

Addy also briefly suggests other unusual characteristics of the diocese: the earthiness and directness of language of sexual encounter (as reported in defamation and adultery cases); a higher incidence of child marriage. He follows J.A. Sharpe in observing that women readily went to court to protect their sexual honour against defamatory remarks. On the basis of the evidence Addy offers, it is difficult to assess whether women in this diocese were in some way more sensitive than women elsewhere to accusations of sexual impropriety. Certainly, women's aggressive participation in sexual offenses often suggests a contrary conclusion (although Addy's unfortunate practice of mixing quotations from defamation suits with testimony in fornication and adultery cases presents problems of interpretation here). Many of the cases cry out for a more sophisticated analysis of gender differences in sexual expression and expectation. Women's desires seem to be every bit as phallo-centred as any male imagination could wish. Was this true, or is it a product of the distortive effects of reporting and of legal constructions of sexuality that tended to equate "sex" with penetration?

So, although Addy does provide some contextual analysis, it seems half-hearted and "tacked on". At times, the book borders on the amateurish; for example, in a concluding truism, Addy irrelevantly observes that "we are continually reshaping the past" (215, quoting Christopher Hill). Some egregious errors escaped editing: on page 129, for example, we learn that between 1642 and 1648, England experienced both civil wars and Commonwealth.

Describing and exemplifying the business of the courts of this diocese is useful service. Even more valuable is Addy's work in organizing the archives he describes here. Because of his work as archivist, future scholars will be able to "flesh out" the analysis of sin in its social setting which Addy only begins in this volume.

Barbara J. Todd
University of Toronto

Jan Breman — *Taming the Coolie Beast: Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989. Pp. xviii, 321.

In the year 1902, a journalist named Johannes van den Brand published a pamphlet entitled *De Millionen uit Deli*, an outspoken condemnation of the treatment of labor on plantations on the east coast of Sumatra. The disclosures in the pamphlet shocked public opinion in The Netherlands and compelled the government to order an investigation. J.L.T. Rhemrev, the investigator who was chosen for this task, looked into the allegations of physical abuse, mistreatment and exploitation of labor made by van den Brand and, in essence, found evidence to substantiate the allegations. However, the Rhemrev Report was never made public. It was Jan Breman's recent discovery of a copy of this elusive report in the General State Archives at The Hague that led to the writing of this book.

The book being reviewed is an English translation in revised form of Breman's analysis of labor conditions in east Sumatra originally published as *Koelis, Planters en Koloniale Politiek* (Coolies, Planters and Colonial Politics), Leiden, Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde, 1987. The English edition does not

contain either the Rhemrev Report or the van den Brand pamphlet, both of which were in the Dutch version.

Breman's work is strongly critical of the plantation system which emerged in east Sumatra in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. In this respect, it is in accord with recent writings such as Ann Stoler's *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870-1979*, New Haven, 1985. Breman indicates that as to how the obstacles to plantation development were overcome by enterprising and ruthless men such as Jacobus Nienhuys, founder of the Deli Company. Land was leased from local chieftains who, in reality, did not possess the right to dispose of tribal property. Labor was secured on contract and kept in virtual bondage. Capital was raised through limited liability companies. Management was by Europeans, and tobacco became the favoured crop.

Breman, like Stoler, rejects the colonial tradition that plantation enterprise was a laudable venture which led to economic development in a hitherto backward area. On the contrary, he argues that it was a viciously exploitative system. Wages were held at minimum subsistence levels (if not lower) by the concerted action of employers acting through a Planters Association, first set up in 1879. The setting of very high work norms and the organization of work along competitive lines were other devices used to keep labor costs to a minimum. The diet of the workers was poor, health care appalling, and housing abysmal. Those who barely survived a gruelling three-year contract were often replaced by fresh stronger recruits. Breman provides evidence of the ways in which the European companies, with the co-operation of the colonial government, forestalled the development of any rival system of production, be it small-scale indigenous farms or Chinese entrepreneurship.

It is in the analysis of the plantation industry as a mode of capitalist production (74-130) that this book is at its weakest. Breman does recognize that the plantation system was not a capital-intensive type of enterprise and he rejects J.H. Boeke's theory of a "dual economy" with a developed plantation sector and a "backward" peasant sector (xiv-xv). Yet, he does not really venture into the question as to whether the plantation system was an economically efficient mode of production. The author might well have benefitted from reading S.B.D. de Silva's *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, London, 1982. De Silva's massive book not only surveys data on colonial plantation agriculture from India, Sri Lanka and the Caribbean, but also delves into the theoretical debate that Breman seems to sidestep.

However, the author comes to his own when he discusses the social aspects of the plantation system. He convincingly argues that both racism and violence are not rare aberrations in the system, but are integral parts of it. Breman details how the labor hierarchy of European managers, Asian foreman and Chinese and Javanese workers led to stereotyping. This, in turn, contributed to attitudes that envisaged the worker (coolie) as a sub-human "beast". Breman clearly documents how this attitude enabled the planter regime to use violence and the threat of violence to maintain its authority. Asian foremen were also cogs in this engine of oppression. The indigenous chiefs simply looked the other way in return for financial gain. Breman also gives ample evidence of the co-operation between the colonial government and the plantation owners in respect of the exploitation of labor. East Sumatra was opened to capitalist development in the nineteenth century almost wholly by private ventures, and the plantocracy was powerful enough to ensure that state regulations were enacted and enforced for their benefit.

Finally, Breman touches on the question of how a government handles an official document which contains information unpalatable to those in power. In the case of the Rhemrev Report, the government simply refused to release the document, gave misleading summaries of the main conclusions of the report, and diverted attention by stating that proposed reforms would ensure that abuses of the type uncovered would never be repeated. The system thus continued with little change despite the Rhemrev Report and the debate that followed. The limited improvements in the subsequent years owed more to economic self interest than to any change of heart by planters or to any change of policy by the government.

The collection of forty photographs at the end of the volume provides interesting visual insights. The bibliography (291-318) is useful, but the index (319-321) is a disaster (consider, for instance, entries such as cash crops 1, crisis 65, 67-9.). On the whole, however, the book is a well-researched exposé of the evils of the colonial plantation system in east Sumatra, written with emotion and a touch of dry humour.

C.R. de Silva
Bowdoin College

David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones, eds — *Metropolis. London: Histories and Representations since 1800*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. Pp. 330

One need not follow in detail Prince Charles' jousting with the architectural profession to realize that the façade of present-day London has altered almost beyond recognition in recent times; similarly, one need not pursue Mrs. Thatcher's abolition of the Greater London Council in order to appreciate the massive reorganization of political life in the capital. Change is all about — perhaps nowhere more evident than in London's erstwhile dockland — but the contributors to this anthology collectively remind us of continuities and constants in London life. In so doing, they call attention to the historical context underlying such dramatic, far-reaching change as the last decade has witnessed. Yet while London's own history continues to matter, the editors assert that the way in which its history ought to be written has changed, albeit in a subtle fashion. As a result, their present volume seeks out "the space between neighborhood and nation...the space upon which the social and political history of London has been fought out" (6). That space —perhaps "metropolitan" best characterizes it — is important not only in its own experience, but also a leading element in the unfolding of the national experience. Thus, in their view, London as metaphor must be placed beside the historical reality.

Their contributors illustrate London's "cutting edge" paradigm evident in metropolitan conceptions, among others, of the nation, the "underclass", the alien, woman as worker, and socialism. To be sure, there is more than these themes in the various individual contributions, but these particular themes admit of generalization and constitute the core of the volume's content. David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones opine that such a search demarcates a newer social history, open to diverse methodologies and a variety of less orthodox sources. Not surprisingly, these new directions of inquiry tend to relate to "metaphor", for example, in the evolving image of working women in London in the first decades of this century; Deborah Thom's