

redefined. She describes this collection as the beginning of a dialogue about the connections between women, space and time. My one criticism of this collection, is that in raising these issues in the Introduction, the reader expects the essays to explicitly address these concerns but most often this is not the case.

There is a tendency in most of the essays to assume women's oppression and to celebrate women's resilience, often without evidence. There is, for example, only one reference to the possibility of genuine partnerships between men and women in pioneering endeavour. I found Aline Gillespie's essay, which describes how the advent of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) into the Lockyer Valley enriched the lives of young women in the region between 1935-40, one of the most powerful because of her skilful use of evidence. Gillespie discusses the limited options for companionship and leisure for so many of the girls who were unable to continue at school beyond grade eight because their labour was needed to support their families. Those living "off the bitumen" were isolated further by unreliable black soil roads and lack of transport. In the time before teenagers were invented, these young women were neither children nor married women and apparently in an hiatus. Gillespie's use of oral evidence to describe the marginalisation of these young women, is compelling. The YWCA provided a variety of Saturday afternoon entertainments including picnics, tennis, craft activities and most importantly opportunities for companionship.

Readers in the Northern Territory will recognise many of the themes in *On The Edge*, and will no doubt grin wryly at the notion of Queenslanders regarding themselves as marginalised. More importantly, however, this collection suggests that women's experiences are unrestrained by traditional regional borders, and that landscape, space and time are more likely to define women's domains.

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Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath, Marian Quartly, *Creating a nation*, McPhee Gribble, South Yarra, 1994, ISBN 0869140957, 360pp, \$16.96

It is sometimes said that both men and women created this nation and that it is foolish to argue otherwise. Men, it could be said, provided much of the brawn and, for a century or more, the brain, in the paid workforce; women saw to it that there was another generation to inherit and carry on their efforts. By and large, this has been the conventional view of Australian society and *Creating a Nation*, authored by four women who are senior academics, Pat Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly, seeks to challenge that assumption. The authors note in the introduction: 'this books starts from the premise that gender is integral to the processes that comprise the history of Australia - that political and economic as well as social and cultural history are constituted in gendered terms.' As a product of collaboration it is impressive; individual authorial style remains yet the book itself is wholly integrated. *Creating a Nation* is valuable in identifying not only the changes which have taken place to women's condition since 1788 but the effect on many of the women who endured them. There are timely lessons to be learnt from it.

The book begins, appropriately, by locating the history within the context of Aboriginal experiences of British colonisation. It is a measure of the pervasive nature of the masculine Anglo colonial construction of Australian history that the reader is continually disconcerted by the new interpretations offered by these academics; at times bewildered, appalled or charmed with the slightly guilty feeling of female focus. This is a big book on a big subject, which philosophically and methodologically is taking on a powerful construction established in two hundred years of political and social history. It is difficult to do *Creating a Nation* justice in a small review but I hope that I have made it clear that this is a significant and important work.

I found most interesting and heartening those sections dealing with twentieth century events where women's voices become stronger and more confident, as they, usually in times of national peril, were permitted a more active role within society. The dichotomy between the roles

of working woman and mother is well illustrated; for the most part neither role a matter of personal choice. The drudgery of unpaid or menially paid work and multiple children was the lot of all women, regardless of education or background. Today's woman needs to know how hard fought was the battle to become an entity in her own right and not simply a chattel of a male, be he father or husband; she also needs to know how difficult was the road (and how many women were cruelly treated in the male-dominated system along the way) to easier divorce and support from the state in times of crisis.

The title of the book does not do it justice; nations are created by lines drawn on maps. Children are created, nations are constructed; but it is the creation of children which cause many women so much joy and so much pain. The construction of Australian society as predominantly Anglo-male, for women too, leads to pain but little joy. Women are used to effacing themselves and being effaced from public profile except under rigidly circumscribed constructions. Here in the Northern Territory, in a remote capital, we are used to reading national histories where our region is ignored. It is a measure of our

maturity as a community that we now share the confidence to celebrate diversity outside the stereotypes of gender, geography or politics. The nation has been created by women *and* men, and only a knowledge of women's role in Australian history, such as found in this book, will give validity to the choices which Australian women inevitably make. Similarly, this book marks a small but significant step down the long journey towards a balanced view of Australian society where all voices, no matter how quietly spoken, are heard.

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