

increasingly outweigh their cooperative labour value. At the same time, the national economic crisis after 1984 has driven up both living costs and production expenses so that cottage industries, such as weaving, *traje*, the traditional Indian costume, are no longer viable. Although some women are proving amazingly adaptive to the new economic conditions, the majority are losing control over their own production and that of their children, as the local market for traditional female-based goods and services declines. As a result, women are also losing ground in the male-female power equation, as Mayan mutually supportive partnerships give way to the domineering relationships characteristic of middle-class *ladino machismo*, where women are dependent on the male breadwinner for financial support.

This delicate topic of the impact of changing economic conditions on the evolution of gender relations is handled with particular insight and sensitivity. However, the strengths of the book are also its weaknesses. The anecdotal approach, while conveying empathy and immediacy, provides a somewhat disjointed framework such that important issues are sometimes "left hanging." The readability of the work is due in part to the decision to relegate much of the major theoretical discussion to footnotes, but this proves distracting to the reader intent on following the arguments.

An important and surprising limitation is the failure to relate local realities to the turmoil of the guerilla war that has afflicted Guatemala over the past 15 years. Ehlers reports that San Pedro has been left largely unscathed by the military attacks on the indigenous population which have been the norm in surrounding areas. Even so, it seems likely that at least some of her informants experienced significant disruption of their entrepreneurial activities and family lives, in view of the regional and national scale of their networks. Given Ehlers' obvious good judgment, these "horror stories" (p. 11) could have been discussed in keeping with anthropological ethics, insofar as they have a direct bearing on the processes under analysis. It seems something of a disservice to her informants and to this book that they were not.

Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact

Margaret Jolly and Martha Macintyre, eds.

New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989. xiii + 296 pp. \$49.50 (cloth)

Reviewer: Dorothy Counts
University of Waterloo

The essays in this volume were originally papers for a conference on "Christianity, Colonialism, and the Family in the Pacific" held in Canberra, Australia, in December 1983. All of them deal with the impact of missionaries or mission policy on the condition of women, gender relations and family organization in Pacific communities from Polynesia (Hawaii and the Marquesas) to Melanesia (Papua New Guinea, the Solomons and Vanuatu) and Australia. Chapter authors are anthropologists and historians, and most provide a diachronic perspective. The chap-

ters are of high quality, they are focussed on a set of themes, and many are cross-referenced to others in the volume. These features give the book a cohesiveness that is seldom found in collections of conference essays.

The goals of the volume are (1) to challenge the assumption that domestic life in indigenous societies is always the same, (2) to view interactions between European colonial agents and Pacific peoples from the female viewpoint, and (3) to examine the role of missionaries in transforming domestic life and the role of women. These goals inform the themes that unite the volume. Perhaps the most consistent theme is that of cultural misunderstanding: the misinterpretation by missionaries and other colonial agents of indigenous forms of domestic life, gender roles and female sexuality, and of the complex interdependence of gender, kinship, sexuality and religious belief. One gets the overwhelming impression from this book that missionary interference in the lives of Pacific peoples – no matter how well intentioned – was based on profound misunderstanding and underestimation of the complexity of native systems. Furthermore, despite the missionaries' intent, the lives of Pacific women did not benefit from the imposition of Christian models and mores.

The volume is replete with information on the rich variety of forms of domestic life and gender relations found in the Pacific, and with examples of how imposed models based on European-Christian values and assumptions had unfortunate, sometimes tragic, consequences for women. For instance, several chapters deal with European confusion over indigenous concepts of female power/danger/pollution. In Polynesia, the authors argue, these notions are based on the idea that women's bodies attract and are channels for dangerous divine or ancestral forces. Similarly, it is clear that the concept of female pollution differs in a variety of ways among Melanesian peoples. In the Solomons, the seclusion of women during menstruation and after childbirth sustains the spiritual and moral order, while among the Enga of Papua New Guinea these beliefs – though based on ideas of female inferiority – were a source of female autonomy which helped to protect women from sexual abuse. Rather than improving the situation of women, as was their intent, colonial attacks on these concepts put women at risk.

There are many other examples in this excellent book. I recommend it to anyone who is interested in Pacific history, gender relations or comparative ethnography. It is rich in content and easy to read, a combination that will make it a winner for university classroom use.

Economic Anthropology

Stuart Plattner, ed.

Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989. xii + 487 pp. \$49.50 (cloth), \$16.95 (paper)

Reviewer: Donald W. Attwood
McGill University

This is a fine text for an upper-level course, better than most, because the editor has commissioned 12 specialists to write the chapters. It is also useful to researchers as a guide to the literature.