relationships – the blond partner of the black man who states that he could never go with a black woman proudly declares that neither of them think in racial terms at all. These rich personal stories depict the way in which the power structure of British society finds resonance in the emotional structures and desires of her people, but also how racism can be resisted and rejected at those deeper levels of social life. The historical and racial loading of desire appears to work both ways, facilitating love and hate in such a way that we can only conclude that where there is social apartheid, love will always have its racial content. On the other hand, as an explanatory concept or a theory, 'race' is revealed to be rather like the Holy Book in its capacity to be everywhere and nowhere, and to explain everything

and yet nothing in the racial and cultural pot-pourri that *The Colour of Love* reflects.

The dynamism of social reality has given rise to an ongoing struggle which affects us all in disparate ways, and which all three books try to address in their very different ways. If theory and understanding are what we need, there has to be a great deal more work and inspiration. It remains to be seen whether contemporary studies of race and culture will succeed in facilitating or otherwise assisting the difficult metamorphosis of culture and politics into forms more compatible with the changes that the global movements of people have already wrought on European societies.

Amina Mama

Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland, 1850–1914

Eleanor Gordon

Clarendon Press: Oxford 1991
ISBN 0 19 820143 5, £35.00 Hbk

Our Mothers' Land. Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830–1939

Edited by Angela V. John

University of Wales Press: Cardiff 1991
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Until recently the development of women's history in Scotland and Wales lagged behind that in England. The lag implied a backwardness in feminist theory and practice, which in turn led to the easy assumption of exceptionally male-dominated societies. The late 1980s saw the growth of historical investigation into the position of women in Scotland and Wales, including the two books under review. Eleanor Gordon and Angela John

both question comfortable national stereotypes which are above all masculine in construct. They also show differences as well as similarities between the position of women in Scotland and Wales, and in England.

Eleanor Gordon's study not only challenges the focus of labour history in Scotland on the skilled male working class, but asserts the necessity to revise the concept of skill by taking gender into account. The tendency in labour history is to categorize women's waged work as unskilled, or at best semi-skilled, and then only at the cost of the dilution of male skills; to assume that the male workers' interests were identical with those of their class, whereas women's interests could undermine class solidarity. The tendency also is to generalize that women's experience as workers was premised upon their subordination as a gender; but as Gordon shows, a full understanding of women's position in the labour market depends on local studies balancing the simple explanation of the sexual division of labour disadvantaging women.

Traditionally, textiles has been a major employer of women, heavy industry of men; but whereas in the nineteenth century the west of Scotland had these 'choices', the Welsh economy was dominated by coal-mining, seriously restricting employment opportunities for women. Thus while domestic service was the major employer of women in Wales even into the twentieth century, the textile town of Dundee was remarkable for its unemployed men and for the dominance of the mill girls. Gordon reveals that even in the traditional flax and linen industries, Dundee employers succeeded in making the prestige tasks of power spinning and weaving a female preserve. While Dundee was unique in Britain in its reliance on female labour, the labour hierarchy, with women subordinate to men, pertained even in such a 'women's town': skilled women workers were paid less than men and were supervised by general male overseers. However, Gordon's painstaking research shows that whereas in England the sexual hierarchy itself determined which sex got the job (leaving women unskilled), in Scotland the sexual composition of the labour force was crucial for deciding what form the labour process took (skilled women supervised by men). Further, she believes that middle-class notions of domesticity were undermined by the centrality of female employment in Dundee. Still, gender divisions remained fundamental to society. Even the Dundee mill girl was defined by her household responsibilities.

Dundee was exceptional. Yet Gordon's study reinforces the generalization of two labour markets, one for women and one for men, with the former inferior to the latter in terms of authority, skill and pay. It also undermines the assumption that work was a negative experience for women, and the stereotype of the subordinate, passive woman worker. *Our Mothers' Land* paints a

bleaker picture of women's work in Wales, even as it asserts the significance of their contribution to the formation of Welsh society and culture.

In the period under review, 1830 to 1939, there were lower rates of participation of women in the Welsh than in the Scottish, or English, paid labour force, and fewer job opportunities – even fewer in the industrial south than in rural west Wales – with women concentrated in domestic service. As a result, many young and single women migrated to the south and south-east of England, to help support their families at home. Most women in Wales married, due to few alternative 'careers', and the dual pressure of the Victorian and Nonconformist domestic ideal. Welsh patriots sought improvements in female education because they saw the mother's role as crucial for the nation, notably as guardian of the national language and culture. In fact, it was crucial for the economy too. Although many working-class and farmers' wives were not formally employed, they had to respond to the demands of their husbands' work, especially coalmining, within a harsh home environment of serious overcrowding and lack of even basic amenities. At the same time, these women took a pride in their domestic labour, which was much more than simply servicing their men. In such a sex-segregated economy, with such a strict division between public and private, women asserted control over their workplace, the home. They exercised a wider influence through the imposition of local community sanctions, thus helping to shape popular culture even as they reinforced their domestic ties.

Domesticity was further strengthened by visual as well as written images in women's magazines, beginning with *Y Gymraes* (*The Welshwoman*) in 1850. The ideal Welshwoman – self-sacrificing, sober, virtuous and maternal – was a

response both to the English criticisms of Welsh morality found in the 1847 Education Report, and to the social unrest of Chartism and the Rebecca riots in which a dangerous female presence had been discerned. Even those women – from the upper and middle classes, either from England or influenced by English ideals – who played a significant role either in running their husbands' businesses or in the various reform and suffrage movements, did not challenge the domestic ideal. Like the working-class women, they manipulated it to give them room for manoeuvre in the public realm. Yet the middle-class women also sought to use their public role precisely to impose the domestic ideal on their social inferiors.

Our Mothers' Land is a challenge to the stereotype of Wales as a land of fathers. It also shows the different cultural and political contexts between Wales and England. Thus it was not simply patriarchy which inhibited the development of the suffrage campaign in Wales, but national pride, hurt by the Pank-

hurst attack on the Liberal Party in general and on Lloyd George in particular. In addition, Welsh women lacked the economic interests to encourage them to demand a political say.

As Deirdre Beddoe shows in the final chapter, this situation changed little for women in economic terms in the inter-war period, even as they won the vote. She insists on the necessity of placing the history of women in Wales within the broader context of the history of women in Britain as a whole. Yet what is so valuable about both the books under review is the difference, the divergence, between women in Britain. It has been too easy to assume a single position of women, based on the English model, given the pioneering work by feminist historians in England. What Eleanor Gordon's detailed study and Angela John's varied collection show is the complexity of the interaction of gender with nationality as well as class.

Jane McDermid