

## **ALL DAY, EVERY DAY: FACTORY AND FAMILY IN THE MAKING OF WOMEN'S LIVES**

Sallie Westwood. 1985. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press

*All Day, Every Day* presents a dramatic analysis of the subordination women face as workers, wives, and mothers under conditions set by patriarchal capitalism. Having spend a year living and working with the women of a British hosiery factory, Sallie Westwood identifies the interwoven layers of work processes and patriarchal ideologies, within gender, class and racial definitions. She manages to clarify how notions, culturally internalized and institutionalized, have ensured the oppression and subordination of all women on all shopfloors. Westwood emphasizes that women's struggle is political and only through collective effort can they overcome the oppressive conditions. She painstakingly unravels the particulars of a struggle, played out through resistance and celebration, that reflects their understanding of the situation. Through determined effort they create a dynamic shopfloor culture, which paradoxically empowers the women to resist the system, yet at the same time, reinforces their dependence and subordination.

Westwood outlines the management structure of the "old family firm" Stitch Co., a microcosm of patriarchal authority that reflects an outwardly benign, cosy, atmosphere; the management promotes the image of "one big happy family." Ironically, the culture created by the women to resist control gives the firm an opening to confirm its family-like image—tolerating the activities of "the girls." However much the reality of the hierarchal control is obscured by the firm's expression of pride in maintaining good labour relations and working conditions, the union structure replicates the hierarchy. As later discussion emphasizes, the union is *of* and *for* brothers, not sisters. The implied choice for workers is one of having either good wages *or* security, good working conditions, and benefits.

The tedium of the work and the reality of exploitation and profit are practically understood by the women, yet their only escape is to create a separate life or culture on the shopfloor, one that is separated from the work itself. However, it is clear that this "reaction" in response to the control is not really separated from anything. The division between the world of work and that of family is practically non-existent. Part of their shopfloor culture is the act of bringing touches

of domesticity to their work—wearing aprons and slippers, decorating “their” machines with personal tokens, and bringing to work other signs of their role in families. Conversely, they transfer the routine and discipline from the shopfloor into their homes, “repeating aspects of the labour process in their housework”

Although the focus is on women’s role in the labour process, Westwood is careful not to ignore how class, race and age also determine position and value within the hierarchy of the capitalistic labour structure, and affect the shopfloor culture. She argues that the worlds of work and home are inextricably linked, noting that in working class families, young men as well as young women are controlled by the system. Familial bases for apprenticeships and job recruitment mean that generations follow one another into the world of low-paying wages. The move into the workplace is anticipated as a move toward gaining autonomy, but in reality, especially for women, the bitter irony is that it is a move toward deeper entrapment.

She points out that as a way to struggle free from the patterns of cultural discrimination, families in minority cultural groups attach particular importance to education and qualifications as a means for younger generations to compete equally with the majority culture for jobs. She argues that Black women (Westwood uses this designation to include Asian, Caribbean, African, and British-born Blacks) suffer gender and racial discrimination on the shopfloor.

The women of Stitch Co. demystify management’s strategy of direct control over their labour. They recognize that the system is divisive, encouraging competition, and imposes socially constructed categories like “skilled” and “unskilled”. The women realize that the designation has nothing to do with skill but with speed for the sake of production. Their response to this divisiveness takes the form of complaints, criticism, jokes, laughter—important means of communication among those who share in the oppression. Westwood reasons that the close supervision, and the intensity of competition are constants in undermining the strength of solidarity shared by the women. In addition, she notes that gender division of labour keeps the “unskilled” women dependent on the “skilled” technicians and notes that these labels (unskilled/skilled) mask actual competencies. Further, she adds, the “the divisions keep the women, with few exceptions, in the low-wage stratum limiting their economic independence and autonomy”.

Another form of subordination is created by the division between the male-dominated union and the women. Although a few women are in union positions to speak for women's interests, the organization, controlled by men and run for the men, most often silences these voices. Westwood listened to the indictment against the framework in which "women's work is minimised, trivialised and viewed as peripheral in relation to [that] of male members." She presents an enlightening picture of the complexities inherent in this framework. The women develop a strong sense of powerlessness and mistrust in the union and even in their female representatives. These perceptions give added power to management. Once again we are reminded of the patriarchal domination reproducing itself in the workplace.

It is within this structure that the shopfloor culture takes place. Paradoxically, the culture evolves as a form of resistance and escape. Yet it "was built on notions of femininity, which colluded with a subordinate and domesticated version of women." Nevertheless, the rituals and celebrations are the women's means of survival on the shopfloor. Despite age and cultural differences, the strength, energy, and power of this solidarity is remarkable.

In her analysis of the culture, Westwood raises the important question of just how liberatory the learning that takes place on the shopfloor is. Again and again, the contradictions seem almost to be stumbling over themselves. Each celebration reflects a notion of anticipation of some measure of control over one's own life, notions that the events of engagements, marriage, and motherhood are steps to full membership in the adult world. The women seem to take pleasure in the celebrations, brief indulgences in an illusory world of freedom; they are merely deferring the disillusionment. These moments are special for the strength of friendship and shared understanding; yet the constant theme of attempting to invert the notion of patriarchal *authority* is undercut by the powerful sexist ideologies which define woman's role, whether in factory or family.

Just as carefully as she defines management structure and the labour process, Westwood defines family structure. Her intention is not to subvert the structure but to emphasize its potential for exploitation, brutality, inequality and fear. Like other feminists, she challenges the "rosy glow" that surrounds family as a haven of warmth and safety in an alienated and aggressive world.

One difference between the oppression and subordination in the factory and family is that within the family the women labour for love, for people who really matter, real people with real needs. Here they feel some value and worth, whereas on the shopfloor, they labour for the profits of supervisors, managers, and owners. Regardless of whatever motivations and illusions the women have, Westwood reasons, the world of work and home comprise one sphere.

In her penultimate chapter, Westwood confronts the most complicated institution so far addressed—motherhood. She refers to Adrienne Rich's condemnation of the experience of motherhood under patriarchal constraints: "Patriarchy could not survive without motherhood and heterosexuality in their institutional forms; therefore they have to be treated as axioms, as nature itself. "From this departure, in a carefully constructed explication, Westwood reveals the inseparable worlds of work and family. Not only is the idea of motherhood perceived as the apex of a woman's life, but also as a means to greater access to the resources of men and the state. Those women who consider motherhood the signal to leave the factory and become dependent on a husband's support, are, in a way, "calling the bluff" of the "family wage" construct. She reports that for some, the strategy proves realistic and practical. Attitudes revealed here about motherhood form a most complex picture. The celebration of birth and the joys of motherhood confirm the pleasures, and push into the shadows the fears and the "emotional and psychological turmoil" involved in motherhood.

Westwood points out that although the women believe in the value of motherhood over "sewing on buttons", they come to realize that leaving the factory means leaving the socialized support and solidarity of women together. Once again the contradictions become very clear: commitment to motherhood means coming into full membership of womanhood. With the acceptance of the role, the woman is removed from the supportive group and becomes further dependent on the male breadwinner.

At this point Westwood adds a powerful dimension to her work. However, she drifts a little far afield in her discussion of the extent of dependence on professional health services. Although her analysis gives particular depth to the expressed disapproval from the women about their treatment, and points to the realities of institutionalized control over reproduction, the vital issues she raises could (and

should) fill another volume. But she makes critical points for framing the problems of women's alienation, protestation, and rejection which contribute to their disadvantage.

After delving into matters of racism, ethnicity, poverty, and poor housing as major causes of poor health, Westwood moves back to the shopfloor. In a direct challenge to the public/private split, she points out the "poverty of a conceptual framework which separates home and work as distinct spheres." She attacks the "male" notion that the two worlds are neatly divided. A real division would give some justification to the attitude that childbirth and motherhood are related solely to family life, thereby suggesting that, within the workplace, issues of maternity rights and benefits are inappropriate and need not be a concern.

Westwood's conclusion offers a comprehensive, critical perspective on the impact of patriarchy and capitalism on women in both factory and home. She reasons that the experiences of the women doing two jobs and still not earning wages that give them independence and autonomy cannot be explained only as a matter of "class oppression located in the economics of capitalism." The women's struggle for equality is locked in mortal combat with the power of sexist and racist ideologies which create strong barriers, reinforcing the dependence and subordination of women.

Westwood presents strong evidence—powerful articulation from the women—to indicate that these women of Stitch Co. learn from their own lives and from those of others, "reinterpreting experience in ways which cut through common sense to uncover the real conditions that constrain them." The complexities, the contradictions, do not paralyze them; they are engaged in a continuous struggle toward a broader perspective. The quality of life is in need of revision.

Westwood, in her critical discourse on shopfloor culture, offers one non-traditional context for the development of a new knowledge base for a learning theory. The shopfloor culture shows a complex, socio-political process. The women learn to cope all day, every day by breaking the patterns, demystifying the system, recognizing the power structure, realizing self-worth, and responding with resistance to the forces working against their autonomy. For presenting this construct, *All Day, Every Day* merits a place in any serious study of developing learning theory.



Structurally, *All Day, Every Day* reflects the life patterns of the women, the intensity, the tedium, broken by moments of celebration, the shocking details, the diversions—all “dead on” course. Reading the “Sink” chapters is like getting caught in a tumble-dry cycle. These sections are most compelling, in all the sleazy details. The experience is as engaging as an occasion of “tripping out on Coronation Street.” With a sustained tone, Westwood weaves through the sonorous dramatic voices with cogent analysis to emphasize the contradictions. She asked about their lives, then listened to what they had to say. Deftly, she clarifies the real drama of *All Day, Every Day*: in learning to cope, the women of Stitch Co. transformed their learning in a way to change their situation from one of hopeless exploitation and submissive subordination to realize some autonomy, some independence, if only for moments at a time. Becoming aware of the potential power of sisterhood is learning enough for a start.

Sallie Westwood does not despair, but by no means does she downplay the oppression. In tackling the realities and theorizing the meanings, she sheds some light. In page after page, she gives the reader opportunity to celebrate in the sisterhood with the women. The greatest value in this forceful, poignant account is the irrepressible, natural expression of the women. Westwood does not meddle with their language; she shares it with her readers and uses it to unravel the theoretical mysteries, thereby delivering the power, the volition of their resistance to the oppression and exploitation. She shows that these women know and they are seething. These women are beautiful!

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