Review
Reviewed Work(s): Women, Work, & Politics: The Political Economy of Gender Inequality by Torben Iversen and Frances Rosenbluth
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and more inclusive market economy fits globalization, the author could benefit from detailing this in the Japanese context. Despite the fresh introduction of network study concepts, they exist only as metaphors and Japan’s positional power in actual specific networks is not truly measured. Lastly, readers may find the subtitle puzzling. Since Japanese selective relationalism at home was externalized into Japan-led Asian regionalism, it would be more suitable to use the subtitle “How Japan Shapes Regionalization.” Or if the author meant that the crisis of Japan-led regionalization pushed Japan to change, then it might be better to say “How Regionalization Shapes New Japan.”


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Gender inequalities are ubiquitous throughout human societies, historically and today. In spite of much research and theorizing on the causes and characteristics of these inequalities, empirical and theoretical puzzles remain. For example, why, in spite of huge changes toward gender equality, are the gender segregation of jobs and gendered pay gaps still so widespread? In Women, Work, & Politics, authors Torben Iversen and Frances Rosenbluth suggest answers to such questions, including questions about how gender inequalities may be fundamentally changing today. They use ideas about markets, individual choice and bargaining to analyze the historical development and cross-national variations of gender inequalities today. They limit their analyses primarily to wealthy, Northern, industrial (or post-industrial) societies.

The authors develop a complex analysis that links individual and intra-household processes with large-scale institutional processes. They argue that gendered inequalities are the outcomes of countless decisions by individuals in their daily lives in families and on the job, as spouses, employees, employers and policy makers as they act in their own perceived interests. The resulting theoretical argument is presented in considerable detail and with admirable clarity. In addition, the authors use the theory to examine the relationships between fertility and labor market participation of women to explain present-day changes and cross-national differences in fertility rates and population growth. They also apply the theory to politics, looking at changes in the political alignments and voting patterns of different groups of women and their political participation in a variety of countries with different electoral systems.

The basic argument of this book is that power differences between women and men, as well as other gender inequalities, arise in bargaining processes within the family, which take place under specific economic, institutional, and ideological conditions. These conditions may change, contributing to changes in the relative bargaining power of women and men. Reciprocally, changes in intra-family bargaining may spark institutional and normative changes in the broader society. Wives and husbands bargain over the division of household labor, the distribution of family resources, whether the woman should take a paying job, and many other matters. Power in the bargaining process ultimately depends upon the individual’s ability to leave the family or marriage, and that depends most basically on outside resources, such as income from a job. The gender division of labor that assigns women to unpaid work leaves most full-time homemakers without outside resources and with little bargaining power. When jobs for women are scarce, marriage is often the best choice a woman has to ensure economic survival for herself and her children. As jobs have opened for women, more and more women have chosen to work for pay, changing the family bargaining situation to some extent. As a result, men do more household work than in the past, but not enough to bring gender equality in housework and caring tasks. Women who work for pay still do significantly more at home than do men. The gender pay gap and male dominance in the “better” jobs persist. To understand this, we have to look at employer decisions.

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Employers' hiring decisions are critical in consigning women to lower paid work than men. These are rational decisions: men's labor is more valuable than women's, especially in the private sector. The economy is divided into two production systems: one employs high-skill, specialized workers who become more valuable to employers over time, and the other system employs workers with general, unspecialized skills that do not build greater value with long job tenure. Employers in the high skill sector are reluctant to hire women because they expect women to leave the job for childbearing and caring work before employers can reap the benefits of their increased human capital. Thus, women are effectively barred from high paying jobs, which remain male dominated. Women do not have similar problems in the general skills sector which covers service and caring work, often in the public sector. This sector is also expanding and jobs are, or used to be, widely available for women. Thus, many women choose to work in this sector. The choices of both employers and women workers create a circular process from which there is no easy exit. The only solution, according to the authors, is to break the vicious circle by eliminating the domestic division of labor—men have to do half the housework.

This is only a brief summary of an ambitious project that makes an important contribution to efforts to understand the causes of gender inequalities and their persistence. The linking of individual decisions and family bargaining to their consequences for the larger society is admirable. Many of the analyses provide new insights into complex processes. The comparative analyses are excellent, demonstrating the complexity as well as the multiplicity of processes that maintain gendered inequalities.

But, does the book adequately explain the gender segregation of work and the ongoing pay gap? I am not satisfied that it does. In spite of its complexity, this argument misses or underplays some important elements in the reproduction of gender inequalities. It does not give enough attention to the ways in which gendered assumptions are fundamental to the organization of work and to images of adequate workers. Most paid work places are organized on the implicit assumption that workers have no obligations outside that workplace. The worker is unencumbered, and is probably a man with a woman to take care of the family and home. This is a gendered organization of work and it disadvantages those who must respond to other obligations, usually women.

Gender images and assumptions are more deeply embedded in workplace practices, including hiring and wage setting, than this theory allows. Although the authors talk about the importance of norms and values, they do not capture the ways in which gendered assumptions about the nature of women and men shape many choices. Men are seen as naturally dominant, potential decision-makers and leaders, while women are seen as naturally nurturing and caring. Such assumptions may not be consciously held, but research on women in organizations has repeatedly shown that such images frequently cast women in male-defined jobs as inappropriate or inadequate to the tasks, simply because they are women. It is reasonable to conclude that such images influence managers' decisions.


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Waiting, the leitmotif of this work, interchangeably referred to as "limbo" and "timepass," is cause as well as effect in youth culture and politics in India. It stems from a socio-historical condition and it ushers society into a new milieu. Biographically, it may seem transitory. Historically, it manages to be eternally defining the destiny of social actors. Craig Jeffrey develops an incisively detailed account of the empirical dimensions of waiting, by wishing away the inherent mind game and experiential complexities thereof. Timepass is not about the epistemological complexities of the term "waiting." Instead, it is about understanding the rich lower middle class, their investment in the education of their children as a strategy to

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