
Women in Asia

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My apologies for the lateness of this newsletter. As mentioned in the last newsletter I have been in Thailand and Andrea Lanyon has also been overseas for an extended field-trip. That combined with the fact that no news items were sent to me until very recently has meant that it has been difficult to put this edition together. I must stress to everyone the need to email me with any news items, otherwise there will not be any newsletter.

I am making arrangements for a subscriber list for *Women in Asia* which I think would be a more efficient way to post advertisements and news and keep in contact. I have not yet constructed a web page but hope that will be up soon and I will let you know when it is.

Unfortunately, due to family reasons, Andrea L. was unable to attend the conference as originally planned but we hear that it was very successful. If your university would like to host the next Women in Asia conference in 1999, please get in contact.

It was an interesting time to be in Thailand. During my stay a new constitution was promulgated, the Thai baht was floated followed by economic collapse and the fall of the Chavalit government. The 'formerly rich' were selling their rolex watches and

Mercedes Benz at Saturday markets, and the construction sites of Bangkok were silent. While most news stories on the economic collapse concentrated on the plight of the rich, the consequences for those already living on marginal incomes will be disastrous. Villagers in Roi Et and Khon Kaen are dependent upon seasonal migration to the cities for work in factories and the construction industry. They predicted that many seasonal migrants would have to find alternative means of supplementing the family income. Combined with a forecast drought this year, it will force many poor families into greater debt.

Perhaps some members of the Women's Caucus should consider working together to examine the effects of the Asian economic crisis upon women in the region. I would like to publish anyone's thoughts or observations on the effects of the economic collapse in the next newsletter.

I look forward to hearing from you and receiving your submissions.

Andrea Whittaker (GRP, ANU)

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At night, Dyamon, a young Muslim woman sat crosslegged chewing betel nut beside the cable TV in the living room of her father's small wooden house under the bridge in a poor community on a riverbank in Marawi City, Mindanao, the Philippines. Her body shook and she cried out; from within her the spells 'spoke' their mischief and 'unseen' spirits gesticulated cures which were articulated by her brother and mother and written down as tasks for execution the following day - coconut and banana leaves, stones or hair to be thrown in the river, forest or road (fn 1997).

Dyamon is different from many other Maranao women I know. She exorcises herself and others, and casts spells which reportedly make men impotent. Dyamon has a university degree and works for a local non government organisation; and she teaches language part-time in a local university. Like her peers she believes unmarried, childless women like herself have no status in her community. And she also believes (covertly) in romantic love between two people, which usually contradicts customary parental arrangement of betrothal and marriage, and polygamy. In this oppositional environment, 'love magic' assists young Maranao women like Dyamon to interpret and regulate their betrothal and marriage.

In this study I examine gender identities of Maranao women in relation to how bodies, most notably their passions are imagined in political terms. Following Ong and Peletz (1995) I explore the diverse ways in which Maranao Muslim society is mapped onto women's bodies, how women's bodies are symbolised in that society, and how these are mutually dependent. According to early anthropologists such as Malinowski (1954), magic is aligned with the emotions and desire (eg. for possessions and power), and science with reason (including knowledge, past experience and technical skill). Magic, though akin to science, inevitably succumbs

RESEARCH REPORT

Love Magic: Muslim women & modernity in the Philippines

Anne-Marie Hilsdon

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to it, being irrelevant and too crude to advance to a higher culture in a developed civilisation.

From May to July, 1997 I conducted fieldwork in a village by the river in Marawi City, Mindanao, the Philippines.

Compared to many other urban areas in the Philippines and abroad, services there are basic or

non-existent. The Agus River provides washing and sanitation facilities (and also hydroelectricity to most of Mindanao); conditions there after heavy rain become hazardous and people often drown; firewood is used in cooking and most rubbish is recycled within the household including the burning of noxious plastics. Residents rent land on the river bank on which they have built unsealed wooden houses with tin roofs. Most residences have electricity and appliances, such as cassette radios and rice cookers; some have cable TV shared illegally with neighbours. Access to health services is very limited and medical care seems to be largely provided by either a nurse who until recently lived in the village and by female family members including pamomalongs (spiritual healers) with health care knowledge.

The Muslim struggle in Mindanao for independence in the Philippines culminated recently (1995) in a peace agreement followed by the formation of an autonomous region for development. After centuries of impoverishment, Muslims such as those in Marawi City are now embracing modernity, 'the higher culture' in the logic of Malinowski. Yet it seems that magic or at least love magic is being used more often than before to negotiate parentally arranged marriage and a recent increase in polygamy. Rather than eradicated by it, magic seems to be incorporated into modernity. Why is this? Perhaps the answer lies beyond local Maranao knowledges, the particularities of which I seek to explore in the thickness of

ethnography. For gender identities are made, too, by 'ever widening geographies of production, trade and communications' (Ong and Peletz 1995:8).

Religious faith or religious commitment becomes problematic because the everyday life of the Maranao is becoming part of a global system of exchange of commodities, eg communication technologies (such as cable TV, readily available in the village in which I lived). Such a system is not easily influenced by political leaders, intellectuals or religious leaders (Turner 1994). Cultural flows of ideas such as notions of romantic love portrayed in overseas soap operas take place alongside material exchanges (Turner 1994; Ahmed and Donnan 1994). And cultural modifications and incorporations occur. For example a new veil called 'Maria Mercedes' (after the heroine of a Mexican cable soap opera) is now on sale in the market; and the increasingly popular black robes of *purdah* are now referred to as 'ninja' after the Japanese turtle cartoon characters. Domination and resistance of Maranao women, therefore, is constituted not only in hierarchised domains like the body and the family, but also in regional, national and transnational arenas (Mohanty et al. 1991). For example, fundamentalism (which in the Philippines, unlike Malaysia (Ong 1995), crosses class boundaries) has been expressed in the dress codes since the early 1970s. And the Islamisation of political, economic and legal institutions in the newly declared Autonomous Region includes the widespread implementation of family law (adopted from Middle Eastern Islam). It comprises men's and women's rights in marriage and divorce which uphold male privilege and male control over women (Ahmed 1992).

The above transcultural forces of Islam dictate how women's bodies are symbolised in Philippine Muslim society, but women in cultural groups other than the Maranao are more mobile: they do not wear the veil and they marry other Muslims and Christians. Hence, as many writers contend with respect to the Middle East (Ahmed 1994; Turner 1994), there seem to be several Islams in the

Philippines of which fundamentalism is considered one (Halliday 1994). The cultural forces of such Islams play a role in shaping Maranao women's bodies.

The body of ethnographer, too, is regulated and controlled as Maranao Muslim society is being mapped onto it. I study closely how symbolic representations of Woman are constituted and inscribed, and my presence is a reminder of the 'intrusion' of knowledges other than those locally produced. My gender identity, infused with Christianity, the West, Australian ethnicity and the academy, invites some expression of the interrelationships between Muslim and Christian local, regional and national knowledges. And the management of perceptions and impressions of me has methodological implications. Presentation of my research self which changed over time implied an increasing familiarity with local knowledges but also pointed out their conflictual relations with regional, national and global knowledges.

Like Dyamon and her peers I was veiled and sequestered, observing the dress code and behaviour of an ideal Maranao Muslim woman who covers her *aurat* (including hair, neck and genitals). I always travelled with a companion, preferably another woman, and avoided eye contact with people I did not know, especially men. If possible I was segregated from men on public transport where, as elsewhere in public, loud laughter and gossiping was discouraged. However, for Maranao women the embodiment of the ideal went much further: Dyamon and her peers believed firmly in virginity before marriage; accepted fully endogamous marriage; and though not necessarily confined to the family home, they stressed obedience and service to their prospective husbands.

Like other women, my presentation of self was at times regulated directly by others. When my research assistant and I were talking excitedly (in Maranao language) while travelling in a public jeep one day, my dress had inadvertently gaped in front

revealing a section of my leg below the knee. Although there were no men present, a student in *purdah* sitting opposite, silently and effectively pulled together the edges of my dress thereby emphasising but correcting my norm transgression. Yet towards the end of the three months stay an old man with whom I had conversed a little in Maranao about being a 'university student' from abroad pronounced enthusiastically: 'But you look and act just like a Maranao woman'.

Representation of Woman in public space, however, differed in several ways from that in the domestic realm. Veils and long clothes were shed in favour of short sleeves and long hair worn loosely and women smoked and sometimes drank alcohol. We also exposed our shoulders and necks to take a bath in the river or under the faucet in the village thoroughfare. In addition, the weaving and revoking of magic spells was located in domestic space. Here my presence did not appear menacing as it seemed public, and my analyses using western psychology were scrutinised for possible additional explanations of behaviour and action. In my fieldwork house sick relatives and neighbours would congregate to be treated by a nurse trained in western medicine (now an overseas contract worker in Saudi Arabia). If the prescribed medicine failed to cure them, her sister (my fieldwork sister), Dyamon, worked to revoke the magic spells believed cast on the patients.

I dressed as a Muslim, was given a Muslim name, and eventually learned to speak some Maranao. However, as indicated above, my suspected ethnicity and class was of some concern in a city where the war against the government for Muslim autonomy which drove out Christians and 'foreigners' had just ended. In fact the political instability which still existed meant that most people were indoors by dark, and seldom walked around the city at night. Kidnapping for ransom and robbery occurred regularly, of which the targets were usually Christians, especially foreign nationals, all presumed to be American. So I was urged by a small group of village members who knew my real

identity to 'pass' as a Turkish Muslim, ie a poor, modern Muslim woman. An alternative identity when I visited public spaces was that of being 'married to a Maranao' and hence a convert to Islam (Balik Islam - return to Islam).

The disguises continued at the local university with which I was affiliated - the threat of violence being continuing testimony to the tenuous negotiations for a globalised Muslim modernity in Marawi City. Yet inside the university buildings such negotiations incorporated the 'traditional' as I had observed in the village. For example, after I had given a seminar paper on my research in the Faculty of Arts to an audience of academics, students and women from a local non-government organisation, several people gathered around me to talk. Simultaneously, elsewhere in the room a crowd of academics were seated around my fieldwork sister, who I discovered later was 'diagnosing' the particular spells of love magic cast on each one.

This study then contests notions of authenticity in the ethnographic project: as passing as and switching research identities over time and space contests conventional methodologies. The study also critiques theories of modernity and Islamism addressing both discourses of orientalism and occidentalism; and it refutes earlier anthropological formulations in which religion coexists with science lifting 'man' above the magical level. This is accomplished by focusing on women and magic in Maranao Muslim society where the body becomes a 'socio-historical nexus of shifting power relations' (Ong and Peletz 1995 interpreting Foucault 1981); but as a corrective to Foucault, the study considers the differential regulations of gendered, racial, ethnic and class bodies, including that of the ethnographer in colonial and postcolonial formation (Hilsdon 1995).

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For further information, contact

Prof James Fox

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I want to preface this piece by saying that what follows is a very personal, partial and perhaps partisan point of view which is not based on any particular research. Yet this is, I believe, a proper topic for an academic conference and a conference on women. I congratulate Norma Sullivan for conceiving it and bringing it to fruition at not inconsiderable cost in time and thought, and to thank all those who have supported her.

Over the past 12-18 months, Australia has been thrown into a state of crisis. One after another, our key institutions are wavering, perhaps even collapsing under attacks which have come from the Government itself. Do you think that perhaps I am exaggerating? Then consider the attacks on that most conservative of institutions - the High Court. The Deputy Prime Minister has said that it should be stacked in a way that will ensure that it does the bidding of the Government. That is itself an attack on one of the fundamental tenants of our democracy, that is, the separation of powers. Consider the attacks on the Public Service that the notion of frank and fearless advice is thoroughly out of favour - another tenant of our democracy. Consider the attacks on our universities, indeed on the whole range of our education system. On hospitals. On research. On the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Radio Australia. On the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, the Child Support Agency and Legal Aid. Consider the ham-fisted cuts to our overseas aid programs and the inept handling of our foreign policy. Consider the damage to our international standing: at the UN, Australia was often described to me as "punching above its weight" - a masculine metaphor, but one whose meaning was clear and commendable. This is no longer the case.

This is not simply the dysfunction of rapid change and globalisation or the inevitable adjustment to accommodate the preferences of a new government. It is not simply the

COMMENTARY

The Race Debate: Getting It Into Perspective

Elaine McKay

Presented at the WOMEN IN
ASIA CONFERENCE, SYDNEY,
3 OCTOBER 1997

massive budgetary and personnel cuts administered across the board in the name of fiscal restraint, though these have precipitated the crisis. Our institutions are under attack - and from none other than the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Treasurer, the Attorney-General, other Ministers and

members of the Government. (This is a radical government, not a conservative one). The other element in the crisis is that we have been offered no convincing argument about the necessity for pain now for gain in the future. There is no alternative future being offered, only reference to a return to a mythical golden age (that existed in the 1950s perhaps). It is not because we are being steered in another direction; rather - we have no (future) direction.

All this has followed a period in which we heard articulated a considerable amount of vision. It was a vision in which socially and culturally our diversity was celebrated, our history was addressed and elaborated, particularly the shameful history of our treatment of the indigenous populations (remember Keating's Redfern speech), and our future role in the international community was outward looking. True, it was wildly internationalist - we tended to get involved in everything from Haiti to Rwanda - but it was also firmly focused on the Asian region. It was a period when we were searching for ways to articulate this focus - were we "Asian", did we want to "enmesh with" or "integrate" with Asia? to be Asia "literate"? Or, more simply, an active, interacting, respected partner in a diverse and dynamic region. This debate is ongoing, not only in Australian minds but also in Asian forums.

For those of us who have been arguing for this orientation - and for the cultivation of the knowledge and skills which are an essential concomitant of such an orientation, this was an exciting and rewarding time. But I would be less than honest if I implied that

all those institutions I listed above weren't already showing varying degrees of stress. Economic rationalism didn't just arrive in Australia in March 1996 and trade liberalisation goes back to the 1970s. Australia's industrial economy matured some time ago and we have in certain places, in certain sectors, entered the post-industrial age. No government in Australia has had a plan to address the social dislocation which is being suffered by significant groups in our community.

What many of us were not aware of was the psychological effects all this was having on those social groups. Nor were we aware of how this was feeding into the frustration and despair being felt by the huge number of young, and increasingly not so young, unemployed and parts of the rural community who are stuck in outmoded means of production or in marginally productive lands. As some of us welcomed the increasing focus on Asia and began to feel that at last our country had caught up with what we had known for a long time, we did not realise there were comfortable middle class people out there who felt very threatened by all this strangeness.

Then on 10 September 1996, a relatively young and generally unknown woman made her maiden speech in the Australian Parliament. She had won the seat as an independent member having been expelled from the Liberal Party for making speeches judged to be racist. In this her first speech to the Parliament, she attacked recent policies of affirmative action towards aborigines, multiculturalism and the Australian immigration policy which she claimed was leading to the "danger of (Australia) being swamped by Asians". She attacked foreign aid and the United Nations. She called on Australians to wake up because we had large and populous neighbours who have their eyes on our resources - the implication being that they would invade and take these resources for themselves. She deplored the loss of our big industries, "our kowtowing to financial markets, international organisations, world bankers, investment companies and

big business people" - the old international conspiracy theory. (Don't worry about the contradictions - big Australian companies are OK - even though they are multinational, it's the big foreign companies we need to watch out for).

Since then she has launched her own political party giving it the highly misleading title of the One Nation Party, "written" a book with the even more misleading title of "Pauline Hanson: the Truth". And she has had herself photographed for promotional purposes wrapped in the current Australian flag, with the British flag prominently displayed. Yet it is important to recognise that Pauline Hanson is symptomatic of something more abstract and elemental.

This conservative backlash and scapegoating is not new in Australian history. We saw it in the 1950s whipped up against the Communist Party to ensure the re-election of the incumbent Prime Minister (in fact, our present Prime Minister's hero, Robert Menzies), we saw it in the depression years of 1930s when armies were raised in rural areas to save the country again from communists and foreigners. Keep out foreigners and Asians was the catch cry of the unemployed in the 1890s and the same evils were attached to them then as now - drugs, crime, perverted sexual practices, disease. So here in the 1990s we have a similar reaction for similar reasons. Can we expect then that it will die down, as it has done in the past? The answer is probably:- yes. That is, die down not die away. The beliefs and sentiments, and the propensity in the hearts of some, are always there.

And lest you think, that I think, there is something peculiarly Australian about this - I don't. I think this is a human condition. I think it exists in all societies, in all countries. In every country I can think of, minorities are discriminated against, indeed some countries legislate for discrimination. How many countries in the region and in the world have an open immigration policy? None, including Australia. How many have a non-discriminatory immigration policy? How

many have a policy for immigration at all? How many countries have a good record with regard to their indigenous peoples? So let those who are without sin cast the first stone.

If this issue is likely to submerge again, as it has in the past, do we then do nothing about it but breathe a sigh of relief? My answer is an emphatic 'no'!. We must act. Our democratic society might be relatively robust, but its price is indeed eternal vigilance. We must take part in the analysis which ensures that an accurate assessment of the causes of social and economic malaise is achieved. We must stand for a set of values which includes informed respect for other cultures, which values diversity, is enriched by diversity because it provides the space and the opportunity and encourages the participation of all, no matter what their ethnic and cultural background. We cannot be complacent when sectors in our community are hurt by racial vilification and children in our school grounds are physically and emotionally attacked. (I am saying nothing here about the effect on our trade, sale of educational services, tourist numbers, our other regional policies or our international reputation. Important though they are, it is more important to know what kind of a society we want to live in and what kind of values we stand for - the rest will follow.)

And when our leaders fail to lead, they legitimise fear of difference, distrust of strangers; they legitimise lashing out and blaming and the vilification of others. When our leaders fail to lead, it is time for citizens to articulate where they stand.

What has been impressive about the public reaction to Pauline Hanson and the One Nation Party has been the large number of people who have joined in the marches organised by the ethnic communities' councils and the huge numbers who have protested peacefully outside One Nation meetings. In Adelaide, 600 people attended her meeting and 6 000 protested outside. In cynical Canberra, 200 people

attended the meeting and 1000 protested outside. The proportions in other cities have been similar, but the media didn't give us this picture. The media was only interested in violence.

Then there are the organisations which have sprung up - Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) which is a national coalition of non-indigenous organisations and individuals who are working to support the National Indigenous Working Group. It calls on the Government to publicly and unequivocally endorse the High Court's decision in the Wik case and to call on the Government to enter into negotiations with Aboriginal people to work towards a model of coexistence. On 12 October it is organising a Sea of Hands on the lawns of Parliament House representing the people who have signed the petition. There is Community Aid Abroad's photo-petition aimed to get 10 000 photos of people who are prepared to "Face Up" to Racism.

Then there is Racial Respect which stands for the rights of all Australians to live without fear of scapegoating, racial attack and discrimination, especially against Australians of aboriginal or Asian backgrounds. It supports the principles established in the High Court ruling in the Wik Case and a continuing process of national reconciliation. Some of Australia's most eminent scientists and academics are members of Racial Respect, as well as young people and old people, women and men. It has members in all the eastern states and a web site at www.vicnet.net.au/~respect.

It is important that such organisations exist - individuals alone cannot sustain the cause. It is important that they have a broad base of support. It is important that there is a popular, organised, public means of challenging discrimination and intolerance wherever it is encountered.

Is this a feminist issue? Racism, no. Racism is a community issue in which women must make their views known. What is a feminist issue, though, is the Hanson phenomenon.

Could the One Nation Party have been built around Graeme Campbell who holds similar views and articulates them with greater force and vigor - read anger? Pauline portrays herself as the deserted wife, single mother, small business person, battler, as uneducated, unsophisticated, not your typical (male) politician. This is backwoods takes on the power of Canberra. The media manipulators have pictured her draped in the Australian flag - a latter-day Britannia, a virginal heroine and patriot against the forces of evil. And how have her detractors pictured her - as a cat or even more archetypally, as a witch (ie. a witch as evil). This is also a feminist issue.

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Journals

ANTHROGLOBE

AnthroGlobe is pleased to announce its imminent conversion to an international multi-media and interactive journal and to solicit contributions. The Centre for Anthropology and Computing at the University of Kent is web site host.

PROCEDURES The Editor is Cyril Belshaw at cbelshaw@direct.ca. The refereeing process is contrary to that used in most other journals. The Editor will determine whether the contribution appears to be in the fields of the journal's competence, and whether it appears to be free of material that is offensive to scholarship and scholarly communication (see <http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/AnthroGlobe>).

INVITATION TO SUBMIT Scholars are now invited to submit materials by first sending an email of inquiry and intent to the Editor at cbelshaw@direct.ca or if in Spanish or from Latin America to ssr@laneta.apc.org Other addresses for submissions will be announced in time. The on-line bibliography department is already well under way. Advice to authors will be posted at the AnthroGlobe site <http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/AnthroGlobe/> as soon as possible. Full articles, articles in progress, shorter contributions may now be sent. AnthroGlobe will not rush into its full technical capacities, but proceed step by step on a learning

curve. Please let the Editor know if you are willing and able to volunteer help.

INTERSECTIONS: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context

Intersections, is a refereed electronic journal conceived as an interactive forum for new research and teaching in the area of gender, history and culture in the Asia-Pacific region. It stems from Murdoch University School of Asian Studies and is published with the financial assistance of the Division of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education, Murdoch University, Western Australia. The aim of the journal is to emphasise, as far as the region is concerned, the paramount importance of research into the multiple historical and cultural gender patterns for the understanding of contemporary, globalised societies where identities and social relations are constantly being negotiated against the background of dominant national narratives. As such, it crosses disciplinary, cultural and gender boundaries. At the same time, *Intersections* is intended as a means to explore innovative ways of doing history using new technologies. The journal will initially be published annually and will include an average of five research and review articles and will also feature post-graduate contributions, poetry and fiction originating from the Asia-Pacific region, book and film reviews, conference announcements and reports. Each issue will be organised according to an interactive format and created with an ongoing living bibliography. Visual material, such as photos, maps, artistic reproductions as well as video clips or sound tracks, will be included where indispensable to the argument being developed. Links with other relevant web sites, be it other journals or academic sites, will be established, while a talk-back forum will facilitate discussions between readers, authors and editors.

INAUGURAL ISSUE The inaugural issue of the journal is planned for mid-1998. This issue will be China focused and will explore topics related to women's cultures and separate spheres, formal and informal power.

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RESEARCH NOTE

The Status of Girls in Nepal

Kushum Shakya

The Australian National University

To understand the status of women in Nepal we must first consider the status of girls (a girl is defined as between the ages of 0-14 years). As Grover (1993) suggests: *addressing the needs of the girl child could be the key to achieving a more equitable status and role for women in the long run. Of even greater urgency, however, is the need to ensure her rights as a person to the full benefits of childhood.*

As Hannum (1997) has noted, the following saying summarises the status of girls in Nepal: "To be born a daughter is to have an ill-fate". Similarly, Ghimere (1991) also mentions sayings of Nepalese people about the girl child: "To be born a daughter is misfortunate" and "let it be later, but let it be a son".

Girls in Nepal have to face many problems in the society. According to Pradhan (1989), in Nepalese society there is: "greater demand for sons over daughters, less access to health care girls and neglect of girl children due to the inferior position of women in (sic) men". Girls are seen as just temporary guests for the parent in the home. Shrestha (1994) cited the Kalidas's Play for a girl as follows; The daughter is a thing to give away, For someone else she is kept. What a relief to send her away today, I'm light as a feather and free from debt.

From girlhood to adulthood, she is never independent in her life. Shrestha (1994) also cited from Manu that, In childhood a female must be subject to her father...in youth to be husband... when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent"

Within this context, this paper will look briefly at a number of problems that girls face in Nepal. These problems include: prenatal sex selection, deprivation of food

and good health care, higher rates of mortality among young girls, lower rates of school enrolments for girls as compared with boys, higher rates of work participation by girls as compared with boys, early age of marriage for girls and no legal rights for girls.

Prenatal sex selection:

People use ultrasound to determine the sex of unborn babies. Nepal does not have statistical records regarding prenatal sex selection. Nepalese people prefer boys because of socio-cultural reasons. This means, if the foetus is a girl some people will choose to abort it even though such an abortion is illegal.

Deprived of food and good health care:

If a girl is born, she is deprived of food and good health care in comparison to boys. She gets less food to eat and less health care than boys (Grover, 1991). Shakya (1993) found that more boys than girls were breastfed (51 percent of boys and 43 percent of girls in the 0-12 months age). Furthermore, boys aged 0-3 years were given more milk as supplementary food than girls. Many couples who have a girl attempt to have a son immediately afterwards. This results in early weaning of girls in Nepal due to the demands of the next child. Due to lack of sufficient food and less health care, girls have more diseases and a lower life expectancy than boys (Shakya: 1996, 1993).

Higher rates of girls' mortality:

Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh have the lowest female life expectancies in the world (UNICEF, 1991). The under-five mortality rate for females is higher than males in Nepal. The under-five mortality rate for females was 139 and 187 per 1000 live births compared to 125 and 178 per 1000 live births for males in 1991 and 1989 respectively (Table 1). This is the case for all SAARC countries except Sri-Lanka.

Table 1: Under-five Mortality Rate (per thousand live births) by Sex in SAARC Countries, 1991

SAARC Countries	1989		1991	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Bangladesh	146	162	130	136
Bhutan	180	187	188	200
Nepal	178	187	125	139
India	118	134	123	125
Pakistan	145	151	137	139
Sri Lanka	28	22	25	19

Source: Acharya, 1994:25.

Table 2: Life Expectancy at Birth in Nepal (Years)

Census	Male	Female
1971	42.1	40.0
1981	50.9	48.1
1991	55.0	53.5

Source: CBS, 1991:111.

Furthermore, census figures demonstrate that female life expectancy is lower than male life expectancy.(Table 2). This difference is probably due to the negligence of girl children and the high maternal mortality rate.

Lower Rates of School Enrolment:

In Nepal, the literacy rate is calculated from the age of 6. The literacy rate for females is 25.0 percent, while it is 54.1 percent for males. In each age group, the literacy rates for males are higher than females (see figures for 1981 and 1991, Table 3). The reason for the difference in the literacy rate is quite clear if we look at Table 4. This table shows that boys attend more school than girls in each grade and age group.

Higher Work Responsibilities:

Instead of attending school, most girls work. According to Nag et al (1978) and Acharya (1994) girls in the 6-9 age group work 2.6 to 4.5 hours per day while boys only work 1.7 to 2.9 hours per day. In rural areas, child labour begins as early as 5 or 6 years of age because of the agricultural economy. Time allocation studies conducted in Indonesia and Nepalese villages found that Nepalese girls work more hours in all types of work (household service and directly productive) than boys in all age groups (Nag et al, 1978). Furthermore, in 59 out of the 75 districts, the percentage of female worker children is considerably higher than for the male worker children (Thapa, 1996). According to Thapa, an average of 224 girls for every 100 boys worked at least six months. The burden of work for girls increases with age (Grover, 1991).

Table 3: Literacy Rate (%) by Age Group for Boys and Girls in Nepal, 1981-1991.

Age Group	1981		1991	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
6-9	27.8	15.2	55.7	38.0
10-14	50.8	21.2	76.0	49.3

Source: CBS, 1991:378.

Table 4: School Attending by Age Group (%) in Nepal, 1991.

School Level	Age Group	Boys	Girls
Beginning	6-9	4.42	3.04
	10-14	7.72	5.57
Primary (1-IV)	6-9	24.56	14.29
	10-14	30.34	19.89

Source: CBS, 1991:395

Early age at marriage:

Girls get married earlier than boys. Legally girls can marry when 19 years old and boys at 21 years old. Nepalese people prefer to have their daughter married at a young age due to cultural, religious and social reasons. In 1971, 2 percent of girls married when aged 6 to 9 years, while 13 percent of girls married when they were aged 10 to 14 years. The latest Census (1991) recorded that 7.2 percent of girls were married when aged 10 to 14 years old. Only 4.1 percent of boys got married at a similar age.

No legal rights:

There are no legal property rights for girls in Nepal. Grover (1991) points out that girls do not inherit properties from the natal house. Property rights for females only exist after a woman is 35 years old, and only if she is unmarried. Furthermore, there is no law regarding child prostitution and rape in Nepal. The Child Labour Act is not effective; there are many children working. Grover (1991) also indicates that 45 per cent of the girls working in carpet factories are sexually harassed. This is a result of the weakness of the child prostitution and child labour act.

In conclusion, the status of girls in Nepal fails to fulfil the standards set by the UN Convention on the rights of the child (UNICEF, 1991). The Convention states that:

- Every child has right to survive (Article 6)
- Every child has right to health and nutrition (Article 24),
- Every child has right to education (Article 28),
- Every child has right to be protected from economic exploitation (Article 32)

- Every child has right to be protected from sexual exploitation (Article 34).

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Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific (edited by Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly, The University of Chicago Press, 1997) is a fascinating collection which explores the

construction of a bewildering array of sexual moments in the colonial and post-colonial world. The "illicit space[s]" (138) of Thailand feature prominently in the book - as they are alleged to do in the Western imagination of exotic/erotic others - and it is on this aspect of the book that I will focus my comments. My concern is that several of the papers seem to reinforce some of the very stereotypes that the volume as a whole sets out to challenge.

In the first two contributions on Thailand, Manderson and Hamilton provide analyses of a series of films (Manderson) and written texts (Hamilton) which both reveal and shape Orientalist discourse on the overlappings of Thai and Western sexuality. Manderson's interpretations of the films provide some interesting insights into the textual construction of Orientalist fantasies but not without the interpretive gymnastics that, for me, make the analysis less than satisfying. *The King and I*, for example, is said to position Thailand as "woman and victim" while simultaneously masculinising Thailand's regional "barbarism" (129). Later, the maleness of Thailand - represented by the figure of the King - and the femaleness of the Western Anna, is (re-)interpreted as an inverted filmic rendering of the relationship between Oriental child and Occidental mother, a rendering which "demands that Thailand be feminized" so that it can be subjugated by Western masculinity for whom the female Anna is an "agent" (130), despite her apparent rejection of "male patronage" (131). Indeed! Hamilton's analysis of expatriate literature is more restrained - and her point about the stereotypical Western

BOOK REVIEW

Textual Gaze And Contextual Grasp: Sites Of Desire In Thailand And Burma

Review of *Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure*.
Manderson, L & Jolly, M (eds) Chicago: Chicago
University Press. 1997

by
Andrew Walker
Australian National University

"quest for love and hope of a gallant rescue" (165) is well made - but, in the end, her emphasis on textual interpretation is equally disconcerting.

I have several specific reservations about the heavy reliance these authors place on their

textual material. The argument that such texts "constitute, or shape, or inform" (143) expectations of the Oriental other - to the extent of facilitating sex tourism - remains a hollow assertion without some concerted analysis of the consumption of these texts. Tracing, as Manderson does, their "genealogies" (126-128) in terms of box-office success, critical response and meaningful resonance with other significant texts in Western culture is not sufficient. Secondly, the claim that texts are "historically situated social documents" (143) runs the risk of temporal caricature. Manderson's claim, for example that the film *Emmanuelle* suggests a "marked shift ... involving an increasing objectification of women and of Thai people (women and men)" (132) undoubtedly finds support in popular images of Thailand as a "sexual playground" for American troops in the 1960s and 1970s. However - to pursue this example - surely there is a need to critically interrogate these widely-held images of Oriental passivity, rather than using them as a passing rationale for textual indulgence. I strongly suspect that historically "situating" the texts may involve little more than drawing on popular clichés of Thai historiography that resonate with the supposed "moral charters" contained in the texts chosen for analysis. My third reservation is that the "ethnographic usefulness" of the texts needs to be more critically assessed. Hamilton suggests that the written texts are one way in which the expatriate community reflects on the "inherently confusing and ambiguous nature" of their real-life relationships with Thai women (149). Later she suggests that

"[o]bviously the authors must have spent some time in bars and in relations with bar girls to have the knowledge to write in the way they do" (156) and quotes from one writer who claims that "some of the stories are based on experiences, though these experiences are not necessarily mine" (157). Nevertheless, by the end of Hamilton's chapter I was left wondering if stories about "Reggie Joyce, vicar's son, from Malderbury" (157) can really support the ethnographic and analytical edifice that is built upon them.

However, my main concern is that both authors' surreptitious weaving between textual interpretation and contextual analysis leads to some bewildering ethnographic simplification. How are we to take, for example, Manderson's sweeping claim that by the early 1990s "Thai women had become a blatant commodity" (137)? or, her related claim that erotic stage shows, incorporating ping pong balls and razor blades, are "observable in any bar in Thailand attracting a European or mixed clientele" (138)? Whose fantasies are these? In Hamilton's paper we are confidently told - in an extraordinary passage that conflates ethnography and the "reading" of expatriate texts - that many Western male clients "have had unsatisfactory relations, been divorced, or have been unable to find a [western] partner" (164). The point of Stoler's critique of "hydraulic" theories of colonial sexual encounter (7, 31-32) seems to have been completely missed! Even more alarming is Hamilton's suggestion that "respectable Thai women are unlikely to accept a Western male as a marriage partner" but that there are "thousands of Thai girls of lower social status ... for whom a *farang* [westerner] is an excellent husband" (164). Exactly where are the stereotypical fantasies of Thai women, and Western men's interaction with them, being constructed? To me these papers come dangerously close to reconstructing vigorously critiqued images of Asia as the "site of erotic excess" where Western men can live out their repressed sexual desires. Overcoming these stereotypes surely requires much more than textual

interpretation. How about some detailed analysis of the aspirations, hopes, desires and fears of Thai women and their Western partners? And, for good measure, how about some genuine ethnographic engagement with the sites of desire in Bangkok and the provinces? Less discourse and more intercourse, please!

Porter's paper on the Burmese corner of the "Golden Triangle" also contributes to the maintenance of some pervasive stereotypes. Porter's primary concern is to highlight the multiple identities of people singularly labelled as "risk groups" by NGOs in a series of proposed HIV/AIDS interventions. His point is well made, and his argument that a term like "Commercial Sex Worker" cannot adequately embrace a diverse range of economic and social identities (223) forms a nice counterpoint to the stereotypical Bangkok bar-girls who feature in the earlier chapters. However, the theoretical orientation of the paper is a little disconcerting. Despite his emphasis on the complexity and multiplicity of contemporary identities, much of Porter's paper seems to be couched in terms of a dichotomy between inner-oriented, bounding, disciplining centers - with whom the NGOs he analyses are presented as possibly unintentional collaborators - and an outer-oriented, fluid, non-bounding periphery. My concern is that there is a real danger that this centre-periphery perspective reproduces the ideologies of central elites. I am sure that Porter is as concerned as any observer of Burman affairs of the activities of the military regime that holds power there, but his emphasis on the northeastern borderlands as a "cowboy land" frontier which - quoting Kristof - is "marked by rebelliousness, lawlessness, and/or absence of laws" (213) seems unnervingly similar to the concerns of the regime in Rangoon. Indeed, for a writer who is so clearly concerned about the imposition of externally derived and inappropriate categories it is puzzling that he so freely accepts not just the label "Golden Triangle" but the Western fantasies of exotic disorder that go with it. Surely, this amounts to a spatial eroticisation that parallels the

colonial discourses of disorderly, undisciplined natives that are subject to so much deconstructive critique elsewhere in the volume.

Of the four chapters relevant to Thailand, I find Jackson's discussion of male homosexual identity the most satisfying. This is a paper of ethnographic subtlety and nuance, refreshing in its uncertainty (see 169 in particular) and pleasantly unreliant on the heavy-handed language of commoditization, colonization and libidinization that characterises some of the earlier contributions. Jackson's aim is to explore the relationships between the ternary concepts of "man", "gay" and "kathoe" each of which now occupy a place in Thai male sex/gender categories. In relation to the older concepts of "man" and "kathoe" Jackson suggests that they should be considered to be alternate categories of Thai maleness (171). The concept "man" refers to the gender normative male who is usually heterosexual and who can be expected to marry and father children. But, and this is crucially important, the concept of "man" provides for significant slippage in relation to sexual practice - occasional, private involvement in homoerotic practices, particularly penetrative practices, need not disrupt a "man's" core masculine gender/sex identity (178-9). The "kathoe" represents the polar opposite, clearly un-manly in dress, behavior and sexual preference but "pivotal to the construction of Thai masculinity" by providing an other against which masculine practice can be defined (175). The final section of Jackson's paper examines the issue of the importance of Western influence. While acknowledging that the concept of "gay" in Thailand has "drawn selectively on Western models" (167), he is cautious about placing too much emphasis on Western discourse in the construction of Thailand's sites of homosexual desire (168). Like Manderson and Hamilton, Jackson relies heavily on texts, but his paper conveys the impression that the observations are well grounded, although this could have been made more explicit.

The comments in this review have been restricted to the papers on Thailand, but the book offers a range of chapters covering diverse areas of the Asia-Pacific region. Overall, the book makes fascinating, stimulating and challenging reading and will provoke a reassessment of approaches to issues of representation in the region.

Dr Andrew Walker is currently employed at the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, The Australian National University.

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