



Book Reviews

REVIEW ESSAYS

Complementary Angles and Inclusive Perspectives: Rounding Out Integrative Views of Material Culture

Crafting Gender: Women and Folk Art in Latin America and the Caribbean. Eli Barta, ed. Durham: Duke University Press. 2003. 244 pp.

Clothing the Pacific. Chloë Colchester. Oxford: Berg. 2003. 215 pp.

Wedding Dress across Cultures. Helen Bradley Foster and Donald Clay Johnson, eds. Oxford: Berg. 2003. 227 pp.

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In the field of material culture studies, theorists disagree on how to evaluate the power of material objects. Should we approach material artifacts as windows onto the social relations that surround them? Do objects have the power to constitute new social contexts as well as reflect them? Despite the lack of agreement, one issue theorists concur on is the value of integrated analyses. Approaching objects with interdisciplinary lenses has become the preferred way to capture the social complexity of material things. Interdisciplinary perspectives constitute a methodological technique, but in addition they are a metaphor for reflecting on the boundaries of power and control in representations of objective reality. In short, there are many advantages to the interdisciplinary study of material culture.

This review examines three anthologies that employ interdisciplinary perspectives for exploring the power and politics of material objects. Each offers a view of things from a set of distinct angles that are often excluded from “integrated” analyses. The study of material things often raises

questions that are too broad for one perspective to resolve alone. Integrative approaches bring the full complexity of objects into light by offering views from creative combinations of analytical lenses. Highlighting new angles on material artifacts can reinvigorate existing disciplinary approaches while ultimately affirming that ordinary things deeply matter to people.

Eli Barta's *Crafting Gender* examines the role of women in making textiles, clothing, jewelry, ceramic pottery, ceramic sculpture, wood figurines, and votive paintings. The focus of the book was suggested by the scarcity of texts describing women as artists in Latin America and the Caribbean, and by the marginalization of folk art in art history. The selected case studies predominantly represent women artists in Mexico and other parts of Central and South America. One article about Puerto Rican *santeras* discusses artists in the Caribbean. The anthology's main theoretical objectives are to integrate gender and aesthetic analyses within studies of material objects. These goals are accomplished by bringing together the writings of anthropologists and feminist, activist-artists such as Betty La Duke.

In Chloë Colchester's anthology, *Clothing the Pacific*, eight articles address a specific category of material culture, namely, clothing and related body practices including wrappings and other coverings made from natural materials such as trees, plants, feathers, mud, sap, and soot. The collection is partly inspired by the paucity of work on clothing in the Pacific, and by the work of Alfred Gell, a major contributor to the anthropology of art and the ethnology of Oceania. In the context of Africa and India, much has been written about the way clothing creates social ties between Europeans and indigenous people. *Clothing the Pacific*

essentially explores this theme, but in its view of clothing as a nexus of social relations, it emphasizes the “destruction” of social ties rather than the creation of connections between Europeans and Pacific Islanders. The book traces these issues through an examination of clothing practices in the colonial and post colonial periods. It deals with the materiality of clothing and conceptualizations of cultural appropriation as well. The book includes works by anthropologists, museum curators, and a celebrated fashion-activist from the region, Rosanna Raymond.

Helen Bradley Foster and Donald Clay Johnson's *The Wedding Dress* also focuses on clothing and accompanying practices. The anthology is the outcome of an interdisciplinary keynote panel at the Ars Textrina Conference in 1999 and a request from the general editor of Berg's “Dress, Body, Culture” series for Foster and Johnson to co-edit the volume. It is the most interdisciplinary of the three. It includes work written by anthropologists, art historians, folklorists, museum curators, textile designers, and scholars with backgrounds in English, women's studies, and fashion and merchandising. The text is principally concerned with wedding dress as a site for the social construction of “tradition.” It explores the ways that colonialism, migration, modernization, and globalization shape wedding dress and the processes of cultural appropriation. In addition to the application of diverse disciplinary perspectives, wedding dress is examined across time and space, including case studies from Japan, India, Greece, Morocco, Peru, and the United States, among other cultural contexts.

It is intuitive that the gender divisions of labor and the social position of women have the potential to shape art and its aesthetic value. Therefore, it is surprising to learn from *Crafting Gender* that accounts of women artists in the region are few and far between. Through a meticulous review of the literature, Barta demonstrates that women's folk art has either been examined in terms of labor or not discussed at all. In this light, *Crafting Gender* is a long overdue collection of ethnographic essays that does much to round out a picture of folk expression in Latin America.

Barta correctly argues that scholarly work on women's craft production infrequently incorporates an analysis of aesthetics. Yet artisans and the public frequently evaluate objects in terms of the creativity they express and the joy they bring to people's lives. Illustrations of the rapidly changing styles of embroidered capes from Suriname (Sally Price) and Quechua artists' analyses of the other women's pottery displayed at crafts fair (Dorothea Whitten) illuminate how aesthetics work to give objects their cultural meaning. These and many other examples demonstrate the centrality of aesthetics in the social meanings of objects, and the importance of integrating it within analyses of material culture.

Crafting Gender best argues that the power of objects is ultimately captured when women's accounts of their creative processes are included within analyses. Analyses of objects are often largely textual, an approach that tends to obscure the role of humans in creating things. In *Crafting*

Gender, however, readers are brought into the cooperatives of Panamanian *mola* makers (Mari Lyn Salvador), the mobile pottery studio of Quechua women on tour in the United States (Scott Whitten), and various other workspaces. These images help to demystify the social power of objects and help to reinforce the notion that if objects possess a power to shape social contexts, then human hands have played a significant role in creating this ability (Friedman 1990). The analyses of material objects in *Crafting Gender*, therefore, paint a realistic picture of the agency of material artifacts.

Crafting Gender provides much evidence that material objects are indeed agents of social relations. Certain artworks contribute to fomenting foreign tourism and international cultural exchange programs (Whitten). Wooden sculptures prompt local middle-class consumers to request the production of figurines with specific patterns that reinterpret cultural meaning with deep historical roots (Norma Valle). Votive paintings enable local folk to get in touch with the gods and to cope with the ultimate problems of life (María J. Rodríguez-Shadow). These examples feature material artifacts connecting people and opening up new opportunities for human interaction. In this light, material objects are shown to blur borders and deterritorialize identities as much as international migration, mass media, and other related processes of globalization.

A final and important point underscored in *Crafting Gender* is that the study of material objects has social implications. Objects produced by “folk” have not been given proper treatment in anthropology. They have often been cast as primitive, tribal, artisan crafts, and as nonexpressive utilitarian objects. These are biased labels that are dependent on a problematical notion that the West is the primary source of modernity and “fine” art. Folk works, however, gain a new status when they are viewed as art. Descriptions of the nonutilitarian ceramic pots produced in Mata Ortiz, Mexico (Eli Barta), a female version of the Three Kings produced by female *santeras* (Valle), and four-foot-high red clay mermaids and other mythical forms produced by descendants of Theodora Blanco (Betty La Duke) make the point that eliminating the category “folk art” runs the risk of marginalizing the creative expressions of ordinary people. The long-standing biases that anthropologists seek to revise may be reinforced when folk art is overlooked.

Although *Crafting Gender* usefully critiques the marginalization of Latin American and Caribbean folk culture in anthropology, it does not deal too deeply with the controversies surrounding this concept and the problem of incorporating aesthetic analysis in material culture studies. An underlying message *Crafting Gender* communicates is that the agency of objects is made apparent when things are approached as art. But, how does one define art? Are all objects art? Some anthropologists propose that art can include everything (Gell 1998), while others ignore the problem entirely. *Crafting Gender* is committed to folk art as a socially important category; however, like many other texts, the anthology avoids proposing a solution to the “folk” problem.

The case studies in *Crafting Gender* have been carefully selected and well edited. They are fairly even in their theoretical sophistication and in their combination of ethnographic information, images, and in the weaving together of reports on contemporary life with relevant descriptions of the past. Overall, the book successfully presents an integrated picture of material artifacts. It is enormously informative and enjoyable to read.

Whereas Barta's book implies objects are agents of social relations, Cloë Colchester's anthology overtly argues this point. Clothing is viewed as a "nexus" or a site that integrates understandings of what clothing did for Pacific Islanders and Europeans and how each party viewed the other as a result of cultural dynamics of clothing. In the anthology's presentation of crisscrossing foreign and indigenous narratives, the nexus of clothing becomes a site for integrating "passive" and "active" readings of material culture. In other words, the anthology approaches clothing as an opportunity to interpret the social relations that gave rise to it and the social relations that it creates.

Unlike Barta's anthology, which argues aesthetics are an integral dimension of material objects, *Clothing the Pacific* takes the importance of aesthetics for granted. The final chapter underscores this. Raymond's essay discusses contemporary photography that combines modern and colonial postures, and renditions of *Sina* and *Tuna* (the myth of the girl and the eel) performed for different mixtures of audiences in Apia, Samoa, and Auckland, New Zealand. On the one hand, this chapter is theoretically light. On the other hand, through pictures and personal anecdotes Raymond makes the point that clothing is not a static object that "texts" social relations. Indeed it is a creative form of doing that constitutes new social connections and interactions. In this light, this anthology successfully makes use of an interdisciplinary format for viewing material artifacts.

Borrowing lessons learned from art historians and their close views of museum objects, *Clothing the Pacific* demonstrates that the material qualities of things are important to an integrative analysis. Prior to European contact, Pacific Islanders used *tapa*, a type of cloth made from strips of bark, pandanus and paper mulberry leaves, feathers, and other natural fibers. Barkcloth wrapped people of rank, ritual objects (Babadzan), and covered piles of gifts in gift-giving ceremonies (Susanne Küchler). Because *tapa* was made from plants that generally grew close to home, and not near the plantations, a family's social identity could be "read" into the cloth (Serge Tcherkézoff). In Samoa today, the materials and designs of barkcloth fine mats continue to illustrate the ranks of families and tell the stories of how lineages became interrelated. In short, the material qualities of barkcloth embody significant cultural meanings that cannot be detected in analyses that overlook the material dimension of things. Moreover, colonialism played a large role in changing the way Pacific Islanders *felt* about the clothed and unclothed body (Tcherkézoff). These feelings and how they factored into Pacific Islander cultural identities cannot be fully un-

derstood without attending to the material dimensions of barkcloth and imported manufactured cloth.

Clothing the Pacific offers an alternative explanation for how distinct European and Pacific Islanders' cultural systems became incorporated within a single form. One view of cultural appropriation, which accounts for human agency, is to conceive indigenous populations as selectively adopting and assigning meaning to foreign cultural forms. Nicholas Thomas proposes that clothing has acted as a powerful "technological innovation" that retained principles of Polynesian ways of life while enabling the religious conversion to Christianity (p. 79). By tracing the history of *tiputa* (the barkcloth poncho), Thomas finds that "imported" cultural forms were not entirely integrated within historically rooted forms. He makes a strong case for viewing local and global cultural meanings as co-existing in single cultural forms and autonomously mobilizing different aspects of Pacific Islander identity. In the study of popular culture in Africa, this concept is called "parallel modernities" (Larkin 1997), and it has become a useful way to reconsider the purity of epistemologies and to avoid "thinking in essences" (Myers 1994).

The topics explored in *Clothing the Pacific* makes for an engaging text that expertly integrates "new" and "old" positions on the properties of objects with colonial and post-colonial histories and a variety of interdisciplinary lenses. This text is much needed because so little has been written about clothing in the Pacific. That said, the introduction contains many technical references that have meanings for an audience that is already familiar with Alfred Gell and Nichols Thomas's work. Less jargon would have made the text more accessible to readers outside of anthropology.

Like Barta's and Colchester's anthologies, Foster and Johnson's edited volume *Wedding Dress across Cultures* addresses an area of research that has also been overlooked. Fascinating books have been written about the social histories and meanings of corsets, blue jeans, sneakers, and the sari, but the wedding dress has rarely been examined so intensively. The wedding dress is a unique garment that plays an important role in the rites of passage of youth and, ultimately, in the production and reproduction of communities. Thus, its omission is noteworthy and a study of it is long overdue.

Wedding Dress across Cultures presents works that are extremely rich in descriptions of wedding practices in particular times and places. The richness is made possible by bringing together a broad mix of work from anthropologists, sociologists, art historians, designers, literary critics, and museum curators. Readers learn about weddings in the Andes that are chronicled by 17th-century Spanish travelers (Lynn A. Meisch) and of dress rituals during the Chosan dynasty (1392–1910), which are conveyed through 18th-century paintings (Na Young Hong). Readers are presented with lively descriptions of colorful saris worn at Gujarati weddings (Donald Clay Johnson), beehive-shaped hairstyles worn by Swazi brides (Lombusa S. Khoza and Laura Kidd), and the outdoor hiking gear, Celtic quilted

gowns, and Marilyn Monroe style garb worn at carnivalesque themed weddings in the United States (Theresa M. Winge and Joanne B. Eicher). Versions of the white wedding dress in Osaka, Japan (Masami Suga), and Athens, Greece (Helen Bradley Foster) are also explored. The variety of examples, rich descriptions, images from museum exhibitions, and stories of everyday people makes a strong case for the power of an interdisciplinary perspective in material culture analysis.

Echoing concerns explored in Colchester's anthology, *Wedding Dress across Cultures* provides a critical examination of the effects of grand-scale processes (i.e., colonization, urbanization, and globalization) on "traditional" ritual dress. Foster and Johnson argue that wedding garments constantly evolve in form and meaning, indicating that "tradition" is not a static body of customs and values. It "signals a notion of what the societal norms were at an earlier time and the use of the word represents the attempt to honor the spirit of those norms rather than a strict retention of the actual style of dress worn in the past" (p. 2). On the one hand, this definition of tradition is slightly romantic for traditions may be invented for other reasons, including obliterating from memory historical customs for the purposes of legitimizing power in the present. On the other hand, it gets at the heart of an important matter in anthropology; namely, "tradition" is culturally created by active human agents.

In comparison to *Clothing the Pacific*, the *Wedding Dress across Cultures* does not take as dynamic an approach to theorizing cultural appropriation. Dressed bodies are shown to respond to "external" processes by appropriating foreign cultural forms and by modifying local historical forms. Little attention is given to the role dress plays in creating new social contexts. Additionally, although the case studies successfully demonstrate the agency of dress practitioners and the flexibility of tradition, beyond this point they do not put forward a new theory about dress, tradition, or the nature of material culture. In this sense, the volume is thick in description and light on theory.

Another limitation is that the voices of the individuals engaging in wedding practices are infrequently incorporated within the case studies. Kathryn Church's analysis of women, dressmakers, and wedding gowns worn in rural Canada is without a doubt the strongest example of a suc-

cessful integration of voices, texts, and analysis. Church artfully brings together the views of her subjects in their own words, her own personal reflections, and a historically contextualized critical reading of wedding meanings and practices. Her article also reads with a smooth flow that keeps the reader engaged. Theory, ethnographic description, and personal anecdote are not as well integrated in other chapters.

Overall, the case studies in *Wedding Dress across Cultures* are written in clear and accessible prose. Although the volume is light on theory, the ethnographic descriptions are excellent and make the book a valuable contribution to the anthropology of dress.

Evidently, things, like human beings, are complex in nature and their relationship with society. Integrated perspectives illuminate just how complicated things are by highlighting the significance of their materiality, the role of gender in materialization, and the power of "passive" and "active" approaches for understanding their dynamics. Considering material objects from a variety of distinct but complementary angles is a useful method for examining things. It is also one that relies on the continuous development of individual disciplinary concepts and methodologies. Interdisciplinary approaches deepen an understanding of the ways lives are lived through material objects, whereas diversely composed anthologies about objects promote a healthy appreciation for the boundaries between disciplines and for the strengths and limitations of particular systems of inquiry.

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People Out of Place: Unquiet Immigrants

Legalizing Moves: Salvadoran Immigrants' Struggle for U.S. Residency. Susan Bibler Coutin. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003. 228 pp.

The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South. Leon Fink. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. 254 pp.

The Children of NAFTA: Labor Wars on the U.S./Mexico Border. David Bacon. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. 348 pp.

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In the jargon of the academy, I am tempted to describe these three books as studies of transnational communities, except that *community* seems too pleasant a word for the human sacrifices resulting from displacement and migration. However, these accounts do show new solidarities being forged as Latin American migrants attempt to reconstruct their lives, work, and citizenship while contending with the aftermath of civil violence at home and the ongoing neoliberal economic upheavals of globalizing capitalism.

The Maya of Morganton, studied by labor historian Leon Fink, actually provides us with a kind of morality tale of reconstructed community. Fink uses oral histories to tell an atypical but fascinating story of Guatemalan immigrants who not only rebuilt community ties in a foreign land but also, against the odds, mounted an organized resistance to abusive working conditions in western North Carolina, a state in which union has long been a dirty word.

It was the labor struggle that drew Fink to Morganton, North Carolina, where a group of displaced Mayans who had fled violence in the Guatemalan Highlands faced off against Case Farms, a poultry processor, in the mid-1990s. In many ways this is a cautionary tale—for despite successful worker actions, and help from the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA), the organized workers gained few concessions from an intransigent management. But it is also a story of the often overlooked role that community can play in labor solidarity, for the close-knit Mayans had already organized the workforce and staged a large walkout when astonished LIUNA organizers arrived on the scene in May 1995.

Although a relatively small corporate player, Case Farms had moved quickly to emulate giant companies like Tyson Farms and Perdue, which were vertically integrating the chicken industry—consolidating all aspects of the business from raising the breeders to packing cuts of meat. Case Farms had seen a rapid 40 percent expansion in the late 1980s under conditions of strong competition. The plant's new owner, Tom Shelton, saw speed of production as critical to the company's profit margins. He saw the challenge of an efficient processing factory "strictly as a technical issue," according to colleagues (p. 14).

Confronted with a labor shortage in 1989, when demand for chicken was at an all time high, Case Farms recruited a handful of Mayan men in Indiantown, Florida. Finding the Guatemalans to be hard workers who did not complain about required overtime (as had local African Americans) or quit to go home for Christmas (as did Mexicans), Shelton recruited more, and then family networks took over bringing a steady flow to this quiet town in the Appalachian foothills. Conveniently, Guatemalans, unlike Mexicans, enjoyed "temporary protected status" at the INS during most of the 1990s.

Even under the best of conditions, however, chicken plant working conditions are a "demanding and unpleasant routine," Fink reported (p. 27). Workers wield knives and saws on a rapid processing line, and at Case Farms, job rotation was rare, putting workers at high risk for repetitive

motion disorders. The Guatemalans complained that foremen harassed them with arbitrary rules, such as restricting bathroom breaks. [AQ1]

The first walkout in 1991—over a shift change that created a speed up for the cleaning crews—caught the company by surprise. Managers made amends, but not before some workers had left town. Problems continued, and more walkouts followed over various grievances including high line speed and low pay. The large strike in 1995 followed the firing of three workers who stopped work over a denied bathroom break.

An energetic Salvadoran organizer for LIUNA gained the confidence of the Mayan workers, allowing the union, which had little experience with food processing, to win an election to represent the Mayan workers. Flush from a successful organizing drive at a Mississippi poultry plant, the Morganton situation presented LIUNA with an opportunity to showcase new strategies being pioneered under new AFL-CIO president John Sweeney to organize rapidly growing low wage workplaces dependent on immigrant labor.

Fink compiled detailed histories of the Mayan leaders, including visits to their home villages in Huehuetenango, to better understand how former political experience in Guatemala had shaped their activism. The men who led the initial 1991 walkout were Q'anjob'al speakers from remote highland towns, which were especially hard hit by government military repression in the early 1980s. They had been among the earliest refugees who fled the country. Fink concluded that they had most likely been briefly involved with guerrilla groups, although they themselves offered conflicting accounts that tended to veil their political agency, not unlike other Mayans who survived the repression (Warren 1998) (p. 47).

In contrast, Fink learned that the leaders who organized the far larger 1995 strike and later led the local, came not from the rural, fiercely independent Q'anjob'al, but, instead, from the urbanized township of Aguacatán. More educated and politically experienced, these men and their families left Guatemala, not because of violence so much as because of unmet economic needs after their local farms had been undermined by foreign food imports. Their education and Spanish-speaking ability positioned them as natural leaders in a population in which the majority spoke only indigenous languages.

Fink traced the Mayans' discourse about worker rights to Guatemalan labor courts dating to that country's 1944 social democratic reforms. But, more important than ideology, he found, was a strong sense of community exemplified by the Aguacatecos' experience in community *directivas* (leadership committees). The leaders had drawn on this influence to organize a burial society in Morganton, which raised funds to send dead family members back to Guatemala for burial. This pragmatic collaboration helped forge the solidarity that made the labor struggle possible.

The workers found allies among NGOs and a local Catholic parish, but little support from the town's

Protestant churches. Case Farms appealed the election results to the National Labor Relations Board, in a drawn-out process that, by the 1990s, typified company responses to union drives. In 1998 the board finally ruled against the company, ordering the owners to negotiate in “good faith,” but this devolved into another year of stalling tactics and insulting offers from Case Farms (e.g., a 15-cent wage increase). Despite enthusiastic (and expensive) efforts by LIUNA, the company’s tactics of dragging out the process was dispiriting to workers. As the book went to press, contract talks remained stalled, and solidarity was flagging among workers.

Although a compelling tale, this book is slow going at times, because of Fink’s diligence in recounting detailed personal histories of organizers and their allies, which often seem tedious and rob the book of the flow and sense of drama that the story deserves. This focus on detail, quite common in historical accounts, ironically also stifles the sense of character development and voice that ethnographers value so much. A timeline of events in the front of the book would also be helpful, because chapter themes do not coincide with the chronology of the labor struggle, and the reader is forced to reconstruct events from partial accounts.

Fink titles chapter 2 in his book “The Flight of the Happy Farmers,” an allusion to the ways that refugees, often advised by legal advocates, reconstructed themselves as apolitical victims of violence and hence deserving of political asylum. In Susan Coutin’s ethnography *Legalizing Moves*, readers gain insights into why refugees are compelled to reconstruct their pasts. Coutin, who studied Salvadoran immigrants’ efforts to negotiate legal status in the United States, adopts a “social constructionist” approach to immigration law, which looks at how laws “produce” social categories, such as citizens, illegal immigrants, practices, and even the state itself (p. 10).

Following the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), life became harder for Salvadorans as employers began asking for green cards before hiring immigrants. Then in 1990 and 1991, many Salvadorans became eligible for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) while their applications for political asylum were pending (p. 16). But achieving this status and seeking asylum required immigrants to negotiate a maze of paperwork and years of legal advocacy and hearings.

Coutin’s multisite ethnography follows the legal process rather than individual immigrants. With the collaboration of NGOs that provided legal advocacy for Salvadorans, she sat in on interviews with immigrant clients and the preparation of their legal cases and attended courtroom immigration hearings.

She argues that immigration law “produces and erases persons,” given that so many aspects of identity, rights, and personhood assumes an a priori legal status. From holding a job to driving a car or renting an apartment, she argues, these “spaces of nonexistence are largely loci of repression” and lead to real material effects such as hunger, unemploy-

ment, and even death (pp. 28–29). The irony is that Salvadorans who fled violence at home to come here experience “merely the latest in a series of violent erasure of personhood” (p. 35), which often began with going underground (“social erasure”) in El Salvador to avoid right wing death squads.

Coutin is careful to distinguish immigrants’ agency from resistance (p. 12), noting that immigrants often deal with their illegal status by finding ways to manipulate the system. Those practices often stem from irrationalities in immigration law. For example, clandestine status almost requires people to take part in illegal economies, yet immigrants must portray themselves as law-abiding citizens to obtain asylum.

Many irrationalities stem from tensions in U.S. society that shape immigration law—the demand of business for cheap labor runs up against the resentment of American workers facing a loss of jobs. Political conservatives seek to militarize the border, whereas advocates for civil liberties seek more humane policies. The result is a hodgepodge of legalese that both disciplines and enables immigrant lives.

Confused by the morass of legal statuses and rigid paperwork requirements, new immigrants often fall victim to notary publics posing as attorneys who offer to *arreglar papeles* (prepare legal documents) for a price. The documents they end up with are *chuecos* (false) but nevertheless accepted by many employers seeking unskilled labor (p. 53). Some employers even assist workers in arranging false documents. The federal government implicitly sanctions such practices by failing to prosecute employers. Coutin observes that this notion that a status inheres in papers, rather than a person, exposes the law’s “mythic character” and, hence, the implicit social contracts on which legalities depend (p. 55).

In chapter 4, Coutin examines how advocates construct a case, beginning with a “diagnosis” of eligibility: Was the client a political refugee (or an economic one)? Can her or his story be documented? Is the client credible (a criterion that may hinge on subjective judgments of emotional displays)? Will the case set an important legal precedent?

Legal advocates shape their clients’ stories to fit an officially acceptable prototype. For example, a narrative should have a logical chronology that shows why their client was uniquely picked out for persecution, or why they are especially deserving of asylum (p. 98). But the official U.S. template for political asylum ignores the untidy political realities of state terror (e.g., categories of people being targeted does not compute). Nor do agents of terror always act in ways that U.S. judges see as logical (in fact, terror is often arbitrary by design).

Chapter 5 is based in the courtroom where judges interrogate clients whose explanations fail to fit into neat black and white categories; complex motives are not legitimate. In a further Catch-22, criteria for a client to “deserve” citizenship entails demonstrating things like continuous U.S. residency, a law-abiding past, a productive work history, or family ties in the United States—in short, many of the

same activities that are made difficult by illegal status. But the court places blame for irregularities on the character of the individual, rather than on the structures that create marginalization, or the social positioning of the client (p. 130).

Unfortunately, the novice reader must reach chapters 6 and 7 in Coutin's book to find what should be introductory material, including the following: an ethnographic case study (the book would be a far more interesting read with more of these); histories of repression in El Salvador and United States's intervention in the civil war; and the role of the Cold War in shaping political refugee status, that is, dissidents fleeing communism qualify, dissidents fleeing authoritarian regimes do not.

Coutin shoehorns the politics of class and race into a short conclusion that deserves more space. Here she briefly discusses the volatile politics of Proposition 187 in California, in which conservative constituencies have marginalized immigrants. Laws like this do little justice to the moral argument that the United States, because of its history of supporting repressive Salvadoran leaders, has an obligation to those who fled that government's political persecution.

An angle that Coutin leaves unexplored is the degree to which immigrants have become critical to El Salvador's economic stability. With a quarter of Salvadorans residing in the United States, and cash remittances making up 14 percent of the country's GDP (Creelman 2003), this has led to entreaties from the Salvadoran president for cooperation and resulted in a tacit policy by the Bush administration not to pursue large-scale deportation of Salvadoran immigrants, even as their status remains legally betwixt and between.

This sense of a people without a country, oddly enough, also describes the world in which Mexicans living near the border found themselves in the aftermath of the passage of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement. David Bacon's *The Children of NAFTA* is an account of the ongoing efforts by workers in the borderlands to resist the oppressive conditions the pact has helped create. This lucid and jargon-free account of post-NAFTA struggles benefits from Bacon's two decades of experience in organizing immigrant workplaces, followed by a journalism career in which he produced a radio show on labor and globalization. Interviews for several chapters in the book originated with this reporting, which transports the reader into plants and onto the picket lines for a firsthand look at the transformations that free trade has wrought in borderlands like Tijuana and Mexicali.

The book opens with a quick overview of the rise and decline of the United Farmworkers Union in California from the 1960s–80s, as seen through the eyes of a farmworker family. Bacon then documents the recent rise of child labor in Baja, California, as U.S. and Mexican growers took advantage of NAFTA's investment incentives, forming joint ventures to grow green onions south of the border in a formerly arid valley.

Chapter two provides a helpful history of Mexico's economic crisis and the passage of NAFTA, and documents how the pact has greased the wheels of multinational companies investing in cross-border operations at the expense of citizen and worker rights. In a later chapter, Bacon provides a valuable overview of the decade of struggles that have ensued in Mexico over privatization, with cases from multiple sectors including agriculture, mining, buses, and ports. It is striking to learn the degree to which Mexico's national budget now relies on the maquiladora industry, which employs one in ten Mexicans, and is second only to oil as a source of foreign revenue (p. 107).

The book traces labor battles fueled by the explosive growth of the maquiladora industry in Tijuana as U.S. companies fled the American heartland to take advantage of NAFTA-related savings, such as tenfold reductions in wage costs. Both governments' fervor to foster cross-border industrialization triggered massive downward pressure on wages, civil rights abuses, violations of worker safety standards, and environmental laws. Bacon takes readers into tiny cardboard houses erected on eroded hillsides near the plants where migrant families, having given up farming as Mexico phased out protections for the *ejido* (cooperative farm), now alternate sleeping shifts and piece together \$6-per-day salaries in an effort to keep tortillas and beans on the table.

In an account of the Han Young strike at a Korean-owned car assembly plant, Bacon shows how the company and local authorities manipulated workers who exposed health and safety violations at the plant. Management of the factory, which built Hyundai truck chassis, found a reliable ally in Mexico's officially sanctioned but corrupt union bureaucracy. Despite some reforms, Mexico's company-controlled unions still have worker reps paid by management, and few hold democratic elections or negotiate bargaining agreements. At Han Young, the company union, backed by Tijuana SWAT teams, resorted to violence and fraud to thwart worker-organizing efforts.

Bacon shows how organizers learned bitter lessons about the empty rhetoric of NAFTA's labor side agreement, which proved toothless, because of lack of enforcement. Ironically, however, through challenging the Clinton administration to live up to the promise of the side agreement, Bacon notes that the Han Young strikers and their supporters helped to block the president's Congressional struggle for fast-track trade negotiating authority.

A key theme for Bacon is the important role of cross-border worker solidarity in bringing workers from the two countries together to resist the corporate and nationalist forces that colluded in the neoliberal juggernaut. The credit belongs to community groups, churches, and a few internationalist-oriented American unions. This solidarity, however fragile and thin, has had long-reaching effects— influencing national politics and transforming the trade union movement on both sides of the border, according to Bacon.

To illustrate this, the author follows immigrants deep into the heartland of both countries. At a ConAgra plant

in Nebraska, he traces a difficult but successful immigrant-dominated union drive in the meatpacking industry following two decades of union busting, wage cuts, and deskilling. Bacon argues that successes of this type are transforming American labor, and that the AFL-CIO is beginning to distance itself from the anti-immigrant and racist positions of the Cold War era.

AQ1 In Mexico readers follow immigrant labor organizer Tony Castillo home to Michoacán, the birthplace of the country's famous land reform. He works with the PRD, the country's leftwing opposition party, prior to the pivotal 2000 elections, to undermine the ruling PRI party's long-standing stranglehold on power. Bacon shows the important role that disenfranchised maquiladora workers played in the rise of the PRD's political fortunes, including winning the mayoralty of Mexico City in the mid-1990s.

Bacon succeeds in striking a nice balance between ethnographic detail and a clear historical analysis of organized labor. Scholars, however, will be disappointed by the absence of complete citations for economic studies that Bacon draws on in painting the socioeconomic realities faced by workers; however, he does list key NGOs doing research on cross-border issues, and the index is cross-referenced.

Some accounts require a close reading to follow the strategic play-by-play, but Bacon succeeds in avoiding the arcane alphabet soup that plagues so many accounts of Mexican politics. The book will be a welcome addition to university courses on contemporary Mexico, Latino community building, or neoliberal globalization. Undergradu-

ate readers will find that accounts of working conditions, and the sheer audacity of company and state tactics to thwart organizing, make for convincing reading.

Bacon's account of Mexican workers in the lawless borderlands, like the Salvadoran immigrants Coutin studies, and Fink's Mayan poultry workers, are examples of displaced people forced to reconstruct social contracts in interstitial spaces created by trade agreements and neoliberal economies in nation-states that are increasingly beholden to corporate interests.

The contradictions revealed in these accounts shed light on the ways that contemporary states attempt to define and redefine citizenship, weighing responsibilities to some polities vis-à-vis others. As Coutin notes, immigration law shores up the "reality" of states—and to the degree that the law "shimmers," so, too, does the solidity of the state (p. 174). The emerging transnational communities being forged in these conflicts are slowly but steadily redefining North American political and economic realities. At present they only "shimmer," but the outlines of Fink's "nuevo" New South are increasingly becoming visible to us all.

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Author Queries

Title: Book Reviews

AQ1: Au: Are these always men?

AQ2: Au: Please provide the full name of PRD.