

white American military men. Written by a sociologist whose family connections in the San Francisco Bay area gave her access to female informants, this book is a richly detailed and sophisticated examination of the lives of these women. The book covers a long period, from the 1920s to 1980s. It details both how historical and economic forces restricted women's lives and how women devised strategies for dealing with their plight. Arguing against a static model of class, race, and gender, Glenn seeks to capture the contradictions and dynamism of the women's situation.

Apart from two chapters charting immigration patterns and the profiles of the three birth cohorts under study, early chapters focus on the structural determinants of Japanese women's oppression. Special attention is given to the restrictive labour market they entered. Two chapters — one theoretical, the other heavily statistical — detail how capitalist labour systems are stratified according to gender and race. Marginal groups, such as male migrants and ethnic women, were confined to a narrow set of job opportunities. The early entry of Oriental men into laundry and other "dirty, female jobs" created an association between Asians and service jobs. This was reinforced as kin networks channelled women into one of the few jobs available to their group.

Factors distinguishing Asian women's lives from other ethnic women are noted. While the daughters of European immigrant women exhibited upward mobility, usually into white collar work, continuing racism explains why *Nisei* and their *Kibei* (Japanese-educated) sisters did not. Ironically, many of the first used their skills in the internment camps, where there was a demand for trained staff. Afterwards, many returned to domestic work. They were joined by former *Issei* domestics and by Japanese American women from rural California whose families had lost farms

or businesses or been displaced by post-war urban expansion. Not until the late 1960s did things change, which is why the three groups of women under study had very similar work patterns.

Later chapters on the labour process, workplace constraints, and barriers to unionization explore a key question: How did women doing work that was regarded by them and others as degrading find satisfaction in their lives? Drawing heavily on interviews, Glenn suggests that blanket definitions of household work as demeaning are misleading and ignore the complexity of the women's lives. While some resented the intensely personal relations they had with their employers, others valued these "friendships." Domestics also found ways to exert control over the work process by developing their own routines and insisting that employers leave the house while they worked. Still others avoided intense relations with one mistress by working for several families on a part-time basis. And they derived satisfaction both from doing their job well and from supporting their families, especially their children. The testimonies also defy conventional images of Japanese women as highly submissive. While some were indeed fatalistic or uncomplaining, others were outspoken critics of husbands and employers. In considering family relations, Glenn argues that the economic deprivation and racism that Japanese Americans faced meant that the conflict over gender inequities within the Japanese family were partly muted by the countervailing pressure on the family to unite against assaults from the outside. For the women the family was simultaneously a resource in the struggle for survival and an instrument of gender subordination. This contradiction was played out on various levels. It was reflected, for instance, in the ambivalence of *Issei* husbands towards their wives' employment.

Husbands opposed it on the grounds that the wife's services were needed at home or that it was insulting to themselves to have their wife employed in demeaning work. Women nevertheless defied their husbands and went out to work. Within *Nisei* families, women's paid work was taken for granted. In both cases, however, working women were expected to tolerate the double day. On the plus side, paid work led to some subtle gains: it gave women a degree of control over their economic circumstances and improved their ability to provide for children. The warbrides, it should be noted, faced a different set of realities. Many had cut themselves off from family at home and they lacked kin and community networks in America — leading some to cherish their "friendships" with caring employers. In contrast to the durability of *Issei* and *Nisei* marriages, the warbrides' marriages tended to be highly unstable; many of them ended in divorce.

Glenn has a sophisticated grasp of complex issues and a talent for making them accessible to non-specialists. Interestingly, many of her findings resemble those of feminist historians studying immigrant domestics in Canada. The book's main shortcoming is the absence of a final chapter summarizing the book. Perhaps Glenn felt overwhelmed and, indeed, she may have tried to accomplish too much. The book is at once an exploration in sociological theory and labour statistics, and a sensitive evaluation of oral interviews with forty-eight women. Also, rather than directly comparing the experiences of *Issei*, *Nisei*, and warbrides, she gives them separate treatment in each chapter; this makes for some unnecessary repetition. But these are minor points. This book significantly contributes to the growing literature on working women, on racial-ethnic women, and on the female immigrant experience.

NO WAY TO LIVE: Poor Women Speak Out

Sheila Baxter. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1988.

WOMEN ACTIVISTS: Challenging The Abuse of Power

Anne Witte-Garland. New York: The Feminist Press, 1988.

FEMINIST ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada

Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, Margaret McPhail. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Elsbeth Heyworth

George Orwell has said that poverty is not only inconvenient but boring. This bleak summary is illustrated time after time in Sheila Baxter's book of interviews with poor women: the volume seldom pretends that it is anything but boring to be forcibly poor. Baxter believes that poor women have a right to be heard, to speak out for themselves, and they do in these vivid interviews, frequently with a burning and justified anger. But, what

they say is that they are hungry, broke and very tired — hardly circumstances for generating witty or provocative aphorisms to seduce “outsiders.” So the question is, will Baxter’s book be read only by the converted? And the point becomes how does the imagination of the unconverted become captured so that poverty is made unborning and change can occur on an issue which has been so often dismissed as ageless, overwhelming, unmanageable?

The single thread that runs through all three of these important books is that of *HOW* to create change in seemingly intractable issues, women’s issues. The titles of the other two books appear more affirmative: we are moved from simply “speaking out” to “challenging the abuse of power” and “feminist organising for change.” They are indeed more upbeat. Anne Witte-Garland depicts women who are bucking the system, putting themselves on the line because of their ideals. Women who are vocal, passionate and sometimes successful in their fights. Women who, in Ralph Nader’s Foreword, are “heroic individuals who combine spiritual reserves with pragmatic applications.” And there is a clear intent to move from the particular and personal to the generalisable and political: although each story can stand comfortably alone in its own intensity, and although the author believes that most successful activism is intuitive, nevertheless the book provides us with “several prisms” through which to view planned change.

Adamson, Briskin and McPhail’s book goes one step further. For them it is not enough simply to display truths, to provide narratives which invite readers to make their own discoveries. They set themselves the dual task of developing a theoretical perspective on socialist feminism as well as addressing the problem of making change in Canadian society. In order to accomplish this they describe their chosen model of feminist practice. It embodies two seemingly contradictory

gameplans: disengagement (the creation of alternative structures based on a critique of present systems) and mainstreaming (reaching the majority through popular and practical solutions to particular issues). They argue that the one holds the risk of marginalisation and the other of cooptation but that the tension is reconcilable through an approach which is both collective and participatory.

Socialist feminism thus encompasses both diversity and specificity in its understanding of the complexity of women’s position in society. The authors claim it avoids the risk that radical feminists take in the isolating and insulating approach of opposition to the ‘male-stream,’ and that liberal feminists take in not straying from the institutional framework.

But in returning to the issue of our first book, the question becomes whether the very richness and diversity of feminism and its many concerns has resulted in a failure to address the most intransigent of problems, that of poverty. When the movement takes on the double or triple oppression of many women, the intertwining of the four major categories of gender, class, race and sexual orientation, is there a necessary dilution? When the articulate and often middle-class focus on the personal becoming political, on the impetus for struggle coming from women’s own experience, do the issues become self-selecting? What happens to those thousands whose personal experience is poverty and whose total energy is taken up in survival needs, leaving nothing for devising strategies or developing theoretical constructs on change for themselves? Perhaps it is not accidental that the feminisation of poverty was a late-developer amongst women’s issues.

So, as feminism is proud to bear no single ideology, thus can it also skirt the most difficult of issues? Are there few left to fight the issue of poverty? Sheila Baxter quotes Martin Niemoller after the Second World War;

In Germany they came first for the communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the Jews and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up.

It is hard to do justice to three excellent books in a single and brief review. But reading them together certainly concentrates the focus on how feminists can join together in the fight to end poverty. This is only one theme and is perhaps unfairly dictated by my particular assignment. But it is also central to the beliefs of socialist feminism and the argument for challenging fundamental differences in wealth, privilege and power in Canadian society.

All three books would be useful for teaching purposes and it is particularly heartening that two of them are Canadian and draw illustrations from Canadian experiences. All three describe the powerlessness that women so frequently feel about their ability to change their own lives. And all seek to increase the understanding which is the foundation for making those changes. Conceptual tools, examples of intuitive action, descriptions of individual circumstances combine as powerful elements towards this understanding. And this combination reinforces the theme of both interconnectedness and variety in the women’s movement. In struggling to understand both the commonalities and the differences we become clearer on what it means to be a feminist. And these books persuade us that wherever the battlefield, women are at the centre of movements for change and must continue, through a variety of levels of sophistication, to ensure that it takes place.

FEMINISM AND POLITICAL ECONOMY: Women’s Work, Women’s Struggles

Edited by Heather Jon Maroney and Meg Luxton. Toronto: Methuen, 1987.

Paisley Currah

As Heather Jon Maroney and Meg Luxton state in the book’s introduction, feminist political economy in Canada has developed separately from the dominant Canadian political economy tradition, with feminists ignoring the androcentric categories of the mainstream work pioneered by scholars such as Arthur Lower, Harold Innis and W.A. Mackintosh. Although

the revival of the older genre — centered around the marxist journal *Studies in Political Economy* — has occurred concomitantly with the surge in feminist research into non-traditional areas of political economy in the last decade, the two approaches remain largely isolated from each other. Maroney and Luxton point out that *SPE*’s first nine issues contained