

Finally, although this is not so much a criticism of this book, I would like to see strong political research, as Agarwala gives us here, intersect more closely with studies that are conducted at a more cultural or microsociological level addressing similar questions and topics. Some excellent contemporary scholarship addresses this issue of how informal workers deploy the notion of citizenship to access state-based support, rights, or security. Joao Biehl and Gita Sen, perhaps most prominently, but also Sonia Correa, Rafael de la Dehesa, Svati Shah, and others have looked at how marginalized communities, who identify with each other in various ways, including the informal work they do, organize themselves to access citizenship-based protections from the state. It would be useful to see more of a defined but multidisciplinary field of work arise around these questions and issues, uniting work that is economically grounded and driven by social justice concerns, regardless of whether it takes a political, cultural, or theoretical approach.

On the whole, this book presents clearly important work, providing rich scholarship on a timely issue that continues to grow in importance. Agarwala's study is admirably researched, cogently analyzed and organized, and very well argued. It would be a useful tool in advanced undergraduate or graduate courses on a wide range of topics, including gender and class, labor movements, and citizenship studies. I also recommend it to anyone interested in the changing face of labor organizing today.

Suspicious Gifts: Bribery, Morality, and Professional Ethics, by **Malin Åkerström**. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2014. 191 pp. \$49.95 cloth. ISBN: 9781412852913.

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Malin Åkerström's *Suspicious Gifts: Bribery, Morality, and Professional Ethics* is a rare empirical analysis of the socially-constructed boundary between legitimate and corrupt exchanges in a contemporary Western

workplace. The author's account of petty bribery is both innovative in its use of data and classical in its resonance with canonical scholarship on gift exchanges. In my comments, I will discuss several contributions that the book makes to the stagnant field of academic corruptology and offer a few thoughts on a core sociological theme, the theme of power, that is conspicuously absent from Åkerström's analysis.

While the social construction of deviance has long captivated the attention of sociologists, the book's focus on petty bureaucratic corruption in a developed democracy is rather unusual. Its methodological approach is also far from typical: *Suspicious Gifts* is based on an ethnographic analysis of several cases in which the meaning of gifts between employees and their clients is contested and constructed as illegitimate. Using these data, Åkerström explores various dimensions of the social process that she calls "bribery gaze," whereby gift exchanges are deemed corrupt by the legal system, media, and the general public.

Suspicious Gifts opens with an argument that the rise of the global anti-corruption movement created a heightened sensitivity to gift exchanges in Swedish organizations. Subsequent empirical chapters explore the dynamics of this new bribery gaze in different empirical settings. Chapter Four, for instance, focuses on how the emergent understandings of what constitutes an acceptable exchange generate conflicting pressures on employees of the Swedish adoption sector. Chapter Five explores ordinary people's struggle to maintain positive reputations in the face of corruption-related media scandals, while Chapter Seven discusses the boundary between personal and professional domains in nursing and business. Åkerström concludes her book by exploring the interplay between symbolic and instrumental meanings of gifts and the impact that the bribery gaze has had on this dichotomy in Swedish professional settings.

Beyond doubt, the major strength of *Suspicious Gifts* lies in its use of rich ethnographic data. As a hidden, stigmatized, and legally ambivalent phenomenon, corruption is difficult to study. In fact, most empirical work on corruption is based on problematic evidence, such as cross-country numeric

indicators and anecdotal accounts of corruption scandals. These reductionist and non-systematic data considerably limit the theoretical contributions of such studies. At the same time, a different body of scholarship examines the theoretical boundaries of the concept of corruption through abstract and quasi-philosophical discussions. In a largely unprecedented way, Åkerström breaches this empirical/theoretical divide in contemporary corruptology by grounding her conceptual discussion in concrete qualitative data. The interviews with people involved in alleged corruption and close analysis of media coverage make the theoretical discussion of bribery gaze come alive with empirical detail, captivating the reader's attention and providing actual evidence in support of the book's arguments.

Another important contribution of the book has to do with its geographic focus. In the context of global anti-corruptionism, pioneered and funded by Western governments and NGOs, most studies of bureaucratic corruption are limited to underdeveloped and non-democratic societies. In contrast, the research on Western settings deals primarily with high-profile business and political corruption. Åkerström's work, then, accomplishes something that has been long overdue in sociological corruptology: it attracts attention to the social construction of the divide between public and private domains, ongoing in each and every Western workplace. Using empirical illustrations, the author convinces her readers that bribery gaze shapes the way that Westerners experience their friendships, construe their professional duties, and understand their moral obligations. By focusing on Sweden, she "unothers" the other, bringing the analysis of the social construction of deviance into a familiar, yet underexplored context.

Praise of *Suspicious Gifts* would not be complete without reference to its extensive integration of classical social-scientific works on gifts into the discussion of bribery in Sweden. From Marcel Mauss' foundational monograph, *The Gift*, to Viviana Zelizer's and Natalie Zemon Davis's more recent work on social exchange, canonical, sociological, and anthropological scholarship provides a background and a point of reference for Åkerström's analysis.

Despite its innovative aspects, the sociological poignancy of *Suspicious Gifts* is greatly undermined by the author's lack of interest in the power implications of the changing bribery gaze. As I argue elsewhere, recent global preoccupation with corruption is a by-product of a neoliberal turn in geopolitics. By blurring the boundaries between public and private domains, corruption interferes with market forces, threatens foreign investments, and generally undermines the political dominance of the West. Thus, the social changes described by Åkerström stem from the consolidation of power in the hands of Western business and political elites. While other studies have linked these geopolitical power shifts with the lives of people in the Global South, Åkerström was uniquely positioned to examine their impact on ordinary Westerners. Yet, she is not concerned with the redistribution of power that happens when the boundaries of deviance are redefined. Thus, she does not consider who benefits from the increased scrutiny of the work life, the shrinking of private spaces, and unrelenting surveillance over low-level bureaucrats. Neither does she question if certain workers are more likely to suffer from increased surveillance, whether the new controls affect job stability and earnings of bureaucrats, and how decreased autonomy in the workplace shapes the patterns of class, gender, and race-based inequality.

Another unexplored power dimension of the bribery gaze has to do with its selective focus. According to studies of high-profile corruption in the West, the growing scrutiny of ordinary citizens is not paralleled by increased visibility of corporate abuses and economic crimes committed by politicians. Thus, the social processes described in *Suspicious Gifts* contribute to the growing gap between the rich and powerful on the one hand and the shrinking middle class on the other. It is ironic that Åkerström makes the Foucauldian concept of gaze central to her analysis, while completely ignoring the power connotations of the growing oversight over middle-class professional lives.

Finally, I must mention the stylistic and syntactic shortcomings of the book. Despite its focus on everyday situations that are familiar to most readers, awkward sentence structures and word choices make it harder

for the audience to relate to the stories of the interviewees. As a non-native English speaker, I appreciate the challenges of academic writing in a foreign language, but I do believe that a better-written book would have been more compelling.

Relative to existing scholarship, this book makes an important step toward evidence-based corruptology. Yet, its lack of engagement with the issue of power and a convoluted writing style take away from its potential to initiate a long-overdue critical conversation about the impact that the spread of neoliberalism and its by-product, the heightened sensitivity to corruption, have had on the lives of ordinary people worldwide.

Interpreting Clifford Geertz: Cultural Investigation in the Social Sciences, edited by **Jeffrey C. Alexander, Philip Smith, and Matthew Norton**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 230 pp. \$30.00 paper. ISBN: 9780230111721.

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What does Clifford Geertz mean to us, the “natives” of interpretivism? How is Geertz deployed in contemporary social science research and writing? These are the questions explored in *Interpreting Clifford Geertz*—a fascinating and broad-ranging compilation of essays regarding Geertz’s contributions. As the editors explain in their introduction, Geertz in large part inspired the field of cultural sociology. Thus, it is apt that the Palgrave series in Cultural Anthropology is launched with a comprehensive review of his work and a “critical interrogation” of his legacy. Yet the book’s ambition is not limited to Geertz’s influence on cultural sociology; it spans the social sciences as a whole. The editors, Jeffrey C. Alexander, Philip Smith, and Matthew Norton, argue that this exploration is important because Geertzian analysis—the thick interpretation of meaning—still provides a vital challenge to reductionist theories in contemporary social research.

These seventeen sophisticated and well-written essays are organized into four solid

sections (“Geertz, Text, and Structure,” “Geertz, Interpretation, and Meaning,” “Geertz and the Disciplines,” and “Geertz, Life, and Work”). They amount to a “thick” description of this awe-inspiring thinker, his work, and his life. The best of the essays give the reader an in-depth understanding of Geertz’s understanding of what social scientists should be up to.

The book stems from a conference on “Clifford Geertz and the Human Sciences” held at the Center for Cultural Sociology at Yale in 2007 (one year after Geertz’s death). Many of the essays are by Geertz’s colleagues, some clearly friends, but they explicitly are not meant as eulogies. Instead, they seek to honor him through engaging seriously and deeply with his work. That said, in this book you will find fewer critiques of Geertzian analysis than brilliant demonstrations of the benefits of interpretivism.

The interpretations of Geertzian analysis here are written by a diverse set of scholars, some foremost in their respective disciplines of sociology, anthropology, science studies, history, comparative literature, and philosophy. This is a testament to Geertz’s influence on other disciplines and to his interdisciplinarity. As Alexander notes, Geertz not only bridged the divide between the social sciences and the humanities, but “undermine[d] its very existence” (p. 56). He gave scholars, David Apter claims in his piece, “permission to jump past the limits of conventional disciplinary boundaries” (p. 187). Taking this to heart, the best works here pose solutions to our common problems. They show us the continued value of interpretivism and what we all have to lose by misusing Geertz as a clichéd icon (see especially, Stuart Clark) or by entirely abandoning him. Ultimately, the (leading) question of the book is whether “thick description,” “deep play,” “turtles all the way down,” “the wink,” or even the use of the term “cultural,” are, as Norton puts it in his afterword, “simple signs that say little but imply much, or a robust set of theoretical propositions that continue to illuminate, problematize, and open up routes of inquiry?” (p. 204). This volume gives us hope regarding the latter.

This was particularly clear in Part II on “Geertz, Interpretation, and Meaning.” Here, several scholars deploy Geertz in their