

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

national identities are mutually constitutive. All three authors situate women as historical and political subjects while analyzing, to varying degrees, the fluidity between national and feminist identities and maintaining a belief in the possibility of feminist transformations.

Wittman's *Interactive Identities* explores, through a post-modern, feminist analytic lens, the identities of Jewish women living in Aotaroa/New Zealand. Based on secondary analysis of interview data with forty-eight women, Wittman argues that a "collective gendered identity" (152) exists for Jewish women in New Zealand. This collective identity, she contends, is positioned outside of the context of the official government policy of the bicultural nation; of two peoples, with two histories and two languages - Maori (indigenous peoples) and Pakeha, (European descents who colonized New Zealand; literally "stranger" in Maori). Based on the positioning of this collective identity as outside of the context of biculturalism, Wittman contends that Jewish women in New Zealand understand the "contingent nature of social identities as a prescription for archaic role performance" and reject "essentialist identity claims" (10).

Wittman contributes to a relatively sparse literature about Jewish women in New Zealand; includes Jewish women in New Zealand among feminist, scholarly considerations; and allows Jewish women, through personal accounts, to expose the homophobia and heterosexist attitudes that prevail in the Jewish community in Aotaroa/New Zealand.

Wittman's argument in *Interactive Identities*, however, is not entirely convincing. While interesting, it is driven primarily by theory and is less than solidly based in the interview data. Wittman's assertion that identities are always conditional and cannot be constructed based on essentialist claims is undermined by her clear assertion that a single, gendered, collective identity, albeit historically situated, exists for Jewish women in New Zealand. Furthermore, there is too little evidence provided to persuade the reader of Wittman's interpretation of the data. Wittman interprets Jewish women's rejection of the official policy of biculturalism as a recognition that it cannot account for the interactive and contingent nature of their religious, ethnic, cultural and

gendered identities. Another interpretation, equally plausible and supported by the data, but not considered by Wittman, is that Jewish women reject the official policy of biculturalism because it has not translated into practice, and has led to little social and economic improvement for Maori in New Zealand.

Wittman laments that the women interviewed do not exhibit a familiarity with contemporary feminist theory, and in particular French feminist theorists, who, she argues, offer "new ways of conceptualizing ourselves and the world we live in" (110). In considering the interactions between feminism and national identity in Aotaroa/New Zealand, she asks "how far the feminist analyses of gender identities has penetrated the understanding of these Jewish women of themselves as socially positioned" (111). Responses are predictably diverse. They range from engagement ("I have constant battles...challenging the rabbi about the status of women"), to ambivalence ("it's not been an issue with me"), to resistance ("I am not over to the lunatic left of lesbian society.") The question that arises is this: is it necessary that Jewish women in Aotaroa/New Zealand find "new ways of conceptualizing themselves" and does postmodern, feminist theory provide the only possible route through which to do so?

Jyoti Puri's *Women, Body and Desire in Post-Colonial India* successfully integrates interview data with a sophisticated and compelling theoretical analysis that engages directly with the topic of feminism and national identities. Puri presents a sociological analysis, through a feminist, post-colonial lens, of body and desire in contemporary India. Based on primary interview data with 54 middle- and upper-middle class women in two large Indian cities, Puri argues that gender, sexual and national identities are unstable processes, "sustained and disrupted through the mundane, intricate acts of [women's] everyday lives" (21). Puri cogently demonstrates that sex and gender are not only categories used to regulate women's everyday behaviours, but that they are also categories that are deployed to construct national and nationalist identities.

Throughout the text Puri analyzes state-sponsored materials, produced by the Family Planning Association of India, for the ways that

they produce and reproduce particular constructions of womanhood. These constructions are naturalized as uniquely appropriate for Indian women and are juxtaposed against an abstract notion of Western women. This is the case not only for sexual behaviours (read sexual respectability), but also for menstruation, marriage, motherhood and heterosexual desire. In one chapter Puri considers "queer narratives" but because the subject of analysis in this chapter is Trikone, "the oldest surviving queer South East organization" (163) based in the United States, her analysis is not located in the interview data or in an exclusively Indian context.

Puri is interested in uncovering the multiple ways that middle- and upper-middle class Indian women challenge and conform to essentialised understandings of womanhood, Indianness and Indian womanhood. Although not explicitly stated, Puri is equally interested in countering Western, anthropological accounts of Indian women as "Other" with regard to topics such as menstruation and preference for sons.

Limitations in Puri's text are few, although her assertion that a connection beyond national discourses, to transnational discourses, is not demonstrated. In a chapter on marriage and motherhood it is avoided altogether: "I refrain from commenting here on the intersection of more wide-ranging transnational cultural discourses" (101). Yet this area presents fruitful territory for future examination. Another limitation is that Puri does not consider the possibility of intersections between India and the West as one dimension of the transnational. This should be considered, as it is apparent from the interview narratives that some of the women have resided in the West.

Patricia Morley's *The Mountain is Moving* is situated in contemporary Japan. Morley draws on three data sources: interviews with Japanese women writers; secondary sources such as Japanese, English language newspapers; and writings by contemporary Japanese women writers, as read in English translation "as a means of understanding how women perceive their own lives" (x). She integrates these into an account that argues "[I]f the mountain is male resistance and patriarchal traditions, the lava of [Japanese] women's anger and dissatisfaction is flowing in the 1990s" (177).

*The Mountain is Moving* has three

strengths. First and foremost, it paints an optimistic picture of women's struggles for equality, one that has momentum as its defining characteristic. Second, it provides an introduction to Japanese culture and tradition and briefly outlines the position of women within Japanese social institutions, such as education, unpaid labour and the paid labour force. Third, it serves as a useful guide to Japanese women's writing available in English translation.

Its central weakness is the homogenous categorization of Japanese women - a conformity that is without the nuance of the postmodern and post-colonial theoretical perspectives employed by Wittman and Puri. In *The Mountain is Moving*, the monolithic category "Japanese women" is rarely interrogated. Ironically, this tendency parallels a homogenization that Morley observes and soundly criticizes in Japanese society. Morley highlights Japanese women writers who are generally from privileged backgrounds with access to high levels of education. Japan's female clerical and factory workers and women who are members of groups marginalized for reasons other than and including socio-economic status are relegated to the background.

Morley refers to women's deviations from the conformist nature of Japanese society, particularly through their writing, as individual acts of "independence." This creates a palpable tension in the text between conformity, which according to Morley affects Japanese women only detrimentally, and esteemed notions of the individual and individualism, grounded in liberal thought and liberal feminism. It is easy to surmise what might be overlooked in Morley's veneration of the individual. One crucial aspect missing from *The Mountain is Moving* is a consideration of the varieties of Japanese women's collective, feminist organizing. One chapter, subtitled "Empowerment Through Working Together," considers the actions of women organizing as housewives and mothers around environmental issues and peace-building initiatives. However, there is a less than satisfactory examination of women's participation in a variety of equity-seeking organizations in Japan. For instance, the reader learns little about the affiliations of the five to six thousand Japanese women (presumably from many different organizations) who participated in the NGO Forum at the United

Nations Fourth World Conference on Women.

Morley's *The Mountain is Moving* is written in accessible language and is suitable for undergraduate students in women's studies, English and those with an interest in feminism and literary traditions. The language in Wittman's *Interactive Identities* and Puri's *Women, Body and Desire in Post-Colonial India* will be less accessible to undergraduate students in women's studies and sociology. However, these two texts will provide graduate students with an understanding of how postmodern and post-colonial theoretical analyses inform accounts that examine the intersections of feminist and national identities.

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***At My Mother's Feet: Stories of Muslim Women***, Sadia Zaman (ed.) for the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Kingston, Ontario: Quarry Women's Books, 1999; illustrations; 120 pages; ISBN 1-55082-263-2; \$14.95.

***Reading Rights: A Woman's Guide to the Law in Canada***, Rahat Kurd for The Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Kingston, Ontario: Quarry Women's Books, 1999; illustrations; 93 pages; ISBN 1-55082-262-4; \$12.95.

Despite growing interests in scholarly and popular writings about Islam and gender, materials that give prominence to the voices of women, rather than to the undeniable discriminatory gender practices in Islamic societies, are still few in number. In recent years, this glaring absence has been addressed to a certain extent by academic and scholarly publications. But publications about the subject for the general reader, including media reports, are predominantly self-congratulatory and stereotypical accounts of the exotic "Muslim woman," who is "kept" in the jealously guarded confines of the husband's home. The public presence and activity of the "Muslim woman," when observed and reported, often has the undertone of an unexpected circumstance. *Not Without My Daughter* (Mahmoody 1987) and *Nine Parts of Desire* (Brooks 1995) are among several

examples which work to fuel everyday racism against the Muslim diaspora in the West. Such publications obscure the profound heterogeneity of peoples from Muslim societies within or without the Middle East and their differing understanding and interpretations of Islam(s) and Shari'a, particularly on issues of women's rights. Worse, they conceal the humanity of Muslim women and particularly, their remarkable resistance against male-serving gendered values and laws in Islamic societies.

*At My Mother's Feet* counters the dominant trend. It is a most welcome contribution to the existing literature about Muslim women, particularly because Muslim women speak for themselves rather than being spoken of. The book consist of an introduction by the editor; a useful historical account of Muslim migration to Canada; a few pages about Islam in very simple language; and a glossary of terms, followed by very interesting life narratives of seven Muslim women of diverse ethnic and cultural background. Some of the women speak of their own experiences (Lila, Solmaz, Atiya, Mariam). Others tell us the story of the difficult journey of their mothers and grandmothers and how they met the challenges of building a new home for themselves and their families in Canada (Amina, Rikia, Najabey).

The book is a valuable source that reveals more than the life narratives of migrant Muslim women. In fact, the early periods after arrival and the struggle both to make a living in an unwelcoming environment and to maintain their identity while adjusting to a new way of life in Canada, as some of the narrators tell us, did not dramatically differ from the experiences of other immigrant woman (48). But these women had to confront racism and ignorance about Muslims in their adopted home. They had to counter the dominant images constructed by Hollywood movies of Muslims and Arabs as villains, (33). The book provides an interesting and telling account of life in nineteenth-century Canada, reminding the reader of the profound social changes that this country has gone through, particularly in its treatment of non-European immigrants. It makes one appreciate the struggles of the pioneering immigrants like Amina, Rikia and Najabey, for example, to end the practice of changing the surname of the arriving Muslim immigrants (to make it easier for "Canadians" to pronounce them).