BOOK REVIEW


DANIELA JAUK
University of Akron

Two new volumes on gender and intersectionality in a global context provide careful empirical research, as well as thorough theoretical advancements for the study of complex inequalities in a globalizing environment: Raewyn Connell’s Confronting Equality: Gender, Knowledge and Global Change, and Analyzing Gender, Intersectionality, and Multiple Inequalities: Global, Transnational and Local Contexts, edited by Chow et al. These works complement each other and advance global gender research by applying an intersectional lens to the shifting dynamics of inequality shaped by neoliberalism, and simultaneously highlighting theoretical analyses beyond Northern paradigms. Both volumes offer a perspective on the intersecting spheres of patriarchy, advanced global capitalism (i.e. neoliberalism), and the role of state actors that play out in social institutions, organizations, and in women’s and men’s lives. It becomes clear that globalization must be analyzed in plural, as globalizations play out differently in different world regions and for different groups of people.

These books advance the field not only through empirical evidence from different countries, but also through integrating what Connell calls “Southern Theory.” Connell makes the point that much

Daniela Jauk is a graduate student at the University of Akron in the department of sociology. Contact can be directed to her at da18@zips.uakron.edu.

Social Thought and Research, Vol. 32
scholarship is “quasi-globalized” (98f), as “international” generally means to have or make theoretical and collaborative connections within the global North and not with global society generally. She calls for moving beyond Northern theoretical concepts and for the inclusion of scholars and theories from the periphery to inform current mainstream sociology. Connell addresses this need by introducing various Southern thinkers in her essays. Chow et al. derive their contributions from the international conference “Gender and Social Transformation: Global, Transnational, and Local Realities and Perspectives,” held in Beijing from July 17–19, 2009, and bring together 13 authors from eight countries of four world regions. Both books are contributions to a truly global research agenda crossing theoretical, empirical, and collaborative boundaries.

Through the 10 essays assembled in her latest book, Connell courageously scrutinizes the effects of neoliberalism, by which she means “the project of transformation under the sign of the free market that has dominated politics in the last quarter-century, both in the global metropolis (Western Europe, and North America) and in most others parts of the world” (2011:41). Connell acts as public sociologist, particularly in the first and last chapters of the book. She served as an expert for global gender equality policy development in the United Nations in 2003–2004 on the topic of men’s and boys’ roles for gender equality. Her experiences are the backdrop against which she identifies grounds for optimism in men’s interest in gender equality, and also warns of the indirect gender politics of churches, ethnic organizations, conservative parties, nationalist movements, media, and neoliberalism. The last chapter is an open letter to the Left in Australia in the literary magazine Overland, substantiated by an examination of Antonio Negri’s theory of Empire in chapter nine. Connell’s kaleidoscopic research agenda in the rest of the book is accompanied by policy recommendations, and demonstrates her dialogical work with a broader public that stands in a feminist research tradition.

Connell is concerned with the neoliberal project that creates new patriarchal institutions at the heart of the international economy, including transnational management and high technology industries, which preserve and exploit ideological gender divisions. The corporatizing of public institutions reduces the steering capacity of the state to contribute to gender equality in society. This becomes
evident in administration agencies that attempt to create a “gender-neutral” workplace, masking old and new gendered divisions of labor (chapter 1), and also in family and education systems (chapters 3, 4, and 5). The neoliberal regime requires parents to operate as consumers and investors in a market that turns gender divisions onto new axes: the father becomes the manager of the family investment in schooling and can connect to his children through commoditized sports activities, leaving the gendered labor division at home intact. Motherhood is more disembodied and expanded with the dimension that mothers are responsible for education in the home, and—in addition to housework—for the management of work/life balance for the family. Teachers, the “workforce of reform” (Connell 2011:73), as well as their students are decomposed into specific, auditable competencies by the neoliberal project, which is deeply problematic for a public education system.

Resistance against this global, neoliberal regime and the subsequent creation of inequality in all social institutions is expected to come from intellectuals, but does the workplace organization of intellectuals really create an oppositional consciousness against the neoliberal elite? Connell approaches this question empirically (chapter 6), and her data refute the notion that intellectual work might be offering structural bases for a democratic outlook. The majority of her large sample of intellectual workers drawn from a qualitative study (n = 58), and a quantitative study (n = 500), work in a hierarchical workplace, work in routines, and work long hours, just like other workers. They remain a group in which oppositional ideas exist, but they are unlikely to act as a collective cultural force because of sectorial divisions. Sociologists as intellectual workers cannot act sufficiently as a collective cultural force if they continue to reify the hegemony of the metropole’s sociology, leaving the periphery to be understood as an imperfect extension of metropolitan modernity. Northern theories have difficulty connecting with the distinctive social experiences of the colonized and postcolonial world. Along the lines of African philosopher Paulin Hountondji (chapter 8), Connell argues that sociologists must move toward a “multi-colored, multi-centered world sociology” (2011:116 f.) and evade “mosaic epistemology” (2011:114 f.). Mosaic epistemology consists of an array of distinct systems of concepts and data, supposedly grounded in local cultural traditions and folk wisdom.
that exist parallel to each other and may be simply reproductions of the colonizer’s gaze by privileged local intellectuals. At the center of a multi-colored sociology should be the colonial conquest itself, and the cultural and intellectual encounters it has created, a topic often left out in metropolitan sociology.

Connell contributed an article to the volume *Analyzing Gender, Intersectionality, and Multiple Inequalities: Global, Transnational and Local Context*, which is an example of the multi-colored sociology she calls for. The articles in this volume are concise and thorough in their theoretical design and their ambitious, unique data sets. Each article includes a standardized abstract that highlights the purpose, method/approach, findings, practical implications, and value of the study. Each piece also condenses an array of literature, providing great entry points for further research. The articles not only make the concept of intersectionality accessible, but also advance it. Thus, the articles in the book are invaluable tools for teaching intersectionality, global gender issues, and feminist methodology, even at the undergraduate level. The book will also be of interest for experienced practitioners who seek to explore applications of intersectionality theory that delve into the study of complex inequalities in a global context. The volume is organized in four parts, which are briefly discussed below.

The book opens with three essays that address global “Frameworks and Methods” (part I). Sylvia Walby analyzes globalization and multiple inequalities by taking a closer look at quantitative data and indicators from World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and Eurostat. Walby finds that gender and class inequalities have a different trajectory of change, depending on the unit of analysis (individual or household). She further develops system theory with her concept of complexity theory to advance intersectional analysis. Walby conceptualizes social systems as environments of other systems with overlapping and mutually influencing inequality regimes. Judith Lorber examines strategies of feminist research in a globalized world and proposes a useful distinction between gender feminists and women’s feminists, who reject the notion of gender because it downplays distinctive bodies and identities of women. Lorber concludes that intersectional research—through acknowledgement of multiplicities of sex, sexuality, and gender that intersect with social class, racial
book review

ethic, or other statuses—gives us new politics to move toward a “people’s feminism” (Chow et al. 2011:47). Connell traces masculinity research in a global society, and introduces masculinity research and masculinity literature from the South, which isn’t normally included in the field. Two case studies from Connell’s research on men in the terrain of global capital illustrate old and new processes shaping elite masculinities.

The four articles in part II explore “Gender in Global-Local Connections” in the lives of South-Korean sex workers, Chinese internal migrants, and female Turkish weavers. Kyong-Ho Shin presents an insightful theoretical view of the globalizing sex industry and proposes a three-pronged model that includes South Koreans’ semiperipheral world system position, local patriarchy, and state policy to explain the high participation of women in the domestic and global sex work industry. She addresses shifting patterns in domestic sex work, such as the increase of migrant sex workers from the Philippines and former Soviet Republics at U.S. military bases in South Korea. Esther Ngan-Lin Chow and Yuchun Zuo look at the gendered impact of the economic crisis on intersectionality, migration, and work in China, bringing in new aspects of age and generation substantiated by extensive new data. The authors carried out 14 surveys in the five Chinese provinces with the highest migration rates complemented by qualitative interviews and narratives. They show that the world economic crisis had more detrimental effects on female migrant workers. However, far from being victimized, some female migrant workers have demonstrated agency, resilience, and a spirit of resistance. This finding and the call for further research on resistance strategies are also emphasized in the last two chapters of this section. Xin Tong analyzes the gender division of labor and social mobility in small-scale restaurants in China, and Dilek Hattatoglu focuses on gender and labor within the Turkish context of the “discourse of local development as a holy mission” (Chow et al. 2011:155). In the latter, Turkish women’s contributions through handicraft and weaving make women’s work visible beyond social security within a traditional system of labor division. Turkish women’s efforts are gaining strength through globalization rather than being replaced with more gender-balanced models of work.
Part III focuses on “Transnational Migration,” starting with a general discussion of the nature of transnational migration and implications for families. Peggy Levitt defines parameters of the new field of transnational studies, illustrated by fieldwork data from the Dominican Republic and Peru. She calls for a “transnational optic” that not only accounts for global migrants but also for nonmigrants, as both are shaped by “global value packages” (Chow et al. 2011:175). Mary Johnson Osirim applies this suggested transnational optic as she sheds light on immigrant African women as change-agents who are contributing to transformation in their societies of origin, as well as urban revitalization in the United States. Her research is based on 45 interviews with female African entrepreneurs and civic leaders in Philadelphia and Boston. Finally, Anna Amelina offers an intersectional approach to the complexity of social support within the German-Ukrainian transnational space. She finds a pattern of “contradictory social mobility” among Ukrainian immigrants in Germany: The higher the education and status in the host country, the lower the amount of financial support provided to relatives in the country of emigration. Amelina concludes that class categorizations are strongly connected with complex gendered and ethnicized categorizations, which influence amounts and direction of social support, access to labor markets, and ultimately lead to self-exploitation of married migrant women.

The last part of the book takes up issues of “War and Peace building,” with narratives of aged widows in conflict situations in northwest India by Abha Chauhan, an examination of the place of gender intersecting with other statuses in U.S. peace activism by Laura Toussaint, and an analysis of women’s absence in peace-building policies in Israel by Rachel Amram. Chauhan brings in voices of an unusual group of aged widows that has been forcefully evacuated during sporadic conflicts between India and Pakistan. She underlines the importance of social security, women’s agency, and their new roles in migrant camps. Simultaneously, Chauhan identifies an accelerated decline of the status of elderly widowed women in conflict situations, in contrast to traditional norms of extended family structure in village life. Toussaint and Amram both focus on peace activists and emphasize the vital role of women as peace and change-makers, as well as their problematic media representation. Although in the United States the intersectionality
and diversity of the peace movement is not reflected, women’s peace activism in the Israel-Palestine conflict is omitted because media do not want to get involved in this politically sensitive issue. Toussaint asks how perceptions of intersections of privilege and inequality shape individual peace activism, whereas Amram seeks to discover how women have been excluded from the masculinized and militarized peace negotiations. Women have thus collectively organized (e.g. within Women in Black) and contributed to Israeli feminism by sensitizing for the Palestinian struggle. Amram arrives at a straightforward conclusion: “The Middle East conflict cannot be solved without the inclusion of women” (Chow et al. 2011:302).

Both books account for the global neoliberal regime as macro context and show in detail how it plays out in the lives of individuals and in social institutions across the globe. Both books convincingly clarify that globalizations are deeply gendered processes, and that women and men must be seen as agents of change and actors that shape and (re)interpret globalization, rather than victims of a disembodied, gender-neutral, extra-personal force. By making women visible agents, the authors are also making them visible in sociological globalization literature and theory that must address its gender blindness. Suggestions for social action and policy recommendations can be derived from, or are spelled out in most of the chapters of both books. It would be good to have more scholarly work like this in sociology, or in the words of Connell (2001:101): “It would be good to have more global globalization!”