
NOTES AND REVIEWS

Gendered Rural Spaces. Studia Fennica. Ethnologica 12. Edited by Pia Olsson and Helena Ruotsala. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society 2009, 158 pages.

This book consists of an introductory chapter and eight articles, which the authors have conducted within a common research network. While the authors acknowledge the countryside as space full of different meanings, their specific aim is to analyse the rural spaces as gendered. The introduction, by Pia Olsson and Helena Ruotsala, gives a brief reflective overview of the concepts 'rural' and 'countryside' and their positions in Finnish research history, and of the approaches to 'space' and 'place'. Olsson and Ruotsala also discuss contemporary processes changing the rural landscape as it is in some way integrated into the urban milieu, and point out that rural and urban spaces are not opposites but have rather been complementary in terms of 'feeding' each other.

While the countryside and peasant culture have indeed been traditional subjects of attention in ethnology, this new interest in rural spaces and residents approaches these subject matters significantly differently. Olsson and Ruotsala find that earlier research dealing with rural questions was simultaneously based on, and formulated by, gender ideals. Both the male and the female have been the subject in traditional research on peasant culture but the emphasis has been on the external consequences of gender (such as gendered division of work) and its more experiential consequences; symbolic meanings were not included in these discussions (p. 7). While the traditional viewpoint has been gender neutral, promoting the idea of

rural homogeneity, the intention of this volume's authors is to bringing the heterogeneous reality to the fore.

The first two articles provide the reader a historical perspective on the issues of gendered spaces. Ann-Catrin Östman analyses how peasantry was represented in the interdisciplinary series *Suomen kulttuurihistoria* (Finnish Cultural History) published in the 1930s. By exploring the aspects through which the peasants were presented in the series, Östman finds that in contrast to earlier accounts, a gender differentiated rural society was depicted. However, only the peasant men were empowered and ascribed with agency. Understandings of masculinity and individuality as a sign of manhood were invoked and employed in order to place the peasantry and peasant society in the realms of history. Peasant women were not seen as actors in local communities and public spaces, they were not related to working for the common good, but confined to domestic places and household and thus rendered invisible.

In 1985 a questionnaire, *The Status of a Woman*, was circulated in Finland. Pia Olsson analyses the written answers to this questionnaire with the aim of studying how the Second World War changed individual women's lives. In her focus are the differences women have experienced in mobility and use of space in relation to men in rural areas. Olsson is critical of the feminist research that has seen the connection between home, gender and sexuality mainly in positive terms and finds that in the responses women rarely describe home in an overtly positive light – in the reminiscences the home rather appears as an obstacle, as expressed through tightly scheduled work and hierarchical family rela-

tionships. Olsson finds that women's mobility in the Finnish rural context after the war followed the same patriarchal customs women had become accustomed to before the war. She detects no open criticism of the gender system in the analysed life histories but finds that they do carry a feminist meaning by making the inequality between men and women visible, even though they do not demand change.

In her paper Katariina Heikkilä considers how contemporary female entrepreneurs on farms re-interpret and reshape the rural space around them in order to live in the countryside. She shows how the traditional gender-related distribution of work is re-examined through female entrepreneurship by challenging other family members' customary habits and working roles. Even though the long distances and poor public transport that restricted women's mobility in the post-war period examined by Olsson can still be present today, the farming women have acquired many new resources with which to overcome these obstacles.

Understanding space as both physical and social, Helena Ruotsala examines the reindeer forest as a gendered space and enquires if there is space for women in it. Although traditionally the reindeer owners were usually male, the herding activities affected the whole family. However, Ruotsala points out that this additional work carried out by other family members has received little attention in earlier studies. Based on her insider's knowledge and experiences Ruotsala assures us that in practice the gendered division of work is often hard to spot. Nevertheless, the contribution of women has been statistically and publicly invisible. Reindeer herding is still regarded as a masculine occupation and the reindeer forest as a masculine space even though about a quarter of owners are women and women perform many tasks necessary in reindeer herding. Intriguingly, today women occupy a decisive position because for many families the employment of woman outside

the traditional herding family space is essential if the family is to continue herding.

Nancy Anne Konvalinka's and Mari Immonen's studies add an international dimension to the predominantly Finnish material analysed in the book. Konvalinka provides enlightening insight into gender-linked uses of land throughout the 20th century in a Spanish village and the effects of these uses on men's and women's positioning in the village's social space today. Gendered division of work lead to gendered uses of land – while the men had a direct relationship with the land, the women's relationship was necessarily through men. As a result, women were prevented from making direct use of their property. Young men face another problem resulting from this gendered use of land as it keeps them in the village and encourages women to continue studying and to seek work outside of the village. In her article Immonen considers interconnecting social issues related to the space and place of youth in a village in Mari El (Russia), and has a special interest in young women in this respect. The indigenous Mari identity is strongest in the countryside, although today the younger generation tends to see their future in the city. The young tend to equate life in the village with never ending chores quite similarly to the women in Olsson's material. Life in cities on the other hand offers clear separation between work and leisure time and amenities such as running water. This is why after completing their studies the young, and especially women tend to stay in the city.

The last two articles of the volume study spaces as perceived by forestry professionals. Tiina Suopajarvi is interested in how forestry workers who were children in the 1970s and 1980s depict the forest as experienced in childhood in their biographical narratives. She finds that when remembering early childhood, actions in the forest are described similarly regardless of the gender of the narrator. Gender became relevant dur-

ing working hours, when the forest was a gender-specific space. During the childhood of the studied professionals the prevailing norm was that boys went to the woods with fathers, while girls stayed at home with their mothers. As forestry work is still very male dominated, Suopajarvi concludes that women who have chosen to work in forestry have crossed not only the prevailing gender roles, but also a very thick line of the gendered agricultural model of labour.

Katri Kaunisto's article is the only one in this book specifically concentrated on the viewpoint of men. Considering the forestry workers' experiences of changes in forestry after the 1960s, she is interested in how the occupational changes such as mechanisation and vocational education have changed the values and image of the ideal forestry worker. Traditionally, practical skills have been more respected than theoretical knowledge. Kaunisto finds that transformations in work practice have made it possible to emphasise different masculinities, where different types of knowledge are respected. Although there has been no strict line between traditional and modern masculinity, the educated modern worker is a growing challenge to workers who represent traditional masculinity.

The authors of this volume use various sources to understand how both society and individual lives are structured by gender. Focusing on the level of individual and multi-vocal experiences, changing rural processes are analysed by looking at spaces and places as gendered. My minor criticism has to do with the fact that the focus of most articles is on women's points of view, I would have been curious to learn more on men's perspectives on changing rural spaces. In general, this book is a welcomed addition in the context of continuing interest in space and place and also for scholars interested in the processes of producing gender.

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