

arrangements that reflect gender inequality in caring for dependent children.

Gender inequality is also Lewis's concern, in her study of the [lack of] public provision of care for dependent family members. A comparison of Britain and Holland along with data from some other European countries leads her to conclude that the compensation and collective provision of care will only occur if both care and gender equality are more highly valued. Additional chapters on the provision of care deal with the tension between public and personal obligations in caring for the elderly in Belgium and Bulgaria (Van Houtte & Breda; Todorova). While there is widespread approval for the personal support of elderly relatives in both societies, the extent to which the state should share in the responsibility and/or enforce the legal provisions is being debated.

By presenting research on a wide range of family law matters, this book deals with many issues that lie at the heart of sociolegal research: the power and limits of the law to advance broad social changes, public regulation and the private sphere, the patriarchal nature of the law, and law as a coercive versus an indirect symbolic control system, to name a few. It exposes sociolegal scholars to research in European countries that are not usually on the North American academic agenda and provides provocative challenges to commonly accepted assumptions and solutions. However, inevitable with such a large number of articles and so many different topics, not all the articles fit comfortably within the general scheme presented in the section headings. Moreover, not all the articles appear to be addressed to academic audiences. For example, statements such as "homosexuality is . . . an individual characteristic, neither chosen nor modifiable. . . , and in no way worthy of censure by those who hold a different ethical or moral opinion" (p. 207) do not reflect the general scholarly level of argument. Nonetheless, this book is a valuable contribution to sociolegal research on family law and a welcome addition to the Oñati series.

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Mutual Life, Limited: Islamic Banking, Alternative Currencies, Lateral Reason. By Bill Maurer. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. Pp. xix+217. \$55.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

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Mark Twain's short story "The Million Pound Banknote" ([1893]1996) concerns a bet that a person will be unable to live for one month with only a million-pound banknote. The main

character discovers that he has a problem: how can he spend such a large note when it is not possible to get change? Artist J. S. G. Boggs (Weschler 1999) draws replicas of currency (with slight changes) and offers to exchange these original works of art for goods and services at their face value (and wants to get change in the actual currency in the process). On the one hand, there is a fictitious story about a real bank note whose value cannot be realized, as it cannot be exchanged. On the other, there is a factual story about fake money whose value comes about because it is an authentic, original work of art that can be exchanged.

While Bill Maurer's *Mutual Life, Limited* references neither of these stories, their juxtaposition provides a good hint at the substance of the book, based on a comparison of Islamic finance and Ithaca HOURS, an alternative currency in the upstate New York city. Both Islamic banking, with its principle of *lariba* (attempting to avoid interest), and HOURS, ostensibly based on an hour's worth of work, seem at first glance to be alternatives to dominant capitalist finance. But beneath the immediate surface, these "alternatives"—and the dominant currency—may not be so distinct. Islamic banking and HOURS are inherently bound together with the prevailing capitalist global economy. Yet Maurer is hardly out simply to unmask these alternatives as mere shadows of the dominant economy. Rather, he argues, these alternatives restage the underlying forms of the economy, bound up with questions of equivalence as a moral form and the difficulty of a distinguishing test of truth when there are multiple worlds and uses of money. In short, both the alternatives—and the dominant economy—work and are enacted by agents despite (and perhaps because of) their impurities.

Mutual Life, Limited also speaks to debates in anthropology and other social sciences about the scholarly enterprise. Maurer finds that his research subjects have debated the purity, truth, and status of Islamic finance and HOURS as alternatives. His research subjects have already made some of the comparisons that he set out to make and recommended reading lists to him before their interviews. Reflecting this experience and connecting the substantive discussion about alternative economies, Maurer aims for "lateralizations," rather than descriptions or explanations, reflecting the ways in which his field experience seems largely prefigured and anticipated.

As a strategy of lateralization, Maurer holds the book out as performance, attempting to re-create a sense of field experience:

The point here is the achievement of a homology of form and . . . a ramping up of the kinds of textual achievements of my interlocutors. It is . . . also densely laterally enmeshed and accelerated, speeded up, so that the enmeshments encountered

in the field can be replicated and heightened in the space-time of a reading of this book (p. 13).

In this regard, Maurer draws from literature, film, and a variety of social theories as frequently as from field experiences and interviews. Consequently, the center of analysis is at times tough to trace. Or, to quote Maurer: "One of the most difficult aspects of this book's project is specifying its subject of study" (p. 24).

The book does not convince me of the usefulness of lateralization as a representational technique for social science. While social science findings may not be entirely new to those who are practitioners in the fields we study, our findings can become a voice in their debates. Social science can attend to the difference between particular actors in social context. For instance, *Mutual Life, Limited* draws on interactions with "grassroots" practitioners and with intellectual leaders in both Islamic banking and alternative currencies. Attention to the continuities and differences between theoreticians and other practitioners can highlight the ways in which the concerns and comparisons Maurer encountered play out in day-to-day transactions. Finally, social science has goals to contribute to academic debates by providing theoretically informed empirical findings. A prestigious university press published this book, presumably to be read by an academic audience. It is this audience who will perform their own lateralizations, drawing on their own experiences and knowledge to connect to existing research and theory. In other words, social scientists may want to mimic the practitioners in the field settings studied who get on with their work, not as performance, but as social action, oriented toward particular ends or values. Or, borrowing Maurer's analogue between money and social science, the lesson from Twain and Boggs, and Maurer's finding: the value is realized through circulation and exchange.

Despite the lateral discussions of epistemology, readers interested in the substantive topic can discover interesting discussions when *Mutual Life, Limited* delves into particular subjects in more depth, such as the introduction of new gold coins in Indonesia in the wake of the currency crisis that were promoted as a superior way to save for pilgrimage to Mecca, the discussion of case law concerning counterfeiting in the United States, or the structure of Islamic mutual credit associations. Given the book's structure, however, readers may need some patience to find these nuggets.

References

- Twain, Mark ([1893]1996) "The £1,000,000 Bank-Note," in *The £1,000,000 Bank-Note and Other New Stories*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Weschler, Lawrence (1999) *Boggs: A Comedy of Values*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.