

Book Reviews, Citations and Quotations

SOAS Bulletin, Nov'82 by Mark Hobart, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Nov' 92 Karim, Wazir Jahan Begum, *Ma Betise, Concepts of Living Things*, Athlone [dist by Humanities], 1982 [1982] 270 p Ill [Monographs on Social Anthropology; 54] bibl. Index.33.00 ISBN 0-931-02424-8, CIP

Ma' Betisek is a nascent classic. A skilled, subtle, insightful, detailed, and eminently readable analysis based on the author's fieldwork among a coastal aboriginal group of western Malaysia { a valuable counterpoint to Robert Dentan's *The Semai, 1968* and Kirk Endicott's *Batek Negrito Religion*, CHOICE, June 1980] Central to the culture are two opposing concepts: plants and animals derived from humans so killing or harming them kills or harms humans. Karim evaluates the ideas in terms of how they become operational, and tests them for reliability and predictability, "rather than worry about whether people see an order or not in what they say or do ..." The rich data on the concepts and myths plus their ramifications in economy, illness, and shamanism, magnificently demonstrates the worth of this approach and raise important theoretical questions. Appendixes include folktales, songs, and spells. Good glossary, bibliography.

SOAS Bulletin, 4 March 1990 [received from Oxford] by Prof. Clive S. Kessler, University of Oregon

Emotions of Culture: a Malay Perspective [Southeast Asian Social Science Monographs] xiii, 178 pp. 4 plates, Singapore, etc: Oxford University Press, 1990

Rich and well argued as these accounts are the central essay in the collection—far from unproblematic though it may be—is that of Wazir Jahan herself on "Prelude to Madness: The language of Emotion in Courtship and Marriage". While Malay culture is hardly unique in applying the idioms of madness to the affairs of the heart, its distrust of emotional life itself, because of the disruption and loss of control that it threatens, as inherently pathological, is remarkable. The other side of this same coin is, of course the perpetual and ubiquitous yearnings – the inchoate if quite mannered cries of anguished unfulfilment – that are characteristic of Malay poetry, popular culture, and the society from which they stem. Inevitably less than exhaustive, Wazir Jahan's essay can in fact only begin to explore the subject, yet her discussion marks a significant moment in Malay cultural studies. It may provide few convincing answers, but in here explicit concern to identify and fathom what lends Malay emotional life its distinctive tone and unmistakable character, she has opened up some timely and important questions. Probing them further in theoretically appropriate ways would not only revitalize intellectually the somewhat moribund field of Malay socio-cultural studies; it might also transform modern Malay society itself by promoting a renovation of the terms of its own self-understanding.

Citation and Review in *Far Eastern Economic Review* 1992

Emotions of Culture: A Malay Perspective Edited by Wazir Jahan Karim, Oxford University Press, Singapore.

The ideas are fascinating but are not rooted, except for Wazir Karim's essay, in the up-to-date ethnography that might substantiate their arguments. Nevertheless, in the setting of modern Malays studies this is a ground-breaking book, and one looks forward eagerly to seeing these same scholars and others pursuing these them to a more definite conclusion.

JSEAS, 1992 by Prof Colleen Ward, University of Canterbury.

Emotions of Culture: A Malay Perspective. Edited by Wazir Jahan Karim, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990, Pp.Xiii, 178 Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index.

In conclusion, **Emotions of Culture** has much to offer to Southeast Asian scholars. It advances psychological anthropology in the region and offers keen insights into the definition, phenomenology, and social and psychological significance of emotions in the Malay community. Despite its explicit orientation, the book crosses social scientific and medical boundaries and, as such will be of interest not only to anthropologists and cross cultural psychologists, but also to sociologists, social workers and transcultural psychiatrists. The work also provides a sound base for a forthcoming companion volume on women and hysteria in Malaysia.

Journal of Asian Studies, Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam by Wazir Jahan Karim. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992. Xv, 255 pp, \$34.95

Prof.H.Strange, Rutgers University

Wazir Jahan Karim's study combines textual analysis of historical documents and information from ethnographic research carried out during a number of brief site visits [one week to one month] to a cluster of villages, particularly Mawang, on the Kedah-Penang border between 1981 and 1985. The results are original and insightful
.....

..... *Her treatment of the tenacity of various pre-Islamic rituals is fascinating*

..... *Her arguments are well developed and certainly thought-provoking.*

Choice, Sept 1993, by Prof. R. Provencher, Northern Illinois University

Karim, Wazir Jahan. **Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam**. Westview, 1992, 255p bibl Index
afp ISBN 0-8133-8519-9 sc \$34.95

Karim examines differences of gender orientation between Malay customary law [*adat*] and bilateral family organisation and she has actively formulated the position of women vis-à-vis men in nonhierarchical ways, opposes the 'universalist' argument of other authors that male dominance over females is 'natural' because of biological differences in reproductive and child-nurturing roles. Karim sets the stage for analysing the present day interface between customary law and Islamic religious orthodoxy with a discussion of method in culture history and ethnography, a historical sketch of how royal lineages combined with the bilateral social organisation of traditional Malay societies from early Malay states, and to an indepth discussion of how Malay customary law as ideology and practice had affected gender roles. Finally she addresses the modern Malaysian situation in terms of the construction of power in political parties and voluntary movements, the interface between adapt and Islam at the local community level, and the relationship between gender and power in the context of Islamic revivalism. She omits some historical details that would have strengthened her argument. Nonetheless, this book is an important anthropological and historical contribution to gender studies. Advanced undergraduate; graduate; faculty professional – **R. Provencher, Northern Illinois University**.

Women and Culture; Between Malay Adat and Islam by Wazir Jahan Karim (Westview; Boulder)

"A well-thought-out, virtuoso performance, looking at Malaysian history from the perspective of its implications for Malay women and their relationship to men"

– David J. Banks, SUNY - Buffalo

In this rich anthropological study, the author argues persuasively that an imported Islamic orientation toward gender is working at cross purposes in Malaysia with the indigenous value system: *adat*. She shows how the Islamic overlay has upset the traditional Malay sexual equilibrium and how native cultural mores attempt to reintroduce a more bilateral Islam.

Contents: Gender, Culture and History. The State in early Malay History. *Adat* as Ideology and Practice. Party Politics, Voluntary Movements and the Formal Construction of Power, Contemporary *Adat* and Islam in a Malay village: Gender Relationships and Power. Islamic Revivalism, Gender and Power. Conclusion.

Wazir Jahan Karim wrote this volume when she was Professor at the School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang

Sept, 1992; 255 pages w/maps, tables, figure, notes, biblio, glossary, index; 0-8133-8519-9 [sc: KARWOMS], \$ 34.95; Rights: world

Pacific Affairs, by Prof. Judith Nagata, University of York

Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam, by Wazir Jahan Karim, Boulder [Colorado]: Westview Press, 1992. Xiv, 255 pp. [Tables, fig. and maps] US\$34.95, paper: ISBN 0-8133-8519-9

This volume represents *a bold and innovative attempt to weave together some diverse strands of kinship, gender, religion and culture to create a composite portrait of Malay society over time*. The historical depth, complemented by detailed observations on contemporary Malay society, makes this study a rich source of materials for the understanding of continuity and change over several centuries, beginning with the pre-colonial Malay state, and culminating with the rapidly urbanizing and industrialising society of the present.

Finally, the author makes a plea for the production of more detailed cultural studies, from a nonwestern feminist perspective, of gender and religious custom, of which this book is trendsetting example. Certainly it should be *recommended for those concerned with subtle expressions of female power through informal means, and it carries messages for feminists both western and Southeast Asian*.

American Anthropologist Vol.98 No 1 March 1996 by Prof Ruth Behar, University of Washington.

Gendered Fields: Women, Men and Ethnography. Diane Bell, Pat Caplan and Wazir Jahan Karim, eds. New York: Routledge, 1993 260 pp

...Caplan also notes that most of the authors are European, or of European descent, and that the three non-European authors all did their fieldwork in their home countries. These preliminary reflections about the politics of location in fieldwork are not developed until we come to the end of the book and Wazir Jahan Karim's thoughtful but all too brief Epilogue. Karim points out how, through fieldwork, non-native feminist researchers can have the positive experience of becoming aware of their "social commitment and responsibility towards the researched". But for native feminist researchers, "when things go wrong, disintegrate or buckle under the weight of politics and development," the results are much more profound: they lead to a "questioning of the native role as 'anthropologist' and the role of anthropology as a discipline concerned with the lives of minorities" [p.251] Oddly, the book ends on this ominous note. On the one hand, these words suggest that anthropology may perhaps be an unresolvable paradox for native feminist researchers. On the other hand, Karim seems to leave a path open for the exploration, just beginning to be carried out, of the tense intersections of feminist and native anthropology. Karim's own essay, "with *Moyang Melur* in Carey Island: **More Endangered, More Engendered**" *which is the strongest in the book*, pushes at the meaning of both 'native' and feminist anthropology. Sensitive to racial and class issues, she reflects simplistic notions of nativist purity or womanly authenticity, and takes a cold look at her own intentions and desires as a privileged Malaysian feminist graduate student working with aborigines in the mangrove mudflats of Malaysia. As her family puts it, 'why should she not go? As long as she is properly deloused and dewormed when she comes home, there should be no harm in it' [pp.80-81]

Diane Bell, Pat Caplan, & Wazir Jahan Karim, Eds *Gendered Fields: Women, Men and Ethnography* Routledge, London, 1994, Review and Citation by Prof.J.Cassell

...Karim offers a moving depiction of her relationship with her indigenous 'family' in a Malaysian village.....

Citation by Berg, Oxford 1995

'Male' and 'Female' in Developing Southeast Asia Edited by Wazir Jahan Karim, Women and Human Resources Unit, University Sains Malaysia

This provocative book seeks to redress inaccuracies in Western perceptions of gender relations in Southeast Asia by bringing to the fore the area's ethnic and cultural variance and showing how women and men explain the informal and psychological dimensions of relationships as vital in holding family, neighbourhood and kinship ties together. Although there are differences between male and female perceptions of sex roles in society, women perceive their situation as disadvantaged rather than less significant. Male-female interpretations of power and status tend to converge usually towards the understanding that the contributions of men and women are equally important in the formation of family and society.

Citation by Prof.Peter Harris-Jones, in *The Future of Anthropology Knowledge*, ed. H. Moore.

The position of the counter-voice was admirably summarized in Karim's paper, 'Anthropology without Tears'

..... The counter-voice replied that instead of taking the pervasiveness of mass communications for granted, anthropologists should be active in explicating local cultures and ‘situated knowledge’ It argued that ‘situated knowledge’, or its synonyms, always runs counter to knowledge in its technical form, unmask the hidden power of the latter and thereby limits its effects.
Peter Harris-Jones, 1996, p.157

Straits Muslims: Diasporas of the Northern Passage of the Straits of Malacca. Straits G.T of Intersocietal and Scientific (INAS) 2009.

“This book is a truly remarkable idea and a great collection. The richness of the story of the Straits of Malacca takes on a new dimension with this pioneering work on the “Straits Muslims” where a distinguished group of writers share a stream of insights from the lives and work of a Diaspora of Muslims.

The vitality and diversity of their contribution to progressive thinking and development have been written about as never before – seriously researched and compiled into a fascinating and highly readable gem of knowledge that will contribute to a most relevant discourse on this very special and increasingly more prominent place on earth, where the December 2004 tsunami brought to bear again the intricate links of soil, soul and society.”Dato (Dr) Anwar Fazal, Director, Citizens International (Cited Backcover)

Malaysian scholarship is fortunate in the depth of interdisciplinary research linking local studies to questions of national and global interest. *Straits Muslims: Diaspora and Civilisational Islam in Penang* is a timely contribution to a growing body of literature that explores the intersection between Islam, ethnicity, and local identity. In bringing together a number of well-known authorities, this collection offer a new view of Penang that details the growth and distinctiveness of its various Muslim communities. While continuing links with Sumatra are a major theme, we are also shown how Malays and other Muslims from India and the Middle East interacted in mosques, schools, coffee-houses, markets and streets. In this environment the demand for leaders of different ethnic groups fostered the development of individual talent, and Muslims of very varied backgrounds emerged to affirm their place in communal memories. The editor, Dr. Wazir Jahan Karim, and her fellow-contributors are to be congratulated for a book that enhances our understanding of the ways in which Penang’s multi-cultural society evolved and provides insightful guidelines for the future. Barbara Andaya U of Hawaii, Manoa (Cited Backcover)

-

Newspaper Features on Wazir Jahan Karim

1. **Women**, New Straits Times February 22, 1983
2. The Star, July 3,1987
3. **Women of Substance**, New Straits Times, November 22, 1988
4. Life and Times, New Straits Times, June 10, 1999 *Relative Values*
5. Life and Times, N.S. Times February 21, **2001 Champion of the Cause** – Women to Watch

Book Features

Biography of Women Leaders in Malaysia, PERTIWI 2004
SHE, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Malaysia 2006