his conclusion that societies everywhere require all-male institutions like Tambaran cults to give men a secure sense of their own masculinity. Such institutions, Tuzin seems to suggest, are benign in comparison to the anomic violence that must inevitably erupt without them. Quite apart from this provocative conclusion, this book, by one of the most literate of today’s anthropologists, is sure to fascinate anyone interested in contemporary religious processes in Melanesia, and in the changing patterns of gender relations in the region.

SIMON HARRISON
University of Ulster

* * *


Asia and the Pacific Islands have been the most relentlessly hypersexualized of all sites subject to the western fantasizing gaze. This eroticization has continued from the era of overt imperialism to the current transnational commodification of bodies and desire through sex tourism, globally circulating pornography, and the no-less-invasive images of Hollywood films and “docudramas” like Dennis O’Rourke’s infamous The Good Woman of Bangkok. Yet scholarship on Asia and the Pacific has avoided sexual themes, particularly from a “cultural” (as opposed to economic or epidemiological) perspective, while the recent burst of western sex scholarship has too rarely turned its attention to the region. Manderson and Jolly’s collection, Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure, is a welcome and much-needed first step in filling this gap in the literatures. The twelve essays in this collection, particularly the masterful introduction by the two editors, explore the interpenetrations and coproductions of Asian-Pacific and western sexual gazes, practices, and mythologies, and go far beyond anthropology’s past expositions on “the sexual lives of the natives,” to examine what the editors call “the deep histories of sexual contact and erotic entanglement between Europeans and ‘others’ ” (1).

The introduction lays out the theoretical stakes. Moving deftly among recent theoretical debates surrounding essentialism and constructivism, the relationship of gender to sexuality and of sexuality to reproduction, colonialism and postcoloniality, Orientalism, race, AIDS, and the political economy of sex, the authors quickly put paid to any kind of universalizing notion of “sex” as a “natural” instinct, but also refuse a too-easy relativism that overemphasizes the exoticism and difference of a unitary Asian-Pacific sexuality. The authors persistently question the very enterprise of studying sexuality without imposing or projecting western sexual models; leaving the question open, they advocate a new attention to nonwestern theories of sexuality, and to the ways that in the contemporary globalizing
culture, western “ideas and fantasies . . . contend with the refractory realities and alternative philosophies of ‘other peoples’ ” (26). This theoretical discussion continues in chapter 1, “Educating Desire in Colonial Southeast Asia: Foucault, Freud, and Imperial Sexualities,” by Ann Stoler (a reprint of chapter 6 of her 1995 book Race and the Education of Desire), a complex rethinking of the influence of Freud’s and Foucault’s theories of desire on recent scholarship on colonial racism. This is the kind of essay scholars long for and rarely find: a brilliant, concise, and readable synthesis of far-flung bodies of writing, and contextualization of the work of major thinkers within large-scale political and intellectual movements.

Stoler’s essay argues, contra Foucault’s History of Sexuality, volume 1, that the history of western sexuality was and is primarily constituted by the colonial conscription of racial (and racialized) others such as natives, mixed bloods, and poor whites into European mechanisms of power and prestige. As such it requires the reader to move beyond both Freud’s “repression” theory and Foucault’s rejection of it, to “the broader force field of empire where technologies of sex, self and power were defined as ‘European’ and ‘Western’ ” (47).

In chapter 2, Adam Reed turns to the Trobriand Islands during the colonial period and deftly analyzes the religious, political, and economic strategies that missionaries and colonial officials sought to enact by intervening in Massim Islanders’ sexual practices. In chapter 3, John D Kelly explores several colonial court cases in early-twentieth-century Fiji and their inscriptions of a supposedly innate “sexual jealousy” among indentured Indians, introducing the useful distinction between the colonial “gaze” of recent theory and the cutting colonial “grasp” of actual legal and political victimization. Chapter 4 by Jolly, on Polynesia, and chapter 5 by Manderson, on Thailand, both examine the sexual exoticization or eroticization of the female (and feminized) Asian-Pacific Other in western media. Jolly surveys eighteenth-century paintings, nineteenth-century travel writing, and the Broadway musical and film South Pacific, exploring the gendered and racialized power relations implicit in these media. Manderson critiques the three films The King and I, Emmanuelle, and The Good Woman of Bangkok, describing all as examples of a genre in which “Thai sex . . . is defined and given a purpose as a vehicle for Western libidinal fantasy and the enactment of power” (125–126), ultimately serving to facilitate and legitimate sex tourism.

Chapters 6 and 7, by Annette Hamilton and Peter A Jackson respectively, continue the focus on Thailand. Hamilton’s essay is a witty and incisive critique of a peculiar genre of “romance writing” about Thailand written by disaffected white male expats, in which would-be white male “saviors” are continually betrayed by ungrateful Thai prostitutes. Jackson then interrogates the historical emergence of Thai gay male identity, and contra Rosalind Morris, argues for considerable continuity between the traditional sex-gender system (which included the kathoey third sex role),
and contemporary “gay” identity. In chapter 8, Jeffrey Clark makes an ambitious and provocative analysis of the relationship between traditional Huli sexual mythologies and the Christian moralities imposed by the emerging colonial state in early-twentieth-century Papua New Guinea.

The last three chapters turn to the issues of prostitution and AIDS, and the various national and international attempts to eradicate, regulate, as well as discursively construct, these sexual “problems.” Chapter 9, by Doug J. Porter, is an intelligent and original analysis of the ways that Myanmar’s national borders are crossed and recrossed by female prostitutes, male truckers, HIV infection, and non-government organizations, and of the strategies that the disempowered have of selecting and resisting discourses of pathology and opportunity. In chapter 10, Lisa Law continues this line of inquiry in the context of prostitution in the Philippines, inquiring into the usefulness of the western (feminist) notions of agency and “choice” in characterizing sex-worker behavior, and demonstrating the persistence of these notions in international development policies in the Philippines.

Finally, Sandra Buckley insightfully examines the “official” Japanese response to HIV/AIDS, with its continual efforts to distance contagion outward from the “pure” national body by erasing the existence of homosexual Japanese and projecting the source of contagion onto foreign bodies and blood.

As is always the case with edited collections, some of the essays in Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure are stronger than others. The essays by Kelly and Jackson, for example, while valuable, are hampered by turgid, often repetitive writing. The essay by Jolly, in turn, does not seem to move far beyond material already covered by authors such as Rana Kabbani (Europe’s Myths of the Orient, 1986). Another problem is the dearth of Asian and Pacific Islander voices; the collection would have been immeasurably strengthened by the addition of work by scholars and critics such as Teresia Teiwa or Miya Yoshiko. An area imbalance is also apparent: six of the chapters focus on Southeast Asia (three on Thailand alone), four on the Pacific Islands, and only one on East Asia. China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Korea are not represented. While no one volume can be expected to achieve perfect “representation,” a better effort should have been made toward balance, particularly in light of East Asia’s own particular significance in American (as opposed to European or Australian) sexual fantasies, right up to Disney’s current fetishization of the eroticized Chinese woman warrior Mulan.

Despite these problems, however, Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure is an extremely important book. It is the first collection ever to systematically examine sexuality in the Asia-Pacific region, and it does so without reproducing a fetishizing sexual gaze on a monolithic (and titillating) “native sexuality.” I have already assigned several of the chapters in both undergraduate and graduate courses on gender and Japan, to great acclaim. This book will find a wide readership, and should play a major role in bring-

Oliver Sacks, professor of neurology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and author of several popularly acclaimed books, has written an account of his travels to Micronesia. He describes his book as a “very personal, idiosyncratic, perhaps eccentric view of the islands, informed in part by a lifelong romance with islands and island botany” (xii). It certainly is that. Sacks recounts two trips to the region, though the exact dates of these journeys remain unclear. The first, to Pingelap via Pohnpei, both islands being in the Eastern Caroline group, appears to have taken place in late 1993; the second trip, to Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, may have occurred in 1994. Confusion over the exact location in time of these trips is of lesser concern, however, than the intellectual, literary, and colonial genealogies informing Sacks’ narrative and his representations of various Micronesian peoples.

Lifelong interests in islands, island botany, and neurological disorders provide the immediate motivation behind the trips. Sacks visits Pingelap to observe a community among whose members exists an unusually large percentage of people suffering from congenital color blindness or achromatopsia. Man of science that he is, Sacks wonders what kinds of heightened and compensatory sensitivities achromatopic people develop in lieu of color. His interest in Guam centers on a neurological disease endemic to the island and called by the Chamorro people lytico-bodig. The disease manifests itself in two forms. There is sometimes lytico, a progressive physical paralysis resembling the motor neuron disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. On other occasions, there develops bodig, a degenerative disease similar to parkinsonism and sometimes accompanied by dementia.

In the early 1950s, 10 percent of all adult Chamorro deaths were attributed to lytico-bodig; the prevalence of the disease in this period was one hundred times greater on Guam than on the North American mainland. In some areas of Guam, specifically the village of Umatac, the incidence of the disease was four hundred times greater than in North America. The cause of lytico-bodig on Guam has been the subject of considerable investigation by neurological scientists the world over. Foreign researchers have considered a variety of genetic and environmental factors, the most persistent suspect being a starch extract from the fruit of the cycad tree that is most often served in the form of tortillas. Called fadang, this popular food was consumed in great quantities by the Chamorro people until the mid 1950s. The decline in its consumption over