

Wolf, Diane

1992 *Factory Daughters: Gender, Household Dynamics, and Rural Industrialization in Java*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Linda Scarangella McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows: From Buffalo Bill to Euro Disney*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012, 254 pages.

Reviewer: Lynda Mannik
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Native Performers in Wild West Shows moves past a litany of excellent histories concerning the global influence of Wild West shows to create a “revisionist history” that begins in the late 19th century and ends in 2005. It also looks at various types of Wild West performances that took place around the world, including contemporary examples in Paris at Euro Disney and mock Wild West shows called Buffalo Bill Days in Sheridan, Wyoming. Anthropologist Linda Scarangella McNenly focuses on Native performer’s experiences and perspectives that are suggested in archival materials and articulated in contemporary interviews with the intention of explaining how Canadian and American Native participants interacted with dominant society through this venue to produce subjective social meanings. Her revisionist history is intended to provide an examination and a re-examination of cultural, social and political expressions of Native identity and agency. Considering the span of both time and place, this is a challenging undertaking.

Scarangella McNenly adopts Mary Pratt’s well-used concept of “contact zone” as a space that allows for negotiations of power within a colonial context. The idea of the contact zone has been employed by anthropologists and historians frequently in discussions of North American fairs, powwows and rodeo competitions as a way of understanding how indigenous peoples have negotiated social identities and acted as political agents. Most recently, Mary Ellen Kelm (2011) used this concept to weave together a holistic view of rodeo in Canada as a space where new identities and new relationships between indigenous and settler communities were crafted, contested and negotiated. Scarangella McNenly’s adds Ortner’s emphasis on “practice theory” to allow for an examination of such processes through discourses and representations, and to clarify how free will and intentions are part of webs of power structures and relationships. Multi-sited research is employed as a way to facilitate her “research pathway,” which is based on “an experience” that cuts across places, ethnicities, archival records (including print media), oral narratives and personal accounts. This book is organized as a series of case studies and is intended to “examine processes, encounters, and relationships through time and space.”

Chapters 1 through 4 focus on Wild West performances and productions in the late 19th century and the early 20th century, ending with a brief overview of the Miller Brothers’ 101 Ranch, last produced in 1932. Chapter 1 provides a fleeting introduction into the basics of American Wild West shows as an international sensation, where the performance of imperialism disseminated ideas about race, progress and indigenous peoples alongside world’s fairs, museums displays and dime

store novels. Chapter 2 and the remaining chapters follow a similar pattern: the first section of each uses archival sources and popular media to explain the context of Native participation, and the closing section brings “forward Native performers’ perspectives and experiences to explore how they engaged with and negotiated these encounters.” Chapter 2 looks at American Wild West shows as employers and Native performers as employees. Scarangella McNenly realizes her intention of providing Native perspectives on historic experiences through archived letters, show programs and personal memoirs to outline the reasons why Native performers wanted to work in Wild West shows, including work for work’s sake, monetary advantage and travel. Chapter 3 explores Wild West shows as performances of identity juxtaposing stereotypical representations of exotic cowboys and Indians in various forms of Western print media with “warrior identity” created by Native participants. The bulk of this chapter emphasizes how agency is expressed through dance, song and clothing. Here, Native perspective is evidenced primarily through previous scholarly literature, memoirs and a brief photographic analysis. Chapter 4 adds Native voices to this historic record through oral narratives that Scarangella McNenly collected in 2004. This case study features members of three Mohawk families who performed in a variety of venues; most interesting is the Deer Family Wild West show, which performed internationally in the early 20th century. This chapter, in particular, would have benefited from a clearer explanation of visual anthropological methods due to its reliance on the relationship between photography and memory.

The last two chapters, which I would argue are the most thought-provoking, move ahead to fieldwork research that took place in 2005. Chapter 5 highlights the perpetuation of stereotypes at Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show at Euro Disney in Paris. After a brief overview of the contemporary Disneyfication of activities—such as buffalo hunting, rodeo and stagecoach racing—that spectacularize noble savage stereotypes, it moves into an interesting conversation about the challenges experienced by Native performers from Canada and the United States in this venue. For them, agency is not defined as “resistance to dominant power, but as the pursuit of one’s own goals and intentions.” Conflicts between representation and identity are central to this conversation. Chapter 6 considers the construction of contemporary “Nativity” at one of many Wild West show re-creations that are continually being performed across the United States. Conversations with performers at Buffalo Bill Days in Sheridan, Wyoming, not only spotlight agency but, moreover, control over performances and, consequently, expressions of identity. Dancing, music and regalia provide educational entertainment that does not conform to Western ideals but emphasizes cultural continuity, survival, skills and knowledge.

Scarangella McNenly concludes by providing an overview of the threads that link this series of case studies, such as similarities in the ways Native identity is expressed through dance, song and dress. This book’s integrity would have benefited from a more determined stress on these links throughout. Even though Scarangella McNenly clearly explains her views on pan-Indianness—that these expressions are suitable for touristic cultural performances and do not “replace tribal identities”—a clearer differentiation between Canadian and American experiences in chapters 4 and 5 would have added to her investigations into the Canadian Native experience

specifically, which she claims is lacking in scholarly literature to date. Overall, the project to examine Native agency in relationship to stereotypical representations within various types of Wild West performances is commendable, and the attempt to navigate through archival sources that are accompanied by oral narratives to uncover such agency across time is plausible. However, this vision of an international “contact zone” that can be viewed across an approximately 150-year period falls short due to necessarily complex types of evidence that lack in-depth analysis.

References

Kelm, Mary Ellen

2011 *Wilder West: Rodeo in Western Canada*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Jacquelyne Luce, *Beyond Expectation: Lesbian/Bi/Queer Women and Assisted Conception*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010, 270 pages.

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Beyond Expectation is an original, engagingly written ethnography about how lesbian/bi/queer women in Canada are pursuing parenthood with Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) in a shifting legal and social landscape. Several significant pieces of legislation in British Columbia in the late 1990s that opened the definition of marriage to include same-sex partners and recognized “second parents” in same-sex relationships serve as the staging area for the book and for the “lesbian baby boom” it describes. Though similar legislation has followed in other provinces, the social and legal acceptance of gay parenting in Canada is not a *fait accompli*. Luce illustrates this amply as she presents the carefully considered—sometimes anguished—reproductive and parenting strategies and experiences of queer women and the varied responses of families, coworkers, neighbours and communities to them. Luce also describes how lesbian/bi/queer women creatively negotiate access to health care and fertility services. In the process, Luce argues, lesbian women experience a second coming out, as parents, would-be parents, co-parents and families. The strength of this book lies in the compelling stories of Luce’s interlocutors and the author’s analytical reflections on them, drawing from anthropology, women and gender studies and queer studies. That the stories will also be instructive and inspiring to queer women and men in Canada thinking about parenthood is by design of the author.

The book is divided into three parts, each containing a set of ethnographic chapters. In part I, *Re-imagining Relations*, Luce describes how legislative changes in Canada in the 1990s presented new opportunities for lesbian/bi/queer women hoping to become parents, or hoping to have their parenthood legally recognized. The stories she tells in this section are of women struggling against what Kath Weston has called the “exile” of gay parents. Queer women often spend years and a great deal of effort setting the stage for their family life: by seeking up-to-date information on how to get pregnant with donor sperm; by preparing family members and friends; and by reaching out to other “lesbian moms” and couples. The

assumed link between reproduction and heterosexuality makes trouble for lesbian parents who find they are frequently “misread” and even queried directly in public about their parental status. Lesbian parents feel they must walk a fine line between “being out” and “staying in” for the sake of their children. As one woman remarked: “There is nothing like having a child to send you kicking and screaming back into the closet” (p. 71). Much of this planning, however, is on behalf of their (future) children, to help them navigate the curiosity and homophobia they are likely to encounter.

In part II, *Negotiating Relatedness*, Luce covers the social and legal strategies taken by lesbian/bi/queer women to contest the heteronormative family and, at the same time, re-enfranchise themselves into the legal entitlements it confers. The stories she presents here vividly demonstrate how painstakingly women strategize about becoming pregnant or having their co-parent status recognized. Biology is variously mobilized and demobilized as a sign for relatedness for different purposes and effects. In these stories, the social realities and emotional bonds of everyday parenthood are often pitted against the cultural value and legal currency of biology (genetic relatedness). In a legal and social system that still cleaves toward biology as the key determinant of relatedness, “second lesbian mothers” are the most likely to be rendered invisible (p. 88).

The spectre of the anonymous donor who somehow reappears to demand custody or access looms large. For example, in chapter 7, Luce describes the various ways lesbian/bi/queer women choose a sperm donor, weighing both social and biological risks. Most couples choose an anonymous donor as the safest option for protecting their legal rights as parents. In one example, a couple chooses between two known sperm donors, one who is unsure what kind of contact he wants in the future and another who is adamantly against any future contact with them or the child. The couple opt for the latter, so that if the child should ask about the donor, they “would be able to say we had no choice” (p. 107). Luce is perhaps too sympathetic to her informants to point out the irony of deliberately closing this door on “recognition” when the parents are struggling to open another for themselves. To withhold—but deny withholding—information and the possibility of contact with a biological parent speaks volumes about the fear and anxiety in which such arrangements are steeped for lesbian women.

Luce ends this section with what she calls “technologies of recognition” (p. 133), the ways and means by which lesbian/bi/queer parents establish their parental status. Second parent adoption did not become legal in BC until 1995, and it was much later in other provinces. For women living in jurisdictions that did not or do not recognize second parents, and where there is no legal mechanism whereby a donor can legally give up his rights, women and men trying to conceive sometimes wrote their own contracts as “legal bridges” to a future in which their choices and relationships would be respected in family law. Others, however, feared that such contracts identifying the donor could be a liability if he ever sought to pursue his parental rights.

In part III, *Reproductive Assistance*, Luce describes the emergence of lesbian women’s health as a framework for addressing some of the discrimination and challenges lesbian/bi/queer women face within the health care system as they try to conceive and to receive antenatal care. The fact that ARTs have become “naturalized” in Canadian society is a boon to