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Pat Thane, Tanya Evans. *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints?: Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth-century England.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 256 p. ISBN 978-0-19-957850-4.

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P. Thane u.a. (Hrsg): Sinners? Scroungers? Saints?

This study of the mothers of illegitimate children in England surveys a century of apparently deep change, yet also continuity, in the social attitudes and material circumstances experienced by unmarried mothers. They are frequently a marginalised and stigmatised group, though Pat Thane and Tanya Evans also point to traditions of tolerance and respect. The changes in the lives of "lone mothers" are clear - though often their timing is surprising. The removal of legal stigma was not completed until 1987; some residential homes continued to offer semi-penal conditions into the post war period, though mothers themselves increasingly rejected this. From World War Two, there were signs of unapologetic 'new women' amongst unmarried mothers. Nonetheless, domestic service continued to be offered as the sole job which many could expect well into the 1940s. Mothers surveyed in the late 1960s in provincial towns still experienced powerful stigma, and the post war decades also saw increases in the levels of surveillance and suspicion they encountered from welfare officials. Despite the rising numbers of unmarried mothers and apparent popular pragmatism towards this, government policy and rhetoric in the 1980s was marked by blame and intense moral panic over their 'scrounger' status; echoes persist in the 2010 election Conservative Party 'Broken Britain' catchphrase. There is no clear pattern of destigmatisation here, and strong evidence for rethinking conventional historical frames such as the 'permissive sixties' or 'family 50s'. Change is perceptible, but has been uneven and long in the making.

The authors are at pains to stress the diversity of experiences of unmarried mothers; the life history extracts included illustrate this in rich ways. Tolerant sexual cultures are foregrounded, though the material deprivation was sometimes intense; the persistence of moralising policies is also noted. Many unmarried mothers lived stable lives marked by successful partnerships. The lack of access to divorce before 1969 meant that many could not legitimise the partnerships they created after a marriage had broken down. As long as norms of propriety were outwardly observed, many British communities were content to accept secrets and silences within families. Despite politicians' rhetoric, the British state had long been forced to be pragmatic over cohabitation, with welfare benefits offered to cohabiting partners as early as World War One.

Major sources for this study are the records of the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child, founded in 1918. The authors draw extensively on its annual reports and other publications for the detail of the lives and circumstances of what might often be private, and at times secretive, individuals. This is supplemented by diaries and memoirs, ranging from celebrity autobiographies to Mass Observation anonymous diaries. Public enquiries and reports such as the Finer Report of 1974 (the subject of an entire chapter) are also drawn on, and this study gives a fascinating case study into the evolution of policy making in this symbolically and materially significant area. Since the treatment of unmarried mothers frequently crossed departmental boundaries, this gives an opportunity to focus on a very wide range of areas of government - housing and homelessness, social security, child support experiments, education and youth services, amongst others.

Through the focus on the National Council, the authors are also attentive to the evolution of voluntary sector activity, in close interaction, even collaboration, with statutory welfare institutions. The continuing relevance and centrality of voluntary activity is made clear across the entire century, in tracing the patchwork of care that unmarried mothers accessed. But there is little complacency in assessing how well this served mothers' needs; there are biting portraits of the failure of care for unmarried pregnant servicewomen and munitions workers during World War Two, and very persistent patterns of poverty and official stigma. The rise of more assertive

voluntary organisations in the wake of the 'rediscovery of poverty' in the 1960s reminds us that this voluntary work was not necessarily wedded to nineteenth century philanthropic traditions, but evolved across the twentieth century to generate some very different voluntary approaches.

This study adds to the recent turn towards siblings and grandparents in the history of the family, and stresses their significant contributions in managing unmarried motherhood. It boldly covers the entire twentieth century, and does not shy away from the very recent developments around unmarried motherhood. The authors note the increase of households with a single parent (mostly mothers) from one in eight in 1980 to one in five in 1992. They integrate the early years of the twenty first century into the narrative, tracing the policy changes and greater sensitivity of New Labour towards unmarried mothers, alongside the persistence of negative stereotypes of teenage 'welfare mothers' more generally in British society. Concerns over family breakdown persist and are visible in relation to more punitive welfare policies under the present-day Conservative government, in power since 2010, as well as in talk of 'fatherless louts' after the urban riots of 2011. This is no whiggish tale of improvement, but of continuing disadvantage and prejudice; poverty not parenting is the real issue, Thane and Evans conclude.

There is real scope here to rethink bigger historical narratives, which could sometimes have been brought out more clearly; chapters sometimes end rather abruptly, and longer, more reflective conclusions might have established the significance of this topic for broader patterns of twentieth century England. It is enormously helpful to have a century-long span, as this links together and allows comparisons of periods that have sometimes been unhelpfully viewed as entirely distinct. In particular, we are now better able to see the Thatcher years as witnessing the development or elaboration of some longer term trends that are not always the direct result of Thatcherite policy making. The new histories of the entire twentieth century represent a welcome historiographical trend, and this specific narrative links policy history to social history in a highly productive and readable fashion.

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