

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

VIVIAN SHALLA and WALLACE CLEMENT (Eds.) *Work in Tumultuous Times: Critical Perspectives*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007, xix + 400 p., index.

This edited collection brings together the writings of many Canadian scholars, activists, and researchers who share a genuine concern for Canadians struggling to survive in a rapidly changing national and global economy. Each of the writers who contributes to this volume approaches the study of work differently, but the efforts of the editors must be recognized as this volume is considerably more cohesive than many edited volumes which dot the sociological landscape. At the outset of the volume, Vivian Shalla grounds all of the writings in the theme of continuing (perhaps reinvigorating) the critical examination of work, with an added focus on the changing nature, conditions, and relations of work in an era of constant crisis. Readers looking for this critical perspective and analysis will not be disappointed as the writers effectively demonstrate how continuous transformations in the Canadian job market have implications not only for workers and the structure of work, but also for educational policy, social relationships, and family life. The diversity of contexts and subject material is both an asset and a drawback to this book. For traditionalists who still focus on the sociology of work as a workplace phenomenon the book may be too broad, although still a valuable resource. For those looking for a more holistic understanding of the implications of our work-lives, this book delivers.

As a whole, this volume is targeted to upper-level undergraduate and graduate students. If not being used in that capacity, graduate students studying work should be encouraged to dip into this volume as a key point of reference. Instructors teaching the sociology of work to first or second year undergraduate students might find Harvey Krahn and Graham Lowe's *Work, Industry & Canadian Society* a more suitable text. There are two core reasons for making this assessment. First, Vivian Shalla's chapter titled "Theoretical Reflections on Work: A Quarter Century of Critical Thinking" does an admirable job of summarizing the key figures and events that have shaped the sociology of work. She starts by revisiting Harry Braverman, positioning his influential work *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* as an important restatement of Marx. Further, the chapter highlights the work of James Rinehart (a somewhat forgotten Canadian scholar), the leftward shift in the study of work during the 1970s, the impact of second-wave feminist scholars, and the impact of non-critical standpoints such as postmodernism

and the managerial perspective. This chapter should serve as an excellent refresher for the most seasoned sociology of work scholar, while simultaneously providing relative newcomers with a strong foundation.

The second reason why this volume is best directed toward more advanced students is its focus on the practice of conducting research. Chapter two, written by Wallace Clement, is about the proper development of a research paradigm. "...Specialists all too often present theory and methods as free-standing rather than integral parts of analysis. The more experienced researchers become, the more attention they pay to the central place of methods in the scholarly research process..." (31). Clement is very effective at explaining the difference between the logic of inquiry ("Big-M Methods") and specific research techniques ("small-m methods"). Reminding readers that methodology should never lead the research agenda, he eloquently clarifies the idea that the presentation of all data requires a myriad number of decisions, which oblige researchers to be as diligent as possible. His lesson will serve a new generation of researchers well, making this chapter appropriate reading for anyone conducting sociological research about any topic.

One of the strengths of this volume is that the contributors consistently relate their own research back to these two key introductory chapters. Many of the chapters are presented in a manner which highlights the theoretical grounding, the research method, the findings, and reach conclusions that are clearly linked to theory. In this regard, the chapters serve as models for students in presenting their own research with purpose and clarity. As a means of demonstrating the strengths of different types of research, the contributors expose readers to both qualitative and quantitative methods. This is one of the strong points of the book. Research about work often relies too much on secondary statistical sources and ignores the actual voices of workers. Many contributors to *Work in Tumultuous Times* effectively demonstrate the importance of qualitative research for studying work. Given the varied topics covered in this book, hearing the voices of the subjects adds significantly to its impact. Individually, each chapter stands alone as a solid piece of work. More importantly, taken as a whole, the writings in *Work in Tumultuous Times* skillfully demonstrate and reassert how work – both paid and unpaid – permeates our social existence.

To comment briefly on the content of the volume, the topics covered include gender, race, the politics of work time, precarious employment, the social implications surrounding household work, and remaking the Canadian labour movement. These subjects are placed in the larger context of the changing forms of work and their influences on Canadians both in and out of the workplace. In her chapter about the working time of airline employees, Shalla effectively demonstrates how unconventional shifts in the airline industry are sources of stress both on the job and at home. Highlighting the fact that our work lives have a varied and wide-sweeping impact on our social lives effectively ties the sociology of work to many other fields of sociology (fields which may be more visible within the

discipline). The result is that readers are given the impression the sociology of work has the substance to be a pivotal area of study for the discipline.

Non-standard forms of employment are a prominent topic in this volume. Two chapters about precarious employment (one by Wayne Lewchuck, Alice De Wolff, and Andy King; the other by Leah F. Vosko) show how the shift away from full-time employment fosters the development of “employment strain,” a condition which is most likely to affect women, young workers and ethnic minorities. Related to these chapters, attention is given to the role of unpaid household and caregiving. June Corman and Meg Luxton carefully craft a brief history of the politics of household work and provide a feminist analysis of domestic labour. Their chapter successfully demonstrates how a feminist perspective can inform our understanding of the operation of capitalist economies and their reliance on women’s unpaid and unrecognized domestic labour. Norene Pupo and Ann Duffy’s thorough treatment of the commodification of household work complements this chapter. Their writing reveals the many complexities that arise from the transfer of work from the home to the public domain. These concerns are further reflected in the writing of Pat Armstrong, Hugh Armstrong, and Kate Laxer whose chapter investigates how health-care workers are counted by Statistics Canada. They comment that as care is moved out of health services and into communities and the household the new providers do not fit the ideal type of a medical worker.

This volume also addresses racial inequalities in the Canadian workforce. Gillian Creese argues that work is a central site for the reproduction of racial inequality and white privilege in Canada. The argument suggests that racialization in the Canadian labour market occurs as a result of the broader social context in which white privilege dictates the terms in which others are incorporated into society. The final two chapters of this volume complement Creese’s research. Janet Siltanen focuses on social citizenship, addressing the need to reestablish the social rights of citizenship. In part, she believes that this can be accomplished by promoting these rights as a challenge to neo-liberal conceptions of the “good society” as the “market society.” In a similar vein, Rosemary Warskett investigates how traditional forms of labour organization do not meet the needs of large numbers of Canadian workers, particularly women, various ethnic groups, and youth. Warskett looks at alternative forms of labour organization, which she sees as positive developments with respect to organizing the unorganized. Her discussion ties in nicely with an earlier chapter by Charlotte Yates and Belinda Leach that comments on industrial work in a post-industrial age. Their chapter presents a brief but meticulous overview of the changes in Canadian manufacturing, effectively linking the decline in unionization to changes in the manufacturing sector. Yates and Leach also comment on the importance of social movements and labour organization as agents for change in the workplace.

While this book admirably demonstrates the diversity that comes with studying work, there is at least one weakness that should be noted. In chapter one Shalla writes that the book is informed by a progressive

political economy tradition and that the essays of the collection are committed to a critical analysis. While I agree that this is the case, notably under-represented in this regard is an in-depth analysis of the Canadian government's attempts to position Canada as a knowledge-based economy. David Livingstone and Antonie Scholtz's chapter on workers' use of skills in advanced capitalist economies is the sole chapter to address knowledge work. The chapter succeeds in informing readers about some of the issues surrounding knowledge work, but there is much more to be explored in this regard. In particular, at no point in Livingstone and Scholtz's chapter, or in the rest of the book, do any of the contributors explore the Essential Skills program, which is one of the major projects being promoted by Human Resources and Social Development Canada. Some commentary about this contentious program would be welcome, and add to the relevance of this book.

Work in Tumultuous Times should be viewed as one of the most important books about the sociology of work which has appeared in Canada in recent years. It reminds readers of the diverse impacts that various forms of work have on all facets of our lives, and deserves to be widely read by all scholars committed to the sociology of work.

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