

Feminism and Families: Critical Policies and Changing Practices

Meg Luxton, Ed.

Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997

Reviewed by Gordana Eljdupovic-Guzina

This collection, edited by Meg Luxton, is the product of a 1993-94 York University Advanced Research Seminar on the relationship between feminism and families. Most of the eleven articles deal with family policies in the Canadian context. The overall thesis is that the many changes which the feminist movement has initiated have not been supported and sustained by specific family policies, thus providing space for neo-conservatism to strengthen its position.

The essays cover a wide range. Brenda Cossman highlights the limitations of the dichotomy between belonging and not belonging to a family; Katherine Side brings out the complexity of a 'family' by comparing it to friendship - a very important relationship in women's lives, yet often neglected in feminist studies. Highlighting the multiple meanings and readings of the 'family', Shelley A.M. Gavigan shows that "... the language of 'spousal benefits' and 'heterosexual privilege' misses the mark with respect to the social relationships that come under the rubric of 'family'" (117). She also asks whether lesbians and gay men in fact want to subscribe to an oppressive and exclusionary institution, as some feminists consider the family to be. On the other hand, Katherine Arnup spells out changes needed in the courts, legislatures, workplace benefits, collective agreements, etc. to provide recognition of lesbians' and gay men's families.

Analyzing interviews conducted with white heterosexual couples during the last trimester of the women's pregnancies and the first year of the couple's parenthood, Bonnie Fox brings out ways in which this period makes a heterosexual couple particularly susceptible to society's encouragement to resort to traditional roles. Heather Jon Maroney examines demographic data, and Frances Woolley, Judith Madill and Arndt Vermaeten look at data on child benefit reform in Canada. Both essays contextualize and examine the underlying assumptions of 'bare' statistics, showing how 'objective facts' reflect and perpetuate a particular ideology and risk 'squeezing' many lives into traditional, conservative categories.

Taken together, the articles in this book show how being considered a family is not just a matter of personal validation, but essential for individuals to obtain legal protection, rights (with the associated obligations) and benefits. Still, one question remains. Why, despite all our knowledge of current laws and forces shaping the family, is it so difficult to project social practices that would facilitate the coexistence of different modes of relationships? In part, this may

reflect an inherent tension in feminism, which aims both to address the specific embodied and embedded experiences of particular persons/groups, but also to respect and facilitate diversity. Perhaps Gavigan comes closest to offering an inclusive project by affirming that "... one's access or entitlement to social benefits...one's dignity and personal and economic security ...should not and need not depend upon being situated in or relegated to a familial relationship" (117). Paradoxically, getting beyond the concept of 'family' in decision-making could help 'families' - in all their diverse forms and modalities—to coexist.

This book tackles important issues of family politics and social practices both theoretically and through data analysis of "changing" practices. It should be of interest to scholars and students with different backgrounds and interests in feminism(s), family studies, policy making and family legislation.

Mothering: Toward a New Psychoanalytic Construction

Silvia Vegetti Finzi Trans. Kathrine Jason
New York: Guilford, 1994

Reviewed by Rosario Arias

Marianne Hirsch, a well-known literary critic, stated once that "any full study of mother-daughter relationships, in whatever field, is by definition both feminist and interdisciplinary" (179). This book offers an insight into the meaning of motherhood and mothering from an interdisciplinary approach, which is successfully achieved by combining history, anthropology, and mythology with psychoanalysis in the different sections of the book. Out of her experience as a psychotherapist and her extensive research, Vegetti Finzi has written this book, in Italian titled *Bambino della notte* (*The Child of the Night*), on the issue of motherhood, described and studied from a woman's perspective.

After a brief introductory section, the author focuses on the repressed women's unconscious, which can be discovered both in the infantile imaginary realm and in ancient rites and classical myths. Thus, the first chapter examines the process of defining one's sexuality in the clinical case of Anna, a girl of nine who has problems in allying herself with being female. Vegetti Finzi pays attention to Anna's unconscious, reflected in her dreams, paintings, and drawings, and, using Freudian theory, interprets Anna's ambiguous gender and sexual identification (which should have been resolved in the oedipal stage). But, in so doing, the author overlooks the preoedipal period, privileged in