

the history, and potentials of women's trans-national solidarity.

As a history of Egyptian women and feminisms the strength of this analysis lies with the rich detail that Bier gave to the ideological supports of patriarchal domination. Bier, therefore, cogently described some of the processes by which patriarchy becomes embedded in practices of governing, which then normalized the control and regulation of women's bodies and labour. By expanding her analysis into both the earlier period of colonial control as well as the current period of neoliberal capitalism, her analysis emphasized the social unfolding of women's subordination to the nation-state as well as the implications of this history for current feminist struggles. In other words, the policies and discourses that were specific to the Nasser era were problematized in a manner that allows feminist research to grapple more generally with the protracted history of women's subordination across historical moments and cultural contexts.

Genevieve Ritchie is a community organizer who works with environmental and migrant justice movements. She writes about anti-racist feminism and critical praxis.

UNIONS, EQUITY AND THE PATH TO RENEWAL

Janice R. Foley and Patricia L. Baker, Editors.
Vancouver, UBC Press 2009

**REVIEWED BY HANS
ROLLMAN**

It is open season on unions not just in the political arena, but in the ivory tower as well. The 'crisis' facing organized labour—an ongoing

loss of membership, density, legal protection, and political influence—has been experienced differently in different jurisdictions around the world, but just as it has set unions on an increasingly urgent course to respond and adapt to the challenges they face, it has also fomented a great deal of intellectual inquiry as academics and researchers assess and analyze unions' responses, and what these efforts can help us to understand about the present and future state of the labour movement, and about workers' experience more broadly.

Thus the growth of a burgeoning body of literature under the moniker of 'union renewal' or 'organized-labour-in-crisis'. There are, of course, no easy answers to the question of how unions can most effectively renew themselves (nor even to the question of what purpose they should be renewing themselves for) but feminist researchers in the field—of which, thankfully, there are no small number—have flagged one important question: what is the role of equity in rebuilding and revitalizing the labour movement? Indeed, this reviewer would suggest the union crisis/renewal literature typically addresses equity in one of two ways: either as a distraction from (what some consider) more primary goals such as an intensified (albeit romanticized and under-theorized) return to street militancy and class analysis; or, by contrast, as fundamental to reversing the decline of organized labour and correcting the failures of white masculinist labour 'organizing' of the past sixty years.

Foley and Baker's collection *Unions, Equity and the Path to Renewal* falls firmly into the latter camp. Their focus is primarily Canadian (rightly so: while union activists have been keen to exchange strategies internationally, the fact is that Canada has not encountered the same sort of 'crisis' or 'decline'

experienced elsewhere in the world, much of which can be attributed to the significance of regional policy (and cultural differences), and covers a broad swath of research and activism taking place under the equity banner within organized labour. The twelve papers comprising the collection provide both broad overviews of equity gains and histories within the Canadian labour movement, as well as more focused critiques on particular dimensions of identity and equity and the shortcomings of organized labour in Canada on these fronts. The editors do not fall into the trap of focusing solely on women's equity struggles: the section "Black Trade Unionists Speak Out" comprises no less than a quarter of the book, while fascinating and critically important conceptual models are theorized in Linda Briskin's contribution on cross-constituency organizing and Janice Foley's effort to theorize a conceptual model for equity, drawing in part on social movement theory. The final section even offers international and comparative perspectives on the themes explored in the book, drawing from Australian, American, and British examples. Anne McBride and Jeremy Waddington's contribution on the importance of addressing women's and equity group representation in union merger processes is particularly salient given the ongoing merger between the CEP and the CAW in Canada.

The contributions in this collection ought to be required reading not just for researchers but for union organizers, leaders, and activists as well. Jan Kainer's masterful overview of the contribution of women's equity activism to union growth and renewal, and Anne Forrest's assessment of the historical and ongoing relevance of economic equality (organized labour's traditional forte) to broader equity issues cast an important foundation for several of the key

debates occurring in union circles today. Indeed, this is the crux of the argument: that equity is not just one dimension of the legacy of organized labour, but that it is the core, and that equity must be the central focus of union renewal efforts. In today's grim reality of austerity-driven governments and increasingly hostile and combative employers, it is difficult for labour activists—as well as researchers—to maintain a focus on the broader agenda; the immediate need to respond to the exigencies of front-line struggles often mean labour is reacting to a crisis, not enacting an agenda. Foley and Baker's work helps put this in context, and offers a vital aid to understanding the historical and ongoing centrality of the equity project to the renewal not just of organized labour, but of working life in general.

Hans Rollmann completed a Masters degree in Cultural Anthropology at Memorial University of Newfoundland and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Gender, Feminist & Women's Studies at York University. His research focuses on gender representation and the labour movement.

WHEN BIOMETRICS FAIL: GENDER, RACE AND THE TECHNOLOGY OF IDENTITY

Shoshana Amielle Magnet
Durham: Duke University Press,
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**REVIEWED BY VERONIKA
NOVOSELOVA**

Building upon a well-established tradition of considering science and technology as constituted by culture, Shoshana Amielle Magnet problematizes the discourses behind

the expansion of biometrics—technologies that aim at verification and identification by means of using data obtained from measuring bodies through iris and retina scans, digital fingerprinting, and facial recognition. Marketed as perfect tools to reduce human error and eliminate subjective judgement, digital biometrics are being increasingly implemented in the areas of law enforcement, information access, and border security. Magnet, however, calls into question the industry's claims of impartiality of identification technologies by arguing that biometrics are based on outdated, essentialized notions of identity and disproportionately target minority populations.

The notion of biometric failure features centrally in the book, and Magnet unpacks its multiple meanings in the introductory chapters. In a literal sense, identification and verification technologies fail more often than the biometrics industry representatives would like to admit: there are mismatches and false rejections of known subjects as well as possibilities that high-tech devices can be hacked or fooled. On a larger level, biometrics fail to realize their core promises of objectivity, convenience, and reliability. Magnet adopts Donna Haraway's concept of *corporeal-fetishism* to explain how a relentless pursuit to uncover the "inner truth" of identity aims at transforming a body into a knowable, fixed object. The framework of corporeal fetishism allows Magnet to trace how bodies that do not conform to a projected image of a white, able-bodied, and gender-conforming male user are constructed as "inscrutable" and therefore, as having a low economic value in a big business of biometrics. To support her argument, Magnet cites numerous accounts of biometric failures on othered bodies. For example, face scanners sometimes fail to accurately identify people of

color; iris scanners are not designed to accommodate individuals with visual impairments; devices that speed up the flow of passengers in the airport will not work on people in wheelchairs or with certain medical conditions. Biometric systems not only privilege white able bodies, but also assume a strict male/female binary which erases the existence of gender-variant individuals.

After providing an overview of the development of biometric technologies, Magnet critically assesses the three major areas of their use: the prison industrial complex and the welfare system in the U.S., and the security system at the U.S.-Canada border. Operating in a neo-liberal context of moving from rehabilitation to punishment, prisons function as locations of surveillance, allowing biometrics companies to capitalize on the growing rates of incarceration; with no opportunity to opt out, prisoners become convenient test subjects for identification and verification technologies. After having been adopted by prisons, biometrics are making huge profits by expanding into the US welfare system. Magnet reveals how neoliberal political climate enables the biometrics industry to profit from policing poor people during times of continuous cutbacks of social services. Turning to the issue of transformation of the US-Canada border by biometric technologies, Magnet shows how Western anxieties around racialized bodies connect to the interests of biometric companies and the global capital. An overarching argument running through these discussions is that biometrics—underpinned by biases around categories of otherness—criminalize welfare recipients, immigrant and refugees populations, queer people, and people of color.

Of particular interest for Magnet are representations of biometrics in popular culture. Coining the term