

is successfully inclusive in the sense that many, perhaps a majority, of those attending and even teaching classes and events are non-Irish.

Nagle's work thus highlights another tension for those seeking recognition from the gatekeepers of state multiculturalism. Enduring notions of authenticity and the added force given by claims of prejudice and socioeconomic disadvantage sit uneasily with a "multicultural numbers game" (127) that encourages a relaxed approach to inclusion – in Nagle's words: "the paradoxical presence of primordial and instrumental discourses which simultaneously envelope visions of ethnicity in state-sponsored multiculturalism" (127).

Nagle illustrates this paradox very effectively in a chapter on census activism, where he documents organized lobbying for an "Irish" box on the British census and subsequent campaigns to maximize the number marking it. A leaflet issued for the 2001 census urged: "Feel Irish? Be Irish!" (125). (With web search, I quickly found similar efforts in relation to Britain's 2011 census.) Both the census campaigns and subsequent arguments over results demonstrate that what is being "measured" is, at every level, a politicized version of reality, starting with how central statistical legibility has been to state strategies for managing, even producing, people, and populations at home and in colonial states. In multicultural policy, it is inseparable from resource allocation. Activists' enthusiastic embrace of ethnicization reflects both incorporation into and claiming of some space in that regime – but as Nagle points out, the key question is what it is possible to do with any ground taken.

In his final chapters, Nagle addresses the backlash against multiculturalism, pointing out that problems now being blamed on multiculturalism, including interethnic conflict and alienation, were a generation ago attributed to a *lack* of multiculturalism. His own guarded assessment befits an anthropological exploration of the opportunities that state-sponsored multiculturalism offers "on-the-ground" and his refusal to take an all-or-nothing stance is salutary. Yet, bringing the benefit of a contextual analysis more explicitly to bear on some of the "bigger picture" normative questions, even if speculatively, would have made this project a little bolder. We get hints of this potential here and there, as when Nagle points out the demands that state multiculturalism makes on minority groups to be open and accommodating even as the dominant "host" group is excused from any such self-transformation. But Nagle might have sharpened his critical commentary. For example, does the Irish case have any lessons for British Muslims, the new "suspect community" in Britain? Also surprising for an anthropological study of multiculturalism, the culture concept is left relatively unexamined.

The major contribution of this work is its ethnographic approach to questions that are often discussed as policy matters or theoretical speculation. Occasionally though, I felt Nagle let a catalogue of cultural studies concepts – heterotopia, hybridity, cosmopolitan habitus, and the like – shape his ethnography more than the reverse. I also would have liked a little more detail on how lived multiculturalism felt – particularly for those who do not com-

fortably fit its categories. Finally, there are more than a few minor writing errors in this book – possibly a reflection of cutbacks in the publishing industry – although the writing itself is generally clear. However, none of these quibbles detract from the central value of Nagle's work: an ethnography of the state from the perspective of those affected by and engaged in its official policies.

Robin Whitaker

**Niezen, Ronald:** *Public Justice and the Anthropology of Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 254 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-15220-4. Price: £ 16.99

How do cultures that are incredibly diverse, if not incommensurable, blend, meld, and, at some significant level, occasionally become one? History tells us that this phenomenon occurs with considerable frequency: tribes become nations, opponents become fellow citizens, and separate religions become shared systems of belief. Yet if the process, or processes, are widespread, how shall they be characterized, and how shall we know coalescence is actually occurring when the end result remains subject to perpetual alteration? Indeed, what theory of culture best accounts for these moments of convergence and in what ways do such events test our general theories of social life?

Ronald Niezen approaches these issues from the standpoint of legal anthropology. He argues that as legal accords are formulated in transnational contexts they actually have the effect of leading diverse groupings – what Niezen calls "publics" – to newly shared orientations and values. Focusing mainly on issues of human rights, he argues that as courts and international agencies are called upon to assert cultural rights one can see that the "unstable conception of culture that pervades the social sciences" needs to be replaced by one that considers how "soft law" – that which lacks enforcement but does articulate new standards – helps to propagate emergent values by means of "international norm diffusion." Through their intervention across existing bounds, international organizations become the main venues for that "conceptual diplomacy" that crosscuts states and ethnic groups. These "legal agencies themselves become the producers and promoters of significant categories of belonging, in which rights claimants subsequently create community, formulate history and invest pride – all through the mirror and moral persuasion of public visibility."

Niezen's apparatus for supporting this view comes from a few theoretical sources and a limited number of proffered examples. Theoretically, he finds fault with Gabriel Tarde's idea that even though nations become structurally similar their internal differences are not necessarily diminished. For Niezen, Tarde fails to appreciate the role of the media in "the practical leverage of soft power," when, for example, indigenous peoples and their former colonizers begin to couch their assertions in shared terms and concepts. His vision of social process is invariably upbeat: "Publics have an abiding sense of fairness," he says, "with inclination to indignation when rules of fairness are violated." Thus, when NGOs or the United Nations formulate rights accords they are not hobbled

by the generality of their terms but, to the contrary, the “new categories of human belonging ... through a process of institutionally-mediated global popularization can reach a point at which a concept becomes current in dominant languages.” Contrary to the view of Max Weber he even believes that bureaucracies can be the source of “re-enchantment” through their valuation of diversity within a framework of a common rights discourse. Indeed, the view that coalescence occurs through the promulgation of uniform rules is, in Niezen’s opinion, displaced by various communities asserting their distinctiveness but, ironically, doing so through the same terms, such that they wind up actually sharing most of the same values.

The examples upon which the author bases his approach are drawn largely from his own work with the native peoples of Canada and the experience of such quasi-judicial forums as UN declarations and national truth and reconciliation mechanisms. He describes in some detail, for example, how the Cree Indians of Canada were able to draw upon notions of fairness articulated by various national and international organizations in their struggle to keep new dams from inundating their aboriginal territory. Elsewhere, Niezen argues that the worst abuses of states are remedied in truth and reconciliation panels, like those of southern Africa, as a “reconfiguration of the moral order” emerges. He even suggests that states are particularly responsive to the “compulsion of soft power,” an openness attributable to “the reformulation of history that has become a central part of the global pattern to the most significant human rights violations.” Thus efforts to eliminate local languages or cultures have backfired and fueled the further development of those “new forms of legal sociability” that have led to the “radical convergence” of cultural rights across former lines of division.

Readers of Niezen’s argument will either find that the glass he offers is half full or half empty – or perhaps both at the same time. If one sees “the recognition of planetary social integration as an unavoidable condition of an ideal future,” or that a strong possibility for “implementing innovative regimes of global governance” is not only likely but desirable, then the glass may appear to be filling nicely. If, on the other hand, one delves into a far broader array of examples – or removes some of the burnishing of the examples presented – one may at least wonder why in so many countries subject to these same accords and forms of media exposure civil strife is still the order of the day. Similarly, many readers may question his view of the role of anthropology as one in which, by taking sides with particular groups within a nation, scholars engage in “calculated misrepresentation,” to the point that “the academy is implicated in the structural violence inherent in distorted appeals to popular will as an avenue to cultural justice.”

There is no doubt food for thought in Niezen’s general proposition that “legal sociology can construct and popularize the very categories by which people arrange and act to defend themselves,” though surely we have had enough examples from legal history to make that assertion far from original. Even so, absent a stronger theory of culture that bespeaks the virtual necessity of this progression, much of the evidence Niezen adduces could cer-

tainly be used to prove the opposite. Proponents of the ineluctability of globalism fail to see that, as the creators of the categories of our own experience, human beings constantly generate new categories which may unite *or* divide: The local remains as powerful a force in human adaptation as does any propensity towards unifying combinations. And notwithstanding those scientists who claim that species often converge as a matter of evolutionary potential, the counterforce of difference remains a force of at least equal power. Similarly, diffusion proved a poor vehicle for anthropological theory a century ago because it could not point to mechanisms affecting its success or failure: Niezen’s reliance on the same concept does little to correct this difficulty. Without a far stronger theory of culture and a far less selective set of examples Niezen’s central propositions, informed by his view of anthropology as hopelessly wedded only to cultural differentiation, will remain more an example of a personal predilection than a comprehensive analysis of prevailing trends.

Lawrence Rosen

**Oester, Kathrin:** Ramadan im Regenwald. Aufzeichnungen aus einer matrilinearen Gesellschaft Zentralsumatra. Wuppertal: Edition Trickster im Peter Hammer Verlag, 2011. 294 pp. ISBN 978-3-7795-0316-3. Preis: € 22,00

Kathrin Oesters Bericht basiert auf ihrer in den Jahren 1995 und 1996 durchgeführten Feldforschung in der muslimischen und matrilinearen Gemeinschaft des Dorfes Tanahjauh, Zentralsumatra, Indonesien. Erschienen in der Edition Trickster des Peter Hammer Verlags, stellt Kathrin Oester in ihrem mehr als 300 Seiten starken Buch die Beschreibung der “Unordnung, die der scheinbaren Ordnung der Feldforschung innewohnt” (7) in den Mittelpunkt und ist daher sehr gut als Einstieg in das Fach der Ethnologie oder für Reisende geeignet. Als Hommage an die Teilnehmende Beobachtung, die “Königin unter den Methoden der Feldforschung”, wie Roland Girtler sie in seinem Buch “Methoden der Feldforschung” (Wien 2001: 47) nennt, präsentiert Kathrin Oester den Leserinnen und Lesern ihr Feldtagebuch in Form chronologischer Aufzeichnungen. Damit rückt sie Themen wie ihre Integration ins Dorf, ihre Beziehungen zu Informantinnen und ihren Umgang mit Differenz und Fremde in den Mittelpunkt und verzichtet fast gänzlich auf Analyse und Theoriebildung. Die durch die Inhaltsangabe auf dem Bucheinband geweckte Erwartung auf Interpretation und konzeptionelle Einbettung der “praktische[n] Lösung” und “kreative[n] Verknüpfung” von “scheinbar unüberwindlichen Widersprüche[n]” zwischen der matrilinearen Erbregelung und dem islamisch geprägten Weltbild werden in ihrem Bericht leider nicht erfüllt. Oester beschreibt zwar viele Situationen und Alltagspraktiken, in denen die Beziehungen zwischen Islam und lokaler Tradition (*adat*) im Mittelpunkt stehen, jedoch bleiben viele Fragen offen. Beispielsweise erzählt die Autorin, dass junge Männer Schweine mit Hunden jagen, beides Tiere, die, gemäß vieler wörtlicher Interpretationen von islamischen Verhaltensgrundsätzen, als unrein gelten. Die