

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN GENDER AND SOCIETY

Gender and Rural Migration

Realities, Conflict and Change

Edited by

Glenda Tibe Bonifacio

ROUTLEDGE



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Gender and Rural Migration

Gender and Rural Migration: Realities, Conflict and Change explores the intersection of gender, migration, and rurality in 21st century Western and non-Western contexts. In a world where heightened globalization is making borders increasingly porous, rural communities form part of the migration nexus. While rural out-migration is well-documented, the gendered dynamics of rural in-migration—including return rural migration and the connectivity of rural-urban/global-local spaces—are often overlooked. In this collection, well-grounded case studies involving diverse groups of people in rural communities in Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, China, Norway, the United States, and Uzbekistan are organized into three themes: contesting rurality and belonging, women's empowerment and social relations, and sexualities and mobilities. As demonstrated in this anthology, rural areas are contested sites among queer youth, same-sex couples, working women, young mothers, migrant farm workers, temporary foreign workers, in-migrants, and return migrants. The rich expositions of various narratives and statistical data in multidisciplinary perspectives by emerging and established scholars claim gender and rurality as nodal points in contemporary migration discourse.

Glenda Tibe Bonifacio is an Associate Professor in Women and Gender Studies, University of Lethbridge, Canada.

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Realities, Conflict and Change
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**To my family whose roots traverse the rural green fields
above the open blue skies, for the best memories of youth.**

Preface

On March 8, 2008, my students in WMST 3020 (Women's Studies, Women and Migration) at the University of Lethbridge hosted a one-day conference on *Gender and Rural Migration: Realities, Conflict and Change* at the Theater Gallery, Lethbridge Public Library. We received an enormous response from local, national, and international scholars and practitioners to participate in this event where students present their research findings alongside established scholars and local experts. A conference proceeding was prepared and is available in local libraries. The success of this student-initiated activity inspired me to raise a more general call for papers of the same topic, and this collection of multidisciplinary studies was born in 2010.

Glenda Tibe Bonifacio

Acknowledgments

This project is a collective enterprise and credits are due to the following: the contributors for sharing their research work and ideas to make this project a reality; their patience and support over a year of preparation affirmed the best of collegiality and cybersociality; my colleagues at the Department of Women and Gender Studies, University of Lethbridge, for their warm support throughout the years; Leanne Wehlage for her quick-fix attitude to our problems and needs; Bev Garnett for helping us during the student-led conference; and to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for their assistance in various ways; Veronica Caparas for assistance in copyediting; the friends I found that made life sweet amidst adversities: Kristy, Ivy, Ate Levy and Ate Gilda and their spouses for the breakaway moments of academic drudgery; Max Novick and staff at Routledge for their guidance; and, of course, my husband, Ike, and our five daughters, Charmaine, Czarina, Charelle, Czyna, and Charithe, including their Bijon Shih Tzus, Charlie and Nero, for their love and understanding of escaped domestic tasks to find time to write and relax, even if the definition of the latter differs to everyone. But, above all, to the Supreme Almighty, who lingers around to sustain the hope and perseverance that this, too, will be done. And we did it!

Glenda Tibe Bonifacio

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1 Introduction

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Migration shapes the lives of individuals, groups, communities, and states. Individuals and families leave their places of origins to seek, for example, better opportunities elsewhere, either temporary or permanently. Many of them are driven not only by economic returns but also by social well-being and quality of life. A number, however, are compelled to migrate due to political strife and even dramatic changes in the environment (Behera 2006; Afifi and Jäger 2010; IOM 2010). Communities within and across nation-states, which are sources or destination areas of migrants, face particular challenges of retaining, welcoming, or integrating them amidst, for example, scarce resources, exclusionary policies and practices. In many ways, migration continues to attract public discourses of various political spectra (e.g., left, right, and center) and holds interests among scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and the general population in the twenty-first century.

Migration, broadly conceived as a temporary or permanent change of residence (Lewis 1982, 8) or “change of life space” (Courgeau and Lelièvre 2006, 354), occurs anywhere, either in urban or rural areas. Yet, contemporary discourse appears to tell this story from one perspective: that of hordes of migration to cities where opportunities abound. But this urban trajectory does not discount the flow of people migrating to rural communities as well. The rural landscape, with its inviting natural backdrop of agricultural plains, serene mountains, and rivers, offers migrants and newcomers a different sense of well-being compared to the hustle and bustle of congested cities (Glendinning et al. 2003). Migration to rural communities may not only be driven by this contrast but could also be for the same reasons as those moving to the cities—work and a better quality of life. Where people decide to go, or to stay, is a complex interplay of factors that demonstrate the varied dimensions of choices available to them.

But choices in migration are gendered: Who leaves? who stays? who goes to where and do what? These are but a few questions of the gendered process at play in migration. For example, women and men have diverse reasons for staying, leaving, or returning to places of origin; and have different types of occupations available to them in receiving communities, including rural areas. As a social construct of roles and expectations for women and men,

gender organizes the ways in which access to and the distribution of resources are available to those making the decisions to leave or to stay (Pedraza 1991; Lorber 1994; De Jong 2000; Davis and Winters 2001; Hoang 2011). Sifting through the layered gamut of which place attracts male, female, and queer migrants, or for what purpose and motivation, demonstrates the direct and subjective interactions in the process of migration.

This book presents gender and rural migration as vital aspects of human migration in a globalizing world. It is based on the premise that rural communities and isolated places are shaped by intersecting economic and socio-political forces and, hence, their concerns are equally as important as those in urban centers. Rural regions in Western societies, for instance, are part of the digital information loop which connects to all media exchange, enabling its residents and entrepreneurs to utilize its potential for growth and development. As in urban areas, rural municipalities are challenged by demographic changes and the inclusion of diverse groups of people. The impact of economic globalization seems far reaching to rural communities as sites of resource extraction by multinational corporations or ecotourism for people in search of adventure. In this case, the 'rural' is intricately tied to the 'urban'; both form parts of an interconnected social and economic system.

But then again lives of people are not moored by ambiguity; they are rather structured and gendered. Consider the individual in the family, the worker in the economy, the citizen in a state as having structured lives and relationships. For instance, individuals are members of a household largely oriented in patriarchal traditions where each member learns their place in the family hierarchy. Or, workers are stratified in the market economy that determines their ability to enjoy employment benefits and privileges. The same is true for the citizen whose rights and obligations are circumscribed by legislated acts. And in all these, gender is a significant variable. By gender, it means that women and men, with varying degrees of identities, have differing experiences with institutions, social, and economic units, both in private and public spheres. This is not to discount, however, the presence of other social identifiers such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability that intersect with lived realities.

In setting out the rationale for this anthology, this section presents an overview of various conceptualizations of the 'rural' since the 1970s; highlights of migration to rural areas in the twenty-first century, particularly under globalization; the gendered dynamics of rural in- and out-migration; and synopsis of chapters. While there are equally important themes in rural migration, this collection selected three areas—contesting rurality and belonging, women's empowerment and social relations, and sexualities and mobilities—as its contribution to scholarly discourse.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE RURAL

'Rural' evokes the idea of a remote locality inhabited by a small population engaged in agriculture or fishing whose lifestyle is embedded in traditions

(Murdoch and Day 1998; Diaz and Jaffe 2003). This popular imagery constructs a static community with homogenous characteristics; as if people and place are set in still moments of particular activities. But the rural is much more than a “geographical expression” (Newby 1980, 8) or a “geographical concept” of a particular locality (Du Plessis, Beshiri and Bollman 2001, 4). In this section, the major conceptualizations of the rural provide a cursory glimpse of the voluminous work in this subject, especially noting critiques of some of them.

Theorizing the ‘rural’ spans a hundred years of rural sociology studies and most of these researches are coming from the West (Bosak and Perlman 1982; Lowe and Bodiguel 1990; Hillyard 2007). In the English-language literature, no consensus exists as to what rural is or means to all. Different criteria and measures of analyses are used by countries, governments, scholars, technical experts, and more (Pizzoli and Gong 2007). In policy studies, “no single, universally preferred definition” is currently available (Coburn et al. 2007, 1). The choice of a definition often becomes contingent upon the purpose. According to Hart, Larson and Lishner (2005, 1149), the use of one definition “may be inappropriate or inadequate for another.” Rural is, therefore, a contested concept.

Scholarly interest on the rural wavered through the years and was considered “less fashionable” (Hillyard 2007, 2) compared to the urban. Since the 1970s, there was an “upsurge in rural theorization and conceptualization” (Woods 2009, 849) that reinvigorated this particular subject across disciplines. By the 1980s, three major approaches in defining rural have emerged (Cloke 1985): rural as ‘residual’ to urban; rural as a measurement of certain attributes like population density; and rural as contrasted to urban in sociocultural terms (Cocklin, Bowler and Bryant 2002, 3).

Perhaps there is nothing more common than the conceptualization of rural as the archetypal opposite of urban; that is, a rural *is* if the urban *is not*. For example, the rural is agricultural and the urban is not (Gilbert 1982; Friedland 2002; Pizzoli and Gong 2007). Another view is that rural represents “isolation, small towns, and low population density” (Hart, Larson and Lishner 2005, 1149) while urban is large bright-lit cities with dense population and gentrified communities (Kim 2002; Brown-Saracino and Rumpf 2011; Jackson 2011). The use of descriptive definitions to understand the rural became the initial approach in rural discourses (Woods 2005), often complemented by statistical indicators such as population density, demographic change, age structure, number of households, and levels of productivity. Halfacree (1993) cautions about the use of these indicators which tends to be based on preconceived ideas that frame related analysis on rurality. In other words, earlier measurements used to characterize the rural from the urban simply describe but not define them, and often from a selected vantage point.

A sociocultural approach to defining the rural suggests a relationship between space and society; that is, how people live is influenced by where they live resulting in differing modes of behavior and attitudes. In sociology,