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## Book Reviews

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Conditions in London and Dhaka*, by Naila Kabeer. London and New York: Verso, 2000. 464 pp. ISBN: 1-85984-804-4 (hbk.). US\$29.00.

Recent trends in the globalization of production have connected the fortunes of workers across borders in new ways. The linkage results from low-wage competition, a central strategy that firms use to lower costs, particularly in labor-intensive industries. Downward pressure on earnings and benefits in one country, coupled with the mobility of physical capital, spills over to affect workers in other countries. How best to withstand these downward pressures in individual countries, given that our lives are increasingly interwoven? The current debate on labor standards reflects this conundrum, and a central question is, “Which strategies are mutually beneficial to workers across countries?” To answer, we must necessarily understand the interests of workers in affected countries. Naila Kabeer has written a book that contributes to this goal, artfully giving voice to the Bangladeshi women working in the garment industry in Dhaka and London.

Kabeer states that her work is in part motivated by what she sees as Northern doublespeak – a concern about the plight of Third World women’s exploitation in export factory work, and at the same time, a push for trade policies that hurt those same women. Kabeer’s perspective, shared by many scholars and activists from the global South, questions the economic hegemony of the North and the willingness of Northern workers as well as capitalists to write the rules of trade in their favor. She has written this book in part to offer an alternative feminist analysis, one based on the perspectives of Third World women, who are so often invisible in policy debates.

To this end, Kabeer uses a testimony-based methodology to examine the effects of employment on their lives. Drawing on interviews with sixty women garment workers in Dhaka and fifty-three in London, Kabeer creates a coherent and insightful portrait of the forces that shape women’s

labor market choices, offering a window into the complexity of human relations. She reveals women to be neither “rational fools” nor “cultural dopes,” neither automatons nor passive beings. These women make decisions (as we all do) from a choice set whose breadth and boundaries are determined by a variety of cultural, social, legal, and political factors. Women negotiate for change, but in Bangladesh they do so within the confines of powerful cultural constraints; and in London, an additional constraining factor is racism against Asian women *and* men. In undertaking a comparative analysis of Bangladeshi women in London and Dhaka, Kabeer is pursuing an additional objective, which is to unravel the paradoxical labor market choices made by women in these two environments. Women in Dhaka choose to go out to work in the formal sector garment industry, while in London, where women face fewer social restrictions on movement in public spaces, they primarily opt for home work.

Kabeer begins by providing the context of Bangladeshi women’s labor-supply choices. In Chapter 1 she documents the global restructuring of the garment industry and the shifts in employment opportunities to which this gave rise in London and Dhaka. This chapter also critiques feminist scholarship on the relationship of gender and capital in the international division of labor and what Kabeer sees as the protectionist policies that this created. The second chapter presents several theoretical frameworks for looking at Bangladeshi women’s labor-market choices. Kabeer synthesizes and critiques rational-choice literature from economics and structuralist explanations of behavior from sociology. She posits an intermediate explanation, suggesting that individual agency “accommodates” a variety of social structures but can be strategic, challenging the notion of intractability of those structures.

In the next three chapters Kabeer presents research results from the Dhaka portion of the study. Chapter 4 outlines Bengali history, including the effects of colonialism on the economy and consequently on gender relations. The structural shifts in the economy led to the economic marginalization of women and to the shift from *pon* (marriage payment to the bride and family) to *daabi* (demand dowry that favors the groom). The export-oriented garment manufacture industry emerged and expanded in the 1970s in the context of this environment. Females were targeted as the source of labor, Kabeer explains, in large part because they were seen as having few outside options, making them likely to be a more compliant and, therefore, less costly workforce than males.

The following chapter considers why women entered factory employment, despite long-established norms of *purdah*. To explore how decisions were actually made, Kabeer widens the analysis to consider the views of family members on women taking up factory work. While the personal testimonies attest to the diversity of factors that shape women’s behavior, an overarching structural influence – namely, economic crisis – made it more

difficult for some men to fulfill their patriarchal role to provide for families. In the absence of a social safety net, women's choices to take on paid labor were, in many cases, imperative, despite the violation of social norms that such factory work implied. Indicating the transformative potential of women's choices, Kabeer notes that some women not only ignored community norms, but even derided them as being temporally irrelevant, belonging to a time past when men were able to provide for their families.

Chapter 5 explores the impact of factory work to understand what gains may have accrued and to what extent men's worries about male power being challenged by women's earnings were borne out. Although the effect of wages was not uniform, some women experienced a decline in status in the community but increased prestige in the family.

In the next three chapters, Kabeer shifts to the experience of Bangladeshi women in London. In Chapter 6 she describes the British textile industry and the process of restructuring that has occurred over the last twenty years, exploring the involvement of the Bangladeshi community. Chapter 7 investigates how structure interacts to shape choices in the London context. Kabeer's goal here is to explore why women pursued home work rather than formal-sector employment in the garment industry or other sectors of the economy. One factor was the desire to avoid working alongside Bangladeshi men in formal-sector garment work, which would have violated norms of *purdah* (although here and in Dhaka, testimonies suggest that women tried to redefine the rules in ways that permitted them greater freedom). Men took up employment in the garment industry, which was geographically situated in the Bangladeshi community, in part as a result of racism and discrimination in the broader economy. Women's decision to take up lower-paid home work was influenced by the British social safety net which, by providing an additional source of income, reduced the family's reliance on labor market earnings. This contrasts with Bangladesh, where economic need forced women into the labor market, given the weak social safety net there.

Of particular interest is Kabeer's explanation of the differential weight given to community norms in Dhaka and London. Social norms of *purdah* played a more important role in London, owing to the community's function as a source of support and protection in a hostile racial environment. Women and their families acceded to the restrictive gender norms of the Bangladeshi community in London because the cost of rejection and isolation was greater than that of following the norms. Ironically, the British social safety net, as well as the phenomenon of greater gender integration in the garment industry, worked against gender equity. The two factors served instead to inhibit the ability and desire of Bangladeshi women to take on better paid factory work, leaving them to opt for underpaid home work.

In Chapter 8, which explores the importance of earnings on women's lives in London, Kabeer notes that earnings from home work, because they

are irregular, are not likely to have as great an effect as factory wages on women's valuation or bargaining power in the household. Testimonies confirm this.

Kabeer next brings together the results of the surveys to explain the paradox of women's differing patterns of labor-market participation in Dhaka and London. She weaves together the interaction of historical determinants and structural factors – markets, state, and community – that mediate women's labor-supply decisions. In sum, these factors create the impression of "inertia" in the role of cultural norms in London, and a successful challenge to those norms in Bangladesh.

Chapter 10 returns to the theoretical questions examined in Chapter 2 to explore the extent to which women's labor supply decisions meshed with those that social-science literature predicted. This chapter highlights women's agency – agency that is constrained by a variety of institutions. A strength of this book is Kabeer's ability to disentangle agency from institutional constraints, especially given that, as she writes, "Ideology and culture do not merely operate as externally imposed constraints on a person's choices – they are woven into the content of desire itself" (p. 328).

In her concluding chapter, Kabeer considers how ethical standards in trade might be perceived by working people in the Third World. Kabeer sees current efforts toward ethical standards in trade as protectionist, although her discussion does not reflect the full spectrum of options under debate. In this chapter, she focuses primarily on child-labor prohibitions, minimum wages, and trade restrictions imposed if these rules are violated.

She challenges the argument made by Northern labor groups that labor standards (in the form of pressures to raise wages in the South) can be a win-win situation, stating that higher wages in the South will only lead to job declines. Missing from the debate over labor standards, she argues, are the voices of women in the South. The survey results Kabeer presents reveal that the Bangladeshi women desired the "bad" jobs in the garment industry and fought to be able to take up factory work, to become more visible in a society whose norms had sought to make them invisible.

This book is an important contribution to our understanding of decision-making in the Bangladeshi context. It reveals that structural constraints are not fixed or immutable, and their strength depends on a variety of other factors. In reading the book, one wonders about the relative importance of various cultural and economic factors in shaping behavior and the degree to which women's jobs were transformative for gender relations. The methodology Kabeer uses was not designed to provide a set of data that could be used for hypothesis testing, but a quantitative analysis of these questions would be useful in order to address the issues raised in the final chapter on labor standards.

The question that Kabeer implicitly poses is this: To the extent that women in the global South do benefit from garment factory work and want

these jobs, can First World labor activists be so sanguine about proposing labor standards that might lead to job losses in developing countries? This question is an important one in a time when labor solidarity across borders is necessary to deal with the problems raised by globalization. Kabeer presents voices from the South that have been little heard or heeded, and that is an important step if the process of change is to be participatory in an increasingly unequal power distribution. We must now consider what policies will create a situation in which labor's global losses are stemmed, and in which nationalistic or racialized labor conflict does not emerge or, if we are to believe Kabeer, continue.

Any debate over labor standards should, however, be coupled with a broader macro-level critique of the external constraints a country faces in pursuing equity-enhancing (along lines of class, ethnicity, and gender) policies in the current economic climate. There is room to explore further whether the lives of Bangladeshi women in London, Dhaka, and elsewhere can be improved by alternative macroeconomic policies and institutional structures. At heart are some important issues about the relationship among income distribution, output, and growth. To her credit, Kabeer touches on these, but it would be useful to go further. Research in recent years suggests a complex set of parameters that shape this relationship, but one that Kabeer leaves out – and that I believe is important – is the potential for higher wages to raise labor productivity, either because workers exert greater effort (efficiency wages) or because higher wages induce firms to take measures that improve productivity. Exchange rate and industrial policies, including measures to “discipline” capital and reduce capital mobility, may also be used to create space for improvements in compensation and working conditions (Ha-Joon Chang 1998; Robert Blecker and Stephanie Seguino 2002). In sum, we have more room to negotiate a win-win situation than I believe Kabeer gives the system credit for.

I can think of two additional topics Kabeer might have explored further and perhaps should consider for a future work. One is how labor standards might differentially affect Bangladeshi women in Dhaka and London. Kabeer argues that the garment industry in London targets boutique sales, while Dhaka operations specialize in mass-produced clothing. Although women in these two areas appear to be employed in unrelated markets, in the long run, the sectors are clearly interrelated. Is there thus a tradeoff for women's well-being in Dhaka versus London, based on variations in work conditions? For example, might efforts to improve the work conditions of home-based workers in London lead to job losses and thus falling wages, which spill over to negatively affect women's wages in Dhaka?

Second, while Kabeer makes a convincing case that garment-sector jobs have provided Bangladeshi women access to employment and much-needed income, it would be useful to consider the extent to which growth in this sector has affected women in the industrialized countries, where

labor-intensive manufacturing jobs tend to be female-dominated. In the North, women's job losses have exceeded men's as a result of north-south trade (David Kucera and William Milberg 2000). There is thus the possibility that policies that promote gender equity in one country or region contribute to gender inequality in another.

This raises the question of just who wins in an export-led growth strategy that relies on low-cost female labor. Kabeer suggests, in her title for Chapter 11 ("Weak Winners, Powerful Losers"), that the winners are poor women in Bangladesh, while powerful labor elites in the North are the losers. However, the rising profit share of income in Bangladesh's garment industry would suggest otherwise. Although there has been a sharp rise in the demand for female labor in that industry (Debapriya Bhattacharya and Mustafizur Rahman 1999), women's bargaining power vis-à-vis employers is sufficiently weak that their wages do not keep pace with productivity growth. The result is a redistribution of income from female workers to capitalists. In light of that, as well as of the negative employment effects on women in the North, Kabeer might reconsider her chapter title. Factory owners in Bangladesh and the firms for which they subcontract are not necessarily weak, nor are First World factory women very powerful.

These caveats aside, Kabeer has made a major contribution to our understanding of constrained choice in the context of Bangladeshi culture. Her work provides us with some important information and perspectives needed to move us toward greater fairness in labor practices and wage payments. Perhaps most importantly, Kabeer lets us hear the voices of Bangladeshi women, including them in a debate that she rightfully argues has been dominated by workers and academics in the industrialized North. By raising these voices, Kabeer reminds us that going forward means including all of those who are affected by labor standards.

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*Women, States and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation?*, edited by Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 246 pp. ISBN: 0-415-22173-0 (pbk.). US\$27.99.

In the introductory chapter to this multidisciplinary collection of essays, editors Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault detail the high standards they set for their volume. As a result, the contributors to *Women, States and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation?*, ambitiously and, for the most part, adeptly, tackle three substantial hurdles. First, via a cross-section of theoretical and disciplinary frameworks, the authors of these essays clamber over multilayered, gendered dimensions and meanings of nationalism. Second, and much more adroitly, they leave the main/male-stream literature on nationalism in the dust by providing much-needed correctives to masculinist tendencies that have overlooked women's contributions at both theoretical and practical levels. The final, and perhaps the biggest, hurdle the editors and contributors attempt to scale is that of significantly advancing the theoretical and substantive scope of feminist scholarship on nationalism.

There is no doubt that this volume succeeds in its primary and secondary objectives. The eleven, eclectic chapters are as wide-ranging in the disciplines they plumb and the varied theoretical gaps they seek to fill as the case studies they cover. Contributions are multidisciplinary, delving into political science, history, and sociology. Theoretical influences run the gamut from liberal to postmodernist feminism. The intriguing case studies range from struggles in India and Israel to those in Kuwait, Northern Ireland, the United States, and Zimbabwe. This multifarious approach highlights the diversity of treatments and experiences scholars can draw upon in examining women, states, and nationalism. These chapters not only provide a clear indication of the depth of theoretical and practical insights into how women have negotiated their places in the nation, but they also render glaringly obvious the impoverishment of masculinist research into these matters. Whether this collection ultimately achieves its editors' main goal of advancing feminist theory is less obvious. But again, to do so would be no mean feat. A systematic look at the chapters in this volume makes both its strengths and limitations more apparent.

In the first chapter, Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétreault impressively integrate their collection's disparate accounts by outlining four unifying themes: (i) the interplay between self versus other and the identitarian intersections and power differentials that are involved; (ii) the implications



of sovereignty, which include state sovereignty but are not limited to it given the interventions made, and repercussions felt, by communities and families; (iii) the identification of different organizational forms engaged in nationalist struggles; and (iv) the instability of texts and subtexts when it comes to discourses of citizenship. While it is true that it would be impossible for every contributor to equally explore all of the book's objectives and themes, it is equally true that some writers are more nimble in their negotiation of key concerns than others.

Linda Racioppi and Katherine O'Sullivan See, Zillah Eisenstein, and Spike Peterson, the authors of Chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively, provide broad theoretical sweeps. The upside of these general overviews, especially for nonfeminist readers, is that they successfully fulfill the objective of revealing the limitations of malestream research. For feminist scholars with an interest in this topic, however, these chapters go over ground that is already well-trodden. Even more problematic is that certain ruminations only cursorily address deep-seated feminist concerns.

For example, in Chapter 2, Racioppi and O'Sullivan See endeavor to "take an initial step in bridging the gap" (p. 22) between mainstream and feminist literature. This chapter provides a careful synthesis and consistent deconstruction of the work of four prominent male scholars of nationalism: Anthony Smith, Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, and Donald Horowitz. While effectively encapsulating the nature of these male scholars' groundbreaking research, Racioppi and O'Sullivan See carefully address their obliviousness to gender. By chapter's end, however, feminist readers are left nodding their heads in agreement, all the while questioning, "Okay, but where do we go from here?"

In the following chapter, Zillah Eisenstein also contests renowned accounts of nationalism. As in the previous chapter, Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" is invoked, but here Eisenstein caustically perceives this to be a "a fantasy world with women present but silenced," where "racism as part of the historical articulation of the nation" is not to be found (p. 42). And so, where the previous chapter was cautious, Eisenstein's chapter is more presumptuous; where Racioppi and O'Sullivan See left us wanting more, Eisenstein provides us with a sustained, albeit provocative, radical feminist assessment. She brings to the fore unequal power relationships and the relationships between self and other identities. Although Eisenstein refers to widely used formulations, she also tantalizes us with more original insights. On one hand, she uses the familiar device of portraying the nation in terms of borders and boundaries, suggesting inclusion and exclusion, as "[o]ne's sense of nation shifts according to one's positioning within it or outside it" (p. 38). On the other, she stresses the multifaceted nature of the rhetoric of nationalism. Such rhetoric can be deployed subversively by oppressed groups, but, as Eisenstein cautions, it can also be used to subvert progressive struggles. She underscores the latter point with the statement

that “White men, who still dominate in public office and the economy, use civil rights legislation to challenge the demands made by people of colour and white women to secure the nation for themselves” (p. 39).

Time and again, Eisenstein writes, gendered identities are subverted in nationalist struggles in which women become “political signifiers” and “symbolic fantasies.” Yet she believes women can also de-stabilize these forms of symbolization, using political signifiers to their own ends. Eisenstein points to groups like the Women in Black (an anti-militarist, feminist grouping opposed to Serbian nationalism) as successful practitioners of this strategy. Nevertheless, Eisenstein is generally skeptical, stressing the closings, the limitations, rather than the openings and opportunities, proffered to women in the realm of nationalist politics.

V. Spike Peterson’s contribution also reflects upon political identities and the identification processes of nationalism; however, she examines not only their gendered dimensions but also their heterosexism. While useful in uncovering heterosexist norms, her chapter is somewhat derivative in its conceptual categorizations. Peterson draws not only from her own invaluable contributions (indeed, this piece was previously published), but she also relies quite heavily on insights from feminist scholars such as Jacqui Alexander, Wendy Brown, Carole Pateman, and Jill Vickers, among others. While Peterson contributes to their critiques by referring to instances of heterosexism, the effect is more one of “plugging in” rather than plowing forward with a more original account. As a feminist political scientist, Peterson has led the way in puncturing taken-for-granted assumptions in the discipline’s field of international relations. She continues to do so in this chapter. Yet surprisingly, given her credentials as a feminist political scientist, her analysis of the state is insufficiently robust. Peterson paints a picture of a fraternal state that is unitary and unidimensional, without countenancing the significant advances in feminist theorizing on the state. Indeed, a more nuanced account can be found in Chapter 8 of the volume, where Ranchod-Nilsson notes, “States can be disaggregated into institutions, governments, and regimes and each of those also can be broken down further, for example, into parties, agencies, and other formal and informal divisions, where a divergence in interests results in a breakdown of unitary identification and behaviour” (p. 145).

Both Eisenstein and Peterson ultimately focus on exclusion; for instance, Peterson states, “nationalism reproduces heterosexist privilege and oppression” (p. 75). Similarly, Surest R. Bald, in Chapter 5, critically examines the construction of women in India under Gandhian ideals and practices. Bald aptly demonstrates that although Gandhi’s influence appeared to have enlarged women’s political roles, it ultimately helped to entrench traditional gender roles. Essentialist views of women as chaste, self-controlled, and nonviolent were intertwined with goals of Indian independence. While Gandhi included women in this struggle, he invoked women’s idealized

traits, and this, in the end, did little to contest their roles or further their political position.

In Chapter 10, Cheryl Logan Sparks, like Bald, provides a critique of constructions of women's difference, albeit in a dramatically different context. Here we find an analysis of obligation and choice against the backdrop of women's rights in the American military. Logan Sparks offers a thoughtful account that contains both fascinating historical details and present-day dilemmas. For instance, American suffragists countered the argument that women should not be granted the vote because they were not allowed to serve in the military by contending that women risked their lives and served by different means: they bore children and created soldiers for the nation. While this strategy was successful, it carried the risk of deepening the distinction between men as life-takers and women as life-givers. Furthermore, over time, its logic no longer held. With medical advances and changing societal norms, giving birth became less dangerous, and many women could choose not to reproduce. That women now appear to have more "choice" and less obligation – they can choose to register to vote, to become pregnant or not, and to a great extent, determine their level of responsibility for national defence – is a source of resentment for men. What is worse, Sparks argues, this reinforces distinctions between women and men, formalizing a two-tiered, hierarchical citizenship: "Exempting women from any of the obligations of citizenship suggests that they are citizens of a different – and inevitably inferior – sort" (p. 194). This, then, is a liberal feminist plea for inclusion and a call for formal equality to bolster women's rights. However, one cannot help but wonder, if one of the most highly regarded requisites of citizenship is obliging to kill and be killed, why not revise these requirements? Instead of women measuring up to patriarchal norms, why not transform them? Clearly, this chapter tips the scales in favor of the equality side of the equality versus difference debate and its liberal feminism clashes with the radical/postmodernist feminist inclinations in other contributions, like those of Eisenstein and Peterson.

Chapters 7 and 11, by Mary K. Meyer and Edna Levy, respectively, contain parallels in that both scrutinize images of fighting women, or lack of them, in war-torn countries. Meyer analyzes murals and street decorations in Northern Ireland – those created by Protestant Unionists versus the products of Catholic Nationalists – and Levy assesses pictures of servicewomen propagated by the Israeli military. Taken together, these two chapters reveal that visual representations of women in the nation can be either enabling or constraining. In Northern Ireland, for example, women are entirely absent from Loyalist murals. In contrast, nationalist murals are rife with depictions of women and draw on symbols ranging from Mother Ireland and ground-breaking activists like Bernadette Devlin, to female freedom fighters from abroad. Meyers admits that these nationalist depictions may be "Sentimental? Yes" and "Patriarchal? Sure," but as for "Weak

and submissive? No” (p. 138). Therefore, she argues, that these representations of women are enabling and that: “There is much more space for women to participate in the nationalist/republican political project” (p. 141). Conversely, Levy outlines how Israeli women soldiers are posed in ways that stress their passivity, cleanliness, and even sexiness. Consequently, women’s femininity and sexuality are continually foregrounded. Rather than being subjects, women are treated as objects that male soldiers can protect or use for sexual gratification.

In Chapter 6, Geeta Chowdhry offers an eye-opening examination of the gendered nature of contemporary communal discourse in India. This chapter is rich in detail and persuasively portrays the “conflation of nationalism and communalism by the Hindu right based on a monolithic victimized Hindu identity and monolithic villainized Muslim identity” (p. 114). Gender plays a prominent role in this construct and Muslim men are cast in the role of the inferior, “uncivilized Other” (*ibid.*). The Hindu right “co-opts the language of feminism” (p. 113) characterizing women as better off in the Hindu community, given the “backwardness” of the Muslim community and its treatment of women. The female body is thrown into the communalist mix at various conjunctures. For instance, according to the Hindu right, Hindu women should counter the so-called “demographic threat” of Muslim reproduction. Moreover, the Hindu right portrays Hindu women as being more prone to violation by Muslim men (than, for example, Muslim or Hindu women are apt to being violated by Hindu men). Chowdhry systematically debunks such myths, *i.e.*, the victimized Hindu woman and the criminalized Muslim man, and demonstrates how they are based on historical, religious, and highly politicized and homogeneous reconstructions. In so doing, Chowdhry does an admirable job of showing the complexity of identitarian politics through her examination not only of gender and nationalist politics but also of the insidiousness of the racialization involved.

The two closing chapters feature the editors’ research and writing. In Chapter 8, Mary Ann Tétreault and Haya Al-Mughni explore the state of women and the nation in Kuwait, and in Chapter 9, Sita Ranchod-Nilsson takes on the difficult issues of power, agency, and representation for women in Zimbabwe. Not surprisingly, since the editors wrote them, both of these chapters more concertedly attempt to address the volume’s aims and objectives. As mentioned earlier, Chapter 8 provides a more sophisticated account of the state than do other chapters. Tétreault and Al-Mughni also offer a sustained examination of the broader implications of sovereignty, acknowledging that the lines between state and civil society are often not well-defined. Drawing on their recognition of the porousness of the state, and of state–society relations, the authors find room for optimism about women’s role in Kuwaiti society. Tétreault and Al-Mughni trust that the monopoly of “social, economic and political power” will crack “under the

pressure of women seeking to realize their political aspirations,” and they hope that “Kuwaiti civil society will reform and the meaning of citizenship will be enriched” (p. 162). That is, even in a situation where certain state configurations have not been open to women, the authors do not consider these configurations to be static. If the state is understood as more fragmented, and one that shifts and changes over time, there is more potential for women’s mobilization.

Ranchod-Nilsson is also at pains to underscore women’s agency. She attempts to offer an alternative to bleak assessments, such as Eisenstein’s, of the effect of nationalism on women’s and multiracial advancement. Ranchod-Nilsson emphasizes the diversity of the iconography of women, and of women’s activism, in the Zimbabwean struggle for independence. During that period, women contested dominant gender relations for example, “‘warrior women’ presented a blatant challenge to rural patriarchal authority” (p. 178). Ranchod-Nilsson also stresses women’s aspirations, which differed from men’s, and their alternative visions for women after independence. Thus, by focusing on political opportunities that may arise in nationalist struggles, asserting women’s agency, and highlighting women’s varied goals, Ranchod-Nilsson provides a contrast to many of the other contributors to this volume. Yet it must be pointed out that Ranchod-Nilsson also acknowledges that many of women’s hopes and dreams were not realized and that, after achieving independence, Zimbabwean women increasingly felt marginalized. Nonetheless, Ranchod-Nilsson suggests it need not have ended this way. If there were “a different constellation of victorious forces,” she writes, “an entirely different Zimbabwean nation might equally well have emerged” with more space for women (p. 179). Hence, “nationalism” is not categorically detrimental, and “citizenship” does not necessarily have to comply with patriarchal criteria. Rather, Ranchod-Nilsson considers nationalist struggles and the subsequent consolidation of sovereignty to be fungible, as women take “advantage of multiple spaces in the nationalist struggle” (p. 178), again leaving more scope for women’s influence.

To conclude, this is a wonderfully diverse and informative, if at times somewhat uneven collection. It vibrantly showcases different feminist theories and practices in relation to nationalism, laying bare the limitations of scholarship that ignores or sidelines gender. In the final analysis, however, contributors could have gone a greater distance in advancing feminist theorization. While these essays certainly provide vivid snapshots of various theoretical and practical approaches, whether we leave with a more profound feminist understanding of this complex subject is debatable. In hindsight, perhaps the editors could have included a final chapter that pushed and prodded at some of the assumptions made, pursued the contradictions, and either provided more satisfying conclusions or provoked further feminist discussions. This would have helped them more thoroughly achieve all the stated objectives of *Women, States and*

*Nationalism: At Home in the Nation?*

Such reservations aside, a cross-disciplinary, cross-national collection that links women, states, and nationalism is both laudable and useful. Anyone working on nationalism, especially those who have had little exposure to these debates and experiences, but also those who are interested in eclectic theoretical and practical forays into women's mobilization, should definitely read this addition to the literature. Moreover, in the new millennium, when, globally, numerous nationalist struggles are challenging the political, economic, and social status quo, this volume provides a timely overview of the contested nature of states and nationalism for women around the world for everyone.

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*The Hidden Assembly Line: Gender Dynamics of Subcontracted Work in a Global Economy*, edited by Radhika Balakrishnan. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2002. 168 pp. ISBN: 1-56549-139-4 (pbk.). US\$21.95. ISBN: 1-56549-140-8 (hbk.). US\$58.00.

Focusing on the phenomenon of subcontracting, this elegant book introduces, investigates, and theorizes subcontracting in four Asian countries: Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, and the Philippines. Radhika Balakrishnan and Asad Sayeed's introductory chapter frames the others with a simple, incisive, and robust theoretical framework, examining the relative importance of factors that both push and pull firms into subcontracting, and the relation of this process to patriarchy.

The richness of this book lies in the individual country studies. The methodology might, initially, rankle comparativists. There are differences in the kinds of data presented in the four case-studies, and differences in the sites to investigate subcontracting in more detail, and in the mix of qualitative (e.g., ethnographic) and quantitative (e.g., macroeconomic) data. Precisely because each contributor had a great deal of local ownership of knowledge, a standardized questionnaire approach was rejected. Comparisons between the four countries in the study are, therefore, not straightforward. The chapters deal with similar issues, such as the impact of structural adjustment programs on the economy and the particularities of subcontracting in sectors of local importance.

Saba Kattak's chapter on Pakistan deserves particular mention; she discusses the ways that a subcontractor's control over access to employment reinforces patriarchy. This is a valuable contribution to a literature that has shied away from addressing this difficult problem head-on, and her chapter

usefully teases out similar themes in the other case studies. Writing on Sri Lanka, Swarna Jayaweera provides a useful corrective to the notion that, simply because the study of a phenomenon is novel, the phenomenon itself is new. She notes that the history of subcontracting in Sri Lanka extends at least as far back as 1930. The complexities of subcontracting, and the important historical and contemporary political differences that shape the ways it works to disempower (and occasionally empower) women, are rarely skimmed on in the empirical chapters.

The loss of parsimonious comparability can be traded against a far more valuable gain. The commitment of these scholars to the localization of knowledge, and to a process of knowledge production that puts citizens in greater control of knowledge about them, casts feminist economics as a process, not merely an accumulation of facts. There *is* an Archimedean comparative point in the book. It is not captured by the question “How are women affected by subcontracting in different countries?” but rather framed by the more honest, “How do feminist activists in these countries understand subcontracting?” As the title suggests, the assembly lines of subcontracting are hidden from public view, in workers’ homes, in sweatshops, in the catch-all accounting line-item of ‘the informal sector.’ Learning to see them demands a familiarity with the local geographies of power. These geographies also condition the sorts of questions that are important for local political action – something that a standardized survey might homogenize and overlook. Given the commitment of feminist economics to improve, and not merely document, the condition of women, this is an overwhelmingly appropriate methodological choice. A little more material on the ways that women are organizing to resist the entrenchment of patriarchy, which some of the writers allude to, would have been welcome. But since this book lies perhaps at the start of such a process for these activists, and given the welter of information, testimony, and analysis already available here, this is perhaps asking too much.

Finally, the book’s accessibility is a great strength. The economic arguments are rigorous enough to satisfy, and persuade, trained economists, while the clear prose makes it appropriate and open enough for undergraduates. It is a book that might easily find a home in courses on globalization that use Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* (2000), to deepen the analysis of gender and globalized production, the surface of which Klein only scratches. However, this work deserves a far wider audience than undergraduates, not only because it embodies feminist economics in practice, but also because its creators successfully push a variety of boundaries – methodological, political, and conceptual.

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BOOK REVIEWS

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Klein, Naomi. 2000. *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. Toronto: A.A. Knopf Canada.

*Feminism, Identity and Difference*, edited by Susan Hekman. London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1999. 130 pp. ISBN: 0-7146-5017-X (hbk.). US\$49.50, UK£35.00. ISBN: 0-7146-8074-5 (pbk.). US\$14.85, £16.50.

This edited collection brings together five accessible and interesting articles by feminist scholars in the field of social and political philosophy. The editorial introduction that precedes them also serves as a debate on identity politics. In the spirit of giving space to different voices, the editor has selected contributors with different theoretical approaches to the crucial issues surrounding identity and difference and the implications for feminism. The chapters deal with diverse themes – the relationship between feminism and identity politics (Susan Hekman); feminism and liberalism (Nancy Hirschmann); masculinized citizenship (Shane Phelan); the post-modern self (Eloise Buker); and the depiction of race in popular culture (Rajani Sudan).

Feminist economists would do well to be aware of these debates, as they lie at the very heart of the feminist project. Perhaps the most convincing argument for economists who are feminists to follow these wider debates relates to the term “*feminist economics*” itself. In whose name do we speak when we speak as “feminist” economists and what are the tensions inherent in claiming such an identity? Feminist economists would find their methodological debates especially enriched if they interwove them with the general debates in feminist theory.

Let me give an example. The general arguments between materialist and poststructuralist notions of identity also play out in feminist economics when we ask this question: Does gender need to be “integrated” into economics, or does economics itself need to be examined as a discourse for the ways in which it writes out (or constructs out) femininity? (See Gillian Hewitson 1999.) Further, there are unresolved issues of *how* feminism can balance the political weight of a universal signifier such as “Woman,” which is unraveling in the face of differences between individual women. As for the articles here, the ones by Hirschmann and Buker are likely to be of less direct interest to this journal’s readership. However, I would definitely recommend a reading of Phelan’s excellent discussion of citizenship. *Feminist Economics* readers might also want to check out the wonderful concluding piece by Sudan to find out why she claims the “marketplace *is* epistemology” (p. 103)! I must note that this is also the only piece in the collection that makes any serious attempt to look “outside” of “the West.”



In her introduction, Hekman argues for the need to develop a theory of social construction of identity for specifically feminist purposes. She argues that the central task of “defining a new paradigm for feminism that eschews modernist dichotomies and articulates a new conception of knowledge and the self” (p. 17) has been sidetracked by an identity crisis (multiple identities and differences). She highlights the paradoxical nature of identity in the Anglo-American philosophical approach, where it is seen as intensely personal and necessarily social and has the concept of a disembodied neutral individual at its center. The liberal tradition of an abstract individual – who is both a hegemonic concept and the hallmark of modernity – is not unfamiliar to feminist economists, who have a similar creature in the versions of the “rational economic man.” Hekman then raises many problems following on from identity politics and insists that the political conclusion for feminism “must be a non-identity politics that defines politics in terms of pragmatic political action and accomplishing concrete political goals” (p. 24). The way forward for feminism involves saying: *no to identity politics*. This is problematic – it is not entirely clear how identity can just be set aside on questions of political action, for effective feminist political actions need identification. What Hekman’s dictum implies in the personal or the experiential register is also not fully explored. To disavow a belonging is not a simple rejection. It may be that a reworking (and not an abandonment) of the concept of identity can prove to be useful. Perhaps if Hekman had explored in greater detail *why* identity politics has become so appealing in the last decade, then it might have been clearer why, despite the problems she raises, identity politics remains an attractive option for certain groups of women.

Hirschmann deals with the uncomfortable relationship between liberalism and feminism and calls for a feminist reformulation of rights, liberalism, and difference by drawing upon Carol Gilligan’s “ethic of care.” She acknowledges that the rejection of liberalism by many feminists as an “inherently classist, racist, and sexist ideology” (p. 28) is justified. But, she argues, instead of outright rejection of liberalism and along with it, the liberal conception of rights, there should be a “feminist reformulation of rights that addresses and accommodates feminist concerns of difference, particularity, context, and identity” (p. 29). This can be done by affirming the ambivalence and paradox lying at the heart of liberal project, and recuperating its positive elements. The process of affirmation and recovery is essential, Hirschmann suggests, because “feminism *cannot exist* without certain key aspects of liberalism *and . . . liberalism as it has been realized in most contemporary Western democracies is premised on women’s inequality and unfreedom*” (p. 33).

The merit and possibility of recuperating the paradox lying at the heart of liberalism is open to debate. Hirschmann’s statement, “We must remember what an important historical advance liberalism (even patriarchal

liberalism) was, an advance that most likely made feminist and other left criticisms possible" (p. 50), buys into (what some consider) the liberal obfuscation of history as a story of progress. From a postcolonial perspective, the paradox is a hypocrisy that makes the task of recuperating liberalism not so useful.

In her essay, Phelan looks at how masculinist conceptions of bodies and passions exclude "others" from equal citizenship (p. 57). She does this by looking at the trope of body politic in public discourse (particularly civil rights) in the USA. In addition to presenting phallic masculinity as one mode of masculinity that has implications for excluding individuals who do not fit in the figuring of body politic as a whole, she goes on to discuss the role of passion in the liberal and republican discourse. In an interesting and innovative discussion she argues that the trope of the body structures ideas about integration, boundaries, power, autonomy, freedom, and order (p. 58). These ideas delineate who shall be a member of the polity and the nature of the polity itself. The liberal citizen is normatively not only male, but also masculine, white, and heterosexual. Not only do race, gender, and sexuality delineate the citizen, but the body politic as a whole shares the attribute of this citizen (p. 62). It must be remembered, however, that not all male bodies are appropriate citizen bodies. Nonwhite men, workers, gay men, and disabled men serve as examples of "inappropriate" bodies, and along with women they appear in public in what Lauren Berlant has labeled as "surplus corporeality" (p. 59).

In the section on political passions, Phelan discusses the different understandings of "passion" within civic republicanism and liberal theories. The republican considers passion as love for one's country, its laws, and fellow citizens, in important contrast to the liberal, who is either passionless or whose passions are in need of subduing. In the section titled "The Body Under Siege," Phelan discusses how republican political theory agrees upon liberty as the fruit of struggle, requiring constant vigilance and valor. But this necessarily means that civic republicanism always needs an enemy, whether internal or external, in order to marshal the citizen body. This trope of the body politic then transforms contests within society into attacks on society (p. 73). For instance, concerns about lesbianism appear in the public in the USA via larger fears about feminism, and about women's equality or power or women's potential to corrupt children.

In the next contribution, Buker starts by claiming that the explanation of humans as self-centered beings causes difficulty in accounting for affection and that the sense of this separated self has been achieved by thinking of another sort of self, a complementary being who depends on others, relies on feelings, and experiences freedom as collective action. The autonomous self is intended for political and economic life and the relational self for home and friendship (women do connections and men do independence). Buker proceeds from this premise: "the postmodern self echoes characteristics of

the old modern female” (p. 83). In other words, in the modern story about women they were dependent persons with virtues of responsiveness and flexibility; they had a relationship with others with an ethics that emphasized care and context over self-interest and independence. Similarly, the postmodern self is made and remade by cultural practices that constitute her, and therefore she can learn from the experiences of modern female self in the latter’s struggle to escape second-class citizenship. Buker’s discussion is confined mainly to the USA and experiences of women there.

In the final contribution, Sudan uses interviews and episodic moments in popular culture to argue the myriad ways in which the construction of subjectivity is implicated in increasingly problematic categories of identity. She points to how shifting notions of women have historically served to lock the feminine within behavioral practices whose parameters have been decided by the more powerful, less visible, and ideologically dominant masculine. Enlarging upon issues raised by some of the earlier articles, she writes that the bodies of women “perform a good deal of work: they metabolize ideological structures in comfortingly visible and familiar ways” (p. 101). In claiming popular culture as a crucial discourse in understanding the shifts in feminist epistemologies, she looks at how the identity of a woman has been disrupted by the imposition of new racial categories and the implications of such new racial categories invented and disseminated in popular cultures. She argues that popular culture not only contributes to the marketing of epistemological structures, which then become solidified into higher forms of discourse, but that in fact popular culture constitutes epistemology (p. 103). She discusses how resources of popular culture such as *New York Times Sunday Magazine* choose to address the new conditions that postindustrialism, globalism, and technology impose upon the market place (p. 105). Her specific example, drawn from the *Times Magazine*, shows how the media portray the rise of an Asian economy: an exposé of New China, where “China” is set against a monolithic “world.” Sudan rightly argues that these media associations are often grounded in hundreds of years of colonialist representations of the East that mapped fantasies about sexual excess onto the edges of imperial rule. Sudan writes, “What gender and postcolonial studies have taught is that Western representations of the foreign or exotic inevitably get displaced and conflated with the representation of the feminine” (p. 107). In connection with issues of identity, this point – that foreign is feminine – raises the important question of who gets agency and of what kind. Further, in her deconstruction of the Hollywood movie *Disclosure*, she outlines the issue of identity as a complex problematic involving considerations of the labor market, the multinationality of postindustrial capitalism, the relocation of jobs and accompanying anxieties, and the way in which all of these factors provoke a range of responses to the increasingly problematized categories of identity of gender, race, class, sexuality, and nationality.

I was surprised and disappointed to see that most other authors (apart from those writing specifically about the USA) have not discussed, quoted, or cited “third-world feminists,” despite the title of the book. The discussions of “difference” are mostly arguments downplaying poststructuralist notions of identity (some usual suspects emerge – Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Richard Rorty, Michel Foucault). The discussions (especially on identity politics) could have engaged diversity more productively (see Chilla Bulbeck 1998; Irene Gedalof 1999). Overall, this book is an interesting and complex endeavor and the arguments are usually very well articulated and nicely detailed. A significant strength is its theoretical diversity (though within the confines I mentioned at the outset). As a (poststructural postcolonial) feminist, I remain somewhat unpersuaded by the editor’s arguments, but they are made very comprehensively and attentively. The debate on politics and identity continues, and this book makes an important contribution to it. Feminist economists will agree and disagree with aspects of this book but on the whole they will find it a promising engagement.

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*States, Markets, Families: Gender, Liberalism and Social Policy in Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the United States*, by Julia S. O’Connor, Ann Shola Orloff, and Sheila Shaver. Cambridge, UK, New York, and Melbourne, Australia: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 281 pp. ISBN: 0-521-63092-4 (hbk.). \$69.95. ISBN: 0-521-63881-X (pbk.). \$24.95.

This book is ambitious in scope, dense in content, and satisfying in its contribution to a feminist theoretical understanding of the relationship among social policy, markets, and families. It is also meritorious as a reference tool (there are 28 pages of references) on liberalism; social policy; labor market trends, particularly as they pertain to women compared to men; and recent decades of women’s equality activism in the four countries the authors compare. More specifically, in their theoretical contribution, the authors of *States, Markets, Families* go beyond analyzing the gender-based consequences

of welfare-state policies in key areas of the labor market, income maintenance, and the regulation of reproduction to investigating the assumptions about the gender division of labor, or gendered policy logic, that underlie said policies. Indeed, one goal of the authors is to describe and characterize the gendered policy logic of social policy regimes in the four countries. As they deftly point out, gendered policy logics may not be consistent with outcomes; that is, an assumption of gender sameness may not lead to gender equality in outcome because of structural gender differences in labor markets specifically and in society overall. An assumption of gender difference that recognizes these structural gender inequalities, on the other hand, may improve the status of women if, and to the extent that, social policies and programs make it easier for women to participate in the labor market on an equal footing with men. Labor market inequalities – class- and race-based inequalities – persist, however, to the extent that social policies do not counteract them in the current climate of withdrawing welfare state entitlements and of economic restructuring that “celebrat[es] market liberalism” (p. 1).

In Chapter 1, the authors provide a rationale for their research and situate their book in relationship to others that develop comparative gendered analyses of welfare states. By focusing on regimes – “patterns across a number of areas of policy” (p. 12) – the authors assert that they take an approach that permits a larger-scale examination of the state instead of the narrower (and more common) analysis of institutional frameworks alone. By including families, they not only examine state–market relations but also how states interact with families and how states mediate between families and markets (p. 13). But they see a tendency in comparative welfare state analysis to confine gender to families. Yet gender is a relevant dimension of analysis not only of families but also of the state and market when considered individually; it is also crucial to understanding the state, market, and families in relationship to one another in public policy (p. 232).

Taking as their premise that Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States are examples of the liberal welfare state type (Gosta Esping-Andersen 1990), Julia S. O’Connor and her co-authors devote all of Chapter 2 to a discussion of the ideologies of liberalism as they have shaped markets and the four welfare states. Specifically, they distinguish classical liberalism, new liberalism, and contemporary neoliberalism and apply them to policy formulations in the four countries. Additionally, they review feminist critiques of liberalism, particularly as they pertain to the liberal citizen, public/private split, and the welfare state.

In Chapters 3 through 6, the authors focus on the heart of their empirical investigations. In Chapter 3 they examine social policy regarding the labor market in the four countries. First, they compare rates of women and men’s labor force participation with the existence of measures – such as child care and maternity and parental leave – that facilitate participation in the paid labor force. They also analyze policies on equal pay, pay equity,

and employment equity, with an eye toward occupational segregation and gender stratification, particularly in the context of labor market shifts associated with recent economic restructuring in the market economies under investigation. Finally, they explore the disjunction between the labor-market participation of earner-carers and the social policies that apply to this group.

Chapter 4 is a systematic comparative analysis of the major income maintenance programs: retirement and survivors' benefits, unemployment compensation, sole parents' benefits, support for families, and caregiving support. The authors describe the roles of states, markets, and families in providing income, in creating or reinforcing gender- and class-based differentiation and inequality within cash transfer programs in terms of the benefits and treatment accorded to different beneficiaries, and in institutionalizing social rights for household support and personal autonomy, or the lack of such rights (p. 41).

Reproductive rights are the subject of Chapter 5, with an emphasis on women's access to abortion. Drawing a distinction between body rights and social rights, the authors examine the liberalization of abortion rights in the four countries in the context of medical entitlement (and mediated by medical professionals); differences in health care systems and social rights to health care more broadly; and nation-specific reactions to liberalized abortion.

In the next chapter, building upon the foundational analysis of single policy areas they laid out in Chapters 3 through 5, the authors summarize the overarching policy regimes and identify the distinctive character of gendered policy logics in the four countries. They aim to show that policy logics are products of national differences in mobilization around the goal of women's equality. To that end, the authors analyze similarities and differences in the mobilization of women's movement groups in relationship to political parties. In their discussion, they highlight the opportunities to advance the cause of women's equality in the four countries by effecting change in social policy.

In their conclusion (Chapter 7), the authors find some significant similarities in policy orientation but also some noteworthy differences across the four countries. Gender-based stratification, as evidenced by occupational segregation, pay inequity, differences in labor force participation by family type, and continuity of employment, persists despite convergence in women's and men's labor force participation in recent decades. While the United States and Canada most closely approximate the earner-carer model, particularly with their higher rates of women's full-time labor force participation, none of the four countries has social policy frameworks that have kept pace with changes in women and men's labor force participation and related changes in household structure (dual-earner, for example, as opposed to male breadwinner-female caregiver or to the increasing percentage of single-parent

households). Further, while policy objectives regarding gender-based labor market equality may be similar, specific mechanisms for implementation and outcomes may differ across the four countries, to the extent that pay equity and occupational segregation show an inverse relationship. Australia has the smallest gender-based pay differentials but the greatest gender-based occupational segregation. The United States labor market is least gender segregated in terms of occupation but has the largest pay gap.

Income maintenance programs across the four countries show a high degree of formal gender neutrality but in varying degrees contribute to gender inequality through differential treatment of recipients. Social insurance systems in Great Britain and the United States institutionalize distinctions between wage earners and unpaid caregivers and among caregivers based on their relationship to wage earners. The Australian system underlines gender difference, but provides less unequal benefits than the other countries. Thus, the four countries can be placed on a continuum with the United States at one end, where the market holds primacy over motherhood, and Britain and Australia at the other extreme, where motherhood is prime.

The four countries also fall on a continuum with regard to reproductive rights. Civil rights to abortion exist in the United States and Canada, whereas abortion is seen primarily within the context of medical entitlements in Britain and Australia. In all cases, however, procurement of abortion services is related to market resources and class-based inequalities of access to services persist.

The authors find broad movement away from public policy frameworks based on an assumption of gender difference to those based on varying degrees of gender sameness. Yet, as noted at the outset, assumptions of gender sameness do not necessarily imply commitments to gender equality. Gender neutrality in the context of inequality of condition potentially reinforces extant gender stratification.

This book will be beyond the grasp of most undergraduate students without an instructor's skillful interpretation, but it should be required reading for graduate students and scholars who specialize in areas related to its vast subject matter. Feminist economists, in particular, will be interested in this book's broad scope and theoretical synthesis.

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