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## Book Reviews

**Little, J., and Morris, C. (eds.)**

***Critical Studies in Rural Gender Issues***

**Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2005, 172 pages.**

This volume is a collection of papers that were presented at the conference, *Gender and Rural Change*, held at Exeter University in May 2002. According to the definition of the editors, the purpose of the book is to respond to the absence of a collection of critical contemporary studies on rural gender issues.

Naturally, the decision to base the volume on papers presented at a single conference means that only some of the issues addressed by contemporary critical research on gender and rurality are included. In this respect, the book does not meet the challenge that the editors define in their introduction. The editors mention four main themes of contemporary gender studies in the field of rural geography in the developed world. A considerable portion of the current work focuses on two of these – gender and the rural community and gender and work. The other two themes – gender and the rural environment, particularly in terms of environmental management and sustainable agriculture, and gender and sexuality – have been given insufficient attention in contemporary research, but the present collection does not help bridge this gap.

Several major issues run through the volume. Little and Morris define some of these, while others are reflected in the body of their introductory chapter. The first of these, which emerges from the editors' review of current innovative conceptual and theoretical research on gender and rurality, is a prominent variance among women (and among men, as well) within the dominant hegemonic gender relations in rural society. In this volume, the variance is evident in terms of personal and family status, socioeconomic status, characteristics of place of residence, and characteristics of the local community. Another issue, which the editors define explicitly, revolves around "the construction and performance of both male and female identities." Issues of relative and fluid gender identity (in most of the chapters focusing on women's lives), power relations, the household, sexuality, and gender-based division of work appear in each of the papers, either as a focal point of discussion or a background to it. A third issue discussed by the editors is geographical in essence, and is derived from the reliance of most of the studies

presented on cases from different regions of the UK, representing similar types of rurality within the national context.

A final issue, which is mentioned only in passing, is that of the methodology. In addition to the presentation and analysis of empirical findings, most of the chapters also include a discussion of the research methods and their suitability for examining gender issues. A large percentage of the studies employ qualitative methodology, either alone or as a supplement to quantitative methods. The diverse and interesting results derived from qualitative research methods highlight their important role in the work of researchers that are able to recognize their inevitably subjective position in the research field.

The book comprises nine autonomous studies, in addition to a very brief opening chapter, where, in my opinion, the editors might have expanded the discussion of the conceptual ties among the chapters of the book. The connection among the first three chapters arises from their involvement with different aspects of women's work, its contribution to the rural economy, and the "price" that women have to pay for their employment. The next two chapters consider the notion of "the farmer's wife," through a critical and challenging examination of the methodological aspects of gender field studies, including the obstacles that await researchers. The other chapters of the book present different perspectives on rural gender in the UK and review the interrelationship between political restructuring and gender relations in the context of property rights; the rural pub as a site of shaping rural exclusionary masculinity; the way in which gender identity was shaped and negotiated in the childhood of adult rural women; and the fear of crime among rural women. The book does not include a summary chapter; in this respect, the editors miss an opportunity to present the readers with the composite and synergetic effect of the papers presented.

On reading the volume, two additional themes that run through all the articles are evident. The first illuminates the interrelationship between rural areas and the systems outside of them in the entire realm from the economic and political processes of (re)structuring on the national level to the complex interrelationship of urban and rural cultures. The second theme, which I see as particularly significant in tying together all the chapters of the book, is the evidence that the popular cultural shaping of rurality, which is largely imagined, involves the preservation and reproduction of traditional models of gender relations and gender-based role division. The preservation of rural culture, which ascribes great importance to the family and the community, depends largely on the reproductive and the community management roles that are perceived as associated with the gender identity of the rural woman. The way to achieve inclusion – acceptance by the rural community and the ability to develop a sense of belonging to it – involves compliance with traditional gender perceptions. The chapters of the book present creative strategies

that women are forced to adopt in order to maneuver between the performance of their different social roles. The major difficulty lies in combining the productive and reproductive roles, in light of the social expectation of fulfillment of the community management role, which is essential to the existence of rural community. In parallel, the authors also present the attempts of many different women to challenge these perceptions, either out of necessity or out of a desire to shape a new gender identity. Some of the women succeed in altering the traditional gender perceptions to some extent. Others are forced to abide by patriarchal dictates, paying a heavy price. In their paper on stress and suicide among rural women, Price and Evans claim that although there are no data on suicide rates in the region they study (Powys in mid-Wales), “generally ... the wives of farmers are recorded as one and a half times more likely to commit suicide than other women of the same age” (p. 50). The relationship that the authors reveal between changing gender relations and suicidal distress among rural women exemplifies the enormous price that rural women have to pay in extreme cases because of their need to follow the dictates of the rural patriarchy.

This collection of articles is an important addition to the body of knowledge on rural society, economy, and culture in developed capitalist countries. In particular, it contributes to the inclusion of rural gender research in the mainstream of rural studies. I am certain that many of us will use it to heighten our students’ awareness that gender research is crucial to the comprehensive understanding of rural social and economic relations.

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**de Noronha Vaz, T., E.J. Morgan and P. Nijkamp (eds.)**  
***The New European Rurality: Strategies for Small Firms.***  
**Burlington, Vermont, Ashgate Publishing, 2006, 291 pages**

This new anthology hinges on land-use questions economics can answer. Studies performed in several countries of Western Europe, and exceptionally reach also Slovenia, Mexico, Poland and Israel. It portrays industrial farming, practice and potential, in less desired contexts, i.e., peripheral and lagging areas. A look at them all provides a broad, mosaic view in which, the state of the art seems second to the shift of approach that endorses new analytical dementia on tackling traditional problems. The book’s chapters are as follows:

1. The editors posit their move toward these issues as it is, mainly, the concern of small firms to advance bargain viz. good deals.
2. Teresa de Noronha Vaz accentuates the role of entrepreneurship in enterprises and local development.
3. Andrew Copus and Dimitris Skuras regard innovative businesses (600 are surveyed) in twelve lagging areas in six EU states.
4. Lois Labrianidis deals with “human capital” and its impact on development in rural, peripheral areas.
5. Cristina Brasili and Roberto Fanfani test theory and evidence as of “agri-food” districts.
6. Eveline S. van Leeuwen and Peter Nijkamp embark upon the embeddedness of small enterprises in rural side of small sized towns.
7. Gabriella Vindigni, Peter Nijkamp, Giuseppina Carrà and Iuri Peri deal with organizational success factors in local agri-food industries.
8. Martine Boutary and M-Christine Monnoyer sum the implication of information and communication technologies in small and medium enterprises.
9. Tzin Baycan Levent, Enno Marsurel and Peter Nijkamp survey the break-out strategies of ethnic entrepreneurs in Amsterdam [!].
10. Anabela Dinis contributes perspectives in search of innovation and entrepreneurship in marketing of rural products.
11. Elena Georgoudaki, Efthalia Dimara and Dimitris Skuras deal with adoption of information and communication technologies among smaller food firms in rural Greece.
12. Tesssa Avermaete, Jacques Viaene and Eleanor J. Morgan tackle the problem of allocation of public support to small food firms in Belgium, Ireland and the UK.
13. Myriam Sagarnaga Villegas, Rene Ochoa Ochoa, José Salas González, Edmundo Haro and Guillermaina García Figueroa provide an economic outlook for cyclical markets of Mexican pig farms.
14. Shlomo Bekhor, Daniel Shefer and Mordechai Cohen tell about adopting innovations in development of greenhouse tomatoes and alternative fertilization methods in the Western Negev.
15. Frederica Cisilino relates the case of assisting small and medium sized enterprises as regards technological innovations in rural areas of the Italian Slovenia border.
16. The last chapter is of Maria Manuela Santos Natário, Paulo Alexandre Neto and Felisberto Marques Reigado, who portray the attitudes to territorial innovation processes in Raia, Central Ibéria.

Pondering development potentials across international borders, *The New European Rurality* puts together a rich variety of outlooks as regards miscellaneous economic objectives. Yet, the sociological setup in the area observed is left unattended. Unrelated are stories of negative migration of indigenous people for either work or work and living elsewhere; influx of labor migrants from other regions and countries; of mega-farming companies cultivating the once small plots of small (family) holders; abandoned public institutions e.g., local markets, schools and churches; real estate bought for seasons' (mostly summer) uses, etc.

Whence prime concern is given to moneymaking and no question is asked, in whose hands it falls; where does it go, or, which way the profits are used—the study objectives are lacking. Capitalism merged with individualism do not medley raise such questions, leaving the bother to study the social fabric of the countryside to others. Why maximize profit in peripheral, rural and lagging areas if it isn't felt necessarily. Why invest in peripheral regions or, increase gain *in-situ* when investments elsewhere do better. What's behind population transfers in which rural inhabitants move out, selling homes and settle in town while wealthy city dwellers find the countryside attractive.

In terms of Alfred Bates,<sup>1</sup> worries arouse by peak oil, climate change and population bomb convey the hunch of incendiary catastrophes. Growing in need become a "green" concern, understanding in eco-life styles and the necessity of change in the manner by which human communities relate to one another and to their natural resources. Capitalism which requires continuous economic expansion will simply be unfit in the coming epoch of century-long recessions. There are a number of speculative scenarios, some now being played out tentatively on the world stage, which suggest successor apt. A more hopeful alternative can be sketched from the experience of small communal societies over the past two hundred years, including Oneida, Amana, the Mormons, Kibbutzim, the hippies, and most recently the eco-villages. Collectively, these experiments have provided vital tools for transition to the steady-state economics, required by a joint future challenge.

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Communities in a Post-Petroleum World: Learning from Communal Studies. A lecture given at the International Communal Studies Association Conference, "Communities: Yesterday's Utopia, Today's Reality"; Damanhur, Italy, June 2007.