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Heading Home: Motherhood, Work, and the Failed Promise of Equality, by Shani Orgad.
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This fascinating book explores the lived experiences of women who left highly successful full-time careers to become full-time stay-at-home mothers. There has been a lot of interest in exploring the phenomenon of women 'opting out' of high-powered careers in recent gender, work and organisation literature (e.g. Biese, 2018; Kossek, Su, & Wu, 2017), with evidence pointing to the fact that it may be better understood when related to the broader context of contemporary cultural discourses of postfeminism (e.g. Gill, 2017; Gill, Kelan, & Scharff, 2017), which construct particular new expectations of women's work and home roles. This book makes a crucial theoretical contribution by demonstrating how contemporary cultural images of femininity, career and motherhood slip into and shape women's lived experiences and with what effect. Drawing on a London-based sample of 35 in-depth interviews with white, middle-class women who left high-flying careers as lawyers, artists, journalists, doctors, top managers and so on, the book crucially pinpoints a deep rift between postfeminist cultural imagery that urges women to become balanced in combining career and family, and women's lived experiences of trying to do so. In doing so, it convincingly debunks widely perpetuated postfeminist assumptions that women's further access to top careers is simply a matter of choice, confidence or ambition. Instead, Orgad shows that toxic, inflexible work cultures combined with the rigid structures and dynamics of heterosexual marriage is what really determines women's forced choice to abandon professional careers and traditional employment.

The book's introduction quotes the UK and USA statistics suggesting that women's participation in the labour market has, indeed, increased significantly, but less so the participation of mothers; as 72% of those women who are not in the labour market are mothers (p. 6). The book sheds light on why this is the case, by exposing the disjuncture between the cultural images of a 'balanced' woman who is a nurturing mother accomplished in her high-flying career, and the structural (im)possibility of achieving this ideal. It also vividly shows that the vocabulary of structural change, feminist collective action and solidarity is almost absent from contemporary cultural discourses, the only way that women are able to explain their 'failure' to live up to the ideal is through the dominant language of individualised choice, 'wrong' attitudes and personal (in)ability, thus leaving them with feelings of guilt and frustration. In addition to making a compelling theoretical contribution, Orgad beautifully and respectfully conveys a range of powerful emotional experiences of women's profound pain, suppressed anger and disillusionment with the cultural promise of

equality, producing a unique and moving narrative that really brings out the injurious nature of the contemporary constructions of femininity.

The book is structured through an ongoing juxtaposition of the dominant cultural discourses about women, careers and motherhood with the analysis of Orgad's interviewees' experiences. It is divided into three parts. Part 1, consisting of two chapters, explores how women account for leaving their careers and how they relate these experiences to the dominant cultural ideal of a 'balanced woman' who is expected to combine work and motherhood. Orgad's analysis clearly shows that her interviewees' stories reveal one common bottom line: that pursuing two high-flying careers in one household appears incompatible with raising children. This is largely due to the toxic work cultures experienced by both women and their partners, which involve the expectations of full dedication to work, extremely long hours, inflexible schedules, and unrealistic workload demands. The book demonstrates that when faced with these conflicting demands, households easily fall into embracing traditional gender roles with women 'choosing' to stay at home. While both men and women uphold egalitarian ideology, in their own homes they do not attempt to question the process of adopting a traditional pattern of gender division of roles. Paradoxically, the analysis of women's narratives also shows that they clearly acknowledge that it's mostly structural factors that prevent them from 'living up' to the dominant cultural ideals of a 'well-rounded' woman who 'has it all'. However, participants still assess themselves against this popular image and attribute their 'failure' to combine work and career to a lack of ambition or personal drive. As Orgad shows, the latter are typical postfeminist mantras, underpinned by ideas of individualism, free choice and personal responsibility for change, while rendering structural factors irrelevant. The fact that the women deny the evidence of their own experience and interpret their trajectories only in these terms shows the insidious dominance of the postfeminist vocabulary in contemporary society. However, the realities of these women's stories clearly illustrate that these ideas are often no more than a cruel fantasy, which instead of empowering women makes them find faults within themselves.

Part 2 explores the consequences of women's decisions to give up their careers and shows how they (re)negotiate their identities as stay-at-home mothers and wives. The women were cognizant that they are not living up to the dominant postfeminist ideal of a 'balanced' woman and that becoming a full-time mum goes against the 'norm'. However, Orgad explains how the cultural ideal of motherhood is highly contested, with images ranging from an 'admirable' agentic decision to opt out for the sake of kids, to a denigrated image of a lazy

and selfish yummy mummy, lacking ambition and drive; and that despite valorisation and idealisation of motherhood, contemporary social and policy discourses imply that one's value still comes from being a worker. Acute awareness of these cultural ideals generated feelings of guilt and self-blame amongst the majority of women and meant that in order to maintain a positive self-identity they constantly had to rationalise and justify their 'choice' to 'opt out'. They also enacted 'intensive motherhood', ensuring their children accrue the 'right' kind of human capital for their middle-class future. While motherhood was at least a legitimate identity to cling on to, women felt extremely ambivalent in relation to their identities as 'wives'. While feeling guilty about their 'privilege' of being able not to work, they felt deep discontent and frustration with slipping into traditional gender roles and a painful loss of positive self-identity. However, Orgad shows that women felt unable to challenge the day-to-day practice of the traditional gender roles in their homes, and both women and their partners skilfully masked feelings of discontent, often for the sake of preserving the marriage, thus becoming complicit in reproducing the traditional patriarchal structures within their homes.

Finally, Part 3 examines the kinds of future lives that women imagine for themselves, showing that while all women expressed the desire to go back to work, they struggled to clearly envisage what this may look like. Going back to their previous employment was seen as unattractive due to the impossibility of having the same careers they had before and the inflexibility of the workplace. The culturally promoted postfeminist 'solution' of becoming a 'mumpreneur' who runs a home-based business that guarantees self-fulfilment and fits 'around kids' seemed more attractive, but women were vague in articulating what or how these ventures may look like. Faced with this dilemma, all women clearly articulated the need for systemic change both at work and at home, but were unable to envisage where such change may come from. The 'conversation' about change in the home also does not seem to happen. As Orgad's analysis shows, while conceptual discussions of workplace equality are culturally widespread now and both women and their partners enthusiastically reiterate these discourses, this does not go hand in hand with making meaningful changes in their private homes. The difficult discussions of sexism and rigid traditional marriage structures are not raised in the home, as men too easily accept their peripheral role as fathers and carers, while women 'work on themselves' to curb their career desires and disavow and block the negative feelings of anger, resulting in bitter acceptance of the inevitability of the existing structures of gender inequality.

I suppose one issue that may be raised as a critique of this study is its sample, as some may say that experiences of privileged middle-class women with their ‘middle-class problems’ may not reflect the experiences of other women, for instance working-class women or women of colour. However, the book has no intention of being representative of all women’s experiences and neither does it have to in my opinion. As Orgad succinctly puts it, ‘oppression can be experienced alongside privilege, [and] choice and inequality are not mutually exclusive’ (p. 16) and the book very much shows this. Overall, this is a fascinating study, written in the best traditions of interdisciplinarity that would certainly be of great interest to academics studying gender and work, feminist theory and contemporary culture.

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