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Book Review: Geographies of identity in nineteenth-century Japan

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To cite this version:

Eric C. Rath. Book Review: Geographies of identity in nineteenth-century Japan. cultural geographies, 2006, 13 (3), pp.481-482. 10.1177/147447400601300315 . hal-00571998

HAL Id: hal-00571998

https://hal.science/hal-00571998v1

Submitted on 1 Mar 2011

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Venus' (Sarah Baartmann). Pred's work is a courageous assault on the 'unspeakable unspoken'. As a case study of historically and geographically specific racisms, the book demands to be read, its message taken to heart.

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PETER JACKSON

Geographies of identity in nineteenth-century Japan. By David L. Howell. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2005. 261 pp. $55.00, £35.95 cloth. ISBN 0 520 24085 5.

This important book examines changes in conceptions of identity at the individual and countrywide level in the nineteenth century during Japan's transition from the early modern to the modern period. In the early modern period (1603-1868), an individual's identity was a function of occupation, which was determined largely by heredity, and served to demarcate one's place in the status system established by the Tokugawa military regime. The status system functioned to allow the small number of samurai to be sustained by the larger population of commoners, most of whom were tax-paying peasants. These status groups, though separated from each other by sumptuary laws, shared customs (*fûzoku*) such as hairstyle which collectively set them apart as 'civilized' in contrast to the 2–3 per cent of the population of 'outcasts', historically discriminated groups within Japan who engaged in polluting occupations, and 'barbarian' peoples on Japan's geographical periphery including the Ainu of Hokkaido and the Ryukyu Islanders.

Howell traces the effects of the dismantling of the status system in the Meiji period (1868-1912), shedding light on the popular violence perpetrated against the newly emancipated outcasts. The Meiji regime redefined civilized behaviour by rigorously enforcing new customs such as short hair, which it derived from its observation of Western society, in its attempts to create a modern, unified citizenry. Japan, which had once premised its relations with the Ainu and Ryukyu Islanders on cultural differences, now sought to expunge those differences as it claimed direct territorial control over Hokkaido and Okinawa. The actions of the Meiji government to try to erase Ainu culture in its efforts to equate Japanese ethnicity with a national identity has as its legacy the mindset of the contemporary state, which recognizes only Japanese ethnicity as having any political meaning, fostering the notion that Japan is a homogeneous country despite the existence of other ethnic groups within it (p. 203).

David Howell presents a compelling argument for the role of institutions in naturalizing customs that become integral to perceptions of one's place within society and the world. Howell introduces several fascinating characters from the Ainu and outcast communities to put his argument in human terms; his analysis is based on primary research and a comprehensive survey of secondary literature, especially on the topics of discriminated groups and the Ainu. This book is certain to be a reference for

scholars of Japan concerned with the politics of identity in the premodern and modern periods.

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For space. By Doreen Massey. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 2005. 232 pp. £60.00 cloth; £18.99 paper. ISBN 1 4129-0361 0 cloth; 1 4129 0362 9 paper.

For space is the seemingly inevitable outcome of Massey's vocation, her passion for encouraging many disciplines and key thinkers to think more seriously about 'space'. Massey describes 'space' as the sphere of possibility, produced and disrupted through multiple, sometimes overlapping stories, heterogeneous historical and geographical trajectories that are embodied and become relational to each other, often spanning local–global connections. Being careful not to reduce her complex argument to spatial fetishism, she systematically demonstrates that we are therefore 'responsible' to (implicated in the production of) the *practised relations* that give meaning to space.

Whilst it is impossible in this short review to go into any details of what 'space' really means for Massey, I will focus instead upon how she relates her work to the particular political tradition from the Left that she has influenced over the years, specifically that of radical democracy. Massey draws attention to the growing plurality and heterogeneity of political alliances which disrupt grand narratives that close down our understanding of, and the possibilities for, space – those narratives which perpetuate the inevitability of capitalism, the inevitability of Western ideas of development, progress, modernity and so on; narratives which downplay the fact that space is heterogeneous, composed of a plurality of trajectories and practiced relations.

For space will no doubt stimulate important debates for this political tradition and beyond, particularly the latter few chapters, concerning how we are 'responsible' to the practised relations that produce and disrupt space. As a start, I raise the following questions. Given that the Left has reoriented away from specific visions of how places *should be*, toward an emphasis upon the ongoing (re)formation of a plurality of different political alliances, can (should) anyone decide what 'responsibility' means and how they respond? Or are publicly accountable institutions necessary to mediate, in some shape or form, the response? For the issue of responsibility also raises important questions for those growing number of varied political alliances (anti-capitalist activists, peace demonstrators, the European Social Forum, for example) that are 'responsible' to the people which they claim to speak for in different parts of the world.

Stimulated to think about the issue of responsibility more generally, I thought about how we should look upon the rise in influence of Deleuze across academic disciplines. For Deleuze certainly privileged escaping, and fleeing the social, over the formation of wider common spaces of social engagement that are necessary to develop what societies, operating beyond a certain scale, can, and cannot, allow 'responsibility' to mean. Given her new emphasis upon responsibility, whilst Massey engages with