

CSSH NOTES

Robert Foster, *Materializing the Nation: Commodities, Consumption and Media in Papua New Guinea*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

This book answers a challenging question: what is the importance of nationalism as a source of identity in the era of globalization? The question is explored through various case studies of the inscription of nationalism in Papua New Guinea (PNG). PNG's experience of nationalism, Foster argues, is revealing because nationalist discourse has been imported to the country first by weak attempts at state-building and second from international non-governmental sources. He follows theories that contend that nationalism is created through mundane, everyday practices that bolster the control of productive forces through the state. What Foster finds interesting about PNG is that there the mundane practices involve engagement with private institutions of international scope as much as, if not more than, state institutions. Each chapter presents a case study in which nationalist discourse is a subtext to the institutions, practices, and messages associated with economic development and the international division of labor. Through these cases, Foster shows how people are placed in nation-like collective identities in their everyday engagement with the global order of production and consumption. Further, the mass culture of the nation-state is useful for creating subjects of new kinds of political power.

An excellent example of this argument is Foster's analysis of commodity consumption in PNG. The task of advertisements in the country is to construct the subject position of consumer in a way that is plausible to the population, and nationalist discourse provides the symbols for this interpellation. The truly successful commodities in urban PNG are those which are made to elicit feelings of nostalgia without undercutting their own mystique as symbols of modern luxury. Advertisements for Coke, for instance, represent traditional life as one kind of personal preference, thereby reflecting the numerous indigenous groups as merely an ethnic mosaic. Moreover, preferences for one's home and roots are similar to choosing one product over another. In this way, the ads create a fantasy of freedom in which the incompatibility of traditional economies and commodity consumption is elided. Nationalism, Foster argues, is the subtext in these advertisements. Because all people of PNG are similar in their capacity to have preference, whether in their culture or in what product they drink, they are impelled to imagine themselves as belonging to a unique collective body, constituted in the terms of modernity, but resonant with their emotional experience of their home and family.

Similar strategies for cultivating nationalism are adopted by the PNG state

in the design of paper currency. Adorned with images of shell and other traditional forms of wealth, bank notes link their users to indigenous identity. At the same time, the design of currency promotes a fantasy of value: wealth in shells or pigs backed by the state's central bank. State currency functions as a fetish of value in which one's membership in a national body entails the guarantees usually found in intimate social relations, yet also gives the user new freedoms to spend and consume. Money signals modernity, but for it to be seen as valuable, it needs to be reinforced by the concept of a national population, a new community that will guarantee it. Thus the traditional symbolism on PNG currency can be seen as an attempt to co-opt nostalgia toward the end of promoting a new regime of value.

Other cases presented in the essays are the controversies surrounding the 2000 Olympic Torch Relay, state health promotion and law-and-order campaigns, and millenarian Christian movements. As this clearly written and sometimes very witty book pursues its insights, it also shows that PNG's experience of nationalism is fragmented and incoherent. Rather than being an official or elite ideology, PNG nationalism has many competing authors and is fraught with ambivalence and ironies. In the era of globalization, anthropologists must take into consideration the weakness of states and the multiple forms of power to which populations of peripheral postcolonial countries are now subject. Given this, the case of PNG presented by Foster is an important one for scholars of nationalism in the postcolonial world.

———Ryan Schram, University of California, San Diego

Dorice Williams Elliott, *The Angel Out of the House. Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2002, 270 pp.

Kathleen D. McCarthy, ed., *Women, Philanthropy, and Civil Society*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001, 314 pp.

The relationship between philanthropy and women is a much-discussed topic in women's studies and history of the welfare state. Women have played a major role in philanthropic endeavors. They were personally involved in caring for the sick, the poor, and other destitutes, and took part in establishing and organizing philanthropic societies that catered to a host of social problems. Both books under consideration address this subject anew, though in very different ways. Elliott's book is about nineteenth-century England, McCarthy's volume includes articles on the development of women's voluntary work in various countries all over the world up to the present time.

England is probably the most researched case when writing about the history of philanthropy, and often serves as a point of comparison for other countries. Many authors have shown that philanthropy offered women of the ex-

panding middle classes a way to combine their traditional roles as a housewife and mother with a role in the wider society. Philanthropy was considered a natural extension of women's domestic skills and was therefore seen fit for upper- and middle-class women. In *The Angel Out of the House* Elliott tries to show that philanthropists nevertheless did undermine the traditional ideology. She focuses on what she calls the internal contradictions of the ideology of domesticity. Women taking roles outside the house, changed the ideals about what women should do and be. They did not do so by resisting the place accorded to women, but by making use of the possibilities implied in the extension of domestic values to the society at large.

Not only women involved in philanthropy gained from the greater leeway allowed to women. Their work had an impact on upper- and middle-class women in general. Literary fiction was one means by which the new ideals spread. From the eighteenth century onward, novels were published with philanthropic woman as their main protagonists. An extensive analysis of this literature, mostly written by women, forms the substantive body of Elliott's book. Starting with Sarah Scott's *Millennium Hall*, published in 1762, via Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854–1855), and ending with George Eliot's *Middlemarch* in 1872, the author traces the development of the "philanthropic heroine." Making use of the Freudian notion of the two desires—erotic and ambitious—she shows how the fictional women philanthropists tried to still both desires. They did not reject the women's domestic role, but applied it to the needy; they did not openly compete with the men from their own class like doctors and clergymen, who professionally were involved with the poor, but rather looked for a space that was not filled by men. From the traditional aristocratic lady visitor to the quasi-professional organizer, from the unmarried woman who found her vocation in a female utopian charitable community to a heroine who could decide against marriage in favor of her philanthropic work, the novels gave an image of what women—married or unmarried—could be.

In our day nineteenth-century philanthropy is often criticized for reproducing dominant class relations. Elliott acknowledges this, but for her the liberating impact on women of all classes overrides the negative aspects of charity. In a subtle analysis, she shows how charitable endeavors offered women a possibility to act on ambitious desires and freed them from the confinement to their sexual role in a period in which there was no other way out.

In the papers collected by McCarthy, the beneficent impact of women's voluntary work on society is so taken for granted that it needs no words at all. On the contrary. The volume grew out of a research project on the role of women's philanthropy in shaping civil society around the world. Philanthropy is defined more broadly than usual, referring to all voluntary work that gives time and money for the public benefit. Not only charitable activities, but also social advocacy, community organization, political activism, and participation in cultural and leisure organizations form the subject of this book.

The various chapters—on Ireland, France, Brazil, Norway, Australia, the United States, Egypt, India, and South Korea—start from a set of common hypotheses and are structured in the same way. Each author gives an historical overview of the growth of women's involvement in different types of voluntary work. In all of these societies, women's activities started with charitable services and extended to political and policy issues in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. The hypotheses that religion was the most important factor in shaping women's philanthropy is clearly substantiated. In all of the societies under study, women were traditionally confined to the home and had no role in public life. Only by using the imperative of charity included in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism could women extend their domestic duties by administering to the poor. This historical legacy of women's involvement in charity can explain why women's voluntary work is even nowadays so often directed to 'maternal' issues.

All the papers point out that women came to play an important and positive role in society through their voluntary work, be it as nationalists, socialists, Islamists, or secular feminists. For readers interested in the position of women in any of the countries covered, the book offers a lot of data, but it could have gained from less historical description and more critical distance or debate.

—————Ali de Regt, University of Amsterdam

Julia Adeney Thomas, *Reconfiguring Modernity: Concepts of Nature in Japanese Political Ideology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, 254 pp.

One of the key narratives of political modernity is that of the emergence of human agency in constructing the social order, with theories of divine origins giving way to the notion of humans as lawmakers. While such narratives often center on the death of God and the wresting of sovereignty from monarchs, *Reconfiguring Modernity* reminds us that they also tend to establish another adversary: nature. Modernity is commonly thought of as a linear movement away from nature or as a dialectical overcoming of nature, which establishes human agency and freedom over and against nature. The prime example for Thomas is Maruyama Masao, a renowned political philosopher who attributed Japan's militaristic nationalism to its failure to establish the primacy of invention or human agency over nature. Thomas questions this conception of modernity based on an opposition between human agency and nature. It is not by negating or overcoming nature that modern political freedoms emerge, she argues. Rather political freedoms come of specific ideological configurations of nature (cosmos) and society (polis). *Reconfiguring Modernity* thus turns to the history of the idea of nature in Japanese political thought to reconsider the formation of modernity in Japan.

Behind the diverse usage of nature-related terms in the Tokugawa era (1603–

1868), Thomas finds a common sense of cosmological nature as preceding and shaping the political order. Specifically, the idea common to diverse thinkers was to “locate the correct place of political practice through correct apprehension of nature’s patterns” (53). Such a conception of nature ultimately bars individual liberties and political transformation, for it equates natural and political orders. The important break comes with the introduction of the problem of time in the 1860s and 1870s, in the form of evolutionary theory and history. Evolutionary theory introduced indeterminacy into previous cosmopolitical equations, affording possibilities for separating nature and politics, for thinking natural rights and popular sovereignty, and for beginning the search for stable points of resistance to government power in the 1880s. Thomas finds such crucial debates short-lived, however, and a space of agency and resistance did not emerge. Concepts of time and history, with their implications of developmental stages and constant political transformation, tended to place the Japanese nation at a disadvantage, internationally and domestically. Nature thus disappears from political discourse in the 1890s, only to re-emerge in culturalist discourses of national exceptionalism from the turn of the century. It is in this form that ideas of nature are stabilized by the 1930s, foreclosing political resistance. Basically, the need to stabilize the nation proved stronger than individual rights, and the sovereign (emperor) assumed the prerogative of nature.

The interest and challenge of *Reconfiguring Modernity* lies in its displacement of the received histories of modern Japanese political thought (rather than its break with them). While the book reproduces many of the received ideas about the failure of political freedom in Japan, the aim is clearly to present this failure with greater complexity and sympathy. Thomas argues, for instance, that modern Japanese ideas about nature are truly novel and innovative; they are not mere importations and imitations, nor are they due to inertia (a failure to break with pre-modern conceptions). She thus complicates the notion of a simple break between past and present, between Japan and the West. Indeed she submits that if one thinks of modernity sociologically (as an achieved state) then Japan has clearly achieved modernity. She thus challenges us to think of modernity beyond the simple framework of modernization, that is, as movement toward the Western norm. Rather, there are multiple forms of modernity. In order to avoid relativism, however, Thomas displaces the evaluative framework from Western normativity onto that of liberal democracy. It is not modernity itself that fails, but only certain forms of it. Japan’s failure is not of a developmental but of a historical order. The historical experience of the transformation from the old configuration to the new (modern) configuration of the cosmopolis did not produce sufficient play between cosmos and polis to allow room for liberal participation in, and resistance to, the political order.

The lucidity of Thomas’s discussion poses questions that reach far beyond it. First there are methodological questions. While the emphasis on the ideas of individual thinkers reinforces a message about human agency and innovation, it

limits discussion of discursive formations and power. Questions about power tend to settle on the ways in which intellectual elites mediate between government and the masses, a very modernist problematic. Second there are conceptual questions. What is nature for Thomas that it underwrites this displacement of modernity from sociological conceptions to historical experience? Is resistance always to be conceived on the model of stable opposition to government power? It is the strength of this insightful study that it forces us to pose such important questions about the nature of political modernity.

———Thomas Lamarre, McGill University

Thomas W. Gallant, *Experiencing Dominion: Culture, Identity and Power in the British Mediterranean*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002, 252 pp., ISBN 0-268-02802-8.

While the mildness of the colonial encounter in the European edges of empire is belied by intractable political standoffs in Northern Ireland and Cyprus, such locations traditionally have been of only secondary interest to scholars of colonialism. This book valuably documents the complexity of one such “sideshow in the great game of European imperial expansion” (p. x), the British protectorate of the Ionian Islands (1815–1864), which now form a part of Greece.

The author, a longtime proponent of anthropological approaches to Greek history, organizes his study around social and cultural themes (politics of representation, patronage, honor, gender, religious identity, and resistance) rather than chronology or narrowly defined political and economic categories. He begins by situating the history of the Ionian Islands within British colonial history, eschewing a more predictable grand narrative of Ionian history. He shows convincingly, for instance, how British observers ‘naturally’ transferred to the Ionian Greeks stereotypes of the Irish, those other marginally European British colonial subjects: traits including a hedonism mixed with violence, a dubious whiteness, and a slavish dependence on the corrupt clergy of a degenerate Christianity. The book then goes on to address ways in which Ionian Greeks transformed and were transformed by colonial policy: Greek-run municipalities learned to play the game of British propriety in their statutes regulating public space, aid for foundling babies became a resource for political favors while men’s dueling and women’s verbal sparring were re-conceptualized within the new public arena of the colonial court. Creative readings of British police and court records provide a refreshing view on Ionian history, but the lack of reference to active local literary and other discursive production of the period creates the odd impression that Greek interpretations of colonial rule can only be read indirectly off of action rather than more deliberate textual practice (even if not always its explicit content, p. 59).

Gallant does not just resist the temptation to side with the colonized in their struggle against colonial power, but uses the Ionian case to argue against what

he perceives to be a romantic overemphasis on resistance in the literature on colonialism. Sometimes this useful corrective seems to go too far as various colonial initiatives are described as “well intentioned” (xii), clearly “sound, sensible, sanitary measures” (62), or as contributing to the “‘civilization’ of male sensibilities to violence” (142). Pressing questions about the production of new subjectivities and political languages, the use of this particular semi-colonial site as a testing ground to formulate social policy back home or in other colonial locations, and the introduction of new forms of violence in the guise of modern techniques of surveillance and punishment (after all, a panopticon prison was built on Corfu during British rule) are not of focal concern. The author in my opinion has engaged with the wrong anthropology for his aims, relying heavily on 1970s and 1980s ethnography of Greece with its focus on honor and shame debates and discussions of gender roles rather than on the now extensive body of contemporary anthropological research on colonial cultures in various global settings.

This book is nonetheless a useful starting point for rethinking the comparative and disciplinary frameworks through which modern Greek history has been written and, in turn, suggests ways that that history could be of relevance for studies of colonialism more generally.

———Penelope C. Papailias, University of Thessaly, Greece