

we realize that no matter what the extent and nature of the struggle, there are no clear-cut, linear answers to explain the birth of a political being, that a woman's dilemmas within a developing society defy simplistic solutions, and that vision is necessary to transcend the daily temptations of corruption.

What is conveyed in the narrative, however, is a sense of Zari's isolation, even in her so-called political activity. Her efforts seem random and transient, her vision inwardly directed and private. Along with the other women in the story, she is able to make use of the traditional means of power at their disposal (sister-

hood-by-oath, taking sanctuary, networking, etc.) to expand their influence to the public sphere. And the women are able to move their men.

A richly woven tapestry of cultural detail, *A Persian Requiem* interests the reader on many levels. The female perspective is subtly counter-pointed with the web of political intrigue, and we learn much about modern Iran at the same time as becoming increasingly involved with the highly charged drama which lies at the core of this gripping story.

Maryam Mafi

Women's Work and the Family Economy in Historical Perspective

Edited by Pat Hudson and W. R. Lee

Manchester University Press:
Manchester (St Martin's Press: New York) 1990, ISBN 0 7190 2377 7
£35.00 Hbk

The publication of this collection is an indication of how women's history has developed, the rewards to be reaped from the struggle with mute or intractable sources, how painstaking the research has had to be, and finally how slowly insights gained from all this effort have been to percolate into general economic and demographic history. In their important, articulate introduction, the editors raise some key questions, not least in querying the very definition of 'work' itself. They emphasize issues of women's work in the creation of *all* social and political identity as well as the better known function of maintaining family income and status.

These and other themes are addressed through investigations of ideology, law and state policy, the sexual division of labour both as it changed and as certain elements remained constant, through tech-

nology and the organization of work, and through concepts of the family economy. 'Common sense' explanations such as suitability of tasks through physique or the need for women to be near the home, are quickly discarded. Throughout the volume, the primacy of social derogation of women's status and women's work is manifest, from the early modern period to the mid-twentieth century.

Covering such a 'long sweep' allows the various authors to shed light on the vexed question of whether or not women's position (economically at least) gained or lost during 'industrialization'. The carefully differentiated studies of various times and places furthers the nascent belief that this may be unanswerable – and ultimately the wrong question to be asking, politically as well as intellectually.

For, as Hudson and Lee point out, women's work, the family economy and family strategies are not merely reactive in the process of change but pro-active in a way which contributes to that change, in both material and ideological outcomes. They make a necessary plea to mount a real challenge to traditional analyses to the point where they potentially undermine their own

enterprise in admitting that this type of 'separate treatment of women may serve to endorse their particularized and marginal status compared to men' (p. 35).

However such reconstructions are vital on the road to re-evaluating mainstream issues and debates such as class formation, standard of living, demographic behaviour, or the relationship between parts of the economy and society. The history of work looked at from this fresh perspective will require some very radical changes indeed.

One of the great strengths of the collection is its attention to and stress on *differences* between types of women, between regions and areas, between periods of time. The studies range from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Wüttemberg woollen weavers to the well-represented nineteenth century where German agricultural families, French urban artisans and labourers, British provincial tradesmen, professional and farming families, Lancashire cotton workers, and Norwegian farmers and labourers are variously considered. Moving into the twentieth century we are given Staffordshire potters, Russian working-class women, Coventry car workers, and the family economy of the Liverpool docklands. It is evident from this range that, for women, so often defined as marginal, local variation in conditions could be crucial.

Despite the wealth of detail unearthed by each study, certain themes emerge; again and again what is meant by work is called into question by the inclusion of women. For example as Ida Blom points out, when married women's work on family farms is included, the percentage of economically active married women in Norway more than trebled. But gender expectations also framed the way 'work' (or nonwork) was formulated as Clare Evan's sensitive piece on unemployment during the Lancashire 'cotton famine' of the 1860s shows. Temporary work pro-

vided by charities and Poor Law Guardians alike for male cotton workers was framed through the concept of men as producers of labour power and production; women were treated as potential reproducers, governed by life-cycle events.

Women could find paid employment in the interstices, at the margins or, as Catherine Hall points out, provide hidden resources ranging from labour power itself to capital and the 'production' of personnel to man (*sic*) economic institutions. In other words, so long as it was not openly recognized, when women 'greased the wheels of the labour-market, they were permitted an enormous range of economic activity' as Richard Whipp documents for both married and single women in nineteenth-century potteries (p. 97).

Hints as to how the economic activities of women were maintained, despite formal denials, appear in many of the chapters. Women were defined through their status of wife and mother, through the institution of marriage. In turn, these concepts were crucial to definitions of the family. Significantly, Anne Meyering's re-use of LePlay's famous family studies shows how his narrow definition of 'family' overlooks the existence of groups like single people and other forms of 'economy' and contributes to standard gender definitions. As so many of these essays graphically show, the relation of the family economy to the wider economy simply cannot continue to ignore the construction of gender.

As household heads, as privileged workers (if only with the privilege of working 14–16 hours in abysmal conditions), men in many situations used their social and political status to block women's full participation in the waged economy. Nor, as Sheilagh Ogilvie demonstrates for seventeenth-century Germany, was this a function of an *industrial* system. The male weavers of Wüttemberg gathered in their

Guilds and Corporations were in a strong position to close ranks against possible competition from women workers (as well as ensuring a steady supply of wifely unpaid labour at home). Linda Grant's investigation of Coventry echoes this in a twentieth-century context. The strong consciousness of hierarchy among male car workers (even when it was factually no longer true) was not about skill alone, it was also about men and masculinity.

In a collection as varied as this one, inevitably there are differences of purpose as well as approach. Some concentrate exclusively on women, while others take on issues about men and masculinity. The individual pieces cover a great variety of sources of all kinds: documentary, statistical, qualitative. This gives a rich, 'grounded' sense as well as a real feeling of diversity which is absent from some of the more recent free-floating, textually based

studies. Not surprisingly, one of the strongest impressions left on the reader is the sheer variety of situations in which European women were to be found in the last four centuries.

For nonspecialists, the collection taken as a whole performs a valuable service. If nothing else, it brings to light those so often 'hidden from history', from Catherine Hall's merchants' and small manufacturers' wives and daughters to Pat Ayers' pawn-broking, thieving neighbourhood women among the poorest. It is full of stories interesting in their own right as well as important historical insights, if only unromantic negative findings about lack of change or the demonstration of local variation. It is to be hoped that it will soon appear in paperback and become more accessible to the wider readership it deserves.

Leonore Davidoff

Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies

Edited by Ann Phoenix, Anne Woollett and Eva Lloyd

Sage: London 1991, ISBN 0 8039 83134 X £10.95 Pbk, ISBN 0 8039 83131 1 £30 Hbk

This collection analyses the representation and treatment of mothers and mothering in psychology. The relationship to psychology is important, for the discipline is both the resource for the normative models of mothering that are critically addressed within this book and the domain of its intervention. Motherhood is analysed as central to the maintenance of sexist, ethnocentric and heterosexist models of the family and the sexual division of labour. Definitions of good (and therefore 'bad') mothering function to regulate women through health and welfare practices, which are also recycled as popular common-sense knowledge. This 'social construc-

tionist' perspective will come as no surprise to feminists. But feminism has made little impact on dominant psychological models and methods, and this book is an example of the new wave of critiques of psychological models and practices that are now beginning to emerge from feminists working within the discipline.

The focus of the book is on how psychology has constructed models of mothering and the ways it has distorted or failed to reflect women's experiences of mothering. There is a clear structure and organization, with the theoretical and political analysis that guides the collection set out in the first two chapters and themes and current debates drawn together in the editorial Afterword. The second section addresses the consequences of the 'mandate for motherhood' for all women, firstly in Anne Woollett's account of the perspectives of women engaging in fertility treatments. This is followed by