

## Culture



**Dorothy Ayers COUNTS, Judith BROWN, and Jacquelyn CAMPBELL (eds.), *Sanctions and Sanctuary, Cultural Perspectives on the Beating of Wives*, Westview Press, 1992, \$44.50 (paper)**

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Dorothy Ayers COUNTS, Judith BROWN, and Jacquelyn CAMPBELL (eds.), *Sanctions and Sanctuary, Cultural Perspectives on the Beating of Wives*, Westview Press, 1992, \$44.50 (paper).

By Caroline Knowles  
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*Sanctions and Sanctuary* contains a diverse collection of essays providing interesting, disturbing and sometimes hopeful accounts of domestic violence. It argues that wife beating must be differentiated from wife battering, as these concepts indicate important differences in severity and social acceptability (Brown, p. 2). The book is both interesting in its material and ambitious in its scope. The material is drawn from Australian aboriginal communities, Botswana, Papua New Guinea, the Marshall Islands, Belize, Ecuador, the Indian Ocean, India, Fiji, Iran and China. But it is the theoretical and methodological diversity of this volume that is its major strength. The delicate complexity of wife beating and battering is not reduced to a few simple variables or causes. Nor is it conceptualised in terms of rather general theoretical paradigms, though there is a slight sense of unease in the final chapter (Campbell, p. 229-249) concerning the relationship between this volume and feminist theory. This concern is misplaced. It is not the book's theoretical orthodoxy which is at issue, but the extent to which it develops and contributes to an understanding of domestic violence. *Sanctions and Sanctuary* contributes to the conceptualisation of domestic violence in a number of important respects.

Analytically several of the chapters go well beyond the immediate domain of domestic violence. In problematising the meanings of domestic violence and its contextualisation in a multiplicity of family relationships, what is offered is an understanding of the nature of gender categorisation itself, and the extent to which gendering processes employ notions of violence, resistance and passivity. Ayers (p. 63-76) discusses the organisation of violence in the construction of wifedom and femininity among the Lusi-Kaliai in Papua New Guinea. She points to the ways in which the women's relationship to male violence forms part of a set of calculations concerning self-assertion. Carucci (p. 99-123) points out that domestic violence plays an important part in organising

masculinity among Marshall Islanders and that it is a response to feelings of disenfranchisement. McDowell's (p. 77-88) analysis of the Bun in Papua New Guinea indicates the violence embedded in the construction and maintenance of "personhood". McKee (p. 141-145) argues that in the dynamics of family violence, men and women live out gender ideals in which male aggression becomes the expression of a besieged masculinity, and which is met by a calculated feminine passivity. Gender categories are constituted around domestic violence in all of their complexity in this collection, and with a sensitivity to the position of women which does not demand their victimisation as an analytic device.

A second strength of this collection, and incidentally what separates it from analyses of North America, is the extent to which domestic violence is contextualised within the broader spectrum of family violence. Much of this implicates women themselves, and for this reason this volume may be controversial. McDowell (p. 78) and Kerns (p. 127) for example indicate the involvement of mothers in the use of force in disciplining children. Mother-in-law-sanctioned abuses directed by violent husbands feature in the material presented by Hegland (p. 209-211) and Gallin (p. 222). Miller also provides illustration of mother-in-law collusion in domestic violence, though this sits uncomfortably in her overall framework which is to explain domestic violence with reference to male dominance (p. 173). The use of violence in relationships between siblings and cousins is described by Carucci (p. 111) and Lambek (p. 161). This offers a number of challenges to other, especially feminist, accounts which is not acknowledged. It challenges the tendency in North American literature to see domestic violence as focussed on wives, and as a discreet social problem. It also offers certain challenges to theories of patriarchy which work from two registers of power; male and female, victim and perpetrator. *Sanctions and Sanctuary* could have concluded by arguing these challenges through. It offers an impressively complex and sensitive account of the delicate relationship between women and violence.

Finally, and most helpfully from the point of view of reform, is the extent to which domestic violence is conceptualised as something which is a constrained process. Mitchell (p. 89-98) indicates the significance of the ancestral gaze as a disciplinary device over the behaviour of violent men. Burbank (p. 40) and Nash (p. 102) point to the extent to which

kin and other members of the community are prepared to intervene as a significant constraint in structuring domestic violence. The extent to which violence is socially sanctioned, and the availability of sanctuary (hence the book's title) are crucial constraints in the social organisation of domestic violence. Here too are some important lessons for North Americans from the people in the communities documented in this collection.

Overall women emerge from this collection in a positive light, as active agents in constructing their own lives (Lateef, p. 192), their cultural and social networks and the complex patterns of violence embedded within them.

Samuel W. CORRIGAN (ed.), *Readings in Aboriginal Studies, Vol. 1: Human Services*, Brandon, Manitoba: Bearpaw Publishing, 1991. 319 pages, \$24.00 (cloth), \$18.75 (paper).

By Fraser J. Pakes  
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Anyone who has attended human service inter-agency meetings in aboriginal communities will attest to the increasing importance given to this process by Native peoples. Even in their simplest form such meetings demonstrate the potential of an holistic approach to address contemporary problems. It is perhaps fitting then that this first volume of a projected series of readers on aboriginal studies, is devoted to this area. Directed towards undergraduate introductory studies as well as related courses in human services training, the book contains some eighteen papers drawn from a wide variety of journals on the major areas of human services, housing, health, education, child and family services and justice. The sections of the book are all prefaced by an introductory background. While this is the classic "reader" approach it still relies on good editing to make it work well. This is certainly the case here: Samuel Corrigan has provided a smooth transition from one section to the next so that the text may be read in sequence as a narrative. His introductions are reasoned and evenly balanced, critical but fair. They also provide a good background to the particular theme covered, an important factor because the

papers themselves are in many cases not introductory but rather detailed analyses of situations.

Ranging from statistical studies to case histories the papers have a good geographic coverage across Canada and are as current as can be expected in publishing. A number of the papers are described by their authors as "exploratory" introductory studies with no firm answers found to the problems dealt with. These are particularly suited to the undergraduate classroom where open-ended questions provide the necessary class debates and themes for assignment papers.

Because this reader is designed for the student at the introductory level there is of course a reiteration of data that has become rather familiar to the general public — that aboriginal people have a shorter life-span and a higher infant mortality rate, are the most poorly housed, and the most misclassified from culturally-biased WISC-R-type intelligence tests. Depressing facts such as these emerge again and again in the papers. Yet at the same time a number of the papers provide optimism. These include Moore, Forbes and Henderson's study of the health care service among the Montreal Lake Band, and Gardner's paper on the Seabird Island Community School. It should be noted both these successful examples involve band-controlled operations, a fact that most of the authors and the editor clearly see as part of the solution. The common thread running through virtually all the papers is the view that there is a fundamental problem in agencies designed by, implemented by, and run by non-aboriginal organizations. The Native people appear to have had little input in the design, implementation or running of the system, but are certainly being asked to be willing clients.

The authors' message is for Native people to take over their own affairs and change the format as needed, particularly in housing, health and justice. The damaging effect of current non-aboriginal systems emerges most poignantly in the sections on children. The accounts of children taken away, often out of the country and into oblivion, have received wide publicity in the media. While these accounts are repeated here the authors draw attention to the attitudes that survive from the past such as are exemplified by the almost generic remark "He's not in enough trouble yet to justify our agency taking action" (during a request for action on a Metis child, p. 166). The inappropriateness of much of what has been set up outside Native control is thrown into