

Michèle Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class and Immigration*. London: Harvard University Press/Russell Sage Foundation, 2001, 432 pp., £ 27.50 (ISBN 0-674-00306-3).

The book 'Dignity of Working Men' by Lamont combines theoretical excellence with interesting inductive qualitative research. Lamont wants to show how working class-men live and assess the world as they now it. The main emphasis of the book is on American working-class men who, because they do not have a college degree, experience limited access to high-paying jobs and other social benefits. Most of these black and white workers have to struggle to make a living and Lamont wants to show how they see themselves and the rest of society in a situation in which they cannot fully live up to the American dream. By making use of in-depth interviews she reveals morality is at the centre of these workers' worlds. Based on her qualitative research, Lamont argues they find identity and self-worth in their ability to discipline themselves and conduct responsible but caring lives. White workers put more stress on self discipline, black workers find a caring identity – of which black 'brotherhood' is a central characteristic - more important. These moral standards replace economic definitions of success, which are generally out of reach to these workers. At the same time these moral standards function as markers of social division between them and the poor and, to a lesser extent, the upper classes. These (di-)visions also subtly function as racial boundaries. Whites tend to talk about blacks as morally inferior because they put less stress on the disciplined self. Blacks tend to think whites are domineering, uncaring and exceedingly disciplined. In the second part of the book Lamont introduces an internationally comparative element by looking into processes of self and other categorisations by white French workers. Interestingly, while sharing the stress on work ethic and responsibility with white American workers, they have a much stronger discourse of class solidarity and do not really distinguish the poor from themselves. While being less critical of black workers with French nationality, they distinguish themselves foremost from upper-middle-class people and North-African immigrants. The latter are deemed to refuse to assimilate and hence are seen to remain outside of the French 'republican' political culture. According to Lamont, this difference in social categorisations by workers in the US and France illustrates the different forms of inequality, and, more importantly, the different political discourses which are readily available to talk about social differentiation, found in both societies. Although Lamont's empirical research is based on a limited number of interviews in particular settings, through thoughtful and extensive analysis and contextualisation, she is able to sketch a convincing picture of social categorisations by US and French workers. Interviews from earlier research function as comparative material, in which Lamont has shown how the educated upper middle class stress self actualisation and conflict avoidance, in contrast to the importance workers attach to straightforwardness. Weak spots of her research - of which Lamont is conscient - are the fact no women were interviewed and that internal heterogeneity of the studied groups is given only limited attention. Overall, 'The Dignity of Working Man' is a more than welcome contribution in the academic analysis of boundary work.

Dirk Jacobs (KULeuven – KUBrussel)