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BRYDER, Linda: *The Best Country to Give Birth? Midwifery, Homebirth and the Politics of Maternity in Aotearoa New Zealand, 1970–2022.* Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2023. 400 pp., bib., index, notes. NZ$59.99 (softcover).

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Linda Bryder's *The Best Country to Give Birth? Midwifery, Homebirth and the Politics of Maternity in Aotearoa New Zealand, 1970–2022* is a literary road map tracking the political development and evolution of maternity care in Aotearoa New Zealand. This book represents significant research and is the first study to explore the history of Aotearoa's childbirth policies and services as well as the debates underpinning them.

The book begins with a question posed by Gordon Matenga, following his 2012 coronial investigation into two babies who died during childbirth at Waikato Hospital: "Does New Zealand have the safe, world-leading system the Government says we do, or are we losing babies because the balance has swung too far towards the idea that because childbirth is natural, then the philosophy of 'non-intervention' is best?" (p. 1). This question, particularly the last part, will be a recurring philosophy that is mentioned, questioned and reexamined throughout the book.

The first half of the book focuses on the origins of the 1990 Nurses Amendment Act, which is central to the book. To provide context for readers, Bryder focuses the first two chapters on the 1970s homebirth movement, introducing readers to women, practitioners and activists who championed homebirths, such as Joan Donley. While it was unsurprising that during the 1970s and 1980s, almost all the homebirth parents were Pākehā (New Zealand European), it was a startling insight to learn that the Home Birth Association's perceived profile for a woman "suitable" for homebirth included being in a stable relationship, politically aware, a yoga practitioner, a user of alternative therapies and ideally a person rejecting modern technologies such as ultrasounds (pp. 19–29).

As the book progresses, Bryder reviews submissions and findings of government inquiries as well as specific sections of the Nurses Act to present the debates around the inclusion of homebirth within maternity services during the 1970s and 1980s.

Chapter 4 explores the autonomy sought by homebirth midwives during the 1980s. Māori and Pacific women are discussed in this chapter, firstly in relation to the Save the Midwives Direct Entry Midwifery Task Force's explanation of why they felt midwifery training should not put the emphasis on science and academic excellence (p. 81). The Task Force stated that Māori and Pacific women were "often overwhelmed by the theoretical structure

of the course and ultimately by having to partake in tests and examinations in a language that is not their own" (p. 81).

Despite the Task Force and others' attempts to increase Māori and Pacific participation in the homebirth movement as participants and practitioners, Pacific women were opting to have medical support and assistance from their general practitioners throughout their pregnancy (p. 97). Bryder explores the Home Birth Association's lack of cultural awareness as a key contributor to this disengagement and disconnect (pp. 96–97).

Chapter 5 unpacks pro-homebirth strategies and their success due to the receptive social and political climate of the 1980s. Chapter 6 tracks the journey of the Nurses Amendment Bill through Parliament. Chapter 7, titled "Midwifery Autonomy and Partnership in the 1990s", provides a perspective of mothers who did not feel their relationship with their midwives was equal—often when things had gone wrong. While this chapter includes a section exploring the partnership between Māori and the College of Midwives (pp. 153–56), it lacks the voices and experiences of Māori mothers and other mothers who did not feel like equals and remained unheard.

The politics of primary maternity care after 1990 is the focus of Chapter 8, with a discussion on the new funding system and the growing tensions between general practitioners and midwives. Chapter 9 examines the New Zealand College of Midwives's midwifery model of childbirth, which became the foundation for new midwifery qualifications, replacing the medical model.

The final three chapters review early 2000s maternity care to determine whether the 1990s tensions had been resolved after the establishment of the Midwifery Council in 2004. Bryder also explores the findings from the coroner's and health and disability commissioner's investigations into homebirths that went wrong and also examines the systemic issues that contributed to these failings. The book concludes by highlighting the academic research and government reports that have identified inequities across population groups, including Māori.

Bryder effectively maps the political landscape and tracks the evolution of Aotearoa's childbirth policies and services over the decades. While the research Bryder has undertaken is substantial, the book is heavily focused on the Pākehā experiences of midwifery and homebirth. While this may be due to the limited research or writings about Māori and Pacific women's experiences of midwifery and homebirth, Bryder could have undertaken empirical research as part of this project to help contribute to the literature gap.

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