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### Title

Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran Immigrant Networks in America

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5022j61x>

### Journal

American Ethnologist, 29(2)

### ISSN

0094-0496

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### Publication Date

2002-05-01

### DOI

10.1525/ae.2002.29.2.430

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Peer reviewed

embarked on a deep engagement with Yoruba popular theater through her involvement with the company of Oyin Adéjobí. Her sophisticated knowledge of the Yoruba world allowed her to participate not only as a researcher but also as an active member of the company and an actor in plays. Her initial field research on Yoruba theater took place over three years (1981–84) during the peak of the genre's popularity. Over the past two decades, Barber has published numerous valuable books and articles that address aspects of this research, including the texts of three plays with extensive commentary. *The Generation of Plays* is the final result of two decades of research and analysis.

The two-decade scope of Barber's research contributes to the historical refinement of her analysis. Barber demonstrates how popular theater companies' engagement with Nigeria's television industry in the 1960s came to reshape the form of the plays. Moving from primarily sung performance to predominantly spoken dialogue, the plays embraced the theatrical realism demanded by the television medium while retaining the didactic morality of the original form. The troubled dynamic between television and live theater is an important theme, and Barber agrees with her Yoruba compatriots that, along with general economic decline, the co-optation of the genre by local popular video producers played a pivotal role in the demise of live theater. Other observers have dismissed the new video industry, but Barber avoids this temptation. Instead, she thoughtfully considers why local videos have been so successful in displacing both live theater and imported videos. She writes,

these videos are holding their own against the much glossier and more technically sophisticated imported video dramas because they are better than the imports at importing: that is, they have the capacity to encompass, include, and envision a wider range of disparate experiences, including foreign elements but also including the ever-present sources of pride and unease in modern Nigeria—"tradition," paganism, the occult, the past, and polygamy; and above all, they have the ability—even more than the stage plays did—to bring these disparate elements within one frame, a frame which assures the viewer that the contradictions can be resolved. [p. 262]

*The Generation of Plays* is first and foremost an ethnography. Barber's analysis is thick with the lives and struggles of theater company members and the social dynamics of audiences. Detailed ethnobiographical accounts of the experience of actors and Adéjobí himself are rendered with a balance of compassion and critical reflection that marks this as the work of a fully realized ethnographer. The analysis is skillfully theorized in a manner that allows the Yoruba people themselves to shape the epistemic grounds of analysis. It is framed in terms of Lefebvre's "criticism of life by ideas" (p. 8), and the ideas that constitute this ground-up approach are fundamentally Yoruba in origin. The result, however, has significance that extends far beyond the rarified concerns of Yoruba studies. Barber's book is a model study of modes of creative production and consumption in a postcolonial context.

*The Generation of Plays* is a massive and thorough volume that is probably too dense for use in undergraduate classes on African popular culture. The African Studies Association selected this book for the prestigious Herskovits Award. It will be of great interest to anyone concerned with postcolonial arts and their roles in the construction of alternative indigenous modernities. Its vivid ethnography, careful analysis, and rich historical detail make this a crucial work of significance to any serious scholar of emergent African cultures.

**Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran Immigrant Networks in America.** Cecilia Menjivar. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. xiii + 301 pp., map, tables, appendixes, notes, references, index.

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The popular counterpart to the Proposition 187-era image of immigrants as greedy and grasping is the vision of immigrants as altruistic beings who, out of love, provide financial assistance to more recently arrived friends, family members, and relatives back home. Some policymakers have even begun to take such generosity for granted, assuming that immigrants' social networks will automatically provide substitutes for the health insurance, welfare, and development aid for which governments would otherwise be responsible. *Fragmented Ties* provides an important corrective

to such assumptions. In this study of Salvadoran immigrants in San Francisco, Cecilia Menjívar details the constraints that migrants' material conditions impose on their abilities to assist others. Menjívar found that migrants often were unable to provide assistance regardless of their desires and family members' expectations. She attributes this finding not to the erosion of Salvadoran values of generosity and mutual assistance but rather to the extreme marginalization that recently arrived Salvadoran migrants experience in the United States. Menjívar demonstrates that immigrant networks are dynamic; differentiated by gender, class, and age; affected by structural conditions; and a means through which individuals attempt to defy or reshape the conditions in which they live.

Menjívar's analysis is based on fieldwork conducted between 1989–91 and between 1992–94 in San Francisco. She surveyed 150 migrants and conducted more intensive interviews with 50 adult Salvadorans who had been in the United States for less than five years. She met her informants through a language school, a food program, and other community programs. In addition to formal interviews, Menjívar spent considerable time with informants—giving them rides and attending baptisms and other significant events. In an appendix, Menjívar usefully describes the ways that she—who is also Salvadoran—was positioned regarding the people that she interviewed.

The narratives that Menjívar quotes are compelling. For instance, informants describe the nightmarish uncertainty of clandestine migration, the ways that migrants coach each other on how to appear Mexican, and the instability of their arrivals in the United States. One informant told Menjívar, "I feel like I am at a bus station, always waiting to go on" (p. 75), while another said that he had learned the significance of Thanksgiving: "I celebrate it in my own way by giving thanks again, and even by eating what the restaurants throw away on that day" (p. 128). Although based primarily on fieldwork in San Francisco, *Fragmented Ties* also contains vivid descriptions of the ways that the Salvadoran civil war shaped social relations within El Salvador. Menjívar's informants' narratives demonstrate the severity of the violence, even for people who were only peripherally or indirectly involved, as well as the ways that social networks became dangerous. Through her skillful use of interview material,

Menjívar effectively depicts informants' marginalization without treating them as victims.

Another strength of *Fragmented Ties* is Menjívar's attention to gender. She notes that, from its inception, migration is a gendered process. In the case of Menjívar's informants, for example, men were usually the first to migrate; they left women to do subsistence farming, then move to cities, and finally to join family members in the United States. This process often led to renegotiations of marriages and other familial relations. Moreover, immigrants' networks are gendered. Menjívar points out that within gender and family groups men and women could repay one favor with another. If a woman accepted a favor from an unrelated man, however, she had to pay him in cash in order to avoid the possibility that he might expect her to repay the favor sexually.

*Fragmented Ties* also includes a fascinating discussion of intergenerational relationships. Regarding the older people in his family, one young person commented, "It's like they have in their heads a country that doesn't exist anymore, except in their imagination. It's like a made-up country with made-up customs that they try to teach me about and then expect me to behave like that" (p. 211).

Its description of the profound dilemmas that are associated with immigration makes *Fragmented Ties* a good read—and one with which it would behoove policymakers to engage. Migration is an economically and physically costly process. It leaves migrants struggling to pay back enormous debts on low incomes. Documents, such as Temporary Protected Status (which was awarded to Salvadorans in 1990), do not necessarily inspire security, as one of Menjívar's interviewees noted: "Because of the uncertainty . . . even with TPS, they're not here permanently, and, well, the poverty in which they live, Salvadorans . . . don't know if they'll be here tomorrow" (p. 109). Some of Menjívar's informants' children lost educational opportunities in the United States due to their poverty, their legal status, and the violence in their schools. Some of these children were traumatized not only by the civil war but also by the terror of their journey from El Salvador to the United States. As Menjívar concludes, "Policies based on the assumption that because immigrants have strong networks—so often extrapolated from the mere fact that they have relatives in the United States—they can take care of one

another need to be recast" (p. 241). This point is important for policymakers in both receiving and sending countries to bear in mind.

In short, Menjívar's comprehensive treatment of immigrants' networks of assistance makes this book a valuable resource for anyone studying immigrant networks, Central American immigration, or the history of the Salvadoran immigrant community in the United States.

**Saqqaq: An Inuit Hunting Community in the Modern World.** Jens Dahl. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. vi + 277 pp., maps, figures, tables, references, index.

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In 1979, Denmark expressed its commitment to ending more than 250 years of colonial rule in Greenland by granting Greenlanders their own home rule government. Although establishing home rule has led to many positive developments, many questions remain about the place of small towns and settlements in the future of this young nation. Home rule leaders back policies to stimulate economic growth and greater independence from Denmark, policies that often benefit those living in the larger towns while disfavoring those who live in the settlements. Jens Dahl, a Danish anthropologist, arrived shortly after the creation of home rule to examine, among other things, the effects of home rule on a settlement in north-west Greenland. This book is based on fieldwork—both long and short term—carried out between 1980–96.

Dahl provides a compelling portrait of hunting and fishing as socially integrative activities. According to Dahl, the Saqqarmiut (the people of Saqqaq) have retained many of the old Greenlandic hunting traditions; the Danish colonial presence has had only a minor impact on those traditions. Dahl portrays the Saqqarmiut as a proud and confident community of hunters who continue to adapt to an ever-changing present. In chapters 2, 3, and 4, he describes and analyzes hunting for beluga whales and seals and fishing for capelin. In chapter 7, he reveals how these practices fit within a rubric called the "hunting mode of production" (pp. 207–229), a concept Dahl borrows from hunter-gatherer studies. In brief, he argues that the rules and strategies used by

Saqqarmiut to regulate their hunting and fishing practices originate from a series of beliefs and norms ("seven pillars of the hunting mode of production" [p. 211]) that have evolved into their present form largely because of environmental influences. Dahl believes these norms help to ensure the vitality of the community and the sustainability of a precarious resource base. Hunting beluga and processing and distributing its meat and blubber are arduous activities requiring cooperation from the entire community. These activities create opportunities for the affirmation of social alliances. Hunters also exploit many other resources that could be harvested more intensely if some species, such as the beluga, were to become scarce.

A number of problems in Dahl's analysis emerge, however, when he reveals how the rules associated with sharing are often contested—how certain hunters often deploy gifts of meat to manipulate social relations, or, alternatively, how they abstain from making gifts to express social distance. Dahl's allegiance to the hunting mode of production model leads him to downplay these acts as exceptions to the norm rather than as purposive and meaningful forms of social action. In my view, trying to fit the activities of contemporary hunters into a production model leads Dahl to disregard the contingent and indeterminate sides of social experience. It also prevents him from treating the Saqqarmiut as historically situated social actors with different perspectives on the world and varying capacities (and desires) to transform it.

A similar criticism can be made of Dahl as author. He does not adequately position himself within the Saqqarmiut social world, and he does not discuss how being a Dane affected his relations in Saqqaq. In contrast, his voice is that of an omniscient and authoritative observer, evident in his frequent willingness to generalize about the Saqqarmiut: "the inhabitants of Saqqaq . . . are hunters—because they consider themselves so" (p. 7). Later, Dahl states that, with few exceptions, only the men of Saqqaq hunt. The reader is left wondering about the place of women and children in the Saqqarmiut portrait of themselves; further questions remain concerning how perceptions of and involvement in hunting and fishing are mediated by age, gender, and level of schooling, to mention just a few factors. Although Dahl argues that women do play an important