

***Earning and Caring in Canadian Families.***

Roderic Beaujot. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000; 426 pages; tables, figures, boxes; ISBN 1-55111-166-7; \$29.95.

***Women, Work and Social Rights: Canada in Historical and Comparative Perspective.***

Cecilia M. Benoit. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Allyn Bacon, 2000; vii + 184 pages; tables and figures; ISBN 0-13-022049-3; \$33.95.

***Women's Organizing and Public Policy in Canada and Sweden.***

Linda Briskin and Mona Eliasson, Editors. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999; xxi + 384 pages; ISBN 0-7735-1855-X (bound); ISBN 0-7735-1891-6 (pbk); \$65.00.

This trio of books has very different goals, presentation, style, emphases and conclusions. *Earning and Caring in Canadian Families* is a lengthy single-authored overview of how caring and earning take place and have changed in Canadian families. Its focus is on men's and women's changing roles. It concludes that gender and caring/earning have become, or perhaps should become, unlinked, with important implications for policy. If women and men are, or are thought to be, now more equally involved in earning and in caring, then policies that "risk insure" women for caring over earning could, the book argues, be dispensed with in favour of more gender neutral policies. *Women, Work and Social Rights*, also single-authored, sets as its goal comparisons of women's work situations, both paid and unpaid, and women's access to social rights across time and place, and how these link. The focus again is largely on Canada, with windows on the United States and Sweden for comparative contextualization. Key to this book's intellectual structure and organisational backbone is its questioning stance: on the meanings of work; on historical myths about gender and work; on the relation of women's economic independence to socio-political recognition of their continuing role in unpaid caring work; and on the inevitability of both capitalism and patriarchy for structuring women's work and social rights. *Women's Organizing and Public Policy...* is a large-scale systematic comparative study of

women's political and social action groups in relation to public policy in Canada and Sweden. It is an edited collection, nearly every chapter of which is co-authored by a Swedish and a Canadian feminist analyst, expert in that subject.

*Earning and Caring...* examines the meshing of earning and caring in Canadian society, with glimpses of how this occurs in the social policy contexts of other countries such as Sweden. The book takes a macro lens to examining earning and caring in contrast to a life-course or micro perspective. The former is seen by the author as too often taken and prescriptive of normative lives. The latter is not seen as incorporating broad social and structural changes that impinge on families. The book is organised into eight chapters, preceded by an introduction: overviewing the study of families; looking at gender; family change; paid work; unpaid work; childbearing and reproduction; children and youth; and policy implications. The book's strength is its extensive analyses of Canadian data, and of the links between the private and public spheres of work and family.

*Women, Work and Social Rights...* sets out to refine recent feminist critiques of the meaning of work by analysing historical and cross-national trends. Light is shone particularly on Canada, Sweden and the United States as Benoit reveals that women's inequality in work has not been universal, and that deep differences exist across capitalist countries in the ways in which paid work and family life co-exist for women, and in the social rights women have achieved. Key to this book's findings is its strong historical stance. For example, Benoit traces the comparative advantage of Swedish women relative to American and Canadian, not to the typical explanation of the more beneficent twentieth-century Swedish welfare state, but to the historically advantaged Swedish peasantry going back to the sixteenth century. This created a politics, existent today, that incrementally provided women rights, but maintained the entrenched concept of separate gender spheres. The advent then of the welfare state in the 1930s in Sweden enabled women more access to economic independence and extensive women-friendly social rights. The paradox is underlined in this book that national governments of Canada, Sweden and the US make women's social rights available at the same time as they do less than they could to facilitate the

realisation of those rights.

*Women's Organizing and Public Policy...* analyses women's action groups in relation to public policy in three parts: national boundaries under challenge, organising contexts, and domestic policy. The ten chapters plus overview introductory chapter set out to analyse and compare the gender implications of key public policy areas and to examine how women in Canada and Sweden organise to challenge and reconstruct these policies. Policy areas addressed include a wider than usual range: trade and regional integration, immigration, health, education, violence, sexuality and child care. Key to the volume's framework and its success is the editors' strong sense of women's agency - that women can, and do, make policy, even in emerging arenas not typically the focus of women's organising such as regional integration and immigration. This volume peels back the shibboleths held about both Canada and Sweden, with the result that Canadian and Swedish authors see afresh their own country and the other country. This makes for a journey of discovery, of transiting the unknown, for the reader.

Comparing these volumes is challenging, given their contrasting approaches, content, and styles. All are empirically based but the data differ. In Beaujot, the analysis is heavy with data, largely from Statistics Canada's various censuses and surveys. Tables and figures abound. At times, the analysis may be difficult to follow for someone not experienced in reading demographic articles. Where this book is weakest, in policy discussions, the Benoit and the Briskin/Eliasson books have greatest strength. There seems to be a chasm between the careful analysis in the Beaujot book and its policy discussion. While true from the evidence provided that both women and men in Canada are now both engaged in earning and in caring, to differing degrees, it is a stretch to argue that that participation is sufficiently equal as to merit abandonment of social policies that insulate women from breakdowns in family supports.

The data analysed by Benoit are historical or policy-related. Where historical or full policy data are scant or non-existent, Benoit cleverly pieces together with aplomb and imagination what can be known to tell the story, as the example above about sixteenth-century Sweden reveals. This leads to surprises as she makes the reader come to doubt

explanations of changes in women's work and women's rights that rely on globalization or post-Fordism. This is in contrast to Beaujot's volume, which relies more uncritically on these explanations.

Data in the Briskin/Eliasson volume are wider and more diverse. In comparing Canada and Sweden only, there is decidedly more depth as well as more breadth than in either of the other two. An example of depth comes from the summary introduction, which notes the struggles the authors had before reaching agreement on the meanings of basic concepts such as state, civil society, community, family, and volunteerism: these organizational forms are different in the two countries. An example of breadth is the chapter by Cameron and Gonas on women's organising in relation to NAFTA and the EU. Feminists in both countries were concerned about the role of the state in these regional integration pacts in provision of social services and in labour market regulation. Yet in Sweden, that organising took place within established mixed-gender political parties, while in Canada, intervention came principally from women's groups.

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***Interactive Identities: Jewish Women in New Zealand.*** Livia Kathe Wittman. Palmerston: Dunmore Press, 1998; 160 pages, ISBN 0-86469-315-X; \$24.95.

***Woman, Body, and Desire in Post-Colonial India: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality.*** Jyoti Puri. London: Routledge, 1999; 234 pages, ISBN 0-415-921287; \$26.99.

***The Mountain is Moving: Japanese Women's Lives.*** Patricia Morley. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999; 226 pages, ISBN 9-780774-806765; \$39.95.

All three of these texts engage with the issues of feminism and nationalism. While the first considers women in New Zealand, the second women in India, and the third women in Japan, they share a common assumption that feminist and