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# INTRODUCTION

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Pacific historians and anthropologists have long observed and commented upon the dramatic social and political changes that have occurred in response to colonial intrusion and pacification. As they describe the demise of indigenous political systems or the upheavals concomitant with new forms of economic activity there is often the implicit assumption that certain core institutions persist or that essential cultural characteristics are retained. In the Australian context, Aborigines, and even those who oppose their struggle for autonomy, subscribe to an idealised view of the desert or the 'outback' as the true locus of traditional continuity. The nomadic band of hunter-gatherers subsisting on their country is an image so compelling that it obscures the harsh realities of poverty both in large cities and rural regions and the facts of land alienation and cultural displacement. Similarly the idea of the unchanging village is as comforting to anthropologists as it is to many urban peoples in Pacific nations. The relative simplicity and monotonous regularity of quotidian activities in rural regions is seen to set them apart from the complexities and fast changes of the urban centres. And while some view outback Aborigines or Pacific villagers as those deprived of the benefits of technological and cultural advances, condemned to underdevelopment in remote backwaters, others see them as the guardians of custom, the true defenders of tradition. Both views fail to acknowledge how rural life has changed at its very core and that these processes of change began a long time ago.

Crucial to this presumption of an unchanging cultural core is a view of domestic life as always the same. In this volume of essays we challenge this notion, exploring the dramatic and spectacular



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changes in domestic life throughout the Pacific. In varying ways and with varying degrees of regret, ethnographic chauvinism and moral outrage, the contributors contest the romantic notion of an unchanging domestic life that was untouched by colonialism. We look particularly at the ways in which Europeans introduced new ideas about the family and relations between the sexes. We select as areas of concern those aspects of domestic life which were fundamentally altered – the values that centre on kinship, patterns of marriage, the division of labour, residential patterns, eating and sleeping arrangements and the care of children and the sick.

But charting such changes involves a prior understanding of what we mean by 'domestic life', and if recent comparative scholarship has demonstrated anything it is that 'domestic' and 'family' are very slippery terms indeed (Harris 1981; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Yanagisako 1979). What appears as an acceptable definitional or descriptive use, contrasting domestic and public for instance, emerges as inadequate or misleading in another context. It appears unexceptional to describe a domestic unit as a group of people who live together in the same dwelling, who cooperate in producing and consuming food and who conceive of themselves as closely related according to the precepts of kinship and marriage that obtain in that community. The domesticity of such arrangements derives not only from the residential forms but from the activities which at first may appear as similar to Western or European patterns (*cf.* Illich 1982). However, as European observers have discovered, there were forms of domesticity in the Pacific which did not accord with Western models at all.

For instance many Europeans were horrified by the lack of a clearly demarcated household dwelling or family form among the Australian Aborigines. Foraging dictated a nomadic existence in most habitats and Aboriginal settlements were thus temporary settlements with flimsy shelters at most. Moreover although close kin tended to cluster together in one camp, and around one hearth or camp fire, these close kin were not necessarily a nuclear family let alone a family enjoying a privatised existence. Hamilton (1979, 1980) has shown how the economic relations surrounding food production, distribution and consumption did not privilege the relation of husband, wife and children. And Bell has noted (1983), for Warrabri at least, the continuity of the separate women's camp where single, widowed and married women not presently wanting to camp with their husbands lived around a separate hearth.

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In Melanesian communities, where men lived together in separate houses while women and children lived in smaller dwellings, where was the family or 'domestic life' located? Men in such houses often cooperated in work, ate and slept together, and defined themselves as a group of agnates. Is the men's house then as much a domestic locus as the houses of women and children? Some have portrayed these men's houses as the locus of public life, and yet their exclusivist and secret character makes such a depiction hardly appropriate. And in all those Pacific societies where the relationship with the departed ancestors is intimate, continuing and central to the social and cosmological ordering of daily life, are the ancestors 'family'? We have not adopted a constraining definition of 'domestic' or the 'family' from the outset, precisely because it would compromise the arguments implicit in this essay in comparison and obviate the discovery that in some societies the ordering of daily life is not familial at all.

In charting the transformations of domestic life in the Pacific we must acknowledge the multifaceted and often contradictory pressures which colonialism exerted. Everywhere colonialism had enormous effects, but these were regionally variable and rarely unitary. Rather than presuming the fatal impact of a monolithic colonialism we have tried to scrutinise the complexities of colonial processes. We examine therefore the alienation of land, the appropriation of labour, the introduction of European goods and modes of work, the expansion of colonial states and the influence of Christian missions. This is not to suggest that the 'economic', the 'political' and the 'religious' aspects of colonialism are unrelated. They clearly converge in powerful ways. Christian theology provided justification for some colonial officials and even some labour recruiters who thought they, like the missionaries, were rescuing Pacific peoples from their benighted state of savagery. Christian missions imparted not just novel religious notions but new modes of economic and political relation. The daily discipline of work was as much cultivated on missions as on plantations or cattle stations.

But the interests of the various colonial agents were not necessarily unified. There were important bases of conflict, and several of our contributors illustrate divergence and opposition within the colonial regime. Sexual relations between indigenous women and foreign men emerge as a frequent source of such conflicts. Missionaries generally opposed such liaisons as immoral or exploitative. However, as Ralston and Hamilton reveal, this is only one side of a debate.

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Ralston re-examines the early relations between Hawaiian women and European sailors – liaisons which were severely condemned by Christian evangelists from the 1820s onwards as both 'promiscuous' and 'prostitution'. She queries such appraisals not only because they are rooted in a repressive and patriarchal Christian morality but because they obscure the purposes of the women concerned. In this early period their motivation was most likely to secure intimate access to the divine and material powers of these invading gods and to perpetuate this by bearing a child (*cf.* Sahlins 1981b:40).

Hamilton reports a similar conflict between missionaries and other white male settlers in early Australian colonial history (Chapter 12). By Hamilton's account, Australian evangelicals were as much concerned to rescue Aboriginal women from the degradations of relations with white men as from their degraded state under Aboriginal male control. To this end the missions routinely segregated and oversaw Aboriginal women in mission settlements and chose suitable husbands for them. Again what is often overlooked in this process is how Aboriginal women themselves perceived the indigenous patterns of bestowal and how far they were coerced or willingly entered into unions with white men. Clearly such unions were frequent despite missionary interventions. This is evidenced by the number of part-Europeans in the Aboriginal population and by what the missionaries called that other 'testimony of vice', the rapid spread of venereal disease in the Aboriginal population after contact.

Throughout Melanesia women's sexuality was equally safe-guarded by missionaries who came into open conflict with traders, planters and labour recruiters whom they saw as stealing local women and subjecting them to licentious degradation. Vehement missionary critics of the labour trade, such as the Presbyterians of southern Vanuatu, saw women not as willing recruits but as sexual slaves exposed to the ravages of both black labourers and white masters on plantations. Again this missionary stereotype needs critical reappraisal (*cf.* Jolly 1987).

It must already be obvious that Christian missionaries deserve particular scrutiny in any study of domestic transformations in the Pacific. This is why they figure so prominently in this volume, and we will discuss the reasons for this in a moment. But this focus is not to the exclusion of other colonial personae. Hamilton weighs the influence of the missions against the influence of other white settlers

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in Australia – be they property owners or labourers. Young and Macintyre both credit the importance of the labour trade in changes in the Massim region of Papua New Guinea. Ralston and Thomas look at the impact of early navigators in Hawaii and the Marquesas. And three papers in the volume can be seen to go far beyond the particular focus on missions.

Denoon (Chapter 5) concentrates his attention on the medical system of colonial Papua New Guinea, including both the mission and the government establishments. As Denoon demonstrates the missionaries were as much engaged in saving lives as saving souls, and they preceded the colonial state in both Papua and New Guinea in the provision of medical care. When governments did get interested it was primarily in the treatment of male patients who were engaged as plantation labourers, while it was left to missions to retain their central concern with women and children, a concern of crucial importance given the alarmingly high rates of infant and maternal mortality. In the context of both mission and government systems Denoon shows how the gender hierarchy of the medical establishment provided particular models for indigenous people. Until World War II expatriate males predominated as doctors, indigenous males as orderlies, and medical assistants and expatriate females as nurses. The expansion of maternal and child health nursing and nutrition after the war increased the opportunities for local women in the medical system, but female personnel were still seen as under the direction of doctors who were both male and white. Although Denoon does not comment on this it is interesting to ponder how the familial model of male doctor as father and female nurse as mother which saturates our own medical system is absorbed in a colonial medical system such as that of Papua New Guinea.

Meggitt, in his study of Enga women (Chapter 7), presents a rounded portrait of the impact of colonial and post-colonial history. In his view, Enga women were excluded from traditional Enga politics and lived a severely circumscribed existence. Alien Europeans rarely addressed themselves to Enga women directly, and both church and state agencies tended to ignore their specific problems and to relegate them to the garden. Men were encouraged to participate in new agricultural projects and to become wage labourers to the exclusion of women. Yet in spite of official neglect Enga women were able to assert themselves in new coffee-growing

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and food-marketing projects from the 1960s onwards. Control over their meagre profits and the sociability of the marketing business provided a new and relatively independent arena for women. However Meggitt sees these small advances on the economic front as no compensation for the disruptions that followed changes in sexual mores and patterns of sexual segregation, changes which we discuss further below.

Thomas, in his study of polyandry in the Marquesas (Chapter 3), situates the work of earlier anthropologists in the colonial context. He suggests that talking about polyandry engages a set of Western presumptions about sex and domesticity, and that Marquesan polyandry thus appears not only as a foreign but also as a threatening form of domesticity. Such presumptions can be found in earlier analyses such as those of Linton and Kardiner (Kardiner 1939) who tend to explain away the institution as deriving from a numerical disparity between the sexes. This alleged sex imbalance is challenged by attention to early sources and it is claimed that, in so far as it is reported for certain regions in a later period, that it was an effect of contact rather than an indigenous pattern deriving from female infanticide, for example. Portraying an effect of contact as an eternal tradition is a likely outcome of the ahistorical and asystemic view of Polynesia adopted by the anthropologists of the Bishop Museum. They may have made an even more fundamental error in viewing this institution as a form of marriage at all. It is, Thomas argues, better understood as a form of domestic servitude whereby low-ranking landless men entered into relations of service with high-ranking wealthy women in exchange for food, shelter and protection.

So in these various chapters the focus shifts beyond missionaries to the broader context of Pacific colonialism, but in most of the essays in this volume they are given especial prominence. This is justifiable for several reasons. First, the work of Christian missions was particularly important in the colonial history of the Pacific, most especially where there were few other white settlers or where the colonial state was weak. Second, in most regions missionaries were the most sedentary of white settlers. Unlike colonial officials or labour recruiters they exerted a continuous rather than an episodic influence. Unlike other sedentary whites, such as planters and traders, they were strongly committed to acquiring local knowledge and learning local languages and not just a lingua franca. It is abundantly clear from the writings of Pacific missionaries from the

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early nineteenth century onwards that learning languages was seen as essential to spreading the word of God. Attaining oral fluency, committing unwritten languages to writing and eventually printing texts of the gospels or catechisms were seen as crucial steps in the process of conversion and the consolidation of mission power.

Some interesting differences emerge between the denominations in both the longevity of their sojourns and their commitment to learning indigenous languages. Langmore, reporting on the four missions operating in Papua before 1914 (Chapter 4), notes that Catholics and Anglicans tended to stay longer and were more zealous about acquiring local languages than the LMS and the Wesleyan missionaries. She associates this with a more liberal attitude on the part of both Catholics and Anglicans towards local traditions. She does however acknowledge that prior education and class origin also shaped such liberalism – the Catholics and Anglicans tended to be more highly educated and come from a more elevated middle-class position than their LMS and Wesleyan counterparts.

As well as the longevity and local engagement of the missionaries, a third crucial fact makes them key figures in the charting of domestic transformations in the Pacific – that is, they were self-conscious agents of change. Other Europeans may have hoped for alterations in indigenous domesticities, but it was missionaries who articulated the need to reform the family and who actively intervened to promote such changes.

This did not mean that their plans were always clear and consistent. For instance Young suggests (Chapter 6) that the Wesleyan programme in the D'Entrecasteaux region of Papua New Guinea was, despite the martial metaphors, less a coherent campaign than an expression of misty ideals and incomprehensions. He poses the important question as to how we uncover missionary ideals and intentions. The sources available range from policy statements made at church conferences or governing bodies, through the prosyletising literature of pamphlets, journals, public letters and biographies of missionaries to the more intimate genres of daily diaries, journals and private letters. Given the taste many early missionaries had for writing, this constitutes a voluminous corpus, and our contributors might be seen to have sampled this for particular times and places.

The immediacies of daily diaries and private letters reveal most clearly how policies were translated into practice and how optimistic

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intentions were recast as practical strategies. These were often wildly variant. Grimshaw shows both here and elsewhere (Grimshaw 1983) how the New England missionary wives in Hawaii imported models of domesticity both at variance with the realities of their own households and those of the Hawaiians they had managed to convert. Indigenous domestic life was predicated on principles of kinship, sexual relation and work organisation which differed radically from a Christian marriage between a dominant providing husband and a submissive dependent wife. As these women of New England themselves had problems in attaining their ideals of true womanhood, it is hardly surprising that Hawaiian women had even greater difficulties with such early attempts to recreate them as Christian wives.

The Hawaiian example also highlights the problematic relation between ideals of domesticity and the actual models which Christian missions presented. Here there is an intriguing contrast between the different denominations – the Catholics and Anglicans for the most part being represented by sex-segregated communities of priests and nuns, the Protestants for the most part by the married couple. Langmore suggests that although priests and nuns were more segregated they, paradoxically, often presented a less-differentiated model of male and female activity. Both nuns and missionary wives were crucial in imparting European models of housewifery – teaching cooking, laundry, sewing and infant care. Both were also teachers of writing and scripture, nurses, and sometime gardeners and storekeepers. But the work of nuns seems in general less confined to the more domestic of these tasks. However as Jolly suggests, on the basis of research in Vanuatu (Chapter 11), all missions stressed the separation of male and female spheres and ultimately devalued women's activities as auxilliary to those of the male missionary/priest.

The national origin of missionaries also deserves some attention. Throughout the Pacific there are important ethnic differences between missionaries by period, place and denomination. In some places missionaries from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand predominated – for example, in the early Protestant missions of Polynesia (see Grimshaw and Ralston, Chapters 1 and 2), and still in the Marist missions of Vanuatu and the Solomons (see Jolly and Keesing, Chapters 10 and 11; *cf.* Boutillier *et al.* 1978). Polynesian converts became missionaries and teachers in many parts of

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Melanesia (for the Massim see Young and Macintyre, Chapters 6 and 8). Elsewhere local people were very early encouraged to become clergy and teachers – for instance the Melanesian Mission in Vanuatu (see Chapter 11). As Jolly argues, in her essay on South Pentecost, these differences are very important in assessing the local relevance of the models presented. This does not mean that an indigenous clergy necessarily increased the propensity for local imitations, since many Pacific peoples were in fact aspiring to become 'like Europeans', but it does indicate how far these changes in family life were seen as alien or indigenous transformations.

What then were the specific changes in domestic life which the missions sought and how did these changes ensue? In these very different locales throughout the Pacific the Christian churches were promoting a fairly consistent view about the sanctity of the Christian family and the appropriate relations between women and men. These were, as we shall see, idealised visions rather than realistic memories of the dominant modes of domesticity at home. What aspects of indigenous domestic life they took exception to and what reforms were seen as necessary to creating a decent family life varied between the different regions of the Pacific.

In Polynesia there were many causes for alarm, as Ralston, Grimshaw and Thomas report. The missionaries in Hawaii, expecting perhaps to see women in the state of savagery as beasts of burden, were shocked by the idleness of women, and thus tried to inculcate the value of work though the elaboration of wifely duties. In both Hawaii and the Marquesas the power of women and, in particular, high-ranking women caused great concern, and the several missions tried to make women behave with more appropriate modesty and to show greater obedience to their husbands. Particularly worrisome was the practice of polyandry in the Marquesas whereby high-ranking women took secondary husbands or *pekio*. This institution offended both because it suggested female power and female sexual appetite. Throughout Polynesia indeed the vaunting of the pleasure of heterosexual relations and procreation had perforce to give way to Christian restraint and repression in such matters. Here too the system of restrictions on movement, sexuality and eating, known variously as *kapu* or *tapu*, was early opposed by missionaries, although as we later see this was based on a radical mistranslation of the indigenous meanings of such segregations.

Similar patterns of segregation occasioned missionary disapproval

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and interventions in Melanesia. The segregation of dwellings and of cooking fires on the basis of rank and gender in north Vanuatu, as reported by Jolly, and the seclusion of women during menstruation and childbirth in Malaita, as described by Keesing, were likewise opposed because they seemed a transparent sign of women's exclusion and inferiority. Such interventions, as we later argue, involved some misunderstanding of the ancestral religion.

Missions in all areas disapproved of the ways in which children were nurtured, seeing parental engagement with children as deficient or lacking in discipline. But in the D'Entrecasteaux region of Papua New Guinea there was an even more spectacular instance of the failure of family love, that is, the routine killing of infants whose mothers had died in childbirth and the mutilation of children in memory of dead adults. Young demonstrates how the Wesleyans used this motif of rescuing the children in fund-raising and also how this was part of a broader mission strategy which set children against their parents. The wider programme for change in this region also entailed the mission regulation of courtship and marriage with the outlawing of polygyny in particular, the diversion of wealth and labour to the mission and the subversion of the traditional patterns of exchange and leadership.

Equally spectacular patterns of intervention are reported by Macintyre (Chapter 8), for the short-lived Wesleyan mission on Tubetube, also in the Massim region. Here missionary efforts to promote Christian domesticity had to confront pre-existing forms of kinship association and forms of housing which placed value on the clan or lineage rather than the nuclear family. The large communal clan houses were seen as a threat, and were burned down by the Polynesian teachers of the Wesleyan mission. These houses were ossuaries for skulls both of ancestors and enemies and were thus seen as signs both of satanic worship and of cannibalism. They were also important signs of the power of the *guyau*, or lineage head, hence burning the houses was also a challenge to this pattern of leadership.

A more recent and subtle process in Wesleyan erosion of wider kinship forms is reported for the Takuru Wiru of the highlands of Papua New Guinea. Clark notes (Chapter 9) how a new Christian definition of the group based on church affiliation and attendance supplants the old definitions rooted in cult activity. Christians have opposed many such rituals and exchanges, especially those at death. Ancestral powers have been redefined as satanic, and the indigenous

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