

# Women *and* the Family

Edited by Caroline Sweetman



Oxfam Focus on Gender



The books in Oxfam's *Focus on Gender* series were originally published as single issues of the journal *Gender and Development* (formerly *Focus on Gender*). *Gender and Development* is published by Oxfam three times a year. It is the only British journal to focus specifically on gender and development issues internationally, to explore the links between gender and development initiatives, and to make the links between theoretical and practical work in this field. For information about subscription rates, please apply to Carfax Publishing Company, PO Box 25, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3UE, UK; Fax: +44 (0) 1235 553559. In North America, please apply to Carfax Publishing Company, 875-81 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139; Fax: (+1) 617 354 6875. In Australia, please apply to Carfax Publishing Company, Locked Bag 25, Deakin, ACT 2600, Australia; Fax: +61 (0) 6282 3299.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the Publisher.

Front cover: *Off to school at Kwa Ngema, Eastern Transvaal.*

GILL DE Vlieg, AFRAPIX

© Oxfam (UK and Ireland) 1996

Published by Oxfam (UK and Ireland), 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ, UK.

Designed and typeset by Oxfam Design Department OX 808/MCA/96

Oxfam is a registered charity No. 202918

Oxfam (UK and Ireland) is a member of Oxfam International

ISBN 0 85598 352 3

This book converted to digital file in 2010

# Contents

## **Editorial 2**

*Caroline Sweetman*

## **A voice of alarm: a historian's view of the family 8**

*Anna Arroba*

## **Patriarchy and development in the Arab world 14**

*Suad Joseph*

## **Fighting female infanticide by working with midwives: an Indian case study 20**

*Ranjani K Murthy*

## **Female-headed families: a comparative perspective of the Caribbean and the developed world 28**

*Sheila Stuart*

## **Structures and processes: land, families, and gender relations 35**

*Susie Jacobs*

## **Women, the law, and the family in Tunisia 43**

*Hafidha Chekir*

## **Marginalisation and gay families in Latin America and the Caribbean 47**

*Dinnys Luciano Ferdinand*

## **Child-care and the benefits trap: a case from the UK 52**

*Annie Oliver*

## **Interview: Maria Isabal Plata of PROFAMILIA 54**

## **Resources 57**

**Book review: Kampala Women Getting By: Well-Being in the Time of AIDS by Sandra Wallman et al 57**

*Ambreena S Manji*

**Further reading 60**

**NGOs and UN organisations 62**

**Audio-visual resources 64**

# Editorial

**T**he meaning of work and definition of output come into question once non-market work is admitted into the economic picture, because this involves emotional labour or caring work' (Folbre 1994, 37). Examining the family from a gender perspective demands that we consider how the roles expected of women and men, the old and the young within the family affect the ways in which people are able to participate in the wider community, economy and state.

It is no accident that the rhetoric of many conservative forces, including religious leaders, about women's role as wives and mothers tends to stress the literally priceless nature of in-family care for dependents. Research by feminist economists and social scientists and the women's movement continues to emphasise – as it has done for the past three decades – that this care is mostly provided by women as daughters, mothers and wives, and that the economic and political forces which enmesh households create societies which ignore the cost of this caring (Young et al. 1981; Kabeer 1994).

Development built on this invisible, uncounted work is unsustainable as well as inequitable. A dual concern for women's rights and welfare demands that we examine how membership of a family can curtail women's chances of participation in economic and political life outside the home, and defines their day-to-day

existence as daughters, wives, and mothers, through exploiting their care and commitment to their families; women commonly prioritise the interests of other family members above their own well-being – termed 'maternal altruism' by Ann Whitehead (1984, 112).

## Recognising the cost of caring

A wide and varied literature on the family gives us perspectives on what the reproductive role, in its widest sense, means for women and men, and their relationships within the family (see Resources section for suggestions for further reading). Women are viewed in most communities as primarily responsible for all kinds of domestic activity, despite the fact that there is no biological reason for taking on this work in addition to their sex-specific role in pregnancy, childbirth, and breast-feeding (Oakley 1971). This association of femininity with domesticity has profound implications for women's status, well-being, and participation in economic and political activity outside the home.

An aspect of reproductive work which is of little importance to economists and technical planners is the affection and emotional support inherent in caring for children, marital partners, and the elderly. For most people, the focus of their emotional lives is the family. This aspect of

'women's work' has been used cynically by planners who trust women to shore up inadequate social provisioning through extra hours and energy put in at home, at no cost to the state. Socialist feminists have stressed the value of the work women perform in their role as carers, arguing that women, through their unpaid reproductive work, are directly contributing to production by subsidising the cost of reproducing the workforce (Folbre 1994). Because women's work in the family involves an identification of interests with 'children, husbands or lovers', it is 'difficult for women to take an oppositional stance of the sort necessary to acknowledge [their] involvement in an exploitative exchange of labour' (Ferguson 1989, 97, quoted in Folbre 1994).

## Perceptions and reality

In examining the family, we need to recognise that there is a profound difference between popular conceptions of what families are, and the reality. Most people are confident that they know what a family is, or is should be; our ideas about this primary social institution are shaped by what Gramsci called 'common sense'.<sup>1</sup> However, as articles in this issue argue, our perceptions of family may be quite different from the realities of family life in our own communities, and these in turn differ from those in other times or places. What we believe to be 'common sense' is actually shaped by a constant contest between the ideas of those who wield power in our societies, and those they dominate. In addition to changing awareness of gender inequalities at national level, changes must take place in hearts and minds. In her article, Hafidha Chekir examines how the civil law of Tunisia interacts with custom to limit women's chances of realising their rights as individuals.

Ideas of family life are usually based on an ideology of caring and co-operation between family members. In fact, the reality

of life within all families is often a paradoxical blend of love, companionship, and support, combined with friction, domination, and even cruelty. Family members have different interests which may clash with each other, and their status in the household will determine their negotiating power. Added to that, 'in some contexts the family identity may exert such a strong influence on our perceptions that we may not find it easy to formulate any clear notion of our own individual welfare' (Sen 1987, 6).

The perception of the family as a benign institution, free from the conflicts which characterise life outside, is accompanied by a second myth – of a senior male household head who holds everyone's best interests at heart – which runs parallel to a more complex reality (see, for example, Sen 1987, Standing 1989). The patriarchal family structure is widespread throughout the world, and the power relations within it cannot be narrowly compartmentalised from what goes on outside, in the 'public sphere' of the market, the state, and the community. In this issue, Suad Joseph defines patriarchy (the rule of male elders) in the context of the Middle East, and discusses the way in which power is held and retained by older men not only in the family, but in commerce, politics, and religion. Joseph argues that it is the pervasiveness of patriarchy, and the fact that it is part of 'common sense', which make it resistant to attempts from different quarters to end it.

## Family and household: defining the concepts

The need to care for children is a primary rationale for the existence of the family, which has been defined as a primary social group consisting of parents and their offspring, the principal function of which is provision for its members.<sup>2</sup> The belief in most if not all societies that a family is centred on children has profound

implications for childless couples and households made up of adult siblings, friends, or same-sex partners. Policies at state or NGO level may marginalise such families, or try to coerce them into conformity.

In most communities, women become associated with another family through marriage. As Anna Arroba discusses in her article, the need of patriarchy to ensure knowledge of paternity necessitates that female sexuality is controlled by norms of heterosexuality, marriage, and fidelity. On marriage, through practices such as changing one's surname – and, in some cases, one's forename – and travelling to live in the husband's home, women are generally understood to leave their birth family and become a member of the spouse's family. Women's identity is thus defined through their relationships to fathers and later to husbands.

Closely connected to abstract ideas of family and kinship is the more concrete notion of the household: the physical space inhabited by members of families. It is likely that many or most of the people within a household may be related by descent or marriage, but this is not universal. Many households include individuals who are not part of the family in these ways, and family members may in their turn be absent from the household for all or most of the time.

A web of external and internal factors determines which pattern of family, and which household form, is dominant in a particular context. Under colonial domination and in the post-colonial era of development along Western lines, policy-makers joined with religious leaders to promote the model of a nuclear family form living beneath one roof (Hansen 1992), and the terms 'family' and household have thus commonly – and wrongly – been assumed to be synonymous. Anna Arroba gives a historian's view in challenging the idea of the unchanging, 'traditional' nuclear family model.

An assumption on the part of national and international policy makers that the nuclear family form is superior to, and more desirable than, other forms has caused the failure of many development interventions, and marginalised households which have alternative characteristics, as Sheila Stuart points out in her article on female-headed households in the Caribbean. In many parts of the world, households headed by single women have been, and are, particularly singled out as deviations from a norm.

Over the years, research into female poverty by gender and development specialists emphasised that female-headed households in developing countries often suffer from acute poverty, not only of resources, including human, but of status in the community, which makes it harder for them to take advantage of initiatives intending to address poverty (Young et al., 1981).

## **Households, work, and economics**

Economists have given the household varying degrees of attention, starting with the assumption that the household is an arena where individual needs were understood, and resources distributed accordingly<sup>3</sup> (see Kabeer 1994 for a useful summary of theories of household economics). Many development initiatives have foundered because of this assumption, and still more have worsened women's status and well-being. A degree more sophisticated than this, 'bargaining' models of the household highlight the different bargaining power of family members, according to age and gender.

Understanding how bargaining power in the household works necessitates that we understand 'perceived contributions ... to be distinguished from actual contributions' (Sen 1987, 24). Cultural, economic, and political factors combine to ensure that the contributions women are permitted to make are perceived as less valuable than

those of men (Standing 1990). Women's responsibility for reproductive work is not valued as 'work' in the same way as paid work outside the home: 'husbands are generally in a stronger bargaining position than wives, because men tend to earn more money than women, and gain forms of work experience which aren't adversely affected by divorce' (Folbre 1994, 23).

## **Women, the family, and production**

For most women, work to nurture and maintain family members is inextricably linked to income generation, as part of an overall livelihood strategy; the common association of men with production and women with reproduction ignores the reality of most women's lives. For many women throughout the world, working the land provides subsistence and sometimes income, and their control of this vital resource is linked to their status in the family. In her article, Susie Jacobs explains this link, assessing the extent to which land reform affects women's subordination.

The fact that unpaid reproductive work within the home continues to be considered the primary responsibility of women has deep implications for the sort of work women do outside the home, and for their access to such work. In many countries 'a male-dominated labour market has managed to exclude women from many areas of skilled employment, as well as to lower the prestige of 'feminised' occupations such as nursing and teaching' (Perry-Jenkins 1994). Growing poverty, and a process of 'feminisation of labour', are currently pulling more women toward whatever means of making an income they can: concerns which will be addressed in the next issue, 'Employment, economics, and exclusion'.

Where women are able to break through the practical and ideological barriers to participate in work which men are also employed to do, governments and employ-

ers can use woman's role at home as a useful excuse to justify paying women less than a 'male breadwinner', or laying them off from paid work whenever the employment market becomes slack; this is currently the case in Eastern Europe (O'Connell 1994, 111).

## **Families in crisis**

What are the implications of ideas about the family, and the different realities of contemporary family life which confront politicians and development organisations? A central question is where responsibility should lie in caring for dependents – the non-productive members of society who are becoming steadily more numerous, as the proportion of older people increases in Northern countries and, in the South, the percentage of children in the population continues to grow.

As this introduction has indicated, separation of the private sphere of family life from the public sphere has been convenient for governments whose regimes benefit from unmeasured work performed within the home. First, and most importantly, not only must the work carried out within the household be recognised by mainstream economists and political decision-makers, but they must design future policy in a way that does not take the work of caring for families for granted. Women's health, human rights, and ability to participate in development all depend on this. Women deserve, and demand, more than a sentimental acknowledgement of their contribution to the welfare of humanity through unpaid family work. At the Fourth UN Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, demands included formal recognition through statistics, with the setting up of 'satellite accounts' which include unpaid work.

There is a common assumption that poor countries cannot afford to provide the services associated with a 'welfare state', and this view is increasingly taken by

richer countries as well. Yet, it is unacceptable and unsustainable for economic policy to be formed around an assumption that women's work will subsidise cuts in social spending. The assumption that women's time and energy is elastic has been at the heart of IMF/World Bank structural adjustment policies, where women have had to substitute their labour for health and education services which have been withdrawn (Lennox, 1994).

In the confusion over national and international will to consider how social welfare should be provided, one thing is clear: women's workload in the family must be addressed if family stability is to be ensured. A failure on the part of other family members to assist with work in the home, and decreasing opportunities for men's paid employment, is causing crisis: 'obviously, some degree of co-operation is necessary if households are to remain intact; persistent non-co-operation is likely to lead to disintegration' (Kabeer 1995, 127). Women should not be forced to bear the burden of the two 'shifts' – of paid or subsistence work, and of care for dependents – which must be accomplished in all households. In 1997, one issue of *Gender and Development* will look at masculinity and address aspects of family life from this alternative angle.

Most crucially, condemning a breakdown in the 'traditional family' as the cause of civil disorder of all kinds is a convenient way for policy-makers to shift the blame for failed economic and political policies onto other shoulders. The suggestion that family life is separate from its social context, and that some issues are inappropriate to address in the public sphere, is used highly selectively. For example, both religious and state leaders have often intervened in the most intimate areas of the family when it comes to policies on reproductive rights; yet violence against women has until very recently been seen as a 'private' matter for the family to address. Female infanticide is an extreme

form of violence against women, and in her article, Ranjani Murthy points out that cultural bias against females is linked with economic poverty and powerlessness both inside and outside the home. Community leaders and development institutions need to work with traditional birth attendants to halt the neglect and murder of female infants behind the closed doors of the 'private sphere'.

Development agencies, as well as governments, need to recognise that family structure, and women's position within it, is critical in affecting the sort of development needed by families and communities, and the likely outcome of projects. In an interview in this issue, Maria Isabal Plata of PROFAMILIA discusses Beijing in relation to debates on the family. An approach to development which is gender-aware profoundly challenges the idea that development is something which takes place only in the public parts of people's lives, and which benefits all members of the household equally.

Even where policies are designed which are intended to benefit families of different sorts, careful consideration is needed as to whether an unconscious bias will limit the access of families seen as atypical. Although households with a female head may be economically independent, this should not be confused with social empowerment; a female-headed household may face real difficulties through being marginalised from state and development policy which assumes that there is someone within the household charged full-time with the duties associated with a domestic 'wife', while a 'husband' exists with the attributes and authority to participate in meetings and development activities outside the home. In this issue, Annie Oliver of Single Parents' Action Network (SPAN) speaks of her experience as a single mother who is prevented from finding regulated, well-paid employment by the lack of child-care facilities open to her; and Dinnys Luciano explores the marginalisation of families

based on a homosexual union from policy and development practice – basic statistics on these families do not even exist in many countries.

Planners and policy-makers must recognise that the family evolves to meet changing human needs. A sustainable vision of human development should not only consider economic and socio-political factors, but should also stress intangibles such as emotional satisfaction and happiness; those aspects of reproductive activity which cannot be counted in quantitative terms. 'Wherever there is lasting love, there is a family' (Hite, 1994, 372).

Finally, we must challenge the idea of the nuclear family as the ideal model in all circumstances, and learn from societies which have evolved alternative, more appropriate, social structures. For example, a common tradition within African communities is to view the mother as one of many carers for her children, valuing the role of the entire community in socialising its junior members (Forma 1996). 'Women's equality and the removal of gender constraints are the essential foundation stones of juster societies within which families can thrive' (O'Connell 1995, xii).

## Notes

1 Gramsci defined common sense to denote an 'uncritical and partly unconscious way in which people perceive the world ... often confused and contradictory, containing ideas absorbed from a variety of sources and from the past, which tend to make them accept inequality and oppression as natural and unchangeable' (Simon, 1991).

2 Definition from Collins Softback *English Dictionary*, 1992

3 For a fuller discussion of household economic models and their relevance to gender-sensitive analysis, see Nancy Folbre's 'Hearts and Spades: paradigms of household economics' in *World Development* 14: 2.

## References

- Comaroff, J and J L (1992) 'Home-made hegemony: modernity, domesticity and colonialism in South Africa' in Hansen, K (ed) *African Encounters with Domesticity*, Rutgers.
- Folbre N (1994) *Who Pays for the Kids? Gender and the Structures of Constraint*, Routledge
- Forma A 'Two mothers, two cultures: I know how it feels', *Independent on Sunday*, 12 May 1996
- Hansen K (1992) (ed) *African Encounters with Domesticity*, Rutgers University Press, USA.
- Hite S (1994) *The Hite Report on the Family: Growing up under Patriarchy*, Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, UK.
- Kabeer N (1994) *Reversed Realities*, Verso.
- Lennox J *Paying for Health: Poverty and Structural Adjustment in Zimbabwe*, Oxfam, Oxford.
- O'Connell H (1994) *Women and the Family*, Zed Books.
- Perry-Jenkins M (1994) 'The family division of labour: all working is not created equal' in Sollie D L and Leslie L A (eds) *Gender, Families and Close Relationships: Feminist Research Journeys*, Sage Publications.
- Sen A (1987) *Gender and Co-operative Conflicts*, WIDER.
- Simon R (1991) *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction*, Lawrence and Wishart.
- Standing H (1990) *Dependence and Autonomy: Women's Employment and the Family in Calcutta*, Routledge.
- Whitehead A (1981) 'I'm hungry, mum: the politics of domestic budgeting' in *Of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination in International Perspective*, CSE Books.
- Young K, Wolkowitz C, and McCullagh R, (eds) (1981) *Of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination in International Perspective*, Routledge, Chapman and Hall.

# A voice of alarm:

## a historian's view of the family

**Anna Arroba**

*This article argues that the category of 'family' is not universal; in fact, there are, and have always been, 'families'. No attempt can be made to analyse what the family means for gender issues in development without pointing to the variations in its forms, in the different responsibilities of its members, and the manner in which different social systems and ideologies of family life encode particular definitions of the rights, needs and responsibilities of individuals within families (Moore, 1994).*

I am speaking from the perspective of living in a family first as a daughter, and later as a mother who did not always manage to create and perpetuate the normal 'nuclear' family, and yet who, despite it all, managed to raise fairly well-adjusted human beings. The pressure to conform as a 'family' for me has meant building a tight facade of respectability and normality, so as not to be blamed for problems like delinquency and teenage pregnancy, and so as not to fall into the hands of the welfare system, and be labelled dysfunctional. If these things happened, it somehow meant that women were to blame.

That all over the world millions of women are doing the same under circumstances including wars, revolutions, droughts, and economic depression makes it seem necessary to analyse what 'family' is, and what danger comes from a narrow understanding of the term, from the perspective of women's realities and roles. For many of us, the family was where we acquired our griefs and sad memories, and also where we learnt to be women or men.

For those of us who were raised within unconventional families, meaning that we were circumscribed emotionally and economically by illegitimacy, single-motherhood, divorce, or the absence of our fathers, not to mention alcoholism, domestic violence, incest, and so on, statements about the dangers to the 'family' formed a permanent background chorus. The alarm has been raised by different institutions in the West, pointing to a crisis in the family. To understand who is raising the alarm, and to what crisis they refer, this article will attempt to peel back some historical layers in order to understand what 'the family' has meant for women.

### Origins of the family

Generally, the family has been studied from a Eurocentric and ahistorical perspective. Ironically, even historians have studied the variations in family structure, and not its origins (for example, Rossi et al, 1978; Laslett 1972, Stone, 1979). It has been seen as the 'natural', hierarchically-ordered

human organisation, as if people naturally and automatically join together under the protection of their father, and the nurturance of their mother.

This notion hides the coercive ways in which many families are structured, and the laws, religion, and education that have made people exist within family organisations. Sociologist Maria Mies asserts that concepts like the 'biological' or 'natural' family are linked to an ahistorical concept of the family, in which heterosexuality and the birth of children who have the same biological parents, are both compulsory (Mies, 1986).

As a historian, I am here concerned with examining how this model of family evolved, and how it became established as the best and only model for all groups and all societies. In order to do this, it is important to establish that 'the family' has varied and changed, but in fact has not always existed.

## The creation of the patriarchal family

Gerda Lerner asserts in her book, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, that the patriarchal system has existed for about 5,000 years. She arrived at this conclusion after lengthy research on ancient Mesopotamian society during the second, third and fourth millennia BC, and argues that the 'establishment of patriarchy' was not an event, but a process developing over a period of nearly 2500 years, from approximately 3100 to 600BC.

Lerner asserts that the basic unit of Mesopotamian society was the patriarchal family, which both expressed and constantly generated social rules and values. Female subordination within the family became institutionalised, and codified in law (Lerner, 1986). Men, as a group, had rights over women, which women as a group did not have in men. In effect, women themselves became a

resource acquired by men, and could be exchanged or bought in marriage, to benefit their families.

Lerner's study suggests, with other influences, that the major symbols and metaphors of Western civilization regarding people's gender identity were largely derived from Mesopotamian and, later, from Hebrew sources (*ibid.*). Many other historians, as well as anthropologists, theologians, and archaeologists have concluded, on overwhelming evidence, that patriarchy replaced a system of family organisation based on the care of mothers for children, and on the leadership of women, in most communities (Stone, 1976; Gadon, 1989; Gimbutas, 1991).

Marija Gimbutas maintains that this is universal (*ibid.*). During thousands of years of pre-patriarchal existence, motherhood was the only recognized bond of relationship. Stability in societies was created by the kinship bond that kept groups together and encouraged co-operation. In most matrilineal societies, the oldest woman headed the family, which was composed of her brothers, children, and grandchildren. The mother's brother was the male authority figure, because he was understood as a blood relative to the child (Walker, 1987). The kinship bond was maternal, because no paternal relationships were perceived. Research has asserted that the idea of fatherhood was alien to the religious or social thinking of the earliest civilizations (Walker, 1983; Knight, 1991), which believed that only women held the divine power to give life.

According to Gimbutas, all the most ancient mythologies throughout the world speak of a Creatrix, Life and Birth Giver, rather than a Creator, because living things could be made only by a female, according to primitive beliefs. As childbearers and nurturers, women also took charge of growing crops. They became the producers, storers, and distributors of vegetable foodstuffs, hence the owners of the land they used for cultivation. They made the

BELINDA COOTE



*The basic family unit: a woman and her children. Jamaica.*

earth valuable, and their metaphors and symbols equated it with femininity. Women's economic and social power thus evolved the early village community in matriarchal form (Walker, 1983).

Once the link between man and childbearing was understood, the rule of the father, and of men in general, was solidly established (*ibid.*). Patrilineal descendency replaced matrilineal descendency, and the children that did not have their father's name were categorized as illegitimate or outsiders to the newly created laws, and also outsiders to the new religions of male gods. For the West, this meant a religion of God the father, and God the son, that made birth, (from a mother's body) the result of original sin, that only the new church 'fathers' could forgive (Ranke-Heinemann, 1990). An example of an early patriarchal state is that in the Ancient Near East, which emerged in the second millennium BC (Lerner, 1986).

Therefore, I would argue that subordination, and the reality of man's control over women's reproductive capacity, underpins

our ideas of the male-headed family. Proof of this can be seen in laws and beliefs dealing with the regulation of female sexuality and behaviour. An example from *Laws of Manu*, an Indian sacred book for religious and civil institutions dating from 1280BC, states: 'during her infancy, a woman should depend on her father; during her youth, on her husband; if he should die, on her children; if she does not have children, on the husband's next of kin and, if this is not possible, on her father; if she does not have parental relatives, on the sovereign; a woman should never govern herself at will' (Book V, Rule No. 148).

### **The changing patriarchal family**

The patriarchal family has been resilient and flexible, varying in its features in different times and places. It has encompassed polygamy, and female enclosure in harems. In Classical Antiquity and in its European development, it was based upon monogamy for women, but in all its forms a double sexual standard, which disadvantaged women, was part of the system. Patriarchal dominance in the family has taken a variety of forms, principally through the man's absolute authority over his children and his wife or wives (except that in some places and at some times restraints on this exist, due to reciprocal obligations to the wife's kin). The man holds authority over the other women in the household, such as slaves, and poor relatives, and over younger men.

As other articles in this issue show, patriarchal dominance moved from private practice into public law. The legal subjection of wives to husbands and of children to parents reinforced the obedience of each subject to the growing claims of the centralising state (Boxer and Quataert, 1987). Lerner stresses that sexual dominance underlies class and race dominance, and that the sexual regulation of women underlies the formation of classes, and is

one of the foundations upon which the state rests (Lerner 1986).

The basic pattern of the patriarchal family has been constantly reinforced both in ideology and practice. Political or religious reforms have invoked ideas of 'morality' to confine sexual activity solely to marriage, treating premarital and extra-marital intercourse as sex crimes. These laws and norms have not only elevated the monogamous family to the basic economic unit of society, but have helped to strengthen property ownership and class formation (Lerner, 1986).

Women have complied with the rules in order to survive, and taught, and are still teaching, their daughters to comply in their turn. By their compliance, women can guarantee the protection of men, the family, and wider society. Women who live outside the patriarchal family have been, and still are, severely victimised; if not by the religious institutions, and the immediate community, then by the welfare states, or development projects that perpetuate the dichotomy of the father-breadwinner head of family, and the mother-housewife concepts, at the expense of women and children (Mies; Afshar, 1991).

The transformation in family structures and roles over time has had important consequences for women and wider society. For example, major changes affected the early modern family in the European upper classes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Maria Mies maintains that capitalism created modern notion of the nuclear family first among the propertied classes, and later in the working class. 'Childhood' began to be conceptualised as a separate stage of life, at the same time that the social and sexual division of labour, characteristic of capitalism, was established (Mies, 1986). The family was declared a private territory in contrast to the public sphere of economic and political activity.

It appears that the nuclear family form, as we understand it today, was much less

the norm before this period than is usually believed, and in fact was considered progressive. Thus began the process of what Mies has termed the 'housewifisation' of women (Mies, 1986). Men were viewed as providers and as breadwinners. Sally Westwood comments, with reference to India in the 1920s and 1930s, that ideologies of this kind had clear resonances with both colonial ideologies and extant cultural forms. Using these ideologies, the state played a key role in promoting a climate in which it was easy to push women out of the mills (Westwood, 1991).

The Western model of family – Christian, nuclear, middle-class, with employed father and housewife mother – has been a major ordering and prescriptive concept, and is still central in many policies and welfare programmes. Other articles in this issue explore the argument that this model of family is vanishing, not only in the West itself, but in other societies, and argue that this is not, as so many policy makers have thought, due to individual failure, but to the fact that the family is embedded in society, and mirrors social, political, economic and cultural changes. Such changes profoundly affect gender relations and arrangements, for the family is made up of individuals who also change.

## **Motherhood and fatherhood**

Families are social institutions, where the work of mothering and (sometimes!) fathering takes place. Mothering is not recognised as work by most men, and thus many women themselves find difficulty in seeing it as such. This distinction causes us to blame women who try to combine both. We are in danger of replicating the idea of separate productive and reproductive work, valued in different ways.

Yet, fathering does not have the same implication as mothering. When men declared themselves the fathers of society, it was in opposition and reaction to the

founding principle of motherhood and mothering that had sustained societies for thousands of years. To 'mother' and to 'father' have very different meanings. While to 'father' signifies to beget a child, to 'mother' implies constant nurturing, and lifelong concern for the children.

Mothers are commonly blamed for the problems that assail new generations; they are described as possessive, emotional, and overprotective. The irony is that while women are socialised to take care of others, when they do what they have been taught, they face overwork, and in millions of cases, impoverishment, domestic violence, and possible abandonment. For hundreds of years, 'experts' in various disciplines have been talking about mothers' faults, particularly in relation to the sons women socialise. From Aristotle to Freud, hundreds of male experts have written about women as mothers, and have overseen and directed mothering (Ehrenreich and English, 1979).

### **The future of care**

Where are we today regarding women's relationships to family? It seems to me that women are holding their families together almost entirely on their own. I recognise that some men might feel offended by this statement, and retort that they change the nappies too, and cook, and earn in order to maintain their families. However, this does not diminish the fact that even when a family includes a husband/father, a majority of women do most of the domestic work within and for the family, even when they also have to go out and 'work' – i.e. generate income. Neither does it change the harsh reality for a large percentage of women who are left literally 'holding the baby', unexpectedly and unprepared, and who may then be blamed for the situation. What has happened to motherhood since the beginning of patriarchy? Why are women and their children among the poorest people on earth? And what does

this say about the state of the family today?

History helps to explain the present. It is not an exercise in escapism, but a device to help us to understand the barriers to the changes that so many of us are trying to implement. I personally believe that the family is in crisis. It is the principal pillar of patriarchy, and, as such, contains people who have varying amounts of power in their relationships. This power is often expressed in violence (Heise, 1993). We only have to look into our past and present families to see women struggling to liberate themselves from belittling or damaging roles.

But to say that the family is in crisis does not mean that it is extinct. What is in crisis are the rigid concepts about the family held by many institutions: religious, educational, medical institutions, and many development agencies. Many of these have a profound interest in propagating their ideas, for they sustain them, and the social systems which give rise to them, and justify their work and the employment of their workers.

However, if we are interested in the rights of women and men to a fairer system of social development, we must work from a knowledge of different family forms, and the needs of individuals within those families. This was one of the central arguments at the UN Fourth Conference on Women, at Beijing in 1995. We live in a world where the work of care for dependents is marginalised from economics and politics (Waring, 1988; Folbre, 1994). Communities, states, and development agencies need to make the ethics of care central to all development initiatives. This demands that we confront the causes and consequences of poverty, and understand why it is that households headed by women are disproportionately represented among the poorest households (Moore, 1994). We should assert that the state and its institutions have a responsibility towards all families, and that a duty of care is shared by all individuals in a society.

We should also analyse the deeply rooted misogyny in our societies. It is time that men began to ask themselves about patriarchy and masculinity, and their part in sustaining a system which is fundamentally unsustainable.

I conclude by offering a practical idea, based on my experience in development projects, and as a firm believer that what we have to change first is human attitudes in order to change behaviour. I suggest that in any project that involves women and men, a child-care centre be established, where both women and men take turns in caring for their young. Caring is learned behaviour. Once the children are taken care of, women will free themselves from looking on caring as their private destiny, men will involve themselves emotionally by learning to care for their children, and both will work in a more productive way towards a collective goal. 'Family' in this case would acquire a collective connotation, instead of being a symbol which represents the private burden of just a few.

*Anna Arroba has lived in Costa Rica since 1980. She directs a programme on Women, Health and Gender at the Latin American Institute for Prevention and Health Education. She also teaches in the Women's Studies Master's Programme in the University of Costa Rica and the National University.*

## References

- Afshar, H (ed) (1991) *Women, Development and Survival in the Third World*, Longman, London and New York.
- Boxer, M J and Quataert J H (1987) *Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World, 1500 to the Present*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford.
- Ehrenreich, B and English D (1979) *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*, Doubleday, New York.
- Fauné, M A (1995) *Mujeres y Familias Centroamericanas: Principales Problemas y Tendencias*, PNUD, San Jose, Costa Rica.
- Folbre, N (1994) *Who Pays for the Kids?*, Routledge, London.
- Gadon, E W (1989) *The Once and Future Goddess*, Harper, San Francisco.
- Gimbutas, M (1991) *The Language of the Goddess*, Harper, San Francisco.
- Heise L (1993) 'Violence against women: the missing agenda' in Kobinsky M, Timyan J, and Gay J (eds) *The Health of Women*, Westview Press.
- Kandiyoti D (1988) 'Bargaining with Patriarchy' in *Gender and Society*, 2: 3.
- Knight, C (1991) *Blood Relations. Menstruation and the Origins of Culture*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.
- Laslett, P (1972) *Household and Family in Past Time*, Cambridge University Press.
- Lerner, G (1986) *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford.
- Mies, M (1986) *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, Zed Books, London.
- Moore, H (1994) *Is there a Crisis in the Family?* Occasional Paper no. 3, World Summit for Social Development, UNRISD.
- Ngan-ling Chow, E and Berheide C W (1994) *Women, the Family, and Policy: A Global Perspective*, State University of New York Press, New York.
- Ranke-Heinemann, U (1990) *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality, and the Catholic Church*, Doubleday, New York.
- Rossi, A S et al (eds) (1978) *The Family*, W W Norton, New York.
- Stone, L (1979) *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, Harper and Row, New York.
- Stone, M (1976) *When God was a Woman*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York and London.
- Walker, B (1983) *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, Harper and Row, San Francisco.
- (1987) *The Skeptical Feminist: Discovering the Virgin, Mother, and Crone*, Harper and Row, San Francisco.
- Waring, M (1988) *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics*, Harper, San Francisco.
- Westwood, S (1991) 'Gender and the Politics of Production in India' in Afshar H (ed) *Women, Development and Survival in the Third World*.

# Patriarchy and development in the Arab world

Suad Joseph

*The persistence of patriarchy in the Arab world, and other regions, is an obstacle for women, children, families, and states. It affects health, education, labour, human rights, and democracy. This article argues that patriarchy is powerful in the Arab world because age-based kinship values and relationships are crucial socially, economically, politically, ideologically, and psychologically.*

To understand why patriarchy is so resilient, we have to study how it permeates society at many levels, not only in the family. I define patriarchy in the Arab context as the prioritising of the rights of males and elders (including elder women) and the justification of those rights within kinship values which are usually supported by religion (Joseph 1993, 1994a). (This definition differs from some Western feminists, who do not consider age or kinship.)

Few scholars have analysed the systematic impact of patriarchy throughout Arab society, and little has been done to study its psychological implications. I will focus on these points in offering a framework for understanding the persistence of patriarchy in the Arab world.

## Differing 'patriarchies'

Patriarchy is a useful descriptive tool for discussing social patterns. In the Arab world, as in the rest of the world, patriarchy does not have just one form (Tucker 1993, Schilcher 1985) or one site, the domestic.

In the European context, Carole Pateman has argued that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western political philosophers replaced the father with the brother figure to create 'fraternal' patriarchy (Pateman, 1988), and that as a result women are understood by Western political theorists as subordinate to men as men, rather than to men as fathers. Most Western feminists, following suit, have seen patriarchy as the power of men over women (Jones 1993, Phillips 1993, Eisenstein 1994).

Arab patriarchy has been defined by Peter Krauss (1987:xii) as 'a hierarchy of authority that is controlled and dominated by males', originating in the family. Another view is that while patriarchy is the 'universal form of traditional society' (Shirabi, 1988,3) patriarchal values and social relations also exist under a veneer of modernity. This is termed 'neopatriarchy'.

Halim Barakat contended that the traditional Arab father 'has authority and responsibility ...expects respect and unquestioning compliance,' (Barakat 1993,100) and supports his power by control over land, resources, and income

generation. Barakat argues that patriarchy is seen throughout Arab society because the family is the basic unit of society (ibid.).

## **Social patriarchy**

Most writers on the Arab world agree that kinship is the centre of Arab society. It sustains a person's sense of self and identity, and shapes their position in society. It is the primary source of economic security. Kinship defines political membership and offers networks to crucial political resources, and also defines religious identity. The centrality of kinship has implications for patriarchy: kinship transports patriarchy into all spheres of social life.

But patriarchy is also independently produced throughout social life, because the privileges of males and seniors are justified in terms that are not bound up with kinship. For example, men and older people are argued to be superior to women and younger people as administrators, professionals, politicians, religious leaders, and the like, without reference to kinship.

In the Arab context, descent through the male line determines one's primary identity throughout one's life. Thus, patrilineage is responsible to varying degrees for the well-being and behaviour of family members. A married Arab woman retains membership in her father's kin group, who are responsible for her throughout her life, which is not the case for all patriarchal systems.

This aspect of patrilineality gives elder males authority over women and juniors of their lineage. While matrilineal kin (mother's relatives) are important emotionally, socially, and often economically, political membership in non-kin communities is based on patrilineal heritage.

## **Economic patriarchy**

I use the term 'economic patriarchy' to discuss the privileging of males and elders in ownership and control over wealth and

resources, including human resources. Patriarchal kinship is the primary source of economic security, and males and elders are considered to be financially responsible for women and junior relatives. Even though women and children are economically active, their contributions to their households are often considered secondary to, or subsumed under, that of men and elders, so that their contributions often do not appear in national statistics.

Inheritance rules in the Arab world favour male descendants and patrilineal members over females. In most Muslim legal systems, daughters do inherit, but they inherit less than sons. But many Muslim women never claim or obtain their full inheritance, in deference to their brothers. Land tends to be given to males. Some women accept this as insurance for the future, should they need to return to their father's or brother's household in case of divorce or widowhood.

While Arab Christian inheritance rules usually allow for female inheritance, many Arab Christian women also defer to their brothers. This deference may be forced. In many Arab countries, land inheritance is complicated, since patrilineal kin often do not legally subdivide properties for generations. Concentration of wealth in the hands of males and elders offers them the economic resources to underpin patriarchal authority.

Economic patriarchy gives men and elders control over kinship labour; they can call upon others for services and labour (paid or unpaid) more than women and juniors can. The assumption here is that males and seniors are more able to reciprocate, or that when females and juniors reciprocate, they do so through the male and senior kin. Relatives often pool resources for investments, open businesses together, or run agricultural endeavours collectively. Kin-based shops, crafts, businesses, and farms account for a significant proportion of small and big business in the Arab world. While some of these

enterprises may entail co-ownership, often financially able kin employ other kin in their businesses. Even when females and juniors are involved as workers or co-owners, males and seniors are usually the primary owners and decision makers.

Patriarchal kinship directly supports economic patriarchy through the use of kin networks for temporary or long-term support. Males and elders are more likely to help their kin find jobs and learn important information about the market place, or to act as references. Males and seniors are better located in the market to begin with, and can offer better assistance. Since males and elders usually control greater financial resources, they are also in a better position to give short- or long-term loans.

In places of work where workers are not related, economic patriarchy draws on the idea of the patriarchal family. For example, in small businesses, kinship terms are often used to justify work relationships. Here, economic patriarchy can be seen supporting gender and age privilege independently of patriarchal kinship. The employer may be thought of as a father or uncle. The workers may be thought of as juniors in this 'workplace family'. Employers may bear 'familial' responsibilities toward their employees, such as going to weddings, funerals, births or other special familial occasions of their workers, extending loans during family crises, or even intervening in family disputes. Workers are expected to be loyal to the employer as head of the family, doing such things as working long hours, rejecting strikes or unions, and attending to the family of the employer.

In all Arab countries, men control the better-paid and higher-status positions. Males and seniors support and prioritise the placement and advancement of other males and seniors. Such gender and age privilege can be justified on the assumed superiority of men and seniors in specific jobs and professions.

## **Political patriarchy**

Kinship is central to the political system. The constitutions of most Arab countries state that the family, not the individual, is the basic unit of society. By declaring the responsibility of the state to preserve the family as the basis of the nation, the constitutions use the family as the recruiting and training ground for citizenship (Joseph 1996). Children inherit their father's citizenship, so, for example, citizenship is usually denied to children of women who marry non-citizens, but given to children of men who marry non-citizens. Children born outside of wedlock may have difficulty in obtaining citizenship, or be labelled 'illegitimate' on their ID cards. A child also inherits the national, ethnic, religious and social affiliations of his or her father. In so far as these affiliations affect political choice, then the father's heritage determines children's opportunities and outlook.

Many Arab countries reinforce patriarchal kinship through pronatalist policies, which subsidise reproduction with payments for births, which are usually added to the wages of the father. A few Arab countries have offered payments for dowry to make marriage easier. Social security, welfare, medical, and retirement benefits are often channelled through the labour market. Given that the formal labour market is mostly male, women's access to these state services is through their husbands and fathers (Giacaman, Jad, Johnson 1996).

Children may inherit the father's political affiliation or political patron/client relationships; Arab political leaders often ensure that their sons follow them as heads of political parties or as members of parliaments. Heads of state and state agencies give their kin government positions. The privileging of relatives in access to government resources is so normal in most Arab countries that it not only goes unnoticed when practised by political

leaders, but is accepted as a political principle. People come to feel that their rights of access to the state come not from citizenship, but from specific relationships which link them to resources and services.

Even those who do not identify with their father's political affiliations often find themselves having to rely on such connections. In Arab countries where access to political resources is through kinship networks, people often start with, while not limiting themselves to, kin to gain public services and resources. Political leaders often reinforce this patrilineal patronage process by asking clients about their kin connections.

I have called this a 'relational construct of rights'. It contrasts with the contractual notion of rights found in many Western states (Joseph 1994b). Relational rights and contractual rights, however, co-exist in most states. While a few scholars have attempted to study relational rights (Nedelsky 1990), what has not been recognised is that relational rights are often part of many patriarchal systems.

Political leaders enhance patriarchy by using patriarchal kin terms. Heads of state often refer to themselves as 'fathers of the nation'; heads of political parties identify themselves as 'fathers' of their movements. Members in political parties may refer to each other as 'brothers' and 'sisters'. They capitalise on the legitimacy which is implicit in the kin system, but, in doing so, they support patriarchy in the political arena. The political system also reinforces patriarchy in that males and seniors constitute the overwhelming majority of political power-holders, as heads of state, members of parliament, government officials, and members of political parties.

Patriarchy is woven throughout Arab society partly because of the fluidity between civil society and state, public and private domains, family and government (Joseph *In press a*). Many political theorists have argued that democracy requires civil society and state to be independent of each

other. Some political theorists argue that boundaries among these domains are inadequate in Arab countries, leading to faulty systems of representation, and authoritarian regimes (see Sadowski 1993 for review). However, these theorists take Western society as 'natural', and inappropriately judge other societies by a Western model of social organisation, which has developed only recently.

Such theorists seldom recognise the contribution of patriarchy to the lack of boundaries between spheres of socio-political life; they themselves are often bound up in similar patterns.

## **Religious patriarchy**

I use the phrase 'religious patriarchy' here to refer to the privileging of males and elders in religious institutions and practices. Religious identity is important in the Arab world. Children and women take the religion of their fathers and husbands. Even if a person leaves their religion, they are identified by the religion of their fathers. Religion can bestow social status and communal identity, as well as channel political membership and opportunities.

Religion is sometimes regarded as a civil status in Arab countries, and this is also true of many non-Arab and non-Middle Eastern countries. In Lebanon, citizens have their religion indicated on their national ID cards. Representation in the government is allocated on the basis of an assumed distribution of the 17 formally recognised religious sects. Distribution of state services and resources is supposed to follow sectarian lines.

Most Arab states do not define citizenship in this way, but religion remains politically important. With the exception of Lebanon, all Arab states identify themselves as Muslim, and honour some Islamic laws. The most important of these are personal status laws, or family law. With the exception of Tunisia, none of the Arab countries have civil personal status laws.

Marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance are governed by religious law. Usually the laws of one dominant religious sect prevail, while recognised religious minorities are tolerated. By placing personal status laws in the hands of religious clerics, most Arab states have given control over fundamental issues of daily life to males and elders. The privileges of patriarchy include patrilineal custody over children, and male privilege in inheritance, in divorce initiative, and in passing on of religious identity. Religious clerics often reject marriages outside their sect.

Religious clerics are, throughout the Arab world, males. Clerics prioritise the kinship system and sanctify it in religious terms; religious institutions in the Arab world, as in much of the world, are patriarchal. They support the power of fathers over their spouses and children, the power of elders over juniors, and the authority of extended male kin over females and juniors; and they themselves act like father figures of their communities.

### **Patriarchy in the self**

Patriarchy works also because it becomes part of the psyche, one's sense of oneself as a person. The way in which patriarchy permeates the psyche is one of the most profound reasons for the endurance of patriarchy. This internalisation of patriarchal principles is perhaps the least understood aspect of the persistence of patriarchy. I have argued (Joseph 1993) that patriarchy in some Arab societies is linked to a 'connective' (or relational) notion of self: a sense of self that is embedded in relationships. In contrast to the individualist, autonomous, bounded, contractual self valued in the West, both women and men in some Arab societies are encouraged to see themselves in relationship to critical others, especially in their families. The boundary between one's sense of self, and other people, is relatively fluid.

Where a sense of selfhood is fostered which emphasises the connectedness of individuals to each other, 'patriarchal connectivity' can emerge. This is the fostering of selves with fluid boundaries who defer to males and elders and understand gender and age privilege in kin and religious terms. Few anthropologists or sociologists have managed to capture this psychodynamic aspect of patriarchy. Astute analyses of patriarchal connectivity have come instead from novelists such as Naguib Mahfouz (1990) and Hanan Al-Shaykh (1989).

### **Development planners, practitioners, and patriarchy**

The argument that patriarchy persists because it permeates social, economic, political, ideological, and psychological aspects of social and personal life has important implications for development planners and practitioners, and policy makers. Democratic development means that every part of society has to be studied for patriarchal practices and beliefs. Most non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are headed by males or seniors, and kin terms and values are frequently used in NGOs. Even women's organisations often parallel men's organisations in using kinship, and female heads of NGOs may act like mothers, bring their relatives into the organisations, and treat members as junior kin (Joseph submitted).

Planners and practitioners must assume that indigenous organisations and activities, in whatever sphere, are likely to be imbued with values and practices that support gender and age privilege. If they start with this assumption and are proven wrong, they will have lost less than if they disregard the influence of patriarchy.

It also implies that development programmes for any sector of society have to be carefully designed, so that they do not

reinforce gender and age privilege. Not every programme may actively work against patriarchy, but it should be the goal of all programmes to avoid supporting patriarchy.

However, planners and practitioners should expect resistance on many fronts when patriarchy is challenged. It would not be surprising for local stakeholders to respond with confusion and disorientation to organisations which seriously displace patriarchal values and practices. Little can constructively happen without local people committed to change holding positions of leadership. In addition, planners and practitioners need to examine their own values, practices, and psyches for overt and covert patriarchal assumptions.

*Suad Joseph teaches anthropology at the University of California. She has published extensively on sectarianism, gender and the family, and constructions of the self and state in Lebanon. Department of Anthropology, University of California, Davis, CA 95616, USA*

## References

- Al-Shaykh, H (1989), *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, Quartet Books, London.
- Alvarez, S (1990) *Engendering Democracy in Brazil*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Barakat, H (1993) *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State*, University of California, Berkeley.
- Eisenstein, Z (1994) *The Color of Gender: Re-imagining Democracy*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Giacaman, R, I Jad and P Johnson, 'For the public good? gender and social citizenship in Palestine,' *Middle East Reports*, 26: 1, 11-17.
- Jones, K (1993) *Compassionate Authority: Democracy and the Representation of Women*, Routledge, New York.
- Joseph, S (1993) 'Connectivity and patriarchy among urban working class families in Lebanon,' *Ethos* 21: 4.
- Joseph, S (1994a) 'Brother/sister relationships: connectivity, love and power in the reproduction of Arab patriarchy,' *American Ethnologist*, 21: 1, 50-73.
- Joseph, S (1994b) 'Problematising gender and relational rights: experiences from Lebanon,' *Social Politics*, 1,3,271-285.
- Joseph, S (1996) 'Gender and citizenship in Middle Eastern states,' *Middle East Reports*, 26:1, 4-10.
- Joseph, S (In press) 'Civil society, the public/private, and gender in Lebanon,' in Muge Gocek, (ed.), University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Joseph, S (Submitted) 'Shopkeepers and feminists: the reproduction of political process,' in Dawn Chatty and Annika Rabo, eds., *Women in Groups in the Middle East*, Berg Publishers, Oxford.
- Kondo, D (1990) *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Krauss, P (1987) *The Persistence of Patriarchy: Class, Gender, and Ideology in Twentieth Century Algeria*, Praeger, New York.
- Mahfouz, N (1990) *Palace Walk*, Doubleday, New York.
- Meeker, M (1976) 'Meaning and Society in the Near East: Examples from the Black Sea Turks and the Levantine Arabs,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 7, 383-422.
- Nedlesky, J (1990) 'Law, boundaries, and the bounded self,' *Representations*, 30,162-189.
- Pateman, C (1988) *The Sexual Contract*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Phillips, A (1993) *Democracy and Difference*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Sadowski, Y (1993) 'The new orientalism and the democracy debate,' *Middle East Reports*, 183: 23: 4,14-26.
- Schilcher, L S (1985) *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, Stuttgart.
- Sharabi, H (1988), *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Tucker, J E (1993) 'The Arab family in history. "Otherness" and the study of the family,' in J E Tucker (ed.) *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 195-207.
- Wolf, M (1972) *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

# Fighting female infanticide by working with midwives: an Indian case study

Ranjani K Murthy

*A feature of family life in many cultures and throughout history has been preference for sons over daughters. This article describes a workshop with traditional midwives in Bihar, which explored the underlying power structures in families and the community which lead to son preference in general, and infanticide of female children in particular. Strategies for combating female infanticide are examined and lessons drawn from this experience.<sup>1</sup>*

In May 1995, Adithi, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working in parts of Bihar with resource-poor women, and Bal Mahila Kalyan (BMK), an NGO working in Bihar with poor people in general, organised a workshop with dais (traditional midwives), on the issue of female infanticide. Adithi had previously carried out a study in the area which concluded that a central reason for the ratio recorded in the 1991 census of 820 girls for every 1000 boys between the ages of birth and six, was female infanticide in certain caste groups. It noted that dais were often called on to kill female infants. Dais predominantly belong to the dalit community,<sup>2</sup> are mostly illiterate, typically live in poverty, and have little power in the community.

The workshop aimed, first, to explore gender discrimination in different caste and religious groups. A second aim was to understand the history and extent of female infanticide in the area, and to examine whether the incidence varies with caste, class and religion, and birth order. Finally, the workshop aimed at identifying

strategies to combat female infanticide. Participants included 28 dais, staff and volunteers from Bal Mahila Kalyan and Adithi, the author as an external consultant, and a reporter from *The Times of India*.

We began by asking the dais: 'if you could choose, would you like to be born a male or a female next time?' We gave each dai a chick-pea to place next to pictures of a boy and a girl, and asked each to state her reasons. (This method was adopted as most of the dais were illiterate.) Of the 23 dais present at this stage, 18 wanted to be male; only five wanted to be female. The benefits perceived of being male fell into five categories: material, social, religious, biological, and emotional. Among the dais who wanted to be born again as a female, two felt that women played an important role in producing life, and keeping the generations going. One of them said: 'if all of us became males, how will life continue? We play an important role in society.' Two dais felt that as women they could be closer to the children, which was a source of satisfaction. Two dais pointed out that women do not need to go out and strain

themselves as much as men. They could relax, to an extent, at home. Thus, as far as the issue of the division of labour between women and men is concerned, it appears that some of the dais had struck 'bargains with patriarchy' (Kandiyoti 1988), and enjoyed some of the privileges which the system had to offer women, though it limited their access to, and control of, resources. On the positive side, at least two of the dais felt that women played a key role in society.

We decided to summarise the different reasons cited through pictures. Most dais were used to drawing *rangolis* (decorative designs) on the ground, and some also drew pictures on the wall. Some of these pictures may make more sense to those of us present than to outsiders, but it served the purpose of summarising and synthesising the discussions!

### Caste, religion and male preference

The dais participating were all from the dalit community, and were mostly very poor. We asked them if they considered that gender-based discrimination was prevalent in other castes, and to what extent. The dais thought gender-based

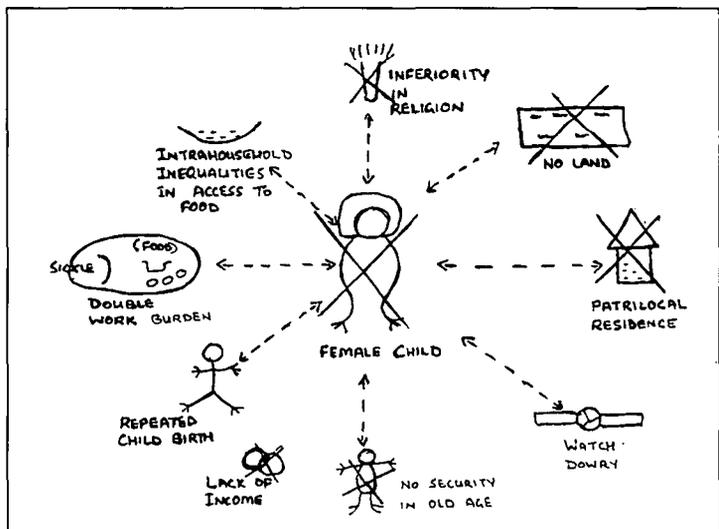
inequality and discrimination are found in extreme forms in upper-caste Hindu communities. The upper castes – Rajputs, Bhumihars, Brahmans and Kayasths – who are also wealthier, scored the highest with the dais in terms of gender inequality; Baniyas and Yadavs came next; and gender inequality among the dalits and Muslim communities was perceived to be lower than in other groups – though still considerable.

### Gender inequalities among Hindus

There are some common gender-based disadvantages faced by all Hindu women in this part of Bihar; for example, irrespective of caste, Hindu women do not have customary rights to land. It is common across all castes for daughters to leave their parental home to go to their husband's home upon marriage, so the parents do not derive any significant economic benefit, nor social support from daughters after their marriage. Irrespective of caste, women with sons occupy a higher spiritual status than those with only daughters. The practice of paying dowry to the husband's family was widely prevalent, though the extent varies with caste.

There are also a few caste-specific disadvantages. 'Forward-caste' women<sup>3</sup> do not normally go out of the home to work,

Diagram drawn by dais in the workshop illustrating various ways in which gender discrimination is experienced and expressed.



irrespective of wealth or poverty, and are constrained by strict norms of exclusion. Domestic work and child care is solely their responsibility. The incidence and rate of dowry is much higher than in other castes. In contrast, women from 'backward' castes engage in income generation; in the case of Baniyas, women assist in their husband's business, while women from the Yadav community engage in wage labour and are also involved in cultivating any land their husbands possess.<sup>4</sup> Men in the Yadav community help out with housework at times. Women from these two communities either receive money from their husbands, or can at least claim a share of resources. However, their economic contribution to the household is usually significantly lower than their husband's.

Among dalits,<sup>5</sup> women play an important economic role in the household, sometimes contributing even more than their husbands. Husbands help out in housework and child care, though the primary responsibility rests with women. The extent of gender discrimination was least in this group.

In all castes, the costs of daughters to parents are higher than those of sons, and the benefits lower. The cost of a girl's upbringing was highest in the case of Rajputs, Bhumihars, Brahmans and Kayasths, and the socio-religious-economic benefits the least. The costs of having a girl were slightly lower in the case of Baniyas and Yadavs, while the economic benefits to the parents and the community were slightly higher. In the case of dalits, the costs were even lower, and benefits were even higher, though still far from equal.

According to the dais, female infanticide is common amongst all Hindu castes, to varying degrees, except among dalits. They observed that in the case of the upper/forward castes, the second or third daughters onwards are the most vulnerable, while in the case of backward castes, the fourth or fifth daughters onward are the most vulnerable.

### ***Gender inequalities in the Muslim community***

The dais perceived the status of women in Muslim communities to be better than that of Hindu women. They pointed out that Muslim women earn income from home-based work, and help in cultivation if they or their husbands own land. Some Muslim women own land themselves, though their land is a quarter to half the size of that owned by their brothers. Muslims in the area married their daughters within the village, or in the neighbouring villages, which made it easier for them and their husbands to manage the land which the women owned. Intra-household inequalities in access to food on the basis of gender were much lower when compared to upper-caste Hindu communities.

However, dais reported that, in common with their Hindu counterparts, Muslim women in the area did encounter inequalities and gender discrimination. For example, women earned substantially less than their husbands, and they did not have full control over earnings. The burden of domestic work and child-care continued to rest on them.

The practice of dowry had spread even to this community. The dais felt that the Muslim religion accorded women a lower status, although women benefited from that fact that Muslims, unlike Hindus, do not believe that having sons gives parents a higher spiritual status. It was noted by the dais that the fertility rate of Muslim women in the area was much higher (ten to twelve children) than that of Hindu women (four to five children), possibly due to religious sanctions against contraceptives and the insecurity stemming from belonging to a minority community.

Dais felt that on the whole both Muslims and Hindus value the birth of a girl less than that of a boy; and, in both communities, the gender differentials in costs and benefits of male and female children lead at the day-to-day level to practices like favouring male children in

the distribution of food and education, and at the extreme, to practices such as female infanticide. However, the dais said that female infanticide is not practised amongst Muslim households because it is against Islamic principles to kill a female infant, and Muslims feared that they would incur the wrath of God if they did so.

### **Dais' experience of female infanticide**

The dais stated that the practice of female infanticide started among the upper castes in this region around 15 years ago, and spread much later to backward castes. The assertion that female infanticide is a recent phenomenon in parts of Bihar is also supported by the study carried out by Adithi (Srinivasan et al, 1995), which attributed its emergence to increase in dowry, poverty, and destitution in the last decade and a half. However, the study does not support the view that female infanticide is not practised amongst dalits and Muslims (Srinivasan et al, 1995, Priya and Tyab, 1996). According to the findings, the practice has spread to these communities as well, due to economic marginalisation of women from these communities with technological changes, though it was less frequent than in upper-caste Hindu communities. The study supports the view of dais that girl children born later in the family are more vulnerable to female infanticide.

We encouraged the dais to take part in a 'role play' and held informal, intimate discussions with four dais, to try to understand the context of female infanticide, the role of the dais, and the different forms which female infanticide took. Role play was chosen as the method as the issues are very sensitive, and it is easier to explore them if people are acting rather than talking directly about the experience. In the role play, the father was portrayed as asking the dai who assisted in the birth to kill his infant daughter for 1,000 rupees. The father

threatened the dai (who was extremely poor) that if she did not comply, he would harm her entire family. The dai used a rope to strangle the female infant and received only 100 rupees in payment. The mother was a silent observer throughout.

When we asked the dais at the workshop to elaborate about the reaction of mothers in such cases, they said that no mother would willingly kill her own child, even if it was a female. According to them, mothers do not have any power in the household.<sup>6</sup> After the role play, dais said they do not like being asked to kill female infants, but are forced to, because of their extreme poverty. This poverty is caused by complex factors including the low pay dais receive for delivering babies (even lower if the infant is a female), dependency on upper-caste households for agricultural employment and credit, and the power which some of the men from these castes wield in the village.

Informal discussions with four dais revealed that they had delivered 14 children in the last month, of whom eight were females. The dais stated that, while all the male children were allowed to live, four out of the eight female infants were killed.<sup>7</sup> According to the dai concerned, two of these were killed by the parents (although she admitted to having killed these two infants as well, in the interview with Adithi staff during the survey), and the remaining two by the dais. Two of the babies were from the upper caste, one from the Yadav community, and one from a family from West Bengal, whose caste the dais did not know. A variety of methods were used to kill female infants. Strangulation, giving the baby a large quantity of salt, mixing poisonous seeds with milk, and leaving the infant in a clay pot covered with a lid were some of the common methods. The dais were often promised Rs600 to Rs1,000 before killing the infants, but they admitted that they were usually paid much less in the end.

## Why the discrimination?

The next theme for discussion at the workshop was the underlying causes of gender inequity and female infanticide. Some dais said that men did difficult work, and hence they earned more. A few said that women's inferior status was ordained by God, while others pointed out that social structures were the underlying causes.

### *Do men do the more difficult tasks?*

We analysed whether it was true that women's work was easier than that of men, and whether that explained gender differentials in wages. The more vocal amongst the dais felt that this was not so, and that poor or untrained women perform work which is comparable to, if not more difficult than, the work done by men. Taking the example of the dais themselves, their work required many skills, as much as some of the surgery done by male doctors, which was highly valued. Cooking as an activity was paid when done (predominantly by men) outside the household, but not when done at home by women.

Thus, participants realised that women's work inside the house was not valued economically and socially, not because it was easier and unskilled, but because of the value attached to it by society. This prejudice extended to women's work outside the household, which was undervalued because of gender ideology, despite the fact that it earned income.

### *Are gender inequalities ordained by God?*

The more vocal amongst the dais argued that the inferiority of women is not ordained by God, but was a particular interpretation of religious tradition by male religious leaders. They pointed out that there are many Hindu goddesses, revered by the community, including Lakshmi, associated with wealth, Saraswathi, with education, and Durga or Kali, with strength

and power, and others believed to have power over the fertility of land.

### *Are gender inequalities a result of social structures which favour men?*

It would appear that underpinning the problem of gender discrimination and its extreme manifestation in female infanticide are complex economic, social, and cultural issues which are expressed through social institutions, including the family, community (including religion), market, and the state. Ideologies, practices, structures, and resource distribution are linked together, and this leads to gender discrimination, as well as discrimination arising out of other social differences, such as caste, class, religion, and ethnicity. Given that these are social problems, not biological or divinely ordained, they can be changed over time.

## Strategies to fight female infanticide

Several innovative strategies were suggested by the dais:

- **Make the prevalence of female infanticide visible to the eyes of state officials:** at present, the prevalence of female infanticide is not officially accepted by the bureaucracy, judiciary, and police, as no government survey has been conducted of its incidence in castes, classes, and across different regions, and its variation depending on the birth order of babies; nor does the census provide such disaggregated data. One of the problems is that births and deaths are not officially registered. A workshop on this issue is being planned with representatives from various government departments, district court officials, commercial and co-operative banks, and NGOs, to discuss carrying out a joint survey on demographic changes across different caste and religious groups, over a period of time. The survey would gather inform-

ation on the birth position of female infants who are known to have died, through interviewing parents, dais and progressive village members. A campaign for compulsory registration of births and deaths would also be launched, and care would be taken that dais, victims of the system but the official culprits, were not victimised. The results of the survey would feed into a second workshop on female infanticide with government, bank officials, NGOs, dais and sensitive village leaders, in which joint strategies would be discussed.

- **Set up watchdog committees at village level:** dais suggested that BMK should set up watchdog committees at village level immediately, to keep track of demographic changes discussed above, and ensure registration of all births and deaths; to raise awareness of the issue of female infanticide and other forms of gender discrimination; and to exert social and moral pressure to prevent female infanticide, failing which to take legal recourse. Dais, representatives from different communities, Sarpanchs (leaders of local self-governance institutions), school teachers, religious leaders, government officials and local staff of NGOs would be members of this committee, provided they are sensitive to the issue of female infanticide and gender discrimination. The dais felt that leadership should not rest with themselves, to avoid incurring the wrath of the community. Half the membership and leadership will be reserved for women.

(After the workshop, the staff and the facilitating team had a heated debate about whether gender-sensitive people could be found in some of the above groups; whether religion should be used to apply moral pressure by saying it is a sin to commit female infanticide; and whether police and legal action would be useful if social and moral pressures failed. A majority felt that 'benevolent patriarchs'

can be found who may be against female infanticide, and these, and religious institutions, should be used strategically. Similarly, while the state perpetuates patriarchal values in several ways, it was felt that its official commitment to gender justice can and should be exploited.)

- **Promote anti-poverty programmes with dais and women from vulnerable groups:** The dais suggested ways of addressing poverty so that they could resist being involved in a criminal act. They suggested fighting for higher wages, and equal payment for delivery of boys and girls; trying to obtain a government provision of Rs100 per month for dais, which existed in the past; and upgrading their skills so that they could offer a wide range of services and earn more. They could also supplement their income by beginning non-traditional income generation programmes.

(In the post-workshop meeting, NGOs felt that building the earnings of dais was not a solution by itself, as the parents could hire others or kill the female infants themselves. Strategies to raise the incomes of all women from the vulnerable castes was felt necessary to raise their status, and give them an independent voice.)

- **Promote welfare programmes directed at female infants:** Some dais wanted an orphanage for female infants, where parents could leave unwanted babies. The external facilitators disagreed; one, cited Tamil Nadu's experience which had led to girls irrespective of age being dumped by parents (Vydhanathan and Mathew, 1992, Express News Service, 1992). The centres were not well-run, and adequate food and education was not provided. The dais pointed out that these problems could be reduced if the orphanage was run by NGOs with watchdog committees, and that although this strategy does not address the root of

the problem, it provides immediate relief and can save the lives of female infants.

- **Raise awareness and empower women, using dais as change agents:** dais who had been exposed to other group activities joined the staff of BMK, and the facilitators in suggesting training committed dais to act as 'change agents', to enhance awareness among women and men of the broader issue of gender discrimination, and to empower women. Such programmes may be carried out by NGOs, rather than the government, and may be directed at women and men from all communities, unlike most programmes of NGOs which are directed only at economically weaker sections of the community. Some of the strategies identified for raising awareness were setting up of gender-sensitive cultural groups, holding *shivirs* (awareness-raising camps) at village level, and organising a *padayatras* (march) of parents, who are proud and happy to have daughters, with their daughters. It was recognised that the empowerment of women may demand strategies beyond occasional events; forming women's groups, and strengthening their economic and social base, was considered essential.

## Lessons learnt at the workshop

The experience of the workshop offers several lessons on how to examine factors leading to son preference and its consequences at family and community level; particularly the importance of getting to the roots of such issues, showing how the distribution of resources and power in the family and community leads to son preference, and how policies and practices of the state and markets reinforce this.

Gender relations are always closely intertwined with other social relations. Within the institution of family, it is useful to explore how gender relations interlock

with age and birth order, and how, at the community level, gender relations interlock with social relations of caste and religion. In short, a social relations and institutional approach (Kabeer, 1994) to examining gender relations is essential to understand the ideology of son preference, and female infanticide as its extreme consequence.

The exploration of strategies to combat female infanticide suggests some of the difficulties in prioritising strategic gender interests over practical gender needs in the short run (Moser, 1989), and raises the question of whose priorities count. Both strategic interests and practical needs should be identified and addressed simultaneously, with the vision of working towards strategic gender interests in the long run. Women's own definitions of their needs and interests should be central.

Other lessons relate to the methods chosen to unravel the factors leading to son preference and female infanticide. While surveys are inadequate to address complex social relationships, participatory methods are not foolproof either. If the methods employed in a participatory way of working actually challenge power relations, they may be more effective than the survey method, both in capturing the factors leading to female infanticide, and indicating appropriate strategies.

An analysis of what worked and didn't work during the workshop suggests that some of the factors which need to be kept in mind while using participatory methods are: identifying methods<sup>8</sup> to express gender-based power relations which lead to son preference and female infanticide; working towards a goal of changing these power relations throughout the workshop process; promoting clarity on the objectives of each exercise among participants, and consensus on this;<sup>9</sup> respecting the need of participants to retain privacy during sensitive discussions, and timing the workshop according to demands on their time; and making a conscious effort to reduce hierarchies between facilitators and participants.

Lastly, the strategies suggested for combating female infanticide suggest that participatory approaches and survey methods may not be mutually exclusive. For example, strategies to make visible the prevalence of female infanticide may need to combine participatory approaches with base-line surveys.

*Ranjani Murthy is a gender specialist and researcher in rural development. Address: 16 Srinivasa Murthy Avenue, Adyar, Madras 600020 India.*

## Notes

1 The author would like to thank the dais, Adithi and BMK staff for giving her an opportunity to be part of the process of sharing, analysing and learning. She is also grateful to Caroline Sweetman for her comments on the original report.

2 The term 'dalit' means oppressed and down trodden, and was coined by the untouchables to refer to themselves and other oppressed groups, as against the paternalistic term 'harijan' (children of God) which was coined by Gandhi to refer to untouchables alone. In popular usage, 'dalits' refers almost exclusively to untouchables.

3 'Forward and backward castes' are terms used by the Indian government to categorise different caste groups based on their economic and social position. Forward castes are more privileged in these two respects, and backward castes are less privileged. However, the government's valuation of social position does not take into account the gender dimension, which at times follows the reverse order. Forward castes are Rajputs, Bhumihars, Brahman and Kayasths.

4 Yadavs (traditionally cow herders) and Banias (traders)

5 Including Dravidas, Mushahars, and Chamars.

6 The facilitation team felt that the processes at work may be more complicated. Do mothers silently give consent because they realise the plight of their daughters if they survive? Do they comply because the status of mothers of only daughters is lower than the status of mothers of only sons or sons and daughters? A very basic area for questioning is whether mothers are more biologically attached to their children than

fathers – or if it is simply a cultural belief that this is the case. These aspects need to be explored further.

7 The figure of a maximum of one female infanticide per month per dai is lower than the figure recorded by Adithi in the course of its survey, which put the figure as high as 3-4 cases of female infanticide per dai per month (Srinivasan et al, 1995).

8 For a detailed analysis of lessons from this workshop and other experiences, see Murthy (forthcoming).

9 Some of the dais, given their poverty, were at times more concerned with their personal gain, rather than combating female infanticide. Similarly, the journalist who attended the workshop, though committed to combating the practice of female infanticide, had also come with another objective – of getting facts (names of dais, for example) required for authentic reporting. These various motivations came into the way of good discussions.

## References

Express News Service (1992) 'Cradles for unwanted attracting bigger kids', *Indian Express*, 26 November.

Kabeer, N (1994) 'Towards gender-aware policy and planning: a social relations perspective', in Macdonald, M (ed.), *Gender Planning in Development Agencies*, Oxfam, England.

Kandiyoti D (1988) 'Bargaining with patriarchy' in *Gender and Society* 2: 3.

Moser C N N (1989) 'Gender planning In Third World development: meeting practical and strategic gender needs' in *World Development* 17: 11.

Murthy, forthcoming, 'Examining gender relations through participatory approaches' in Guijt, I and Shah, M (eds.), *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, IIED/IDS, England.

Priya, D and S, Tyab (1996) 'Birthday deathday', in *Humanscape*, January.

Srinivasan, V, et al (1995) *Female Infanticide in Bihar*, Adithi, Bihar.

Vydhianathan, S and Mathew, T (1992) 'No babies for TN cradles', *Indian Express*, 2 December.

# Female-headed families: a comparative perspective of the Caribbean and the developed world

Sheila Stuart

*The Caribbean family has been perceived to be in crisis, partly because it does not conform to the Western ideal of a nuclear family. This article compares the changing family patterns in other parts of the world with family patterns that have remained fairly constant in the Caribbean, and suggests that many of the earlier assumptions about Caribbean families, particularly in relation to female-headed households, need to be re-examined.*

According to Hart and Miller, family forms long established in the Caribbean are now becoming more general in the Western World, as the nuclear family collapses under a multiplicity of social forces. It has therefore become 'more difficult to hold that the Caribbean family is a backward failure to achieve the modern nucleated norms celebrated by American sociologists of the 1950s (Hart, 1989). Miller theorised: 'Caribbean peoples are still to discover that they are ahead of most of the world in their adaptations and adjustments to fundamental factors shaping the nature of society, now and in the future' (Miller, 1991).

The changes taking place in the metropolitan countries provide the opportunity for a less biased approach to the study of family everywhere, discarding notions of superiority and inferiority, and seeing family formations as adaptations to economic and social conditions. One of the basic features of the family is its ability to adapt to new social forces and reconstruct in response to both internal and external pressure (Bruce, Lloyd and Leonard 1995).

## The controversial Caribbean family

The African-Caribbean family has been examined over the past 50 years from varying theoretical perspectives. While providing some understanding of the family within the Caribbean context, family research in the Caribbean has remained a hot-bed of controversy. For example, early studies have alluded to 'anomalous' family types; however, the analytical framework on which these assessments is based is essentially Eurocentric, suggesting that the nuclear family, which has its roots in Western civilisation, is the ideal social unit.

The Caribbean is distinguished by the high incidence of female heads of households. According to official statistics, between 22 and 44 per cent of women in CARICOM countries are sole heads of households (CARICOM, 1995). Various studies have attributed this phenomenon to the sexual irresponsibility of the Caribbean male, which had its roots in slavery, the migration of large numbers of men in search of employment, and the loose and

temporary arrangements of conjugal bonds (Chevannes 1993). Marriage is not seen in the dominant culture of the region as a socially necessary precursor for procreation, hence women may opt to have and raise children independently.

Women have long been acknowledged as the backbone of Caribbean families: they often perform the dual roles of housewife and breadwinner. The cases where men and women share housekeeping tasks equally are very rare, but there is some indication that this is changing. The primary responsibility of women for family welfare is based on the sexual division of labour in the family. In the early literature on the Caribbean family, women's role in society was defined almost exclusively as reproductive, and mothering was viewed as the chief occupation through which women's status was determined; while the male was defined mainly as breadwinner (Mohammed, 1988). However, this view ignored the historical contribution of women to the economic and social development of Caribbean societies, which has its roots in plantation slavery; and has been challenged by a number of Caribbean scholars. The Caribbean has been regarded as unique in the immense historical importance of the economic role of women, which has given women a motivation to achieve autonomy, in terms of their relationships with men and with wider society (Beckles 1988; Mohammed 1988; Phillips 1994; Reddock 1994; Safa 1986).

### **Shaping and re-shaping the Caribbean family**

Caribbean families are highly complex, and many forms exist side by side – reflecting the pluralistic nature of Caribbean societies. These diverse family forms have emerged in response to historical, economic, and social forces, evolving according to what people have found functional to their needs. For example, in Barbados,

immediately following emancipation, many families chose to remain on the plantations, in order to safeguard their children and keep their families intact (Marshall, 1986).

Families in the Caribbean have been variously categorised over the years. The census definitions are:

- 1 Married: husband and wife sharing a common residence.
- 2 Common-law: man and woman not legally united but sharing a common residence.
- 3 Visiting: unmarried couple, sharing sexual relationship but not common residence.
- 4 Single-parent: single woman or man living with their children, defined as 'no longer living with spouse or common-law partner' or 'never in a union'.
- 5 Extended: three or more generations sharing a common residence.

The 'extended family' typically includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and sometimes close friends, and provides a network for support and nurturing. It is still common today to find two or three generations of family members sharing a home and household responsibilities (Stuart, 1993). However, as a result of social and economic changes, extended families are beginning to break down. A major contributory factor to this breakdown has been migration in search of employment, which has taken many forms over the years, ranging from internal, between territories, to external, to Europe, USA, and, to a lesser extent, Latin America. A 'transnational family' structure is developing: 'a nuclear or extended family unit which spreads across national boundaries', in which 'critical family functions, such as economic and emotional support are shared among family members' (Wiltshire, 1986, 4).

## Life-cycle factors

Census data and research have shown that up to 75 per cent of Caribbean women under the age of 25 have their first child prior to the formation of a residential union. The mating pattern has three distinct stages, beginning with the 'visiting union', where it is not uncommon to find young women with children living in their parental home. In this situation, there is heavy dependence on blood relatives for support. Young mothers are predominantly in visiting unions where 'marriage.. except in East Indian populations, is negligible' (McKenzie, 1993, 81). The second stage is the common-law or non-marital, residential union; while the third stage is marked by a gradual transition to marriage; most women between the ages of 25 and 45 are in such unions.

Age is therefore a critical factor: while family formation may begin with early unmarried childbearing, as partners become older there is a trend towards marriage. After the age of 45 there are indications of higher levels of separation, divorce and widowhood, which leave large numbers of women without resident male partners; the majority of female heads of households are found in older age group.

## Blaming women for 'family breakdown'

A view, frequently heard today, is that women are abandoning their responsibility to their children by opting for full-time employment outside the home. Since the mother has been recognised as being the prime socialising agent in Caribbean society (Chevannes 1993), she has been and continues to be consistently blamed for the breakdown of family, and particularly for delinquency in young males.

The basis of this argument is multi-faceted, but includes the premise that the loose arrangement of single-parenting does not allow for proper socialising of children, and leads to deviance and a breakdown of

social order. One Government Minister in Barbados recently stated, 'women should be wary of their actions. Being a single parent is no easy task and judging by the number of single-parent families in our society mainly headed by women, it would appear that men are not fulfilling their obligations to women or their offspring' (*Daily Nation*, 3 April, 1995).

## Female-headed households and economic motivation

Recent research has revealed that a significant number of single-parent households result from deliberate choice (Chant 1985; Leo-Rhynie 1993). Women often prefer not to enter permanent or semi-permanent unions with men, for various reasons. Women sometimes perceive that they will be better off financially if they remain on their own; women also fear that they will lose their independence and become subordinate to men, and lose control and custody of their children.

The view that female heads of households are found primarily in the lower classes of society, and tend to be very poor, has also been challenged. In analysing the incidence of poverty in Guyana, Thomas' investigations revealed that the data on single-parent households headed by females do not confirm the widely held view that these households are the most vulnerable. (Thomas 1995). There is, indeed, a new trend among middle-class professional women deliberately to choose single parenting, because of their social and economic independence (Leo-Rhynie 1993). But there is also a growing trend of professional single men who are adopting and raising children single-handedly. Although this new family type has its own challenges, the parent's commitment tends to be intense because it results from choice.

## Men's status in Caribbean families

Another assumption being currently challenged is the traditional negative view 'about men and the roles they play as husbands and fathers' (UNICEF, 1994, 1). Men have tended to be seen as irresponsible, and marginal to family life in the Caribbean, and it is true that many women are deserted by their partners, and left to support their offspring alone. R T Smith, for example, claimed that the extra-residential mating patterns of men were an expression of irresponsibility towards family. But this position was challenged by Chevannes, who conducted a survey in Jamaica among males 18 years and over and found that nearly 40 per cent had fathered a child with only one woman and 30 per cent had no children.

The contribution of men to the family has been narrowly defined as providing financial support and discipline. However, there are many situations where men (fathers, step-fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers, and cousins) are involved in an array of support networks, which benefit female relatives who head households. Recently, therefore, there have been calls to explore the role of fathering beyond providing an income and discipline.

## Comparative perspectives on the family

Having outlined the features of the historic and prevailing Caribbean family, I would now like to turn to the literature on changing family patterns in the developing world, survey different reasons offered for these changes, and touch on some of the similarities and differences between the Caribbean and Europe and North America.

In the West, change in family life is characterised by a decline in the significance of marriage, as witnessed by falling marriage rates, and an increase in divorce and cohabitation. There has also been a

corresponding rise in non-marital child-bearing in almost all age-groups (Bumpass 1994). In an analysis of the changing family in Sweden, which he describes as one of the most advanced and egalitarian amongst Western industrialised nations, Popenoe argues that the trend is towards movement beyond and away from the nuclear family (Popenoe, 1987). What Popenoe and Bumpass describe is almost an exact replica of family patterns prevalent in Caribbean societies: low rates of marriage, high rates of non-marital cohabitation, high rates of family dissolution, and extensive movement of women into the labour force.

Historical data has indicated that female-headed households in European societies are not such a novel concept as social scientists would have us believe. For example, *de facto* female-headed households were prevalent under feudalism, where wives were left not only in charge of households, but often managed estates on their own when their husbands went off to wars: 'even medieval peasant women found themselves in charge of hearth and farm - with even fewer resources - when their serf husbands followed the knights to war' (Hager, 1993, 13). More recently, Moeller (1993) examined the West German post-war family in 1946, explaining that Germany became a 'country of women', with a high proportion of women living alone with their children, and an illegitimacy rate of over 16 per cent.

In Britain, Graham found that 'families' do not conform to a standard shape or size: 'There is no such thing as "the family" in the sense of one accepted model of family life. Instead, variety is the norm' (Graham, 1983). There is evidence of a major change in the formation of first partnerships among young women in Britain, with cohabitation becoming the dominant model. These unions either end in marriage or are dissolved. The percentage of women having a child within a cohabiting union is also estimated to have doubled in the last 30 years or so (Buck and Ermisch 1995).

In comparing this pattern with the Caribbean family life cycle outlined earlier, there are some distinct similarities. First, it is younger women who cohabit; secondly, a large percentage of such unions lead to marriage; thirdly, a large percentage of first births occur in such unions. This is confirmed by Bumpass, whose research shows that the vast majority of new single-parent families in the US were formed by the birth of a child to an unmarried woman, not through separation or divorce.

Changes in the family in the 'developed world' have been attributed to the advances in gender equality, and 'economic changes which provide parents with sources of sustenance independent of their spouse' (Sokalski 1993, 8): mainly, women's increased participation in the paid economy. The underlying assumption is that female employment, due in part to the expansion of educational opportunities, brings financial autonomy, which allows women to make a choice where family is concerned. This phenomenon has also been cited as being responsible for changes in family life in the Caribbean, but researchers including Reddock, Miller and Beckles argue that Caribbean women have always been active in the workforce, performing the dual roles of income earner and caretaker of the home and family. While the working women in industrialised societies may spend periods outside the workforce in childrearing activities, this is not the case for Caribbean women.

However, as Miller asks, 'what does slavery have in common with industrial societies in full bloom of economic prosperity?' (Miller, 1991, 71). The emergence of family patterns similar to those in the Caribbean, in Western industrialised societies, which have no history of slavery or plantation systems, calls for new explanations for such changes. Although not disputing the fact that plantation society influenced patterns of family formation in African-Caribbean groups, Miller argues that the spread of such patterns in

contemporary society among non-African groups who have never experienced slavery challenges the slavery legacy thesis (Miller, *ibid*). Hart has tried to grapple with this paradox, arguing that industrialisation in the West demands the gradual separation of social production from domestic reproduction. This separation, had already begun under slavery, and therein lies the similarity. The division of labour under industrialisation removed from the family the responsibility of preparing the labour force. This function is taken over by the state, primarily through the provision of education. With industrialisation, the institution of the 'family' becomes almost redundant, because reproduction no longer depends on a specific domestic arrangement between men and women.

The availability of welfare benefits has been put forward as an 'economic motivation' for black female-headed families in the United States. It is frequently used to explain why large numbers of these families are living on welfare rather than earnings (Darity and Myers, 1984). A similar theory has been propounded in the UK, where large numbers of young women, many of whom are black, are perceived as living off the welfare state. It is claimed that young teenage girls, who are desperate to get away from home, strategically exploit the welfare system, where the state provides all single parents in poor socio-economic circumstances with adequate housing.

In the Caribbean, there is no elaborate system of welfare support, so the economic motivation thesis is used in a different context. Here, it is linked to the phenomena of multiple 'baby-fathers', where in an effort to find financial support for their children, mothers become involved with a series of men. There is a strong perception in some quarters that women deliberately choose to have children so that men will support them. For example, in Barbados a Probation Officer was quoted as saying that mothers 'seem to think that men must

support the children. Child support cases could be decreased if women were more responsible. They need to control themselves and not let men believe they are sex receptacles ... very often a woman is saddled with raising children on her own.' (*Daily Nation*, 3 April 1995).

## Conclusion

When we recognise that the 'family unit' does not function in isolation from the larger society, it will be easier to remove the labels which serve mainly as stumbling blocks in the understanding of 'families'. The nuclear family is but one family form among many, not only in the Caribbean, but elsewhere (Hart 1989; Mille, 1991; Harris 1994; Graham 1984). 'Dysfunctionality within the family is not necessarily correlated within single-parent families and occurs in families of all types' (Harris, 1994).

We therefore need to give equal recognition and support to all family forms (Harris, 1994), recognising that although the 'family' is the primary social institution in society, it can exert both negative and positive effects. We should not romanticise the family, whatever form it takes.

There are numerous policy implications inherent in this analysis. Policies should be devised in such a way that women are not marginalised, but instead are better prepared to be economic decision-makers. To achieve this, the following are needed:

- Recognition of the economic contributions of women to families and to society through their paid and unpaid work. For example, the International Wages for Housework Campaign proposed, at the 1985 United Nations End of Decade Conference, that governments should place a monetary value on housework and have this reflected in national budgets (Stuart, 1991).
- Support for self-employed status for housewives. In 1989, Caribbean housewives called on their governments to recognise them as self-employed persons, so that they could contribute and have access to National Insurance benefits where these existed (Springer, 1989). Such a reform would recognise that women's contribution to their families is not only unpaid but under-valued.
- Re-definition of the roles of men and women in 'families', to give equal status to each parent. For example, in several Caribbean territories married women cannot under law register the birth of their children, which can only be done by the husband, the presumed father..
- Strengthening of the family through sharing responsibility in the upbringing of children between women, men, and society. 'Maternity, motherhood, parenting and the role of women in procreation must not be the basis for discrimination nor restrict the full participation of women in society' (Item No.30, Beijing Platform for Action).

*Sheila Stuart is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, PO Box 64, Bridgetown, Barbados, WI.*

## References

- Barrow, C (1986) 'Finding the support: a study of strategies for survival'. *Social and Economic Studies* 35: 2.
- Beckles, H (1988) *Afro Caribbean Women and Resistance to Slavery in Barbados*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Buck N and Ermisch J (1995) 'Cohabitation in Britain', *Changing Britain*, Issue Three, Economic and Social Research Council.
- Bruce, J, Lloyd C B, and Leonard A (1995) *Families in Focus: New Perspectives on Mothers, Fathers and Children*, The Population Council, New York.
- Bumpass, L (1994) 'The declining significance of marriage: changing family in the United States', Keynote Address in *Changing Britain Newsletter*, Economic and Social Research Council.
- CARICOM (1995) *Towards Equity in Development: A Report of the Status of Women in Sixteen Commonwealth Caribbean Countries*, Prepared for

- the Fourth World Conference on Women, Caribbean Community Secretariat.
- Chant, S (1985) 'Single-parent families: choice or constraint? The formation of female-headed households in Mexican shanty towns', *Development and Change* 16: 4.
- Chevannes, B (1993) 'Stresses and strains: situation analysis of the Caribbean family', Paper prepared for United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting, Preparatory to the International Year of the Family.
- Daily Nation*, 'Parents urged to be aware of roles', 3 April, 1995.
- Darity W A Jr. and Myer S L Jr. (1984) 'Does welfare dependency cause female headship? The case of the black family', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 46: 4.
- Gonzalez, V D (1982) 'The realm of female familial responsibility' in Massiah J (ed.) *Women and the Family: Women in the Caribbean Project*, Volume 2. Institute of Social and Economic Research, UWI, Barbados.
- Hager, J A (1993) 'The medieval family: lessons from the past?', *Development* 1993:4.
- Harris, S T (1994) *Family Code for the Caribbean*, Caribbean Community Secretariat.
- Hart, K (1989) *Women and the Sexual Division of Labour in the Caribbean*, Consortium Graduate School of Society Sciences, UWI.
- ISER, Barbados (1986) *Sub-Regional Seminar on Changing Family Patterns and Women's Roles in the Caribbean Final Report*.
- Leo-Rhynie, E (1993) *The Jamaican Family: Continuity and Change*, Grace Kennedy Foundation.
- Marshall, T (1986) 'Post-emancipation adjustments in Barbados' in Thompson, A (ed) *Emancipation I*, lectures to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of Emancipation, Department of History, UWI and the Barbados National Cultural Foundation.
- Mckenzie, H (1993) 'The family, class and ethnicity in the future of the Caribbean', Greene, E (ed) *Race, Class and Gender in the Caribbean*, ISER, Jamaica.
- Miller, E (1991) *Men at Risk*, Jamaica Publishing House.
- Moeller, R G (1993) *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Post-war Germany*.
- Mohammed, P (1988) 'The Caribbean family revisited', in Mohammed P and Sheppard, C (eds) *Gender in Caribbean Development*, Women and Development Studies Project, UWI.
- Phillips, D (1994) 'The family in crisis: explaining the new phenomenon of street children in Trinidad', *Bulletin of Eastern Caribbean Affairs*, 19: 4.
- Popenoe, D (1987) 'A statistical portrait of the changing family in Sweden', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 49:1.
- Population Census of the Commonwealth Caribbean, 1980/81*, Volume 3: Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St Lucia.
- Reddock, R (1994) *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago: A History*, Ian Randle.
- Safa, H I (1986) 'Economic autonomy and sexual equality in Caribbean society', *Social and Economic Studies*, 35: 3.
- Society for International Development (1993) 'The family, women's rights and community responsibilities', *Development*. 4
- Sokalski, H J (1993) 'Aims of the International Year of the Family', *Development* 4.
- Springer, J (1989) 'Housewives want self-employed status', *Barbados Advocate Newspaper*, 24 May.
- Stuart, S (1991) 'The good women have done to family life', *Family*, May, Barbados Family Planning Association.
- Stuart, S (1991) *Counting Women's Work: New Woman Struggle*, WAND, UWI, School of Continuing Studies, Barbados.
- Stuart, S (1992) 'Women and family life: a feminist perspective', *Family*, December.
- Stuart, S (1993) *Whither the Family!* WAND Occasional Paper 3. UWI.
- Thomas, C Y (1995) 'Social development and the Social Summit', A report on Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, paper prepared for Caribbean Symposium on Social Development, Barbados, March 1995. Consortium Graduate School of Social Sciences, ISER, UWI in association with UNICEF and CARICOM.
- Wiltshire, R (1986) *The Caribbean Transnational Family*, ISER Barbados.
- UNICEF *Children in Focus* 6: 4, December 1994.
- United Nations (1995) *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace. Beijing, 1995.

# Structures and processes: land, families, and gender relations

Susie Jacobs

*Despite the variation in land-reform processes and in the cultures in which they occur, there is striking similarity in some of the effects of land reform on gender relations and women's family positions. Family and kinship patterns both affect, and are affected by, land reform. This two-way relationship is examined here, looking in particular at the author's study of north-eastern Zimbabwean Resettlement Areas, conducted in the mid-1980s, and Agarwal's 1994 study of women and land rights in South Asia.*

Land issues are often considered to be 'male', especially outside Africa. However, land reform and land inheritance processes illuminate the gender relations within family structures and processes. This is indicated by the exclamation of one Ministry of Agriculture official to Bina Agarwal: 'Are you suggesting that women be given rights in land? What do women want? To destroy the family?' (Agarwal, 1994:53). In South India, women's natal kin, especially brothers, were particularly hostile to women's land rights because of their fear that land might pass out of the patrilineage. In communities in which women have never held land, such rights are met with particular hostility: witchcraft accusations, attacks, divorce threats, torture and even murder.

Land may be a powerful symbol of 'community', and of 'family' solidarity and culture. Although these symbols may operate for women as well as for men, women as (usually) unequal members of families may be subsumed within them. In

many small-scale agricultural systems, male domination of land and of women may seem to be both 'natural' and interconnected. Hence, the commonly-made feminist point that one must disaggregate and analyse 'the family' also applies to systems of land tenure and agriculture. This is particularly important because these systems are intertwined with family and kinship relations.<sup>1</sup> I argue that in most small farming systems, male domination is particularly firmly entrenched.

Land reforms may seem to have the potential to break the connections between women, land and domination; however, they rarely do so. Much depends upon the system of tenure and the type of action, if any, which has taken place to challenge it. Many land reforms have resulted from the activities of grassroots movements; however, many others have been imposed 'from above'. Even where land redistribution takes place as a result of widespread popular struggle, as in the 1940s Telengana movement, led by the Communist Party of India, issues of gender equity may not be

given priority, despite women's prominence in the movement (Sanghatana, 1989). In fact, many land reforms, often unwittingly, have further entrenched what Wiergsma (1990) terms 'peasant patriarchy'.

### **Effects of land reform**

Land reforms have different aims and scopes in different societies; for example, in Korea 54 per cent of land was distributed, encouraged by the USA, and in India only 1.5 per cent (Sobhan, 1993). Forms of land tenure within land reform programmes also vary widely. There may be individual ownership, land titles distributed individually but held by the state, co-operative tenure where land is held on behalf of all members by a co-operative entity, or collective forms where land is held by the state and no private ownership exists. In many horticultural and agrarian small-holding societies, land is held (not owned) by a kinship or lineage group; in other pre-reform societies, land is held on an individual basis. But generally where reforms take place, land is redistributed from large-scale landlords or estates.

One of the main aims of land reforms has been to share land more equitably between individuals. However, concerns for equality seldom recognise women's interests, which are subsumed under those of the household or family; land is usually assigned to the (male) household head.

### **Family formation, family relationships, and land**

Rules of descent and kinship often determine inheritance and land-use rights. Family relationships also play a part in allocation of land, either through customary tenure systems (as in much of Africa), through customary systems of inheritance, or through national laws of property transmission. Property, including land, may be passed on either through marriage

transactions (dowry and bridewealth payments) or through inheritance. Thus, kinship links are crucial factors when considering women's rights to land, and how land reform has affected women's status.

Family and kinship systems vary between and within societies; and between regions, classes, castes and ethnic groups. In many, though not all, societies they are heavily male-dominated. This may operate at many levels: husbands, fathers and brothers; village elders; and state officials.

#### ***Kinship, lineage and marriage***

In most Western societies (including Latin America), kinship is recognised bilaterally, on both 'sides' of the family. In other societies, kinship links are only or mainly recognised on the father's side (patrilineal) or on the mother's (matrilineal).

Marriage systems may be monogamous, polygynous or polyandrous. Social norms for preference in choice of marriage partners vary: in some societies it is believed that marriage should take place between a man and woman from different villages (as in China), in others marriage between cousins is favoured, so that the kin group is more likely to remain together.

#### ***Residence***

A crucial factor in relations between women and men within the family is the system of residence established through marriage. In the UK, the couple usually establish a new place to live (neolocal residence). However, in many societies, a new bride lives with the husband's patrilineal kin group (patrilocal residence). In a smaller number of societies, residence may be with the wife's parents (matrilocal). Still other societies have no particular norms of residence; and even in societies with seemingly strict rules of descent, residence and inheritance, rules are not always followed.

Women's place of residence after marriage may affect the outcomes of land

reforms. In some cases, even women who hold land, either through inheritance or land reform, are unable to work it since they tend to marry out of patrilocal villages. This effect is documented both for China (Stacey, 1982, 1983) and for parts of South Asia (Agarwal, 1994). Matrilocal and (sometimes) neolocal systems are less likely to pose such problems for women.

Women's status in the family, and their access to land, is further linked to the division of labour between women and men, and to gender-related authority and power. Some types of work may be prohibited for one sex, such as ploughing for women in South Asia. More broadly, women's status and rights to land are influenced by ideas about female behaviour, ideologies of female and family sexual honour and shame.

## Family and land in South Asia

As Bina Agarwal's study (Agarwal 1994) highlights, where South Asian women have gained land title, usually through inheritance, there have been many barriers to their full use and management of the land. In South Asia, as in many societies, women are not deemed to be fit to control land fully. Even in matrilineal systems, which tend to grant women higher status, the actual management of a woman's land is often undertaken by a man.

Agarwal stresses the effects that family structures and customs, residence arrangements, and ideologies of gender may have on women's ability to hold and control land. She argues that the weakening of custom and adherence to new laws has different effects depending on kinship systems, suggesting that the contemporary recognition of land rights causes greater conflict in communities in which women have not traditionally had such rights.

Aside from legal barriers which directly discourage women from claiming land rights, there are other, more indirect

considerations. Norms and ideologies of gender behaviour in some cultures stress female modesty and seclusion, particularly for upper-caste and upper-class women. Most women are dependent upon male kin. Especially in acutely land-hungry countries such as Bangladesh, a woman faces a dilemma: on the one hand, the security even a small plot of land can bring; on the other, the risk of losing vital social and economic support from kin.

For women in South Asia, brothers in particular are potential protectors from violence and ill-treatment by the husband and in-laws. Few women wish to break the valued relation with their brothers. However, a woman claiming land to which she is entitled may come into conflict with her brother; if she renounces her inheritance, any needed support is far more likely to be forthcoming (Kabeer, 1985).

## Reforms which disadvantage women

The majority of land reforms redistribute land to individual families, which in fact means household heads, usually defined as men. In many cases, widows or divorcees with children are technically allowed to hold land; in some cases they are not. In Operation Bargu, West Bengal, which undertook the registration of tenants, mainly men, the assignment of land titles meant that some widows actually lost their rights to use of land (Agarwal 1994).

In societies in which women previously held land rights, or simply had independent rights to use land, land reform programmes commonly diminish such rights and increase women's dependence upon men. This is evident in many African programmes, and also occurred in highland Peru, where land inheritance previously was bilateral (Deere, 1982). In effect, nuclear family structures tend to be endorsed – sometimes inadvertently – by land-reform processes along individual household lines. Where women were

already denied autonomous rights over land – the majority of cases – this makes it more difficult to alter their position, and entrenches male authority. Land reform may bring a change in control over the land, from a more distant patriarch (a landowner, or village elder) to the husband. Wives in rural smallholdings are more likely to be classified as ‘housewives’ by land reform programme planners, regardless of their actual contribution to farming. In Sri Lanka’s Mahaweli resettlement scheme, women lost customary land rights and decision-making power due to ‘houswifisation’ of their roles (Lund, 1978).

Women may also be under pressure to bear more children, who are needed to work the extra land (Palmer, 1985). And in some cases women are persuaded by officials to grow cash crops, for which men are usually responsible. A consequence of this is that women have less time to grow food crops, with adverse effects on family and child nutrition. The result of land reforms in many contexts is that women’s burdens of work actually increase, if the household works more land, or women are expected to cook for field hands.

One of the main aims of land reforms is to increase production and raise household incomes. However, even where household incomes may rise, these are not automatically redistributed by the males who control them. Women’s personal incomes often fall because of the loss of land rights and of marketing opportunities.

### **Benefits for women of land reform**

Land reforms along individual household and collective lines bring a variety of benefits and problems for women. The main benefit for women in individual household redistribution lies in the increase in ‘family’ income mentioned above. Without assuming that households pool all their resources, some, perhaps many, women benefit indirectly.

Where livelihoods are at subsistence level – for example, in Ethiopia (Tadesse, 1982) or for some people in my Zimbabwean study – the benefits of increased food security outweigh all other considerations. However, in most cases such food security is ‘purchased’ at the cost of women’s autonomy. It is very rare for women’s *personal* incomes to rise with land reform.

Co-operative and collective forms of land tenure tend to offer more benefits for women, which may give them more autonomy. One reason for this is that elements of social reproduction are placed outside the family sphere, so that they are less under the husband’s or father’s control. In a few countries, such as China under the Great Leap Forward, co-operatives have attempted to address the problem of women’s domestic labour by socialising it: by establishing collective eating facilities or child care. Where such arrangements do not occur, women’s domestic responsibilities commonly prevent them from fully participating (Deere, 1986; 1990).

In many co-operatives women members are awarded individual work points, rather than being considered simply as family members. Even though women are usually more poorly ‘paid’ than men, their status is reinforced both socially and in their households, because their work is thereby made ‘visible’.

Co-operatives and collectives tend to maintain gender-stereotyping of women’s work, so that men control technology (for example, ploughs, or high-yield seeds), and governing committees tend to be male-dominated. However, in some societies quotas of female members are established. The existence of a committee *may* mean that women are able to discuss their needs in a public forum. The provision of schools, clinics and other services by co-operatives and collectives is of benefit to all, but particularly to women. All of these factors tend to raise women’s family status and give them more say in domestic situations.

The nuclear family model, I would argue, is ambiguous for women. While it implies female dependence, it also implies a companionate *model* of family life, in which the wife, although subordinate, has a measure of influence, particularly over domestic matters. Collectivist land reforms, while not promoting the nuclear family directly, contain a tendency to individualisation of household units. This contrasts with the situation for young and for junior wives in patrilineal, patrilocal and polygynous systems, in which wives are subordinate to husband's lineage kin. Women in my study, and those in China and Vietnam, saw changes linked to land reform as beneficial in loosening the power of the husband's extended family.

### **Case Study: North-eastern Zimbabwean Resettlement Areas**

In pre-independence Zimbabwe, large amounts of land, including nearly all the most fertile, had been expropriated from Shona and SiNdebele-speaking horticultural and herding peoples by white estate owners. One of the new ZANU-led government's most important programmes after independence was land 'resettlement' – the redistribution of land in 12-acre plots to heads of households. Smaller amounts of land were also redistributed in production co-operatives. As elsewhere, the effects of land reform on women varied according to age, class, marital status, and other factors. Women were largely left out of the allocation, since land went to household heads, although a very small proportion of widows and divorcees with children gained land titles.

In Zimbabwe, land was customarily held communally within patrilineal communities; the land was allotted to households by a 'chief' or elder. Polygyny was and is allowed, and wives had the right to a small garden plot. However due to the development of settler capitalism,

forced population movements, declining soil fertility, and the guerrilla war in the 1970s, customary practices had ceased in some areas by the time of land reform. Land was sometimes held by individual men (Pankhurst, 1991). While some still allotted land to wives (usually 0.5-1 acres) many did not.

The extent to which land resettlement allocation practices represented a change in tenure, varied. Where land had been held communally, there was a change to landholding by individuals. For many of the women in my sample (208 people, including 104 wives and 41 divorcees), who had had little or no land previously, an allocation of half-acre gardens to them represented an improvement: 'I can grow vegetables now,' said a 30-year-old mother of five, 'but I need more land.'

A majority of wives in my sample reported a significant rise in their *personal* incomes as well as in household incomes. However, women had more work to perform. This was in part due to the distance of shops, clinics, schools and boreholes, but was also due to larger landholdings and to the pressure (from husbands and from external bodies) to raise production: such pressure fell heavily upon wives.

One of the main changes in the sphere of family relations was that, after land reform, families in Resettlement Areas lived in nuclear families, whether monogamous or polygynous; most often, these were separate from the husbands' brothers and other patrilineage relatives. In general, women thought that this change increased their influence within households.

While husbands by no means saw wives as equals, they were more likely to turn to the wife, or senior wife, for advice, in the absence of wider kin. 'We are alone here, on other people's [ancestral] land: the husband talks to me more,' one 50-year-old wife said. However, with male-household-head land titles, wives did not gain the security that land can bring. Any increased influence is dependent upon remaining

married; and divorce and desertion are common. Many women live in fear of divorce as they are likely to face destitution and the loss of custody of children<sup>2</sup> (Mpofu, 1983). 'What can I do?' said a woman aged 45, whose husband ill-treated her. 'I cannot leave my children and I have no land... I will have only my cooking pots...'

Resettlement Officers (ROs) who administer the areas have near-absolute jurisdiction, including the power to adjudicate disputes and to expel settlers deemed to behave badly or not to work efficiently, although such expulsion is rare. The main effects of the presence of the RO on family and gender relations are, first, that men are now more likely to participate in fieldwork and to undertake 'male' tasks such as ploughing (in Communal Areas, often left to women). The 63 men in my sample sometimes assisted with a wider range of fieldwork and other tasks, such as fetching fuelwood. Thus, although women's work

burdens increased, the overall division of labour became somewhat more equitable. Second, men, according to wives, were 'better husbands', ploughing back profits into the smallholding, drinking less, and behaving less violently. This change may have been due to fear of eviction, but was nonetheless appreciated by women. 'He goes for beer less; now he ploughs.'

Did patrilineal and patrilocal family and kinship structures have any effect on the outcome of the Zimbabwean land reform process itself? In my sample, the percentage of polygynous marriages after land reform was very high (34 per cent), and almost certainly much higher than the national rate for rural households. This may suggest that some male farmers are able to use, and to distort, customary kinship and marriage norms to obtain a labour force through marrying multiple wives. (In Zimbabwe, second and other wives are not excluded from resettlement.) Cheater (1981) and Weinrich (1975) have

*Svimusi Co-operative members working their land, Cashel, Zimbabwe. Of the group's 25 members, nine are women. They grow food crops for their own consumption and for the market. Co-operative land tenure can have considerable benefits for women.*

CHRIS JOHNSON



found this on a larger scale in the few areas where land was available in freehold to African farmers before independence.

With this proviso, and despite the exclusion of most wives from holding land, the land-reform experience for women in my survey was perceived by them to be generally beneficial; however, the Zimbabwean situation may be unusual in this respect.

## Conclusion

It is clear that kinship systems have significance in determining the outcomes of land reform processes. In particular, patrilineal and patrilocal kinship and residence systems restrict the possibility of female autonomy. The effects of land reform policies which assign land to household heads differ according to the gender and kinship systems already in place. Women may lose rights, or their rights may be largely unaltered.

The alternative to policies assigning land to household heads – as Pankhurst and I have pointed out (1988) and Agarwal argues powerfully (1994) – is to assign land to women on the same basis as men, whatever this may be in the particular society and situation (freehold, through land permits, or through co-operative membership).

Agarwal (Agarwal 1994) lists three arguments for female land rights:

- land rights reduce the risk of poverty and destitution; Agarwal argues strongly for the benefits of land for increased economic and food security;
- efficiency: land titles make it easier for women to adopt improved agricultural practices and enhance their motivation as farmers;
- equality and empowerment: land rights help to empower women in their relationships within and outside families.

Agarwal also points out that the usual arguments against assigning land to

women – that this will be inefficient or will lead to subdivision of holdings, or that land rights on this basis are ‘unsocialist’ – are not applied when land is assigned to men. Although women may find it difficult to cultivate their land on an autonomous basis, as several examples above indicate, due to constraints imposed by patrilocal residence and by beliefs about appropriate female work, this is no reason to further disempower women. Agarwal suggests, as have others (Lapido, 1981) that female agricultural co-operatives may be one useful strategy in helping women to cultivate their holdings more effectively. Women in the Bodghaya struggle in India (the first in which women and men campaigned for women’s *independent* land rights) saw that a struggle against kinship systems and patrilocality was a necessary accompaniment to the struggle for land.

Of course, the existence of unequal relations in families rest in part on unequal holdings. But would women’s landholding threaten the family *per se*? There is no reason to suppose this, and one might argue the opposite: that family stability could be increased (Deere, 1990; Agarwal, 1994). Women holding land are far more easily able to feed themselves and their children (Pankhurst and Jacobs, 1988); in any case, many women are *de facto* heads of households. Women landholders within families are likely to exert more influence, and to be able to counter ill-treatment, and are less likely to be abandoned. Women’s landholding rights, which are still a long way off in practice, are crucial in the struggle for ‘democracy within the home’.

*Susie Jacobs teaches sociology at Manchester Metropolitan University. She has written on gender relations in Zimbabwe, and on gender and issues of land reform. Address: Department of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Humanities Building, Rosamond Street West, Manchester M15 6LL, UK.*

## Notes

1 Such systems are by no means completely kinship-based: forces 'external' to the household such as markets, landlords, and state policies may be equally or more crucial; however, they are outside the scope of this essay.

2 Legislation in Zimbabwe means that women, even those married under 'customary' law, now have the right to custody of older children (mothers always have custody of children under seven). However, most rural and many urban women find it impossible to take advantage of these new legal rights.

## References

- Agarwal, B (1994) *A Field of One's Own: Women and Land Rights in South Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Cheater, A (1981) 'Women and their participation in commercial agricultural production' *Development and Change*, 12.
- Diamond, N (1975) 'Collectivisation, kinship and the status of women in rural China' *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 7:1.
- Deere, C D (1986) 'Rural women and agrarian reform in Peru, Chile and Cuba' in J Nash and H Safa (eds) *Women and Change in Latin America*, Bergin and Garvey, New York.
- Deere, C D (1987) 'The Latin American agrarian reform experience' in Deere and Leon (1987) *Rural Women and State Policy: Feminist Perspectives on Latin American Agricultural Development*, Westview, Boulder.
- Deere, C D (1990) *Household and Class Relations*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Deere, C D and Leon de Leal, M (1982) *Women in Andean Agriculture*, ILO, Geneva.
- El-Ghomeny, R (1990) *The Political Economy of Rural Poverty: the Case for Land Reform*, London
- Fapohunda, E (1987) 'The nuclear household model in Nigeria' *Development and Change* 18: 2.
- Jacobs, S M (1989b) *Gender Divisions and Land Resettlement in Zimbabwe*, D. Phil thesis, Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton.
- Jacobs, S (1992) 'Gender and land reform: Zimbabwe and some comparisons' *International Sociology*, vol. 7, no. 1.
- Kabeer, N (1985) 'Do women gain from high fertility?' in Afshar, H W (ed) *Women, Work and the Family in the Third World*, Tavistock, London.
- Kelkar, G and Gala, C (1990) 'The Bodghaya land struggle' in I. Sen (ed) *A Space in the Struggle*, Kali for Women, New Delhi.
- Lapido, P 'Developing women's cooperatives: an experimentation in rural Nigeria' in N Nelson (ed) *African Women in the Development Process*, Cass, 1981.
- Lund, R (1978) *Prosperity to Mahaweli: a Survey on Women's Working and Living Conditions in a Settlement Area*, People's Bank Research Division, Colombo.
- Mpofu, J (1983) 'Some Observable Sources of Women's Subordination in Zimbabwe' Centre for Applied Social Studies, University of Zimbabwe, Harare.
- Palmer, I (1985) *Women's Roles and Gender Differences in Development: The NEMOW Case*, Kumarian Press, Hartford, Connecticut.
- Palriwala, R (1990) 'Introduction' in L Dube and R Palriwala (eds) *Structures and Strategies: Women, Work and Family*, Sage, New Delhi.
- Pankhurst, D (1991) 'Constraints and incentives in "successful" Zimbabwean agriculture: the interaction between gender and class' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17, 4.
- Pankhurst, D and Jacobs, S (1988) 'Land tenure, gender relations and agricultural production: the case of Zimbabwe's peasantry' in Davison, J (ed) *Agriculture, Women and Land*, Westview, Boulder.
- Sanghatana, Stree S (1989) *We were Making History: Women and the Telengana Struggle*, Zed, London/Kali for Women, New Delhi.
- Sobhan, R (1993) *Agrarian Reform and Social Transformation*, Zed, London.
- Stacey, J (1982) 'People's War and the new democratic patriarchy in China' *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 13:3.
- Stacey, J (1983) *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*, University of California, Berkeley.
- Tadesse, Z (1982) 'The impact of land reform on women: the case of Ethiopia' in Beneria, L (ed) *Women and Development*, Praeger, NY.
- Wiergsma, N (1988) *Peasant Land, Peasant Revolution*, St. Martin's, NY.
- Weinrich, A K H (1975) *African Farmers in Rhodesia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Wiergsma, N (1991) 'Peasant patriarchy and the subversion of the collective in Vietnam' *Review of Radical Political Economics* 23:3-4.

# Women, the law, and the family in Tunisia

Hafidha Chekir

*This article considers the links between civil law, the family, and religious custom in Tunisia, and assesses the status of women in the Tunisian family, suggesting ways in which family life could be democratised to enable women to achieve equal status with men.*

Family life moulds men and women, and determines both where and how they live. The family is, however, also a nucleus of society. To organise the family is to organise society, and to democratise the family is to democratise society.

As in other Arab-Muslim countries, the status of women in Tunisia bears the weight of Arab-Muslim culture, and is based on the superiority of male elders – the ‘patriarchal order.’ However, the legal status of women in the family differs from that in other countries in the region, due to the role played by the State, since Tunisia achieved independence in 1956. This difference is shown in regulations governing the status of women, and the role of the family in its relationship with the State, which drives, supports, and protects the patriarchal system.

## State involvement with family law

On independence, the state of Tunisia involved itself in legislating on the status of women in the family, even before it drew up the state constitution. The legal Code on the Status of the Person, which defines the status of women in the family, appeared in

1956 while the Constitution appeared only in 1959. Ironically, at the same time that the State acknowledged the rights of women in the family, it excluded women from the political arena, by depriving them of the right to vote for members of the constituent Assemblée Nationale, the body drawing up the new Constitution.

In organising the family before even organising the State, did the government intend to make the family the basis of the new State? Or was this part of a social policy which sought to confine women to the traditional tasks of bringing up the children and housework, in conformity with ancient Arab-Muslim traditions; and to exclude women from the arena of politics, which is dominated by masculine privilege?

## The evolution of women’s rights

In the marriage contract, the 1956 *Code on the Status of the Person* allows women to agree freely and personally to their marriage. This very important law gives men and women the same rights, by removing an injustice to women who hitherto had been subjected to arranged

marriage. The custom of arranged marriage involved the concept of the 'representative' in the marriage contract: the woman did not give direct and personal consent to the marriage, but could only marry through her guardian, who acted as an intermediary. This custom is based on a particular interpretation of Koranic law, and is still practised in some countries such as Morocco.

The *Code* set a minimum age for marriage. Women can marry over the age of 17, men over the age of 20. Only in exceptional cases can a young girl get married before 17 or a young man before 20, on the authorisation of the judge. This age limit prevents early marriages, which permit sexual intercourse before partners are physically or mentally mature, and delays motherhood, thus reducing the number of children in a society where around 50 per cent of the population are under 20 years of age. (Early childbearing, before full physical maturity, is likely to affect the reproductive and sexual health of any woman, in addition to blocking her access to education and a profession.)

The *Code* also requires a pre-marriage medical certificate. The medical certificate is a guarantee against any venereal or sexually-transmitted contagious diseases, to protect the physical and mental health of the woman, her children, and her husband.

Other features of the evolution of women's rights regarding marriage include the right of the wife to consent to the marriage of her children when they are minors, in the same way as the father or guardian. This new right, which was only recognised in 1993, marks the beginning of the legal status of a mother in relation to her children. Consent is a legal requirement, and if it is refused the matter is referred to a judge.

Some duties of the wife in a marriage can also be considered as rights. Thus the woman can contribute to the costs of the marriage if she has the means. The wife can co-operate with the husband in family

matters and the proper upbringing of the children, together with the management of the children's affairs. Should the husband die, the wife automatically assumes the guardianship of the minors.

In the event of divorce, the wife can assume certain guardianship prerogatives if the male guardian has behaved improperly, neglected to fulfil his marriage obligations, or absents himself from the home. Following a divorce, the judge can entrust children who are minors to the care of the father or the mother, depending on the children's interests. If the children are entrusted to the mother, she has rights to certain guardianship prerogatives.

### **Protection against abuse**

The 1956 Code also legislated in three areas to protect a wife against abuse by her husband. First, polygamy has been forbidden. This contrasts with the situation in most other Arab-Muslim countries where polygamy by the husband is still allowed and is based on a law whose origins are Koranic. The 1956 *Code* both forbids marriage to more than one wife, and includes legal sanctions, which vary from imprisonment to a fine for a man who undergoes a further marriage while still living with his first wife. By this prohibition, the law has introduced to married life a certain equality between man and woman and a psychological stability for women who, particularly when they became sterile or began to grow old, lived in fear of seeing their husband marry a second, third or fourth wife.

Secondly, divorce is now available to both spouses. Before 1956, unilateral repudiation, which is a widespread Muslim tradition, allowed a husband to divorce his wife freely and with impunity. Since 1956 women have been given a guarantee, since divorce is now a legal matter: only a judge can grant a divorce, and a woman can bring an action for divorce. There are three possibilities of divorce: mutual agreement

by both spouses, or at the request of one spouse because of the harm to which that spouse has been subjected, or at the request of the husband or the wife.

When a divorce is granted, the woman can demand compensation for any wrongs to which she has been subjected. She then has the right to an allowance, payable monthly in arrears, which depends on the standard of living to which she was accustomed during her married life, including accommodation. This allowance, which is paid until her death or remarriage, can also be paid to the wife as a single-payment capital sum.

Thirdly, the rights of women to manage their own assets are protected under the 1956 Code. The legal regime, as in all Arab-Muslim countries; is that of the separation of assets. The woman can acquire assets, manage them, and dispose of them without the consent of her husband, who has no administrative power over his wife's personal assets.

In addition to these rights, the law recognises and protects other para-family rights. Thus a woman has the right to adopt children, provided she is married. She has the right to abortion, so long as it is performed in an approved hospital within the first 12 weeks. She can grant her nationality to her children, but with the consent of their father.

## **Barriers to the achievements of the civil law**

Despite the legal provisions of the 1956 Code, customs with a religious basis, which embody a patriarchal concept of the family, compromise equality and democracy within the family. For example, even though the law has introduced the idea that both spouses must consent to marriage freely and personally, nevertheless the Code has been interpreted in ways which have led to the Minister of Justice preventing a Muslim woman from marrying a non-Muslim man. But a

difference of religions only appears to form grounds to prevent a marriage for women, since men commonly marry non-Muslim women. Thus, religion becomes a determining factor in a woman's freedom to choose a husband, even though men and women are equal in this respect in civil law.

Another inequality concerns dowry. The dowry is a condition of the marriage contract. It has to consist of lawful assets which have a monetary value. The assets may be in kind or a sum of money given to the woman. By law, the husband cannot consummate the marriage or force his wife to do so as long as he has not paid her the dowry.

There is also a continuing inequality in responsibilities between husband and wife. Despite the elimination, in 1993, of the duty of a wife to obey her husband, he retains the headship of the family, and the family and paternal authority. The conjugal home belongs to him, and the children bear his name. While the husband is expected to provide for the needs of his family, his wife and his children, at the same time, it is the husband who has sole guardianship of the children, even though they are entrusted to the mother and father during the marriage.

This exclusive authority of the husband has repercussions on the behaviour of the wife, who while not subject to the duty to obey, has to fulfil the conjugal duties required by habits and customs, conforming to age-old patriarchal traditions. This confines her to a traditional role which places an excessive value on woman as a wife and mother, devoted to the service of the family, and sacrificing her personal welfare for the happiness of her husband and children.

Despite the evolution and recognition of the rights of women in the family, there are still gaps and inequalities in the way these laws can be used, which give rise to 'half-rights' or 'limited rights' for women in many situations. I would argue that this is largely due to the fact that family law in

Tunisia is based on patriarchal culture, marked with the stamp of religion, which recognises only legitimate marriage as a framework for cohabitation and sexual relationships; it ignores alternative ways of life, such as celibacy and non-marriage, by demonising celibate women and unmarried mothers.

### **Building democracy in the family**

It is imperative to develop another conception of the family, which is based on democracy and equality. It is necessary for women to claim a civil right, based on egalitarian principles and legal instruments, aimed at combatting all forms of discrimination against women. To do this, there needs to be a clear distinction made between religion and politics, since as long as the patriarchal order continues to be connected in people's minds with religion, attempts to combat it are hampered by the fear of attacking people's faith and religious freedom.

What steps need to be taken to ensure that the family is no longer the framework for patriarchal and unequal practices? First, an egalitarian approach should be developed which would change the authority of the father to the authority of the parents, and the paternal responsibility to a parental responsibility. This approach should give both spouses the same rights and the same duties as regards both conjugal responsibilities and responsibilities concerning the children.

We also have to fight the dominant idea that the only framework for men and women is the legal family. An egalitarian approach would allow a free choice of a family structure, including structures which could currently be classified as legal, outside the law yet allowed by custom (since the family is today's guardian and protector of traditions and customs), or illegal. There should be legal recognition of all existing forms of family structure, so that all mothers and their children born within or outside of marriage, are legally recognised and protected.

We must also call for the indivisibility and interdependence of the rights of women. Women must have all their rights in all domains: public and private, family, professional and political. It is incoherent to recognise laws in certain circumstances only, while half-recognising them or ignoring them altogether in others, in order to avoid going against tradition.

Finally, it is imperative that women are allowed a real role in political, economic, social and cultural development, so that they can move beyond the traditional framework where they have been confined as wife and mother, since above all a woman is a person, entitled to human rights, and a citizen, aspiring to political and socio-economic democracy.

*Hafidha Chekir is a Tunisian feminist, and one of the founders of the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates. She is Professor of Law at the University of Tunis. Address: Faculté de Droit, Campus Universitaire, 1060 Tunis, Tunisia.*

# Marginalisation and gay families in Latin America and the Caribbean

Dinnys Luciano Ferdinand

*This article discusses different family forms in the Dominican Republic and surrounding region, particularly addressing the marginalisation of lesbian and gay people from existing research into the family.*

To speak about families, it is necessary to look at the different ways in which economic, emotional, and erotic needs are expressed in domestic life. Expanding the traditional concept of family, Marcela Lagarde (1990) points out that the domestic unit is based on the co-existence of a social group – not necessarily related by marriage – which wishes to reproduce and maintain itself. In this sense, a domestic unit can take the form of a commune, a traditional family, a group of families, or a group of relatives. It could also be people living together in a variety of institutional contexts, including a nursing home, a prison, an orphanage, a hospital, or a religious community.

The Jewish-Christian tradition influences most of the predominant ideologies of the Latin American and Caribbean region, which promote an 'ideal family', in contrast to the reality of life for the majority, and also denies that 'family' can exist in other forms. In addition, it presents the only allowable model for human sexuality as monogamous and heterosexual.

Much distress is caused by children's realisation that the lifestyle of their parents does not fit into this rigid model, and conservative political and religious

teachings suggest that such a life-style – whether this is lesbian, gay, single motherhood, or divorced – is immoral. Through such social pressure, images of ideal men and women and their relationships with children and wider society pass into myth, while the reality of diverse family forms, gender identities, and sexuality remains unspoken.

## Visions of sexuality in the family

The reason why idealistic concepts of sexuality in domestic groups is questioned in family studies is because ideas about gender identity govern ideas about the sexuality of women and men, and these play an important role in creating these ideal images.

Feminine and masculine sexuality can, obviously, be expressed in many different ways in families. These range from active sexual behaviour (heterosexual or homosexual) among adults within a shared domestic environment, or a similarly stable erotic relationship with a partner who does not share the same dwelling, to the sexuality which is inherent in power relations between people of different sex and age, which may be expressed with

sexual violence, including incest and child abuse.

Feminine sexuality, within the domestic environment, plays a fundamental role in determining ideas about women's practical roles, and the symbolism attached to them as mothers and wives. The predominant social ideology in Latin American and the Caribbean defines women mainly as mothers and sexual objects, giving women's sexuality a connotation that increases their vulnerability. As Lagarde states:

*women's job, and more widely their activities, consist in reproducing others not only physically but also subjectively in their view of the world, in their affective, erotic and political needs. It also consists, every day, from birth to the end of life, in humanising the human being in its own culture, in the epoch, according with its gender, with its group and traditions (Lagarde 1990, 355).*

Although, some important changes in women's status and day-to-day lives have taken place, the domestic sphere has changed more slowly than the public sphere. Isis Duarte and Ramón Tejada (1995) have argued that the ideal family does not exist in modern society, and even less in the uncertain environment of the Dominican Republic today, because it is the result of a series of intrafamily factors and socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions. Yet data from the Dominican Republic shows strong evidence of the ideal family, at least in terms of the nuclear household; the results of the study on the 'extended home' (Hogar Ampliado), from the 1991 Health and Demographic Survey (ENDESA-91), shows that 55.3 per cent of rural homes and 49.8 per cent of urban homes are of the nuclear type.

Duarte and Tejada point out that 42.4 per cent of the homes in the Dominican Republic are 'nuclear biparental' (with the presence of both spouses). The percentage of homes with just one resident is about 8 per cent, both in the rural and in the urban

zones, and has been steady for the last ten years. The proportion of extended homes (homes which include parents, children, and other relatives) have reduced significantly and the compounded homes (homes which include non-relatives as well as nuclear and extended family members) have increased

There are no statistics in the Dominican Republic in relation to homosexual and lesbian families. The researchers continue to see them as compounded home or monoparental, or just 'two women or men living together'.

The free union or 'concubinato' is the predominant pattern in the Dominican Republic. According to the 1991 Health and Demographic Survey (ENDESA-91), more than 60 per cent of Dominican women have married before the age of 25, the age of marriage being lower in rural areas than urban areas.

In the Dominican Republic, the relations of married women are more stable than the relations of women who live in a consensual union. According to ENDESA-91, only 22 per cent of married women had dissolved their first relation, compared with 53.3 per cent for the consensual unions. Also, one in ten married women had had more than one union, in comparison with four out of ten for those women in free unions.

## **Gay families and marginalisation**

In the region, in common with other areas of the world, the likelihood is that there are more lesbian couples with children than gay male couples with children, because in legal and cultural terms, women are seen as responsible for raising children. Many lesbians are socially and statistically considered as single mothers, rather than as part of a couple. This is due to the social stigma attached to same-sex couples, and the fact that their existence has been denied or ignored in family research in the region.



*Family group, Dominican Republic. 'The family is a wider concept which must ultimately be defined by its members.'*

There is a lack of research into alternative family forms, even by liberal researchers. The maternal and paternal roles are commonly viewed as incompatible with homosexuality and lesbianism. The term 'lesbian mother' or 'gay father' link a procreative identity with an incompatible sexual identity. However, while marriage as an institution can be defined in a narrow legal sense by a marriage certificate, the family is a wider concept which must ultimately be defined by its members and their actions. Gay men and lesbians who wish to have children have no legal access to becoming foster carers, or to surrogate parenthood, adoption, or artificial insemination. They are declared, implicitly, to be unfit for parenthood.

Meanwhile, it is impossible to say how many children in the Dominican Republic already have a gay or lesbian parent. Children of gays and lesbians are most often born within heterosexual marriages, to parents who subsequently 'come out'

into a homosexual identity. There are many lesbian mothers, but they seem invisible, because they fear harassment and want to shield their children from stress.

### **Women as heads of households**

The myth of the male breadwinner is widespread in the region, although recent data shows an increase in women-maintained households. Paid employment has long been viewed as one way of breaking down women's isolation and dependence on men. Paid employment is expected to give women greater economic autonomy, to increase their consciousness of gender and class subordination. However, there are many obstacles to achieving such goals, including the segregation of women into poorly paid, unstable jobs (such as export processing), their double burden of wage work and domestic labour, and gender ideology that continues

to portray women as 'supplementary' workers, even when they are becoming increasingly important economic contributors to the household economy (Safa, 1995: 4).

Women-headed households have increased significantly. For example, in the Dominican Republic, the percentage of homes led by women, increased from 20 per cent in 1971 to 29.5 per cent in 1991. The statistics show that in 1991, 69.2 per cent of women heads of households did not have a companion, while 86.1 per cent of male heads were married or in a consensual union.

The families with a woman as head have fewer working members than those headed by men. This is one reason why women's economic burden is greater than men's. Women heads of households are also older than male heads; their level of education is lower and fewer of them participate in the paid economy.

The most typical home with a woman as a head of household is the expanded home or the monoparental home. Duarte and Tejada (1995) say that this situation probably implies that these women organise their families around a more complex system, which includes more than one generation of women (mother, daughter, grandmother, friend, etc.) including also the male members, such as brothers, uncles, cousins and in-laws. On the other hand, in several Latin American countries and in the Caribbean, some women live with their children in expanded homes without being the head of the household. These women, who create a home within another home, are mainly single mothers.

In a study by Ariza, Gonzalez de Huerta and Oliveira, (1994) Central American and Caribbean countries were grouped according to the prevalence of women-headed households:

a. Countries with a very high prevalence (more than 40 per cent): Barbados,

Granada, Monserrat, San Vicente/Granadinas. According to data from the 1970s, Santa Lucía and San Cristóbal/Nevis.

b. Countries with a high prevalence (between 30 and 40 per cent): Dominica, Guadalupe, Martinica, and Turks/ Caicos. According to data from the 1970s, Cayman and Jamaica.

c. Countries with moderate prevalence (between 20 and 30 per cent): Bermuda, British Virgin Island, Cuba, Las Antillas Neerlandesas, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and Trinidad and Tobago. According to data from the 1970s, Guyana and Belice.

d. Countries with low prevalence (less than 20 per cent): Mexico, Costa Rica, and Guatemala.

## **Suggestions for policy**

Traditional definitions of family ignore reality and serve to exclude large numbers of people. There are some benefits and rights that go to those who fit society's traditional definition of the family, but state policies, in the Dominican Republic as in other states, deny those rights to the families who do not fit this restrictive definition. Taking this into consideration, the priorities for the region are, first, to give support to families which have particular needs, including families which have a woman as head, either in a compound or expanded family.

It is critical to promote the visibility of the variety of different forms of family, including lesbian couples. Social conditions must be created to protect their rights, including legislation. Social attitudes need to change; even when family relationships are stable in themselves, a parent's unconventional sexuality can complicate life for both the children and the adults in their role as parents. Support from the community is needed for families which

have an unconventional gender identity, since constraints may exist which may curtail or restrict their ability to join in economic, political and social activities.

Lesbians and gay men have interests as women and men, and interests as gay people, and if they have children, interests as parents. Development agencies need to involve them in their planning for human development by understanding that these different interests exist and identifying policies and programmes which do not marginalise them, or make them worse off.

Research should be carried out into the needs of different domestic groups and, therefore, different family types, which exist in Latin America and the Caribbean, to inform policy development and to enable women to confront the consequences of the control of their sexuality, their health, personal development, educational opportunities, and social participation.

In the Dominican Republic, the women's movement should prioritise the study of the family and its political relevance to dominant religious and cultural ideologies. National campaigns are needed about different forms of family to gain greater legitimacy in the mass media, civil organizations, government services, and at community level. Changes in social attitudes towards 'alternative' family forms could lead to collective action to promote the needs of these families.

Maybe some might argue that the cost of extending family benefits to more people will put undue economic pressure on the government. NGOs are advocating increased government support for families. In the Dominican Republic, the state bears little responsibility for families. When parents divorce, one of them has to pay maintenance for the children which the other is caring for: a legal recognition of the myth of the male breadwinner and unproductive housewife. If the importance of the private, family sphere for human development, equity, and equality, and as

the ethical basis of the reform of the state, is recognised, this would deepen the understanding of human development, and help to break down the barrier between the public and private spheres, redefining politics, democracy, and development policies. Finally, we need to take action to promote a greater involvement of men in domestic and reproductive activities. What is needed is a campaign to raise awareness of the importance of both parents sharing responsibility for the domestic work of the household and the socialisation of children. The aim should be to create a system of family law which takes a gender perspective.

*Dinnys Luciano Ferdinand is a psychologist, therapist, and researcher, and a consultant on gender and development. Her particular interests are violence against women, and women's health. She is a university teacher and works at the Centro de Apoyo Aquelarre, an NGO working in the field of women's health and reproductive rights.*

## References

- Duarte, I and Tejada, R (1995) *Los Hogares Dominicanos: El Mito de la Familia Ideal y los Tipos de Jefaturas de Hogar*, Instituto de Estudios de Población y Desarrollo, Santo Domingo.
- IEPD, USAID, ONAPLAN, DHS-Macro Internacional, Inc. (1993) *República Dominicana: Encuesta Demográfica y de Salud, 1991*, Santo Domingo.
- Lagarde, M (1990) *Cautiverios de las Mujeres*, Universidad Autónoma de México Colección Postgrado, México.
- Safa, H (1995) *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner: Women and Industrialization in the Caribbean*, Westview Press, San Francisco.

# Child care and the benefits trap:

## a case from the UK

### Annie Oliver's testimony

'I'm going to talk about the lack of decent, affordable child care, from my experience as a single parent. My little boy is four, and starts school on Monday. But first, I'd like to say that when I'm talking about child care, I'm not only talking about the needs of single parents, but about child care for every parent in this country. I don't want single parents to be set up against other families, because I think the state already tries to do plenty of that, as a tactic of 'divide and rule'. When I say that decent, affordable child care should be available across the board, I think maybe this could be achieved with a sliding payment scheme, but I haven't thought about that too much.

'I think single parents in the UK are constantly discriminated against; mostly, at the moment, they are criticised for living on state benefits which cost society too much. For me, the answer to that criticism is so simple it's just unbelievable – I can't believe that I am still talking about it. If I had been offered good quality child care at a low cost, I would have been working for the last four years – as I was before I had my son. I don't want income support or benefits, I want a career; but I'm only prepared to work if my son is properly looked after. I've done voluntary community work ever since I've had him, because I want him to see his parent going out to

work, and doing something positive. I'm not saying that mothers shouldn't have the right to say that they'd like to stay at home with their children – it's a personal thing. As far as single parents are concerned it doesn't seem to matter what we choose to do – it is always wrong.

'I think that there's been a whole campaign of discrimination against single parents, because we are a useful scapegoat when somebody is needed to blame for the massive cost of state benefits, or the lack of council-houses for decent young families, or delinquent youth – whatever the issue, single parents are a pretty good target.

'I don't really think that the state wants to help us to work, or come off benefit at all. According to the state, we live a good life on our seventy-odd pounds a week, and we don't want to work, study or train. I think those in power truly believe that we enjoy being trapped in poverty and being dependent on benefits. In fact, I would like my son to have the best of everything, as far as I can manage – and I don't just mean material things. I mean good education, good life experiences, travelling and that kind of thing, that all cost money. If the child care was adequate in this country I would 'pay my way', as they say. I think that my son would have a better quality of life.

'I've spoken to some other single parents in the organisation with which I do voluntary work, to see if they feel the same

way as I do. One of them said, “the lack of child care keeps me in poverty. I won’t let my kids go with anybody, and I can’t afford good quality child care. Because I don’t get a break from them, I’m stressed, which means the quality of time with them is not always one hundred per cent good. It’s not that I’m not a competent mother – I just get short-tempered. Because I’m always at home I can’t work, and I can’t afford outside interests. The knowledge and experience I can offer my kids is limited. Children need good quality care and education. Learning is important. And being with other children and adults helps to improve social skills.”

‘Another single parent said that because she can’t get child care, she can’t train, she can’t go to college, and she can’t return to work. She says that since the Children’s Act it’s increasingly difficult to leave her children with people, as she can’t afford to pay a professional child-care worker. She thinks parents want and need outside interests and training, which would improve the quality of their own lives and, in the long term, those of their children; that children need stimulation. That’s true for *all* children, not just children from single-parent families.

‘When parents don’t get a break from child care, they feel isolated, depressed, and stressed, which is obviously bad for the children. I think all parents are in agreement that we would like more nursery provision from the time our children are about three years old; after-school and holiday clubs; and more work-place nurseries.

‘Single parents in particular would like more recognition of our skills, because coping alone with kids is hard work, and most of us manage very well – and also have to cope with the stigma attached to single parenthood, and the resulting discrimination. We are very resourceful people: we have to be. If colleges would provide creches, and employers would be more flexible and maybe provide nurseries,

we would prove our resourcefulness as students and employees, I’m sure.

‘A lot of single parents are forced into low-paid, ‘back-hander’ (illegal, informal-sector) jobs, in bars, cleaning, or worse. The wages are appalling. Maybe a neighbour will look after their children for a bit, so that they can have a little extra money. But this sort of situation means that you are always looking over your shoulder; you’re always frightened that someone might inform the Department of Health and Social Security; you’re frightened a social worker is going to knock on the door looking for your kids, and the neighbour’s door; you’re frightened that you might lose your little two-hours-a-night job because your kids are ill and you can’t go, and you’ve started to rely on that money – you’ve got used to having the heating on for an hour extra a day, or buying a bit of extra fresh fruit for the children (that’s what that two hours a day spent working means).

‘It’s a terrible way to live. That fear – it weighs you down and makes you depressed. I just can’t understand why women can’t have the child care we need; why we’re not given the opportunities to do the things we want to do. It doesn’t make sense.’

*Annie Oliver was speaking at an event organised by the National Women’s Network (NWN). The Single Parents Action Network (SPAN) is a national multi-racial organisation working to improve policies and practice for single parents and their children, and to support single-parent self-help groups in different parts of Britain. SPAN was set up under the Third European Poverty Programme in 1990, and is also doing work on a European level to improve policies across the European Community. Its aim is to empower single parents to work with statutory and voluntary agencies to improve the conditions of life for themselves and their children.*

## INTERVIEW

Maria Isabal Plata, Executive Director of Profamilia, talks to Caroline Sweetman about the work of the organisation in Colombia

*Could you tell us about your organisation's involvement with the issue of the family in Colombia? What sort of work do you do, and with whom?*

PROFAMILIA was founded in 1965 as a private, non-profit, family-planning organisation. Today, it is responsible directly and indirectly for nearly 70 per cent of all family-planning activities in Colombia. The association is also involved with sexual and reproductive health programmes, and services directed to women, men and adolescents. The health activities and services are complemented by, among other things, a legal service programme, an evaluation and research programme, and a documentation centre. The legal programme offers legal orientation and aid to those in need of advice about family law, and help for victims of violence. It takes cases to court, and its lawyers also participate in legal research projects on women's issues, human rights, and sexual and reproductive rights.

PROFAMILIA works with and for women, men, and adolescents of the lower middle class and working class. The main objectives of the association are to provide and defend the basic human right of family planning in Colombia, and to work towards achieving better sexual and reproductive health by offering information and other services.

*What is Profamilia's perspective on how economic and political forces are affecting the social formation of family in Colombia?*

Please let me answer from a legal perspective, since I am a lawyer by training. The final recognition of equal rights for men and women in all fields of law came in 1974; in 1991, there was a constitutional prohibition on discrimination against women. In theory, these measures have ensured the full social and economic participation of women in the country. Yet, at the same time, neo-liberal economic policies have affected women in disproportionate ways, for women are the first to lose their jobs or become heads of households on family breakdown; it is they who carry the weight of social responsibility for the family, but without equal economic opportunities.

The participation of women in the paid labour force was a trend which started here in the late 1950s, and it has certainly changed the traditional concept and organisation of the family. The liberation of women from only taking a role in the private sphere has definitely changed the family, but women have not yet achieved equal responsibility with men for family chores. Sex stereotypes are still common, and are in fact still required by traditional social rules of conduct.

*At the UN Fourth Women's Conference at Beijing last year, some felt that Northern participants spent too much time stressing the centrality of safeguarding reproductive rights and sexual rights and banning violence against women. Did the Conference fail women and their families by giving too little attention to the economic poverty which many women in so-called 'developing countries' would regard as their major problem?*

No. The economic poverty and inequalities faced by women in the global system will only diminish when women in those societies are ensured their sexual and reproductive rights, and are allowed to exercise them freely. Unless women start to demand economic equality and fairness as individuals, as persons with rights, the men and the governments of our societies will not pay full attention to poverty as an important issue for women. So it can not be seen as an 'either/or' situation.

The struggle to get 'developing countries' to recognise the importance of safeguarding reproductive rights and sexual rights, and banning violence against women, is crucial, for it will give women the chance to become full-time citizens, who will exercise their rights and power to bring attention to the economic poverty they and their families face. Only when we (as women) are able to freely exercise our sexual and reproductive rights, will we be able to move from our traditionally assigned activities in the private sphere into public roles.

*Do you find contradictions between 'women's rights' and the interests of the family? Will the interests of conservatives, in the Catholic church and elsewhere, be always opposed to the interests of women?*

Feminist perspectives on 'the family' allow the possibility of analysing and studying

*Children at La Peninsula day-care centre run by a group of mothers from the community to allow other mothers to go out to work. The centre also provides preventive health care for pre-school children. It is run by a local organisation, Bienestar Familiar, which is closely associated with PROFAMILIA.*



GIULIETTA BIANCHINI

the individuals who make up the family. They allow us to see the woman as a whole person, and not only as a part of a family. Looking at the family from this perspective has allowed us to ask new questions, and demand new rights, for example sexual and reproductive rights.

When the family is studied from the perspective of women's rights, there is always a contradiction with the concept of the traditional family. As long as the traditional concept of family, be it religious or social, remains, there will be a continuing disregard for the value and rights of the people who make up families, and societies will continue to oppose the interests of women.

*How likely is it that progress towards recognising women's rights within the family, made at Beijing, will lead to real progress for women at grassroots level? To give a concrete example, what good will recognising women's right to live without violence do when a woman is faced with a drunken husband demanding sex?*

We have no doubt that the recognition of women's rights within the family, which started with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and continued in Beijing in 1995, will lead to real progress for women at a grassroots level. Why? Because when one has a chance to act as a person who has fully-recognised human rights and the possibility of exercising them, one becomes an actor in society, and no longer a victim.

When Colombia recognised the right of women to live without violence, it opened the legal doors to fight the drunken husbands demanding sex. Of course this is just the beginning, for law alone is not the solution.

*Has Beijing's outcome suggested new directions for feminist research and work on the family? If so, what are these directions?*

In general terms, from a Latin American perspective, the focus will move to the topics of full citizenship for women and the democratisation of our societies.

*NGOs concerned with development and empowerment often assume that the nuclear family is the normal – and most desirable – form for the family to take. How do you feel the perspectives of the women's movement on the family should inform the work of NGOs concerned with development and empowerment? What opportunities are there in Colombia for the women's movement and development organisations to work together?*

The experience in Beijing, in the sense of the women's groups working with governments when possible, and leading governments on basic issues in other cases, has opened the door for local national women's movements to consider working with development organisations. Today, this collaborative work is a real alternative.

*PROFAMILIA can be contacted in Colombia at. Street 34 no. 14/52, Santa Fé de Bogota, Colombia. Tel: 00 571 287 2100, Fax: 00 571 287 5530.*

# Resources

## Book review

### *Kampala Women Getting By: Well-Being in the Time of AIDS*

Sandra Wallman in association with Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, Solveig Freudenthal, Jessica Jitta, Frank Kaharuza, Jessica Ogden, Valdo Pons. (London: James Currey, forthcoming 1996)

Since 1983, when HIV/AIDS was first documented in Africa, it has come to the forefront as an issue of immense social and human importance. In most instances, the disease strikes men and women between the ages of 15 and 45, their most productive working years, fatally destroying their immune system. In Africa, it is spread predominantly through heterosexual contact and is usually closely associated with other sexually transmitted diseases, such as syphilis, which increase the likelihood of infection by the HIV virus (Essex, 1994). In developing countries, AIDS is an additional burden upon communities which are already faced with poverty and in which human labour is essential for survival. This disease challenges us to look again at issues of poverty, economic inequality, medical care and gender relations.

In recent years, social science research has increasingly grappled with AIDS as a development issue. There has been a growing recognition that, although it is medical science which will have to find a cure or vaccine, the socio-economic and human impact of AIDS demands the attention of social scientists (Blaikie and Barnett, 1992). The consequences of AIDS for households directly and indirectly affected by the disease, its effect on agricultural production and the availability of labour, and the position of orphans, are some of the issues dealt with in recent social-scientific literature.

Sandra Wallman's book *Kampala Women Getting By: Well-being in the Time of AIDS* is a welcome contribution to work on AIDS from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Although the book is informed by an anthropological approach, medical doctors and researchers from diverse academic backgrounds worked on the study in Kampala on which the book is based. The book is an illustration of the manner in which inter-disciplinary co-operation can illuminate the complex issue of how communities are affected by and cope with the AIDS epidemic.

The book explores the contexts within which women recognise, and seek medical treatment for, their own symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases, and the symptoms of other illnesses in their children aged under five. The book is based on a two-year study of

Kamwokya parish, a densely populated suburb of Kampala where more than a quarter of the households are headed by women. This urban environment is an important focus of the book, which aims specifically to understand health care decisions in such settings.

It is recognised in the book that responsibility for the health and well-being of members of the family tends to fall to women notwithstanding the presence of a man in the household. It is women who notice signs of illness in their children and who care for them at home until such time as they regard the symptoms as serious enough to seek further treatment.

The book assesses two steps in women's decision-making about health. Firstly, which environmental, economic or cultural factors determine when a set of symptoms are regarded by women as serious enough to merit treatment outside the home? The following factors which affect women's decisions are documented: the resources and infrastructure of the area in which they live; the treatment options available within the area or accessible outside it; women's own assessments of the options themselves (such as how feasible, appropriate, private or shameful they might be); local perceptions of the symptomatology and aetiology of serious infection; women's access to resources which enable them to act (such as time, information and confidence); and, finally, the extent to which women are constrained in their decision making by, for example, the need to obtain their husband's consent. The second step in women's decision making is the choice between different treatment options which are available. These include indigenous and herbal treatments and biomedical treatments.

In relation to HIV/AIDS, the objective of the book is to contribute to the prevention and control of the disease by identifying factors which may impede women from seeking early treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, thus

rendering themselves more vulnerable to infection by the HIV virus. Furthermore, by exploring the range of informal treatment options open to women and the extent of the interaction between these informal systems and formal biomedicine, the study hopes to suggest possible areas of priority towards which scarce resources may be channelled.

Wallman provides a detailed and comprehensive account of Kamwokya and the people who live there, explaining the socio-economic and historical context; and demonstrates how a vibrant and pluralist economy has sprung up in the provision of health services in Kampala. The collapse of the formal economy in Uganda by 1975 was accompanied by the disintegration of the country's health-care sector. This has been further exacerbated by the recent strains being placed on the system by the conditionalities imposed by international donor agencies. The stringent economic prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have led to severe decreases in health expenditure in Uganda. Most Ugandan hospitals and other health-care facilities now demand a formal user fee which clearly puts these services beyond the reach of the poorest and most vulnerable. The collapse of a formal state health system has led to a boom in private clinics and drug stores, and an increase in the number of individual, and presumably unregulated, practitioners working from their homes.

Although Wallman touches upon the impact of structural adjustment programmes on Uganda, in my opinion she does not give the issue the attention it deserves. The collapse of the health care system is an important element of the context within which women have to make treatment decisions about themselves and their dependants. This is not addressed explicitly by Wallman. Clearly, as the health system deteriorates, the choices facing women become severely limited and indeed one may well question the concept

of 'choice' of treatment in these circumstances. It would be interesting to assess the impact of the collapse of state health services on women's decisions, a historical perspective which is perhaps lost because of the book's otherwise unproblematic strategy of 'freeze-framing' Kamwokya in 1994.

Various methods were employed in the study, and the book uses data from both quantitative and qualitative sources, relying on surveys, interviews, group discussions, and case and situation analyses. The women participating in the study were selected by reason of their residence in Kamwokya rather than such factors as the state of their health or their membership of a high-risk group. The value of an approach which does not focus on the 'problem cases', so to speak, is that it enables us to develop a sense of how women as ordinary citizens of this densely populated urban environment may negotiate the AIDS epidemic and other crises.

In chapter five, the notion of 'well-being' referred to in the sub-title of the book is elaborated. While the English language separates the idea of health from that of well-being, in Luganda the word *bulama* encompasses both terms. Thus, when researchers in Wallman's study asked "What is/are the major health problems in your household?" they were commonly met with 'lack of money' among the responses (Wallman, 1996, 90).

The significance of this interpretation of well-being for women should be recognised. Women who perform the task of caring for members of their household see their role not simply as one of tending the sick but, more widely, of providing labour and services to the family. Thus, all women's work, such as growing and preparing food, cleaning the house, and gathering fuel, is considered by them to be a necessary contribution to the well-being of the family.

If this expanded definition of 'caring' for the family is explored in the context of

recent cuts in state expenditure on health and the attempt to promote increased home-based care for the sick (World Bank, 1992), the burden which these policies will impose on women becomes clear. International donors regard decreases in the amount of time a patient spends in hospital as a means of increasing efficiency and saving costs. However, it is clear that this efficiency is achieved by transferring the burden from the formal economy to women whose work is unpaid. Thus, although the cost per patient for a hospital may fall, the unpaid work of women in the household rises (Elson, 1989). Seen in this light, it is clear that increased home-based care will add to the work of women who promote the well-being of their family in the widest sense by providing their labour and time, as well as tending to the material needs of the household.

Wallman's study clearly reveals that when women are faced with scant resources, they prioritise the needs of their children and members of their household above their own need for treatment. The provision of food and clothing for children takes precedence over the good health of the women themselves. It was found that even when women acquired money, they would use it for household consumption rather than to treat their own illnesses; sexually transmitted diseases often remain untreated.

An issue which appears to fall outside the scope of this book, but which nonetheless must have an impact on resources available for treatment is the illness of other members of the household. For instance, it is estimated that a patient in the advanced stages of AIDS may require up to 280 hours of home care each year in the two years prior to their death (World Bank, 1992). In such instances, women must stretch their resources to provide for the sick, often to their own detriment. The presence in the household of an AIDS patient will no doubt have an impact on treatment decisions which it would be instructive to study.

By providing a full description of 'what goes on in the arena of health and treatment', Wallman clarifies important issues in order to offer some possible answers to the question 'what (most) needs doing?' The findings of the study will thus be of interest to researchers, policy makers, and planners, who are provided with a sophisticated account of women's health-care decisions in this book.

Wallman suggests that studies of health-care decisions in other urban settings will be carried out, and such further comparative work on this subject will be useful. In addition, because there is no reason to suppose that the conclusions to be drawn from Wallman's work may be applied to rural women, who confront the AIDS epidemic in an altogether different environment, it is hoped that the book will prompt thought about the context within which rural women decide how, where, and when to seek treatment for themselves and members of their household.

This is a detailed and well-researched book which will prove to be an important resource for practitioners and academics alike.

#### **Reviewed by Ambreena S Manji**

*Ambreena Manji is carrying out doctoral research at the Faculty of Law, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK, on the impact of AIDS on women's legal status in Kagera region, Tanzania.*

## **References**

- Blaikie, P and Barnett, T (1992) *AIDS in Africa: Its Present and Future Impact*, Bellhaven: London.
- Elson, D (1989) 'How is structural adjustment affecting women?' *Development* 1.
- Essex, M et al (eds) (1994) *AIDS in Africa*, Raven: New York.
- Fleming, A et al (eds) (1988) *The Global Impact of AIDS*, John Wiley: London
- Hunter, S (1990) 'Orphans as a window on the AIDS epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa: initial results and implications of a study in Uganda', *Social Science and Medicine* 31.
- Mamdani, M (1990) 'Uganda: contradictions of the IMF programme and perspective', *Development and Change* 21.
- Sparred, P (1994) *Mortgaging Women's Lives: Feminist Critiques of Structural Adjustment*, Zed Books: London.
- World Bank (1992) *Tanzania AIDS Assessment and Planning Study* World Bank: Washington DC.

## **Further Reading**

F R Elliot, *Gender, Family and Society*, Macmillan Press, 1996. Examines the relationship between family, gender and sexual structures and some major Northern concerns: ethnic differentiation; shrinking labour markets and high unemployment; sexual violence and abuse; and the AIDS epidemic.

J Bruce, C B Lloyd, A Leonardo, with P L Engle and N Duffy *Families in Focus: New Perspectives on Mothers, Fathers and Children*, The Population Council, New York, 1995. Examines recent trends in family formation; the economics of motherhood with particular reference to the increase in mother-supported families; fathers as parenting partners; how family relationships affect children; and the weaknesses and strengths of family-related policies.

H O'Connell, *Women and the Family*, Women and Development Series, UN-NGO Group on Women and Development. Zed Books, 1994. Explores the contradictions for women inherent in the family: a place of security and support, but conversely an instrument of oppression, subordination, and brutality. Examines the internal and external influences on the family, women's place within it, and the role of the state in supporting families.

K Young, C Wolkowitz, and R McCullagh (eds) *Of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination in International Perspective*. Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1981. Articles analysing the sexual division of labour, sexual relations, and the notion of the domestic sphere, in relation to women's subordination.

N Folbre, *Who Pays for the Kids? Gender and the Structure of Constraint*, Routledge, 1994. Analyses traditional neoclassical economic, Marxist, and feminist explanations for why women are overwhelmingly responsible for caring for dependents within the family.

Asia-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, *Reappraising Population Policies and Family Planning Programmes; An Annotated Bibliography*, USA, 1994. Published after the 1994 Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, this bibliography contains details of reports, papers, and books on population and development, family-planning services and programmes, and reproductive health and rights.

Raymond and Smith ed. *The Matrifocal Family; Power, Pluralism and Politics*, Routledge, 1996. Essays including discussion of family and kinship in the Caribbean; the Negro family in Guyana; hierarchy and dual marriage systems in west India; and how changing family structures in West Indian society affect social policy.

L Sarkar and B Sivaramajaya (eds) *Women and the Law: Contemporary Problems*, India Association of Women's Studies, Vikas Publishing House, India, 1994. Essays including discussions of Muslim family law, marital rape, state responses to rape and dowry, and the custom of *sati* in India today.

E Bumiller, *May You be the Mother of One Hundred Sons*. Random House, USA, 1990. Female infanticide, sex-determination tests, and bride burnings in India, and local efforts to change prejudices against the female child.

A Hochschild and A Machung, *The Second Shift*, Piatkus Books, 1994. How working women are coping with changing roles and responsibilities in the family, based on interviews with 50 couples, and observation in homes in California.

J Van Every, *Heterosexual Women Changing the Family: Refusing to be a Wife!* How women can transform relationships to minimise inequality; new perspectives on the division of domestic labour, mothering, marriage, and financial allocation; anti-sexist living arrangements.

K Amup (ed) *Lesbian Parenting: Living with Pride and Prejudice*, Gynergy Books, Canada, 1995. Essays describing procedures for lesbian pregnancy, and legal and social recognition of lesbian parents; involving men in parenting; the lesbian mother; and the role of feminism.

International Human Rights Commission, *Unspoken Rules: Sexual Orientation and Women's Human Rights*, USA, 1995. Overview of gay and lesbian rights in 31 countries, details of laws on lesbian marriages, the adoption of children by lesbian couples, and custody rights for women with children in lesbian relationships. Information on organisations for lesbian and gay issues in these countries.

### Reports

UNESCO *Final Report on 1994 International Year of the Family (IYF)*. UNESCO's objectives during IYF, including increasing awareness of family issues among governments and NGOs; strengthening

institutional capacity to implement and monitor family policies; and enhancing local and national family programmes and responses to family problems. Details of UNESCO's family-related programmes.

D Lewis, *Going it Alone: Rural Female-Headed Households and Their Dependents in Bangladesh*, Centre for Development Studies, University of Bath, 1992. A report to the Overseas Development Agency analysing female-headed households and their importance for poverty-focused development because they highlight the problems faced by all women in poor households in Bangladesh.

### Papers

N Folbre *Women on Their Own: Global Patterns of Female Headship*, International Center for Research on Women, USA, 1991. Recent research on women-maintained families in developing countries: how 'headship' is conceptualised and measured; what determines the incidence of female headship across countries and over time; and the economic consequences for women and children.

M Buvinic and G R Gupta, *Targeting Female-Headed Households and Female-Maintained Families: Views on a Policy Dilemma*, Population Council/ICRW, USA, 1994. The policy implications of targeting interventions to woman-headed households and woman-maintained families, drawing from experiences in the US, Chile, and India.

J Bruce and C B Loyd *Finding the Ties that Bind: Beyond Headship and Household*, Population Council, USA, 1992. Builds the case for a new research focus on the family rather than the household, and a policy focus on family relationships.

M Buvinic *The Vulnerability of Women-Headed Households: Policy Questions and Options for Latin America and the Caribbean*,

Population Council/ICRW, USA, 1990. Discusses five questions: the usefulness of the concept of female headship; the social significance of the female headship trend; the relationship between female headship and poverty; the welfare implications of female headship; and policy dilemmas and options.

## NGO and UN organisations

### Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA)

A network of researchers, activists and women's organisations who define feminist politics as a matter of both consciousness and action. CAFRA is committed to understanding the relationship between the oppression of women and other forms of oppression in society, and working for change. CAFRA, P.O. Box 442, Tunapuna, Trinidad and Tobago.

### Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Community (COFACE).

Rue de Londres 17, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

### United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)

Prior to the International Year of the Family (1994), INSTRAW produced an Occasional Paper Series on the family, and conducted four preparatory conferences in the lead up to the World NGO Forum Launching of the International Year of the Family 1994. Over 1000 participants from nearly 100 countries met in Valletta, Malta from 28 November to 2 December 1993 at the World NGO Forum. More than 200 NGOs signed the Forum's Malta Statement agreeing that stable, self-reliant families are main agents of sustainable development that are entitled to 'maximum protection and assistance to fulfill their roles for the well-being of the individual members of

society'. They urged that policies that empower families be enacted and the diversity of the world's family forms recognised – provided they are fully consistent with fundamental human rights. DCI-1106 United Nations, N.Y., N.Y., 10017, USA.

### **International Center for Research on Women**

An NGO dedicated to promoting social and economic development with women's full participation. ICRW works in collaboration with policy makers, practitioners and researchers throughout the developing world in formulating policy and actions concerning women's economic, social and health status; women's critical contributions to development; and policy and programme features that improve the situation of poor women. ICRW's programme consists of policy-oriented research, programme support and analysis, and communications forums. ICRW list of publications can be obtained by writing to: 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW Suite 302, Washington DC 20036, USA.

### **International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission**

A San Francisco-based NGO that primarily works to monitor, document, and mobilise responses to human rights abuses against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgendered people, people with HIV and AIDs, and those oppressed due to their sexual identities or sexual conduct with consenting adults. 1360 Mission St., Suite 200, San Francisco, CA 94103 USA. Tel: (1)-(415)-255-8680. Fax: (1)-(415)-255-8662. E-mail: IGLHRC@igc.apc.org

### **PROFAMILIA**

PROFAMILIA was founded in 1965. Today, it is responsible directly and indirectly for nearly 70 per cent of all family-planning activities in Colombia. It provides sexual and reproductive health programmes and services for women, men, and adolescents.

The association also offers a legal service programme, of advice on family law and help to victims of violence. PROFAMILIA also organises evaluation and research, and runs a documentation centre. PROFAMILIA Street 34 No. 14/52, Santa Fé de Bogota, Colombia.

### **Southall Black Sisters**

Currently coordinating a campaign to abolish the British immigration law that forces people who have come to join their spouses in the UK to remain within the marriage for at least one year before they can apply for permanent residency. Women are not entitled to basic welfare services during this period and are therefore unable to leave violent marriages. Brent Asian Women's Refuge, Kalayaan, Asian Women's Resource Centre, Waltham Forest Ashiana, Newham Asian Women's Project, Akina Mama Wa, Rights of Women and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants are also members of the campaign. To lend your support, contact Southall Black Sisters, 52 Norwood Road, Southall, Middlesex, UB2 4DW.

### **The Women and Development Unit (WAND)**

A regional development agency, which promotes analysis and action on women's role and participation in Caribbean development. Its aims are to empower women to contribute to Caribbean development in the region; and to strengthen the capacity of institutions and programmes to address the needs and concerns of women. WAND, University of the West Indies, School of Continuing Studies, The Pine, St. Michael, Barbados.

### **Women Living Under Muslim Laws**

A network of women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws, both written and unwritten, drawn from interpretations of the Koran tied up with local traditions. Provides and disseminates information for women and women's

groups in Muslim communities, supports and publicises women's struggles within Muslim countries, and provides channels of communication. Main Office: Boite Postale 23, 34790 Grabels, France. Asia Office: 38/8 Sarwar Rd., Lahore Cantt., Pakistan.

### **Women and Law in Southern Africa Research Trust (WLSA)**

WLSA is a non-profit organisation based in Zimbabwe that is currently focusing on family law and the position of women in the family, with special reference to access to, and control of, resources. Reports on these issues in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Swaziland, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Botswana will be completed by 1997. WLSA has an extensive publications list, including reports such as 'Parting Grass: Revealing and Conceptualizing the African Family,' 'Uncovering Reality: Excavating Women's Rights in African Family Law,' and 'Beyond Research: WLSA in Action'. All these publications can be obtained from WLSA's national office: PO Box UA 171, Union Avenue, Harare, Zimbabwe. Tel.: 263-4-729151. Fax: 263-4-729152.

## **Audio-Visual Resources**

### **People Like Us**

A 27 min. video that tells the story of three mothers living in desperate poverty in Ecuador, interspersed with interviews with a random sample of British women expressing their views on poverty. Can be rented from Oxfam, Oxford, UK.

### **Your Child Too**

A 23 min. documentary produced by WLSA on maintenance law which won a Women and Development award through the British Council. To obtain a copy, contact WLSA at the address, fax or phone number provided in the NGO portion of this resources section.

### **Work-place Nurseries**

A short documentary produced by the Work Place Nursery Campaign. Parents, employers, politicians and campaigners agree that nurseries subsidised by employers for employees' children are beneficial for all concerned. They allow women to carry on working after they have had children; and help employers to retain valuable employees, which means that they don't have to spend funds on retraining new staff. More information on work-place nurseries can be obtained from the Work Place Nursery Campaign, Room 205, Southbank House, Black Prince Road, London SE1 7SJ. Video is available from Oxfam Information Services, Oxford.

