

A Voice for Mothers; The Plunket Society and Infant Welfare 1907–2000. By Linda Bryder (Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2003).

OVER THE PAST HUNDRED YEARS, THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CHILDHOOD has undergone a fundamental transformation—at least in the Western, industrial/post-industrial world. From quasi-adults and economic assets of the patriarchal family, children have been re-imagined as people with specific developmental needs and rights. The fact that children are no longer considered to be fodder for the mines and workhouses is perhaps one obvious manifestation of this revolution. More subtly, the development of specific children's health and community services has been another outcome of this historical process. To this end, social and professional movements across the globe have increasingly organised around the provision of such services.

One early and significant example of this was the New Zealand movement that gave rise to the Plunket Society, named in honour of its original patron and advocate, Lady Victoria Plunket. While it built upon the pioneering work of children's advocates such as Truby King, the Society was a movement led by women and based on maternalist values. It played a pivotal role in New Zealand in the development of the entire landscape of health and welfare services for infants and children and their mothers. Bryder's history of this organisation is a fascinating case study—charting its development from its inception in 1907 to the present day, and exploring its relationship with the government service sector, the developments within the health profession and the shifting social and cultural currents of New Zealand society.

Within a social and historical context in which the preservation of infant life became an increasingly important social goal—the impetus for the organisational development of the movement was largely driven by middle-class white women, and as such provides a case study of the development of the maternalist welfare movement. This movement was based upon voluntary networks of women, which had organised to assert control of welfare services relating to women and children. Accepting the patriarchal organisation of family and social life, women who engaged in this movement were, nevertheless, grounded in a sense of civic responsibility in which, as educated women and as mothers, such control was 'their duty and their right' (p. xiii). Bryder's history charts the expression of this social movement in the Plunket Society, and, in particular, documents the conflict and accommodation between it and government-run services and the various professional interests such as the emerging field of paediatrics. While the maternalist welfare movement was to provide the social momentum that drove the development of infant welfare services, its force had become exhausted by century's end—giving ground to the values of second-wave femi-

nism, professional interests and the increasing intrusion of the State in this field.

One of the achievements of this particular history is the extent to which Linda Bryder is able to manage the complexity of the historical processes, giving both a sense of the contribution of those individuals who were influential in its history, as well as the cross-currents of the key institutional and social influences on its development. One aspect of this, which I found particularly fascinating, was the penetration of 'race values'. The preservation of infant life was not just based on the concern for the welfare of children. It was also intimately connected to a moral sense of nationhood—as it was evolving in the late imperial era. At stake was a British way of life. It is not surprising, consequently, that Plunket had a history of exclusion of Maori and Pacific migrants. Maori care remained segregated within the Native health service and, later, the development of public health nursing programs. This remained the case for most of the history of the Plunket Society, despite many internal debates about, initially, the needs of urban Maori. It is a striking paradox that the welfare revolution, in which New Zealand and Australia were global pioneers, was so influenced by such racialised and racist imperatives.

The Plunket Society did not take significant steps to shed this racially exclusive image until the late 1970s when it also evolved a focus on some of the issues more familiar to those working in contemporary children's services, such as child abuse, SIDS or cot death, accidents, immunisation, and new forms of child advocacy. This transition reflected some of the professional development in paediatrics and, in particular, the emergence of a greater community focus in the discipline. While the Plunket Society today no longer plays the role it once did, this history provides a fresh insight into the development of the welfare State, health care and children's services. It breaks new ground in exploring the relationship between the voluntary sector and the State. For those with an interest in these fields, it is a must read.

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Life and Death in the Age of Sail: The Passage to Australia. By Robin Haines (UNSW Press, Sydney, 2003, hb, ISBN 0-86840-549-3).

THE SUBJECT OF TRANSOCEANIC POPULATION MOVEMENTS MIGHT PUT ONE in mind of the slave trade of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Several million captured Africans were confined to berths five