CONTENTS

ix **Editor's Remarks** *Teasing Out the Richly Embedded Nuance*

REVIEW ESSAYS

Author | Title | Reviewer

Water, Climate, and Society

393 **James Lawrence Powell** *Dead Pool: Lake Powell, Global Warming, and the Future of Water in the West* **John Walton**
John M. Whiteley, Helen Ingram, and **Richard Warren Perry** (eds) *Water, Place, and Equity*

Brave New Worlds

396 **William I. Robinson** *Latin America and Global Capitalism: A Critical Globalization Perspective* **Juan E. Corradi**

REVIEWS

Culture

399 **Michael Bull** *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* **J. Zach Schiller**
400 **Robert G. Dunn** *Identifying Consumption: Subjects and Objects in Consumer Society* **Joseph D. Rumbo**
402 **Juan Flores** *The Diaspora Strikes Back: Caribeño Tales of Learning and Turning* **Vilna Bashi Treitler**
403 **Wendy Griswold** *Regionalism and the Reading Class* **Laura J. Miller**
404 **David Hesmondhalgh** and **Jason Toynbee,** eds. *The Media and Social Theory* **Jefferson D. Pooley**
406 **Shalini Shankar** *Desi Land: Teen Culture, Class, and Success in Silicon Valley* **Sunaina Maira**
407 **Nico Stehr** *Moral Markets: How Knowledge and Affluence Change Consumers and Products* **Daniel Breslau**
409 **Jinqiu Zhao** *The Internet and Rural Development in China: The Socio-Structural Paradigm* **Guobin Yang**

Demography

410 **Cynthia J. Buckley** and **Blair A. Ruble,** with **Erin Trouth Hofmann,** eds. *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia* **Karen Muth** and **Georgi Derlugian**

	Author	Title	Reviewer
412	**David Fitzgerald**	*A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages its Migration*	**Ernesto Castañeda**
413	**Rubén Hernández-León**	*Metropolitan Migrants: The Migration of Urban Mexicans to the United States*	**Nancy A. Denton**
415	**Douglas S. Massey,** ed.	*New Faces in New Places: The Changing Geography of American Immigration*	**Philip Kasinitz**

Deviance and Control

416	**Ari Adut**	*On Scandal: Moral Disturbances in Society, Politics, and Art*	**Howard S. Becker**
417	**Randall Amster**	*Lost in Space: The Criminalization, Globalization, and Urban Ecology of Homelessness*	**Teresa Gowan**
419	**Colin J. Bennett** and **David Lyon,** eds.	*Playing the Identity Card: Surveillance, Security and Identification in Global Perspective*	**William G. Staples**
420	**Scott H. Decker** and **Margaret Townsend Chapman**	*Drug Smugglers on Drug Smuggling: Lessons from the Inside*	**Alice Cepeda**
422	**Benjamin Fleury-Steiner,** with **Carla Crowder**	*Dying Inside: The HIV/AIDS Ward at Limestone Prison*	**Shari L. Dworkin**
423	**Lisa L. Miller**	*The Perils of Federalism: Race, Poverty, and the Politics of Crime Control*	**Joachim J. Savelsberg**
424	**Karen F. Parker**	*Unequal Crime Decline: Theorizing Race, Urban Inequality, and Criminal Violence*	**Lesley Williams Reid**

Ethnicity

425	**Heather Jacobson**	*Culture Keeping: White Mothers, International Adoption, and the Negotiation of Family Difference*	**Cardell Jacobson**
427	**Philip Kasinitz, John H. Mollenkopf, Mary C. Waters** and **Jennifer Holdaway**	*Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age*	**Dina Okamoto** and **Kimberly Ebert**
428	**Nadia Y. Kim**	*Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA*	**Jennifer Lee** and **James A. Bany**
429	**Michal Krzyzanowski** and **Ruth Wodak**	*The Politics of Exclusion: Debating Migration in Austria*	**Gregory D. Squires**
431	**Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema,** and **Mark J. Goodman**	*Diaspora by Design: Muslim Immigrants in Canada and Beyond*	**Morton Weinfeld**

	Author	Title	Reviewer
Health			
432	**David Baronov**	*The African Transformation of Western Medicine and the Dynamics of Global Cultural Exchange*	**Susan Cotts Watkins**
433	**Wendy Chapkis** and **Richard J. Webb**	*Dying to Get High: Marijuana as Medicine*	**Bernard H. Ellis**
435	**Jill A. Fisher**	*Medical Research for Hire: The Political Economy of Pharmaceutical Clinical Trials*	**Mary Ruggie**
436	**Jonathan B. Imber**	*Trusting Doctors: The Decline of Moral Authority in American Medicine*	**Carol A. Heimer**
Politics			
437	**Kevin Bales** and **Zoe Trodd**, eds.	*To Plead Our Own Cause: Personal Stories by Today's Slaves*	**Elizabeth Bernstein**
439	**Herbert J. Gans**	*Imagining America in 2033: How the Country Put Itself Together after Bush*	**Joseph Gerteis**
441	**Amin Ghaziani**	*The Dividends of Dissent: How Conflict and Culture Work in Lesbian and Gay Marches on Washington*	**Clark McPhail**
442	**Susan Greenhalgh**	*Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China*	**Vanessa L. Fong**
444	**Irving Louis Horowitz**	*The Long Night of Dark Intent: A Half Century of Cuban Communism*	**Joshua H. Nadel**
445	**Anna Kirkland**	*Fat Rights: Dilemmas of Difference and Personhood*	**Abigail C. Saguy**
446	**Thomas Lines**	*Making Poverty: A History*	**A. Fiona Pearson**
447	**Peter Alexander Meyers**	*Civic War and the Corruption of the Citizen*	**Guy Oakes**
449	**David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule,** and **Hanspeter Kriesi**, eds.	*The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements*	**Mary Bernstein**
450	**Lynn A. Staeheli** and **Don Mitchell**	*The People's Property? Power, Politics, and the Public*	**Indermohan Virk**
452	**Nico Stehr**, ed.	*Knowledge and Democracy: A 21st Century Perspective*	**Mark B. Brown**
453	**Sultan Tepe**	*Beyond Sacred and Secular: Politics or Religion in Israel and Turkey*	**Mansoor Moaddel**
455	**Aristide R. Zolberg**	*How Many Exceptionalisms? Explorations in Comparative Macroanalysis*	**Dongxiao Liu**
Sexuality, Gender, and Social Psychology			
456	**Noreen Abdullah-Khan**	*Male Rape: The Emergence of a Social and Legal Issue*	**Drew Humphries**
457	**Steven K. Baum**	*The Psychology of Genocide: Perpetrators, Bystanders, and Rescuers*	**David Smith**
458	**Lori B. Girshick**	*Transgender Voices: Beyond Women and Men*	**Tracy E. Ore**
459	**Jackie Hogan**	*Gender, Race and National Identity: Nations of Flesh and Blood*	**Abby L. Ferber**

Stratification

	Author	Title	Reviewer
461	**Duncan Lindsey**	*Child Poverty and Inequality: Securing a Better Future for America's Children*	**John Iceland**
462	**Beth Frankel Merenstein**	*Immigrants and Modern Racism: Reproducing Inequality*	**Norma Fuentes-Mayorga**

Theory and Methods

	Author	Title	Reviewer
463	**Pierre Bourdieu,** translated by **Richard Nice**	*Sketch for a Self-Analysis*	**Georgi Derluguian** and **Karen Muth**
465	**Reuven Brenner, Gabrielle A. Brenner** and **Aaron Brown**	*A World of Chance: Betting on Religion, Games, Wall Street*	**Richard Swedberg**
467	**David Chalcraft, Fanon Howell, Marisol Lopez Menendez** and **Hector Vera,** eds.	*Max Weber Matters: Interweaving Past and Present*	**Lawrence A. Scaff**
468	**Mark Davis**	*Freedom and Consumerism: A Critique of Zygmunt Bauman's Sociology*	**Eugene Halton**
469	**Eugene Halton**	*The Great Brain Suck: And Other American Epiphanies*	**Monte Bute**
471	**Eric Livingston**	*Ethnographies of Reason*	**Gil Eyal**

Urban and Communities

	Author	Title	Reviewer
472	**Jon Shefner**	*The Illusion of Civil Society: Democratization and Community Mobilization in Low-Income Mexico*	**Ebenezer Obadare**

Work and Organizations

	Author	Title	Reviewer
473	**Michel Anteby**	*Moral Gray Zones: Side Productions, Identity and Regulation in an Aeronautic Plant*	**David Shulman**
475	**Robert Dingwall**	*Essays on Professions*	**Steven P. Vallas**
476	**Martin Kilduff** and **David Krackhardt**	*Interpersonal Networks in Organizations: Cognition, Personality, Dynamics, and Culture*	**Matthew E. Archibald**
477	**Michael Musheno** and **Susan M. Ross,**	*Deployed: How Reservists Bear the Burden of Iraq*	**David Rohall**
478	**Mangai Natarajan**	*Women Police in a Changing Society: Back Door to Equality*	**Nancy C. Jurik**
480	**Kenneth A. Root** and **Rosemarie J. Park**	*Forced Out: Older Workers Confront Job Loss*	**Corey M. Abramson**
481	**Malcolm K. Sparrow**	*The Character of Harms: Operational Challenges in Control*	**Mathieu Deflem**

Briefly Noted

	Author	Title
483	**Yangbin Chen**	*Muslim Uyghur Students in a Chinese Boarding School: Social Recapitalization as a Response to Ethnic Integration*
483	**Adele E. Clarke**	*Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn*
483	**Rachel Condry**	*Families Shamed: The Consequences of Crime for Relatives of Serious Offenders*
484	**Jo Freeman**	*We Will Be Heard: Women's Struggles for Political Power in the United States*
484	**M. Paz Galupo,** ed.	*Bisexuality and Same-Sex Marriage*
485	**Andrew Grant-Thomas** and **Gary Orfield,** eds.	*Twenty-First Century Color Lines: Multiracial Change in Contemporary America*
485	**David Gudelunas**	*Confidential to America: Newspaper Advice Columns and Sexual Education*
486	**Paul Iganski**	*'Hate Crime' and the City*
486	**Nicola F. Johnson**	*The Multiplicities of Internet Addiction: The Misrecognition of Leisure and Learning*
487	**Richard L. Legault**	*Trends in American Gun Ownership*
487	**Glenn C. Loury,** with **Pamela S. Karlan, Tommie Shelby,** and **Loïc Wacquant**	*Race, Incarceration, and American Values*
488	**Michael J. Lynch, E. Britt Patterson,** and **Kristina K. Childs,** eds.	*Racial Divide: Racial and Ethnic Bias in the Criminal Justice System*
488	**Roger Neustadter**	*The Obvious Child: Studies in the Significance of Childhood*
489	**Stella R. Quah,** ed.	*Crisis Preparedness: Asia and the Global Governance of Epidemics*
489	**Uri Ram**	*The Globalization of Israel: McWorld in Tel Aviv, Jihad in Jerusalem*
489	**Robert Redfield,** edited by **Clifford Wilcox**	*Social Anthropology*
490	**Kimberly D. Richman**	*Courting Change: Queer Parents, Judges, and the Transformation of American Family Law*
490	**Hartmut Rosa** and **William E. Scheuerman,** eds.	*High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity*
491	**Barry Schwartz**	*Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in Late Twentieth-Century America*
491	**Joseph M. Schwartz**	*The Future of Democratic Equality: Rebuilding Social Solidarity in a Fragmented America*
492	**Jacqueline Scott, Shirely Dex,** and **Heather Joshi,** eds.	*Women and Employment: Changing Lives and New Challenges*
492	**Jared Sexton**	*Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*

	Author	Title
493	**Gill Seyfang**	*The New Economics of Sustainable Consumption: Seeds of Change*
493	**Kate Soper, Martin Ryle** and **Lyn Thomas,** eds.	*The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*
494	**Samuel Totten**	*Plight and Fate of Women During and Following Genocide*
494	**Max Weber,** translated and introduced by **Stephen Kalberg**	*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, with Other Writings on The Rise of the West*
495	**David Willer** and **Henry A. Walker**	*Building Experiments: Testing Social Theory*
495	**Kathleen Woodward**	*Statistical Panic: Cultural Politics and Poetics of the Emotions*
496	**Stephen T. Ziliak** and **Deirdre N. McCloskey**	*The Cult of Statistical Significance: How the Standard Error Costs Us Jobs, Justice, and Lives*

497 COMMENT AND REPLY

500 PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

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EDITOR'S REMARKS

TEASING OUT THE RICHLY EMBEDDED NUANCE

If one were altruistic enough to accept an offer from *CS* to review a book, one could indeed during the composition of said review "trouble the otherings," or "embed the nuanced intervention," or "grow the frame," or "deploy the borderings" or "privilege the transgressions." One could "parse out" or "tease out" or "practice framing" or "interrogate rich knowledges," or "question binaries." But one need not; one could simply write English.

About twenty years ago a fair number of English professors across America, especially younger ones, became weary of trying to persuade their charges that Chaucer, Milton, Spenser, and that lot were worth reading, so to guarantee and vastly enhance their sinecures, they happily discovered Social Theory of certain types. They did not get there by way of Tönnies or Parsons or Sorokin, but by means of watered-down Marx via second-hand Gramsci, or by studying Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in the English translation as if it had Biblical meaning. And, of course, they fell hard for some Foucault. They discovered that "knowledge is power" and that "homocentric epistemology" is a serious mistake, not to mention "the essentialist fallacy." Thus the officially designated Guardians of Prose Style abdicated their roles, fell into a protracted orgy of incomprehensible and self-absorbed exposition, and set the pace for others in the academy to follow. So just as Lionel Trilling and others during the 1950s found it easy to caricature sociologists for propagating numbing jargon, today's critics (especially from the Right) have enjoyed quoting current academicese, prompting gales of knowing laughter from their audiences, whose low opinion of intellectuals is confirmed by jargon-fests masquerading as "new ideas."

As I read reviews submitted to *CS*—and I am forever grateful and truly appreciative for the effort that goes into writing a good review—I and my copyeditor see the same phrases—stock academic expressions—popping up again and again. I wonder if the copyeditors at *The New Yorker* have the same problem, for if they do, it does not show. If an issue of *CS* contains 50 to 60 reviews, and 30 of them observe that a book is "finely nuanced" or "theoretically embedded" or "richly drawn," one begins to wonder at the uniformity of consciousness that must ensnare reviewers, or, perhaps even more startling, the similarity of substance that must saturate today's monographs. As in music, a phrase is most welcome when first heard, but after the tenth repetition, its magic is lost.

Taking a tip from Hemingway, I encourage all reviewers to reread Sam Clemens at least once a year, or any of Edmund Wilson's hundreds of reviews, in order to remind themselves what clearly expressed, intelligent, and pertinent English prose can accomplish when handled well. Notice the effectiveness of this sentence: "If. . .we are going to use history for our own pleasure and amusement, for inflating our national ego, and giving us a false but pleasurable sense of accomplishment, then we must give up the idea of history either as a science or as an art using the results of science, and admit frankly that we are using a version of historic fact in order to influence and educate the new generation along the way we wish" (Du Bois, "The Propaganda of History," 1935). Or consider this: "To read George Eliot attentively is to become aware how little one knows about her. It is also to become aware of the credulity, not very creditable to one's insight, with which, half consciously and partly maliciously, one had accepted the late Victorian version of a deluded woman, who held phantom sway over subjects even more deluded than herself" (Virginia Woolf, "George Eliot," 1925). Nothing in these passages indicates academic stretching or posturing; instead, these writers wanted mostly to communicate with smart readers across a broad spectrum of knowledge and sensibilities, without throwing needless barriers in their path. Their goal was to be understood clearly and to write interestingly. In addition to edifying reading, reminding us of what talented folks have done with English, it would be good to keep a handy list of all the current academic clichés near one's workdesk (beside the inkwell perhaps), and then vigorously struggle to avoid using any of them, at least when writing for *CS*. One way or another, it will be grand to see that they are not appearing in the journal, diluting what would otherwise be delightful reading.

The Problem of Categorizing Books for Review

Myra Marx Ferree, Judith Lorber, and Barbara Risman each recently wrote to ask why "sexuality and gender" had been "dropped," so they thought, from the categories displayed in the journal's Table of Contents. In fact, the immediately preceding editors did not use these terms; many such books fell instead into their "intimate relations, family, and life course" category. The last time "sexuality and gender" appeared in so many words in a *CS* ToC was during the editorship of Ida Harper Simpson, in 1991, with a category entitled "Differentiation and Stratification: Age Groups, Class, Gender, Race, and Ethnic Groups"; "gender" appeared in a category of its own under the same editor in 1987, and not since.

I explained to them that "sexuality and gender" are pervasive in most of the books we receive for review, which illustrates the broad success of scholarship in this area. However, the category has been reinstated as of this issue precisely to recognize its ubiquitous importance. For technical reasons having to do with expensive software created a few years ago exclusively for *CS*, we have joined "sexuality and gender" with "social psychology." This is indeed intellectually defensible, but reflects more the constraints of an inflexible computer program than a scholarly choice.

REVIEW ESSAYS

Water, Climate, and Society

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Dead Pool: Lake Powell, Global Warming, and the Future of Water in the West, by **James Lawrence Powell.** Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008. 283pp. $27.50 cloth. ISBN: 9780520254770.

Water, Place, and Equity, edited by **John M. Whiteley, Helen Ingram,** and **Richard Warren Perry.** Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008. 318pp. $25.00 paper. ISBN: 9780262731911.

Water, for drinking, bathing, sanitation, agriculture, industry, and habitat preservation, is a necessity of life. Among the many ramifications of climate change, the form, content, and distribution of the earth's water are changing in ways that fundamentally affect society and the environment. Social scientists in growing numbers are turning to problems of climate change and society: from drought, famine, and flooding to rising sea levels and wholesale migrations.

There is no more nor less water on the planet today than there was at the time of Noah's flood. The water cycle assures that the molecule moves from solid to liquid to gas through transpiration, evaporation, and precipitation, but never increases. Seventy-one percent of the earth's surface is ocean and the oceans contain ninety-seven percent of the world's water. With two percent stored in glaciers and ice caps, less than one percent of the world's water remains in lakes, rivers, springs, and aquifers for potential human use (excluding prospective desalination, of which more below). That one percent sufficed for the needs of most societies when the world's population stood at one or two or three billion but becomes exiguous as we reach seven billion in the next few years. The U. N. reports that half the world's population is without ready access to adequate water for drinking and sanitation. And, of course, access is unequal internationally: per capita daily consumption for all uses is 12 gallons in Africa, 22 gallons in Asia, 88 gallons in the United Kingdom and 153 gallons in the United States. Yet growing scarcity is predicted for all regions of the world, a looming "water crisis" according to the U.N.

Archaeological evidence shows that societies have previously experienced drastic effects of climate change. Ancient cities and canal systems have gone to dust. Once fertile irrigation societies in Mesopotamia and Central Arizona succumbed to growing accumulations of salt and silt. The spectacular Chaco Canyon civilization in New Mexico abandoned its hub and satellite cities when the waters stopped flowing—a fate duplicated in the great Mayan droughts. Today the African Sahel, a strip of land 4400 miles long and 500 miles wide from Sudan to Senegal, has been migrating south bringing the Saharan climate to once habitable land. The Colorado plateau is presently experiencing a decade-long drought (2005 was exceptionally wet followed by a return to the driest months on record in early 2009) that threatens the delivery of water and power from the Hoover and Glen Canyon dams that sustain southern California, Phoenix, Las Vegas, and a host of other southwestern communities. Will the contemporary water crisis bring the kind of societal ruin documented in the historical record or will some combination of environmental policy and equitable resource allocation make it possible for all societies to live within nature's providence? That is the question underpinning the works reviewed here.

Dead Pool, the main title of James Lawrence Powell's compelling book, refers to the condition in which Lake Mead or Lake Powell may fall to levels of the lowest outlet works, meaning that the Hoover and Glen Canyon dams no longer produce hydroelectric power and their storage reservoirs are reduced to a meager through-flow. It is an even chance that deal pool will be reached by 2021 and the odds rise for subsequent years. These estimates are based on current volumes of Colorado River flow, yet climate science predicts warmer temperatures for the region resulting in a reduced snowpack to feed the river, early melting and more evaporation—"a recipe for depleted rivers and reservoirs" (p. 177). And growing scarcities of water and power coincide with greater demand from a warmer, dryer, air-conditioned, urban Southwest. Powell anticipates growing legal conflict among the states and water authorities that claim more water and power than the river can deliver, new water wars, and perhaps to a repetition of the choice of the ancients who abandoned their unsustainable settlements.

Powell's story of how we reached this looming crisis is told in an engaging narrative ranging from the early days of exploration of the Colorado River and Grand Canyon to the era of imperious dam building by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Reconstructed events stress the importance of bureaucratic cultures, political machinations oblivious to environmental limits, and the valiant efforts of conservationists who sought with mixed success to save the natural treasures of the west. Yet dams were built that destroyed canyon lands, never paid for themselves, overestimated the amount of water promised to beneficiaries, provided water at great public expense to marginal crop lands, sponsored unsustainable Las Vegas-style development, and all of that short-lived as silt accumulates behind the dams eventually rendering them ineffective and unsafe. The argument concedes that the dams were marvels of engineering and that Los Angeles, Phoenix, Tucson, Las Vegas, and all the rest provide salubrious life styles. The larger argument, however, is that expansionary hubris has met natural constraints — that the water crisis is here.

Forecasters, whether public officials, private developers, or scientists, are of two minds about the crisis. Either technology will save us or we will save ourselves by adopting fundamentally different ways of living with nature and our neighbors (a few worry we will do neither and many hope for both). Technologically, the substitution of wind, solar, nuclear, and geothermal power for hydroelectric (and coal) is advantageous, although some of these options require large quantities of water. Provision of fresh water is a tougher problem. Powell reviews a number of proposals. Reclamation of wastewater and storm runoff go part of the way toward sustaining current demand as traditional sources (including over-tapped aquifers) decline. Orange County, California runs a successful "toilet-to-tap" recycling program (via treatment and aquifer recharge). Optimists place heavy bets on the future of desalination plants, often located near the sea. But "desal" has not proven itself a ready solution. Effective plants turn out to be much more expensive than estimated, costs rise with the desired level of water quality, completion dates extend ever further into the future, several completed facilities (e.g. in Yuma, Arizona and Santa Barbara, California) have been closed owing to excessive costs. Plants located near the sea draw in fish larvae and expel overheated water and brine degrading the ocean. Plants distant from the sea require more power and transmission lines to move the heavy liquid and the energy required to operate any of these plants contributes to further global warming. Yet desal is continuously proposed as the solution to urban growth throughout the Southwest. Although the argument will go on, the most efficacious long-term solution lies in conservation by multiple means of reduced consumption and recycling. Big gains will have to come from agriculture where consumption exceeds industrial and domestic uses—drip irrigation, drought resistant hybrids, an end to publicly subsidized water and water intensive crops that can be produced elsewhere. Domestically, small-tank toilets, efficient showerheads, cistern and gray water use outdoors, and increased percolation surfaces for groundwater replenishment yield substantial economies. Chicago is turning alleyways into permeable surfaces by replacing pavement with a compound made from shredded plastic bottles.

Water, Place, and Equity is a collection of case studies of water management that focuses on distributional questions in a variety of places, often places whose identities are defined by their relation to water. The organizing theme is a "turn," empirically noted and normatively urged, in water resource management from efficiency to equity, from water as a commodity to water as a public good. The shift is not complete; efficiency has its virtues and equity of access to and the cost of water is seldom fully realized. The case studies intend to excavate this tension.

Several of the cases provide fertile comparisons among themselves and with other research. The San Luis Valley in south-central Colorado has been the scene of a successful water war in which local ranchers organized in communal irrigation associations (*acequias)* fought back repeated corporate attempts to privatize surface and groundwater for export to Colorado's growing "front range." Author Thomas Clay Arnold borrows (from E.P. Thompson) the idea of "moral economy" to characterize the way people think about water and the way they mobilize collective action for community survival. Madeline Baer describes how the natives of Cochambamba, Bolivia organized mass protests to defeat a World Bank project to privatize the city's municipal water system. Local mobilization, coupled, I suspect, with growing opposition throughout Latin America to neo-liberal reforms, convinced the Bolivian government to cancel the project. Paul Hirt's neat comparison of the environmentally unspoiled, fish-friendly Fraser River in Canada and the over-dammed, salmon-killing Columbia River in the Pacific Northwest provides a classic lesson in environmental policy. Yet this is mainly a fish story with limited connections to other chapters.

Ismael Vaccaro's chapter on modernization of the Lillet Valley of Catalonia and Maria Carmen Lemos's study of the Brazilian Northeast both demonstrate how the growing efficiency of regional water works introduce new inequalities, especially in the possession of technical knowledge about their operation. Margaret Wilder's piece on the institutional management of water systems in Mexico invites comparison with the studies of Bolivia, Spain, and Brazil as they all deal with potential means for citizen participation in the largess of public works. Stephen Mumme describes the trickle of Colorado River water that now reaches Mexico and the international treaties that destroyed the once luxuriant Colorado River Delta—a consequence fully developed in Powell's book. Sheldon Kamieniecki and Amy Below provide a description of how Los Angeles proposes to deal with prodigious amounts of contaminated storm-runoff water, an interesting problem with little relation to the rest of the collection.

The editors of *Water, Place, and Equity* write introductory and concluding chapters with impressive authority and persistent stress on equity in the provision of water for economic development, health, and local democracy. The case studies do not always dovetail, their implications going in many thematic directions (collective action, resource management, political domination, environmental policy). Each of the studies raises equity issues in a general way, although equity is a problem for any social undertaking and certainly for any class of public good whether a road, school, park, nuclear waste dump, or water system. One would hope for sharper generalizations from the cases and some framework for their selection. Yet, it is no doubt useful to stress the characteristic inequities of infrastructure projects to efficiency experts and international agencies that may be the volume's main audience. Their argument may be gaining influence, as the recent international conference in Copenhagen set the stage for a new version of the Kyoto Treaty by devoting a number of sessions to the question of equity.

Dead Pool and *Water, Place, and Equity* open up the immanent problem of climate change and society; such contributions to the field are increasing in tandem with the growing threat of climate change. Alongside the facts of global warming is a new literature on environmental action, societal collapse, drought, famine, rising seas and saltwater intrusion, energy futures, decimated fishing industries and communities, and perhaps millions of "climate-change refugees." There is much work for sociologists.

Brave New Worlds

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Latin America and Global Capitalism: A Critical Globalization Perspective, by **William I. Robinson.** Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. 412pp. $55.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780801890390.

This large volume is a welcome turn to the classic roots of political economy. "Globalization" here refers to the dynamics of late capitalism, an economic system that now covers the entire planet. "Critical" means that such system must be examined in terms of costs and benefits, potentiality and actuality.

The field of globalization studies is organized around a set of questions about late capitalism and its various articulations in different areas—in this case Latin America. The situation of the field was well-stated by Eric Hobsbawm, for whom the living dichotomy "capitalism/socialism" is over (Hobsbawm 2009). Moreover, the failure of socialism *preceded* the bankruptcy of capitalism. In fact, the socialist collapse may have precipitated the current capitalist crisis by launching an unopposed search for cheap labor, with the consequent migration of industry to hitherto out-of-bounds nations, and the overspecialization of former industrial countries in the service sector, including financial speculation and leveraged consumption. We are now witnessing the rebalancing of this unsustainable dynamic.

The situation presents a paradox for Marxists, for whom socialism will ultimately *succeed* capitalism. To this reviewer such an outcome seems unlikely. Not so to William Robinson, who hopes that the present crisis of world capitalism will usher in a new wave of revolutionary movements. In his view, this new "march towards socialism" is happening in various parts of Latin America and will become a source of international inspiration.

In the analysis of capitalist globalization and its crisis, interpretations from the right quadrant are lacking. Market fundamentalists have remained silent since the crisis started, with a few exceptions to be found in some newsletters circulated by investor gurus.

By and large, the economic establishment has moved to the left. The narrative is as follows: the crisis began in the American real estate market and it rapidly spread over the global financial system largely due to complex debt instruments that mixed good and bad assets and diluted financial responsibility. The system as a whole became opaque. The calculus of risk broke down.

The theoretical bases for this analysis can be found in the work of post-Keynesians for whom monetary systems tend towards financial instability, and produce speculative bubbles. The ensuing disorder requires the intervention of the public sector and the reform of financial institutions. In this view, financial crises are recurrent and severe but not terminal. Here the debate centers on the scope of public intervention. Regardless of disagreements as to procedures and velocities, most economists concur in recognizing a need for a massive state intervention to reactivate credit, production and demand.

Further to the left, critics seem to be more in disagreement among themselves than mainline analysts. Some of them come close to the Keynesian school of thought and point to the financialization of the economy as the main source of the crisis. Some go back to Marxist sources for the study of finance capital. Others follow the theses about "overproduction" and "under-consumption." The thesis of the "unmanageable surplus" was once popular in the United States in the radical 1960s. Likewise today, the great recession before us would be an expression of the "falling rate of profit."

Finally, postmodern theorists break the productivist mold of conventional analyses and point to what in economic parlance we may call the "internalization of externalities"—ranging from overpopulation to climate change—as the underlying force beneath the crisis. For them, capitalist society solves some of its problems at the cost of generating even bigger ones.

The geopolitical interpretations follow closely the theoretical positions. Some see new capitalist powers emerging to challenge older hegemons, with the ensuing risk of war. Others see instead a less traumatic "passing of the baton" from the West to the East. Others yet envisage new ruling alliances, such as a reformed G-20, a rising G-2, or an evolving "Chimerica." And there are those who sense the dawn of a world order in which a major shift will take place towards public action, prodded by a looming environmental catastrophe.

The calls for action are also varied. Some propose a radicalized set of Keynesian policies to tame capitalism. Others believe that socialism has found its second wind, and there are those who think modernity itself will be replaced by a different type of civilization.

Where does *Latin America and Global Capitalism* fit in this field of positions and proposals? In my view, somewhere between Marxism and post-modern anti-globalism as abridged above. In his interpretation of global capitalism, and in his treatment of Latin America the author tends to over-generalize. He gives short shrift to the *varieties* of capitalism—a subject with a rich scholarship. Likewise, he glosses over the striking *diversity* of national experiences, at a time when most experts refuse to define a single Latin American problematique, as was done earlier around concepts such as "development," "revolution," "dependency," "modernization," and "democratization." In both instances—globalization and Latin America—Robinson seems to uphold the notion that a single paradigm of causal relationships exists.

Prefatory disclaimers notwithstanding, Robinson is a resolute determinist. The concepts of expanded reproduction, commoditization, phases of accumulation, and stages of development are culled from standard Marxism. Robinson's contribution is to bring the analysis forward in time.

The grand narrative is familiar: capitalism is driven by underlying "laws of motion" which lead to periodic crises, at which points the ruling elites re-design the system for further bouts of growth. Robinson dwells on the last experiment in capitalist re-design, neo-liberalism, which he portrays in Spenglerian tones.

Here Marxist materialism lapses into idealism. Neo-liberalism becomes a *Zeitgeist* that wreaks havoc on the planet. With the exception of Cuba, all regimes in the region—military and civilian alike—were presumably streamlined to the requirements of transnational companies and elites.

The account is too much of a gloss. Robinson's methodological problem has been described as an "historical Doppler effect," which, similar to acoustics, creates a more homogeneous interpretation for distant eras and sharper, more complex interpretations in periods closer to the present. The Doppler effect leads to the logical fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*—the illusion that what has happened necessarily had to happen, when in fact, upon closer examination, all action faces algorithmic forks. The most interesting research on Latin America separates political, social, and economic processes and maps their combinations in variable matrices without assuming a single line of causation.

Robinson modulates his determinism. In the past, he sees actors as agents of structure; in the present, a counterpoint of domination and resistance. In the future, he sees a number of conflicts and mobilizations—ranging from indigenous Andean movements to the struggles of unemployed blue-collar workers in greater Buenos Aires—coming together under a Single Social Movement that would supersede capitalism. Diversity is reduced to unity, and disparate historical trajectories are boiled down to an all-or-nothing option—as in the old slogan *socialisme ou barbarie.*

I beg to disagree. The past is less over-determined and the future less dire. Latin America will continue to consume more history than it can produce. As during the Great Depression, the response in the region is pragmatic and sometimes innovative, but not world-shaking. Brazil, the largest country in the area and one with a sizeable new middle class, will surge ahead and become a player on the great international chessboard. Its challenge will be the reduction of inequality. Mexico, on the other hand, will reboot development on the coat tails of an American recovery. It will continue to be "too far from God and too close to the United States."

Argentina, as always, will muddle through more thanks to the bounty of nature than to the wisdom of its leadership. Chile will continue on its path of steady growth and good governance, with closer links to the Asia-Pacific region than to its immediate neighborhood. The Andean countries will pursue the inclusion of the long-marginalized native majorities, but without any significant spillover on the rest of the continent. Only Venezuela will follow a path to "twenty-first century socialism." The question here is: will the Bolivarian revolution succumb to the natural resource curse and a self-destructive dynamic?

This sample illustrates the *diversity* of experiences. Just as neo-liberalism has had different interpretations, so will the roads out of the world crisis differ from each other. Like the River Plate, continental solidarity is wide but also shallow.

Robinson proposes a different view. Not only is Venezuela's revolution seen as sustainable but also as a superior model—thanks to a dialectic of permanent popular mobilization. Robinson acknowledges the many inconsistencies of the Bolivarian transformation but thinks they can be overcome. Yet why call this process "twenty-first century socialism" and not "plebiscitary leader democracy" (following Max Weber) which involves charisma, cumulative radicalization—and crash? To think that the experiment can be replicated in places like Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, or Chile is a fantasy. Much as Robinson castigates those who propose a distinction between a "well-behaved" and a "bad" left in Latin America, he proposes a similar Manichean dichotomy between a reformist and a revolutionary left.

Yet Robinson manages to pour new wine into old bottles. The book contains admirable analyses of new globalization processes in Latin America. The middle chapters on industrial subcontracting, transnational services, tourism, the export of labor, and migration are excellent and will reward the reader who is eager for data on ongoing social processes.

Robinson's grand finale, on the other hand, places unwarranted hopes on a single continent that will shine upon the world the light of a brighter future. When seen from the South, this attitude appears as one more unsolicited kindness from the North. To skeptics like myself, Latin America is a garden of forking paths. To Robinson, it is a projective Eden that redeems the disappointments of history.

Reference

Hobsbawm, Eric. 2009. "Socialism has failed. Now capitalism is bankrupt. What Next?" http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/apr/10/financial-crisis-capitalism-socialism-alternatives