
BOOK REVIEW FORUM

Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989. Pp. xxiii, 246, bibliography, index. US\$25.00 hardcover.

Review: CLAUDIA KNAPMAN
JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY OF NORTH QUEENSLAND
TOWNSVILLE, QUEENSLAND

Patricia Grimshaw's *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii* is a welcome addition to the growing feminist literature on women in the Pacific Islands. The book, organized into an introduction and eight chapters, draws together and extends the content of her earlier articles (Grimshaw 1983, 1985). It includes notes, bibliography, index, and illustrations.

Each chapter is introduced by an apposite quotation, effectively an introductory signpost. Most are the voices of the women themselves. The entry for the fourth chapter on "Pious Wives" provides a succinct example (p. 74):

In whatever situation in life a female may be placed, ardent piety is the jewel which above all others adorns and beautifies her character; but more especially is this the case, in the wife of a missionary. Indeed, without it, all other gifts and graces would be comparatively worthless. It is the mainspring which should set in motion her every action, and guide and regulate all her conduct. (Mercy Whitney, Waimea, 1837)

This quotation incorporates two of the most powerful themes of the study; a study that demonstrates in the mission context, first, the moral

dimensions of nineteenth-century American prescriptions of femininity and, second, the expected subservience of wives to male endeavors. The exploration of the tension between female virtue and male authority in ideal and practice, among missionary women, is the most significant contribution of Grimshaw's work. Her analysis leads to the conclusion, well substantiated by evidence, that these missionary women failed to negotiate this tension in a manner that they evaluated as "successful." This brings us to the opening quotation, taken from H. A. Carter's *Kaahumanu*, published in 1899 : "It has been said that the lives of *happy women*-- like happy nations--are never written" (p. xi). Thus, Grimshaw neatly foreshadows her finding at the outset.

The introduction, "Changing Worlds," paints a wider canvas for the more detailed scenes to follow. Grimshaw points out that eighty women were involved in the work of the American Protestant mission to Hawaii from its inception in 1819 to the mid-century. She argues for their centrality in their own, predominantly New England, social worlds and for the enthusiastic nationalism of their spiritual and cultural endeavors overseas. She touches on the impact of economic transformations on women's traditional labor patterns, and the "subtly related reformulation of definitions of femininity and masculinity [that] took shape within a particular religious context" (p. xii). The division between public and private life, the location in the home of the moral sphere and spiritual influence of wives and mothers, and the supportive and complementary role wives assumed in relation to their husbands are noted. The incorporation of single women into this ideal of femininity was assisted by the defining of teaching in moral terms. Grimshaw finds New England Protestantism's emphasis on evangelism legitimated women's involvement in spiritual outreach and social reform, and fitted nicely with the increased participation of women in teaching and in charitable activities more generally. Within this context, the broadening of women's roles as moral crusaders to those outside of Western Christian culture was a logical extension. The raising of the status of the female in heathen societies was regarded as the direct concern of American women.

The beginnings of mission interest in Hawaii and a brief introduction to the complexity of Hawaiian society follow. Grimshaw notes gender relations were part of class, work, and family relations embedded in a culture that was to remain inaccessible to the American missionaries. The mission concentration on the inferior position of Hawaiian women resulted in a distorted view of their life experience, with implications for mission work that are addressed later in the book.

Finally, the introduction outlines the objectives of the study. Grimshaw's assertion that scholarly accounts have depicted the mission enterprise as a male undertaking occurring in the public domain is incontrovertible. These histories rendered the lives of women and the private (or unofficial) transactions between Hawaiians and American missionaries invisible. Her aim is to put those lives back into history, at least for the period 1826 to the 1850s, because they are "a valuable human record," provide a deeper understanding of the Hawaiian mission's activities, and might lead to the reorienting of aspects of Hawaiian history (p. xx). Grimshaw intends to demonstrate that the American women were pursuing vocational ambitions independent of male aspirations, and that marriage to a departing male missionary was the criterion for entry to that career. The resultant inherent conflict noted in my opening remarks is pointed out. As well, Grimshaw hints at the conflict resulting from the Americans' intentions to change Hawaiian society and the reality of their contact experiences.

I have dealt with the introduction at length because it is more than a prelude to the study. It raises the general and the more theoretical issues at the outset, it outlines the major findings and, in many respects, the ensuing chapters provide the evidence for the analysis presented here.

Chapter 1, "Christian Brides," documents the way in which finding a "suitable" wife was a condition of male missionary service. The emphasis in these initial and metropolitan negotiations was on the women as objects, the requisite property, enabling the men to get on with the real work: "there was negligible sensitivity to the needs and plans of the particular women involved" (p. 10) and "[t]he male missionaries' courtships were decidedly unconventional and placed their own ambitions center stage" (p. 12). From the women's perspective, however, marriage to a missionary was an opportunity for self-fulfillment, and helps to explain why these women were prepared to marry strangers.

Grimshaw carefully demonstrates just how well qualified these women were for independent work as missionaries. Moreover, it becomes clear that their professional outreach to Hawaiian women was expected by the missionary authorities and supportive public at home. It might appear that this convergence of the women's own aspirations and the expectations of the mission community proved a happy coincidence. But, Grimshaw states, "however much the brides set themselves center stage in their own life projects, they lived in a male-dominated world which limited their potential in a fashion they dimly understood" (p. 23).

"Intrepid Pilgrims" describes the voyage, arrival, initial efforts to

secure a foothold, and early mission successes. The focus of this second chapter is the importance of the mission wives in these early encounters. The new arrivals were taken by surprise by the status of the female chiefs and, Grimshaw argues, the conjunction of the powerful Hawaiian women with the forceful American women "was of incalculable importance in the complex intercultural negotiations and in the resulting balance of power by the end of 1825" (p. 30). The burdensome domestic skill of sewing proved the most direct means of securing chiefly approval and fitted with the domestic labor that dominated the women's lives. Opportunities for engaging in the principal work for which they had come to Hawaii were subordinate to the domestic duties, turned to "with relief" (p. 35), and further eroded by the arrival of babies. Although "the mission wives were so obviously crucial in the process of persuading chiefs to the cause . . . the women themselves were losing their early buoyancy and optimism" (p. 42). Grimshaw attributes their despondence to their own ethnocentrism and inability to adapt to other behavior patterns rather than to threats and confrontations with members of the host society.

Chapter 3 explores relationships: between husbands and wives, among the missionary women, between the women and their families and friends at home, and the absence of friendships between the women and Hawaiian women. The difficulty of traveling in mountainous country, especially with children, rendered the American women extremely vulnerable to isolation. According to Grimshaw, the mission wives' inability to tolerate cultural difference led to their finding Hawaiians and foreign residents unacceptable as friends. If Hawaiians had been acceptable companions, then they would not have been defined as "other" and the purposes of missionary endeavor would have been unnecessary. Another consequence of what Grimshaw depicts as self-imposed loneliness was the heightened importance of letters from home. She shows how the missionary women remained attached to American communities, as they were in the past, but were unable to capture the reality of family processes and social change. Mission society was another source of support, but under isolated mission station conditions, marriage provided the single source of continuous emotional support and companionship. The women's increased dependence on their husbands, and their husbands' dependence on them, resulted in very close relationships. The social and emotional support, and the sexual and romantic love, together provided a protection against anomie.

The analysis of marriage is continued in chapter 4, "Pious Wives,"

where the complexity of the relationships between responsibility, companionship, spiritual support, and female submission and dependence are explored. Publicly, marriage was represented as a partnership rather than being based on sexual intimacy. The women were clearly aware that active sexuality placed them in a decidedly unequal position. Reproduction dominated their fertile years and was complicated by sickness, medical ignorance, and iatrogenic illness. There is the usual catalogue of grim tales of childbirth and miscarriage familiar to readers of mission journals. Grimshaw notes that although men loved their wives, "models of companionate marriage . . . could not counteract the effects of women's reproductive experience . . . [and] did not alter the gender division of labor in the marriage" (pp. 98-99).

Women's work within the home and in relation to mission life is the subject of chapter 5, "Prudent Helpmeets." The reproduction of a New England-style gender division of labor posed far greater problems for women in the Hawaiian Islands than in America. It was on the women's ability to recreate this domestic model-- as a comfortable home base for the missionary and as an alternative to Hawaiian domestic organization --that the missionary enterprise largely depended. The difficulties of housework, servants, household economy, and supplies required to maintain an American lifestyle are described. The additional labor this necessitated, the networks of reciprocity women had to establish, and the domestic, agricultural, and trading skills involved all placed further restrictions on the women's abilities to engage in the mission work to which they aspired. The subordinate role of women in the mission hierarchy and the resulting male agenda and priorities are also considered. Clarissa Armstrong's efforts to take a central role in mission work, and ignore the gender proscriptions on teaching and praying with men, led to criticism from the mission community. She was forced to relinquish her work, despite her own confidence in God's blessing. Domestic work came first; women's missionary work was marginalized and firmly contained within gender-defined limits.

Chapter 6, "Faithful Mothers," deals with childrearing and the dilemmas women faced about their respective responsibilities to their children and to the Hawaiians. The ease with which their babies adopted the other culture remained a source of concern: their childrearing practices were the subject of constant discussion in Hawaii and America. As with domestic labor women shouldered an unequal burden, the fathers' mission duties absorbing the bulk of their available time and energy. The extra stresses of trying to raise godly American

children in this environment, the tension over the constraints on their teaching, the domestic labor entailed, and the lack of practical support from the fathers again took a toll on the wives' well-being.

The seventh chapter, "Devoted Missionaries," is a discussion of the women's direct mission work. Their ambitious goals of reforming the Hawaiian family were doomed to failure, covering as they did every aspect of daily life from sexual practices to household organization and the division of labor. Nevertheless, Grimshaw argues that they were more successful than their own evaluations indicate. One significant offering to Hawaiian women was a range of skills that enabled them to negotiate their changing environment.

The final chapter, on "Family Fortunes," takes a longer view, placing the aging mission women's life experiences within the context of a new materialism, new laws, and the prosperity and success of the mission children as adults. Their American economic individualism is contrasted with the economic and social marginalization of the Hawaiians. The defeat of the women's mission endeavor is attributed to their ethnocentrism, male dominance, and failure to understand the connection between the model they wished to impose and specific forms of economic organization. They made an immense effort, but died without a victory.

The book is likely to be criticized by some for failing to address Hawaiian women, except as the objects of American women's endeavors. Grimshaw has attempted to convey the Hawaiian viewpoint in particular contexts and she defends herself, in advance (p. xxi), in terms of the focus and constraints of her research. There is nothing inherently ethnocentric about limiting one's topic, and most researchers select or investigate areas that are both accessible to them and worthwhile subjects in their own right. So little has been done about any women in the Pacific that this type of criticism is more political--conforming to prevailing ideological positions--than substantive.

Grimshaw is more vulnerable in relation to her analysis of gender issues. The women are far too often discussed in isolation: *their* idealism, *their* ethnocentrism, the unreality of *their* aspirations being examined with sensitivity but without being located sufficiently in relation to the parallel views of the male missionaries. In some respects this reinforces a stereotypical view of white women and denotes a tendency to assign responsibility for failure to their peculiar idiosyncrasies. The dangers of this have been demonstrated with reference to race relations and white women in Fiji and white women in colonial situations more generally (Knapman 1986). The accounts of the mission women's commit-

ment and the hardships endured in physical, social, and emotional terms; the evidence that these women did not conform to narrow, prudish stereotypes in relation to sexuality within marriage; and the location of their dependence in American social and economic organization dispel such a narrow reading. However, there is an ambiguity in much of the text. A comparative approach would have allowed for an assessment in context and avoided the possibility of retrospective and unrealistic judgments of what was or was not possible for people of their time and culture. A pertinent example of this problem is the treatment of the women's revulsion at Hawaiian habits (pp. 59-61). What about their male counterparts? The emphasis on women's ethnocentrism fits more with nineteenth-century readings of women's "character" than with feminist reconstructions exploring women's behavior and attitudes in a wider sociocultural framework. Travel is another instance. The "female" requirements on an "expedition," and assumptions about Hawaiian women's physical capabilities, American women's weakness, and American men's strength (pp. 52-53), reflect male and ethnocentric assumptions. The accuracy of such assumptions and context is not explored, nor do they match up with the tenacity, the sheer "guts and determination," of the women, which is demonstrated in chapter 1.

The treatment of cultural differences is limited by resorting to the concept of ethnocentrism. Although Grimshaw provides examples throughout of ways in which the American women's understanding of social organization was tested by Hawaiian social practices, it is not quite sufficient to dismiss the missionary wives' reactions as ethnocentric. The public/private dichotomy of American life, and its attitudinal and practical hold over the mission families, is drawn upon for explanations of the division of labor, women's lack of autonomy over their own lives, and their thwarted ambitions. More detailed attention to the organizing principles of Hawaiian society, and closer examination of how actual practices and cultural assumptions of both groups differed, would have allowed for a firmer grasp of the problems these women faced in personal terms and for their reformist goals. Nancy Pollock's (1989) examination of missionary housekeeping in Fiji provides the type of detail and evaluation that is needed to avoid assigning blame. There is also something more to be said about the challenges that Hawaiian women's behavior in the public domain, and chiefly women's status and power, provided to the American women: women who lacked access to public life and these attributes themselves, but assumed Hawaiian women's inferiority.

The importance of women in intercultural negotiations is one of the

major conclusions that has relevance for the objective of shedding new light on mission history. Apart from the roles women played in establishing positive relations in the early days, this conclusion is not adequately demonstrated. There is only scattered evidence throughout: their trading, network development, teaching, and personal contacts with Hawaiians warrant more detailed attention and the threads to be drawn together. Strengthening this analysis would enable the problems of the public/private dichotomy discussed above to be addressed in more depth, also. Much of the evidence for redressing the devaluation of women's contributions to economic survival and for the existence of the nineteenth-century "double day" lies in this area. One might argue that these women, in attempting to serve as active missionaries, were confronting a "triple day."

Grimshaw's analysis of the marriage relationship and its central importance for sustaining the American men's and especially women's sense of identity, purpose, and reality provides a significant insight for future work on mission history and many other situations involving physical and cultural isolation. Indeed, its impact may be more far reaching. This example appears to provide an excellent illustration of Donald Denoon's argument in relation to Australian history and Australians overseas, if we take the liberty of transposing it to a different arena. He suggested "that the essence and the implications of many Australian ideas became manifest *only* in those extreme situations which Australians encountered abroad" (Denoon 1986:258). The essence and implications of nineteenth-century American gender relations in marriage are clarified in the extreme situation analyzed by Grimshaw. Illumination of the critical importance of the marriage relationship for women-- their lives privatized, their domestic work trivialized, and their ambitions frustrated--is a major contribution to understanding the structural nature of women's social and emotional dependence.

Grimshaw dissects the tensions and contradictions inherent in the position of the missionary women, but she could have distinguished more clearly between their personal frustrations and their failure to meet the more general goal of the mission community that they convert Hawaiian women. The crux of the personal problem was that in efforts to reproduce Western patterns of domesticity and "Christian patriarchy" (Jayaweera 1990:323), they were advocating models they found inadequate for themselves. The division of labor and their allegedly companionate marriages neither reflected the real mutuality they sought nor allowed them independent aspirations and careers.

Much of the foreign women's effort to convert Hawaiians was moti-

vated by compassion. Grimshaw's study minimizes this aspect of the missionary endeavor, and the genuine desire of the American women to "help" Hawaiian women-- I reserve use of the word "sisters" for reasons that will become apparent-- deserves more attention. In Fiji, my research shows that even those women who were not motivated to convert Fijians or Indians, on either religious or broader cultural levels, were often moved to compassion (Knapman 1986). They acted on their behalf or at their request.

Another viewpoint here is provided by Marjorie King in her study of American missionary women in China. She suggests that foreign missionary women "saw themselves as *mothers* to weak and wayward Chinese women more often than as *sisters* sharing common experiences and burdens" (King 1990:375). This parental role is consistent with the notion of "maternal cultural imperialism." In her work on British women in India, Barbara Ramusack uses the image of "maternal imperialists" to refer to the cultural evangelism of concerned women "preaching a gospel of women's uplift" based on British models of womanhood (1990:309). The notion of "maternal cultural imperialists" might be developed as a concept to be applied to analyses of white women in the Pacific Islands. It is clearly relevant to Grimshaw's research and to female missionaries more generally. It is reinforced by the general image of the (male) imperialist as father to the "native child" (McClure 1981:107), which is based on a patriarchal family model, and the common depiction by Europeans in the nineteenth century of Pacific Islanders as children. The maternal perspective would also help account for the American women seeing little need to understand the way of life of the "other."

Ramusack argues that British women were "most able to cross the boundary of race as feminist allies when their skills most suited the needs of Indian women" (1990:309). This is pertinent to white and indigenous women's contacts in the Pacific. In Fiji, the case can be illustrated by the demand for European women's sewing and by Fijians' and Indians' seeking medical help and help in childbirth from European women (Knapman 1986). The example of sewing supports this generalization in the Hawaiian context as well. Analysis matching needs and skills in other areas of interaction might well strengthen Grimshaw's claims, first, about women's importance in intercultural contacts and, second, about facilitating Hawaiian women's adaptation to change.

There are many other interesting aspects to *Paths of Duty*, but one final point on presentation (which applies equally to my own book) must suffice. The inclusion of vignettes and examples is integral to the

work, but the breaks in continuity in the life stories of the main actors leave the reader without a firm grasp of the individual characters. An appendix with biographical profiles, such as is found in Dea Birkett's study of Victorian women explorers (1989), would be a worthwhile inclusion.

Many of the more theoretical issues raised here have emerged from recent feminist studies of white women in other colonizing contexts. That Grimshaw's work has not addressed or utilized this material is largely a result of timing, her research having been undertaken some years ago. The critical application of feminist insights from other contact and colonization situations can only benefit and extend the analyses of those working on Pacific Island histories. The excellent groundwork laid by scholars such as Patricia Grimshaw is essential to this process.

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