

*Contemporary Australian Feminism 2* edited by **Kate Pritchard Hughes**. Melbourne: Longman, 1997. Pp. xii + 360; \$32.95 (paperback).

It is, of course, impossible to comprehensively review an anthology of the extent of *Contemporary Australian Feminism 2*. With thirteen contributions, ranging from an introduction to feminist thought through deliberations on the various contexts shaping gender to a discussion of how feminism has intervened in Australia's legal system, this volume aims to present the reader with a cross-section of the topics which feminist research and critique have addressed since the late 1960s.

Although the coverage of the anthology is impressive there are some topics that stand out as not being addressed. In my opinion the volume would have benefited from including a non-heterosexual perspective on being a woman in Australia, a presentation of Australia's feminist movement and from commenting on feminism in Australian university education and research. Even though the editor's introductory first chapter touches upon these issues, the book articulates an unquestioned heterocentrism and fails to position the circumstances of its production. With these shortcomings in mind the volume still provides a valuable overview of feminist work in Australia.

The contributors to this anthology are all very good at explicating difficult theorising in a way that makes it accessible without insulting the readers' intelligence. I mention as an example Kwok Wei Leng's chapter "Sex and Sexualities: Contemporary Feminist Debates" which, in an admirably lucid way, outlines a debate covering complex issues and somewhat inaccessible theorising. Leng highlights the political struggles over the articulation of female sexuality in the early days of the second wave of feminism and the ongoing debate on pornography. She also summarises the current theorising which draws on psychoanalysis and French feminism. Anyone who finds present day poststructuralist feminist theorising on sexuality difficult to grasp will benefit from this chapter.

Another feminist research task is looking at Australian women's realities through feminist categories. Several contributors work this agenda in their contributions. I find the chapter by Lyn Richards titled "The Ideology of the Family: Women, Family and Ideology in Three Australian Contexts" especially illuminating. With a firm footing in empirical data from several projects she provides the reader with excerpts from interviews and life-stories of Australian women at different stages in their lives. The empirical material brings a vivacity to the analysis when she discusses how ideas about what it means to be a woman are reproduced in everyday Australian realities.

Other contributors stake out territories for feminist investigation in a way that challenges the reader to learn more. One of these is Lesley Instone whose chapter "Denaturing Women: Women Feminism and the Environment" boldly takes on the complex and sometimes even contradictory field of feminist ideas on the natural environment. Her exposition of ideas and issues maintains a balance and fairness that many other commentators in this discourse have lost.

However, being pursued in Australia, by Australian scholars using Australian material, does not necessarily make feminism Australian. For that to happen something novel and unique has to be created, something that is not the established conceptual

framework in every location where this discourse is pursued. In this regard the anthology is uneven, but some contributions do live up to the promise of the title. I especially want to mention chapters two, five, nine and thirteen, for in these the modality "Australian feminism" is creatively charged with content.

In chapter two "Who is an Australian Woman?" Sevgi Kilic discusses feminist ideas about ethnicity and race. Having some familiarity with feminist conversations on these topics in North America and Europe it seems to me as if the intersection of feminist critique and Australian realities is a discursive site where challenging and original scholarship is being produced. Instead of reproducing ideas from the dominant US discussion Australian feminists appear to pursue their own trajectory, taking into account the historically unique way in which ethnicity and race have been and are constructed, reproduced and changed when women from a non-English speaking background and Aboriginal women challenge both male-dominated society and Anglo-dominated feminism.

In the chapter "Femininity and Culture: Some Notes on the Gendering of Women in Australia" by Barbara Brook, a similarly fruitful meeting takes place. The author explores what being made into a woman means in Australia. She manages to establish the relevance of international feminist thought for life in a Melbourne suburb as well as for the way race and gender were co-constructed over two hundred years of British colonisation. The interplay of race and gender in creating social order and prescribing the ideals on which people are expected to model themselves are pinpointed in this chapter.

Deborah C. Saltman's chapter "Feminism and the Health Care Movement" also succeeds in making the intersection of feminist theory and Australian realities into fertile soil for new ideas. Creatively merging material, ranging from health statistics to personal communication with Chinese refugee workers, she articulates her own evaluation of the importance of feminist ideas on health. She identifies a major threat to feminism's successful politicisation of women's health in the increasing dissociation of health from politics in an incorporativist mainstream health care movement.

The fourth successful articulation of "Australian feminism" in this volume is "Gendered Justice: Some Feminist Interventions into Law" by Padma Raman. This author describes the Australian legal system and the changes that have come about due to the work of feminist critics and she also points ahead, urging feminist legal reformers to see the connection between the political and the legal systems.

Reading these chapters I learned a lot about the successful interaction of global and local, in this case global feminist discourse meets with Australian realities and novel conceptualisations become possible.

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