for three reasons. First, Somali women do not appear to have taken on this role passively and under sublimation, but give indications that they are active agents in the 'preservation' of Somali culture and the use of their own bodies as cultural 'markers'; second, they also appear to have gained a limited form of advantage from this positioning, at least in comparison to young Somali males; and third, discussion of the gendered nature of ethnic boundaries has tended to ignore the negative consequences for male members of an ethnic group who are *not* expected to embody ethnic boundaries in the same way as women.

*Somali women as active agents*

To begin with the notion of agency, Bhachu notes that the literature largely ignores migrant women as active agents or negotiators in the transnational diaspora and regards their cultural locations and ethnicities as fixed and 'ethnically absolute'.<sup>32</sup> In countering this line of thought, she argues that transnational women frequently transform traditional cultural forms to manufacture newer cultural forms that *derive* from their ethnic traditions but are continuously formulated in the context of their class and local cultures. Thus, the ethnic boundaries of which they are a part are not fixed and homogenous but rather negotiated and adjusted through social interaction.<sup>33</sup>

As a result, although Sorenson notes that migrants 'carry' culture with them in their suitcases filled with 'tradition', what is regarded as 'traditional' often takes on new forms within changed social contexts as the desire for the 'maintenance' of certain cultural traits arises.<sup>34,35</sup> This has certainly been the case for Somali, particularly in relation to Islam. In many ways, Islamic faith *is* Somali culture, for it dominates the roles, rituals and rites of Somali people. However, the external symbols of Islam adopted by Somali in Christchurch are nonetheless different to those practiced in Somalia.

The best illustration of this process stems from the fact that the modest clothing Somali women wear in Christchurch is *not* 'traditional' for most of the middle- and upper-class urban Somali women who have resettled there. According to my cultural advisor, many Somali women wore Western clothes in their home country.<sup>36</sup> The seven years Somalia spent as a 'Scientifically Socialist State' between 1970 and 1977 enforced a ban on long skirts and headscarves

for women and the school uniform included trousers for both sexes.<sup>37</sup> From that time, most urban women in Somalia continued to dress in Western style. Living in a country where ninety-eight per cent of the population were Sunni Muslim and where the Qu'ran was an important part of a student's schooling, external markers such as clothing were not necessary because there was little threat to this aspect of Somali culture.<sup>38</sup>

However, years of famine and civil war resulted in the Somali now in Christchurch leaving their homeland and finding refuge in neighbouring countries. Having lost everything but their lives, many Somali found solace in the Islamic faith while in the refugee camps. They studied the Qu'ran as a way of explaining and surviving the terrible situations that they were experiencing. At this time, many Somali women adopted the code of dress modesty that Islam promotes, as an outward sign of their inner faith. They found this necessary now that they no longer lived in a country where Islam dominated society and could therefore be taken for granted to a large degree. Resettlement in Aotearoa New Zealand – where Christianity dominates religious and social life – furthered this need for external signs of faith and culture.

Thus, the 'traditional' clothing of Somali women became constructed as an 'emblem' of Somali culture and a 'marker' of ethnic boundaries only *after* their exile from Somalia, when they were required to resettle in host societies vastly different to their own and where the threat to their culture and ethnic identity was considerable. The meanings attached to the bodies of Somali women are directly related to the historical and socio-cultural spaces they occupy and thus changed with their location.<sup>39</sup> This stresses the fact that ethnicity is a social process, with moving boundaries and identities which people, collectively and individually, create around themselves in their social lives. Ethnic and gender categories are thus not stable or permanent orderings of people, nor are the symbols that represent them.<sup>40</sup> Rather, identities are actively created and recreated in response to contested political, economic and social power relations.<sup>41</sup> However, that does not diminish the significance that such symbols have for migrants, in this case as a marker of 'inclusion' within Somali culture.

In the context of exile and migration, clothing has become a major symbol of religious faith and of ethnic difference for Somali, and the women who embody this ethnic boundary have found it very difficult



to resist wearing modest clothing because of the huge cultural significance it holds. Teachers spoke of at least two young Somali women who – as one teacher stated – ‘found it difficult to be a teenager when wrapped up in scarves’ and began to dress in Western clothing. As a result, they were largely disowned by the Somali community, yet found it no easier to be friends with ‘Kiwi’ students, discovering that cultural differences could not be overridden by a mere change in clothing. This emphasises that the clothing is primarily a *symbol* of the ethnic boundaries that are enforced both to keep members of an ethnic group in and non-members out.

The modest attire that Somali women have adopted in Aotearoa New Zealand consequently acts both as an *external* ‘marker’ and a reminder of the *internal* cultural and religious beliefs they wish to ‘maintain’ and reinforce against the threats that migration and resettlement have brought. The majority of young Somali women do not contest the expectation that they wear modest clothing, despite pressure from outside their culture, because they have internalised the Islam-influenced culture it represents. A nineteen-year-old female student explained it this way:

... we are wearing this because it is something to me, it’s not something like somebody has to make you do it, but it is something each person does believe it, like here in New Zealand you can do whatever they want to but if something every person believes religion, some form of belief, if you don’t do it, you are thinking of hell after, because you believe in your judgement day.

This young woman has a strong commitment to the religious belief that dictates modest clothing for Muslim women. Her parents have clearly influenced her religious and cultural beliefs and Somali children are expected to obediently respect the wishes of their parents. Nevertheless, this makes the desire to follow religious faith no less real for young Somali women.

It is difficult to tell how much of an active role she and other Somali women have played in using their own bodies as ethnic boundaries. It is likely that patriarchal attitudes in Somali society have influenced their decisions to some degree. Significantly, however, the first and largest group of Somali refugees accepted into Aotearoa New Zealand were women and children only. Many of the first Somali refugees came as ‘women-at-risk’, a category created for those women

perceived as vulnerable to torture, rape and violence because they had no male relatives or guardians.<sup>42</sup> While it later became clear that many of this initial group of women did have husbands and male relatives – although not necessarily in the camps with them – it is noteworthy that they came to this country as part of a group dominated by women.

Amongst these initial refugees were at least two well-known advocates for the banning of female genital mutilation and a strong contingent of middle-to-upper class women who had occupied prominent professions in Somalia before the civil war. A situation like this often allows women the opportunity to break with traditional constraints. Nevertheless, the modest clothing was not abandoned, but adapted to the Aotearoa New Zealand situation. Just as women in Western-style dress might adopt a sense of modesty in their clothing as a barrier to perceived threats – particularly sexual threats – the Somali women maintained the modest clothing associated with Islam to act as a barrier to perceived threats to their culture.

Consequently the embodiment of Islam ‘markers’ need not be necessarily allied with an acceptance of patriarchy. For example, Pallotta-Chiarolli cites a young Sunni Muslim woman of Australian-born Turkish descent who stresses that there is an often unrecognised fine line between a culture embracing Islam and Islam religion.<sup>43</sup> The latter regards the status of women as equal to that of men, while patriarchal control has constructed unjust cultures in which the positioning of women is often unequal with men. Butler’s research affirms this statement, providing examples of second-generation Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslim women maintaining their commitment to Islam while modifying their parent’s traditions and customs.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, the endorsement of patriarchy need not be associated with the embodiment of the ‘traditional’. It is possible for women to be involved in questioning and trying to change an inegalitarian gender structure *and* in reproducing traditional culture, for the two processes are not mutually exclusive.<sup>45</sup> Hochschild’s research on the unpaid and paid work undertaken by two-career parents in the United States certainly highlights the fact that white, middle-class and reputedly ‘liberated’ women can embody both discourses of ‘choice’ and ‘freedom’ while working a ‘second shift’ of housework without conscious confusion.<sup>46</sup>



Thus, although those who wear Western clothing might consider the positioning of Somali women as oppressed by patriarchy, it is clear that offered the choice of Western or modest Islamic clothing, Somali women *choose* the latter. To them, the long gown and head scarf are the more *liberating* of the two options and as a result, young Somali women in Christchurch continue to resist pressure from both teachers and 'Kiwi' students to 'fit in' by dressing in Western attire. These feelings and actions are affirmed in the writings of young Muslim women in Australia, who tell of their need to understand the difference between Islam as a religion and Islam as a patriarchal culture before they could 'come out' and 'go home' as Muslim and female. Like Somali women, they have had to resist the stereotype that the veil always signifies ignorance and oppression, as is often suggested in non-Muslim, Western constructions of feminist power and identity.<sup>47</sup>

*The advantages and disadvantages of embodying ethnic boundaries*

Without a doubt, the young Somali women interviewed in Christchurch have had difficulty interacting with 'Kiwi' students and participating in certain aspects of school, such as sport. It is clear that the interpretation of Islam that Somali in Christchurch adopted sets many physical, moral and social boundaries that make it hard for Somali women to 'fit in' at school and embrace opportunities that education in Aotearoa New Zealand affords them. This certainly appears to affect their cultural adaptation to their newly adopted home and the response of local communities to their presence.

However, a major finding of the Christchurch study suggests that the continued *inclusion* of young Somali women and girls in their home culture benefits them *academically*. As Muslim custom requires that the young women should lead more restricted lives and practice greater obedience than young men, the former appear to be studying harder and spending more time in school. Although the girls are not achieving great success, simply being in school enhances their likelihood of academic adaptation because they are actually present to absorb the content and methods required for success. The close monitoring of their lives and their heavy involvement in familial and religious activities has thus forged a strong group identity that makes it difficult for many Somali girls to drop out of school or get into

serious trouble. They appear to largely accept their central positioning within Somali culture and demonstrate less confusion about their cultural identity as refugee Somali resettling in a host society.

This situation contrasts with that of young Somali men. They are experiencing considerable difficulty in terms of academic adaptation and have lower chances of educational or employment success in the future. This situation may be at least partly explained by the fact that they have *not* been expected to embody ethnic boundaries or actively undertake responsibility for the 'preservation' of Somali culture. The greater opportunity for positive interaction with 'Kiwi' students and society appears to have created more cultural confusion for young Somali males. There is far more leeway for ambiguity in the men's cultural identity because their lives are not as closely prescribed as the women's and their clothing does not act as a boundary between cultures.

As a result, many of the young men are experiencing considerable cultural confusion, for their greater knowledge of, and experimentation with, non-Somali cultural practices has placed them in the situation of leading a double life. They are not the first to be caught in this ambiguous transitional state. Kasanji reports a similar situation in her study of the Gujarati community, in which young women also demonstrated greater limitations placed upon their social activities due to their clothing and monitoring by parents, therefore appearing less marginalised than their male counterparts because they had less contact with non-Gujarati.<sup>48</sup>

In the Somali case, familial dislocation and the mental and physical toll of years in refugee camps have resulted in many young men lacking positive male role models to provide the cultural socialisation and reinforcement that the young women receive. This situation had not been aided by the truncation of their formal religious instruction. Although still expected to play their formal prayer role at the mosque on Friday afternoons, migration and resettlement has left Somali young men without many of the daily props and support mechanisms of Islam that could help them 'make sense' of the cultural confusion in which they are enveloped. Unlike Somali women, the young males are not expected to actively embody their religious and cultural beliefs on a continuous basis, allowing them the freedom to straddle ethnic boundaries in a way that has increased their potential to be marginalised from both the Somali and the New Zealand cultures.



The expectation that Somali women 'do' and transmit ethnicity has been facilitated by the fact that the 'traditional' gender roles of nurturing and socialising are readily transferable or adaptable to the Aotearoa New Zealand context. However, the type of roles through which young Somali men 'do' ethnicity and gender are not as freely available in this country. For example, boys aged twelve and over were recruited into the army in Somalia, where they felt they had a real and powerful role in life. This occupation, which endorsed both notions of masculinity and also national/ethnic identity, is clearly not valid in Aotearoa New Zealand; instead these young men have been put into schools and expected to behave like 'Kiwi' children.<sup>49</sup> Some of the young men mentioned 'I am a *man*' during interviews, stressing that they did not consider themselves children.

Other expressions of adult masculinity in Somalia, such as early sexual activity, have also been less acceptable in Aotearoa New Zealand. One teacher remarked that male Somali students often make what are considered to be inappropriate sexual comments to 'Kiwi' girls, reflecting both the Somali expectations of early sexual maturity and the gender roles within Somali society. Some young Somali men in school have also found it difficult to accept the authority of female teachers because of the gendered understandings they have brought to Aotearoa New Zealand.

As a result of these factors, young Somali males appear to be more inclined than their female counterparts to play truant and drop out of school because they are bored in class or because they find school too difficult. Aotearoa New Zealand school retention rates show that sixteen and seventeen year old males from almost all ethnic groups are less likely to stay in school than their female counterparts. This suggests that poor retention is a gendered phenomenon which is complicated and enhanced by ethnicity/migration issues.<sup>50</sup> In addition, it has also tended to be the young Somali males who have been involved in the few episodes of criminal and violent behaviour brought to the attention of teachers and the police. Kasanji notes that the crossing of boundaries by those in marginal positions is often perceived as threatening and certainly this kind of behaviour has been regarded by both the Somali and non-Somali in Christchurch as potentially troublesome for the young men and the community in which they live.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

Exploring the experiences of Somali refugee adolescents resettling in Christchurch has confirmed that women may experience disadvantage as a result of expectations that they 'maintain' and 'mark' ethnic boundaries. Nevertheless, this article has argued that in some situations, the female embodiment of ethnic boundaries is advantageous for young Somali women and disadvantageous for young Somali men. This fact emphasises Fleras and Elliott's point, made when discussing adolescent immigrants and their upbringing:

If ethnicity is emphasized, ethnic youth may endanger social acceptability or economic opportunity; if ethnicity is deemphasized, it may be difficult to establish an appropriate sense of identity without invoking parental wrath or community ostracism.<sup>52</sup>

There is, therefore, a fine line between the two extremes of ethnic embodiment, as the experiences of the young male and female Somali refugees in Christchurch have demonstrated. Sorenson's research on Dominican adult migrants in New York City provides evidence that this situation need not necessarily apply only to young migrants.<sup>53</sup> She concludes that women find the process of migration and resettlement less confusing than men, who seem to face many more difficulties in terms of cultural identity as a result of conflicting demands relating to the expression of masculinity.

Upon this basis, therefore, it is evident that the positioning of women as the embodiment of ethnic boundaries should not be regarded as a completely negative phenomenon. The academic adaptation of Somali female students is heavily influenced by the expectation that young Somali women actively 'preserve' Somali culture, if simply by the fact that they are present in the classroom more than the males. Cultural marginalisation has also been less prevalent for the young women when compared to their male counterparts, who are experiencing considerable cultural confusion.

It appears that the embodiment of ethnic boundaries involves both disadvantages and advantages. As a result, this process cannot be theorised merely as oppressive or burdensome for women. The case of the Somali refugees in Christchurch has illustrated that such a simplistic understanding of ethnic boundary 'maintenance' and construction is not adequate to describe a complex and ambiguous process resulting from the intersection of gender and ethnicity through



migration and resettlement. It is also evident that women demonstrate considerable agency within this process, actively performing, re-negotiating, adapting and inventing gender, ethnicity and religion to suit their new social context. Their embodiment of ethnic boundaries thus holds the potential both to limit *and* offer opportunities in their new lives in resettlement.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Sorenson, Ninna Nyberg (1995). 'Roots, Routes, and Transnational Attractions: Dominican Migration, Gender and Cultural Change' in Fiona Wilson and Bodil Folke Frederiksen, Eds, *Ethnicity, Gender and the Subversion of Nationalism*. (London: Frank Cass) pp. 106-108.
- <sup>2</sup> Fenton, Steve (1999). *Ethnicity, Racism, Class and Culture*. (London: Macmillan) p. 56.
- <sup>3</sup> Sharp, Joanne (1996). 'Gendering Nationhood: A Feminist Engagement with National Identity' in Nancy Duncan (Ed.), *BodySpace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*. (London: Routledge) pp. 97-108:99-100.
- <sup>4</sup> Cited in Knowles, Stephen, Paula Lorgelly and P. Dorian Owen (1998) 'Are Educational Gender Gaps A Brake on Economic Development? Some Cross-Country Empirical Evidence', Economic Discussion Paper No.9817, (Dunedin: University of Otago) p. 1.
- <sup>5</sup> Fenton, pp. 54-55.
- <sup>6</sup> See Fenton, pp. 56-57; Anthias, Floya and Yuval-Davis, Nira (1992). *Racialized Boundaries: Race, nation, gender, colour and class and the anti-racist struggle*. (London: Routledge) p. 114; Billson, Janet Mancini (1995). *Keepers of the Culture: The Power of Tradition in Women's Lives*. (New York: Lexington Books) p. 370.
- <sup>7</sup> Humpage, Louise (1998). 'Refuge or Turmoil? Somali Adolescent Refugees in Christchurch Schools: Intercultural Struggle and the Practices of Exclusion', unpublished MA thesis (Sociology), University of Canterbury. It is important to note that the issue of gendered ethnic boundaries was not a focus of the original study but emerged as a major theme in the interview data.
- <sup>8</sup> Fleras, Augie and Jean Leonard Elliott (1999). *Unequal Relations: An Introduction to Race, Ethnic, and Aboriginal Dynamics in Canada*, 3rd edn. (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon) pp. 109-110.
- <sup>9</sup> De Vos, George (1995). 'Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation' in Lola Romanucci-Ross and George De Vos (Eds), *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict and Accommodation*, 3rd edn. (London: AltaMira Press) pp. 15-47: 16.
- <sup>10</sup> Wilson, Fiona and Bodil Folke Frederiksen (1995). 'Introduction: Studies in Ethnicity, Gender and the Subversion of Nationalism' in Fiona Wilson and Bodil Folke Frederiksen (Eds), *Ethnicity, Gender and the Subversion of Nationalism*. (London: Frank Cass) pp. 104-118: 104.

- <sup>11</sup> Sorenson, p. 105.
- <sup>12</sup> Wilson and Frederiksen, p. 4.
- <sup>13</sup> Anthias and Yuval-Davis, p. 113.
- <sup>14</sup> Wilson and Frederiksen, p. 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Ebaugh, Helen Rose and Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1999). 'Agents for Cultural Reproduction and Structural Change: The Ironic Role of Women in Immigrant Religious Institutions', *Social Forces: An Internal Journal of Social Research Associated with the Southern Sociological Society* 78(2), 588-613: 585;590.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 588.
- <sup>17</sup> Wilson and Frederiksen, p. 3.
- <sup>18</sup> Tupuola, Anne-Marie (1996). 'Learning Sexuality: Young Samoan Women' *Women's Studies Journal* 12(2), 59-75: 60-2.
- <sup>19</sup> Rozario, Santi (1991). 'Ethno-religious communities and gender divisions in Bagladesh: Women as boundary markers' in Gill Bottomley, Marie de Lepervanche and Jeanne Martin (Eds), *Intersexions: Gender/class/culture/ethnicity*. (Sydney: Allen and Unwin) pp. 14-20.
- <sup>20</sup> De Vos, p. 24
- <sup>21</sup> Kasanji, Lalita (1982). 'The Gujaratis in Wellington: The Study of An Ethnic Group', unpublished MA thesis (Sociology), Victoria University of Wellington, p. 15.
- <sup>22</sup> Banton, Michael (1997). *Ethnic and Racial Consciousness*, 2nd edn. (London: Longman) p. 61.
- <sup>23</sup> Kasanji, pp. 15, 27.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Kiwi' was a term used by the Somali participants. In general, it referred to those born in New Zealand who were familiar with and reflected Aotearoa New Zealand culture. This term was often, but not exclusively, used to describe Pakeha New Zealanders.
- <sup>25</sup> Fleras and Elliott (1999), p. 81.
- <sup>26</sup> Bhachu, Parminder (1996). 'The Multiple Landscapes of Transnational Asian Women in the Diaspora' in Verd Amit-Talai and Caroline Knowles (Eds), *Re-Situating Identities: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity and Culture*. (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press) pp. 298-299.
- <sup>27</sup> Wilson and Frederiksen, p. 3.
- <sup>28</sup> See Rozario, p. 31.
- <sup>29</sup> Crosland, Julie (1991). 'Cultural Uprooting and Barriers to Resettlement: The Experience of Cambodian Refugee Women in Wellington', unpublished MA thesis (Social Work), Victoria University of Wellington, p. ii.
- <sup>30</sup> Rozario, p. 31.
- <sup>31</sup> Kasanji, p. 15.
- <sup>32</sup> Bhachu, pp. 298-299.
- <sup>33</sup> Fleras and Elliott, pp. 109-110.
- <sup>34</sup> Sorenson, p. 105.
- <sup>35</sup> I have placed the verbs 'maintain' and 'reproduce' in speech marks to emphasise this situation.



- <sup>36</sup> Due to my 'outsider' status as a Pakeha New Zealander, cultural advice was provided by a respected and active member of the Somali community in Christchurch.
- <sup>37</sup> Laitin, David and Said Samatar (1987). *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*. (London: Westview Press and Gower) p. 81
- <sup>38</sup> Bell, Daphne (1998). *Ethnic New Zealand: Towards Cultural Understanding*. (Hamilton: New Settlers Focus Group) p. 23.
- <sup>39</sup> Harris, Anita (1999) 'Everything a Teenage Girl Should Know: Adolescence and the Production of Femininity' *Women's Studies Journal*, 15(2), 111-124 : 115.
- <sup>40</sup> Fenton, p. 11.
- <sup>41</sup> Larner, Wendy (1996). 'Gender and Ethnicity: Theorising 'Difference' in Aotearoa/New Zealand' in Paul Spoonley, David Pearson and Cluny Macpherson (Eds), *Nga Patai: Racism and Ethnic Relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. (Palmerston North: Dunmore) pp. 160-161.
- <sup>42</sup> Tremewan, Tanya (1994). *Refugee Women: The New Zealand Refugee Quota Programme*, New Zealand Immigration Service. (Wellington: Department of Labour) p. 11.
- <sup>43</sup> Pallotta-Chiarolli, Maria (1999). 'Coming Out/Going Home: Australian Girls and Young Women Interrogating Racism and Heterosexism', *Women's Studies Journal*, Special Issue: Girl Trouble? Feminist inquiry into the lives of young women. Spring: 71-88: 78.
- <sup>44</sup> Butler, Charlotte (1999). 'Cultural Diversity and Religious Conformity; Dimensions of Social Change Among Second-generation Muslim Women' in Rohit Barot, Harriet Bradley and Steve Fenton (Eds), *Ethnicity, Gender and Social Change*. (London: Macmillan Press) pp. 135-151: 136;144-145.
- <sup>45</sup> Ebaugh and Chafetz, p. 588.
- <sup>46</sup> Hochschild, Arlie (1989). *The Second Shift*. (New York: Avon Books). For discussion see Ebaugh and Chafetz, p. 588.
- <sup>47</sup> Pallotta-Chiarolli, p. 77.
- <sup>48</sup> Kasanji, pp. 110, 150.
- <sup>49</sup> Norris, Joanna (1998). 'Plan to help young refugees adjust' in *Dominion*, 11 September, p. 16.
- <sup>50</sup> Ministry of Education (1999). *New Zealand Schools '98: A Report of the Compulsory Sector in New Zealand*. (Wellington: Ministry of Education), pp. 68-69. It is interesting to note, however, that for eighteen year old males this trend is reversed.
- <sup>51</sup> Kasanji, p. 91.
- <sup>52</sup> Fleras and Elliott, pp. 116-117.
- <sup>53</sup> Sorenson, pp. 104-110.

# Mixed-sex rooming and being female: Delving into the complexities of identity and subjectivity

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I believe a basic and continuing project of feminism is to identify the ways women may assert the relevance of being female in situations where gender difference is minimised. This article, which takes up this feminist project, will examine how certain theories about subjectivity and, concomitantly, agency, may elucidate the relevance of being female where the implications of an 'always already' sexed body is ignored. At issue is whether feminist philosophers Elizabeth Grosz' and Judith Butler's formulations of the female subject ground a notion of subjectivity that is efficacious or can be shown to accommodate varied and multi-formed subjectivity which (in my analysis) it seems women possess.<sup>1,2</sup>

My way into these issues in this article, is to look at the practice of mixed-sex rooming in hospitals. I define mixed-sex rooming (MSR, sometimes called room sharing) as men and women being cared for in hospital beds placed adjacent to one another, in immediate proximity with only curtains, or similar, for partitioning. To my knowledge MSR is relatively uncommon in New Zealand, though where it does occur it seems to have come about as an unplanned consequence of the rationalising of the health service over the last decade in some New Zealand hospitals. Whatever the frequency and source of MSR it is a practice that continues despite both patient and staff objections. For example, objection to MSR is noted in various newspaper headlines: *Mixed-sex wards 'appal'*, *Room with men angers gynaecological patient* and *Hospital Complaint*.<sup>3,4,5</sup> The disquiet of many women who have experienced MSR seems to be linked to their belief that being roomed with men is an affront to their dignity and counter-productive to 'getting well'. On two counts these women are vulnerable and hold relatively little power, namely as patients and as females. Although it is likely that many men would find MSR less than ideal, I will address the issue in regard to women only.

Belief in the interrelational effects arising from sex difference has been a powerful rationale for separate rooming in the past, and



still is in private hospitals and many public hospitals. Certainly the majority of patients are not mixed-sex roomed. It is not possible to quantify the numbers in New Zealand as there are no published figures and it is unlikely instances would be routinely recorded. However, when it does occur, compliance with the practice at times involves all levels of the hospital work force and patients.

In a British study of eight medical wards half of the thirty-three patients surveyed (twenty-seven females and ten males) stated a preference for single sex accommodation.<sup>6</sup> Twenty-seven per cent of women respondents in a study carried out at Maudsley Hospital preferred single sex accommodation.<sup>7</sup> Another British survey reports retrospectively of an acute medical ward in 1990, where patients were mixed-sex roomed. Patients were asked what they thought of MSR, almost nobody objected as current patients, but, on being asked the same question after discharge the majority stated mixed-sex warding was the worst aspect of their stay. The study indicates that an already existing single-sex policy was given more credence when a telephone survey of recently discharged patients revealed the worst aspect of patients' care was being mixed-sex roomed.<sup>8</sup> Lucy Burgess reports that the United Kingdom's Patients' Charter, 1992, which guaranteed admission within a limited time frame, seems to have had the effect of increasing the number of mixed sex facilities in Britain.<sup>9</sup> The same author reported from a survey of nurses and patients, carried out by *Nursing Times*, that the majority of nurses find mixed-sex rooming unsatisfactory and obstructive to ensuring patient's privacy and, second, that objections by patients and staff have increased in recent years.

In an exploratory study which I undertook, a sixty-six year old woman – whom I shall call Pat – was admitted for a three day period and mixed-sex roomed. Pat could compare the experience to earlier and subsequent hospitalisations when she was roomed with women only. For her, being roomed on full bed-rest care with men was distressing. She reported the male patients (similar in age to herself) as polite, respectful and not given to condescension toward herself or the other woman in the room. Despite the polite rapport they all established Pat described feeling very self-conscious, averting her eyes and preferring to read all the time to avoid social contact. In fact she was too self conscious to clean her teeth on the first night. She felt embarrassed doing her hair and make-up. Pat reported feeling

she was 'out on a stage all the time' and that she 'didn't have any little corner to hide in'.<sup>10</sup> Pat believes mixed-sex rooming was unhelpful to her recovery as she was 'stressed' by the embarrassment and constant tension it provoked. In some instances, for the safety of women, we (feminists) want special recognition of the category of 'women' and in doing so need to be clear about what it is we invoke.

The issue of why sexual differentiation makes the practice of mixed-sex rooming damaging to the inner integrity of women (or at least some women) rests upon certain epistemological assumptions. Primarily, I am concerned with examining the concept of a multi-centred subjectivity and the efficacy of this interpretation of the subject for the feminist agenda ensuing from Pat's story. I consider the work of feminist poststructuralists pertinent to unpacking and resolving the dilemma. Women participants in various research studies reveal that MSR was uncomfortable for them due to the obvious way sex differences were ignored.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to clarify the theoretical grounds upon which women's objection or acquiesce to this practice may rest. To achieve this I assess the utility of theories on subjectivity put forward by Grosz and Butler.<sup>12,13</sup> Their understanding of gender, which recognises the assymetry of power relations underpinning sexual difference, is a pivotal concept in both understanding the feelings and responses arising from MSR for women and in resolving the dilemma posed by a continuation of the practice of mixed rooming.

### **The problems posed by the category 'woman'**

The body has been viewed as that irreducible, biologically assigned, ahistorical matter which is significantly differentiated by sex. But what actually constitutes that differentiation is a matter of dispute. The fact that males and females sharing one room is problematic suggests there is more than biology at work. The ontological dispute arises from what – if anything – of the social/emotional being follows from the biological core. If sex-specific qualities are considered not to be significant beyond their function, then sex-differentiation (that is, gender) is acquired socially. In their understanding, we cannot think of a pre-discursive or foundational reality about 'bodies'. Instead, bodies become understood as the entities discourse creates the 'body' to be. A pre-discursive materiality exists that is 'irrefutable' but indefinable.<sup>14</sup> In short, our understanding



of the body is a production of dominant or socially sanctioned discourses.

Both Grosz and Butler investigate sex differentiation, positing that femininity is subject to contingencies (culturally prescribed roles and behaviours) which circumscribe our understandings and meanings constituting the category 'women'. Bodies and sex differentiation are discursively produced entities and act as dominant discursive imperatives. In my estimation, the difference between the authors' alternative descriptions of bodies pivots on the agency attributed to the subject by Grosz and Butler, I will come back to this point further on.

Firstly I will look at Grosz' work. Grosz believes women have a subjectivity capable of, and responsive to, transforming discourses (hence her identification of the body as 'volatile'). It is as if the body is a writing surface signifying particularity and specificity, its marks can be interpreted and assessed, though it is permeable and amenable to change. Volatility is achieved by the process of 'inscription' which is the engravability (imprintness) and consequent readability of the social body. As a body 'inscribed', it is malleable, pliable and transformed by discourse; it is the becoming of a recognisable, able to be read, social form, while 'volatility' is the permeability and openness to change and transformation which the body possesses. Grosz argues:

[t]here must be some kinds of biological limit or constraint (on bodies), these constraints are perpetually capable of being superseded, overcome, through the human body's capacity to open itself up to prosthetic synthesis, to transform or rewrite its environment, to continually augment its powers and capacities through the incorporation into the body's own spaces and modalities of objects ... that supplement and surpass the organic body.<sup>15</sup>

In this quote, we see that Grosz views the physicality of the body as the bottom line, as some sort of constraining influence, although she says the constraint may not necessarily take a pre-set form and is open to varied and multiple transformations. 'Volatility' describes the openness to change, a fluidity and stretchability, 'a set of tendencies' which resists fixedness and constancy.<sup>16</sup>

The 'volatile' body is not a neutral surface on which text is inscribed. It matters to Grosz that the body is 'always already' sexed;

it matters that materially, the female and male bodies are different and it matters which type of surface is inscribed.<sup>17</sup> It is Grosz's definition of 'volatile' that permits the reader to speculate that tacit to 'volatility' is a form of 'resistance'.

In my reading of Grosz, the term the 'inscribed' subject/body is drawn from Foucault's subject, enmeshed in disciplinary regimes. Although Grosz draws on the aspects of Foucault's work that outline the process of self-production (inscription), she stops short of developing his concept of resistant subjects. For Foucault, disciplinary power is continually producing multiple loci and potential trajectories, and in doing so generates sites of resistance. Discursive 'cultivation' better describes Foucault's conception of resistance.<sup>18</sup> Resistance is not simply a matter of reaction to pre-existing power, it is produced in the formulating of strategic 'tactics'.

I return to my point that Grosz stops short of comment or application of the Foucauldian concept of resistance in subjects. It seems to me that events happen to, on and around Grosz's subject but she does not tell us *how* her subjects live out their agency. The concept of agency is a matter of discussion amongst feminist theorists including Scott, King, and Alice.<sup>19</sup> The discussion articulates the mechanics of the processes by which subjects reveal their fluidity, exert influence and formativeness, usually termed 'agency'. Alice posits the idea that agency is always negotiated and, thereby, constituted differently by participants in relations of domination and subjection. To Alice, Grosz appears to favour the notion of the subject as psychically formed and reinscribed by cultural relations of power above a conceptualising of the subject as active agent. While lacking agency as I see it, it is difficult to see by which mechanism Grosz's subject might resist practices such as MSR, originating as it does from sites of considerable power. Without a notion of agent-in-resistance, it is difficult to discern how her subject might move between various positions.

### **Pursuing a critique, presenting some challenges...**

Alice posits that 'interactive inscription' reflects our multifaceted agency more accurately than Grosz's linear version of 'inscription' and as such has more utility for feminist agendas. In ignoring the possibility that race or class are every bit as potent as sex difference in constituting subjects, Grosz 'creates' bodies which



do not fully represent women in their diversity and/or wholeness. In fact, she lays herself open to the charge that her bodies are the fictions she denies poststructural accounts render the body. In overlooking these other formative elements, Grosz's formulation of bodies is narrow. It lacks recognition of the saturations of experience and motivations of resistance of those who live between, what Alice terms, the margins and centre. Grosz's tendency towards uniform bodies cannot represent the multiplicity of women. The crux of my criticism of Grosz is that her analysis of bodies as inscribed comes up with a body which, though subject to the shifts and influences of culture and relations, is no less passive than its traditional stereotype. Its 'volatility' arises, not from an active agency but from the variations (sex difference) of 'essences' and materiality of the inscriptive surfaces of a given body.

Although Grosz describes the body as an 'open materiality, a set of (possibly infinite) tendencies and potentialities....' she does not address the mechanisms by which they are activated or mobilised. Nor does she show how agency is deployed to develop these possibilities, one such possibility being a woman holding a contrary discourse of resistance to the practice of MSR.<sup>20</sup>

Now turning to Butler's work, notions of race, class and sexual orientation are integral throughout Butler's writing. I concentrate on her notion of 'performativity' and the discursing subject and discuss how the subject is itself 'performative' and produced through 'performativity'.

### **The problem of materiality in the constitution of subjects**

Language is used to assign and mediate understandings of matter, by nominating, selecting and devising categories through which matter is then defined. 'Sex/gender' becomes a focus in Butler's project in order to show how we might understand that bodies and gender are socially prescribed and how assumptions about ostensibly recognisable social and gendered roles work to elicit compliance to norms by individuals. The significance which sex difference is awarded in culture is unequivocally due to the nominating, categorising, and selectivity of language rather than the essential materiality of bodies. The materiality of a body is never revealed in a 'raw' state, discourse 'prefigures and constrains any use of terms regarding bodies'.<sup>21</sup>

The trajectory of cultural thinking which has shaped concepts of sexed bodies over time, has pre-figured the meanings and conceptualising available to specific bodies. The understanding of the terms 'female/male' and the material body are indissoluble and resolutely bound up with each other. Any attempt to isolate the 'raw' biological aspects from cultural understandings is a lost cause. The 'raw' is 'sedimented' and inlaid with discourses. However Butler is not arguing that all matter is cultural fiction. She stresses the concept of materiality but attempts to neither presume nor negate its physicality. The 'sedimenting' of gender on bodies should, in her view and mine, neither limit our understanding of the social construction of biology nor force us to rely on the viability of cultural assumptions or mores about certain kinds of bodies.

Beyond, but incorporating, physicality, bodies act in the material world and take their place (for all the meanings 'place' holds) as interactive and material beings. Described below is Judith Butler's slant on how this is accomplished and how it can be discursively understood.

### **The body as discursive entity**

Butler uses the term, 'performativity', to denote a speaking-into-being of the subject/person. 'Performativity' describes how discourses inscribe the speaker and how discourses proliferate from, and beyond, the speaker. As shown in the previous section, language has its role in denoting attributes of a body, and language speaks entities into being in the sense that our understandings are drawn from the shared meanings of words which in turn tell us who we are. Often those meanings hold intent that radiates beyond a subject's boundaries or understanding. As subjects with agency, we are 'performative', we are repeaters of well articulated understandings. Through iteration and reiteration, behaviours and understandings are thus (re)established and become culturally sanctioned as 'norms'. The impact of an understanding going beyond speaking to interpolate both the performer and others, has a restraining and binding effect on subjects.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the act of iteration itself produces the subject as a subject in process created and thus constituted, by participation in a discourse.

Butler clarifies her use of the term 'performativity' by suggesting that it:



... cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularised and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition of the subject. This iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualised production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint.<sup>23</sup>

By ritual reiteration, the subject is bounded, limited and conforms to dominant modes of thought and behaviour. The iteration of norms is productive in the sense that they are self-fulfilling prophecies and productive in the ability to elicit complicity in self and from others. Butler demonstrates how performativity is productive by the example of the common pronouncement at marriage; 'I pronounce you...'. It is a spoken announcement which sets one into a state of being (marriage), which did not exist before, but one which is drafted and well patterned for people to follow, a category and 'type' in which to fit.<sup>24</sup> The path of marriage is well articulated, individuals have schema with which to proceed as marriage is 'practised' and, so, while onlookers hold preconceived ideas and expectations about marriage, it is patterned in a culture. The shared understandings signalled are/ may be loaded with assumptions and, possibly, expectations. Butler explains: '...(d)iscursive productions ... continue to signify in spite of their authors, and sometimes against their author's most precious intentions' (p. 241). This concept explains how one might be, in Laura Ring's words, 'called to gender', a regulating effect which elicits both responses to and cultivation of particular understandings of genderedness.<sup>25</sup> Ring argues that the construction of gender is both product and process of the subject's positioning in available discourses of gender. Ring studied sexual harassment on a college campus and defined the moment of solicitation as a call to women to assume typical gender positions thus acting out a familiar norm.

'Queering' provides us with another example of the operation of discursive productions of subjectivity. The 'queer' subject emerges as their difference signifies, and is signified in, the matrix of relationships, norms and counter norms of homosexuality and heterosexuality. The materiality of bodies alone is not a determination in why some of us do not assume gender 'norms' any more than it indicates why some women are feminists and others are not or why some men are macho and others not.

### The role of 'constraint' in the constitution of subjectivity

Butler's claim is that language pre/proscribes 'types' or 'norms' which, when adopted, constrain us. Yet a fluidity persists. Performativity is the living-out and being in process of the subject, 'not ... determining it fully in advance'; the subject is amenable to differences.<sup>26</sup> Exclusions are created as a type (norm) is assumed. Butler, it seems, always suggests the possibility of another identity and way to be. Whether the myriad of alternatives are clearly articulated or not, Butler asserts their existence.

Her notion of gender as performative introduces what Jeffrey Nealon terms her 'relentless dual focus', in which Butler invokes the normalised categories of gender while 'at the same time open(ing) the category as a site of permanent – contest'.<sup>27, 28</sup>

'Sex' is a normalised and regulated category reified, as the heterosexual ideal will always produce the abjected as 'by-products of exclusions that secure normative identities'.<sup>29</sup> Butler utilises a Foucauldian notion of power by her mechanism of simultaneously describing a norm or privileged discourse while always paying attention to its 'outside'; 'the abjected, unthinkable and unlivable' domains which exist as possibilities, that is, sites to occupy.<sup>30</sup> In this way, Butler explores the categories of race, ethnicity, queer, lesbian and drag as sites of the 'outside'. At this point I wish to explore the 'outside' of the resistant discourse to the practice of MSR.

### Power as diffuse yet productive

In Butler's book, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, she relates her understanding of the power of 'sovereign performatives'.<sup>31</sup> She refers to Foucault's explanation of the shift from sovereign power, in the past seen to be invested in specific state apparatus like hospitals and prisons, to power being divested from some overarching source and instead becoming diffuse: not invested in one 'speaker' but 'emanating from a number of possible sites'.<sup>32</sup> Foucault directs us to avoid thinking of persons *holding* power and ultimately *exercising* that power and instead, look to the extremities of where power acts, that is, the 'point of intention – its real and effective practices'.<sup>33</sup>

In the 'material instances' of MSR, for example, power appears to operate in precisely the diffuse forms claimed by Foucault. It seems no one person takes responsibility for the acts of power involved in



the physical placement of patients in designated beds/rooms, yet the material event of mixed-sex placement is a continuing practice. In the study by Burrell, the one hospital's policy of mixed-sex rooming is outlined in the Patients' Handbook (given to every patient before a planned admission or otherwise on admission).<sup>34</sup> The policy is headed 'Room Sharing' and states in kafka-esque style;

When you are admitted to hospital, every effort will be made to place you in a room with members of your own sex – this is ... (our) ... policy. From time to time there are circumstances when we are forced to place men and women in the same room. If this happens to you we will move you to a room with a member of your own sex as soon as possible. In special care or intensive care units, mixing of men and women is necessary for intensive monitoring. Please talk to your nurse if you have any concerns.<sup>35</sup>

Although the administration views MSR as contrary to an ideal of single sex provision, they permit it, even facilitate it, by conceding they are 'forced' to do it. They absolve themselves of responsibility for the occurrences and yet, in practice, they do hold the power to decide the use of space. In this instance the operation of power seems to be '(d)iffused throughout disparate and competing domains of the state apparatus' and through civil society in diffuse forms as well, power cannot be easily or definitively traced to a single subject who is its 'speaker', to a sovereign representative of the state.<sup>36</sup>

In my view, a Foucauldian analysis of power offers the most adequate description of the operability of power, shaping the complex and juxtaposed effects in the events of MSR. MSR is a deviation from the norm of single-sex provision. Patients are expected to and feel compelled to comply with a practice which is itself running counter to the usual and preferred placement of patients in single-sex rooms. Foucault outlines a very different interpretation of the dominant conceptions of power which see it as radiating from a 'sovereign' position in the order of things. By 'sovereign', Foucault refers to the state apparatus as being the more recent site historically attributed with a tangible power base. Rather than viewing power as negative, 'repressive', and/or 'censoring', Foucault views it as productive: 'power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth'.<sup>37</sup> Using this explanation of power relations we can see how the hospital administration, as quoted earlier,

divests itself of responsibility for the compromises in the rooming of patients. In the era of health service restructuring and devolving of state oversight, political, economic and managerial discourses intersect, oppose and create points of pressure affecting policy formulation. Under the claim of ensuring increased accountability, economic expediency is pursued energetically. Appointees at all levels of the health system are urged to cut costs. The consequences of practices adopted with this goal in mind have not yet been realised in their entirety. Economic efficiency is one prevalent discourse often called upon in support of changes to practices arising at all levels of the health service. Returning to Butler, we see that she takes up Foucault's argument that the historical dissipation of the 'sovereign' organisation of power to the contemporary configuration as multi-sited and diffuse seems to 'occasion the fantasy of its (the sovereign's) return'.<sup>38</sup> Here she means that the return operates in language and that discourses are presented as though they have some 'sovereign' reinforcement ensuring the security of hegemonic political practices. In the hospital setting, the terms 'efficiency' and 'economy' are used to allegedly underpin justifications of reasonable patient care, despite also being used oppositionally to cut costs.

In the health care setting, the patient is the ostensive client and, supposedly, able to withdraw their 'custom' at anytime, yet they (and especially women when MSR) maybe immobilised or silenced by the subordinating power-effects of codified medical knowledges and figures of authority and by public discourses that suggest health care is under threat and we must be governed by the ideals of economic reason.

By addressing difference in all its formations, Butler's analysis offers all women a position from which to speak and act. Grosz seems, inadvertently, to leave aside the issues of race and sexual orientation and talks of a non-specified group when talking of women in general. Alice identifies Grosz's neglect as a form of discrimination in itself.<sup>39</sup> Both Grosz and Butler subscribe to the view that bodies are not simply biological objects; rather bodies are constituted through the ways they are inscribed and named by social and cultural modes. Bodies are spoken into being by discourses which prescribe how particular bodies will be in society. Though these prescriptions usually pivot on the material qualities of sex and race they are amenable to change and, in this way, reveal themselves to be cultural constructions.

Now I turn to summarising Grosz' and Butler's notions of



subjectivity and agency, and assessing the utility their formulations have for solving the dilemma facing women in hospital. Although Grosz sketches a postmodern subject, pliable and 'volatile', her subject is passive in relation to the dynamism Butler awards subjectivity. Butler tells us more about *how* subjects might be amenable to change. Grosz's passive subject operates on a linear plane where race, sexual orientation or other factors of difference are not addressed as formative components. Grosz's description of subjectivity omits a conceptualisation of agency and how it might actually operate. Although Grosz does reveal the flaws in many other conceptions of the subject offered by Western philosophers, she delivers feminism a narrow version of subjectivity impeded by her inattention to the equally potent constitutive elements of race, ethnicity and class. So, as an interpretation on which to ground objections to MSR, and from which to speak, the body as 'inscribed surfaces' is limited and its capability of promoting the positions of women in their diversity is impaired.

Butler offers us a postmodern version of subjectivity, an entity formed in discursive formulations. As shown earlier, her notions of iterability, constitution/constraint and power reveal her postmodern positioning. The significant contribution she makes, which gives us insight into how subjects might effect their agency, is her habitual stating of a category but, at the same time, opening the category to challenge. Her 'double movement' approach allows her to insert the possibility of the subject as active agent.<sup>40</sup> Butler links constitution and constraint together as concepts which constantly interact and affect one another so that the subject is fluid, generative, never determined fully in advance. Constitution depends on the volition of the individual, for example, whether or not one adheres to discourses or commits to coherency of identity. She never implies these as stable, rather gender identity is provisional and constantly contested.

Butler suggests that 'in a culture of democratic contestation' any apparent fulfillment of the hegemonic definitions of 'woman' is constitutively impossible and that we must perpetually interrogate the category for the 'exclusions by which it proceeds and to learn how to live the contingency of the political signifier ...'.<sup>41</sup>

To assert the relevance of being female and contest the practice of MSR political signification is imperative. We participate in the social world, never divested of politics, as political beings. In conclusion, I return to Alice's notion of 'interactive inscription' where

she works the dynamic of the 'dialogic of margins and centre' to reveal how we might proceed as feminist (and thus political) entities. The concept implicitly builds on Foucault's concept of power networks and suggests volatile, self conscious and mutual power-sharing must become the basis of negotiations towards solving conflicts of interests, such as that created by MSR. It is my belief that forming coalitions, based in affinities between subjects who recognise their social identities (or 'authority') as provisional and partial, is the only way to proceed. This is admittedly not an easy path in the issue of MSR because it entails health funding authorities and institutions accepting that the basis of their existence is service to the community, which in turn has the right to help define their function and processes more transparently than is evident in Aotearoa New Zealand today.

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## Book reviews

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### **POVERTY, SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND THE EMPLOYABILITY OF MOTHERS: RESTRUCTURING WELFARE STATES**

**Maureen Baker And David Tippin**

*Toronto, University Of Toronto Press, 1999. \$62.95?*

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I finished reading *Poverty, Social Assistance and the Employability of Mothers* on the tenth anniversary of Ruth Richardson's 'mother of all budgets'. It seemed appropriate. This is a book about the feminisation of poverty in welfare states that have been restructured on the basis of neo-liberal assumptions about the primacy of the market, the moral degeneracy of welfare dependency and the centrality of the principle of reciprocal obligation in relation to all forms of state assistance. In combination these assumptions find their clearest policy expression in the employability programmes, now commonplace in liberal welfare states, that are directed towards moving benefit recipients into the paid workforce. These programmes take multiple paths in pursuit of this objective, including education in literacy and numeracy; training in 'life skills', job-search and work habits; and compulsory work experience (through work-for-the-benefit schemes). All, however, are characterised by an assumption that barriers to employment are located in individual dysfunction and/or skill deficits. And all aim to instil not only labour discipline but also a firm belief in the singular importance of paid employment.

Baker and Tippin's book explores the rise of employability regimes in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, four welfare states that have been restructured along neo-liberal lines in recent years. The authors detail a range of restructured social assistance programmes that affect the income security of low-income mothers. Their particular interest lies in the way in which each of these states has drawn mothers within the ambit of its employability regime, either directly, through a requirement that those receiving state assistance enrol in employability programmes, or indirectly, as the restructuring of social assistance encourages mothers to take on more paid employment.



These employability regimes differ, for each has emerged from a specific economic, political and social context, and yet they are depressingly similar in that each is based, to a greater or lesser extent, on a model of the generic androcentric citizen-worker. The problem, of course, as Baker and Tippin observe, is that 'trying to make women into economic actors without addressing their family roles and their relationship to the market and the state, lays the groundwork for policy failure' (p. 263). The particular policy failure in question is the continued impoverishment of many mothers in these restructured welfare states, whether they are in employment, in receipt of state assistance or, as is increasingly the case for many, survive through a combination of these.

The book explores these issues by means of substantive chapters on each of the welfare states in question. These chapters contain detailed accounts of the political, social and economic contexts from which restructuring processes have emerged. Careful detail is also offered on the transformation of historical structures of social assistance affecting mothers, including family and child benefits, non-custodial child-support policies, public childcare services, social insurance schemes, family tax credits, benefit abatement rates and old-age pensions.

These discussions are framed by opening and closing chapters that draw on feminist and political-economic welfare literatures to provide theoretical tools for a gendered analysis of welfare reform. The authors argue that mainstream accounts of restructuring have tended to focus on the state and the labour market, overlooking the deeply gendered nature of the reforms, particularly in relation to the employability imperatives imposed on mothers in restructured welfare states. Drawing on these two literatures, the authors construct a theoretical framework that allows them to explain the gendered nature of restructuring in the welfare states in question. This begins with an analysis of economic contexts and labour market trends, including the nature of mothers' participation in the labour market and the balance of caring and paid work that they perform. The latter is influenced by the structure of social assistance within each country. Inevitably, these social programmes assume certain models of family and these assumptions are crucial for the decisions mothers make about their paid and unpaid work. These programmes take shape over time within a context of the political mobilisation and strength (or

otherwise) of various interest groups, including women's groups, trade unions and business lobbies. They are also influenced by structures of government and processes of political decision-making, as different combinations of federal and state responsibility for welfare assistance may produce different outcomes for women.

Baker and Tippin put these concepts to work successfully to explain why welfare restructuring has taken the form that it has in each of the four countries, how, in each case, the reforms are profoundly gendered, and why employability is likely to be a partial solution, if it is one at all, to the feminisation of poverty. In particular, the framework is useful for explaining why, despite the general move towards encouraging mothers along the employability path, there are 'important cross-national variations in the original design, implementation and outcomes of social programs for low-income mothers in these four countries' (p. 7). For example, Canada has been much more insistent about the employability of mothers than Australia, New Zealand or the United Kingdom, each of which has displayed some ambivalence about this policy direction and continues to offer varying levels of state support for mothering at home.

The book is a very useful addition to welfare literature. Its opening chapters, 'Setting the Scene' and 'Gendering the Analysis of Restructuring', provide an excellent introduction to literature relating to the feminisation of poverty, while its case study chapters offer a detailed synthesis of an enormous amount of comparative material on welfare histories and welfare reform. It is interesting to read again an account of New Zealand's economic and welfare restructuring – not only is it a salutary reminder of how extreme this country has been in relation to welfare states elsewhere (despite our continued, and contested, support of some mothers in the home) – but it is fascinating to observe just how many aspects of welfare reform are drawn into a discussion that focuses on mothers.

Teachers and students of social policy will find this book a very useful reference tool. It introduces relevant literature and brings together a great deal of comparative policy material in an accessible form. Policy makers will also find it enlightening, for it makes very clear that the links between poverty, social assistance and employability are deeply gendered and require gendered analytical approaches. To ignore this is to lay the ground for policy failure. As the authors observe (p. 61), earned income will not necessarily



improve the economic prospects of mothers, and may simply make their lives more difficult. Indeed, employability programmes are unlikely to provide a solution to poverty for mothers unless other policies address the problems of low paid work, structural unemployment and gender inequality (p. 265).

How, exactly, to address these issues is not a task that the authors have set themselves in this book. Occasionally mention is made of how mothers' poverty rates might be reduced:

... by generous and comprehensive cash transfers and tax concessions for families with children ... by high wages and statutory employment benefits such as pay equity, parental benefits, and leave for family responsibilities, as well as the availability of childcare, public health insurance, and unemployment benefits (p. 63)

But how we get from 'here' to 'there' is another question, and perhaps another book. What is clear from this account is that employability as a policy is itself poverty-stricken: not only is it unlikely to enable mothers to lift themselves and their families out of poverty but it lacks the imagination to recognise that its model citizen-worker is male.

JANE HIGGINS, *Sociology, University of Canterbury.*

**THE WOMEN'S WAR:** NEW ZEALAND WOMEN, 1939-1945

**Deborah Montgomerie**

*The Women's War* offers a clear, fresh view of a period often viewed through the blurry lens of nostalgia and anecdote. During World War II women went out to work, joined the armed forces, learned new skills and kept the home fires burning too. *The Women's War* examines the impact of war upon New Zealand women's lives – in paid and unpaid work and the domestic roles of women as mothers, wives and lovers.

March 2001, illustrations, paperback, \$39.95



AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY PRESS

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**A DAUGHTER OF ISIS: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY  
OF NAWAL EL SAADAWI**

**Nawal El Saadawi**

*Spinifex Press, London and New York, 1999, \$49.95*

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Seeking a temporary respite from death threats back home and agonising over living a life in exile in North Carolina, the author takes up the project of writing her autobiography as a way to make sense of her existence. Now over sixty years old, Saadawi engages in the process of self-reflection, while consciously challenging her representation of 'self-life-text' against time and memory. 'Rediscovering' the past is fused with the present, adding a layer of uncertainty and complexity to the life she seeks to retrieve/undo (p. 15). How she perceives the past and what discourses she draws upon are in themselves revealing, particularly, in light of her long-standing political activism and commitment to issues of gender equity.

Saadawi's autobiography is a journey back to the 1940s and covers her childhood and early adulthood in her country of origin, Egypt. Defiant and proud, the narrative of self conveys a sense of empowerment and agency. 'Daughter of Isis', a Goddess figure whom Saadawi admires and imaginatively inhabits, symbolises a role model, embodying a power/resistance duality in achieving an autonomous self. Indeed, the author's constructed self-image, 'freedom fighter', aptly reflects her numerous struggles against social injustices and other forms of social constraints, including the power of language and discourses that legitimate oppressive practices in religion, culture and politics. The power of language in constructing us is revealed by exploring how words that signify 'love and justice ... shift meanings as we grow older' (p.10). The very same words become 'a sword over my head, a veil over my mind and face' (p.16). This autobiography presents the early signs of Saadawi's numerous struggles for emancipation and democracy as expressed in both spoken and written words.

The text uncovers a social world inhabited and consumed by the author's experiences and critical observations of what it is like to grow up in a society strictly regulated by patriarchal order and



structured around hierarchical divisions based on gender, rigid social status, and class. Questions of race/colour, national identity/belonging, displacement/colonialism are also among the running themes considered. Throughout the text gender, sexuality, class and race are figured prominently as they constitute Saadawi's subjective reality in understanding what it means to become a woman, to be subjected to the male gaze, to be positioned as a marginal class and, significantly, to have the 'wrong' colour. Saadawi's statement that, 'I was proud of my dark skin ... and did not believe in a femininity born with slave society and handed down to us with class and patriarchy' (p. 7) captures the complexity surrounding her sense of gender oppression.

Crucially, Saadawi's writing of self is positioned in relational and comparative terms that cut across simple divisions between gender and class. In this context, she focuses on the dynamics of unequal power relations and observes that systems of domination and subordination are both structurally and discursively constituted. The enactment of these issues are further explored in various institutional settings – family, schools, and community at large. She describes critical moments of her life by moving between different spaces. These spaces include the familial sphere and her conflictual relations with kin and siblings, especially with her older brother, the cultural sphere where practices of rituals and rites of passage are constantly resisted, and the expressive realm that consumes her artistic tendencies – music, imagining, writing short stories and keeping diaries. Through these stories of self/subjectivity, constructions of Otherness are subversively articulated and illustrated with brilliant insights and wit.

Saadawi successfully combines, what Fraser describes as feminist agency: 'the power of social constraints and the capacity to act situatedly against them'.<sup>1</sup> With detailed descriptions and reflexivity, Saadawi narrates her life story from the experience of an embattled identity, grounded in everyday life practices and lived with contradictions amidst and against hierarchical gender/class/race relations. As a child, Saadawi tells us how she grew up in a racially mixed family background with oppositional class relations. Her mother descended from the Pashas ruling class of Turkish origin, and was identified as 'white' in contrast to her father, a self-made man of African roots and a peasant background. Significantly, she inherits her father's physicality (features, colour, height) which marks her as different, and by the given name 'Warwar', the slave girl. But what is

intriguing in the story is the realisation that the emerging tensions and identity conflicts are largely contributed by 'arrogant' maternal kin (aunties and uncles) rather than her immediate family. Having to live with such contradictions is likened to positioning herself on the border of those hierarchies, occupying, in Butler's term, an 'in-between space' from which to resist subordination, and to challenge the very acts of exclusionary gender practices.<sup>2</sup> Saadawi's struggles at such critical moments are chilling, and she captures one's imagination with familiar stories that touch us in deeply one way or another.

Following her 'revolutionary' father's preoccupation with political democracy against British occupation and internal ruling Pashas, from early on Saadawi develops a strong sense of social justice, reflected in the way she explores issues of social inequality in both personal and institutional contexts. She depicts the lives of men/women, husband/wife, brothers/sisters, teachers/students, rich/poor by revealing what is 'hidden through the fear of God, the father, the husband, the teacher – fear of the nation to which we belong and those we love' (p. 17). In these instances, Saadawi highlights the power of hegemonic religious discourse/language in constructing women's (and men's) ways of life as well as legitimating the status-quo in terms of hierarchical and differential positioning. She looks at how gender divisions, orchestrated by the discourse of Islam, become the basis by which social relations are organised and given legitimacy in social norms, and cultural images. Women's lives, in particular, are mostly depicted in terms of their failed personal dreams, even when fashioning themselves in the image of 'womanhood'. Unlike Saadawi's own ambition to change/transform traditions, women's struggles, including her mother's, are mainly portrayed with muted resistance, simply endured as 'God's will'. However, listening to her paternal grandmother's personal tales of resistance Saadawi concedes that 'women have an unwritten history told orally by one generation to the other' (p. 57). With this recognition Saadawi seeks to unearth subjugated knowledge(s) and builds on making them visible. Saadawi engages the reader with powerful images of a variety of women's lives woven in a colourful tapestry in which tales of myth, fiction and reality serve to deconstruct as much as reconstruct the making of gender.

Body politics is an issue close to home for Saadawi. She recounts



powerful tales of how cultural images and meanings in relation to femininity/masculinity are in one way or another consumed by ourselves/our bodies. Sexuality is expressed as a sign of repression and signifies shame which ironically justifies violation. Saadawi describes, for instance, her own forced genital circumcision, followed by other practices of 'humility', such as ripping the hair off the body to please men's desire to 'conquer (the) female body'. Again, more cultural images are depicted of how the female body is associated with shame and pain and could only be 'protected' by following malestream discourse of 'legitimacy', including that of marriage. Why is it, Saadawi asks, that everything in a woman's life is seen as 'shameful, even her face', referring to the veil. It is through her own corporeal experience, and observations of other women, that Saadawi makes the necessary link between body and self and shows how the very act of self-embodiment becomes a site of resistance. To Saadawi, this constituted a political space from which her agency is articulated.

Overall, I find the way she writes herself into the text invokes contradictions between vulnerability and strength in considering acts of resistance against conformity. But what is interesting is that throughout her accounts of inequalities and injustices around her, she maintains personal visions/dreams for a better place for women. Towards this end Saadawi's life journey, informed by both liberal and socialist tendencies, tells a penetrating story of courage and achievement. After all, the slogan 'sisterhood is global' and the struggle against universal women's victimisation remains central to Saadawi's daily politics. In addition, Saadawi is rather sceptical of the complementary model of gender equality as she is critical of its operation even in her own 'loving' and 'caring' immediate family. She argues that 'equal but different' usually means that women remain subjected indiscriminately to male-defined 'traditional values'.

The strength of the book is its contribution to on-going debate within feminism on questions of sameness/difference, patriarchy and women's subordination. Equally, the book presents some challenges to post-colonial feminism on issues of race/colour and the elevation of Whiteness as a colour symbolising power and desire. The book is a pleasure to read for its rich textuality, clarity of prose, engaging style, and sense of humour. I strongly recommend it for both feminist scholars and the general public. On a more personal note, Nawal's

identification with the homeland, the river Nile, and Arabic language/literature continues to constitute a meaningful existence and powerful sense of belonging.

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Nancy Fraser, (1992). 'Introduction', in N. Fraser and S. Bartky (Eds), *Re-valuing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) p. 17.
- <sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, (1997). *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (California: Stanford University Press).

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### CHILDFREE AND STERILIZED: WOMEN'S DECISIONS AND MEDICAL RESPONSES

**Annily Campbell**

*Cassell, London & New York, 1999. \$49.95*

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Having spent more than ten years of my own life studying women and men who choose not to have children, I approached this book with enthusiasm, expecting to find new insights into the process of making the no-child decision absolutely permanent. To that extent I was disappointed. The book has merit, however, not least in its acknowledgement of the methodological difficulties of researching a group of people who are difficult to locate and who, when they are found, carry no clues as to whether or not they truly 'represent' the group on whom the research is focused. While claims might be made that it is the life experiences of *these women* which are important, the inevitable question of 'how typical are they' remains at the core of the sociologist's profession. In Annily Campbell's case, the twenty-three women studied needed not only to be sufficiently motivated to tell their story in response to an advertisement, but they also needed to be sufficiently literate and comfortable with providing written responses to a detailed questionnaire (although eighteen of the women



were also interviewed face-to-face, all except one woman wrote what Campbell calls 'diaries'). Given Campbell's claim that 'most of the women ... had never put pen to paper as a way of recording their thoughts and innermost feelings' (p. 10), the excerpts which are included in the book reveal a facility with the written word which indicates these women are not uneducated. Curiously, as Campbell describes each of her 'diarists' in turn (pp. 16-33) she pays more attention to religion than education. Certainly religious affiliation (or perhaps of more salience would be religiosity) might be connected with the decision never to have children, and to seek sterilisation to achieve that permanence, but education and social competence might be assumed to impact much more significantly on the women's capacity to negotiate the sometimes impenetrable barriers they encountered.

Herein lies, I think, the source of my frustration with this book. The cameos of diarists in the Introduction and the questionnaire and interview excerpts in the Appendix are quite dislocated from the sterilisation decisions recounted primarily in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. This is surprising for a piece of research which is ostensibly 'feminist'. To me, the voices of most of the women weren't always heard when it mattered. These *are* special women, as Campbell reminds us frequently, they have not only flouted the woman-equals-mother norm, but they have taken deliberate action to ensure they will *never* be mothers. However, they do not do this in isolation. Campbell provides a useful account of the 'contraceptive context' (Chapter 2, pp. 72-83) and a useful account of the medical context through the later chapters. Her focus tends to be on how motivations for sterilisation are often grounded in contraceptive difficulties, unwanted pregnancies and distaste for a lifetime of hormonal manipulation, factors which hold varying levels of influence with the medical professionals sought out to perform or approve sterilisations.

But there are other stories waiting to be told. Campbell writes about women's control of their own bodies in theoretical terms – few of her women reflect these concerns, yet one might expect they considered them as crucial. Where this voice is heard it is powerful, whether assertively – 'My body, my decision!' (p. 93) – or by default – from a doctor, that 'he supposed' it was the woman's body and she could do what she liked (p. 128). Campbell writes about how women without children disrupt the woman-equals-mother norm, but the book

contains little reflection on how the women she worked with experienced this. In both cases it seems to me that a much more satisfying book would have developed had the early theoretical discussion (which occupies nearly half the book) been integrated with the women's stories so that the reader could explore how and why this impacted on the process of sterilisation.

Campbell correctly indicates (p. 6 and elsewhere) that women experience the process of 'becoming' permanently childless in different ways. She hints at the commonly-accepted observation that 'there is no single experience of childlessness' (May, 1995, p. 1) and that childless people 'display considerable variation' (Baum, 1983, p. 153), both of which are observations that are important for understanding motivations to be childless and for forecasting future patterns of childlessness.<sup>1</sup> But apart from referring briefly to contraceptors and 'postponers' (p. 90-91), Campbell does not elaborate on the heterogeneity of childless people as a group. She cites Jean Veevers (1980) but does not really use this work or any of Veevers' other publications, which, I believe, remain fundamental to any research on chosen childlessness.<sup>2</sup> Baum and Cope (1980), Morrell (1994) and Elaine Campbell (1985) are mentioned, but not Houseknecht (1979), Bram (1984), Callan (1985 and others) or Nave-Herz (1989), all of whom have contributed significantly to the groundwork for any research on this topic.<sup>3</sup> Between them, these researchers provide important insights into the issues of 'postponers' or 'early articulators', 'rejectors' or 'aficionados', providing typologies which could be of value to Campbell at least as points of reference with respect to her own research analysis. Rather, she accepts without investigation the claim 'I have always known', argues that those who are sterilised differ in this and other ways from those who persist as contraceptors (p. 158-160), and concludes that dissatisfaction with contraception is as important for men as it is for women as a reason for elective sterilisation (p.158). Yet while some of the women volunteer how they know they have 'always known' they did not want children, the study provides no convincing evidence about women who are permanent contraceptors and no evidence about men who are sterilised.

The other story which is waiting to be told from this material relates to the social context of the women. The four-page section headed 'Personal and social contexts for remaining childfree' (p. 96ff) refers to social norms, prevailing definitions of family, the



pronouncements of the Cairo conference and the Vatican, UNFPA statistics on unwelcome and unwanted births and the 'problems of infertility'. These aspects are posed as a context rather remote from the women in this study. They are not demonstrably personal in their impact. Elsewhere in the book there is passing reference to partners of some women and to family and friends when they discuss – curiously – counselling. Yet family, friends and work mates can provide barriers and challenges to the childfree decision which are as significant as those provided by medical professionals. These can be longer lasting and, because of other interactions, are often more difficult to manage. Campbell's quote on page 95, 'I never told my mother!', provokes an immediate research question, namely 'Why?'

Despite the above criticisms, this book reflects important research. The chapters which explore the women's stories about their quests to be sterilised (less than half the book) do provide empirical evidence of a frequently patronising and prejudiced medical profession (both male and female), normative assumptions about women's destiny to be mothers, a trivialising of women's rational decision-making, and the perceived deviance of a choice to be childless. My criticisms are primarily about how the book is packaged. As indicated above, there is potential for an analysis which is deeper and broader than that contained within these covers. On the other hand, some sections are superfluous: the long chapter on contraception, for instance, reads like an essay in social demography (the history of contraception) and except for the section on the recent era of hormonal contraception is far removed from the central topic of the book. It is unclear who the book is written for. Parts of it read like an introductory text, parts like a research account and parts like a book for literate but non-academic childless women. This is often a dilemma when one wants to make an academic topic accessible for non-academic readers.

The book frustrated me, but I liked it. I liked it because I saw New Zealand experiences mirrored in Britain, epitomised by Campbell's UK television interviewer who asked a sterilised twenty-five-year-old, 'isn't it likely, in fact, that you are just dysfunctional?' (p. 111), and the New Zealand television presenter who summed up a panel interview with childfree couples by saying, 'Normal? I don't think so ...'.<sup>4</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Frances Baum, (1983). 'Orientations towards voluntary childlessness' *Journal of Biosocial Science* 15, pp. 153-164; Elaine Tyler May, (1995). *Barrren in the Promised Lands. Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Basic Books).
- <sup>2</sup> See Jean Veevers, (1980). *Childless by Choice* (Ontario: Butterworth).
- <sup>3</sup> See Frances Baum, and David Cope, (1980). 'Some characteristics of intentionally childless wives in Britain', *Journal of Biosocial Science* 12 pp. 287-99; Susan Bram, (1984). 'Voluntarily childless women: traditional or non-traditional?' *Sex Roles* 10: 3,4, pp.195-206; Victor Callan, (1985). *Choices About Children*. (Melbourne: Australian Studies Series, Longman Cheshire); Elaine Campbell, (1985). *The Childless Marriage - An Exploratory Study of Couples Who Do Not Want Children* (London & New York: Tavistock Publications); Sharon Houseknecht, (1979). 'Timing of the decision to remain voluntarily childless: Evidence for continuous socialisation' *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 8:4, pp. 395-8; Carolyn Morrell, (1993). 'Intentionally childless women: Another view of women's development' *Affilia* 8:3, pp. 300-316; Rosemarie Nave-Herz, (1989). 'Childless Marriages', *Marriage and Family Review* 14:1, 2. pp. 239-50.
- <sup>4</sup> Jan Cameron, (1997). *Without Issue. New Zealanders Who Choose Not to Have Children* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press) p. 21.



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**HER SIDE OF THE STORY: READINGS OF MANDER,  
MANSFIELD AND HYDE**

**Mary Paul**

*University of Otago Press, Dunedin, \$39.95.*

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One of the most interesting features of this book is the autobiographical introduction to its generative history as it reflects the political and theoretical evolution of the author. Indeed, Mary Paul covers in her overview of literary criticism – that is ‘reading practices’ in New Zealand from the 1970s to the present – a short history of political ideologies and their theories as applied to the arts in this country. She does this with committed honesty and engagement with regard to her own learning and evolving processes. These processes seem to have given Paul the motivation for the theme of her study (which was originally prepared for a doctoral degree), with an eye, so to speak, on her former and future student audiences.

What she sets out to do, as I ‘read’ it, is to raise awareness with regard to various aspects involved in the appreciation of a literary or any other work of art. First of all issues of historicity become relevant: what were the dominant and/or subversive theories and ideologies at the time of the literary text’s publication? How far might its author have internalised or ironically incorporated some of these into her work? According to what criteria may a reading public have of contemporaries related to the texts discussed?

Paul selected well-known stories and novels written by New Zealand woman writers, ‘Bliss’ and ‘Prelude’ by Katherine Mansfield, *The Story of a New Zealand River* by Jane Mander and poems, as well as a number of novels and autobiographical writings by Robin Hyde. Very different kinds of texts are also introduced and set in relation to those mentioned above, such as Jane Campion’s film *The Piano* or the unpublished filmscript ‘The River’ which was based on *The Story of a New Zealand River*.

Paul’s intention is to make plausible the idea that any text can be read in different ways according to the social, political and theoretical positioning and knowledge of its reader. She selects a number of possible interpretations with which she is familiar, like Philip Armstrong’s

Lacanian interpretation of 'Bliss' (part of his postgraduate studies). Feminist readings of specific types, named and explained by the author, are utilised or cited in connection with all the texts. Others, like a Freudian 'modernist' reading or a 'literary nationalist reading', might be used for one but not necessarily for every text. This variation is Paul's attempt to include contemporaneous debates on cultural politics that were incorporated into, or evoked by, the fictional texts, and which constitute part of New Zealand's cultural history.

In the various 'readings' offered in *Her Side of the Story* the author engages with other literary critics' views on the writer discussed or on specific texts. These interactions mostly illustrate Paul's point about the many possibilities of interpretation depending on the reader's socio-political and ideological positioning, e.g. Allen Curnow's nationalist reading of Mansfield's or Hyde's work. At times, however, these examples become too lengthy and, with more and more names and works added, lead away from what they are supposed to represent, namely just one possible interpretation. One may argue, of course, that in the case of discussing nationalistic readings, their relevance within New Zealand's cultural history is being acknowledged. There is certainly no rigid pattern observed when dealing with the different approaches to themes and accomplishments in fiction or film. Indeed, one might suggest the author's likes and dislikes are unveiled in her lengthy and favourable discussion of the unpublished film script 'The River', based on Jane Mander's novel, in contradistinction to the unfavourably critical comments on Jane Campion's film, *The Piano*. This imbalance in viewing a highly acclaimed work of art and an unpublished script has its roots in the highly charged debate on rights and plagiarism which surfaced in the New Zealand media recently. Here, again, one may suggest that the student of literature could sharpen their tools as critic and challenge the author for her obvious bias.

Mary Paul, like most of us, has her favourites among the theorists. They are – or were when she prepared her study – Paul Ricoeur and the less-known film critic, David Bordwell. The latter especially seems to have served as inspiration for Paul's endeavour to show the validity of multiple interpretations, as long as one understands the ideological/theoretical system these practitioners are embracing. Further, she offers her belief that knowledge of these many possibilities does not have to impede a more 'subjective' or eclectic approach, which can draw on insights acquired from a number of analytic systems.



Certainly, feminist theoretical assumptions dominate the author's analyses, although she distinguishes between different philosophical premises underlying their variety. In the conclusion, however, she states quite clearly her position among the multiple possibilities of readings. It is a 'new historicism' which she finds especially relevant at present. In her words:

In this book I have suggested that more recent semantic approaches to interpretation, for example feminist or even postcolonial, can become equally routine unless they practice some critical innovations. And the first step in new practice is self-consciousness about the social and institutional implications of reading. This book then has aimed to be both an example of, and a proposal for, a more self-aware approach to the study of New Zealand literature and culture. However, whereas Bordwell tends to question the very activity of interpretation I am more concerned about developing a kind of code of ethics (or protocol) for interpretation, one of the most important of which is to introduce a wider notion of historical context and of cultural production. (p. 179)

The notes, the bibliography and the index complete the study and can serve as helpful tools in further exploring the field Mary Paul has mapped. The illustrations between Chapters 2 and 3 offer visual evidence of various possibilities in approaching an author, a work of art, and a topic. Students of New Zealand literature may find *Her Side of the Story* a useful compendium in their area of study and research.

LIVIA KÄTHE WITTMANN, *Feminist Studies*,  
University of Canterbury

## Touchy Subject *Teachers Touching Children*

Edited by Alison Jones

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University of Otago Press

Paperback, ISBN 1 877276 02 2, \$39.95, April

## **Two fingers lightly**

Your big white shoes lead you out in the dawn  
and you bring back sweet william  
on long stems.  
Today for the first time ever  
your stars came  
exactly true.  
To your surprise  
you wear a small violet label  
saying worker.  
It is hard for you but all the same  
you have to punch the bad guys  
on the nose.  
Although tired from this labour  
you hold your chin correctly.  
You are a very particular woman.  
If I am not there to watch you sleep  
how will you know to rest two fingers  
lightly on your eyelid?



**When factory girls dream dreams of love**

*(from Sings Harry, 'Themes' Denis Glover)*

When Mrs Miller  
read it out at school  
that line really pissed me off  
FAC tree girls  
like you might say  
dairy cows or pigs dogs  
but worse  
like they haven't got a life  
probably just what she thought

my mum worked in the shirt factory  
so I know all about  
factory girls  
it was a bloody good job  
she was a brilliant cutter  
well still is but she's old now  
anyway the factory's closed  
it was a great job though  
tons of fun and overtime  
and she never dreamed of love  
she didn't have the time  
she was busy cutting and laughing  
and she didn't need to dream  
because all those women  
she worked with  
they all loved each other  
and she had 4 kids  
and we all loved her  
and my dad and her  
they were so much in love  
they used to hold hands out in the garden  
we thought it was so sweet

So old Glover didn't know a thing  
actually about factory girls  
and girls that got me too  
well I know he's my dad's generation and times have changed  
they used to say that  
even when they were forty fifty  
but that was different from factory girls  
I worked there too  
but I wasn't a factory girl either  
I was young but I was pretty tough  
and I was dreaming of horses  
riding them with the crowds cheering  
and the bets rolling in  
and the horses groomed to a gleam  
and me and the horse  
flying perfection as a team dreaming and planning and riding

Never in your wildest dreams  
old Denis Glover  
would you have dreamt for me  
the horses and loves I was planning.



**Lesbians is an ugly word!**

(*'Catalogue', Janet Charman*)

lesboz lesbidez  
songs slip from strings, words  
pause at the finger's end  
heedless ride waves, stream  
down into the Hellespont  
moths in rain  
Lesbian Lesbese Lesboser  
trash spat from copywriter lips  
lesb ... lips ... just flatten, flip,  
now lick, smack, suck on, celebrate  
O my love, your lips are cherries  
Les Bians, Les Biennes jeu de mots for an idyll  
arching leaves play shade and peek  
over a stony creed raspberries tumble  
leaf to mouth long beans dangle like taonga  
cherchez la femme  
her fragments call for other voices  
distant persistent antiphony ... sapphists  
sophists ... knowing the gleam of sapphire  
and i s t s the steam to swell desire

## Review article

*Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific.*

Nicholas Thomas and Diane Losche, Eds.

Cambridge University Press

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LYNNE STAR

Until the late 1960s something called 'Maori art' was assumed by many non-Maori New Zealanders to be 'in decline'. The story went something like this: when Maori saw the work of Cook's artists in 1769 they were exposed for the first time to European drawing, with its naturalistic codified styles, landscapes, perspective, realist scientific detail and cultural assumptions. Such 'exposure' occurred at about the same time as other so-called 'fatal impacts': missionaries, exotic plants, diseases, alcohol, firearms and much else. Note, this is me, the adult, remembering my own education. At that time, the school-teacherly, parental, editorialising voices didn't use these words. More likely as children on school trips, and via instructional newsreels with softened, sad-reverent inflection of the voice reserved for the damaged and the 'handicapped', we were taught to 'see' a 'dying art' (albeit an awesome and fascinating one of which 'all New Zealanders can feel proud') preserved in a museum.

The idea is an example of a cultural myth imposed by the dominant on colonised groups: less a deliberate falsehood than the reflection of Pakeha cultural assumptions, misunderstandings, naivete and arrogance. Communications springing from those assumptions were repeated so frequently, and so seldom contested, that they came to be thought 'natural'. Like many such myths, this one also kept mainstream Pakeha in an ignorance that was useful to Maori groups and, to some degree, continues to be so. Ignorance of *whare whakairo* (the values behind images) protects sensitive private concerns, history, memories and issues.

Two hundred or so years after Cook, New Zealand's tiny art world erupted with arguments about coloniser appropriation of Maori art, and, later, talk of 'de-colonisation', 'authenticity' and 'indigenisation'. 'Maori art' itself emerged as something of a disputed category. It took another quarter century before Pakeha art historians dared write about the transformations wrought on European art traditions by



exposure to things Maori (a task not yet fully engaged). Or the fact that Maori peoples had been using European technologies to communicate politically assertive and culturally affirming messages under the uncomprehending noses of non-Maori (was this 'appropriation' too?) and that all along Maori had been 'looking back', so to speak, and very probably laughing.<sup>1</sup> In attending to this reverse scrutiny, the peculiarly Anglo-European and academic concept of 'the gaze', together with notions of 'who' is doing the looking and 'how', and of 'what' they might think they are seeing, are undergoing sea changes. We have a long way to go.

This ambitious book by Australian editors announces a 'new project': 're-imag[ining] art and culture in the Pacific, particularly Australia ...'. Contributors are drawn principally from traditional academic disciplines: history, art history, English literature, anthropology. Although work relevant to the undertaking has been produced in interdisciplinary fields like cultural studies, new media theory, feminist and queer and postcolonial studies, and Maori fine arts, little of that appears here. These debates may also be approached from the emerging interdisciplinary field of 'visual cultural studies'.

Viewed deconstructively, the main outcome of *Double Vision* is perhaps to illustrate how far nine (presumably) pale male and three pale female academics (eight of the eleven academics are male), two Aboriginal/Koori identified and Maori identified male artists, have travelled in trying to understand their own history, art and actions. In the process the contributors engage with and generate ideas about colonialism, historical record keeping, interpretation, language, authenticity, translation, incommensurability, multiculturalism, and 'primitivism and modernity' cogent to 'Antipodean postmodernism'; that is to say, in relation to the ideological and political grounds of twentieth century art, history and cultural writing.<sup>2,3</sup>

The book has some obvious limitations, some of which are contained in the title 'Double Vision'.

Question: When do I have double vision?

Answer 1: When I hit my head hard or am so tired that my eyes won't focus 'normally' and I see two unsynchronised moving fields, albeit 'of-the-same-thing';

Answer 2: when I try to perform certain interrogative, often contractual-bureaucratic, tasks such as 'presenting both sides of an argument' or 'representing a fair and balanced set of viewpoints';

Answer 3: When I am presented with two or more images simultaneously on a hi-tech screen.

I'm sure you can imagine other scenarios. Most involve headaches. In each case, epistemological tradition and visual-cultural communicative habit requires me to selectively delimit, stabilise, collect and create (usually 'opposite') 'sides' or poles of some 'image/imaginary' or 'issue'. In order to communicate, debate, enjoy or decide – that is so 'we' can all play – most often collective univocal 'sides' have to be 'picked up', much after the fashion and the rhythms of schoolyard games such as 'oranges and lemons', 'natives and settlers', 'Antipodean and European', 'self and other', 'colonial and indigenous', 'Maori and Pakeha', or 'cops and robbers'. This fine, endlessly compromised balancing act can only satisfy those who feel safe in a world limited by bounded Modernist possibilities and identities. I don't. Those who find ideas like liminality, the performative, normativity, multivocality, boundary-crossing, transgression, polymorphous and perverse pleasures, infinite hermeneutic open endedness and so on threatening, incomprehensible, wanky or impractical, had best stop reading now.

For me, none of the first set of ideas adequately allows for or conveys the political, pleasurable, painful and dangerous complexities of living and meaning that are popularly (still) supposed to reside 'in' bodies and brains, but endlessly overflow and defy their categories. Each inhibits its user should she try to explain the traditional 'what', 'how', and 'why' by beginning with why they are all contingent cultural inventions and impositions, implicated in and for governing selves and populations. Many people just roll their eyes and find another playmate.

To put it simply, how can there be a 'double vision' – two fields only – in the whole of the vast geographic spatial and intellectual cultural spectra of territories and realms inadequately named 'Pacific colonial art and art history'? To take one instance and a single dimension of many millions possible, in Western Australia alone at the time of the invasion there were over three hundred distinct and unique Aboriginal languages (that is to say, three hundred that European philologists and anthropologists managed to count and map). To take a more New Zild approach, what is this thing called 'Maori and European'? The ideas are insulting, simple minded, trippy,



impoverishing, and normalising. They stink of bureaucratic and governmental imperatives, interpersonal insults, popular and policy nightmares. This is especially so for peoples of the tangata whenua whose inventions and frames they are not. To take a related example just emerging into public consciousness, if it is mostly young people who are identifying as Maori for the purposes of censuses and surveys, what does this do to the statistics and thus to the efficacy of 'closing-the-gaps'-style policy-making? Given the above problem of 'sidedness', the relative absence of indigenous-identified writers in this collection has got to be a major limitation and a problem to which I return.

Noticeably absent from the book is a tradition of writing within postmodern visual studies that tries to tackle a metaproblem – the largely unexamined ascendancy of visual epistemologies, orocularity, within Modernity, which Foucault called 'the positive unconscious of vision'.<sup>4</sup> Addressing this might have assisted the discussion. For example, there has been some challenging work done on the how certain 'types' of racialised, gendered and classed bodies became solidified within scopic regimes and technologies, from painting to photography, in the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth centuries. This is an imperialist visual episteme which Timothy Mitchell named 'exhibitionary order'.<sup>5</sup>

*Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific* has the hallmarks of a compilation drawn from a conference, this one (c. 1996) in Canberra to honour anthropologist, Bernard Smith. Much of the language and often arcane references tend to assume a specialist reader. Postscript writer, Peter Brunt, labours to pull together themes, commonalities and a few schisms in offerings that span extraordinarily unlike disciplinary perspectives, theoretical styles, diverse historical cultural and geographic locations and subjects, ranging from the domination of Sydney's settler architecture by an ex-convict governor (Macquarie), to aesthetics and ornithology among the Abelam of Papua New Guinea, to 1980s Australian feminist art. The editors acknowledge:

Confronted by rich colonial art traditions in the region, by the autonomy and power of indigenous cultural expressions, and by a complex pattern of connection and non-connection between these European and indigenous visions, we struggle to find an interpretative frame that makes sense of these histories, in and for the present.

Island groups – Juan Fernandez, Hawaii, New Caledonia, Nuie, the Solomons – form a kind of gestaltic ‘South Seas’ organising principle for writers who mostly hail from the élite white groups of the major (post)colonial powers in the region, Australia and New Zealand. In this context, the appearance of ideas like ‘Micronesia’ and ‘the Antipodes’ as descriptive-analytic concepts seemed bizarre, marking for me problems of habit and articulation that re-inscribe what one author calls ‘the closeness and permanence of the coloniser [against] the silent still bush ... and the loud and unreasonable babble of the wild ... inhabitants’.<sup>6</sup> Diane Losche’s more modest and formulaic aim of ‘address[ing] the philosophical and methodological problems involved in discussing particular issues of representation and cultural difference [in indigenous and coloniser cross-cultural communications]’, felt more honest and more useful.

The unevenness of the papers, and especially where they conflict without cross-referencing or editorial comment, suggests that not only did no greatly effective exchange occur between authors, but also attention to the contradictions and breaks could identify a rich source of (unconscious) stress points and faultlines in the development of non-indigenous ‘counter-colonial imaginings’. An example is Joan Kerr’s detailed discussion of examples of ‘quotation’ and ‘reappropriation’ of colonial and aboriginal images in 1980s and 90s Australian art, which lacks any reference to prior art world debates. The result is that to a non-specialist it is unclear what Joan means by ‘appropriation’, ‘postmodern’ or ‘neo-colonialism’ in the first place. Are we all expected to have read these arguments? Another major problem for this compilation, noted by Kerr in relation to 1980s Australian feminist art (but not taken up by the editors or by any other author), is the virtual obliteration of gender in these accounts. An obvious example is the unconsciously gendered reading of the picture of the Kanak woman on pages 75 and 75, as being ‘in a vigorous but oddly defensive pose, perhaps cowering from the warrior’. To me she might be performing a haka or a martial arts stance. It is hard to imagine many New Zealand feminists reading such a forceful image in such an ambivalent way. Tellingly, in this book dominated by white men, there is almost no personal reflexive writing except, notably, by the two non-white artists, for whom family genealogy is relevant, if not their ‘masculine’ inheritances.

That said, the book contains some impressive scholarship,



exacting historical details, examples and ideas that mark some outposts of anti-colonial thought in the field of art and literary history. Several chapters reward second readings, notably those by Lamb and McLean, and Peter Brunt's 'Afterword'. For New Zealand readers, Leonard Bell's thoughtful multiple re-readings of the work of colonial artist, C.F. Goldie, is a valuable contribution. A couple of chapters annoyed me, notably those by Douglas and Losche, for reasons it might be helpful to contemplate.

To link the interpretation of a work of art, a novel, a photograph, a map, a treaty, etc., to the conditions of its creation (physical, socio-political, economic, technological) and thereby to the mental and ideological conditions governing the conceptions and understandings of authors, subjects and readers, has been – and for many still is – the leading critical method in humanities and social sciences since the late 1960s. Drawing on radical traditions like socialism, the avant garde, existentialism, utopian thought and alternative histories of science and technology, scholars have generated detailed critical readings. Recuperation and construction of alternative histories from personal materials and ephemera as 'traces of resistance' among conquered and disadvantaged groups was argued to be an historically valuable means of providing alternatives and hints against which to read elite and dominant group materials. In their light, industrial capitalism and scientific epistemology and knowledges emerge as overwhelmingly 'ideological' (false and distorted). These were the primary methods used to 'reveal' the operations of capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism and so forth.

Immediately I identify two simple and related problems. Through the inevitable translation processes, the views of all of the above groupings and critiques ultimately become derivative of the points of view of colonisers, owners, masters, patriarchs, captors. For instance, even if a member of an oppressed group gets to speak they have to be translated for and by those who are the judges, consumers, mono-linguistic, etc. Second, if any view is 'ideological', then who has the 'accurate' picture and how will we know when we see it? The critical art historian, however sympathetic, who tries to recuperate the experiences of groups depicted in coloniser art and texts but silenced within mainstream history, needs to explicitly discuss issues of exactly how and through what processes they claim to present readings 'against the grain' of dominant ideologies.

The aim of this book is allegedly to locate 'marks, imprints, traces, or countersigns of a native or subaltern 'agency', 'action', 'presence', and desire ... [but, more likely] the equivocations and contradictions of colonial utopia and the artistic imagination of ... settler culture ...'.<sup>7</sup> It is questionable as to whether in seriously monocultural, classed and gendered settings, such as academic conferences, professional books, museums, universities, courtroom hearings, official educational curricula, subaltern and working class and female peoples – in this case, members of indigenous cultures during the time of colonisation, and convicts at the time of their confinement – can ever have 'authentic voices' or 'fair hearings'. If 'they' can be said to have a voice or to be heard, in what senses and circumstances can that which is represented escape being an instance of 'high cultural' filtering and seizure by 'us' of 'them'? Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argued convincingly in 1988 (and before her, Roland Barthes and numerous feminists since the 1970s), that the answer must favour the negative.<sup>8</sup> But these sorts of authors don't get a look in in this book.

I think this is what Bob Jahnke is objecting to in *Double Vision*, for instance, when he rejects accusations of biological essentialism made by 'certain Pakeha academics' about 'Maori art' and artists. He sees their's as an attempt to perpetuate (to paraphrase) a remote, intellectualised imperialist 'essential white doctrine as the sole criterion for cultural enlightenment'. Such a 'single national voice' can neither accurately represent, nor reasonably condemn, Maori artists trying to protect their rights to control the customary images and motifs inherited from rich, polyvocal histories, and whose cultural significance is central in their negotiations of the liminal spaces of identity and mana in a thoroughly unequal contemporary situation 'beyond the *pae*'. At stake is no more nor less than Maori peoples' right to cultural self determination.

A good deal of contemporary cultural studies would indeed situate narratives that employ unified voices, paradigmatic clarity, definitive translations, secure knowledge and authoritative styles as essentialist, elitist and usually reactionary. The partiality and unreflexive style of much of the criticism since the 1960s, referred to above, its reliance on reading and writing, its elevation of 'academic' authority (with all its predominantly masculinist, white and class-based values) and its unexamined uses of tropes such as 'ideology', 'melancholy', 'cause' and 'vision', do yield partial, ambivalent and unresolvable arguments



and histories. Too frequently they end up reinscribing and celebrating the very things they are supposed to be problematising. Seen from different cultural experiences a book like this slides readily into an evocation and valorisation of bourgeois and coloniser white male 'genius', 'enlightenment', 'progress', 'causality', cumulative real history and a nostalgia for a bucolic period preceding modernity, while simultaneously attempting to un-make such notions.

The aim of *Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific* claims to be something different. The editors explain 'double vision' as having the following dimensions: locatedness in which significant sites, events and artistry are not parallel, and the need to keep both the profound differences between European and indigenous cultures and the need to write the complexities between them in view. The book claims a reorientation of the disciplines it draws on, which are themselves multiple. The history of visual culture is not clear, linear or cumulative. Thomas and Brunt begin and end the book saying that the writers try not to caricature, collectivise or supersede. Rather the effort is to explore a paradoxical condition of connectedness and distinctiveness that characterises the art, culture and social imaginings of the colonial periods and peoples engaged (c. late seventeenth and nineteenth centuries) as well as the disciplines that have attempted to write their history. Heightened attention is paid to the rational as involving profound tensions in European modernist thought, such as the relationship between image and history (the first conceptualised as 'corrupt'), self and other, oral and visual, fantasy and reality, fantastical utopia and sober empiricism. These objectives set out at the beginning are to be laid alongside the alternative knowledges, realities, art and histories of the many never-fully-colonised peoples of the South Pacific. There is a concerted effort to show how the first of the two strands, coloniser/colonised, are in themselves multi-vocal and variable matters of interpretation and interpellation, never simply a matter of action and counter-action. They relate on orthogonal planes.

A favorite was Ian McLean's chapter in which he explores the flavours of nostalgia from the early colonial period which, in these days of satellite communications are scarcely recognised any more as a cultural-artistic-emotional psychic backdrop for native-born tau iwi New Zealanders, and Australians. Another is Leonard Bell's wonderfully subtle and amusing reading of C.F. Goldie, that cuts through the posturing and the assumptions of those who for many

years, and maybe too quickly, dismissed Goldie as a simple minded, exploitative colonial artist. It is not that Bell seeks to recuperate Goldie: more that he explores the many alternative readings available to postcolonial eyes. Art history happens.

The book is unbalanced between Australian authors and those from other Pacific countries. For me it seriously over-represents colonisers in ways that over determine the partial and the visual of the English language élite and non-indigenous art historians, and understates the viewpoints of the colonised. One unfortunate outcome is an over concentration on the histories around the periods of 'fatal impact' matched by a consequent failure to take sufficient note of how these issues intersect with today's debates. Issues important in New Zealand art for the past twenty-five years are overlooked. Lots of whites know that it is not helpful to see 'Maori', 'Pakeha' settler or Aboriginal, etc., as monolithic groups.<sup>9</sup> The issue of art appropriation has been longstanding, dating from the earliest colonial period when Pakeha both expropriated Maori taonga and saw 'Maori art' as confined to the past, the contemporary forms being read, as we have seen, as symptomatic of a dying form, products of a 'dying race', as part of a failure to recognise the adaptive and political possibilities for Maori in the appropriation of European styles, techniques, and technologies. The issue of appropriation involves morality and this is under-addressed. While both groups, Maori and Pakeha, can appropriate the others' art (techniques, aesthetics etc.) the relationship that exists between Maori and Pakeha-authored art is different to the Pakeha's relationship with Maori-authored art.

I wonder what could have been achieved if most of the authors had been members of colonised groups in the many Pacific islands nations whose colonial art history is the major subject of the book. There is a depressing symmetry in the origins of the authors. It might seem an altogether fine endeavour to whites to try and 'rehabilitate' the traces of indigenous agency in drawings and writing by colonial artists, but a situation in which colonisers speak almost exclusively to colonisers tends to produce an echo-chamber effect. How about these allegedly 'lost' histories of what native peoples saw or the very present examples of how they depict it in art, for instance? Is indigenous agency and resistance really so 'lost'? The evidence of oral traditions in New Zealand in relation to the theft of Maori land and taonga, the evidence of carved lintels and art, and in Australia the memories among the



living of the hunting down of aboriginal people for sport, for revenge and for 'science', suggests otherwise. And, what is 'rehabilitation' in this context? Rehabilitation to what and for whom? To me it smacks of justifications for punishment and imprisonment. I suspect that more non-Maori are starting to recognise what many Maori have felt for some time, that 'biculturalism' and 'free speech' (read legally permitted *English*) are on the Pakeha front burner partly because they perpetuate the exclusion and silencing of multiple, semi-comprehended, 'aggressive' and 'unreasonable' Maori voices. It is easier to put Mike Smith in prison for wielding a chainsaw against an Auckland landmark, and to dismiss him in public as a disaffected 'Maori radical' – kin to Tamaiti and his 'like' – than it is to understand the intricate tribal histories that led Smith and Tamaiti, and Dame Whina Cooper and so many more, to make the gestures they do. In Australia this is a huge issue since official 'multiculturalism' represents further layers of exclusion, murder and distancing of Aboriginal voices.

In pre-European times, portraiture as mimesis (conventionally understood as copying or imitating a real model) was nonexistent since Maori art in those days was primarily conceptual and not figurative (illustrative or naturalistic). Once Europeans arrived Maori artists quickly included non-traditional aspects and techniques such as figurative depictions, paint and European symbols around carvings, used nails and steel chisels, wool instead of feathers in cloaks, English lettering and so on. Instead of seeing this as an assured creative adaptation, art historians and social studies teachers invented the phrase 'traditional Maori art': an imagined form that could then be seen as becoming 'debased'. Such 'incursions' were frequently seen as mimicry and as degrading of a 'pure' cultural form. As Rangihiroa Panoho has noted, colonialism often takes the form of nostalgia and of the perception of 'tribal culture' as a passive presence.<sup>10</sup> Mimicry is a complex idea. What to colonial eyes may seem like an 'inferior' form, to the eyes of indigenous artists or culturally savvy viewers may be parody, mockery or subtle and inspirational politics.<sup>11</sup>

There is a whole under-exposed history of innovative and aggressive Maori adaptations of Pakeha forms, design technology and materials, particularly from the nineteenth century ... [which] points to the ability of Maori culture over time to embrace even the most radical innovations and make them its own.<sup>12</sup>

That Maori have appropriated European styles, techniques and technologies has probably generated a lot less controversy than when the reverse has happened, for example, in the best known cases, when Gordon Walters used koru forms, or when Colin McCahon (re)appropriated the word as image as in 'Tohu' and 'Tuhoe'. Such debates at first tended to draw attention yet again towards Pakeha artists and away from contemporary Maori artists,<sup>13</sup> some of whom use ancient Maori symbols and modern Pakeha symbols in innovative ways. Since the 1990s Maori art has become increasingly fashionable, and with that fashion something of a much needed revolution in awareness is gradually occurring among white scholars. In some ways this is a mixed blessing, good for Maori knowledge, ownership, self esteem and pride, it means more exposure, commissions and opportunities for Maori artists, yet, as commercial 'hot property', Maori contemporary art is often still often subjected to the definitions and interventions of outsiders. An example being when European art historians become involved with questions of 'authenticity v innovation' and 'good v bad' Maori art, or when dealers exhibit and set prices. Some art historians (and possibly the odd Maori anthropologist) seem to have an obsession with miscegenation and a fear of 'hybridity', identified and discussed by Robert Young as typically a white colonial fear.<sup>14</sup>

The unfortunate fact is that the descendants of the colonised and subordinated groups under scrutiny mostly don't appear – as themselves, or as writers or artists – and their absence haunts the volume. I read somewhere

Te Ao Marama (this world) is always accompanied by the shadow of the void: the shadow as the residue of presence, the Mauri in one's footprints. In this way, for many Maori, photographs have a life of their own, an animation, just as the chips from a carving are sacred in their potential for recreating the (negative) image of the ancestor.<sup>15</sup>

In this sense, *Double Vision* is far from a non-event. It contains some controversial ideas worthy of debate, and plenty of shadows. It will have uses in postgraduate classes in art history, history, english, visual studies, anthropology and cultural studies with a South Pacific specialisation.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge the sharing of viewpoints that I received from attending seminars given by Bob Jahnke, Shane Cotton and Kura Te Waru Rewiri to



Media Studies and to Women's Studies at Massey University, and from participating in *Toiho Ki Apiti* Maori Art Conference, run by Te Putahi a Toi (Maori Studies) at Massey in 1996. The work and writings of Merata Mita, Ngahua Te Awakotuku and Rangihiroa Panoho have also informed the article. Obviously, none of what have to I say is their responsibility.

- <sup>2</sup> Losche, p. 211.
- <sup>3</sup> Thomas, p. 13.
- <sup>4</sup> See Rajchman, J. (1988). 'Foucault's Art of Seeing', *October*, 44, pp. 89-119, and Jay, M. (1988) 'Vision andvisuality', in Foster, H. (Ed.), *Dia Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, (Seattle: Bay Press.)
- <sup>5</sup> Mitchell, T. (1992). 'Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order', in Dirks, N.B. (Ed.), *Colonialism and Culture*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press). See also Lalvani, S. (1993). 'Photography, epistemology and the body', *Cultural Studies*, 7:3 (October), pp. 442-465; Tagg, J. (1995) *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press). Marien, M.W. (1997) *Photography and Its Critics. A Cultural History, 1839-1900*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Star, L. (1999). 'Blacks are back': ethnicity, male bodies, exhibitionary order', in Law, R. Campbell, H. and Dolan, J. (Eds), *Masculinities in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press).
- <sup>6</sup> McLean (1999), p. 142.
- <sup>7</sup> Brunt (1999), p. 269.
- <sup>8</sup> Spivak, G.C. (1988) 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Reprinted in Ashcroft, B, Griffiths. G. and Tiffin, H. (Eds), (1995) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. (London: Routledge); Barthes, R. (1972) 'Dominici, or the triumph of literature', reprinted in During, S. (Ed.), (1992) *The Cultural Studies Reader*. (London: Routledge).
- <sup>9</sup> Matahaere, D. (1995). 'Maori, the eternally compromised noun: Complicity, contradictions and postcolonial identities in the age of biculturalism, *Women's Studies Journal*, 11, (1-2) pp. 16-23.
- <sup>10</sup> Panoho, R. (1992). 'Maori: At the Centre, On the Margins', in Barr, M. (Ed.), *Headlands. Thinking Through New Zealand Art*. (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art), p. 124.
- <sup>11</sup> Taussig, M. (1993). *Mimesis and alterity: A particular history of the senses*. (New York and London: Routledge); Bell (1999).
- <sup>12</sup> Panoho, R. (1992), *ibid.* p. 24.
- <sup>13</sup> Jahnke (1999).
- <sup>14</sup> Young, R.J.C. (1995), *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. (London and New York: Routledge.)
- <sup>15</sup> Author unknown.

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## *Bibliographical index*

# Women and the law in New Zealand: Thirty years of scholarship

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SANDRA PETERSSON

The past three decades have seen the creation of a significant body of scholarship about the challenges law poses for women. This bibliography draws together New Zealand periodical literature relating to women and the law published between the years 1970 and 2000.

Three main factors have contributed to this body of scholarship being largely unrecognised and difficult to access until now. First, as women and the law scholarship frequently draws on disciplines outside law's core, many articles were published in journals belonging to those other disciplines. Consequently, these articles are not included in the law indices on which legal researchers rely. Similarly, those articles which were published in law journals are unlikely to be included in the humanities indices on which sociologists, historians, women studies researchers, and others rely. This bibliography has surveyed both.

Second, those articles that were published in law journals tended to be poorly indexed. For example, until 1973, the *Index to Legal Periodicals* tended to classify relevant articles on the basis of whether they were about 'women' or 'married women'. Although the index added the category of 'sex discrimination' in 1973, 'feminist legal theory' was not added until 1987, fourteen years later. While the *Current Law Index* provided more subject headings when first published in 1980, its headings were limited to those used by the American Library of Congress. Thus, articles raising new issues and those with a New Zealand focus sat awkwardly within the main international indices. This bibliography adopts subject headings that fit the articles rather than trying to fit the articles into a pre-set system of headings.

Finally, many relevant New Zealand journals are not indexed by the international indices and many have not produced their own indices. This bibliography includes articles from both indexed and unindexed sources.



The bibliography makes no attempt to include books, theses, government or private agency reports, conference papers, or unpublished materials.<sup>1</sup> While much valuable research is contained in such works, they are properly the subject of a separate bibliography. As a starting point, Appendix 1 contains a list of key works.

The collection process focused on New Zealand journals and selected Australian journals. Appendix 2A lists the journals indexed. Overseas articles relating to New Zealand have also been included where these were identified during the search process. Articles from non-law journals were assessed on the basis of their relevance to legal researchers.

Three further qualifications regarding the bibliography's coverage should be noted. First, selected articles from the feminist journal *Broadsheet* have been included to provide a more accurate view of legal issues confronting women in the 1970s. The low number of women in the profession during this period and the tendency to discredit early feminist scholarship meant that journals such as *Broadsheet* were often the only forum in which women could publish their views.<sup>2</sup> Second, articles relating to family law have been excluded except for the areas of domestic violence, reproductive issues, and the family rights of same-sex couples. While family law issues, such as divorce and matrimonial property division, constantly raise issues of fundamental importance to women, specialist texts, journals, and indexing services provide better coverage than this bibliography could hope to provide. Finally, case notes have been excluded, except where they contain a broader critique of the relevant law.

The headings and sub-headings used in the bibliography are set out below. Within each category, the articles are listed in reverse chronological order.

Authors are identified by both first and last names where these could be identified.<sup>3</sup> Journal names are written out in full to facilitate access.

**Subject headings**

**A. ABUSE AND VIOLENCE 81**

1. Against women 81
2. Against children 83

**B. COURTS, DISPUTE RESOLUTION, AND LEGAL PRACTICES 85**

**C. CRIMINAL LAW 87**

1. Rape and sexual offences 87
2. Women offenders and punishment 89
3. Defences 90
4. Other issues 91

**D. ECONOMIC ASPECTS AND POVERTY 91**

**E. EVIDENCE 92**

**F. FEMINIST LEGAL THEORY 93**

**G. GENERAL ARTICLES 94**

**H. HEALTH ISSUES 95**

**I. JUDGES 96**

**J. LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT 97**

1. Demographics 97
2. Equity and EEO 97
3. Harassment 99

**K. LEGAL EDUCATION 100**

**L. LEGAL HISTORY 101**

**M. LESBIANS 102**

**N. MAORI WOMEN 103**

**O. PORNOGRAPHY AND CENSORSHIP 104**

**P. PROSTITUTION AND SEX WORK 105**

**Q. REPRODUCTION 105**

1. New technologies 105
2. Surrogacy 106
3. Parental leave 106
4. Abortion 107
5. Contraception and sterilisation 108
6. Other issues 109

**R. SEX DISCRIMINATION 109**

**S. TORT LAW AND ACCIDENT COMPENSATION 112**

**T. WOMEN IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION 113**

**APPENDIX 1. KEY NON-PERIODICAL SOURCES 114**

**APPENDIX 2. JOURNALS INDEXED 115**





## A. ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

See also C. CRIMINAL LAW 1. Rape and sexual offences  
J. LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT 3. Harrasment

### 1. Against women

- Frank Bates 'Violence, money and informal families in Australia and New Zealand' (1999) 7 *Asia Pacific Law Review* 1
- Felicity Goodyear-Smith 'Childhood sexual abuse and mental health' (1999) *New Zealand Law Journal* 386
- John Hughes 'Battered women's syndrome and "interdependence" as factors in establishing conjugal status in social security law' (1999) 7 *Waikato Law Review* 104
- Nan Seuffert 'Domestic Violence, discourses of romantic love, and complex personhood in the law' (1999) 23 *Melbourne University Law Review* 211
- William Atkin 'The Domestic Violence Act' (1998) *New Zealand Law Journal*
- Allison Morris 'The prevalence in New Zealand of violence against women by their current male partners' (1998) 31 *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 267
- Allison Morris 'Victims of crime: The women's safety survey' (1998) *New Zealand Law Journal* 46
- Fran Wright 'The circumstances as she believed them to be: A reappraisal of section 48 of the Crimes Act 1961' (1998) 6 *Waikato Law Review* 109
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- Maureen Molloy 'Rights, facts, humans and women: An archaeology of the Royal Commission on Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion in New Zealand' (1996) 12 *Women's Studies Journal* 63
- William Atkin 'Parents and children: Mrs Gillick in the House of Lords' (1986) *New Zealand Law Journal* 90
- Allanah Ryan 'Playing at happy families: The state and fertility control' (1986) 2 *Women's Studies Journal* 56
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- Joanna Manning 'Court-ordered caesarean section: The priority of maternal autonomy' (1999) 18 *New Zealand Universities Law Review* 546
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- Susan Watson 'The Rashomon of science: The legal position of the foetus in New Zealand' (1994) *New Zealand Law Journal* 388
- Kathy Laster 'Infanticide: A litmus test for feminist criminological theory' (1989) 22 *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 151
- James O'Neill 'Damages and the unwanted child' (1984) 5 *Auckland University Law Review* 180
- MG Gazley 'Tort liability for pre-natal injuries' (1974) 7 *Victorian University of Wellington Law Review* 202
- Ian Macduff 'Thalidomide: The aftermath' (1970) 1 *Auckland University Law Review* 53

## R. SEX DISCRIMINATION

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                    LESBIANS  
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                    TRANSSEXUALS

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- 'Human Rights Commission Report' (1999) 2 *Feminist Law Bulletin* 8



- 'CEDAW optional protocol' (1999) 2 *Feminist Law Bulletin* 7
- Isaacus Adroxornu 'Victimisation of complainants of unlawful discrimination: An analysis of New Zealand law' (1998) 4 *Human Rights Law and Practice* 75
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- Patricia Monture-Angus 'Standing against Canadian law: Naming omissions of race, culture and gender' (1998) 2 *Yearbook of New Zealand Jurisprudence* 7
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- Rodger Haines 'New Zealand (UNHCR: Symposium on Gender-Based Persecution' (1997) *International Journal of Refugee Law* 61
- Joanne Morris 'Women's experiences of the justice system' (1997) 27 *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 649
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- Mai Chen 'Improving the enforcement of the Women's Rights Convention' (1996) 2 *Human Rights Law and Practice* 19
- Chris Cunneen and Julie Stubbs 'Violence against Filipino women in Australia: Race, class and gender' (1996) 4 *Waikato Law Review* 131
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- Mai Chen 'Self-regulation or state-regulation: Discrimination in clubs' (1993) 15 *New Zealand Universities Law Review* 421
- Mai Chen 'Discrimination in New Zealand: A personal journey' (1993) 23 *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 137
- Mai Chen 'Protective laws and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women' (1993) 15 *Women's Rights Law Reporter* 1
- Mai Chen 'Discrimination, law, and being a Chinese immigrant woman in New Zealand' (1993) 9 *Women's Studies Journal* 1
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- Grant Williams 'The Human Rights Commission Amendment Act 1992' (1992) 7 *Auckland University Law Review* 202
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- Margaret Wilson 'The Human Rights Commission: Educator or enforcer?' (1979) *New Zealand Law Journal* 467
- Priscilla Pitts 'Acting on the Human Rights Commission' (1978) 65 *Broadsheet* 10
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- Jessica Skippon 'Deficiencies in the Bill' (1977) 48 *Broadsheet* 13
- Phillida Bunkle 'Sex discrimination and the law' (1975) *New Zealand Law Journal* 246
- Margaret Wilson 'New bill' (1973) 10 *Broadsheet* 8



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- Rosemary Tobin 'Public authorities and negligent investigations into child abuse: The New Zealand and the English approaches' (1999) 7 *Torts Law Journal* 232
- 'Re-introducing fault-based laws' (1998) 5 *Feminist Law Bulletin* 1
- 'Accident Insurance Bill' (1998) 4 *Feminist Law Bulletin* 2
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- 'Exemplary damages in sexual abuse cases' (1996) 5 *Feminist Law Bulletin* 7
- 'Repressed memory syndrome' (1995) 2 *Feminist Law Bulletin* 7
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- Wendy Parker 'The reasonable person: A gendered concept' (1993) 23 *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 105
- Margaret McGregor Vennell 'Issues for women in claims for medical misadventure' (1993) 23 *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 13
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- James O'Neill 'Damages and the unwanted child' (1984) 5 *Auckland University Law Review* 180
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See also I. JUDGES

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- Gill Gatfield 'Business solutions for women in the law' (1997) 490 *LawTalk* 34
- 'Report finds women lawyers level pegging on salary after five years' (1997) 480 *LawTalk* 7
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- 'Obstacles remaining for women in law: Dame Silvia [Ethel Benjamin commemorative address]' (1996) 447 *LawTalk* 5
- Ruth Arcus 'Sexual harassment in the workplace: The responsibilities of law firm partnerships' (1995) 440 *LawTalk* 16
- Kate Davenport 'Part time lawyering: Career killer or life-saver?' (1995) 431 *LawTalk* 23
- 'Women in the law' (1995) 1 *Feminist Law Bulletin* 8
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- Kate Davenport 'All women firm provides flexible work environment' (1994) 423 *LawTalk* 46
- 'Justice and our neighbour: An address to the Auckland District Law Society church service (February 2, 1994)' (1994) *New Zealand Law Journal* 114
- Annis Cook 'Women go solo in Dunedin' (1993) 402 *LawTalk* 37
- Anne Holden 'Law in the slow lane' (1993) 23 *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 149
- Joy Liddicoat 'Notes from a woman lawyer in government' (1993) 23 *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 77
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- Joanne Morris 'Balancing or juggling our private and public lives?' (1993) 23 *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 49
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- 'Legal writing by women: A survey of writing by women in NZ' (1993) 2 *Feminist Law Bulletin* 3
- John Caldwell 'Practice survey: Job satisfaction and attitudes' (1991) *New Zealand Law Journal* 254
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- ‘Remove discrimination against women’ – Report’ (1989) 312 *LawTalk* 9
- Rosalie Abella ‘Women in the profession: Pain and frustration will be worthwhile’ (1989) 316 *LawTalk* 35
- Robin Cooke ‘Women in the law (Part 1)’ (1988) *New Zealand Law Journal* 147
- Judith Potter ‘Women in the law (Part 2) [interview]’ (1988) *New Zealand Law Journal* 148
- Georgina Murray ‘Women lawyers in New Zealand: Some questions about the politics of equality’ (1987) 15 *International Journal of the Sociology of the Law* 439
- ‘Women in the profession: Marked difference in attitudes’ (1987) 271 *LawTalk* 3
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- ‘Women lawyers group to provide network and support’ (1985) 224 *LawTalk* 2
- ‘Women push for change in Chile’ (1984) 205 *LawTalk* 3
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- Ruth Charters ‘“Feminist/Lawyer”: An impossible dream? The Women’s Studies Association Conference raises some basic issues’ (1981) 137 *LawTalk* 4
- Carolyn Henwood ‘Women and the profession’ (1975) *New Zealand Law Journal* 612
- Janet Moore and Nicola Crutchley ‘Trying to penetrate the law office’ (1975) 29 *Broadsheet* 16
- ‘Women lawyers unite’ (1975) *New Zealand Law Journal* 612

## APPENDIX 1: KEY NON-PERIODICAL SOURCES

### Books

- Rosemary Du Plessis and Lynne Alice (eds) *Feminist Thought in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Connections and Differences* (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1998)
- Gill Gatfield *Without Prejudice: Women in the Law* (Brookers, Wellington, 1996)
- Margaret Wilson *Challenging Law and Legal Processes: The Development of a Feminist Legal Analysis* (New Zealand Law Society, Wellington, 1993)
- Rosemary Du Plessis and Phillida Bunkle (eds) *Feminist Voices: Women’s Studies Texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand* (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1992)

Pauline Tapp and Margaret Wilson (eds) *Women and the Law in New Zealand* (new ed, Methuen, Auckland, 1982)

Kaye Turner and Pauline Vaver (eds) *Women and the Law in New Zealand* (Hicks Smith, Wellington, 1975)

### Reports

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New Zealand Law Commission –

*Justice: The Experiences of Maori Women – Report No 53* (Wellington, 1999)

*Recognising Same-Sex Relationships – Study Paper No 4* (Wellington, 1999)

*Women's Access to Legal Services – Study Paper No 1* (Wellington, 1999)

*The Education and Training of Law Students and Lawyers – Miscellaneous Paper No 11* (Wellington, 1997)

*Women's Access to Justice: Lawyers' Costs in Family Law Disputes – Miscellaneous Paper No 10* (Wellington, 1997)

*Women's Access to Legal Advice and Representation – Miscellaneous Paper No 9* (Wellington, 1997)

*Women's Access to Civil Legal Aid – Miscellaneous Paper No 8* (Wellington, 1997)

*Women's Access to Legal Information – Miscellaneous Paper No 4* (Wellington, 1997)

*Women's Access to Justice: Information about Lawyers' Fees – Miscellaneous Paper No 3* (Wellington, 1996)

## APPENDIX 2: JOURNALS INDEXED

*Auckland University Law Review*

*Australasian Gay and Lesbian Law Journal* (formerly *Australian Gay and Lesbian Law Journal*)

*Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*

*Australian & New Zealand Journal of Sociology*

*Australian Feminist Law Journal*

*Broadsheet*

*Butterworths Family Law Journal* (formerly *Family Law Bulletin*)

*Canterbury Law Review*

*Feminist Law Bulletin*

*Human Rights Law and Practice*

*LawTalk*



*Maori Law Review*

*New Zealand Business Quarterly*

*New Zealand Journal of Industrial Relations*

*New Zealand Journal of Environmental Law*

*New Zealand Journal of History*

*New Zealand Journal of Taxation Law and Policy*

*New Zealand Law Review* (formerly *New Zealand Recent Law Review* and  
*New Zealand Recent Law*)

*New Zealand Universities Law Review*

*Otago Law Review*

*Te Whakamarama: The Maori Law Bulletin*

*Victoria University of Wellington Law Review*

*Waikato Law Review*

*Women's Studies Journal*

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Within this framework, articles updating the progress of the New Zealand Law Commission's project on Women's Access to Justice have also been omitted. A list of the papers produced during the project is set out in Appendix 1.
- <sup>2</sup> *Broadsheet* continued publication until 1997, each issue discussing several aspects of law and law reform. However, from 1980 onwards, the publication of new journals, such as *Women's Studies Journal* and *Feminist Law Bulletin*, and the increasing recognition of feminist scholarship as legitimate scholarship means that *Broadsheet* does not have to be relied on to fill the gaps.
- <sup>3</sup> Identifying first names generally reveals whether the author is female or male. Several of the articles included in the bibliography are unsigned and are listed by title. Most often these articles appear in *Law Talk* or the *Feminist Law Bulletin*. With respect to the *Feminist Law Bulletin* the unsigned articles were written, in whole or in part, by the editors: C. Dot Kettle, Joy Liddicoat, Claire Baylis, and Kate Tokeley.

## Contents

### **Embodying ambiguity: Somali refugee women and ethnic boundary 'maintenance'**

*Louise Humpage*

### **Mixed-sex rooming and being female: Delving into the complexities of identity and subjectivity**

*Beverley Burrell*

### **Book Reviews**

*Poverty, social assistance and the employability of mothers: Restructuring welfare states*, Maureen Baker and David Tippin, reviewed by Jane Higgins

*A daughter of Isis: An autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*, Nawal El Saadawi, reviewed by Nabila Jaber

*Childfree and sterilized: Women's decisions and medical responses*, Annily Campbell, reviewed by Jan Cameron

*Her side of the story: Readings of Mander, Mansfield and Hyde*, Mary Paul, reviewed by Livia Käthe Wittmann

### **Poems**

*Johanne McComish*

### **Review article**

*Double vision: Art histories and colonial histories in the Pacific*, Nicholas Thomas and Diane Losche (Eds), reviewed by Lynne Star

### **Bibliographical index**

*Women and the Law in New Zealand: Thirty Years of Scholarship*  
*Sandra Petersson*

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