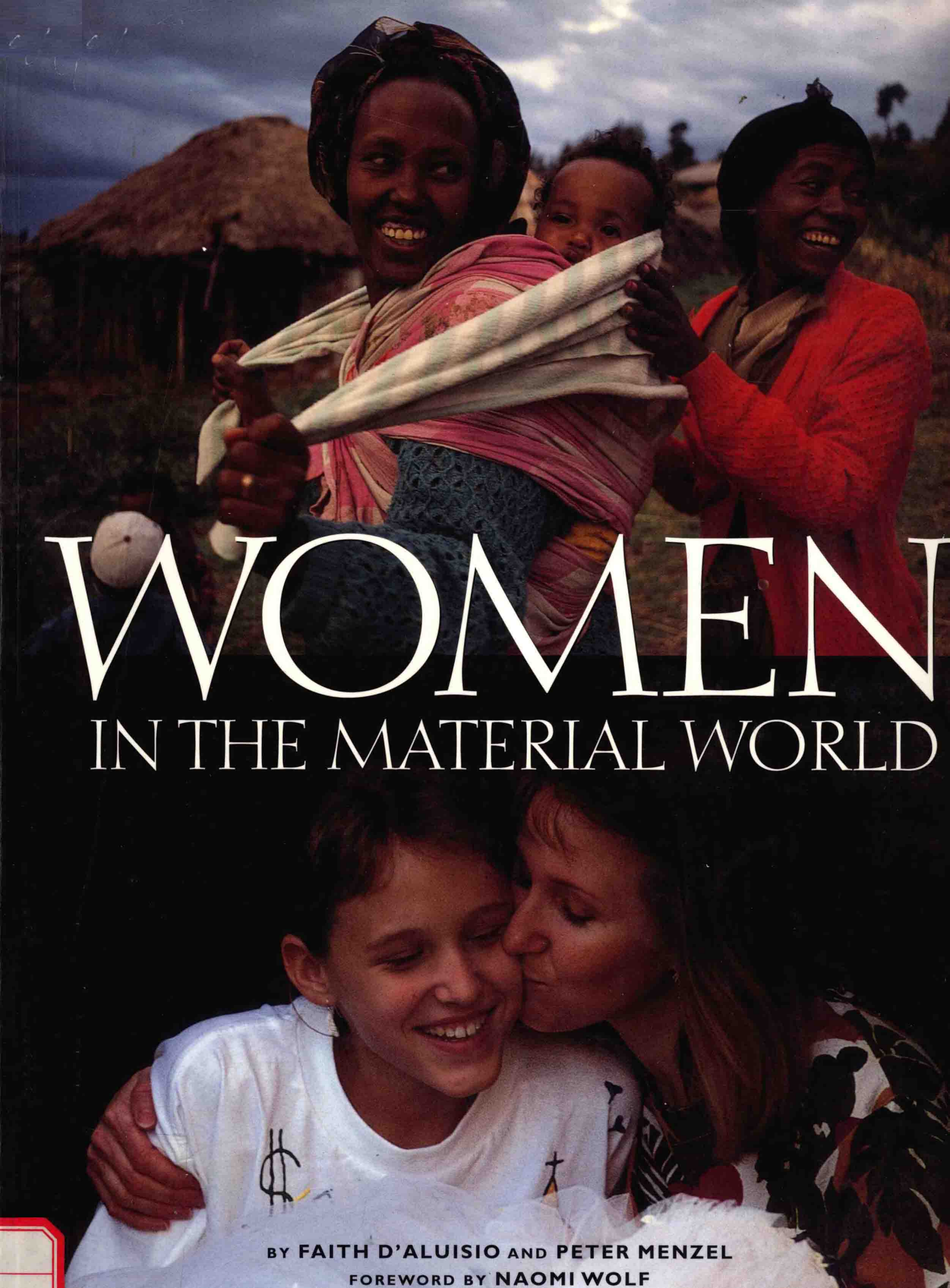
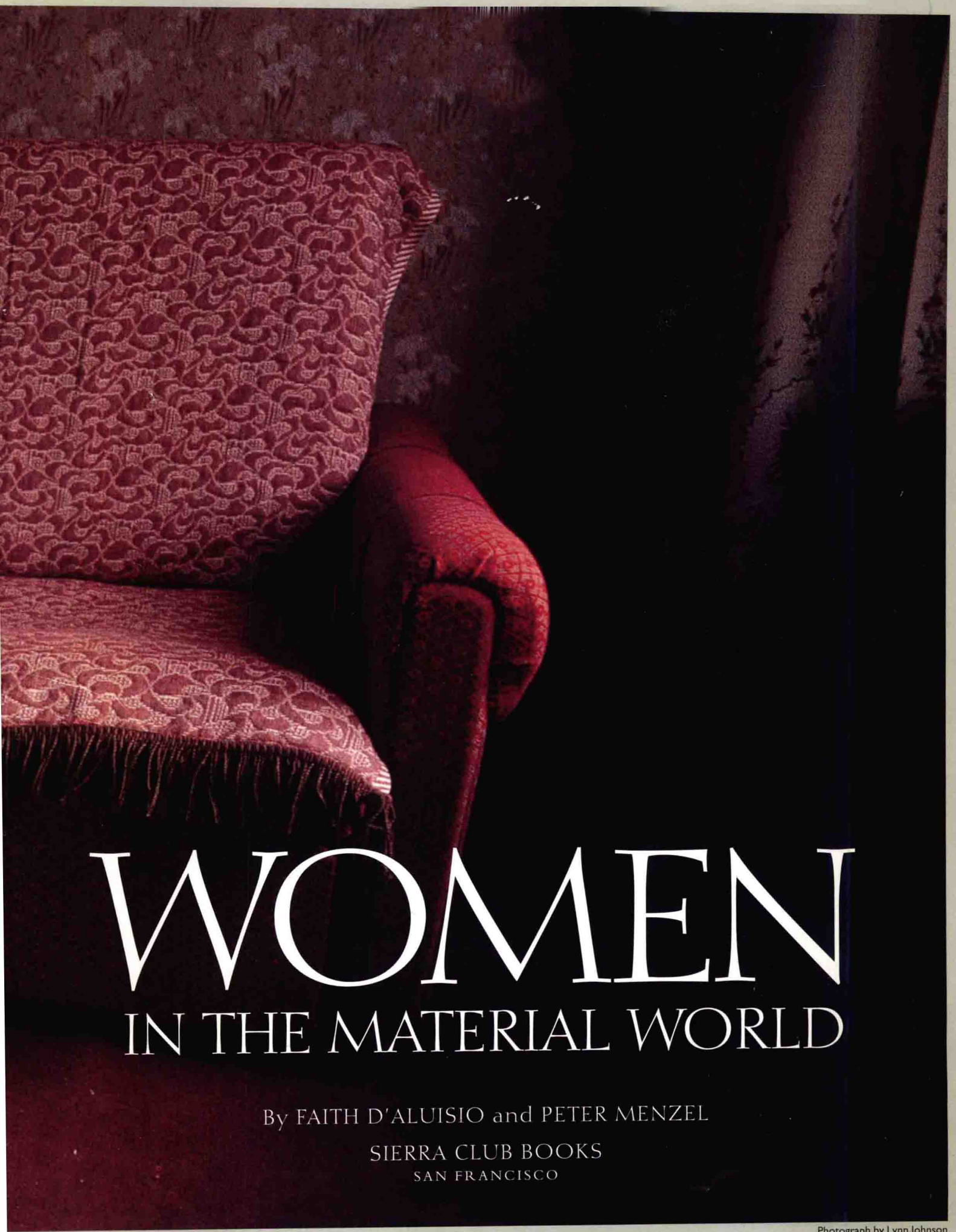


WOMEN
IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

BY FAITH D'ALUISIO AND PETER MENZEL
FOREWORD BY NAOMI WOLF

WOMEN IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

Suzdal, Russia: Anastasia Kapralova and her grandmother share a secret.



WOMEN
IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

By FAITH D'ALUISIO and PETER MENZEL

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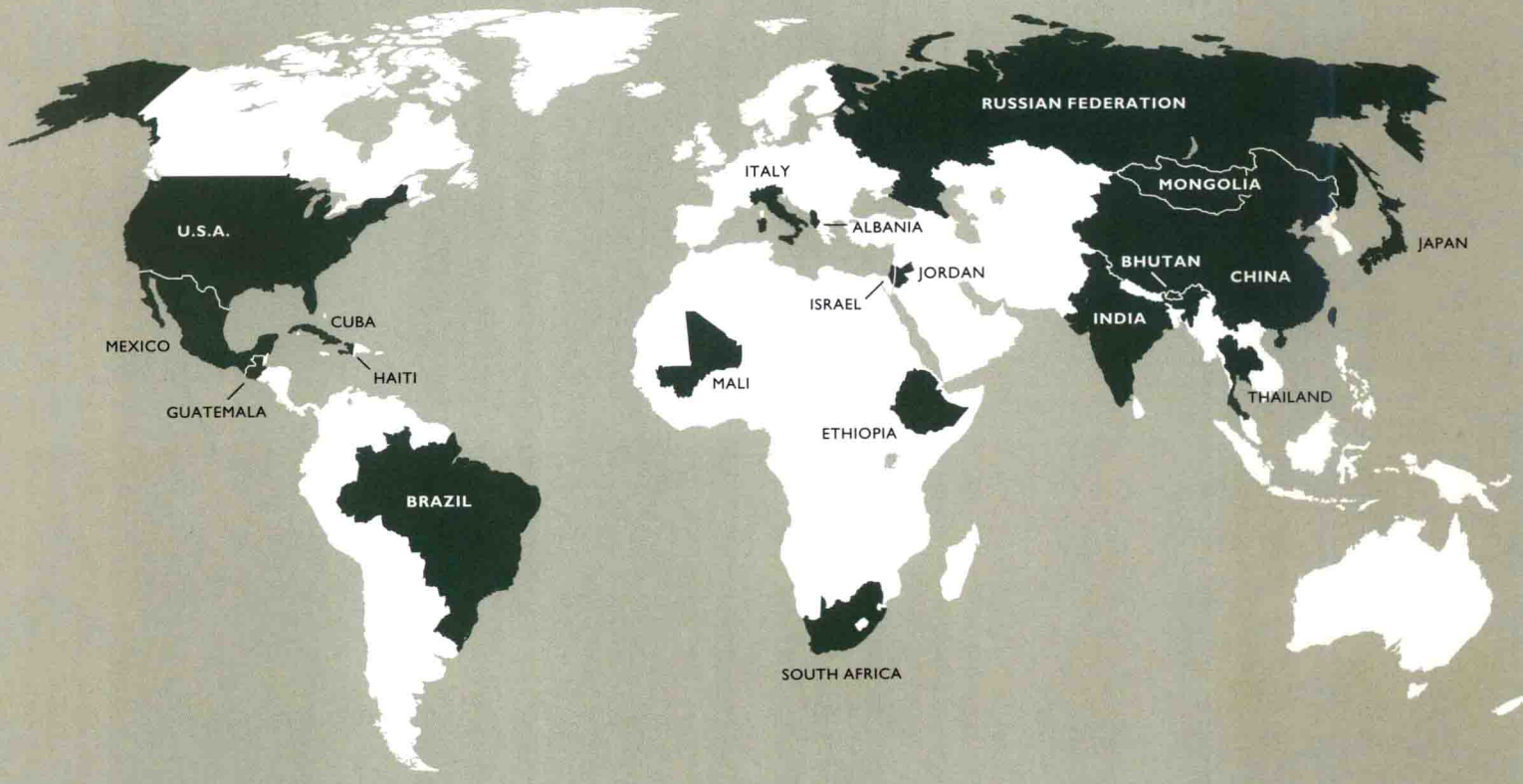
This book is dedicated to our mothers, the memory of their mothers, and to our sons, Josh, Jack, Adam, and Evan, who are part of a generation which is beginning to understand that women have equal status as human beings.

—FDA and PJM

WOMEN IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

" When you get into a tight place and everything goes against you, till it seems as though you could not hang on a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn. "

Harriet Beecher Stowe



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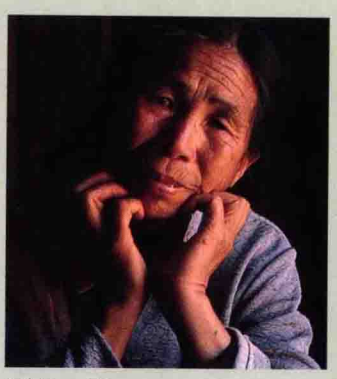

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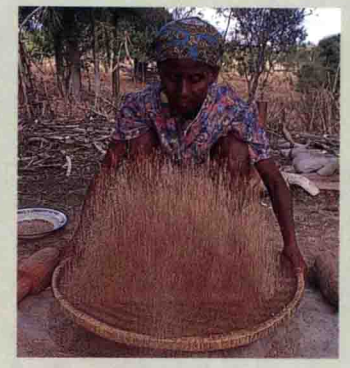

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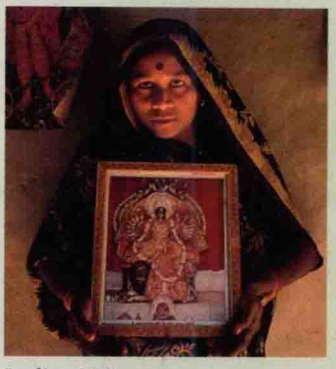

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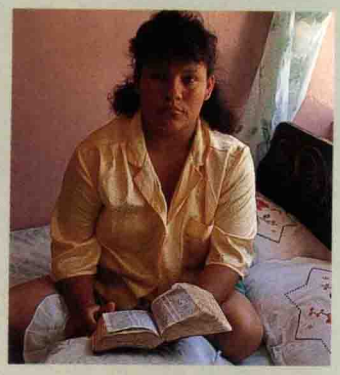

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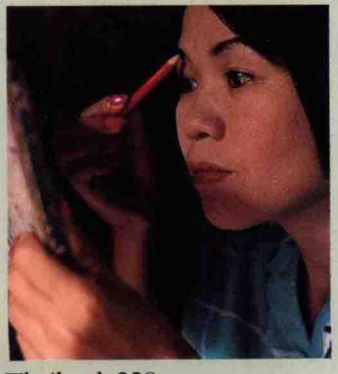

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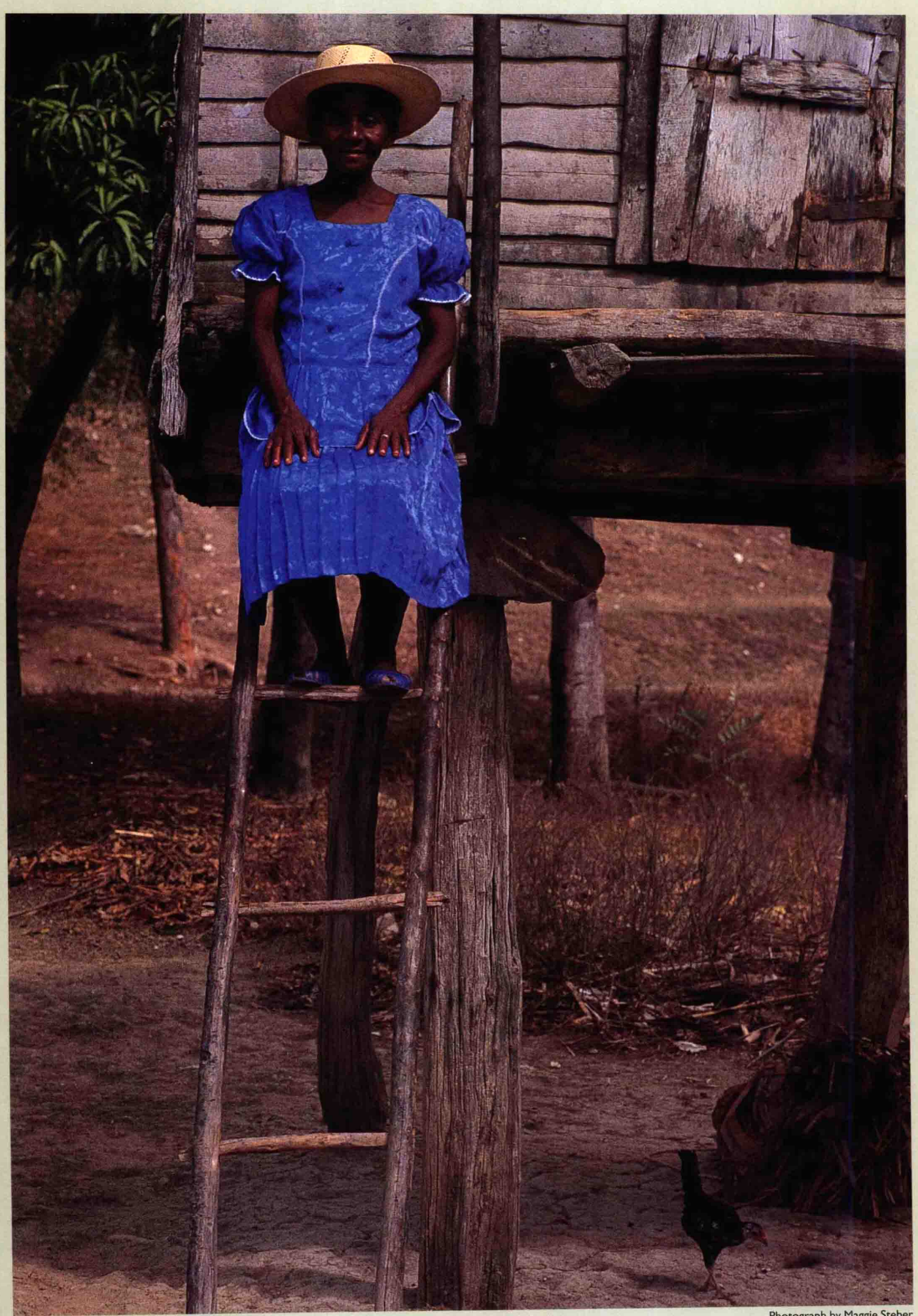
WOMEN IN THE MATERIAL WORLD



Haiti: Madame Delfoart in her Sunday dress, perched on the ladder of her elevated storage shed.

Photograph by Maggie Steber

Foreword

By NAOMI WOLF

ALL TOO OFTEN, THE PICTURE OF THE PLANET WE CARRY AROUND with us—a picture formed of our own experiences and the stream of information from the mass media—is at odds with what is real and important. The world is much more diverse, sorrowful, and splendid than the white-washed and overwhelmingly present stereotypes many of us have in our heads. And it is much more female—there's a whole half of the world that is waiting to be heard from. It's hard to know what a real portrait of what's out there would look like, hard to imagine what a symphony composed of all the world's voices would sound like. But this book may well be an indication.

What you have in your hands is nothing less than a template of a world that has long been invisible. Throughout history, the challenges, the courage, and the oppression of women—the majority of people on Earth—have been kept out of sight. Now, the hidden is coming into view: *Women in the Material World* begins to show what media and culture and consciousness could look like as this imbalance becomes balanced. It's a revelation to see.

Although the political and geographical scope of this inquiry is impressive, perhaps unique, I must confess that what is most striking to me is the beauty of its images. I don't wish to ignore the suffering and anguish that are all too apparent in the faces of some of these women. But I don't think the marvelous color and composition of the photographs are a trivial matter either. Fine aesthetics can engender good politics. The lush magnificence of these images makes it easy for outsiders to see and validate the subjects—something that in the long run, in an information empire, may help determine whether these communities thrive or suffer.

More importantly, the beauty on the page is a tribute to the inherent beauty of the subject: the female love, passion, and toil that invisibly undergird human societies everywhere. In shining such an ambient light on the lives of poor women in Brazil, Haiti, and Mali, for instance, *Women in the Material World* helps make immediate and undeniable many of the things that dominant classes in dominant countries tend to trivialize or take for granted. It reminds us forcefully of a lesson that can never be repeated enough: there is overwhelming drama and value in each and every human life, no matter how profoundly these lives are ignored. These are lives upon which the well-being of the world depends. They are justly celebrated here.

Preface

By PETER MENZEL

THIS BOOK IS THE OFFSPRING OF MY DOCUMENTARY photography project, *Material World: A Global Family Portrait.* The idea for the first book hit me while listening to a radio report on the marketing of Madonna's picture book about her sexual fantasies. I thought about the lyrics to one of her songs—we certainly are living in a Material World. In my twenty-five years as a photojournalist covering extremes all over the planet, I had witnessed warfare, starvation, environmental disasters, and the fruits of technology, science, and business. What the news often ignored were the ordinary folks and how they survived; preoccupied with hyped non-events like Madonna's book, it seemed to me that too many people had little idea of how their neighbors lived all over the world.

To counterbalance this overemphasis on extremes and hype, I came up with a crazy idea: find thirty statistically average families in thirty countries and photograph them with all their possessions in front of their homes. To pick the nations, I apportioned the selection along demographic lines, with Asia—home to the mass of humankind—getting the biggest share. From these rough guidelines, I chose idiosyncratically among nations that were in the news, undergoing rapid change, in timewarps, or had been enemies of my own country. To select the families, I determined what an average family was like in each nation, looking at family size, income, education, occupation, race, religion, and housing conditions, among other criteria. The task of finding and photographing these families was shared by a team of sixteen photographers who set out to accomplish this over the course of a year. I shot a dozen of the "Big Pictures" of the families and their possessions—in a snowy backyard in Iceland, in the desert sand of a vacant lot in Kuwait, on a rooftop in a mud village in Mali, in a narrow street under the scrutiny of officials in Cuba, and my favorite, in a garden in a tiny mountain village in Bhutan. It was truly a universal headache and a global backache. But I learned incredible things about our similarity and diversity.

Although the "Big Pictures" were the centerpiece of the project, most of the book itself was comprised of photos of daily life made during the course of the photographer's week with the family. But as I worked with our questionnaires and examined the photographs, I noticed that the women in nearly every family were eclipsed by the men. Part of this may have been because fourteen of the sixteen photographers were male; another part, because the cultural traditions in each country put the men up front in positions of power and leadership. In any case it was hard not to notice that the women were working longer hours than men for less or no pay while enjoying few of the benefits.

Working now with my partner, Faith D'Aluisio, I decided to go back to nineteen of the original thirty families (we added Jordan to round out our global coverage) to photograph the women of these families and to talk with them about their lives. We wanted to know how they see themselves and the world around them. We wanted to know about their daily routine, their thoughts about their children and their husbands; their hopes and dreams and their proudest accomplishments. And we wanted to ask their husbands some of the same questions.

Faith and I decided that we would eliminate the testosterone filter of the first book by assigning female photojournalists, interviewers, and translators to go back to the families. To get the intimate look at these women's lives we were hoping for, we thought success was more likely if women approached women. The results speak for themselves.

By FAITH D'ALUISIO

VISUALLY DOCUMENTING THE EXPERIENCES OF ORDINARY people—the small events that are the fabric of most human lives—is a uniquely difficult photographic task. Almost nothing "happens," and yet, of course, everything happens. To find the extraordinary in the ordinary, then make it real and vivid to an audience, photographers need a special kind of perseverance, awareness, and anticipation. Collectively, the photojournalists and journalists who took part in this project successfully captured the flavor of the lives of the twenty-one women presented in this book. From their fifty thousand pictures and the one hundred and sixty hours of interviews, we edited the book you now hold in your hands.

The field photographers and journalists were almost exclusively female. This was not a matter of ideology so much as practicality; time and time again, we encountered the reality that in many cultures women spoke more freely and honestly when the figures on the other side of the lens and microphone were female. This lesson was repeated again and again as we struggled across language barriers to disentangle the subtle cultural nuances and personal traits that made each woman different. Conversely, male translators often felt awkward around female subjects; even the excellent Tony Kadriu, our translator in Albania, did not want to ask certain questions of Hanke Cakoni.

In putting together the text, our goal was to represent these women in English the way they would sound if they spoke in English while trying to keep the flavor of their own language's idiosyncratic way of putting things. This proved to be troublesome. Translating in the field is an extremely difficult task—an art, really—especially when the translator must relay everything so that the conversational nature of the exchange can come through. Although in general our field translators did what can only be called a heroic job of interpreting these long, intimate conversations, it would be foolish to expect them to produce the exact yet colloquial text that we wanted. In consequence, the final text is adapted from both the translations we did in the field and further translations we did later on, in the Material World offices.

Occasionally the second translation corrected misimpressions that slipped through the first. For example, the initial translation of Melissa Farlow's interview with Fatoumata Toure, the second wife in Mali, led us to believe that Fatoumata was simply a terse, unreflective woman who didn't have much to say. When Kassim Kone, a Malian doctoral candidate in the United States, listened to her interview, he was able to give us a much fuller translation, which revealed that Fatoumata's way of speaking was thoughtful and sparely poetic.

For the most part the formal interviews became real conversations as one story led to another and we found ourselves sharing as much about ourselves as were the women being interviewed. Sometimes the conversations were intimate indeed. In Russia, Zhanna Kapralova, still recovering from the Christmastime murder of her husband in 1993, seemed to treat her conversation with interviewer Ludmilla Mekertycheva as a cathartic experience. In editing these very personal conversations, we tried to treat these women as we ourselves would wish to be treated were the tables turned. We wanted to balance their right to privacy against our journalistic desire to know and report absolutely everything. We tried, in short, to be accurate, kind, and fair.

Our conversations with these twenty-one women each have their own flavor, but it is possible to make some generalizations. From our experience it is evident that the educated women in developed countries spend more time thinking about their lives than women in poorer nations. They needed little prompting to express their feelings at length on a wide range of subjects. By contrast, our conversations with women in less developed countries tended to fall somewhat more into question-and-answer form, presumably because people in economically marginal situations are less often able to engage in the "luxury" of reflecting on their lives. Naturally, there are always exceptions to every rule. Despite her illiteracy and poverty, the Bhutanese family matriarch Nalim told us stories about her family and her life with considerable glee and verbal flourish. Nonetheless, Nalim was at a loss for words when we asked what made her happy, sad, or angry. Her emotional states are overwhelmingly determined by the quality of her crops and the weather that affects her farming.

Over and over again, we saw how these women negotiated through the range of social choices available to them. Zenebu Tulu in Ethiopia explained to interviewer Vivienne Walt how important it was for her to conform to her culture's expectations. Having regular, unwanted pregnancies is something that she cannot change; accepting them as an undesirable fact of life, she uses her considerable ingenuity to make the best of her situation. For a Western visitor, it was tempting to imagine that another woman might rebel, but this would be more apt to happen if the woman was able to see clearly that there was another path to follow. In Texas, by contrast, Pattie Skeen's daughter Julie, 12, is already making choices for herself and deciding between her options—a circumstance that will continue as she grows older. Alas, the opening of so many options is never accomplished without social turmoil; it would be difficult for Zenebu to have the choices provided to girls in Julie's culture without bringing along some of that culture's anomie and alienation as well.

As different as these women's lives are one from another, they all want more economic security for themselves and more education for their children, including their daughters. The biggest difference is that the women from developing countries usually saw education for their children as a way for the parents to be better off financially, whereas in more developed countries, the women viewed education as a future economic benefit for their children, not for themselves. Women in developed countries also spoke of education as having more than just purely economic benefits—personal growth was also important. Still, all the women wanted their children to have higher living standards. Because it is difficult to imagine how all the world could have more affluent lives without considerable economic growth, these simple, heartfelt wishes presage substantial environmental conflict in the future.

Bhutan: Namgay, Nalim, and family. Photograph by Peter Menzel

Bhutan: Nalim and her daughter Zekom. Photograph by Joanna Pinneo

In speaking of these generalities, it's important to note that although the women profiled in this book are typical of their country, they don't speak for it. They speak only for themselves—not for their neighbors, not for their mothers, not for their best women friends. They are not activists working to make life better for women around the globe (though most hope to benefit from the actions of the exceptional women who are). They are not spokeswomen for feminism, or for a backlash against feminism—an important point in a world that compartmentalizes, oversimplifies and labels in order to define people. They are themselves, purely and simply; twenty-one of the almost three billion ways that human beings on this rapidly changing planet are inventing how to be women.

Albania
Hanke Cakoni

"When I haven't been attentive enough, I start getting upset. It seems to me that he's thinking, 'This is your fault—you brought me to life.' "

HANKE CAKONI WAS TOLD SOON AFTER her son Eli's birth that he was severely disabled. She wept uncontrollably. It was the lowest point of her life, she says, but she learned to care for the son whom the doctors said "Would never be happy." Seven years after his birth, he cannot walk or talk or feed himself.

Hanke, her husband Hajdar, and their four children live in the Albanian countryside, three hours north of Albania's capital city of Tirana. Her days are filled with household tasks and the care of their disabled son and three healthy children. At first, Eli (*left*, watching his sister play) spent the day in a childcare center set up by the government. But by the time Albanian Communism collapsed in 1992, the center was gone. Hanke, 38, was able to stay at home to care for Eli, but for the unhappiest of reasons—she had lost her job when her company was privatized. Her schooling is not enough, she says, to obtain a good job in the post-Communist world.

Unsurprisingly, Hanke and Hajdar, 46, a school teacher, believe fervently in the value of education; they spend evenings working with the children on their homework. A comfort in a hard life, she says, is being able to share difficulties with her husband. Although Hanke does all the cooking (*inset*, her doughy hands), Hajdar is willing to help with what is traditionally viewed as women's work—an unusual attitude in a nation where a new bride's parents give the groom a bullet to symbolize the extent of his power over her.

Photographs and Interviews by CATHERINE KARNOW

Family and Nation

Albania

Population: 3.5 million

Population Density: 312.6 per sq. mile

Urban/Rural: 37/63

Rank of Affluence among UN Members: 150 out of 185

Hanke Cakoni

Age: 38

Age at marriage: 22

Distance living from birthplace: 2-hour walk

Children: 4

Occupation: Homemaker

Religion: Islam

Education: High school and one year of technical school

Favorite subject in school: Russian

Monthly family income: 5,800 lek [US $64]; includes Hajdar's salary and government payment for Eli's disability

Cost of a pair of sneakers for oldest son: 600 lek [US $6.50]

House: 4 rooms (goats live in two of them)

Cost of home: Built by themselves for 40,000 lek [US $440 at current rate]

Fuel source: Wood gathered several times a week

Time spent gathering wood: 3 hours each time

Electricity: Yes, intermittent

Best life event: First child's birth

Worst life events: Parents' deaths and discovering son's disability

Favorite task: Caring for disabled son, Eli

Of all the tasks Hanke performs, gardening (above) is her least favorite—though having her husband Hajdar joking beside her as they work makes the hoeing and weeding almost pleasurable. Thanks in part to the couple's constant diligence, life is slowly improving. Growing up, Hanke says, "I had just one blouse and I had to wash it during the night and hang it up to have it ready for the next day to go to school." By contrast, her daughter, Artila, 8, (right) has three or four blouses and two pairs of shoes. "She eats much better than I used to eat," Hanke says proudly.

Conversation with Hanke Cakoni

Catherine Karnow: I know you work at home now, but can you tell me about the job you used to have?

Hanke Cakoni: I was a topographical technician [surveyor] for 12 years. When I began I was paid 4,800 lek [US $53 at current rate]. By the time I left the job, I was paid 6,500 lek [US $72] per month and I had three months off every time I had a child. When democracy came and the country privatized, it became hard for me to keep my job in this field. It was difficult because I was in competition with people who graduated from university. I was fired. Almost everyone with my level of training was fired. There were a lot of people with university degrees. They got the jobs.

Do you wish you'd gone further in school?

I would really have loved to go further, but there were two obstacles. The first was that I had a low [grade] average. The second problem was that during Communism, not every child in every family was allowed to go to university. My older brother got the scholarship. Of the five children in the family, only one went to university.

Was life better for women under Communism?

Under Communism, women were given the right to speak out and were allowed to take part in every activity, but the problem was that neither men nor women were allowed to experience the rest of the world. We were closed in—the whole country was closed in. It was completely impossible to exchange thoughts with foreigners, so we could not compare where we lived to where others lived. And it was too difficult at that time to find material goods. Now it is easier to have such things, which is why I think it was probably worse under the communists. For example, it might be that here is an Albanian-made couch, let us say. Even if I had money during the communist rule, I could not buy a foreign-produced couch. Now there are a lot of people who can buy everything, who can buy a much better couch than this one. I could talk all day about this. At that time I could not even imagine what an electric stove would be, or what a gas stove would be, or what a very beautiful carpet on the floor would be, or anything else.

Ignored by one of the family's goats, which stands in the doorway, Hanke (above) finishes making lunch before Hajdar, daughter Artila, 8, and sons Armond, 14, and Ardian, 12, return from school. The Cakonis' house is divided between farm animals and people, with the goats and chickens occupying the two rooms on the right-hand side of the front door and the family using the two smaller rooms on the left.

Catherine: What do you do during a typical day?

Hanke: I wake up at 5:30 in the morning. I make the fire and I go to the children and say, "It is high time to go to school—time to get ready!" At 7 a.m., the children and Hajdar have breakfast and go to school. [Hajdar teaches in the school attended by the two older children—*Ed*]. Eli and I, we have breakfast afterward. Then it's time to wash the dishes and prepare lunch. At 10:30 a.m. I go out with the goats and chickens for 20 minutes. After this, the things I'm cooking for lunch might be ready. They are all boiled and I am expecting the children and Hajdar to come from school. At 1 p.m. they come in, one after the other, and we sit and have lunch. In the afternoon we are freer, and sometimes we visit our friends. And then we come back and relax until 6 or 6:30 p.m. After that is the struggle to prepare for dinner. We have dinner, and I wash the dishes, and do other work. We watch television for two hours—it depends on the day and the program. And at 10 p.m., we go to bed.

What takes the most time?

The biggest part of my day is used up by washing laundry—I have a handicapped child, so his clothes have to be changed very often [he