

SCIENTIFIC MOTHERHOOD

ACROSS THE BRITISH EMPIRE

WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER 16

13:00-16.00

AIAS, Aarhus University

1632-212

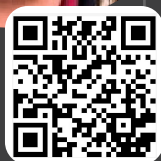
NO REGISTRATION
NECESSARY

Health Transitions, AIAS and the Research Programme for History invites you to an afternoon seminar on the management of motherhood across the British Empire. Two presentations will explore the ideals of mothering and infant care in early-twentieth century British India and postwar Britain.

EDUCATING 'IGNORANT' MOTHERS AND MAKING 'HEALTHIEST' BABIES:

'SCIENTIFIC' MOTHERHOOD
AND CHILD HEALTHCARE ADVICE
IN BRITISH INDIA AND BEYOND

DR. RANJANA SAHA
TIAS, TURKU AND AIAS, AARHUS



PROFILE

'Scientific motherhood', also promoted as mothercraft, primarily involved medicalised childcare with discipline and precision by the clock, which was considered indispensable to the rejuvenation of community, 'racial' and national health and vigour. Despite a few significant scholarly references, however, there remains lacunae in scholarship on ideas and materialities of 'scientific' motherhood and child healthcare in British India and its broader connections with Britain and its empire.

With the spotlight on Bengal and by primarily using a wide range of visual and textual source materials, this presentation brings to light the making of 'clean' / 'modern' / 'scientific' midwifery and motherhood in a colonial setting like India. Infant mortality was a major public health concern and a central trope across public health reports and censuses, advice manuals and periodical essays, child welfare exhibition and conference reports, newspapers and advertisements, etc. This presentation uses this great concern around infant mortality as its entry point into 'scientific' motherhood advice in British India and beyond. Medicalised guidance about maternal and child welfare was often presented as unbiased, scientific and objective suggestions usually underscored by a civilisational gap and time lag between the coloniser and the colonised.

Guided by the social history of medicine, histories of ignorance and knowledge, history of experience, and postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, this presentation aims to decolonise the colonising cult of 'scientific' motherhood in order to bring to light that western medicine was not always imposed on the colonised. It explores why and how British and Indian doctors, alongside men and women from different walks of life, negotiated the cross-cultural tensions between mothercraft, colonialism and nationalism in the making of 'ideal' mothers and 'healthiest' babies.

NURSES OR SUBSTITUTE MOTHERS?

SCIENTIFIC MOTHERING,
MATERNAL DEPRIVATION,
AND RESIDENTIAL INFANT CARE
IN POST-WAR BRITAIN

DR. KATHARINA ROWOLD
UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX



PROFILE

New conceptions of motherhood as much as new conceptions of childhood were embedded in British post-war welfare policy. In the wake of the end of the Second World War, children's care was reorganised, favouring fostering over institutional care. For the youngest children in care, however, residential nursery care continued to be deemed appropriate. And yet, this raised difficult questions: What did 'good mothering' in infancy entail in the absence of family life? And who was best suited to provide the mothering of infants not in the care of their families? And how, if at all, could an established medical infant welfare approach to infancy be reconciled with newer psychological theories on the emotional life of early childhood?

This paper explores these questions by examining shifting policies on the staffing of residential nurseries and the training deemed appropriate for nursery nurses. The principles of 'scientific motherhood' in which medical expert knowledge was to guide the raising of babies had been deeply entrenched in pre-war infant welfare programmes. Understanding deprivation in terms of infant mortality, malnutrition, and the physical health of babies, particularly urban working-class babies, 'scientific motherhood' promised not only infant survival but also the creation of disciplined citizens of empire. Newly emerging psychological theories, however, emphasised children's emotional, rather than physical health. Positioning mothering and the mother-child bond as pivotal to children's psychological health, and by extension, national stability, deprivation was redefined as the absence of maternal care.

This paper explores post-war discussions about the appropriate staffing and training of residential nursery staff in light of these competing and shifting understandings of infancy and motherhood.

MORE INFORMATION? Please contact Niels Brimnes - email: hisnb@cas.au.dk



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