

a particular woman, and her individual history, is highlighted in bringing about this development.

A major flaw of this publication is its outrageous list price of \$158.91, according to Amazon (though a discounted price of “only” \$99.54 is offered). For that price, a book on textiles surely merits a set of colour rather than black-and-white plates which this book does not have.

In sum, the book contains a number of useful, and occasionally innovative, case studies. I wish I were able to recommend this rather uneven collection as an introduction to the fascinating study of world-wide textile traditions. Unfortunately, the promise of the title is not fulfilled. There is little in the way of synthesis. Some common threads are identified in Barnes’ introduction: the mobility of textiles since ancient times, their huge importance in trade, the necessity of combining technical with sociological analyses, the dynamism and mutual influence (“fusion”) of textile traditions and their meanings and symbolism. But there is no far-ranging analysis that makes a definitive theoretical and factual statement on the subject. Readers whose appetite to delve into the study of textiles in their sociological, technical and historical contexts would be better served sampling such works as Forshee (2001), Niessen (1993) or Barnes’ own ethnography (1989)—all from Indonesia and all with beautiful colour as well as black-and-white illustrations.

References

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1989 *The Ikat Textiles of Lamalera: A Study of an Eastern Indonesian Weaving Tradition*. Leiden: EJ Brill.
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2001 *Between the Folds: Stories of Cloth, Lives, and Travels from Sumba*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.
- Niessen, Sandra
1993 *Batak Cloth and Clothing: A Dynamic Indonesian Tradition*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

Scott Simon, *Tanners of Taiwan: Life Strategies and National Culture*, Cambridge, Mass.: Westview Press, 2005, 172 pages.

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Scott Simon quotes one of his factory-owning informants in this ethnography of the Taiwanese leather tanning industry, as follows: “The Chinese have been making leather for thousands of years, but it has just been to cover their bodies. Taiwan has a modern tanning industry only because of foreign technology...Leather tanning has nothing to do with Chinese culture” (p. 60). It is statements like these that, for Simon, form the central problematic of his study: how is it that labour and business practices which are promoted by the government as distinctively Chinese (and linked to new forms of global Chinese

capital) are instead identified by their own practitioners as precisely the opposite, as non- or even anti-cultural? Simon conducted almost two years (with several subsequent field trips) of anthropological fieldwork in both small- and large-scale leather tanneries in southern Taiwan to answer this question. His ethnography uses the experiences of leather tannery owners and employees to explore questions of national identity and ideology in Taiwan, especially in light of recent political and social changes that have allowed previously marginalized populations to influence the course of the nation.

This book is much more than simply an ethnography of work. Most of the ethnography is not about the workplace itself but about how business owners and workers situate themselves within the imagined space of the nation: “In the workplace and at home, [Taiwanese tanners] craft identities at the same time that they craft leather” (p. 5). Simon includes a four page appendix that describes the technical steps of the leather tanning process, as well as some ethnographic detail of his own experience working in one such factory (pp. 93-96), but the bulk of the book concerns the contestation of national identity. Such an investigation is invaluable in its own right but, as Simon points out, is particularly compelling in the Taiwanese case. Taiwan was colonized by several successive waves of migration from the Chinese mainland, the final wave arriving after the Nationalist (KMT) defeat in the late 1940s. The more recent immigrants, backed by American influence and military power, were able to exclude other, mostly Holo-speaking, Taiwanese from positions of power and influence. At the same time the government embarked upon a series of ideological campaigns to emphasize Taiwan’s “Chinese” heritage. Mandarin Chinese became the only acceptable language in schools, while the teaching of history and geography had to conform to approved narratives. This historical context makes the appearance of a new identity politics which challenges the official government narratives that much more interesting.

The book is divided into nine chapters, the first three introduce the tanning industry, the historical context of Taiwan, and the relevant social, religious and kinship details of Taiwanese society. The next two outline two different types of tanneries: family-based and corporate firms. Family-based firms were encouraged by the government in the 1970s as means of strengthening the economy. While most firms are still owned by individual families the largest ones are now corporate entities. The family enterprises in Simon’s research tended to emphasize the benefits of kin-organized enterprises, arguing that employing family members helped reduce labour disputes, kept skilled labour from moving to other factories, and developed workers with years of experience in the industry. Corporate firms, on the other hand, emphasized their technological investments and rational business management.

Simon makes the argument that the narratives he recorded from both family and corporate firm owners represent an important counter-point to official discourses of Chinese-based identity. Instead of locating the success of their businesses in “Chinese” or “Confucian” business models, tan-

ners owners situated themselves as cosmopolitan technocrats and rational managers. However, in what is perhaps the ethnography's greatest weakness, Simon does little to outline the content of these official discourses. He refers to Gramsci's concept of hegemony in describing the Taiwanese government's attempts to impose an ideology of Chineseness on nativist Taiwanese cultural practices, but we are forced to accept Simon's characterization of the content of this ideology without much textual or documentary evidence. If Simon's characterization is accurate however, then his conclusion to these two chapters is quite powerful: marginalized into unpleasant industries such as leather-tanning, native Taiwanese are nonetheless "labeled as the carriers of "Chinese" tradition because they do business within the family or networks of trusted kin and friends" (p. 73).

Simon also devotes chapters to gender, labour relations and the increasing amount of investment by Taiwanese factory owners in mainland China. The chapter on gender is particularly interesting in that, contrary to a Confucian ideology that proscribes roles for women outside of the household, women are crucial to leather tanning firms, especially the position of the *thau-ke-niu* or boss-wife. Making a distinction between male and female labour as *cuxin* (coarse) and *wixin* (meticulous) respectively, the female heads of households in family firms often controlled the money while men handled heavy work on the factory floor. This granted many *thau-ke-niu* a significant amount of control over the operation of the business and its future. Nonetheless, social and economic changes have altered the expectations and ambitions of many women who now aspire to professional careers or to running their own businesses.

In the final chapter, Simon describes his experiences as an international observer in the 2004 presidential election which returned former opposition leader Chen Shui-bian to power. The ballot included a referendum question on the status of Taiwan-China relations. Both the election and referendum stimulated heated debate about the future of the country: is Taiwan an outpost of Chinese culture or an independent nation in its own right? Simon points out in his conclusion that "Taiwan demonstrates well that culture is not unitary and bounded, nor is it explanatory of anything" (p. 148). His argument is rather that culture is a political tool that is recruited by various groups to both maintain and challenge relations of power.

This seems to be a rather pessimistic view though, especially coming from an anthropologist. Simon disputes the idea, cultivated by much early anthropological work, that Taiwan can be seen as an example of "pure" Chinese culture. But while he argues that this point of view suppresses ethnic, gender and social differences, he implicitly accepts the notion of a "pure" culture as the only one possible.

The case studies of various tanneries and the ethnographic details presented in this book are particularly rich, and it is clear that Simon has both a rigorous research methodology and a detailed understanding of contemporary Taiwanese politics. This ethnography would be particularly suitable for

undergraduate courses on identity, ethnonationalism, East Asian anthropology and the anthropology of work. Despite some conceptual shortcomings, *Tanners of Taiwan* is a short, readable, and comprehensive ethnography about the contemporary politics of identity in a postcolonial state.

Nadine Picaudou, dir., *Territoires palestiniens de mémoire*, Paris/Beyrouth : Karthala/IFPO, 2006, 379 pages.

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Cet ouvrage collectif propose un parcours à travers les différents « territoires de mémoire » palestiniens. Les contributions explorent les nombreuses facettes d'une mémoire qui se distingue aussi bien par la singularité du cas palestinien que par sa plurivocauté. Si la *nakba*, la « catastrophe » de 1948, est érigée en élément fondateur et collectif de l'identité palestinienne, la pluralité des mémoires reflète aussi la diversité de l'expérience palestinienne : Palestiniens de « l'intérieur » face à une construction étatique nationale aujourd'hui en échec, réfugiés d'origine citadine ou rurale, installés dans les pays limitrophes, et exclus de la construction étatique. À travers un panorama des entreprises mémorielles palestiniennes et de leurs enjeux politiques et identitaires, les auteurs proposent d'analyser l'articulation entre mémoire, histoire, construction nationale et construction étatique. Plus largement, la question du registre du témoignage comme opérateur de vérité dont la reconnaissance partagée pourrait permettre d'engager une réconciliation mémorielle entre Palestiniens et Israéliens parcourt également cette réflexion collective (N. Picaudou). Trois parties organisent l'ouvrage, consacrées successivement à la constitution du récit national palestinien, aux résistances et dissidences face à ce récit, et, enfin, aux formes de la mémoire sociale.

Comment se construit le récit national palestinien ? Les contributions composant la première partie pointent d'emblée la complexité inhérente à la constitution d'un récit qui se veut exemplaire et collectif. Le souvenir entretenu de la *nakba*, constitutif de la mémoire palestinienne, s'oppose de manière irréductible au discours israélien : c'est bien l'inconciliabilité entre les récits palestinien et israélien sur les événements de 1948 qui explique l'échec du processus de paix ; l'enjeu central du droit au retour des réfugiés a ainsi achoppé sur l'impossibilité à négocier une vérité historique acceptable pour les deux parties (B. Botiveau). La construction étatique palestinienne opère aussi à travers l'investissement par l'Autorité Palestinienne de la mémoire des lieux saints, et en premier lieu de la ville de Bethléem, devenue le lieu d'expérimentation d'une nation désormais conçue non plus dans un cadre nationaliste laïc, mais sur le modèle multiconfessionnel (S. Andézian). D'autres entrepreneurs de la mémoire trouvent leur place dans le dispositif mémoriel nationaliste. C'est le cas des folk-