

nineteenth century, Jews had good reason to seek both in the form of the dowry.

In the final essay entitled, "Dowry in Modern Greece: An Institution at the Crossroads Between Persistence and Decline" (1972), Jane Lambiri-Dimaki considers the legal and social aspects of dowry in Modern Greece, thereby linking this essay with the first two. Among very poor and very rich women, dowry has recently favoured early marriage, though it has been an obstacle to early marriage in the middle classes. Among the urban middle classes marriage has been delayed to permit a woman to finish her education and gain a job to enable her to provide her own dowry; in this way the institution of dowry has encouraged female emancipation as well as later marriage. But the use of dowry in Modern Greece has been subject to abuses, including the likelihood that hypergamy would occur for men and hypogamy would occur among women, or, in other words, that men would gain and women lose social and economic status through marriage accompanied by the payment of a dowry, whether by the woman's family or by the woman herself. New trends observable in the early 1970s were judged likely to undermine the dowry system and to create a situation in which a woman's dowry is her education and her work.

Any of the five essays could stand alone; as a collection they are less satisfying. They permit none of the precise comparisons which would be possible if they dealt with the same place over time or with similar social categories in different places during the same period. Together the essays tell us very little about general trends in the various cultures over the vast period they collectively study. Indeed, the places and periods omitted may be more important than those included; axial periods in the social history of the places studied are not considered. Thus, Medieval France but not early modern France, Medieval but not Renaissance Siena, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sicily and Germany but not Norman Sicily or Reformation

Germany, contemporary but not classical or even post-Turkish Greece are examined.

Other more pertinent omissions occur. Despite Jack Goody's challenge (1983), neither Hughes nor Riemer has considered the role of the Church in promoting the use of dowry. It is surprising that the editor did not require an endnote or postscript on this subject from Hughes. And what of men's misuse of their wives' dowries? The silence of the last three essays on this subject raises the question of whether we will have to continue to depend entirely on modern European literature to describe this phenomenon.

A magisterial study of the nature and use of dowry in Western Europe from the late Middle Ages to the present would be a welcome addition to sources for the study of women's history. This collection of essays should not be mistaken for such a study. But if such a book should ever be written, its author will have to incorporate the findings of these interesting, carefully researched and well-written essays into that larger synthesis.

Gillian Thompson
University of New Brunswick

The Captured Womb: A History Of The Medical Care Of Pregnant Women. Ann Oakley. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1984, pp. 352

Ann Oakley does it again. In *The Captured Womb*, as in her earlier books on domestic work and childbearing, she pioneers in her feminist analysis of an aspect of social life which has been used as a means of furthering the domination of women. *The Captured Womb* is an enthralling and painful book to read.

It is enthralling because Oakley pieces together the framework of social analysis and

builds her case bit by bit to establish the ways in which the medical profession has sought further and further mastery of the process of childbearing, seeking to diminish and control the involvement of the mother and relying instead on its own technological and scientific expertise. The themes defined in the early part of the book echo again and again in maternity care, up to our own time. The womb is the last unconquered territory in medicine and recent encroachments from both ends of pregnancy have diminished the length of time necessary for the mother herself to care for the fetus. Life can be created outside the womb, nurtured in a petrie dish and implanted in a waiting receptacle. Life from 750 grams can be sustained and grown until it is capable of self support. Mothers have become less and less necessary to the totality of pregnancy and the medical control over the actual period of pregnancy required for the fetus has increased.

It is painful because it is yet another well-documented account of the way in which women's bodies and minds are controlled by the patriarchal bias of our society.

Oakley describes and documents the insight of many childbearing women in a way that few are able to articulate. We know that our experiences and assessment of our physical state is not valued during pregnancy, or at other times. This is a book for those who have felt discontent, lack of involvement, or are interested in a broader context for their childbirth experiences. Here they can find background and analysis to piece their experiences together. But it is also a book that all of us interested in women's roles should read as well, because it is an extremely well argued account of the take-over of a distinctive aspect of women's culture, institutions and bodies.

Oakley's book describes the development of what is called antenatal care in Britain. (Here it is prenatal care.) The book is organized in chronological order. She begins by describing the advice available to perspective mothers prior to

the twentieth century. This is a mixture of the state of the art medical knowledge at the time and evidence based on the experience of women themselves. The concerns of pre-twentieth century care often parallel our own in focus if not in solution — the safety of hospital versus home delivery (home was safer then and may be safer now too, at least in the case of planned home delivery) or the termination of pregnancy, both at-term and prematurely.

Concern about educating mothers for proper prenatal care was originally, in Britain, a political issue. The extremely low standard of health of soldiers recruited for the Boer War (1899-1902) were blamed primarily on problems of poor feeding in infancy and childhood. And mothers (rather than economic circumstances) were blamed for poor feeding. The solution was obvious — educate the mothers. As Oakley states, "Educating mothers was, certainly, a cheaper solution than the provision of adequate free medical services or improved housing, but the zeal with which it was promoted probably had more to do with perceptions of women's social functions...." (p. 38). The impact of the overlap of politics and ideology was overwhelmingly devastating for childbearing women.

Maternity care then became the solution for the nation's problems and major institutions cooperated to define the problem as the mother and her failure to come for, or take the advice of experts. This trend continues in prenatal care today.

Several factors cooperated to redefine the control and location of childbirth. Oakley argues, for example, that World War II, especially the large scale evacuation in 1939, and later patterns of wartime maternity care, contributed to the acceptability of institutionalized childbirth. Redefinitions of terminology also changed individual perceptions. Focussing on neonatal rather than infant mortality meant that hospital procedures were seen as far more effective in pro-

viding safer childbirth and that the socio-economic changes to cut infant mortality were not undertaken.

Early in the twentieth century the distinction in childbirth between the “normal” and the “abnormal” developed. This distinction continues to exist in contemporary obstetrics but the boundaries have shifted. As Oakley points out, in 1918 a breech delivery would have been normal and fetal rotation practiced, that skill has now been lost and breech delivery is now abnormal and requires a caesarean section in most hospitals. More and more aspects of pregnancy and childbirth are now considered abnormal or potentially abnormal and require greater intervention.

Through her chronology Oakley demonstrates the continuity of these two themes — educating mothers and redefining abnormality — in prenatal care in the twentieth century. While her analysis is specifically relevant to Britain, there are many valuable insights that Canadians can get from this book. It provides a comparison for trends in our obstetrical care and is a reminder that medical and scientific “truths” are often poorly researched, undocumented as to long term consequences and based on ideology as much as science. Oakley was aware of the mystification of language in science and has written her book without medical jargon. Her analysis of maternity care should be widely read. I hope it will appear in a paperback edition to make it more widely available. We need public awareness and discussion of the issues she raised if we are to halt the overwhelming medicalization of childbirth and indeed of life itself.

Jane Gordon
Mount Saint Vincent University

Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America Michael Grossberg. *Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985*

Governing the Hearth is a truly ambitious undertaking, a remarkable study of the interplay between nineteenth-century American family law and social history. Few other historians have displayed the courage to tackle the whole of the nineteenth century, and to examine the sweep of law across the continental United States. Grossberg does both. Traditionally, family historians have limited their inquiry to legal issues such as married women's property, divorce, abortion and child custody. Grossberg widens this investigation significantly. His book unearths a wealth of promising new material: (1) actions for breach of promise to marry; (2) the legal regulation of wedding celebrations; (3) legal restrictions on who could marry; (4) legal regulation of both abortion and contraception; (5) laws of bastardy; (6) child custody, adoption and apprenticeship.

Grossberg's pioneering work on lawsuits for breach of promise to marry makes fascinating reading. He concludes that these actions became an entirely female remedy in post-revolutionary America. Women were increasingly confined to the domestic sphere, and broken engagements were often calamitous to women's future life-prospects. At common law, matrimonial pledges were legally binding. A jilted lover was entitled to seek damages from her fiancé for his failure to live up to the bargain. Grossberg makes the interesting observation that these lawsuits had far more to do with finance than with romance. The action served largely to protect a rejected father-in-law's property rights, since a broken engagement often frustrated complex family negotiations relating to dynastic property interests. Although nineteenth-century judges were largely sympathetic to plaintiffs in such cases, women did face significant risks in litigation. Most defendants would attempt to prove