Restructuring Gender Relations and Employment: The Decline of the Male Breadwinner

Rosemary Crompton (ed.)

The rise in women’s employment, including their growing presence in the professional and managerial echelons of the occupational hierarchy, is well known, but the implications of this trend are still being debated. Are these changes in women’s economic roles transforming gender relations? Which theoretical framework best equips us to analyse the dynamics of how gender relations are reproduced and changed? This tightly organised collection will make an important contribution to these key debates at the heart of research in this field.

The introduction provides a succinct discussion of recent debates in feminist and social theory pertinent to the interpretation and explanation of gender relations. It advocates a pluralistic approach of ‘analytical dualism’ to take advantage of the creative tensions of working with different frameworks rather than attempting to synthesise ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ perspectives into one overarching theoretical framework. Purists may find this to be an untidy solution, but should be persuaded by the valuable insight gained from the analysis in the subsequent chapters.

The volume is organised around three themes, with a cross-national comparative approach adopted in each chapter. The first concerns the way that the gender allocation of care and market work is encoded in welfare states and other macro level social institutions. This theme is central to chapters two to five which engage with current debates concerning the merits of the ‘gender system’ approach and different typologies of welfare state regimes. The male breadwinner model of gender relations is used as an ideal type with which to analyse national variations, to discuss trends and tensions which are contributing to the erosion of this model, and to identify possible models which may emerge in different national settings. Chapter two considers how notions of autonomy and dependency are variously constructed in welfare state regimes through a comparative analysis of family obligations in the EU member states. Chapter three unpacks the ‘Scandinavian’ model by drawing out the differences between these countries, and then provides a comparison of working-time practices and workplace cultures in the public and private sectors in Norway. Chapters four and five discuss how different national models of gender relations have emerged historically, and identify different dynamics and trajectories of restructuring using the comparative cases of Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK. Together these four chapters provide a thorough distillation of much of the theoretical and empirical understanding that has emerged from cross-national research on this subject since the mid-1980s.

As our comparative knowledge of different national gender systems has matured, research preoccupations have begun to shift towards the dynamics of restructuring and agency so as to understand how ‘individuals negotiate these structures and live out their lives, and in doing so contribute to the transformation of these structures’ (p. 18). This is reflected in the other two themes which are central to the second part of the book: the role of individual values, attitudes and choice in shaping the gender division of labour; and the relationship between individual action and the transformation of institutions and gender norms. My only quibble is that the analysis of
the third theme is less developed than the second, although the work done here sets the ground for attending to this in future research. Chapters six to nine draw upon a cross-national project on gender relations and employment in the contrasting welfare state regimes of the UK, France, Norway, Russia and the Czech Republic, focused on women doctors and retail bank managers. Individual attitudes, values, plans and decisions are brought to the fore and interpreted contextually in relation to the macro-level of social institutions and the meso-level of occupational career structures. Chapter six shows that non-traditional gender role attitudes are significantly associated with a non-traditional division of domestic labour, demonstrating that attitudes have an independent effect over and above material and situational factors on how we ‘do gender’ in the home. This interplay of attitudes and circumstances is developed further in chapters seven to nine, where the biographical data are analysed to show how both ‘choice’ and ‘constraint’ are present in the way that women have managed their work and family lives. Here the career structures of professional and managerial occupations are shown to create different choices and constraints that cut across national contexts. This biographical analysis is interpreted using the analytic framework offered by Dubet’s (1994) ‘sociology of experience’, which basically argues that behaviour develops from the articulation of three logics of action: normative, strategic and reflexive. Norms are caused by the conforming pressures of socialisation, strategic decisions are driven by the obstacles and opportunities different people face, and reflexivity emerges from the unfolding of individual biographies as people strive to interpret and lead their own lives. The other main question addressed in this part of the book is whether the numerical feminisation of professional and managerial occupations is transforming gender relations or reproducing them under a different guise. Here the authors are more tentative, arguing that closer attention to the identities, beliefs and behaviour of individuals is needed to assess the extent to which a transformation is taking place, and that numerical feminisation may take on a different significance in different professional and managerial settings. The conclusion reached is that the changing economic roles of women are eroding the male breadwinner model, but that it is less clear what will emerge in its place. But what is clear from the rich analysis presented in this book is that the politics and reflexivity of individual and collective action will play a crucial role in this restructuring process.

REFERENCE

University of Manchester
COLETTE FAGAN

Social Partnership at Work. Workplace Relations in Post-Unification Germany
Carola Frege

The study of social phenomena in the two parts of the reunified Germany provides the social scientist with a rare chance to explore to what extent and how 'system' characteristics impact on institutions and social behaviour and how institutional transfer into a new cultural context works in practice.
Carola Frege’s study of workplace relations during 1993–4 makes very good use of this unique historical opportunity and is able to present us with some novel and well-substantiated findings about the outcome of wholesale ‘institution transfer’. Although industrial relations in the post-communist part of Germany have been widely studied, particularly by West German scholars, Frege’s broad and deep study contains a number of features which enable her to contribute something new and valuable to various debates on both industrial relations in general and the reunified Germany in particular.

Frege systematically studies how industrial relations institutions, primarily at workplace level, are actually working in the post-communist part of Germany and how their working is perceived by employees. Her key question is whether works councils are independent, cooperative and effective, or whether they are, as many analysts claim, subservient, extended arms of management. Moreover, she makes careful controlled comparisons between the situation in these two respects in the eastern and western parts of Germany and tries to determine how similarities and differences may be explained.

The study’s focus on the clothing industry—a severely depressed industry with a very high level of unemployment in East Germany and little scope for union bargaining—covers a ‘worst case’ scenario. Any positive outcomes in terms of the functioning of industrial relations are most likely to hold also for the rest of East German industry. Frege has interviewed not only union and works council officials in both parts of Germany but also ‘ordinary’ unionised employees. Here she tries to determine whether East German employees are more individualistic and instrumental than their western counterparts. In her evaluation of her results, Frege is careful to distinguish between managers of West and East German provenance and, in the latter case, between those who held their position already under the communist regime and those who have been promoted since then.

Although Frege combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches the latter is more dominant and makes the study a little ‘dry’. Her exhaustive surveys of all the relevant literature on each aspect of her study and her very careful and competent testing of a number of hypotheses—the hallmarks of a book based on a doctoral dissertation—inspire confidence in the validity of her findings. But the resulting detailed discussion and somewhat formulaic approach do not generate in the reader the intellectual excitement which some of her findings warrant.

In contrast to many ‘pessimistic’ German evaluations about the actual functioning of institutional arrangements, ‘imposed’ by the West, Frege finds that East German employees’ orientations towards their industrial relations institutions and processes are not very different from those of their West German counterparts: both believe in cooperative, partnership-style industrial relations and hold generally supportive attitudes towards their works councils and unions. Although they wish to maintain a cooperative industrial relations style, in neither case does cooperation mean ‘incorporation’. East German employees are well aware of differences in interests between management and labour, as well as being conscious of the one-sided shift in power towards the management side. Management, in turn, respects the works council, but does not always like to work with it. Moreover, in both East and West German employees’ attitudes she finds a mixture of instrumentalist and solidaristic attitudes towards their bodies of representation, with East German workers being only slightly more instrumental. The main difference between East and West German workers is that the former have much more negative attitudes towards their work arrangements, expressing strong resentment towards the highly intensive pace and their generally Taylorist nature. This prompted some managers (both of East and West German origin) to comment unfavourably on East German workers’ work effort, in comparison with that of their western colleagues.

Frege offers explanations for both similarities and differences in attitudes between the two sets of workers. When it comes to explanations of the ‘system’ type, however, the dearth of reliable
information about the industrial relations and work regimes in the communist past, despite Frege’s best efforts to reconstruct the communist past at both the ‘institutions’ and the more informal level, often compels her to speculate.

Carola Frege’s overall conclusion about the viability of transferring the ‘partnership’ model to a different cultural and economic context are sanguine: she considers that the transferred institutions have been accepted by employees and that they are functioning well, in that they are both cooperative and effective representatives of employees’ interests. Her results suggest that, in post-communist East Germany, there has occurred not only system integration, but also social integration. Frege’s conclusions about institutional stability, by implication, counsel optimism about the survival of the whole German ‘partnership’ model which, by many writers, has been regarded as endangered by developments in the East. One wonders, however, if her optimism might have been tempered if her study had focused more strongly on the ‘employer’ side where, arguably, the real danger to solidaristic institutions and the survival of an industry-focused wage bargaining system lies.

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CHRISTEL LANE

Cottons and Casuals: The Gendered Organisation of Labour in Time and Space
Miriam Glucksmann
sociologypress 2000, paper, £15.00, 188 pp., ISBN 1-903457-00-9, e-mail: sales@yps.ymn.co.uk

This, the very first book to be published by the new BSA imprint, makes a compelling case for the necessity of empirically grounded sociology and the integral relation between theory and concrete research. It also puts culture, diversity and multiplicity centre stage but, notwithstanding the postmodern discourse within which this is couched (too often and too defensively for my taste), it actually develops a more mainstream approach to social analysis in which the distinctiveness of sociological understanding lies precisely in its capacity to integrate structure and meaning, global and local and their relation to subjectivity and identity.

Its focus is the lives of working class women in North West England in the 1930s and pursues themes which Glucksmann first tackled so well in her study of women’s role in mass production and consumption in the inter-war period (Women Assemble), but this time in Lancashire where consumer goods industries were largely absent and where older, declining industries, along with high unemployment and poverty, made the connections between market and household and transformations in gender relations very different. Manchester and its adjacent towns, particularly Salford and Bolton, also provided crucial evidence of diversity within regions, for example in the pace and patterns of household modernisation and in the salience of local identity.

Diversity is captured most eloquently in Glucksmann’s rich account of the myriad differences between women weavers in the textile industry, the cottons of the title, and the casuals, those women who also worked virtually fulltime following marriage but in ‘little jobs’ and ‘all sorts’, differences shaped largely by local labour markets. Some of the most striking parts of the study deal with the contrasts between the cottons’ and casuals’ experience of employment and the implications this had for the ways in which they conceptualised as well as organised their lives—
and this extends to the very structure of memory itself. Weavers worked in relatively unsegregated and similarly paid employment alongside men, bought ready-made meals, clothes and laundry services as well as consumer durables. In addition they paid for child care undertaken by family or neighbours on a daily or weekly boarding basis. Glucksmann shows how these material circumstances and connections were related to a pride in their employment skills and earnings and a distinct public/private division, with clearly demarcated leisure and domestic labour shared (to some extent) with husbands as well as a sense of their own lives being marked by public events, both national and international. Casuals, however, took great pride in women’s domestic labour and its performance according to community norms which dictated the timing and standards to which all aspired. And, most important of all, it was they who were likely to sell their own labour services to women employed full-time, providing paid child care or washing alongside their self-provisioning. This interconnection between domestic and paid work sharply limited any ‘free time’ and underpinned their self-identity as principally wives and mothers as well as neighbours, not workers, and their memories of their own lives as marked by personal life course events such as marriage, births and deaths. These strikingly different temporal modalities are examined in terms of their implications for the degree of control women could exercise in their lives, but of equal significance is the extent to which relations between women workers were actually ones of structured inequality.

Sensitivity to these relational networks, these structured connections and ‘circuits’ linking the household and market economy, was given by the concept of the TSOL, the total social organisation of labour (Glucksmann 1995), but it is elaborated here with reference to temporal and spatial dimensions. Time and its construction are explored to great effect as constitutive of experience (and history) as much as product of the organisation of labour though the latter is undoubtedly critical. The significance of place is also scrutinised, particularly in its influence on the salience of local attachment compared to other ties and identities.

This textured analysis is an impressive achievement. The elaboration of the TSOL, its refinement through detailed empirical investigation, also seeks to link theory and the concrete intimately. The concept does capture especially well the interconnectedness of work, its multiple domains and levels (for example for individuals, for occupational groups or for labour markets), the ‘configurations’ which link production/consumption and changing patterns over the life course. But it does not of itself account for how or why the components of these relational networks assume the form they do in particular places, or at particular times or over time. The TSOL is not, as Glucksmann is at pains to stress, a theory but then, as such, its explanatory power is limited. And, as she also observes, the working lives of women were interconnected with those of men in crucial ways but there is no necessary relation between, for example, women’s and men’s casual employment, although its coincidence in the Salford labour market shaped the high level of gender segregation there and its temporal dimensions, just as women had more equal status to men in Bolton because men’s job opportunities here were largely limited to textiles. Yet the wider historical development of these labour markets is beyond the study’s remit.

Gender relations, too, are less its subject than are women. The book also explores the relationships of daughters with their mothers, and fathers, through her respondents’ narratives of their childhood and youth. Glucksmann discusses the importance of gendered and unequal child labour to the household and the TSOL, the ubiquity of ‘mixed’ and compound families, of lone parents and the atypicality of any nuclear form, along with the emergence of teenage culture, especially dance halls and cinemas, in more prosperous local economies of the region. She also discusses the very specific position of single women – the intergenerational reciprocities (and conflicts) in supporting parents and their distinctive experiences of employment.

The project’s emphasis on difference and inequalities, especially those between working class
women and between localities, emerged as much by default as by design. But Glucksmann’s telling and honest account of how her initial blueprint had to be amended in the face of a far more complex social reality than anticipated, will be of great value to students, as will her discussion of the research process and the practicalities of data analysis which are so often absent. The methodological chapter uses individual cases to show how the interviews challenged many of her preconceptions and how she was forced to recast what she was hearing (or the silences) the better to understand their meaning. She also dwells at some length on the issues that arise from the use of different sources ranging from oral testimony to surveys of the period such as Mass Observation, with its class-specific commentary on the supposed rationalities or otherwise of working class customs. She shows how conventional meanings of work, which equated it with full time employment, account for the apparently contradictory stories she was told about the prevalence of work for married women in different towns. And she shows too the limitations of census data in establishing patterns and change given the differences between 1930s’ and postwar constructs and hence classifications of women workers.

The circumstances of women textile workers were and remain central to all processes of industrialisation and they have rightly preoccupied feminism. Students at the turn of the millenium may at first sight find this project remote from their own experience of work. This would be a real pity, and not only because their knowledge of any social history is often dire. Unequal interdependencies between formal and informal economies and between women themselves are as important today as in the inter-war period. This much is clear from current research on care and household services – employment’s infrastructure of support – and the way that socio-economic change is rearticulating the work/life interface, the meanings of time and the commodification of domestic work (Yeandle 1999). Glucksmann’s study highlights vividly the need for particular and historically situated rather than abstracted accounts of these relations. Its findings are not always surprising, but it shows how commitment to locality and diversity requires more than postmodern rhetoric and how substantive research is needed to theorise the patterning, layering and structuring that constitute the complexity of ‘lived experience’.

There is, however, one especially ironic absence in a book which does so much to chart the topography of social relationships. There is not one map and this despite the emphasis on the importance of place and spatial relations. This absence is the more marked given the inclusion of contemporary photographs by Spender (but only three) which Glucksmann critically but sympathetically analyses as data. This monograph is beautifully produced, but if sociologypress is to cater imaginatively to a market currently ill-served by orthodox publishers’ reliance on textbooks, which is its stated and welcome philosophy, then it should consider relying less on the written text alone.

REFERENCES


University of Bristol

Jackie West
Women, Work and Inequality: The Challenge of Equal Pay in a Deregulated Labour Market

Jeanne Gregory, Rosemary Sales and Ariane Hegewisch (eds.)

This collection of chapters originates from a seminar organised in 1996 by the Gender Research Centre at Middlesex University and the Pay Equity Project. The seminar had a strategic focus, in that it constructed a fifteen-point programme of action for the eradication of labour market inequalities, with a particular focus on the issue of equal pay (although it is not clear what happened to this programme of action, if anything). The contributors to the ensuing collection include academics and legal practitioners, as well as representatives of campaigning organisations and trade unions. The geographical coverage is wide, with contributors from New Zealand, the USA and Canada, as well as the UK. Several chapters provide detailed contextual and historical information on policy development, with the contributions from Hoskyns and Sales and Gregory being particularly helpful in this respect.

The overall focus of the collection is the recognition that despite several decades of political and campaigning activity on the issue of equal pay, the pay gap remains obdurately wide. A major point made by the editors is that most industrialised countries are now faced with contradictory policy climates. European Union influences should mean that national governments have to strengthen their equality laws. Furthermore, trade unions have increased their commitment to the issue of equal pay. However, New Right policies have led to labour market deregulation, unlikely to favour tighter equal pay legislation. The introductory chapter promises the exploration of possible solutions to this clash of ideologies, and to a certain extent the collection does this, since many of the contributors imply that the role of trade unions is increasingly important in the face of the largely ineffective legislation, demonstrated by many contributors.

McDermott, writing about Canada and specifically about Ontario, is one of the few contributors to analyse the problems of assuming that trade unions will take on the fight in favour of pay equity. In an admirable chapter, which was for me the highlight of the collection, McDermott asks for clarity in relation to the goal of pay equity – is the aim to increase wage costs or to redistribute wages? In other words, will equalisation mean that men’s salary expectations must be kept on hold until women’s wages catch up? This is a crucial point, since trade unions are unlikely to accept this position, whilst employers are likely to favour it. In the absence of any likely agreement between these two parties on the aim of pay equity, the role of politicians becomes crucial.

For almost all the contributors, the advent of a deregulated form of market capitalism has provided a harsh climate from which to argue that pay equity should be brought about. One exception here is Bruegel. Whilst accepting that globalisation has increased inequalities within many countries and between countries, she shows that in the UK, and specifically for highly educated women in London, the ‘global city’ is the context where some narrowing of the pay gap has been seen. Making effective use of large-scale data, Bruegel’s chapter is stronger than some in this collection. It contains valuable empirical evidence and it also seeks to pick out differences among women, rather than referring to one homogenous group. There is some effort in the collection to look at within-country differences between women, notably in the chapters by Tacoli and Bhopal, but this could have been explored rather more widely. A specific section on issues of race and ethnicity is of course to be welcomed (and indeed the literature on women’s employment is generally quite weak in this respect), but issues of difference/diversity go wider than this, with social class, educational background and location being only some of the stratifying factors which
need to be taken into account. The empirical and theoretical challenge is to recognise the intersections between different variables, a point made by some contributors.

The use of large-scale data surfaces at various points in the collection, in addition to Bruegel’s chapter. For example, McDermott argues for the job evaluation techniques which are conventionally used to demonstrate ‘equal value’ in pay equity cases to be abandoned in favour of a ‘data analysis’ approach. She makes a strong case for the use of data analysis in order to establish actual examples of discriminatory pay, rather than engaging in lengthy, subjective and expensive debates about ‘whether women making soup and sandwiches in the kitchen were as valuable as men removing the rubbish bins from the kitchen’ (p. 149). A further example of large-scale data being used to good effect is found in the chapter by Allen and Moon, where academic expertise was used to produce statistical evidence to back up a particular legal argument. (However, in relation to this particular chapter, it was unclear to me why a contribution on unfair dismissal was included in a collection which was otherwise about pay equity.

This is a useful collection which covers international perspectives, ethnicity issues, the evaluation of equal pay law (including a fascinating, but worrying, insight into the work of an independent expert used in UK equal pay industrial tribunals) as well as examples of different strategies in the use of equal pay law. In this section, the role of the major UK union, UNISON, makes particularly optimistic reading. It will be helpful for many different constituencies, including lecturers and students in economics, sociology and social policy, as well as legal practitioners. There is unfortunately no indication that the book is going to be published in paperback and this will certainly diminish its usefulness.

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JUDITH GLOVER

The Roles of Evaluation for Vocational Education and Training: Plain Talk on the Field of Dreams

W. Norton Grubb and Paul Ryan


With an electoral slogan of ‘education, education, education’, and the statement by the prime minister that ‘education is the best economic policy we’ve got’, vocational education and training (VET) has acquired an even greater salience in UK policy debates than hitherto. Besides economic ills, such as lack of competitiveness and low productivity, VET is also seen as one of the main engines that can drive social inclusion and help tackle poverty and deprivation. Massive, centrally directed change in schools, coupled with further expansion in post-compulsory education have resulted, along with special measures, such as the suite of New Deal programmes, aimed at particular groups deemed to be disadvantaged within the labour market. Given the range and scope of this activity, and the beliefs that drive it, evaluation has followed on a similarly massive scale. For example, the New Deal programmes have already been the subject of at least twenty reports sponsored by the Employment Service and the Department for Social Security. Further evaluation work aimed at assessing outcomes and improving practice is already in train.

Against this backdrop, Grubb and Ryan offer a range of audiences an extremely useful, concise and stimulating overview of the uses and abuses of the evaluation of VET programmes. The
metaphor adopted by the authors as their central organising device is the film Field of Dreams, wherein the protagonist builds a baseball field in the midst of the American Midwest, with the conviction that the great baseball players of previous years will somehow show up if only he provides them with a suitable place to play. The film and its central motif – ‘If you build it, they will come’ – are an extended metaphor about faith in dreams and an approach that can be characterised as a supply-side belief. It is upon this field that Grubb and Ryan argue that ‘plain talk about the limits of supply-side views is necessary’ (p. 2) – hence the volume’s title.

Rather than trying to provide another how-to-do-it volume on the detailed methodology of evaluation techniques, what is offered here is a discussion about the uses and abuses of evaluation; the need for researchers to draw upon eclecticism and a broad range of evaluative approaches; and, perhaps most importantly of all, the problems of the interface between evaluation and policy. The authors dismiss the notion that the policy-making process will normally be a rational or simple one. As they are at pains to point out, experience in many developed countries indicates that the findings of evaluative research often do not have any impact on policy makers decisions if they are contrary to received wisdom or a predetermined ideological standpoint, or the findings are used selectively to support the relatively simplistic ways in which policy makers have chosen to frame and interpret complex problems.

This point is important and timely. Evidence-based policy making is an appealing notion and an admirable objective, but despite the Secretary of State for Education’s support, it remains highly problematic, not least because policy makers’ definitions of what constitutes evidence differs very substantially from what academics tend to be thinking of when they use the word. For example, a random anecdote told to a minister by a constituent about a training programme is often, to the minister, evidence which may carry equal, if not greater, weight than a detailed, painstaking cohort study of participants in the same programme.

One of the book’s most important points concerns the often neglected temporal dimension of evaluation. The pace of the modern political process demands rapid action and near instantaneous judgement. As a result, the recent history of UK VET is littered with the corpses of hastily conceived schemes, for example, youth credits, whose success was being trumpeted before even the pilot stage was fully up and running. Yet, as Grubb and Ryan underline, the true effectiveness or otherwise of some programmes can take years to show through, particularly in terms of their ability to provide lasting gains (in terms of higher wages or enhanced employability) for participants.

Although this book focuses on the evaluation of VET, in its coverage of the problems of integrating the findings of evaluative research into a politicised policy-making process it illuminates a much more general problem. The complexities of the social and economic problems VET policy is attempting to tackle can be replicated in many other areas of modern government – health, housing, and social deprivation. Issues of inter-connectedness and of systems failure abound in these fields. In an ideal world, this volume would be compulsory reading for all those who undertake, and, more importantly, commission and use evaluations of VET, whether policy makers or politicians. It should also be of considerable interest to students of the VET policy process, and to those with wider concerns with the construction of social policy formation.
The American State of Hawaii was the first state to have a Governor (in the 1980s) of Japanese descent and at the turn of the millennium about one quarter of the state’s population are Japanese Americans. They are not uniformly middle class and prosperous but they are certainly an established and comparatively well-placed group in Hawaii and California, the two states where Japanese Americans are numerous. It was not always thus.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, when Hawaii remained an independent kingdom prior to the American imperial takeover, Japanese had been brought to the islands as plantation labourers and by 1920 they were by far the largest group of fieldworkers. As Andrew Lind has observed, in his 1938 classic, Hawaii’s plantation labourers were not formally slaves but their conditions of work were slave-like in many respects. Physical beatings were common, earnings were extremely meagre, days of work were long hot and arduous, and freedom of movement was restricted. It has long been argued that solidarity among plantation workers was undermined by ethnic difference and that the plantation owners played on difference, and wage differentials, to strengthen their own hand. Duus’s book *The Japanese Conspiracy* demonstrates that nonetheless, by 1920, the plantation workers were capable of concerted action against the sugar factors, in a bitter struggle which had long-term consequences for both ethnic and class formations in Hawaiian society.

The great strength of Duus’s book is its enormous detail, its ability to use both Japanese and English language sources, its knowledge of Japanese homeland society, and its framing of the 1920 strike in a wider perspective on American radicalism of the period. It is hard to imagine that anything will supersede this book in the fine detail of the historical story. Perhaps most captivating is the story of the young men who came to Hawaii after spending their young life and education in Japan, especially those who were to become leaders in the 1920 strike. The US Bureau of Investigation held a file on ‘T. Tsutsumi’ who was described in 1921 as ‘one of the leaders of the Japanese Federation of Labour and is considered by Informants as a very dangerous agitator, being a graduate of the Imperial University at Tokio [mistake for Kyoto] … He is a very fluent speaker and very radical in his views’ (p. 28). The author has both referred to contemporary records and interviewed the present descendants of leading figures in the events of eighty years ago.

For the sociological taste the narrative history may read as under-interpreted. The strength of the Japanese community is impressive, from the Japanese language schools, the Buddhist and Shinto temples, to the Japanese Physicians’ Association who offered free treatment to workers during the strike. But the 1920 strike was also important as an index of growing class solidarity, the collaboration with Filipino workers being one of the earliest instances of breaking the mould of ethnic unionism. This is a fascinating book with so much to offer to the specialist in Hawaiian history and in the history of American unionism and labour struggles.

*University of Bristol*

STEVE FENTON
Taking Care of Men: Sexual Politics in the Public Mind
Anthony McMahon

Anthony McMahon has developed one of the first Australian courses on men and this is his first book. Much of the intention of the work is revealed in the preface in which he states that he is attempting to provide a materialist analysis of domestic labour by means of a consideration of both the academic and popular ideology that surrounds it. In addition, he states with some vehemence that what is missing is: ‘a serious recognition of the central role men’s material interests play in their motivation to defend the gendered status quo’ (p. vi). What is immediately apparent, and then amply demonstrated throughout, is that this work is as much concerned with political polemic as it is with an informed academic analysis of exactly what is happening to the domestic division of labour and men’s involvement in it.

The introduction sets this up clearly, taking the example of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, as its starting point. Picking up on the media presentation of Prince Charles’ plight as a lone parent and the impact this has on perceptions of the ‘feminisation’ of his masculinity, McMahon contrasts this sharply with the academic debate concerning the double burden faced by working women as wives and mothers as well as employees. He draws very heavily here on the work of Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard within the framework of feminist materialism. The gloomy conclusion is that: ‘The social conversation about men and the sexual-political issue of domestic work omits the most significant fact about male resistance to change – that it suits men’ (p. 8).

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, entitled ‘The interests of men’, focuses on a primarily empirical review of popular and academic evidence concerning the domestic division of labour. The second part, ‘The revolving door’, critiques various optimistic accounts of changes in the division of labour and is the most sustained part of the work. The third part, called ‘The blocked door’, provides some analysis of theories of men’s resistance to change.

Chapter one is an examination of the empirical evidence concerning the current state of the domestic division of labour. The overall conclusion is that women still conduct the vast majority of domestic work in terms of household chores and child care whilst the role of men remains primarily one of ‘helping out’. Variations according to such factors as class and race are less significant than the continuities as far as McMahon is concerned. The role of women in providing networks of support for each other, paid and unpaid, is also highlighted. In addition, men are also seen to feign incompetence and guard their leisure time as means of resistance and as part of the overall maintenance of their ‘interests’. McMahon also critiques the work of Laclau and Mouffe and asserts that a historical analysis of men’s ‘interests’ in the maintenance of patriarchal relations is required. This is complemented by chapter two which provides a feminist materialist account of work and production and which seeks to incorporate the analysis of domestic labour into a wider understanding of work per se. The apparent ‘collapse’ of the domestic labour debate due to the invocation of increasingly psychoanalytic explanations for gender inequalities is heavily criticised and the work of Heidi Hartmann as well as Delphy and Leonard is strongly supported.

Part one therefore constitutes a useful, if rather sketchy at times, overview of prevailing literatures concerning domestic labour. More problematically, though, this is often muddled into a wider debate concerning populist accounts of men’s increasing involvement at home. So much so that widely differing empirical sources are not separated out during the analysis, whilst the work of such major academics as Michelle Barrett or Zygmunt Bauman is often dismissed in no more than one or two sentences.
Part two seeks to pull apart the ‘revolving door’ thesis where women’s entry into the paid workforce is seen to be complemented by men’s increased contribution to domestic labour at home. Chapter three therefore seeks to deconstruct such rhetoric as a kind of false optimism that maintains the status quo through an ideology of slow but gradual change. Whilst the critique of the symmetrical family model is appropriate there remains a lack of sensitivity to models of audience reception or interpretation concerning more populist or media accounts. This is particularly clear in chapter four which tackles media portrayals of the nurturant ‘new man’ with examples drawn from the press, magazines and Hollywood films such as *Three Men And A Baby*. In each case the medium itself remains wholly unproblematised and subject to an overriding dismissal as conservative rhetoric.

Academic attention to the phenomenon of the ‘new man’, and his younger brother the ‘new lad’, is more sophisticated and useful, drawing on the work of such authors as Rowena Chapman and Barbara Ehrenreich. Interestingly, the ‘new lad’ is seen precisely as an attempt to reconcile the tension of the wimpish and narcissistic (or materialist) elements of the ‘new man’. Chapter five develops this theme further through an analysis of the ‘new father’ as precisely a kind of new, and non-wimpish, masculinity. Consequently, part two provides a useful and increasingly interesting critique of accounts of primarily over-optimistic perspectives on gender inequities in child care and domestic work. The difficulty is that this remains driven via a polemical and often sketchy dismissal of any and every counter perspective.

Part three is potentially the most interesting area yet also the one which tends to be haziest. It focuses upon explanations for men’s resistance to greater involvement in domestic work and child care and addresses this question from two key angles. In chapter six, the emphasis is placed upon more structural explanations for resistance such as the objections of women themselves to greater involvement of their partners in the home, blaming ‘society’, and the sex role ‘system’ all of which McMahon dismisses. The very real difficulties of inequities in state provision for fathers, lack of sympathy from employers, and limited paternity leave are also discarded as ‘excuses’ according to the fact that take-up rates for provision when it exists are rather low. What all this then hinges on are more psychoanalytic explanations, discussed more fully in the final chapter, which McMahon similarly dismisses as: ‘conservative, since attention is directed away from interested male practices and towards a fetishised personality’ (p. 193). The work of Nancy Chodorow and Brian Easlea is particularly vilified whilst that of Delphy and Leonard is resurrected once again. The short conclusion simply reiterates his position that notions of progress whether in theory or practice are simply illusory.

In summary, McMahon’s book provides a useful if very critical review of a wide range of literatures concerning masculinity and domestic labour, whether as child care or housework. However, the heavy-handedness of the analysis which retreats into a rather out-of-date resurrection of feminist materialism provides little which is original. It also begs many questions concerning areas where change may be taking place or is worthy of empirical investigation such as in households where gender roles are reversed, lone fathers, or gay and lesbian variants, let alone the rise of the professional and affluent childless couple employing a cleaner, eating out most of the time and throwing money at everything else.

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TIM EDWARDS
This book is about the efforts of working-class people in small town America to survive economic restructuring. Nelson Smith argue that loss of stable employment is now a systemic feature of the ‘new’ economy in the United States and that an increasing number of American lives are being marked by ‘bad’ jobs. The concern at the heart of their book is with the consequences of ‘bad’ jobs. By taking the household as the unit of analysis, they show that the ways people sustain themselves go beyond the individual wage, but are, paradoxically, intimately associated with waged work. Women and men in households dependent upon ‘bad’ jobs are the ones who find it hardest to participate in other activities necessary for economic survival.

It has been claimed that everyone in the United States knows the joke ‘millions of jobs created and I’ve got four of them’ (Aronowitz et al., 1998: 35). Nelson and Smith document and analyse, from original survey data and in-depth interviews, the responses of people trying to survive under changing economic conditions in ‘Coolidge County’ (a fictitious name for a real county in the state of Vermont). Households in Coolidge are busy places, where hard work and self-sufficiency are valued. Yet closer examination shows that not all are busy in the same way. Differences between the households’ ability to survive and prosper emanated from one thing alone. That was the presence, or lack of, at least one household member with a ‘good’ job.

A good job is full-time and long term, with a regular pay cheque, a pension, holiday entitlement and health insurance. A ‘bad’ job lacks those benefits. So, for example, when one spouse has a bad job, the other may fail to maintain a foothold in the labour market at all because only good jobs ensure sick leave and paid holidays, which can be used to cover unexpected illness within the family. Decisions about who should work and how much do not always follow economic logic, however. Men in bad-job households cling to the assertion of their masculine status as family breadwinner, sometimes in defiance of the actual income earning opportunities available to them and their wives in present-day Vermont.

‘Moonlight in Vermont – or starve’ is a bumper sticker which plays on the romantic image of the region. A popular assumption about small town life in America is that a wealth of opportunities exist for income earning outside the formal labour market and for self-provisioning (e.g. growing vegetables, gathering wood, hunting). The authors inform us that they began their research with Coolidge households in the belief that informal work, barter, other non-monetary exchange and self-provisioning would indeed be major resources for those whose participation in waged work was less than optimal. They found that this was not true, because households dependent on bad jobs are characteristically unable to develop tactics that might supplement low wages. In other words, participation in extra income earning and self-provisioning builds upon employment, and the more employment the better, as Phal (1984) found in an earlier British study.

It is often asserted that self-employment is highly valued in the United States, and, moreover, that the economic vitality of other countries would be enhanced if only that entrepreneurial spirit could be imported. The Coolidge study exposes the shallowness of that argument. Many people in Coolidge reported aspirations to turn some form of ‘side’ work into full-time self-employment. In good-job households this was often possible, because the good job holder’s steady wage, and good credit rating, could underwrite a new enterprise. The Coolidge data reveals that self-employment almost never provided an escape route from the struggles of a bad-job household. In the short concluding chapter Nelson and Smith sum up this aspect of their findings:
The poverty of bad jobs is deeper and more devastating than that created by low wages alone, and self employment – even if it carries with it obvious personal satisfactions – cannot do the trick. (p. 185)

The book contains much to interest the readership of *Work Employment & Society*. It provides an insightful account of transformations in the institutions of work, the uneven distribution of gains and losses in midst of prosperity, and how that unevenness is becoming intensified. Much of the evidence in this book is drawn from in-depth interviews which are quoted at length throughout the text. There is also a thorough and thoughtful methodological appendix. There, the expected and necessary discussions of sample selection, sources of bias and classification of data are enriched with a frank account of the moral dilemmas and sheer messiness of doing research with households.

**REFERENCES**


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**SUSAN BAINES**

**Making Sense of Prostitution**  

**Joanna Phoenix**  


*Making Sense of Prostitution* explores and analyses certain women’s involvement in prostitution. The book provides a fascinating account of the author’s research into the lives of twenty-one women working as prostitutes in ‘mid-city’. The women’s narratives provide compelling accounts of the complexity of their lived relations as workers, mothers, lovers, and the ‘paradoxical ways in which they make sense of their involvement in prostitution’ (p. 189). The author hopes that her analysis (drawing upon Foucault), will ‘go some way towards displacing the “either/or” analyses and debates’ of prostitutes as victims/survivors or ordinary women/bad-criminal women. Moreover, ‘by laying bare the social meanings of engagement in prostitution’ she seeks to show that ‘prostitutes are not simply victims or survivors and are not simply coerced into or choose to engage in prostitution’ (p. 188). Rather, through a deconstruction of the narratives of the prostitute women interviewed, the author concludes that ‘prostitute women are sustained within prostitution because engagement in prostitution comes to make sense’ (p. 185). The paradoxes ascribed to their involvement are accommodated by the women through the construction of a ‘prostitute-identity’, constituted within specific and shifting sets of meanings around men, money, normality and abnormality (see chapter 6).

The notion of a ‘prostitute-identity’ is constituted by the women thinking of themselves as both workers – ‘rational economic agents’ (p. 186) and commodified bodies (that is to say bodies for rent/vaginas for rent); businesswomen *and* loving partners; victims (particularly of male violence) *and* survivors (negotiating and surviving the risks involved in their dealings with men). I understand the author’s concept of ‘prostitute-identity’ to be fluid, not fixed, and ultimately emerging in the gaps and spaces between binary descriptions and definitions offered by the women and re-presented through the author’s analysis.
The book is separated into two parts. Part one deals with some of the available literature on prostitution, socio-legal contexts to prostitution rooted in Wolfenden (1957) and particular Sexual and Street Offences Acts, and academic discourses emerging from empirical research and theoretical analyses. Part two presents the author’s analysis of the women’s narratives, focusing upon: the risks and contradictions involved; and men, violence and the concept of ‘prostitute-identity’, within the symbolic landscapes that underpin the social and material circumstances through which women live out their lives. The author’s aim of making sense of the women’s involvement in prostitution centres upon their negotiating and accommodating in subjectively meaningful ways paradoxes such as prostitution as both enabling and threatening/dangerous; men as potential income, lovers, and abusers.

The section on violence is very thorough, well researched and argued and adds a great deal to the available literature on violence against women working as prostitutes. It is vital that we respond to the issue of victimisation and support for women seeking to leave prostitution and/or dangerous men. The fact that some refuges do not offer refuge to women involved in prostitution needs to be explored and addressed as a matter of urgency. One response taken by some grass roots agencies is to develop networks of safe houses for women escaping violent partners and/or prostitution. Often the police can be instrumental in helping women to make the first move as indicated in chapter four. The contradictions involved in seeking help from police officers are clear. Women talk of their experiences of being forced to have sex with police officers, that is to say raped, and in one case a woman was raped so brutally she miscarried in the officer’s car (see p. 122). The descriptions highlight the sometimes dangerous, precarious and mostly complex relationships between vice or anti-vice policing and the women involved in prostitution.

In chapter three ‘Ways of talking about prostitutes and prostitution’ I would have liked to see a section examining feminist responses to prostitution. The academic explanatory models the author focuses on to make sense of women’s involvement include: the gender and male violence model; the economic position and poverty model; the social dislocation and criminal subculture model; and the pathological model. My experience has been that feminist responses have delivered some of the most creative, women centred responses to the complexities involved in women’s lives, including recommendations for policy, largely because feminism(s) is not just an intellectual discourse but a practice and a politics. The work of Susan Edward’s for example, in this area (conducted for over twelve years) could have been woven into the analysis of the ways in which the women ‘construct their bodies as distinct and separate from themselves’ (p. 133). Edward’s ‘Selling the body, keeping the soul’ subtitled ‘Sexuality, power and theories and realities of prostitution’ is a useful text because it interweaves subjective experience of commodified bodies, critical legal, and feminist analyses. Moreover, on a personal note, I was referenced within the context of seeing prostitution as nothing more or less than selling sex. This is simply not the case as any reading of my published works (alone and with women involved in prostitution) over the last nine years will show. Challenging stereotypes, and fixed categories, working with women in women centred ways including developing policy through feminist praxis, and multi-agency working are some of the ways that feminist work has highlighted and resisted the binaries used to define, re-present and aestheticise ‘prostitutes’ and prostitution in western society.

Post-structuralist discourse, upon which the author’s work is premised, offers a great deal to facilitate better understanding of our social worlds. Problematising categories ensures reflexivity and a resistance to fixity, an openness to multiple realities, and the many ways we negotiate structural and psychic practices and processes. The approach taken in the book provides rich accounts of experience and careful analysis of these accounts.

There is a contradiction in the analysis between the methodology used (resisting fixed categories) and the fact that the author defines the women as ‘prostitute women’ in the text.
therefore, in one sense, fixing their identity. On the other hand, the author’s analysis focuses very clearly upon the contradictions and paradoxes in their lives as mother, lovers, and workers, thus challenging this fixity. As we know from media re-presentations of prostitution, the clients of ‘prostitutes’ have no such fixed identity—their identity is temporal within the zones of prostitution, in their dealings with the police and courts in the judicial process, and in media reports. Clients and punters are labelled only during the time-space of their involvement with women selling sex.

In summary, the book will be an excellent text for use with undergraduates, particularly across the disciplines of sociology and criminology; and will also be a useful text to inform research in the area. This book undoubtedly adds a great deal to the available literature in helping readers to make sense of prostitution, to understand the sexual, social inequalities and the very real risks that women negotiate in their experiences of prostitution, men, and violence. It also raises issues and questions for further research and analysis. I would like to see a follow up book by the author on the men involved with these particular women—especially the ‘ponces’ and ‘boyfriends’ that emerge in part two. I wanted to know: how would they appear through the author’s lens (post-structuralist analysis of discourse); what sense would men such as ‘Dagger’ (pp. 154 and 163), ‘Shiner’ (p. 117), ‘Smasher’ (p. 153), ‘Fabulous’ (p. 161), ‘Krypton’ (p. 139) and ‘Freddy’ (p. 179) make of their involvement/roles in prostitution and with ‘prostitutes’ (as lovers, businessmen, abusers); and how would they articulate the undeniably complex social, sexual, material and emotional processes involved. I look forward to reading more of the author’s work.

REFERENCE

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Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry
Samita Sen

One of the more persistent challenges faced by feminist historians is to foreground women as subjects, and gender as an analytical category within the practice of labour historiography. Even when women are visible, they are usually presented as marginal to class politics; consequently the story of the working class continues to be overwhelmingly the story of male workers. Labour historiography in India is no exception to this general tendency. Scholars have mostly assumed that women play an insignificant role in the formation of the working-class in India. They also typically assume that the experience of being part of the working class is homogenous across gender differences.

Samita Sen’s book begins by questioning these gender-blind assumptions. Her main concern in this work on women workers in the jute industry in late colonial Bengal is to investigate ways in which the ‘experience of being “working class” [for women is] different from that of their male colleagues’ (p. 2). Through a series of interrelated chapters, in which she deftly handles an
impressive volume of historical research, Sen demonstrates how gender ideologies work in tandem with shifts within the economy to simultaneously limit women’s access to paid work, and make their valuable, but unpaid labour within the household invisible. These processes, in turn, lead to the construction of only wage work as ‘productive labour’ and, by implication, the worker as a predominantly male category.

The early chapters of the book document the patterns of labour migration to the jute mill belt around Calcutta, and their impact on women’s work in both rural and urban areas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Sen points out, ‘the strategies of survival [of a working-class household typically] straddled the village and the city’ (p. 3). Men typically migrated to the city in search of wage work, while women and children stayed behind in the village with an increased workload. Focusing on women’s work allows Sen to highlight this crucial link between the rural and urban sectors, with the former usually subsidising the latter. Sen’s discussion here is clearly related to the articulation of different modes of production argument that was first elaborated by Rosa Luxemburg, and is now commonsensical within the filed of women and development. Sen’s account could gain much in terms of clarity from a systematic engagement with the theoretical insights of this literature which highlights the continued importance of subsistence/household sectors to the growth and sustenance of capitalism, especially in the periphery.

Perhaps the more impressive manoeuvre in this book is the explicit connection the author draws between the devaluing of women’s work—paid or unpaid—and the rise in the practices of dowry child marriage, purdah (seclusion of women), and the growing opposition to widow remarriages in late colonial Bengal. As Sen discusses, gender ideologies emphasised the value of domesticity and motherhood, thus undermining women’s capacity to earn a living. Even when women had access to paid work, they were likely to be concentrated in ill-paid jobs since they were supposed to be ‘unskilled labour’. What is more, when the jute industry began rationalising, women workers were the first to be dispensed with. Women’s worth, thus, came to turn increasingly on their reproductive rather than productive capabilities, leading to a shift from the practice of giving bride-price to the natal family in recognition of the loss of her labour, to paying dowry to the conjugal family to defray future costs of maintaining her.

According to Sen, this devaluing of poor-women’s labour also underpinned the upper-middle-class’s ability to withdraw their women from ‘visible work’ outside the domestic sphere, since they could now afford hired help (p. 63). And this ability in turn facilitated the bhadrolok’s efforts to demarcate themselves from the chotolok (the poor), and the refinement and chastity of the bhadramahila from the ‘unbridled sexuality of plebeian women’ (p. 178). As ‘poverty, manual work outside the home and sexual promiscuity’ (p. 178) came to be intimately connected in the minds of the elite, working women found themselves simultaneously devalued as workers because of their gender, and as women because of their visible labour. Sen’s argument in this regard once again distils for us the relational nature of elite and subaltern identities, and the constitutive role played by gender in forging them.

At the end of the book, Sen turns to the problems of adequately ‘reconstructing’ the ‘political roles’ of women workers, and ‘recovering’ their ‘diverse concerns’ (p. 214). As she points out, focusing on women’s participation in strikes as the ‘only measure of their class identity’ blinds historians to the ‘distinctive forms of protest’ (p. 216) deployed by women to express their specific demands. In fact, spontaneous walkouts, and other modes of protest outside the context of union organisation, or the use of ‘unconventional weapons like heavy ornaments or broomsticks’ (p. 236) by women are typically seen as irrational, and disruptive of working-class solidarity.

Sen’s efforts in writing a different history of working-class politics can be read profitably with Joan W. Scott’s book *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), in which Scott grapples
with the difficulties of constructing a feminist labour history, given the gendered constructions underlying the universalised definition of class. Sen’s own work goes a long way in questioning gender blindness within conventional labour historiography in India. It is unfortunate that her many valuable insights and the theoretical implications of her research remain somewhat buried in thick description.

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