

Book Reviews

Anne Digby, Waltraud Ernst, and Projit Mukharji, eds, *Crossing Colonial Historiographies: Histories of Colonial and Indigenous Medicines in Transnational Perspectives* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). ISBN (10) 1-4438-2154-3 (HC). 8 B&W illustrations, xxii + 249pp.

Waltraud Ernst and Thomas Mueller, eds, *Transnational Psychiatries: Social and Cultural Histories of Psychiatry in Comparative Perspective, c.1800–2000* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). ISBN (10)1-4438-2217-5 (HC). xxiii + 321 pp.

These two recently-released collections offer some excellent starting points for rethinking the history of medicine and psychiatry. Their production standard is high: they are elegantly presented, and it is hugely satisfying to read a historical work with footnotes rather than endnotes. The chapters are concise and for the most part clearly written, and there is enough theory to keep most people happy and enough ‘practice’ to balance it. And unlike many international monographs, they are also competitively priced (around £40 each), which is another substantial advantage.

Crossing Colonial Historiographies specifically addresses the lack of inter-national and inter-disciplinary collaboration in the history of medicine, which too often we see manifest in conferences where minority world traditions are streamlined into ‘Asian’ or ‘African’ sessions. It offers instead a refreshing reformulation of the categories of ‘colonial’, ‘regional’, and ‘national’ histories of medicine, which hopefully will allow a freer flow of ideas and more cross-fertilisation.

Having said that, the collection’s individual essays also have much to offer in the more traditional fields of drug history, medical pluralism, and the cultural interpretation of illness. Guy Attenwell’s opening chapter on the mysterious polypharmaceutical known variously as *tiryaaq*, ‘treeak farook’, and Venetian treacle is a fascinating example of the many different disguises and interpretations one drug can take on across its lengthy lifetime. Carla Nappi’s intriguing study of the

Chinese ‘winter worm, summer grass’ ascomycete fungus known as *dongchong xiacoa* also raises many questions about national identity, drug and plant classification, and their potential instabilities.

Thomas Williamson’s chapter on running *amok* in Malaysia was one of my favorites: *amok* is a concept that, like *berserk*, has moved into Anglophone culture. This complex social phenomenon has suffered from being medically ‘compressed’ into a single expression, but Williamson’s chapter unpacks its full meaning to a considerable extent. Anna Afanasyeva opens her chapter on the Russian imperial experience in the Kazakh Steppe with the provoking claim that even though the Russian empire was one of the largest in the world, it has been virtually ignored by historians of medicine. There are fairly obvious historical reasons for this, however, which she explores thoroughly.

The remaining chapters are equally diverse in area and content, although there is a noticeable focus on Africa. Walter Bruchhausen examines instances of medical pluralism in colonial East Africa (British, German, and independent). Markku Hokkanen also examines multiple agencies at work in south-central Africa, particularly Malawi, and Jorge Varanda has a fascinating chapter on the health services offered by the Diamond Company of Angola, especially in its battle against sleeping-sickness. The final chapter by Jo Wreford examines the role of traditional health practitioners in the HIV/AIDS programs operating in South Africa. Outside Africa, David Sowell explores the development of public health in the Yucatán, and Liesbeth Hesselink looks at medical pluralism in Java. Cristiana Bastos has produced a broader survey of the interactions of politics, medicine, and authority in Portuguese Goa.

Transnational Psychiatries is a similarly scoped collection of papers, this time from a 2005 international conference on the same theme. One of the major selling points of this collection is that it has three essays on Japanese psychiatry in different forms: Junko Kitanaka’s study of the ‘translation’ of depression in the context of both Japanese and Western medicines, Akira Hashimoto on the historical role of the family in psychiatric care, and Akihito Suzuki’s chapter on the use of shock therapy in Japan from 1920 to 1945.

Other chapters take us beyond the Anglophone world to the colonial Pacific, Argentina, and the German influences on its psychiatric practice. Other chapters feature the British Raj, the historiography of deinstitutionalisation in northern Europe, two excellent chapters on aspects of French psychiatry by Aude Fauvel

and Isabelle von Buelzingsloewen, and a fascinating comparison of the textbook interpretation of psychological trauma since 1945 in three very different places: Germany, Great Britain, and Serbia.

Both collections have much to offer to a wide range of readers working in this field, and are well worth examining. Each chapter stands alone and can be easily read and digested, none is over-long, and their brevity is useful for readers who are new to many of these previously unexplored fields. Both collections' scope and theoretical challenges mean that they would also be useful as teaching material, as well as background resources for researchers.

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