

for socially marginalized people' (p. 91), Schmidt does not provide a convincing alternative. In order to synthesise the wealth of theory Schmidt uses, '[f]rom Engler's agency theory to Geertz's bio-cultural theory of religion to Csorda's embodiment paradigm and Greenfield's cultural biology' (pp. 176–177) – not to speak of a wide field consisting of Spiritism, Charismatic Christianity and Afro-Brazilian traditions – into a coherent argument, it would take significantly more meta-communication than she offers. Furthermore, the presentation rarely follows a progressive line of reasoning; more often, she moves from theory to theory in a stream-of-consciousness style, often lacking in dialectic interplay between fieldwork and theory in support of her main thesis about deixis. However, each chapter does provide a vivid introduction to a broad range of theoretical frameworks.

The subtitle of the book is *An anthropology of religious experience*; however, Schmidt declares already in the beginning that she 'did not attempt to experience it [spirit possession/trance] myself. Although I was often told that it is impossible to describe it fully, and that I need to experience it, I decided to maintain my scholarly distance' (p. 16). Yet, the full epistemological consequences of this stance are not thoroughly dealt with. Time and again, she depicts field situations which definitely would have benefited from more participatory fieldwork, such as when she – not being an initiate – 'was not allowed in the sacred chamber of the *terreiro* [locus of spirit possession]' (p. 109). She claims that '[w]e do not have access to such a core mystical experience, only to texts that describe the experience' (p. 105), but that is more an outcome of her methodological design than a universal fact. She contends that these experiences are 'to a high degree ineffable' (p. 108) and that her interviewees often 'could not remember or would not reveal their memories about'

these experiences they had had (p. 108). However, the reader is left wondering why she does not take this methodological impasse as an occasion to engage in a more participatory way by which she could perhaps have gained access to these allegedly ineffable experiences herself.

Though the book promises slightly more than it delivers, it definitely has its merits. It provides good and clear introductions to fascinating traditions like Candomblé and Umbanda, not to mention an extensive outline of the literature on gender, race and class in connection with spirit possession (Chapter 2). Moreover, her field examples bear witness to her keen sense for the corporeal, sensorial aspects of the possession act (Chapter 4 in particular), most inspiring for other ethnographers. Finally, although her main thesis about the deixis of spirit possession could indeed do with more ethnographic substantiation, it is, nevertheless, a much-needed move towards provincialisation of this highly contested concept.

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Suter, Misha. 2016. *Rechtstrieb. Schulden und Vollstreckung im liberalen Kapitalismus 1800–1900*. Konstanz: Konstanz University Press. 328 pp. Pb.: €32.90. ISBN: 978-3-86253-077-9.

The main title of this book, *Rechtstrieb*, refers to the use of legal sanctions for the collection of money from debtors. This special term was only used in 19th-century German-speaking Switzerland, indicating the scope of this study. It is an example of the way in which in Germany, Switzerland and Austria historians have adopted anthropological methods and concepts when studying everyday life in the past known as *Alltagsgeschichte*.

In 1889, after protracted discussions dating back to the 1870s, a federal law on legal execution and bankruptcy replaced in Switzerland a great variety of regulations peculiar to each canton. This law was approved by a small majority when subjected to the usual referendum. Proposed by a liberal executive that advocated the advantages of uniform rules for commercial growth and expansion of credit, it was opposed by conservatives who emphasised the differences and conflicting interests between urban and rural areas. Unlike the incomes of merchants, those of farmers were tied to annual crop cycles and their relation to the means of production was very different from that of craftsmen and manufacturers. After analysing these different perspectives Suter describes how in general the *Rechtstrieb* was implemented and how it evolved between 1830 and 1870, when the growing influence of political liberalism placed ever more reliance on individual motivation to comply with indirect and inconspicuously standardised forms of regulating behaviour, which in the end resulted in the law of 1889.

One would have liked to know what happened after the law of 1889 was implemented in view of the opposed expectations that had been voiced, but Suter only briefly mentions the adjustments in cantonal regulations after its acceptance. Legal sanctions before 1889 included also in certain circumstances the loss of civil and political rights, but the federal law had left this issue, concerning such details as the conditions of rehabilitation, to the cantons.

Preceded by a theoretical interlude, Suter devotes the rest of his book to an extended analysis of specific sources of information that are intended to bring us closer to the actual experiences of individuals. First he takes a look at literary sources (diaries, fictional tales, political pamphlets), then he deals with problems of classification using reports of police

interrogations that for a time were part of procedures in the city of Basel, and finally he considers the relation between things and persons when used as pawns.

Suter's aim is to write a history of systemic ordering in which the heterogeneity of received practices and new forms of exploitation and accumulation constitute uneven development. He wants to show how individual reactions to the use of standardised legal procedures result in frictions indicative of the contradictions of liberal capitalism. In order to do so he uses a great variety of theoretical perspectives. Next to Foucault's subjectivation and Marx's alienation that help typify broad diachronic trends, he is particularly inspired by the ongoing discussions of Mauss's *The gift* for his analysis of the nature of credit and debt relations, showing a thorough understanding of recent anthropological developments. This is also the case when he uses E. P. Thompson's concept of the moral economy, emphasising the importance of this historian for the anthropological understanding of the impact of colonialism and globalisation.

When compared with the work of Finn (2003), who used the same categories of empirical evidence, which Suter explicitly acknowledges, one is struck by the relative poverty of Suter's material. This may be due to the amount of time Suter had at his disposal, but perhaps also because the problems of legal action and insolvency were far more salient in England than in Switzerland. He seems to suggest as much when emphasising the lack of public attention before discussions about a federal regulation started. Even then much of the rhetoric used was probably more inspired by differences in political ideology than by substantive concerns. Suter's linkage of the few utopian pamphlets and fictional narratives which he discusses with the idea and practice of the *Rechtstrieb* is also very tenuous, while his choice of only one set

of diaries may not be representative. On the other hand, Suter recognises more clearly than Finn the problem of dealing adequately with problems of uneven development. Although one could object that his rather unrestrained theoretical eclecticism impairs the internal consistency of his analysis, in my opinion his sophisticated treatment of this issue outweighs this possible drawback.

Reference

Finn, M. C. 2003. *The character of credit: personal debts in English culture, 1740–1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Wolf, Sonja. 2017. *Mano Dura: the politics of gang control in El Salvador*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. 320 pp. Pb.: US\$20.07. ISBN: 9781477311660.

Since the end of the 1992 civil war in El Salvador, the country has faced serious problems with crime and gang violence. During the civil war thousands of civilians fled, many of them ending up in Los Angeles and southern California as asylum seekers (p. 9). Two of El Salvador's largest and most powerful gangs, Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Calle 18, were formed in the USA during this time. After the war, thousands of arrested gang members were deported to El Salvador and many of them became part of street gangs that later formed the largest criminal organisation in the country. To deal with the rise of gang violence and crime, the conservative party National Republican Alliance (ARENA) instigated an anti-gang policy called 'La Mano Dura' (Iron Fist or Firm Hand) in 2003. Mano Dura promised to bring peace to the streets of

El Salvador and was met with massive public support. The policy promised to increase military and police presence in gang-riddled neighbourhoods and introduced harsher sentences for suspected gang members. For example, any person whose appearance indicated gang membership, such as having tattoos or other 'gang identity markers', could be arrested and imprisoned (p. 51). The government further allocated funding to organisations working 'on the ground' to help eradicate gang violence.

In Sonja Wolf's book, *Mano Dura: the politics of gang control in El Salvador*, we follow three nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and their respective activities and prevention programmes as they advocate for policies to end gang violence (p. 15). In the book we learn that, despite promises to end violence, Mano Dura backfired and did very little to erase crime and violence. Instead, as the central argument in Sonja Wolf's book reveals, the ARENA government used Mano Dura as a manifesto to gain public support and protect the political elite while doing very little to realise its promises (p. 19). The reasons for the unsuccessful implementation of La Mano Dura (and follow-up strategies such as Super Mano Dura or Mano Amiga (Helping Hand)), the book emphasises, were multiple. For example, the NGOs were not only underfunded and ineffective but also unable to mobilise pressure for policy change. But foremost, Wolf's book shows how the ARENA government was more interested in gaining populist support and electoral appeal than in fighting crime (p. 14). Mano Dura, she writes in the introduction, enabled the government to appear concerned with public security without addressing the structural causes and root problems to violence, such as socio-economic inequalities and marginalisation that led people into gangs (pp. 14–19). Rather than having positive outcomes, Wolf further describes