

women are free.' (Mrs. R F Hussein, 'Ornaments or Badge of Slavery', *Mahila* (Women), May, July, 1903) Even those who love Calcutta will admit that it is not an easy place for academic investigations. Hilary Standing aptly describes the city as 'simultaneously shocking and exciting'. The scrupulous fieldwork, the basis of the book, took toll of Dr Standing's health and delayed the publication of her study. But it was not in vain. Indeed, it is the long gestation period that has given her an insight into the society she set out

to study with empathy, modesty and love. The result is a book which offers a rigorous theoretical framework yet is also full of human experiences and interactions. The study reflects the process of an 'outsider' becoming an 'insider' in the course of her academic research. As someone coming from Calcutta – the city I left to avoid an arranged marriage just like one of the characters of Hilary Standing's book – this is the greatest compliment I can pay to her research.

Swasti Mitter

Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature

Donna J. Haraway

Free Association Books: London 1991,
ISBN 1 85343 139 7 £12.95 Pbk,
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Reading these essays – a collection culled from the prolific output of Donna Haraway in the period 1978–89 – was a great pleasure. My enjoyment came from a sense of political engagement and intellectual project. I was pursuing the trajectory of a serious feminist thinker who is forever mapping, exploring and challenging established Western conceptual frameworks. Each of the sections had its distinctive delights. Part One documents some of the major shifts in the development of Western biological sciences. Donna Haraway doesn't take any short-cuts as the density of the research and the complexity of the analyses indicates. She captures and deconstructs the layers of the social constructiveness of science with unique energy and insight. Yet or perhaps because of this, she is one of the few individuals who can point to the changes in the beast. She really does have her finger on the pulse and is thus able to highlight meta-patterns. The essays in Part Two present a reader of an

impressive range of cultural stories: from scientific stories to those of Buchi Emecheta. Across that range, Haraway is forging new tools as both reader and teacher – reflective and questioning, insisting on the plurality of readings. Part Three presents a series of broad reflections on politics at the end of the twentieth century – the politics of: sex/gender; language; socialist-feminism; knowledge; bodies; scientific medicine; etc.

In style and content these essays stand firmly against epistemological imperialism in any form. Contestation is possible at many levels and these essays both are, and encourage, contestations. As Donna puts it, her concerns are both 'dominations' and 'possibilities' (p. 154). Yet she recognizes the complexity of twentieth-century politics and refuses short-cuts which evade that complexity. There are no privileged agents or pure starting-points as she emphasizes in her comments about the key categories of 'women' and 'nature': 'Nature is constructed, constituted historically, not discovered naked in a fossil bed or tropical forest. Nature is contested, and women have enthusiastically entered the fray' (p. 106). A zany optimism which readers are likely to love or hate pervades the whole collection.

Perhaps no other Western feminist writer has struggled so effectively against epistemological imperialism whilst maintaining the importance of political agency. Donna Haraway recognizes that this involves walking a tight-rope: 'The task is to "disqualify" the analytic categories, like sex or nature, that lead to univocity.' Yet, in this process, she recognizes and shares with others the 'fear of losing a concept of agency for women' (p. 135).

In reading these essays I feel that I'm on the leading edge of feminist thought. Donna Haraway is the Laurie Anderson of feminism and I am exhilarated by her performances. Ironically, it is my pleasure which fuels some reservations about this work. It is easy *for me* to get lost in the pleasures of Haraway's text. My fear is that the texts can become ends in themselves because they are both demanding in every sense and so pleurably insightful. This is a labour and an aesthetics few outside the academy have the time for or are likely to savour. This I find worrying.

Yet, there is so much embedded in Haraway's medium that I would recommend these essays as vital reading material for life in the Western world in the late twentieth century. My favourites from the menu include a rich exploration of the concept of 'Gender' for a Marxist Dictionary. There is also, a version of her 'Cyborg Manifesto' (A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century), earlier versions of which have already been widely circulated and consumed with great gusto. This is a manifesto without the heroics of its Marxist predecessor, but with considerable wit added to improve the flavour. So, I would urge would-be readers to sample the delights: a taste for them is easily acquired. Perhaps, given my concerns about accessibility and Donna Haraway's commitment to complex analysis, I should say that such a taste is *uneasily* acquired.

Maureen McNeil

The Family Way: A New Approach to Policy Making

Anna Coote, Harriet Harman, Patricia Hewitt

Social Policy Paper No. 1. Institute for Public Policy Research: London 1990, ISBN 1 872452 15 9, £10, 68 pp Pbk

The Family Way should not be seen as a book by three individual feminists but as the first 'social-policy paper' by an independent, left-leaning think tank anxious to influence the Labour Party's programme in government. This may explain its relative lack of feminist radicalism (and radical feminism – which, unsurprisingly, it does not contain either).

In its own terms, *The Family*

Way can be seen as an attempt to combat traditionalist, stultifying concepts of 'the family' – not confined, unfortunately, to the right wing alone – and to codify an approach to family policy based on moving with change in family structure. It sets out a new agenda for the left, tackling simultaneously the all-pervading Thatcherist ideology of the 1980s and the labour movement's own conservative traditions.

The first section, 'Right, Left and Family' analyses the different views of the family on the right and left of the political spectrum. While pointing to some of the contradictions of Tory thought – such as the conflict between recognizing employers' needs for female labour power and the traditional Conservative loyalty to the woman's place in