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Tracing the Veins: Of Copper, Culture and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata. by Janet L. Finn. Berkeley: University of California Press (1998) 327 pp.

Reviewed by Judy Root Aulette, Department of Sociology, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Like the tale of those other two cities, Janet Finn's book about Butte, Montana and Chuquicamata, Chile is a complex story with surprising twists in a long history of wars, revolutions, betrayal and the human spirit. Unlike Dickens, Finn does not tie up all the loose ends at the conclusion. An account of real life rather than a novel, the story that unfolds is still unfinished and has opened up as many questions as it has answered.

Finn started her work with a relatively direct question about how a strike in the 1960s had been experienced by the copper mining community in Butte. The people she began to interview, however, had difficulty explaining that event in the 1960s without putting it into the historical context of the Twentieth Century. As Finn began to do documentary research on this history, she discovered that the story of Butte could not be told without exploring the 'sister city' of Chuquicamata, Chile. She then traveled to Chile to investigate the history of that mining town and embarked on a three-year journey, traveling back and forth between the two sites.

The book provides an intricate ethnographic description that includes field notes, interviews, and documents; spans two languages, two nations, and one hundred years of history; and reports a myriad of voices from dictators to media people, union leaders, men miners and community women.

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In addition to a detailed recounting, Finn has developed a “practice framework” to encompass these data. This framework, I believe, comes close to the classic statement by Marx that people make history but they make it within the confines of the social context in which they find themselves. Finn takes this idea and shifts it to emphasize human agency. The central insight of her work is that people make history despite enormous forces to constrain them. Social institutions like the government and the economic system, as well as the efforts of their adversaries within systems of class and gender inequality push to shape and limit the people in her research. The people, however, also push back.

The presentation of Finn’s work is organized around the themes of community, class, and gender. She writes about the construction of community by the conscious efforts of the Anaconda Company, which was trying to build an “ideal” settlement (from the point of view of control and profits). The company’s efforts, however, exist alongside the construction of community by the tensions, solidarity and resistance among its inhabitants. In the case of Chuquicamata, business interests wanted to create a community divided into two living spaces, one for local workers and one for Yancu supervisors. The company also wanted to establish a distinction between Anaconda workers and other workers in Chile with the appearance that ‘their’ miners were a privileged group and that they were more rapidly advancing toward the goal of the American dream model. In Butte, the company promoted the idea of a mining community in which “we are all in this together” the great all-encompassing American middle class with miners as true patriots in preserving the ideal business/social environment. In both cases, this community building from the top down was not met with uniform acceptance. Chilean and American miners and their families continued to uncover the reality of the “model” communities; counter their promotion; and seek to build their own community by conscious resistance and just trying to make a life for themselves.

Finn also focuses on the construction of gender and social class and the connections between them. Both play important roles in people’s lives, sometimes operating in synchrony and sometimes in contradiction. She writes about the converging and conflicting relationships between working class women and men around family issues, work, strikes and the miners’ disease, consumption (silicosis). And she writes about how these relationships compare and contrast between people in the two communities and over time. In this discussion, I found the observation Finn makes about the connection between gender and class being experienced differently for women and men especially interesting. She argues that for men, gender identity is closely tied to their class position: to be a miner is to be a man and to be a miner is to be working class. For women, the connection is not so clear. Dominant images of womanhood are not tied to social class: to be a good wife and mother is to be a woman. But this image crosses class lines and being working class sometimes interferes with being able to be a good wife and mother and therefore to be a good woman.

In addition to the contribution the book makes empirically and theoretically to our understanding of a range of topics that include among others, gender, class, work, imperialism, unions, repression, social structure, and human agency, it also contributes to the literature on research methods. Finn explains how she grew up in Butte and the story she relates is personal journey as well as a scholarly one. She also notes at one point that she was immersed in a study not of social change but for social change. Her reflections on how her particular point of view affected the research and how the research in turn shaped her disclose a number of methodological insights that are interesting to read about and helpful to those who wish to undertake ethnographic studies. This book would make an excellent reading in a course on qualitative methods because Finn is so conscious of methodological issues and writes so clearly about her insights.

This book also makes a special contribution to research methods because it successfully ties together micro level data with a macro level analysis. Most ethnographies present micro level analysis. Scholars and students who are trying in particular to understand the connection between data about human agency and the large social institutions that encompass that activity will find her

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work a useful model.

Finn concludes the book by reflecting on a question often posed to her about her research, "But what were the major differences you found between Butte and Chuquicamata?" While there were differences, equally important were the commonalities. But most important, these two communities represent two sides of the same coin of multi-national capitalism. Our boundaries are permeable and our fates intertwined.

The Ecology of Practice: Studies of Food Crop Production in Sub-Saharan West Africa, A. Endre Nyerges, editor, Food and Nutrition in History and Anthropology series, Volume 12, Gordon and Breach Publishers; 1997. 259 p. : ill., maps

Reviewed by Wendy Wilson Fall

Dr. Wilson Fall is a social anthropologist living in Senegal, West Africa. A former instructor at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, she now works in local NGO development and in the implementation of social surveys examining small holder farming.

THEORY AND PRACTICE: NEW VIEWS IN ECOLOGICAL STUDIES

Ecology of Practice: Studies of Food Crop Production in Sub-Saharan West Africa presents an example of the benefits of the "ecology of practice" approach. It gives a strong demonstration of the value of multi-dimensional analysis; in this case the confluence of the ecological perspective and anthropological process applied in the field context. The value of the volume is twofold: it gives examples of the rigorous application of a fairly new theoretical framework, and it provides examples which are well suited to comparison and thus allows the reader the advantage of being able to easily apply to one essay what was learned in another. The volume provides groundwork for further reflection and debate about the application of the "ecology of practice" to both the pursuit of knowledge as it pertains to understanding peasant production systems in the current era, and to pointed analysis for practicing, applied anthropologists whose input may have critical impact on the lives of people in communities such as described in the texts.

There are also major questions that arise after having completed the reading of such a collection in terms of a real apprehension of elements of a useful ecology of practice approach. These pertain to the significance of the "political economy variable" and to the possible role that related "hard" sciences such as agronomy, horticultural sciences, or soil sciences have to play in