82 | book reviews

Equality: from theory to action

John Baker, Kathleen Lynch, Sara Cantillon and Judy Walsh, Palgrave Macmillan/Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2004, ISBN 1 4039 4429 6 £20.99 (Pbk); ISBN 1 4039 0392 1 £60.00 (Hbk)

Equality: From Theory to Action is the excellent collaborative effort of four academics at the Equality Studies Centre at University College Dublin. Equality studies are described as 'an interdisciplinary field that combines both normative and empirical enquiry and aims at transformation' (p. 14). The book asserts that there is a global egalitarian social movement. It theorizes some of the movement's aims, and offers principles for promoting egalitarianism in the future. While the authors believe their framework and recommendations are germane for egalitarians around the world, they acknowledge that the focus is on Western, developed societies, particularly the Republic of Ireland.

The book is in three parts. Part one represents the theoretical core. It sets out three models of equality: basic equality, liberal egalitarianism and the authors' preferred model – equality of condition. It compares the latter two models along five key dimensions of equality: respect and recognition; resources; affect (which includes love, care and solidarity); power; and working and learning. According to liberal egalitarianism, social inequalities are inevitable because our basic social institutions – for example, capitalism and liberal democracy – generate them. Therefore, the task is to try to limit these inequalities, not to eliminate them. The authors assert that from this view, equality means 'the right to compete, not the right to choose among alternatives of similar worth' (p. 33). In contrast, the concept of equality of condition challenges the character of western societies' basic institutions. For example, the equal opportunity to compete for jobs in a hierarchical division of labour is insufficient. Equality of condition says people should have 'real choices among real options' (p. 34) of roughly equal value.

The book's second part, 'Putting Equality into Practice', enlarges on the five dimensions of inequality. For example, a chapter on education rejects the commonsense view that the distribution of education is primarily a problem of resource inequality. Instead, they relate the different experiences that individuals have in formal education to the inequalities of social class; respect and recognition (e.g., the silencing of gay and lesbian students and the segregation of students with disabilities);

and power (symbolized by the hierarchical relationships between administrators and teachers, and teachers and students). In general, the analysis sets out concrete recommendations for institutional changes required to bring about greater equality in each dimension, stressing the interconnectedness of inequalities in individuals' lives.

The book's final part is called 'Strategies for Change'. It addresses political, strategic and ideological issues around promoting social equality. This section also reiterates one of the authors' most fundamental claims: that a *global* egalitarian movement, composed of a network of emancipatory groups, is evident today.

This book is an excellent contribution to at least two literatures: political theories of equality and social movement theory. It is especially valuable for offering a sophisticated theoretical framework for analyzing a wide range of inequalities, and then applying it via detailed discussions of pressing practical problems. Given that it is a collaborative effort, the authors deserve credit for producing a text that is seamless and accessible. The frank admission of their emancipatory aims ('Equality studies aims not just to understand but to change the world') is also refreshing.

A couple of peculiarities of the book, rather than problems *per se*, are worth noting. It frequently refers to Irish Travellers to illustrate inequality's complexity, particularly aspects of unequal respect. Travellers are 'an ethnic minority of about 30,000 people' with a 'tradition of nomadism' and a separate language spoken among themselves (p. 9). Undoubtedly, the situation of Travellers vividly illuminates particular dimensions of inequality. However, the regular references to them lends the book a slightly odd feel. The rest of the analysis is much less country-specific, and the authors' stated ambition is to 'review some ... inequalities that exist in the world generally' (p. 3). More regularly drawing on even a slightly broader geography – for example, the experiences of Afro-Caribbeans in the UK – would have improved the analysis.

The book's structure in part two is another peculiarity. The authors stipulate five dimensions of equality as important. Given that there are five chapters in this section, it seems odd that these chapters do not correspond in any straightforward way to these five dimensions. Instead, we have chapters on economic inequality, participatory democracy, the legal system and employment law, education, and emancipatory research. I suspect these choices are, in part, due to the authors' academic backgrounds. The authors *do* make an effort to invoke the five equality dimensions in each substantive analysis of inequality. Still, I expected more systematic attention to each dimension since some are dramatically undertheorized within the liberal egalitarian perspective they criticize.

One's attitude about two things – the appropriateness of 'grand theory' in the academy, and the possibility of progressive social organizations forming coalitions in real political life – will undoubtedly determine one's receptiveness to this book. Since I am a believer in both, I think this book makes a significant contribution to the field and is a positive sign of things to come from the equality studies discipline.

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Laboring women: reproduction and gender in new world slavery

Jennifer L. Morgan; University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004, ISBN 0-8122-1873-6 £13.00 (Pbk); ISBN 0-8122-3778-1 £36.00 (Hbk)

Many scholars have emphasized the exploitation of enslaved women in the Americas for both their productive and their reproductive capacities, but none have examined the meaning of childbearing for enslaved women with the sensitivity and subtlety of Jennifer Morgan's *Laboring Women*. Morgan argues that slaveholders in the early English Atlantic world were acutely conscious of women's reproductive potential, and that this fact had enormous significance for the development of slave societies and for both women's and men's experiences of them. Moving from analysis of early European travellers' sexualized and gendered depictions of African women (a revised version of her much-cited 1997 article in *William and Mary Quarterly*), through chapters on African gender relations and the slave trade, on slaveowners' gendered strategies in acquiring and using enslaved people's labour, on reproduction from enslaved women's point of view, on agricultural work, and on resistance, Morgan intervenes in a series of crucial debates in the historiography of slavery and the African diaspora.

Laboring Women is full of points that have never previously been made with such clarity. An example is Morgan's discussion of creolization, a phenomenon which, she points out, is inherently linked to reproduction and to family life: the creation of Creole generations depended on African women's child-bearing. Yet in the context of American slave societies, 'creolization was in fact rooted in loss; in the despair of infant death and the altered meanings of women's fertility under the weight of burgeoning plantation regimes'. Morgan's insight should persuade future historians to investigate the familial and gendered substructure of a process often discussed in abstract and andocentric terms. In other places, Morgan articulates points that have been raised elsewhere, but does so in particularly acute and elegant ways. Thus, she emphasizes the difficulties inherent in the concepts of 'resistance' and 'accommodation'. These binary