

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



In the first part of this chapter, I will succinctly reiterate and elaborate on the main points and findings that were discussed in the previous chapters of this book. Some recommendations based on this material will be proposed in this section. In the second part of this chapter, recommendations that broadly relate to education, mobility and leisure will be proposed. Specifically, I wish to discuss how these three topics intersect with gender and how women, in particular, can benefit from participation in all three spheres. To illustrate the importance of these areas for development and change, particularly in rural areas, I will draw on research themes and ethnographic data that have not been thoroughly explored in this book so far. I have left this to last because these are innovative ways of developing rural and farm women's potential in rural areas. Another reason is because I hope that some of my readers will remember to put these visionary ideas into practice in their own lives.

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### **Main points and findings**

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In an attempt to understand the ways gender is socially and culturally constructed in the villages where this study was conducted, one of the aims in this research was to grasp and give voice to women's (and men's) everyday lives and experiences. In other words, to understand their lives 'in their own terms' – to understand their 'realities', their perceptions, as well as their engagement in these worlds. Focus on women's subjective experiences revealed that this is a valid 'way of knowing' as well as understanding the rural and rural femininities. Another aim of this study was to authentically present and impartially analyse the perspectives and practices of women and men whom I was privileged to meet in Slavonia. This marks a shift from the pursuit of objectivity in which the researcher is portrayed as an impartial observer who produces an authoritative and unified account, towards greater subjectiv-

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study of rural women

ity, more reflexive authorship and experiments with forms of writing that give expression to a broader range of voices or perspectives (Clifford 1988; Atkinson 1990). Although this study primarily deals with the lives, perceptions and practices of women 'on the ground', this book also gives an overview of the socio-cultural, political (as well as historical) contexts that reflect conditions as they appear at the macro-level. This includes a review of available and relevant demographic statistics and reports. These quantitative sources of data were useful because they provided a broader picture and helped identify differences among groups and changes over time to document differences between the sexes. However, qualitative methods (interviews, participant observation) were primarily used in this study because quantitative methods seek to answer 'why' rather than 'how' questions and do not help us to understand the complexities of lived experience that was an inherent goal of this study. Essentially, qualitative research does not reach places no other method can, but creates a different representation of phenomena. In other words, using qualitative methods means subscription to a different interpretive framework and the resulting qualitative account is one of many possible interpretations. Hence, this book contains my anthropological interpretations, which may not necessarily be the only interpretations possible; other researchers might draw different conclusions. In any case, further research (whether quantitative or qualitative) with rural and farm women is of immense importance because these groups have been traditionally neglected in Croatian social science research. Moreover, further research is crucial because a lack of data is a major impediment to the development of coherent policies and meaningful strategies that are required to meet the needs of this vulnerable group.<sup>94</sup>

Bringing the issue of gender to the fore allows us to sharpen, refine and reorient anthropological problems. In this study, gender is first and foremost understood as relationships between people in which women are defined in relation to men and vice versa. Specifically, women,

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94 While this book has attempted to uncover the experiences of rural and farm women whose voices remain largely silent within mainstream writings on the rural, there are other vulnerable groups with marginalised voices in rural areas. These include the experiences of being young, elderly, disabled as well as the recognition of other identities of sexuality in rural spaces that have not been adequately researched. In addition, marginalised ethnic minority groups such as the Roma who have received little attention from researchers. An exception is a book based on research among the Roma in both rural and urban areas in Croatia (see Štambuk 2005).

femininity and female experiences are understood as constituted and open rather than robust unities. Clearly, gender differentiated practices depend on the circulation between subjectivities and discourses which are available. In other words, our gendered being (through doing, saying and thinking) depends on whom we interact with and the discourses that we encounter. Gendered subjects emerge from the exigencies of the social order, not instantly from physiology or sexual orientation. In Butler's words (1990: 8), 'not biology, but culture becomes destiny' such that gender as a social construction does not flow automatically from genitalia and reproductive organs, the main physiological differences of females and males.

Accordingly, this book highlights the socially constructed and historically specific nature of womanhood and rurality. It emphasises the complex ties between domesticity, femininity and rurality as they interrelate to influence the (domestic) identities of contemporary rural and farm women. Undoubtedly, rural femininity is neither fixed in stone nor frozen in time as changes due to transitions, war, globalisation, and media/market forces, etc. will mediate and shape gender and rurality. However, despite these changes, a dominant femininity still exists, even though concealed femininities were also evident attesting to the contested and multiple identities of womanhood in these spaces. Most of the chapters in this book focus on particular sites: in the home with other family members, in the (farm)yard, in the community (social events), and at church where femininities are commonly constructed and reinforced in comparison to inns, cafes, sporting events, and farms where masculinities are constructed and reinforced.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, although rural femininities may be changing and these changes are occurring in multiple directions, femininities are always defined as inferior to masculinities (see Brandth & Haugen 1998). Thus, rural femininity, for both women and men constitutes not only a relational ideology but a relational set of social practices – what are appropriate actions for women are often conceived in contrast to what is deemed appropriate for men and vice versa. Consequently, if women do gender appropriately, they simultaneously sustain and reproduce socially accepted notions of gender, but if they fail to do gender appropriately, their character, intentions and predispositions are questioned by both women and men.

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95 It should be noted that masculinities are also played out in the private sphere of the home and family but in a different way to femininities.

Chapter 3 clarifies the significance of foregrounding the embodied, situated and subjective self of the researcher because researchers do not simply observe but are active agents in the production of meaning. Our research gaze, attention, choices, questions, and engagements all create knowledge. In addition to their academic background, researchers' personal experiences and memories as well as temperament and personalities influence the choice of research sites, themes, design and theoretical approaches. Incontestably, the lived world between researchers and the people that they study adds reality to the field. Awareness of the different selves and their changing nature (personal/ ethnographic-professional) that researchers bring to the field are also significant. As researchers have shown, the research process changes the researcher, and this changed self becomes part of the data itself (Coffey, 1999; Davies, 1999). In any case, since ethnographic fieldwork is constituted within a discourse of immersion, reflexivity, and rapport, the ethnographic self cannot always be easily extracted. However, based on experiences in this study, I found that the ability to know and understand what shaped research became clearer to me after I had left the field and began writing.

On entering the field, I had to accept that like the participants of my research, I was also being observed and constrained by certain normative practices and cultural arrangements. During fieldwork, although my positionality, background and familial situation helped me fit in, there were also experiences of 'misfitting' and fitting differently. In this chapter, I show how dilemmas can sway research focus and empathy but also provide opportunities to revise research plans and create space for dialogues. It also provided the chance to explore unexpected research themes and refocus for wider meanings. Clearly, it is essential to interrogate our own beliefs and feelings to become open to new forms of situated knowledge. Finally, this chapter confirms how there is a crucial need to include researchers' experiences and memories into research accounts because the invisibility of researcher only limits our understandings and upholds researchers' power over their participants.

Chapter 4 on gendered values and attitudes specifically looks at how values and attitudes are emphasised, held and sustained by rural women and the wider community. It explores some indicators of traditionalism (patterns of residence, levels of education, attitudes to women's employment) showing that gendered values and attitudes in these rural areas were and continue to be deeply anchored

in tradition. Girls learn early from other women as well as from circulating discourses about respectable femininity that in many ways 'bounds' them. Girls and women must continually watch themselves. From earliest childhood, they are taught and encouraged to behave in an appropriate gendered way and socialised into housekeeping skills by other women in the household. Without doubt, the 'socialisation mould' endorses compliance and submissiveness among girls in rural spaces where there is a marked lack of progressive female roles and a lack of support. The ideal woman and her ideal place is perceived by the majority to be a home-maker (*domaćica*) who is primarily responsible for the home, family problems and children while all other duties are secondary. Further, most women (with only a few exceptions) defined their experiences of womanhood through the realms of home, family, and interpersonal relationships. They focused their narration around highly traditional themes such as femininity; motherhood; caring and self-sacrifice for their children and other family members; their responsibility for maintaining the family and a harmonious family atmosphere; as well as housekeeping and 'homemaking'. Although these are all ways of doing 'respectable' femininity, they can also entail confinement for women because they are prevented in many ways from obtaining other forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic). These aspects of a rural way of life that are most valued by women appear to be those that offer them the least opportunity to make choices. Understandably, in the absence of options, women strictly adhere to traditional beliefs because they do not have any other ways of gaining social power.

Chapter 5 is on the meanings and experiences of domestic labour and how this work has far-reaching ramifications for women in rural spaces. By focussing on the domestic realm, this research has recovered both past and contemporary experiences of rural and farm women; experiences that are all too often neglected and marginalised in academic writings. I explain how doing housework (domestic labour) and being satisfied with this arrangement is more an indication of what women (and men) should do rather than other factors that play a part in this division. This division reflects the much broader organisation of these rural communities/villages around assumptions of gender. Findings show that their domestic work entails less choice (as it is low-control); women feel more responsible and accountable for this work and consequently do more. In addition, homemaking which ensures the physical, emotional, psychological and economic well-being of their

families is another important task that women carry out. Beyond doubt, the domestic work that women do produces gender relations and creates well being for individuals, the family and wider community, but this burden also has repercussions on women's well being. Inevitably, there are disadvantages connected to the home-maker role. These include: i) the double/triple shifts where women are often too worn out to do anything else; ii) this work is devalued and less visible and often taken for granted; and iii) affords women highly fragmented career trajectories that in effect isolates them. On the other hand, some advantages were also noted in this study. These include understandings of domestic labour: i) as a personal fulfilment that can reduce psychological stress; ii) as related to respectable femininity and subjectivity – the experience of being a women in rural spaces; iii) as an opportunity to instil a sense of belonging i.e., 'fitting in'; iv) as potential to hold power (although this is informal because it has no relation to a 'legitimate' authority); and v) as a way of ensuring economic and emotional security later in life through children. Nevertheless, regardless of these benefits, gendered divisions of domestic labour relegate women to an inferior position where they often have little power in the rural household, despite their multiple contributions. Since rural and farm women have significantly less access to resources and limited ways of easing the burden of their household duties (as many still do many tasks by hand), it is more difficult for these women to fulfil their potential.

Chapter 6 shows that rural development, which in turn affects overall development (i.e., viability and sustainability of a country) can be hindered by the following: i) rural women's lack of access to different forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic); and ii) prevalent dominant rural ideologies that to a large extent determine women's roles and positions as well as construct obstacles to public participation in rural areas. In relation to the first point, women tend to have lower levels of capital due to traditional rural practices (e.g., they do not inherit land, they are frequently economically dependent, they are not encouraged to pursue further education, and they do not have wide social networks etc.). In addition, since economic and political processes are not gender neutral, women experience macro/micro level changes (brought about by war, transition and recession) differently from men and have been differentially affected by them. Second, prevalent rural ideologies prescribe traditional roles for women that are simultaneously sustained by a marked lack of infrastructure (preschool institutions, support ser-



vices, specialised medical care, e.g. gynaecological, mental health care; efficient transport system). Nevertheless, this chapter demonstrates that rural women could feasibly contribute to rural development if these obstacles are addressed in rural policies. Based on findings in this study, rural women are often required to inhabit different places and *habituses*, making them skilled at organisation, coordination and adaption and in many instances men cannot substitute them. In essence, this chapter shows how it is fundamental to pay attention to the conditions, situations and needs of men and women as well as address gender disparities (gaps/differences) and inequalities that were and are barriers to rural development.

In this book, I have attempted to illustrate how rural and farm women are generally among the most disadvantaged groups of the population, even though they play a key role in agriculture and rural development. In consideration of all the social, economic and political changes that have taken place in Croatia over the last two decades, additional pressure has been placed on rural and farm women, which has significantly contributed to their marginalisation. As their levels of public participation are low and there is a marked lack of NGOs working with women to represent their interests in the County of Vukovar-Srijem, concrete and diversified strategies need to be devised to improve women's quality of life and empowerment. In the following section, as a means of instigating change and development, I will discuss the significance of education, mobility and leisure and how investment in these areas can contribute to empowerment and a higher quality of life among rural and farm women.

## Education and Gender

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As already mentioned in the previous chapters, in rural areas there is a gendered lag in education marked by economic, socio-cultural, and distance constraints which still result in lower levels of education among girls and women.<sup>96</sup> Likewise, at the national level, statistics show that 16.7% of all females aged 15 and over completed higher education (compared to 16.0% for males) while 45.9% finished secondary school (compared to 60% for males) and 37.2% had some level of primary school (compared to 23.8% for males) in 2011 (CBS Census 2011).

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96 See Chapter 2 for statistical data on illiteracy and levels of tertiary education among women in rural populations as well as in the county where this study was conducted.

Evidently, there are low percentages of people with tertiary education in Croatia, undoubtedly hindering overall development of the country. For comparative purposes, in 2009, 58 regions in the EU had more than 32% of the population (aged 25 to 64) with higher education (Eurostat 2009). According to this report, the regions with the lowest percentages of people with tertiary education are largely concentrated in the rural areas of nine countries, one of which is Croatia. Clearly, to promote development, national strategies and policies must focus attention on improving availability and access to education, especially in rural areas to all age groups. In particular, special attention should be given to girls, as investment in girls' education is an important investment in national development. The benefit of girls' education is that it reaps huge benefits not only for individual girls but for their families, the wider community/society and country. Importantly, girls who attain secondary and tertiary educations can become agents of change and essentially break the intergenerational cycles of marginalisation and exclusion that are prevalent in rural families. By emphasising and supporting the importance of (advanced) education particularly among girls, this system that perpetuates social and gendered inequalities can be changed.

Other recommendations include scholarships for rural children as a useful helpful way of boosting up education levels among these populations. Families in areas where this study was conducted often cannot even afford transport costs to the nearest town so they send their children to secondary school across the state border because it is closer and cheaper. However, children who finish secondary school in Bosnia-Herzegovina often find it easier to find employment (compatible to their schooling) there, which is a strong contributing factor to depopulation in these villages. As lower levels of education often exclude rural and farm women from obtaining other forms of capital, they could substantially benefit from knowledge that is especially relevant to rural populations. For example, courses in home economics could be on a variety of issues such as nutrition (e.g., nutritious foods and healthier menu alternatives), budgeting, accident prevention and safety. These acquired skills would improve the quality of life in rural homes and wider community, particularly in the area of health. In the absence of kindergartens and play groups, sound practices in nurturing child development would also be of great benefit to parents. In addition, entrepreneurial skills or resources to facilitate self-employment among rural and farm women would be advantageous.

Other areas of potential interest include: modern agricultural technology, training in processing agricultural products, marketing and selling products, as well as agro/village tourism. This knowledge would undoubtedly build up self esteem among women and make them proud of their own achievements. Moreover, this experience would also provide them with opportunities to socially interact with others outside of their kin groups.

Clearly, further investments in education and lifelong learning are needed to increase the labour market inclusion of women, in particular, and to pull rural populations out of poverty. As already mentioned, low levels of education as well as traditional ideas of femininity, particularly women's roles as mothers, serve to restrict women's opportunities within the rural labour market. Strikingly, in this study, femininity in the rural context is narrowly constituted through domestic roles and spaces in which domesticity largely goes unchallenged. Since childbearing and breastfeeding are the only truly biologically determined roles (the rest are socially constructed gender divisions), this gendered domestic arrangement considerably undermines women's rights and limits their choices. Realistically, adherence to the homemaker role could be partly an economic consequence of the job situation getting worse in rural areas. In addition, childcare costs in the absence of state run facilities<sup>97</sup> are costly and too far away (approximately 30 kilometres for families in this study). As a consequence of these factors, women in these rural spaces may have realised that getting a full education and a job is just not worth the stress. Some might sincerely feel that they love staying at home with their children and this is living out their 'best life' which makes them happy, healthy and whole. However, considering the precariousness of rural spaces, it is questionable as to how long women who choose to stay at home will feel in this way if they are not supported. Unfortunately, women's care work is taken for granted by the Croatian government and remains unrecognised and undervalued in these rural spaces. More equitable domestic work and childcare arrangements would facilitate women's participation in (further) education and the labour market as well as contribute to the overall quality of life in rural areas. Research has shown that policies

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97 According to data from the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, the overall state coverage of preschool age children in regular programmes (five-hour and ten-hour programmes) amounts to 56.64% of all preschool age children, which still does not meet all parents' needs for placing children into kindergartens – about 5,000 of preschool children remain on the waiting lists each year.

that encourage men's participation in domestic labour create the possibility for change at the interactional level.<sup>98</sup> In addition, education on gender equality and public promotions of a father's role in children's upbringing might increase the use of paternity leave and benefits among fathers. Almost certainly, this could have positive repercussions on rural and farm women's quality of life and well-being.

## Mobility and Gender

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*K.O.: What is your greatest fear?*

*R.B.: My greatest fear is to become petrified: to become a tree, to put out roots and not be able to move. I have a fear of immobility, of being stuck in one spatio-temporal dimension. It is a variation of a fear of death, a kind of death, of turning to stone and not being able to move again. (Interview with Rosi Braidotti by Kathleen O'Grady 1996)*

In response to a question about their greatest fear, the women who participated in this study described fears that were quite different to Braidotti's fear of immobility. Illness was mentioned by a third of the women in this study. This fear can be logically attributed to the lack and costs of quality specialist services in the surrounding area, especially for women and the long waiting periods if they cannot afford private health care.<sup>99</sup> In addition, the general lack of knowledge about health issues as well as their small social networks makes it more difficult for them to manage and resolve their health problems. Generally, as a result of all these factors, they seek help at a much slower pace (compared to women who live in urban areas) that may have detrimental effects on their health and well-being in the long-term. About the same number of women expressed fears related to an 'uncertain future' that is beyond their control due to poverty, unemployment, war and death. A smaller number (every tenth woman) feared for their children/husband (that something might happen to

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98 The Croatian government partially supports the involvement of fathers (see Law on maternal and parental support, *Official Gazette* 85/08 and 110/08), but use of parental leave among fathers is still a decision that is made by individual couples. Comparison of data shows that the number of fathers who used paternity leave decreased – in 2009 it was 0.6% while in 2010 it was 0.4 percent (Ombudswoman for Gender Equality, Report for 2010, 2011: 49-50).

99 In Croatia, many more rural residents rated their health as poor, where distance to the nearest medical facility and related costs were serious problems for rural respondents (Šućur & Zrinščak 2007: 663).

them) which complies with their caring, nurturing selves and accurately reflects how their energies are focused on others. Unsurprisingly, none of the women expressed Braidotti's fear of becoming immobile. Their fears are not about immobility as they are not mobile<sup>100</sup> and usually do not aspire to be mobile (i.e., seek further education, find employment, venture into entrepreneurship or explore leisure possibilities) in these rural spaces. On the contrary, many are quite 'rooted' in their home spaces where they are firmly established and settled. In other words, as this study has shown, women are 'fixed' in these rural spaces due to socio-cultural, situational and structural constraints that greatly hinder their physical, social, and intellectual mobility in the widest sense. Seemingly, this lack of mobility more often than not brings about inertness with regard to personal autonomy, but also a sense of 'motionlessness' and mental lassitude that does not safeguard them against sickness or unfavourable economic circumstances. In many ways, this immobile 'way of being' is compatible with traditional ideas of femininity that are central to the dominant cultural constructions of rurality. In contrast, there were some women in this study who are or were mobile during some point of their lives. Based on these experiences, they do attempt to transgress gendered boundaries or challenge social norms but these individual attempts are often too fragmented to bring about any real change to the gendered social order. Incontestably, immobility clearly restricts women's opportunities in further education and the rural labour market as well as their participation in recreational activities.

## Leisure and gender

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Undoubtedly, leisure allows human-beings to increase their health, well-being and quality of life that has far-reaching effects. Scholars have argued that the psychological benefits of leisure are likely to impart both on people's physical health and indirectly on the vitality of their interpersonal relationships, the organisations of which they are a part, their communities and society-at-large (see Mannell & Kleiber 1997). However, leisure has different meanings for men and women. As already mentioned in previous chapters, leisure options for women are greatly reduced in rural areas while men's activities and sports are

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100 As mentioned earlier, four out five women in this sample do not drive and women in many ways are bound to their home spaces by traditional social norms.

accorded greater legitimacy. Most of the women in this study reported that they have little leisure time, except on Sundays. Women told me that it is harder for them to forget about their work and put aside specific times for their leisure outside the home. They are invariably 'on call' to tend to the needs of other family members and have to make extra efforts to get it all done. Inevitably, they do not schedule any time for their own needs. Overall, participation in leisure activities for women was curtailed by domestic and family commitments. In addition, there is a lack of cultural activities (cinema, theatre) and sport clubs/facilities for women in these villages. Needless to say, women also mentioned distance barriers as well as financial constraints. Temporal constraints are well illustrated in the next quote from an employed woman with three children who seemed to be chronically exhausted. Much to the detriment of her well-being, the opportunities to sleep and do handiwork (i.e., functional/utilitarian activities that cannot be strictly defined as leisure) are perceived by her as opportunities to engage in leisure.

*On Sundays and holy days I lie down and go to sleep or perhaps I go out for coffee to my neighbour's (female) although this is very rare, on other days I do handiwork. (Ana, aged 37)*

Once again indicating a shortage of time and a lack of options, this farm woman either reads, visits her neighbour or watches TV; activities that do not challenge notions of respectable femininity that can all be done at home or at least 'close to home'.

*If I get the time I read something or I visit a neighbour or they come here. I don't know, I don't have much free time. We watch television in the evening and I always listen to the radio – that's the only communication I have with the (outside) world... (Marija, aged 54)*

In particular, rural and farm women could markedly benefit (personally, health-wise, socially, etc.) from leisure activities that are more or less non-existent for women in rural spaces. As leisure is a potential site of struggle for gender diversity and gender equity, provision and investments in leisure facilities should be made for women who live in rural areas. Creating an advantageous environment for women's leisure is important not only because of its impact upon men and the way in which patriarchal relations of power work, but also because it would actually encourage women to use their leisure time and also see that they have a right to it. Mobility is an essential element

of an advantageous environment for women's leisure (e.g., reliable public transport). In addition, other forms of support that would lessen women's workload (e.g., childcare facilities, equitable sharing of domestic work) would also be valuable. Thus, access to and participation in leisure activities would mark a transgression and perhaps initiate a shift in the work-life balance<sup>101</sup> emphasising the pleasure, leisure and health aspects for women. As role models, women who participate in leisure activities also might encourage others to engage in these beneficial activities. Without doubt, leisure is very important to women because it gives them a chance to relax and recover from stress and fatigue of everyday life. It also provides a creative outlet and an important opportunity to establish and maintain social networks. Most importantly, leisure can also empower rural and farm women to reflect on their autonomy which may in turn bring about changes in traditional gender arrangements and relations.<sup>102</sup>

In many ways, women are excluded from rural spaces if they do not 'fit in' with the hegemonic construction of rural womanhood, i.e. respectable femininity. Throughout this book, I have attempted to show evidence for a 'dominant' form of femininity that has become 'rooted' and 'embedded' in these communities. Although there are other more or less concealed forms, this dominant form is powerful enough to establish the entire gender order of villages. In small communities, where there is no anonymity, the pressure is far stronger because those that do not come up to scratch are more visible. Hence, it is difficult for rural and farm women to resist social pressures to conform. In comparison, as mentioned, individual transgressions are not sufficient to upset this relation as they are fragmented; there is no articulated 'common voice' among these women. Moreover, the gendered image of rural spaces with predominately male symbols and activities may mean that girls/women feel less comfortable in this social context. In response, many young women choose to leave their natal villages (to study and work in urban centres) and never return thus undermining a key potential area of resistance to men's power. Undoubtedly, new forms of subjectivity come about through mobility. Different social

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101 A work-life balance here is understood as a concept including proper prioritising between 'work' (career and ambition) and 'life' (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development).

102 Some may argue that they do not need to be changed, but this research has revealed that traditional dominant ideologies and social constructions maintain powerful constraints on women and ensure gender stratification.

locations (in education, employment, leisure) for rural and farm women will mediate and shape new constructions of gender and rurality. Clearly, in contrast to doing 'respectable' femininity, the interplay of education, mobility and leisure might ensure better ways for rural and farm women to gain social power. Undeniably, these spheres give women's voices and activities visibility, creating possibilities to challenge discriminatory practices and to dispel myths and stereotypes that are damaging. As a final note, these spheres would also promote a more progressive notion of womanhood, i.e. a *self-reliant* femininity that sustains women's independence, power, strength/resistance, assertiveness, personal development, lifestyle changes and determination.





# POSTSCRIPT



In May 2014, Croatia was hit by unprecedented and serious flooding that swept across villages in a matter of hours making thousands homeless in Eastern Slavonia. Sadly, the most affected areas included some of the villages where I carried out fieldwork for this book: Gunja, Rajevo Selo, Račinovci and Posavski Podgajci. As many as 15,000 residents were evacuated from these flood-stricken areas and now face the complicated and challenging prospect of rebuilding their lives after these massive floods. Countless studies have shown that losing homes and all means of livelihood in natural disasters have a more direct and adverse impact on women. On the other hand, past catastrophic experiences have encouragingly shown that women from these villages contributed amazing strengths to the recovery efforts in the aftermath of the war during the nineties. Indubitably, once again women will be the key actors in building, shaping and sustaining strong communities in these areas. Women, who do return, in their attempts to restore all that has been devastated by these floods inevitably will be tied to their homes indefinitely.