

Jul-2013

Book Review: Reshaping Gender and Class in Rural Spaces

Thelma Maluleke

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Recommended Citation

Maluleke, Thelma (2013). Book Review: Reshaping Gender and Class in Rural Spaces. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 14(3), 295-299.

Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol14/iss3/22>

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Reshaping Gender and Class in Rural Spaces. 2011. Edited by Pini, Barbara & Leach, Belinda. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing; 268 pages. Hard cover (\$114.95) ISBN: 978 1 4094 0291 6 ISBN: 978 1 4094 0292 3 (ebook)

Reviewed by Thelma Maluleke¹

Reshaping gender and class is one of the six books under the series title "Gender in a Global /Local World book series" edited by Jane Parpart, Pauline Gardiner Barber and Marianne H Marchand . The book, " Reshaping gender and class" that is edited by Barbara Pini and Belinda Leach gives an extensive overview and analysis of gender and class in rural areas of the following developed countries, Australia, Britain, Canada and United States of America. It consists of twelve chapters that were contributed by seventeen well qualified authors. The thesis that cuts across all the chapters is the intersection of regimes of gender and class and their consequences in the rural setting.

The book begins with an introduction that analyses the transformation of class and gender in the globalised rural spaces and a detailed overview of the chapters in the book. It raises a concern on the disappearance of social justice and class in the academic discourses and policy makers' vocabularies that are replaced by concepts such as social inclusion and social wellbeing which in turn gives the impression that rural communities are homogeneous and classless. However, towards the end of the last decade because of the efforts of some feminist authors the issue of class in rurality discourse has resurfaced. Pini and Leach argue that rural areas shape and reshape themselves, but they also respond in their own way to global activities which consequently shape the rural spaces.

Chapter 2 entitled "Material, cultural, moral and emotional inscriptions of class and gender: Impressions from gentrified rural Britain" argues in favour of analyzing class using the culturalistic approach that is accompanied by a detailed exploration of emotions and class. Martin Phillips argument is based on the culture and class discourse led by highly acclaimed scholars namely, Michele Lamont, Tony Bennett and Dianne Reay. The author further uses research to support his arguments on the importance of using emotional capital in future research conducted in rural areas. The research explored the use of moral labels by communities of gentrified villages in Britain. The study yielded similar findings as the work done by Lamont (1992) and Phillips (1998) that suggests the use of concepts that describe an individual as pretending to be what they are not. These concepts are used to isolate or reject the individual they are level at and an indication of class that the individual belong to. Silva (2000) argues that the classifications as cultural qualifications and constructions of identity incorporate emotions to devalue, differentiate and evaluate an individual against another.

Susan Machum in chapter 3, "Articulating social class: Farm women's competing visions of the family farm" explores class relations between farming women through a case study that was conducted in New Brunswick, Canada. To enrich the case studies the author gives an analysis of the discourses of the liberal and Marxist social class in farming. The liberal notion of social class is described as a hierarchical classification of people according to their socio-

¹ Human Science Research Council, Pretoria.

economic status for example, income, occupation and education. While the Marxist notion focuses on the internal dynamics of the family farming business by examining the labour relations, distribution of the earnings and earnings of employees are in relation to their labour contributions. Machum argues that women in farming communities have their own way of analyzing class and gender that use farm specific status symbols which are farm size. In their view social class in the farming community is determined by the interconnection among the technological innovations, farm size and labour needs.

Chapter 4, “Picking blueberries and Indian women go hand in hand: The role of gender and ethnicity in the division of agricultural labour in Woolgoolga, New South Wales Australia”, based the analysis of gender and on the 2006 Joan Acker’s feminist theory who referred the intersection gender, class and race as the inequality regimes. Gufty and Liu view the Woolgoolga blackberry farms as a good example of this intersection. The authors argue that workforce in these farming communities are mainly women earning low wages, semiskilled and with no or minimal tradition of unionization. Furthermore they argue that the workforce and nature of class relations is gendered and radicalized.

In Chapter 5 entitled “Re-examining the social relations of Canadian family farms: Migrant women farm workers in rural Canada”, Preibisch and Grez in their chapter. This chapter is based on a study that sought to analyze and bring to the fore the challenges that non-citizen migrant women in the rural areas of Canada face at their workplace. The authors argue that the agricultural sector in Canada is highly masculinized with labour programmes that are oppressive, gendered, race and class based. The temporary migration programme creates an unhealthy divisive competition among the farm workers along gender and racial lines. Women are perceived as problematic by their employers and face greater restrictions on their mobility. These restrictions could be related to the fact that non-citizen pregnant women are perceived by their employers as a major inconvenience and their pregnancy often lead to their repatriation. Within the workplace non-citizen women farm workers are at the bottom of the workplace and social hierarchy with white males placed near the top of the hierarchy.

Pini and Mayes begin Chapter 6 entitled “Configuration of gender, class and rurality in resource affected rural Australia” by giving a historical perspective of rural change and class literature. Concerns about rurality discourse during the 20th century were lack of gender focus, failure to pay attention to class frictions and dynamics in rural spaces and the tendency among researchers to portray social class in rural areas as fixed and predetermined. The authors interviewed 18 women who were working in farming and mining sector to explore the contours of class are configured and expressed in the rural Western Australia. They examined the influence of gender in changing class composition and identities in rural spaces and explored differences within class groups and how they shift across the different categories in the rural areas. There was a visible difference in the incomes of the farming and mining communities. There was very minimal social contact between the mining and farming women. Farming women used negative descriptors that were moral value laden to describe mining women, considering them as others and morally inferior. Mining women had positive description of farming women except that they perceived them as conservative which could be stemming from the insistence of farming women on moral values that are essentially gendered. On the issue of social class in their community, women from the mining sector were uncomfortable and reluctant to name class relations in their workplace and community.

Chapter 7 entitled “Jobs for women? Gender and class in Ontario’s ruralized automotive manufacturing industry” discusses gendered jobs in the context of the manufacturing sector in

Ontario, Canada. The chapter is based on a 15 years study conducted in the Ontario automotive industry based in rural areas of Canada. Leach argues that the existence of the automotive industry in rural Canada was mainly motivated by easy access to low cost land and cheap ununionized labour "...workers who are willing to work for less than urban workers" (p131). This chapter mainly addresses issues of gender but completely silent on class relations that exist within the workplace. In relation to gender relations at the workplace the author argues that the industries always take their cues from the local communities. In other words gender ideologies in the local industry and agricultural sector is determined by the gender ideologies within that particular community. Inequities and inequalities that occur in the community also occur in the workplace. This could include the perpetuation of women subservience and violence against women at the workplace. According to Nolin (2006) rural areas in Ontario have refugees and job seekers from neighbouring countries. It would have been interesting to understand how the interplay gender and class from their country of origin plays itself in the rurality of Ontario. As industries in Ontario claim to take their cues on gender relations from the local communities, this could mean that refugees continue to endure gender stereotyping, inequities and discrimination that were trying to avoid when they left their countries.

The author further identifies gender- based elements that are used in the automotive industry to exclude women attaining certain jobs which are usually better paying and relegate them to the low paying jobs that the industry view as feminine and referred to these elements as consequences of rural masculinity. These elements are: physical strength and ability to endure and dominate the forces of nature which in their view are absent in women; rejection of formal education – rural jobs for men require skills not education; men have access to political power and representation through farmers organizations and unions; women are expected to continue doing domestic work within the workplace and after work within their home environment. These elements often disadvantage women and limit their employment chances in rural automotive industries

Chapter 8 by Susan Tallichet examines gender management strategies that Appalachian women miners have employed to resist and accommodate the highly masculinized coal mining industry. In the chapter entitled "Digging deeper; rural Appalachian women miners' reconstruction of gender in a class based community" the author conducted a study that aimed at identifying various gender management strategies that Appalachian women miners used and assess the extent to which these strategies may have altered the masculinity discourses meant to exclude or dominate women in the workplace. The findings of the study indicate that Appalachian women miners used the breadwinner discourse and good miners' nomenclature as strategies for dealing with gender issues within their work environment. Tallichet argues that these strategies yielded very little change in accepting women as authentic miners. However, the Appalachian women miners' somehow succeeded in bringing discussions on the meaning of 'women's work' to the forefront.

In chapter 9, Annie Hughes examines the notion of class, rurality and lone parents and their connection with wage labour by using lived experiences of lone parents in Britain. 'Lone parents' is a concept that refers to both male and female parents, however, in many instances is often used for single mother. Hughes argues that literature concerned with lone parents in rural spaces mainly focused on women survival skills in relation to poverty, employment and welfare regimes. Although the author has argued against the gendering of the concept 'lone parent' in the study that this chapter is based on, the representation of men was less than 6% of the sample which raises issues of stereotyping. The author also argues that the concept 'lone parents' is

misleading as they have relationships with other people e.g. their ex-partners, friends, families and employers. These often provide critical practical support for the lone parent that is crucial for the coping strategies of lone parents. The reason for seeking paid employment amongst the lone parents is not only class based, but more about accessing the much needed economic capital. This leads many lone parents into combining their family caring responsibilities with part-time work. The author is of the view that for many rural lone parents family and work are interwoven. The author argues that spatial relations of rurality plays a significant role in the constitution of class and gender but the author does not clearly explain how class and gender are constituted in rural spaces.

The author in Chapter 10 draws her arguments from two research studies on lesbians and gay people to highlight sexuality the intersection of class and sexuality between urban and rural spaces. This chapter builds on a plethora of literature that examined lesbian and gay life across different spaces and class. She uses a study of lesbian and gay people in the United Kingdom too examine classed and sexualized intersection between urban and rural spaces. The findings of the study suggest that lesbians and gay people negotiate, avoid, recreate and circumvent boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in both urban and rural spaces. The author challenges the portrayal of as more accommodative to lesbians and gay people and rural areas as backwards and homophobic as the experiences of some of participants in her study suggested different experiences. Some lesbians and gay people had experienced exclusion and hostility in urban areas. She asserts that some spaces in both rural and urban are more accommodative to lesbians and gay people than others and refers to it as disruption of the rural/urban dichotomy.

Chapter 11 entitled Terms of engagement: “The intersections among gender, class and race in Canadian sustainable forest management” by Mureen G Reeds and Debra Davidson examines the intersection of gender, class and race identities within the forestry culture and how these influence the participation and involvement of local communities particularly Aboriginal people in the forest management. Racialized identity is used in their discussions to give emphasis to the marginalization of the Aboriginal people of Canada. The authors argue that division of labour in forestry is strongly gendered with women earning less than men and often excluded from high paying management positions. Gender, class and race in forestry management are shaped by the types of knowledge and concerns about environmental issues. Knowledge in this particular rural space is determined by the ideological assumptions from a particular classes and race over others especially the over aboriginal people in particular. The authors argue that participation in decision making committee also followed these ideological assumptions with elites dominating the committees. Class and race based inequalities are evident with aboriginal people, both males and females being marginalized in the forestry workplace.

Chapter 12 entitled “The hidden injuries of class and gender among teenagers” is based on a book by Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb entitled ‘The hidden injuries of class’ that argues that “social class as a source of equal resources, as well as a threat to dignity”. The author of this chapter, Edward W. Morris uses the ‘hidden injuries approach’ to demonstrate ‘how class-based challenges create hidden anxieties for rural teenagers’. The discussions in this chapter are based on experiences of two rural teenagers, a male and female from a rural high school in Ohio, United States of America. Morris argues that the construction of gender and class originates from the notion of space. Gender, class and place are constructed outcomes that are interwoven through the individual’s personal life. People experience and respond to these inequalities in different ways that is often consistent with the expectations of their location.

The strength of the book is that all authors have based their chapter on appropriate theories and built their arguments on existing literature. The authors have addressed issues of gender, their impact on individuals especially women and how they play themselves in different settings. A good number of chapters have managed to show the intersection between class and gender and their impact in the rural spaces. However, some chapters delve much on the interplay of gender and rural spaces with no reference to the issue of class in rurality. The book in general is very good for learning about the theories on class and gender, but might be quite challenging for a beginner to sequentially align the order in which these theories were developed in order to build on them. Although the rurality referred to is explicitly explained that it is rurality in developed countries, it is sometimes challenging for the reader with a different picture of rurality to understand the rural settings described in the book. It therefore requires the reader from a different understanding of rurality to consciously remember that the rurality the authors are describing is in a different context than that of developing countries. A comparison of how the interplay of gender and class in rural settings of developing countries and developed countries discussed in the different chapters would have been interesting to study.

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