

crises, of which pesticide abuse is but one symptom. As social scientists, we are very adept at documenting these crises. What can we contribute to their solution?

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Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation, by Andrew Armitage; Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1995. xiii + 286 pp.

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This is a comparative study, as the title suggests, covering three colonial jurisdictions; Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The focus for the work is 'assimilation,' a policy more readily associated with the late 1950s than with the present in Australia and New Zealand, at least. The author defines the assimilationist years for Australia as "1930-70" (p. 14), which helps to provide some time frame within which to judge this account. It is not clear from what follows, however, whether this is a historical account or a contemporary one, nor whether policies based on welfare, assimilation and integration are differentiated.

The book starts with a general introduction to the subject of colonialism and a brief explanation for the choice of the "comparative" method. Reasons are also provided for the choice of the three study areas, along with a description of sources and methods. Chapters Two through Seven describe the Australian (pp. 14-69), Canadian (pp. 70-135), and New Zealand (pp. 136-184) situations. For each area, Armitage devotes one of the chapters to "Child Welfare Policy," giving clear direction to his approach to the subject. As he notes in

the Preface, he is a 'social worker' whose primary concern has been with "child welfare policies" (p. xii). He further notes, "Child welfare policies serve as a [sic] detailed examples of how general policies of assimilation have been pursued" (pp***). By documenting the indigenous policies put in place by colonial regimes, particularly with respect to children, Armitage hopes to clarify the administrative reasoning that led to these policies.

One of the major problems with a book that attempts to cover a great deal of ground is the necessary tension between detail and generalization. The Australian material is covered rapidly and with difficulty. Wisely limiting his field to New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory, it is still almost impossible to reflect the true state of over 200 years of policy accurately in just a few pages. Whereas an overall impression of a shift from initial contact and conflict to protection, through to welfare and assimilation is achieved, the reader is left wondering whether such a summary account can contribute much to the debate. Moreover, the data are limited, with 1986 figures being the latest quoted. There is no reference to the major land rights reforms of the 1970s--the Northern Territory Land Rights Act, 1974--or the National Land Rights legislation of the 1980s (never enacted), all of which had considerable impact on the rising tide of self-determination for indigenous people in Australia. Most important of all, no mention is made of the creation by the Federal Government of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1989, which represented a major step in self-determination for indigenous Australians, and perhaps, in times to come, for some form of limited regional self-government. Nor is there any mention of either the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody or the huge body of materials that were developed as a consequence.

Of course things change very rapidly in a country like Australia. Even five years ago, however, Armitage's following statement would not have held true: "the general assumption of Australian writers and officials is that, eventually, Aboriginals will be assimilated into white society... it is generally believed that... in the end there will be one integrated society living under one set of public institutions and laws" (pp. 68-69). This flies in the face of all the available evidence: Australia's multicultural policy, its various recognitions of Customary Law, the granting of land rights, the recent High Court decision to recognize Native Title and the subsequent Commonwealth legislation affecting such recognition to the whole of Australia. The statement may have been true twenty five years ago but it reflects neither government policy nor a general public view today.

The chapter covering Canada's history of native policies is even more compact. Covering over 450 years (rather than just over 200), the author is, nevertheless, clearer about the divisions of time, separating early contact from later phases and distinguishing assimilation, integration and finally self-government. I am not in a position to comment on the accuracy of the summary, for summary it must be, except to note that once again the data are disappointingly dated for a book published in 1995. I could find neither figures post-dating the 1986 census nor any reference to recent events. The chapter ends on the banal note that, "the current period of administrative activity tends to be characterized by uncertainty, conflicting objectives and political manoeuvring" (p. 99). One wonders what period in history was not so characterized. The chapter on child welfare policies in Canada has some recent references, but depends quite heavily on detail extracted from other writers (e.g., pp. 109-113 provide details of a 'residential school'). The overall effect is impressionistic and general rather than specific, with only superficial analysis.

The two chapters on New Zealand follow in similar fashion. The author notes in particular that the Treaty of Waitangi provided a very different context to that evident in both Australia and Canada. The treaty "gives added force to the cultural and political

reality of a Maori community sufficiently organized to assert direct influence on the development of social policy” (p. 184). Despite this positive assertion, however, Armitage earlier states that, “the policies of integration established in the 1960s... remain in effect in the day-to-day operation of New Zealand social and educational services” (p. 159). Integration is differentiated from assimilation (pp. 142-146) which raises broader questions about the scope and focus of the whole work.

The last two chapters represent a comparative analysis of the three study areas. In comparing the “similarities and differences” the author selects six issues for attention: social policy, labeling of indigenous peoples, instruments of government policy, separation of children, regional and demographic differences, and recovery of indigenous peoples. The main instruments for comparison are tables that set out comparative data but introduce novel policy period definitions (“Paternalism: Protection;” “Paternalism: Assimilation;” “Integration” and “Pluralist”). This is puzzling in the light of the previous chapters where such categories are more or less absent. At the beginning of the last chapter, Armitage states, “it has been shown that Australia, Canada and New Zealand had, in common, a general policy of aboriginal assimilation” (p. 220). The chapter then goes on to “understand aboriginal assimilation” by looking at trace relations, colonialism, ethno nationalism and social policy. Although the descriptive accounts of the four issues are adequate, it is difficult to see exactly where the analysis is going except to some general conclusions about the nature of colonialism and the powerless state of indigenous peoples when their land is appropriated.

This book's major contribution is to provide a summary of the history of government policies in the three countries and a potted overview of the events of colonization. As a comparison of policies, however, it lacks the focus and definition of a work that identifies the major issues and brings them to a compelling comparison. This is, for the most part, a consequence of a failure to clearly define the policy terms. The author has conflated “assimilation” with the context of a whole range of other issues and policies from which it is in fact distinct. It is rather as if the author sees “assimilation” as a matter of colonialism and exploitation, a generic terms that encapsulates the history of indigenous peoples in three countries. Clearly, the situation is not as simple as that. The result is that tough issues and complex policy strands are ignored or become lost in generalizations and summary statements.

Social Ecology, Edited by Ramchandra Guha; Oxford in India Readings in Sociology and Social Anthropology. Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1994. x,398 pp.

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Social Ecology is a collection of sixteen papers on social ecology in India, all but one of which are excerpts from previously published sources. In a crisply written introduction to the volume, editor Guha points out the increasing public concern for the various forms of environmental degradation in India. Guha observes that while natural scientists as well