Book reviews

Aid, development, and humanitarianism


Dream zones takes us into the realm of India’s Special Economic Zones (SEZs), iconic large-scale industrial infrastructure projects that, over the last twenty years, have come to represent both the promised land of growth and development and highly charged flashpoints of protest and resistance across the country’s post-liberalization landscape. It is precisely against these polarized ideological positions that Jamie Cross situates his important ethnographic intervention. Steering clear of both triumphalist narratives of India’s rise and dystopic counter-narratives of capitalist modernity, Cross responds to totalizing abstractions with grounded and open-ended anthropological engagement, building on influential works on ‘friction’ (A.L. Tsing, Friction: an ethnography of global connection, 2005), an ‘aesthetic of emergence’ (H. Miyazaki, The method of hope: anthropology, philosophy, and Fijian knowledge, 2006), and, most centrally, diverse ‘dreamed-of futures’ and their complex material effects. SEZs in contemporary India, the book argues, are built on an ‘economy of anticipation’ (chap. 1), and it is the relentless pursuit of diverse and often divergent dreams that continuously reconfigures relations of power and makes spaces of global capital in particular regional contexts and historical moments.

In this case, the context is Andhra Pradesh (AP) in South India, which in 2013 was the Indian state with the largest number of SEZs in various stages of development. Between 2004 and 2011, Cross spent twenty-six months conducting fieldwork in AP, based primarily in and around the economic zones in the state’s north coastal plains, outside the city of Vishakhapatnam. Fieldwork covered multiple sites, including villages and market towns, resettlement colonies and industrial townships, government, trade union, and NGO offices, and, most notably, work as a machinist on the factory floor of a sub-contracting company operating inside the SEZ. This material is presented in five ethnographic chapters, each centred on a different mode of anticipation and set of actors: regional politicians, planners, and real-estate speculators (chap. 2); farmers and agricultural labourers, dispossessed and resettled owing to land acquisition (chap. 3); the British general manager of an Anglo-Dutch diamond manufacturing company and his Indian management team (chap. 4); young, unmarried male labourers who work on the factory floor (chap. 5); and metropolitan and local anti-SEZ activists (chap. 6). The book is accessibly written with a number of well-chosen photographs, giving us a view of vast and unfinished infrastructures, filled in with intimate observations of life in motion, the stuff of ethnographic connection.

The chapters work in different ways. Chapters 2 and 3 on visions and speculations around agrarian land and its industrial (and real-estate) futures are the most closely grounded in the regional histories, political economy, and developmental genealogies of Andhra Pradesh. This is where structural adjustment meets
Telugu nationalism and where globally mobile infrastructural projects like SEZs are mobilized into movements for regional autonomy and processes of state-making. The density and dynamism of the narratives here derive from an understanding of the social and political histories of land, caste, commerce, and accumulation in AP, and from the highly differentiated access to resources involved in negotiating futures and adjusting to changing circumstances, whether by Kamma and Reddy politicians and industrialists, rich Velama and Raju farming families, less wealthy Kapu farmers, or Dalit communities of Mallas and Madigas.

Chapters 4 and 5 follow in the tradition of industrial ethnography tracing the future-orientated strategies of management and labour on an altogether more intimate scale inside the Worldwide Diamonds factory located in Vishakhapatnam SEZ. Here, Cross argues against thinking of industrial workplaces only in terms of exploitation and coercion, and makes the case for including sentiment and desires in our analyses of both new management techniques and the self-fashioning practices of industrial workers. Interestingly, through their particular spatial arrangements, both the resettlement colony and the factory disturb long-standing caste segregations, even as different individuals and groups respond to old prejudices and new status anxieties in precarious times.

It is this diversity of dreams and effects that motivates Cross, who is not interested in an empirical accounting of the success and failures of SEZs, evidently much to the frustration of some of the urban, educated anti-SEZ activists, whose audit practices and anticipatory imaginations, of hurling towards dystopian futures and hope for better, alternative worlds, he addresses in chapter 6. But failure looms large throughout the text – in vast empty stretches of publicly acquired land and unfinished and inadequately appointed resettlement colonies, in lapsed investment agreements and long-promised jobs, in disappointing management schemes and dejecting employment conditions. And drawing on important anthropological work, Cross argues that it is the renewing force of failure and unrealized futures that fuels capitalist modernity. I therefore wish he had used the final chapter to advance a more complete and compelling analysis of the generative powers of failure and perpetually deferred dreams – and their material, social, and political effects. What might it mean, in the words of Raju, one of the three young men Cross closely follows, to ‘dream without hope’ (p. 145)? How might this problematize ideas about what it means to consent (chap. 5)? How might we theorize the work of deferment in democratic practice and in an investment-orientated economy? These are only some possible directions that such thinking might take, and Cross certainly has the ethnography to take us further. In this sense, the book’s slim conclusion feels somewhat like a deferral itself, and yet, in keeping with its spirit, it gives grounds for hope that we may expect even more in the future.

Mekhala Krishnamurthy Shiv Nadar University


What would happen if everyone was simply provided with an income, regardless of employment, and irrespective of their ability or willingness to work? As James Ferguson notes, thinkers on all sides of the political spectrum have often viewed this kind of proposal as sheer folly. Giving money to the poor with no strings attached, it has been assumed, would be a recipe for disaster. The money would just be wasted, recipients would lose any incentive to work, they would be reduced to an undignified dependency – these and other well-worn arguments have sustained the sense that income uncoupled from employment poses fundamental problems.

In Give a man a fish, Ferguson – with a regional focus on southern Africa – charts the fact that despite these entrenched objections, proposals for this kind of ‘Basic Income Grant’ appear to be on the increase, while a range of less radical forms of unconditional welfare payment are actually being implemented; something that might come as a surprise to readers familiar with narratives of a triumphant neoliberalism putatively antithetical to state provision, as Ferguson points out. The book comprises an extended meditation on the implications of this emergent ‘distributive politics’ for political thought, orientating itself particularly towards traditions of the left. Advocacy of distributive politics, Ferguson argues, offers progressive thinkers the possibility of overcoming a tendency to remain entrenched in a purely oppositional mode.

Central to the book’s argument is the assertion that politics rooted in a ‘productivist’ logic are inadequate to the times. Opposition to unconditional cash transfers often fixes upon risks posed to employment. But Ferguson notes that increasing levels of joblessness seen in southern
African countries appear persistent, as technological advance allows industry to produce ever more with ever less need for labour. Efforts to improve the position of the poor primarily by expanding and improving employment, Ferguson argues, fail to acknowledge this basic fact: the global economy no longer needs so many workers. It is in this context that distributive politics are presented as taking on an urgent relevance. Ferguson provides an amusingly literal interrogation of the book’s eponymous slogan to make the point. Do people really need to be taught to fish in a world of high-tech fisheries that shed jobs even as they increase production?

A closely related concern is an exploration of the alternative basis of entitlement implied by distributive political initiatives such as the proposed Basic Income Grant. Conditional and insurance-based welfare systems, revolving around the figure of the male breadwinner, have been bound up with a model of entitlement centred on the exchange of labour for wages. Legitimate beneficiaries in such systems show up as those unable to work. Distributive political claims, Ferguson argues, fundamentally question this centrality of labour and exchange in theorizing entitlement, along with the related understanding of welfare as an unreciprocated gift. Drawing on anthropological analyses of ‘demand-sharing’ in hunter-gatherer societies, Ferguson suggests that a contrasting model of entitlement founded upon sheer ‘presence’, and related to an insistence upon a ‘rightful share’, could provide the conceptual underpinning for a practical expansion of unconditional cash transfers into a potentially radical political project.

If political thought has much to learn from cash transfer programmes, however, Ferguson makes clear that ordinary people in southern African countries have long been developing their own forms of distributive claim. Dependence might be denigrated by productivist assumptions, but Ferguson analyses a range of everyday livelihood strategies as explicitly seeking out forms of dependency in order to facilitate distributive flows. This ‘hard work of dependence’ (p. 94) – described as playing out in social fields as diverse as landholding, migration, sex, and funerary practice – serves to bind overlapping networks of dependants into the income streams of those who do have access to cash. Wage labour may have previously been the central source of such flows, but Ferguson describes new cash transfer programmes as necessarily taking shape in the context of these quotidian distributive pressures: as pensioners, for example, come to be subject to the kinds of claim long aimed at migrant workers.

Overall, the book stands as a compelling manifesto for an ‘inductive’ politics of distribution grounded in ethnographic observation of ‘what the world’s disadvantaged actually do and say’ (p. 140). The writing is clear and the analysis lucid throughout. Readers may be left wanting more extensive ethnographic treatment of the way existing cash transfer programmes are playing out, but the book comprises a powerful theoretical intervention, and can be expected to provoke anthropologists to undertake such studies.

David Cooper
University College London

Flynn, Alex & Jonas Tinius (eds). Anthropology, theatre, and development: the transformative potential of performance. xiv, 368 pp., illus., bibliogr. London: Palgrave, 2015. £73.00 (cloth)

Eugenio Barba wrote: ‘Theatre anthropology does not seek principles which are universally true, but rather directions which are useful’ (‘Theatre anthropology’, The Drama Review 94, 1982, p. 5, original emphasis). This statement aptly summarizes the aims and utility of the edited volume Anthropology, theatre, and development. ‘Development’, a term laden with divergent understandings, is given useful direction through the series proposal that readers think through ‘development as change’ (p. viii, original emphasis), a theme that editors Flynn and Tinius harness with effective centripetal force. This multidisciplinary collection articulates transformation as the root of what ‘the theatre’ and political performances can and will do – not just in terms of final outcomes and ‘impact’, but in how performers and audiences ‘develop’ the worlds they create together.

To unify the contributors’ myriad takes on transformations, the editors suggest employing an analytical tool: ‘relational reflexivity’ (p. 5). Relational reflexivity demands an engagement with performers’ internal processes of change as these impact upon, and are in turn impacted by, external processes of development, enabling examination of ‘radical changes in people’s conceptions of themselves and their understanding of wider political subjectivities’ (p. 5). The collection’s articles mobilize relational reflexivity by unpacking: performers’ intensive processes of self-becoming; ways people collectively interpret, manage, and perform their imagined and ‘real’ worlds, particularly during moments of conflict and upheaval; and ways performance praxis and process interact with
institutions – state, religious, artistic – through entrenched rules and expectations.

The volume is presented in two parts: ‘Ethnographies of political performance in developing contexts’ (I) and ‘Theatre as paradigm for social reflection: conceptual perspectives’ (II), from which a selection is briefly highlighted here. Part I presents changes wrought through the processes of theatrically embodying protest. Flynn cogently focuses on the practice of mistica performances as critical to the MST (Landless Workers Movement), ‘[envisaging] change within themselves and also collective change in the conception of political subjectivity’ (p. 13). Jeffrey Juris examines ‘protest theatrics’ (p. 100) as ways activists controvert institutional and social expectations using artistic confrontations.

This section then looks to performative engagements in rule and justice. Here, Jane Plastow convincingly advances the concept of theatrical performance as one of literally ‘taking space’ (p. 111), citing bodily transformation from a physicality of shrinking to one which expands – through revision of self-value and a greater expectation of recognition – filling both staged and everyday spaces. Plastow simultaneously problematizes continuance of ‘developed’ being represented as ‘correct’, and questions how this influences development projects and their participants (p. 119).

Part II scrutinizes the relationship between performers, audiences, and institutions, calling to mind Richard Bauman’s definition of communicative performance as ‘responsibility to an audience’ (Verbal art as performance, 1984, p. 11). The first three essays work well in concert: Tinius discusses the tension between performer developing ‘self’ as she affects (and is affected by) institutional expectations, and aesthetical aspirations (pp. 192-8). Rafael Schacter examines ‘allegiance to the social body’ (p. 216) through processes of masking and revelation, an argument Clare Foster’s piece furthers through her understanding of the performer-audience relationship as the ‘embodiment of a fractured, multiple and contradictory “we”’ (p. 247). Artistic objectification of transformations wrought by conflict is provocatively discussed through several essays from arts writer Rolf Hemke (pp. 267-70, 273). Ethnographic application is directly and persuasively addressed by Nicholas Long and Caroline Gatt, both of whom look to theatrical praxis – verbatim theatre and research theatre, respectively – as a potentially transformational tool for anthropological representation.

The success of relational reflexivity becomes apparent in the unease that results from dividing these essays into ‘contextual’ versus ‘conceptual’; the collection is strongest in its moments of interconnection. Narratives are retold not only as a matter of ethnographic record, but, particularly in Dan Baron Cohen’s offering, as ethical, methodological engagement (pp. 73-80), echoing Gatt’s assertion that research theatre enables ‘ways of knowing of the people we collaborate with to influence not only the content of our anthropological work, but also one’s methods’ (p. 338). Breed’s presentation of (invisibly) scripted ‘law-as-performance’ in Rwanda’s post-genocidal gacaca courts (p. 127) juxtaposed with scripted theatrical counterparts (p. 142) seemingly answers Foster’s contribution on the ‘collective meaning-making’ potential of theatrical performance processes (p. 18) as well as reflecting on similar challenges to those presented by Rau (pp. 283-4) and Schuler (pp. 294-300) regarding the institutional restriction of social transformation.

Ultimately, mobilizing ‘change’ as the locus for what is otherwise a highly diverse interdisciplinary assemblage is compelling as a cohesive thesis because it defies division between contextual and conceptual. This volume therefore not only challenges readers to question processes that typically nest under the term development; it demands re-examination of embedded conventions concerning ethnographic practice and representations. This yields deep implications for anthropological and theatrical practices, providing very useful directions for future thought.

KELLY FAGAN ROBINSON University College London

MALKKI, LIISA H. The need to help: the domestic arts of international humanitarianism. x, 270 pp., illus., bibliogr. Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2015. £17.99 (paper)

The need to help is an ambitious book that aims to demystify humanitarianism as an ideology and practice of selflessness. It is inspired by Liisa Malkki’s long-term engagement (beginning in 1996) with the Finnish Red Cross doctors and nurses who worked with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Rwanda, Goma, and Burundi (where Malkki previously conducted her ethnographic research, Purity and exile, 1995) and supplemented by data derived from an extended participant observation in the humanitarianism context in Finland. Malkki argues that, contrary to the popular assumption surrounding humanitarian motivation, and the work
of international aid workers in particular, arising from a position of relative strength and power, humanitarian ideals materialize in practitioners’ inter-subjective encounters at ‘home’ where ‘affective’ neutrality and imagination entangle, and ‘in the field’ where professionalism and ethical self-making blur – all revealing the profound ‘neediness of the helper’ (p. 8).

The book is divided into six chapters. The introduction helpfully charts the argument in relation to the studies of critical humanitarianism and affect in anthropology. In the first half of the book, Malkki argues that the intertwined need for sociality at home and solitude during field missions – not dissimilar to anthropological fieldwork – co-constitute aid workers’ professionalism, internationalism, and ethical orientation. Chapter 1 situates aid workers’ neediness and vulnerabilities in their desire to be ‘out in the world’ (p. 24) and declared professional obligation. Chapter 2 explores an array of ethically difficult circumstances, or ‘impossible situations’, confronting aid workers in the field to richly draw out the ambivalences and precariousness intrinsic to humanitarian work. Switching focus, Malkki elaborates on neediness outside aid workers’ individualized experiences and maps onto the broader humanitarian logic, institutionalized knowledge practice, and social relations in the latter half of the book. Chapter 3 traces the histories of the construction of children as the ‘embodiment of a basic human goodness and innocence’ in ‘the West’ to argue that the ‘figure of a child’ as an ahistorical and apolitical subject fuels humanitarian sensibilities (a key insight from her previous work, ‘Speechless emissaries: refugees, humanitarianism, and dehistoricization’, Cultural Anthropology 11, 1996). Chapters 4-6 develop the conceptualization of ‘the realm of the mere’ and present ethnographic evidence for universalizing and de-contextualized representations of children, animals, and inanimate objects doing political work in the Finnish humanitarian context (p. 122). If, in ‘Bear humanity’, Malkki shows that cultural artefacts seemingly thought to ward off loneliness among elderly Finns are about the need to ‘ward off thoughtlessness’ (p. 130) in the international aid scene, in ‘Homemade humanitarianism: knitting and loneliness’, she unfolds the intricate connection between the Finnish Red Cross domestic services and international generosity. Whether affective sociality offered to one another by the volunteer knitters of ‘Mother Teresa Blankets’ or ‘stranger sociality’ (E.A. Povinelli, The empire of love: toward a theory of intimacy, genealogy, and carnality, 2006) afforded for many through ‘Red Cross Friendship Services’, the need for sociality and the need to help are manifested through complicated ‘techniques of selflessness’, on the one hand, and ethical self-making, on the other. Malkki persuasively posits that possibilities of ‘giving’ in the international aid context are part of, rather than distinct from, cultivating imagination and sociality in the domestic sphere. As a way of circling back to Malkki’s initial claim of neediness, chapter 6 asks how ethical limits generated in humanitarianism, or ‘zealous humanitarianism’, provide the condition of possibility for the (continued) work of aid workers: the enduring adherence to ‘operational neutrality’ (p. 174) in politically fraught situations renders visible humanitarianism as the ‘power of the mere’ (p. 122) in its raw intensity rather than the politics of ‘a certain moral high ground’ (pp. 74-5).

The affective turn that Malkki adopts in the book creatively advances the anthropological debate on humanitarianism. As an eloquently argued and ethnographically grounded conceptualization of ‘humanitarianism inside out’, the book is an exemplary addition to the emerging interest in institutionalized knowledge production offering critical perspectives on current and former aid workers’ complex negotiation within and beyond the international humanitarian context. The complete absence of any deeper engagement with the robust anthropological literature on ethics and subjectivity is somewhat surprising, given the book’s key concern of ethical self-making and inter-subjectivity in humanitarianism. None the less, its extensive exploration of and emphasis on the ambiguity between politics – as the context for humanitarian institutions and aid workers – and neutrality – as the underlying principle for humanitarian affect, work, and motivation – will be of interest to the general anthropology audience and those invested in the specialized debate on humanitarian ethics. These discussions open up a wider re-evaluation of affect theory in anthropology as well as invigorating the discussion of humanitarian affect as politics in and of itself.

Tina Shrestha  Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore


The ethical positioning of economic growth in relation to human and social outcomes is fluid.
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gained momentum during greater regulation of, and public debate about, business practices. Corporates are not the only ones shaping the ethical environment. This publication examines CSR, and its variants, in determining and regulating those changes.

Walker-Said’s introduction is a well-written summary of a good book, explaining most chapters in terms of key CSR challenges and debates; the positive and negative contributions of corporates to the realization of human rights agendas. The book is in three parts. The first part considers the development of a CSR discourse through practices of communication and coercion by corporations, NGOs, activists, and academia. The second part addresses the legal platform of CSR, considering existing legislation, the scope of liabilities, and enforcement. The final part incorporates earlier material to examine the African context of international markets and emerging political systems, including when private corporations are seen as more responsible than governmental institutions. Extractive industries represent the larger proportion of evidence within the book.

Benson’s chapter on the tobacco industry reminds us that there are financial bottom lines to business function. In a theme repeated elsewhere, he observes that what corporates say and what they do can be quite different matters. The language of CSR also comes under scrutiny. In his chapter (which is repeated in C. Dolan & D. Rajak’s 2016 collection *The anthropology of corporate social responsibility*), Hirsch highlights a terminology of ‘strategically deployable shifters’. Phrases like ‘sustainability’ and ‘CSR’ are mobilized to grow a jungle of virtuosity that surrounds corporate prioritization of economic interests. As critics struggle to cut a path through to the economic operation, the higher education institute, with its own financial priorities and social-environmental ‘virtues’, colludes via virtuous partnerships with corporates, thus providing intellectual validity and making the virtuous jungle ever denser.

Bush delivers a historical examination of the lesser known, and less successful, prosecutions of business entities in the Nuremberg Trials. With an eye on contemporary events, he highlights the negative economic consequences of prosecuting big companies. Criminal accountability for past actions is ‘only one of many interests to be served’ (p. 145). Scheffler points to international criminal courts holding corporates to account along similar lines to war tribunals. Gilmore compares systems of military and corporate compliance, noting the lack of effective sanctions in the latter and reasoning that military systems of command could also safeguard corporates from incurring liabilities.

This interdisciplinary collection contains an interesting array of different outlooks, which includes some qualified support for CSR. For example, although Rosenblum argues that the unexpected permeation of CSR into commerce has ignited positive changes to production conditions, he warns us to engage with CSR, but not trust it. Chapters by Kaeb, Wynhoven, and Aftab, influenced by Amartya Sen, look towards non-legal mechanisms of compliance. In my mind, these latter readings are reminiscent of older debates in economic anthropology (although in ways less predictable at that time). These authors suggest that the ‘institution’ of corporates not only maximizes profits but maximizes other values too. Core company values, like other ontologies, are imagined as consistent across a range of practices. Or at least that is the idea. The evidence from other chapters suggests that any corporate ontology might contain significant conflicts or contradictions and that the difficulties of legal accountability cannot be understated.

Although the language of CSR is examined and the book reveals a variety of corporate practices, the actual corporation is too easily reduced to a monolithic, unitary actor (with similarly conceived shareholders). I am never quite sure what makes a corporate a corporate. They cannot be identical, internally homogeneous entities – there must be a spectrum of differentiation incorporating variations of structure, capacity, and ethos. The corporate is too conveniently bounded. Evans’s chapter on multi-stakeholders only covers a small aspect of this question. For example, since speaking to private security companies that offer international corporates security analysis and protection services, I am mindful that the security sector can shape corporate operations. What happens to CSR when corporates outsource expertise and knowledge to other companies?

The questions that delved into ‘the state’, and occupied much attention in the social sciences, have yet to be similarly applied to ‘the corporate’ – a social process often reported as a fait accompli. In order to build upon the insights of scholarly work on CSR and the movement towards corporate governance, ‘the corporate’ needs further deconstruction to understand more about the shaping of future human (and economic) rights.

**Jonathan Newman** *University of Sussex*
**Bodies and materials**

BACON, LOUISE, VICKY PUREWAL, EMILIA KINGHAM & DEBORAH PHIPPS (eds). The conservation of hair. vii, 120 pp., illus., bibliogs. London: Archetype Publications, 2015. £25.00 (paper)

The conservation of hair is a specialist publication which focuses on the particular conservation issues raised by hair. This category includes human and animal hair and fur (hair still attached to the skin). The volume contains seven contributions from a mixture of museum professionals, forensic scientists, and specialists in pest control, all of whom have first-hand experience of the practical challenges surrounding the identification and conservation of objects made of or containing hair. The selection of artefacts discussed is testimony to the wide range of practical and symbolic uses to which hair has been put in different times and places. We move from goat hair tents, beaver hats, horse hair upholstery and human hair embroidery and jewellery to stuffed dogs, baroque religious sculptures, and ancient human hair mats from a sixth-century Sudanese cemetery. Fascinating fragments of the biographies of these objects emerge in passing but the authors remain focused on the primary theme: conservation. Detailed images of carpet beetles and moths mingle with scientific diagrams of strands of hair and photographs of artefacts ranging from a leopard skin-covered radio, an ancient Egyptian wig, and a bear’s head undergoing restoration. The colour images, many of which are powerfully magnified, are highly effective for giving a sense of the material challenges, diversity, and intricacy of hair conservation work.

The volume is successful at introducing the reader to the characteristics and specificities of hair. It reveals that hair, which is composed of keratin, a tough, fibrous, insoluble protein, is remarkably resistant to physical, chemical, and biodegradation. The main threat comes from moths and carpet beetles, which are attracted especially to keratinous material that is soiled by substances such as sweat, urine, and dust. Furthermore, many of the artefacts under discussion are only partially made of hair. Their deterioration is often linked to the degradation of the materials to which they are attached. Many of the contributors offer insight into the specific methods they have employed to overcome the difficulties posed by particular objects. They also place emphasis on the need for vigilance regarding the regulation of light, humidity, and what they call ‘good housekeeping’, as well as pest control. A persistent theme is the tension between conservation, research, and display, which no doubt applies to the conservation of most museum objects. One also gets a sense of how the practices of conservationists are shaped by various legislative guidelines such as the EU Biocidal Products Regulation, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, and guidelines concerning the treatment of human remains.

Some contributors, most notably Charlotte Ridley, offer wider anthropological insights into human hair’s frequent associations with ritual, power, and remembrance. Ridley suggests these are universal associations, giving examples of Hawaiian necklaces, English mourning jewellery, Taoist priests’ hats, Balinese and Japanese Noh masks, and Ugandan head-dresses all found in the Horniman collection in London. Hair’s symbolic power is also highlighted in Kimberleigh Collins-Peynaud’s fascinating essay about baroque Holy Child devotional sculptures in Spain and Italy, some of which have human hair wigs made from the hair of devotees, reinforcing the intimate bond between the sculpture and worshipper. Such examples seem to suggest that human hair has the capacity to animate objects, but we should be wary of making generalizations purely from what we see in museum collections. Ethnography outside the museum reminds us that human hair is sometimes used as a fibre for making rope, stuffing mattresses, and weaving interlinings for suits (see my own *Entanglement: the secret lives of hair*, 2016). Here hair’s potential for symbolic potency is subordinated to its practical attributes as a strong and elastic fibre.

For a book on something as specific as the conservation of hair, the volume manages to be playful. Bob Child’s contribution on hair-eating pests is titled ‘Hair today gone tomorrow’, whilst Kerri Allen’s essay on identifying different animal fibres is called ‘Splitting hairs’. Combined with judicious images and a striking cover, these touches make for a welcoming volume. It is ironic, however, given the focus on conservation, that the pages fall out with alarming ease. Returning to the content, one area the volume fails to address is the fate of the extensive collections of human hair samples that lie neglected in museums of anthropology and natural history. These are currently attracting the attention of different groups, including members of communities from whom hair was taken and scientists wanting to use them for DNA research. They raise pressing questions concerning
conservation, ownership, education, and ethics, which might have further broadened the scope of this interesting volume.

Emma Tarlo Goldsmiths, University of London


An archaeology of the immaterial is deliberately paradoxical. How does one do an archaeology of the immaterial? And why? The answer lies first in the fact that this is not an archaeology of the conventional sort. Material objects figure episodically throughout, but what matters in this book is a genealogy (in Foucault’s sense) of Western intellectual movements that deny and denigrate materiality while hailing an idea, an ideal, or an alternative reality that cannot be seen or verified. Following philosopher Richard Rorty, Buchli calls such immaterial figurations ‘incorrigible’. Rorty means to say they are irrefutable, but one senses that Buchli wants to extend this to say they are obstinate, or, more literally, ‘headstrong’. The book deepens some themes in the edited volume An anthropology of absence: materializations of transcendence and loss (eds M. Bill, F. Hastrup & T.F. Sørenson, 2010) and engages critically with the new tradition of asymmetrical archaeology. Buchli’s answer to the ‘why’ question is that the material/immaterial duality has permeated Western ontologies and epistemologies from Aristotle down to the twenty-first century. He contends, convincingly, that while it is all fine and well for academics to be weary of binaries in the long poststructuralist period, we cannot understand past and even present worlds without appreciating the cultural potency of such polarities for most actors.

Buchli recounts a long history of about 1,500 years of European theology and political movements that accentuated asceticism, iconoclasm, and anti-materialism. After a linguistically thick introduction that sketches important abstractions and borrowed terms, the book progresses into three chapters focused on Christian theology and practice, from orthodox icons (unpacked in their full Peircean sense), to medieval ascetics who punished their body to make heaven shine through their open wounds, to the Reformation, with its spasms of iconoclastic violence and ambivalent embrace of the text (the Word as written with paper and ink is, after all, material, and so ‘bibliophobia’ quickly followed). The fifth and final chapter, ‘Leninism, immateriality, and modernity’, returns to Buchli’s empirical strengths in the archaeology of the Soviet era and ventures into the contemporary period, in which, he asserts, the rationality of the material and immaterial is being turned on its head through 3D printing.

There are many things to admire about this book, and a few aspects that readers may find vexing. The central argument works against the self-congratulatory narrative of modernity as alterity and refreshing finds a continuity between antique and contemporary lives: ‘[T]he immaterial is by no means a unique quality of late capitalism or modernity but a thoroughly “un-modern” aspect of human activity that has a long, if poorly understood, history’ (p. 1). Buchli’s intellectual interrogations of specific objects are particularly engaging, such as the orthodox icon (which viewers looked ‘through’ rather than ‘at’), microscopes, and the camera obscura. Throughout, his discussion of the senses of sight (which are plural and change historically) is particularly helpful. For the thick middle of the book, one must have a native interest in Christianity and a faith that its anxious experiments with making the divine present through materiality pertain to capitalism’s commodity fetish, communism’s utopian aspirations to go ‘objectless’, and the digital world’s conviction that ‘code is all’. While a case may be made that these connections, whether of a genealogical, archaeological, or parallel type, are significant, the reader is left to impute an association due simply to their ‘propinquity’ (a favoured term in the latter part of the book). A more anthropological argument could have been made about how iconoclasm and anti-materialist movements dialectically relate to materiality if more diverse comparative cases had been developed (fundamentalist Islam and Zen Buddhism are some obvious choices). Assertion, synthesis, and citation are the tactics of the writing rather than evidentiary argument. That said, some citations are strangely absent. Kant and Heidegger, for example, for all their attention to both ideals and objects, receive barely a mention. Buchli frequently shifts registers between theo-philosophical debates and actions in the world (whether by saints or mobs), but it is not clear which immaterialities are most pertinent to popular practice. These criticisms, however, arise out of a deep engagement with a serious thought-piece. Buchli’s erudition shines through and one is left with the realization that all the many ways in which the immaterial is materialized may be variations on how consciousness manages its bewildered self.

Shannon Lee Dawdy
University of Chicago

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According to the editors in the introduction and conclusion to this volume, we are undergoing a ‘materials revolution’: innovations in materials are transforming our world, and possibly even changing the very nature of capitalism. This revolution is not simply a scientific or technological one – involving the disciplines of materials science, engineering, manufacturing, and design – it is also cultural and social, yet these dimensions remain poorly understood. The volume proposes a reflection on the role that the social sciences can play in this materials revolution, notably questioning artificial divisions between science and society and proposing methodological approaches to understand materials use.

The title of the volume is of course a reference to the seminal collection of essays edited by Arjun Appadurai, The social life of things (1988). This is not the first volume that proposes to revisit Appadurai’s collection of essays, but the volume edited by Drazin and Küchler is notable in at least two respects. First, it broadens Appadurai’s methodological scope to include the trajectories of materials before they are transformed into fully formed objects and throughout their decay. Another interest of the volume is that it incorporates and expands upon current debates in the anthropology of material culture, including on materials versus materiality (with reference to Tim Ingold’s provocative writings on materials), the agency of objects (and of materials), and the social critique of science and technology.

What all chapters have in common is a rejection of a clear separation between pure, ‘raw’ materials and the social. A quick overview of the contributions to the volume can attest to the variety of disciplinary approaches and range of materials addressed. These cover subjects as diverse as the history of ‘New Zealand flax’ (Were); pharmaceutical molecules (Barry); materials libraries (Miodownik); anthropologists’ ability to change the way industries conduct consumer research (Howes); the properties of wild silk (Douny); the ubiquity of plastics (Fisher); the apparent paradox of a Hindu religious group that promotes detachment from the material world yet for which materials such as cloth are central in teaching new devotees (Mohan); the failure of the fairtrade and fairmined gold movement (Oakley); the relationship between plastics and poverty in the Philippines (McKay); the ritualized interactions surrounding transactions between diamond miners and traders (Calvão); the development of sustainable materials such as improved PVCs (Wilkes); the success in China of fragrances promoted as quintessentially Chinese (Wah); and contemporary artists’ appropriation of the meanings of the humble woollen blanket (McDonald).

Overall, this is a welcome volume that offers a wealth of insights, extends current debates in material culture, and brings us to a better understanding of the way materials affect and transform our daily lives.

GEORGE GOWLAND Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo

ROSENBLATT, ADAM. Digging for the disappeared: forensic science after atrocity. xxi, 278 pp., illus., bibliogr. Stanford: Univ. Press, 2015. £20.99 (paper)

Digging for the disappeared is an exploration of the growing use of forensic science, particularly the excavation of mass graves, in the investigation of war crimes and human rights abuses. Rosenblatt is not a forensic practitioner but a social scientist with first-hand experience of human rights investigations. His primary focus in this book is to interrogate the political, intellectual, and ethical framework in which these investigations are conducted and the many challenges they pose.

The core substantive chapters are effectively a group of stand-alone essays, structured around important illustrative case studies or key debates within the forensic investigation of atrocity. These include an in-depth analysis of the search for the desaparecidos in Argentina and a chapter on the prohibitions surrounding the disturbance of human remains of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. These cases are well chosen and very well researched. The wealth of factual detail is handled with a light touch, in a highly readable style. Those unfamiliar with these case studies will find this an excellent source, and those already immersed in the discipline will find the analysis and discussion of the cases goes far beyond the descriptive or empirical reports that have been covered in other sources.

There is an interesting discussion, much needed within the discipline, of how the exhumation of mass graves fits into a broader contemporary discourse on human rights, and the interrelationship between forensic archaeology and the burgeoning sector of human rights professionals and organizations.
somewhat facile manner in which some forensic investigations reference a monolithic notion of ‘human rights’ as the ethical framework for exhuming the dead, and the unproblematic way that the human rights sector references the ‘hard’ or physical evidence furnished by scientists, is a source of unease for some working in this field. This book is one of the few to identify and problematize the link between the dead and human rights discourse. The key question, of whether the dead can meaningfully said to be bearers of rights, is explored very thoughtfully here. It is a fundamental question both for those engaged directly in this work, and for those interested in the investigation of atrocity as a cultural phenomenon of our times.

Despite the clear, case-based focus of each chapter, they have somewhat elliptical titles, suggesting a thematic or theoretical progression through the volume which, ultimately, is not fully realized. The book begins with a factual introduction mapping the history and organizational background of these investigations, which is useful for those new to the topic. However, a clear theoretical or thematic introduction, sketching out the intellectual landscape, would be more helpful to the main aim of this book, which is a deeper critical engagement with the complexity of post-conflict investigation. The structure is also somewhat artificial, as in reality the same issues cross-cut the distinct cases presented here. The volume would have benefited greatly from a really substantive conclusion, drawing together the preceding chapters, and tackling head-on some of the rich theoretical or metaphysical questions raised here.

Although the book is sensitive to dead-body politics, there is a less profound consideration of belief and the very real metaphysical questions posed by exhumation: the importance of the body, individual and collective identity in death, and the possibility of an afterlife. In the chapters on Argentina and the Holocaust, Rosenblatt engages with the different stances on exhumation taken by various stakeholders as if these were primarily strategic or instrumentalist positions in the power struggles surrounding the dead. At times, I detected his own stance (which might be characterized as broadly rationalist, redemptive, and pro-exhumation) colouring his assessment of the tensions that surface in these cases. The book is well supported and erudite but occasionally eclectic in the literature cited, which is a pleasure but also a limitation.

The preface to this book includes some self-reflection by the author on why he was drawn to this subject area and his own visceral reactions upon encountering human remains for the first time. He touches on his family’s experience of the Holocaust and writes movingly about how this has informed his work. This is to be commended, particularly writing in a field in which so many scientific practitioners have aspired to a radically detached tone and style, in order to underscore their claims to objectivity and authority. Rosenblatt maintains a humane, sensitive, and self-aware authorial voice throughout the book, and this is one of its major strengths. Although critical and clear-eyed, his compassion for all the stakeholders in these cases emanates from the text.

Digging for the disappeared is an informative, moving, and enriching read, well written and perceptive. This book will serve as a great student introduction to the politics and ethics of exhumation, as it manages to be highly readable and accessible, without glossing over the complexity of these investigations in the real world. It will also be helpful to scientific and forensic practitioners, offering a more reflective perspective than those standard case reports that emphasize protocol and best practice. For those working in dead-body politics, it is a key text, which will stimulate further debate.

Layla Renshaw
Kingston University

Weiss, Elizabeth. Paleopathology in perspective: bone health and disease through time. xiv, 249 pp., illus., figs, bibliogr. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. £37.95 (paper)

As a discipline, palaeopathology, the study of diseases in ancient human remains, has developed a long way from the early days of describing unusual pathological case studies to population-based approaches, discussing the occurrence of diseases within their biological, cultural, historical, and social context in order to inform broader questions about what life was like for past human populations (D.J. Ortner, ‘Human skeletal paleopathology’, International Journal of Paleopathology 1: 1, 2011). Recent years have seen another shift towards addressing the relevance of the field not merely with regards to history but more importantly to modern medical science (M.K. Zuckerman, B.L. Turner & G.J. Armelagos, ‘Evolutionary thought in paleopathology and the rise of the biocultural approach’, in A companion to paleopathology, ed. A. Grauer, 2011). Studying ancient human remains has the potential to provide unique long-term perspectives on the evolution and development of many diseases affecting
humanity today, some of them, such as cancer or cardiovascular diseases, far more than they did in the past, on a level otherwise unavailable to medical science. Consequently, it is more than timely that Weiss aims to ‘explain . . . categories of traits and review data drawn from both ancient and more contemporary populations to explore how global trait trends have changed over time’ in order to ‘provide clues not just about how ancient humans once lived, but also how biology and behaviour, lifestyle and health, remain intrinsically linked’.

In eight well-structured chapters, Weiss discusses the main categories of disease markers and bone traits manifested in skeletal human remains, such as bone growth, childhood health, infections, metabolic diseases, osteoarthritis, dental health, and congenital disorders. Each chapter provides a brief introduction of the category and reviews data on the occurrence and frequency in past and present populations. The chapters further describe epidemiological changes in each group of disease marker over the past fifty to sixty years and seek out to find underlying reasons for these temporal trends. An opening section introducing the basics of bone biology increases the accessibility of the text to a non-specialist audience. It further discusses the nature and problems associated with using clinical databases and different types of skeletal collections as a source of comparative data, highlighting the fact that comparisons of modern and past data need to be undertaken with caution owing to potential biases towards age, gender, ethnic origin, or social status. The final chapter provides an outlook towards health threats that are likely to shape the spectrum of morbidity and mortality over the next fifty years, such as obesity, longevity, or food fortification. A glossary explaining important scientific terms used in this book and highlighted in bold throughout the book is a useful addition, improving its usability to readers unfamiliar with medicine or biological anthropology.

The general approach is innovative and of great relevance to students and specialists in biological anthropology and medicine, and even to a more general audience. However, the book suffers from several weaknesses which limit its use as teaching material or reference work. The author misuses scientific terms (e.g. pp. 80-1: confusion of lumbarization and sacralization) and wrongly diagnoses conditions (e.g. p. 92, Figure 6.4 (top): fusion of the spinal processes of two thoracic vertebrae is unlikely due to osteoarthritis; a differential diagnosis of congenital fusion should be considered). Many sections are only very lightly referenced, and references to medical literature are particularly limited. (If using or reviewing clinical data, publications should not simply be cited from other palaeopathological studies or textbooks.) Furthermore, it is surprising that cancer, rising to become one of the most common causes of death worldwide over recent decades, is not addressed at all. This is unfortunate as adopting an evolutionary approach – to which palaeopathology is key – is particularly relevant to cancer research (R.M. Nesse, ‘How is Darwinian medicine useful?’, *Western Journal of Medicine* **174**: 5, 2001). The book provides a good overview of the potential of human remains as a source of information on diseases in past human populations and will be an interesting read for a general audience. The author is to be lauded for his efforts in compiling a large amount of clinical and palaeopathological research and for taking an innovative approach that broadens the scope of traditional palaeopathology. Nevertheless, the use of the book is sadly limited for students owing to its lack of appropriate referencing and thus poor scientific practice, as well as its factual and terminological errors.

**Michaela Binder**

* Austrian Archaeological Institute

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**Memory and violence**


This is an excellent long-term ethnography adding to the ‘New Anthropologies of Europe’ book series by Indiana University Press. Erica Lehrer gives a detailed, extensive, and fascinating account of the making, unmaking, and remaking of Poland’s Jewish heritage, primarily in Kazimierz, a historical district in old Kraków renowned for the interpenetration of Christian and Jewish cultures. It is now a restless, arresting space for engaging with hybrid ideas of post-Holocaust Jewishness. What are the many present, unidirectional gazes the ethnographer (Lehrer), local Jewish and Christian Poles, and the tourists make of themselves and each other, as well as the absent imagined gaze from those denied a life there? How is identity re-signified after national trauma, and what contortions and convolutions take place in post-atrocity reconciliation? Lehrer bravely addresses these topics in her nuanced, sensitive, and intimate
portrait of contemporary life haunted by Nazism, Communism, and now capitalism.

In the introduction, Lehrer positions her case study within debates surrounding subaltern histories and a reconciliation of heritage and memory: Kazimierz is a bellwether destination, a conciliatory landscape that is approached by (mission) tourists, pilgrims, and (Jewish) nationalists from different directions and left often in unexpected and different ways. The place has been a historical centre for Jewish settlement in Poland for over a thousand years; a ghetto during the Second World War for many of the 64,000 local Jews; a postwar Eastern European slum; a UNESCO-listed heritage site from the late 1970s; and a poignant movie tourism destination following the filming of Spielberg’s *Schindler’s list* in 1993. But as Lehrer so ably shows, Kazimierz is about the people present as well as the people absent, and so much more than a kitsch tourist destination for Hasidic wooden figurines and Yiddish-singing Poles or a site for some godawful ‘necro-nostalgia’ (p. 8). The choice for the Jewish tourist should not be between a death or Disney binary (p. 51). Post-Communist Poland is mixed, vibrant, and re-assimilating.

Chapter 2 concentrates on mission tourism, with Jewish American teenagers visiting the locale to enact the March of the Living, a diasporic memorialization as part of the 100,000 annual American and Israeli Jewish visitors. Ten-day heritage tours from Israel and America are used as political instrumentalizations of culture to instil an embattled sense of identity in the participants. The goal is to inspire memory of the Holocaust and so produce a present-day experience of trauma. The visits are full of heightened emotions, victimhood construction, tension without release, and the desire to seek out antisemitism to subsequently be able to confront it physically. Lehrer then moves on to look at quest tourists to Poland (the hyper-centre of the Holocaust), who differ from mission tourists. They are carriers of post-memory shards, fragments, inherited anger, scraps of language from parents and family. If, as Lehrer points out, mission tourists aim for traumatic repetition in their experiences of Poland, quest tourists pursue resolution (p. 97). Why does Nate wear his ‘I’m a Jew. Fuck You.’ T-shirt during his visit? What sort of subjunctive identity – his unlived life over here; what might have been – does he carry? This is traumatic inheritance writ across the backs of visitors coming out in visits to the locale and attempts to commandeer the local tour guide narratives, challenging the locals and also being challenged locally by the hybrid, non-binary nature of Jewish life – and not just Jewish death – in Poland: of raves in synagogues, cultural and youth events, locally supported bookshops, Yiddish classes, and *krav maga* martial arts. The strength of this sensitive salvage-like ethnography is its ability to shift between the needs and goals in the itinerary of the visitor and the subtle, sometimes shifting reception given by the local stewards of the place, whom Lehrer refers to as the ‘Jewish memory workers’ – whether ‘Jewish’ or not (*shabbos goyim*) (p. 23). Working both sides of the engagement takes time, requires acceptance from all quarters, and allows us to see backstage, so to speak, and to understand the misunderstandings at work.

Chapter 5 presents post-Jewish culture in a commercial context with a narrative approach to Polish-made Jewish figurines, one exploring the biographies of makers and buyers and the journeys made by the display objects themselves. Lehrer looks at Polish depictions of Fiddler-on-the-Roof-styled Hasidic figurines in various poses (praying, music-making, teaching, being deported to the death camps). Uniquely, we learn how and why they are made; which sell best; who commissions them and what internal feelings are at play; and how the figurines are stored by the maker and displayed by the buyer back home in the United States. Here we have national suffering blended with religious persecution, self-conceptions executed in a creative Polonization of the past. For Lehrer, this exchange is a slow-motion memorial dialogue, self-reimaginaion in resistance to the erasures of the recent Communist era. Kazimierz and the tour guides are the frontline in this cultural awakening, a creative and often unexpected self-conscious heritagization that is emboldening (with the ‘Never Better’ slogan replacing the ‘Never Again’ epitaph [p. 203]). The end result is a surprising *agora* of Jewish/non-Jewish engagement.

Jonathan Skinner University of Roehampton


Following the violence of partition, east Bengal experienced a second traumatic event as it suffered the intervention by (west) Pakistani military forces in 1971. While Pakistan lost the war, enabling the emergence of the new state of Bangladesh, it was not without considerable damage to the citizens. Many women were subjected to rape, a form of violence that is
particularly insidious as the effects can be both lasting and socially ramifying. The story in Bangladesh took a twist in that the new government decided to take a proactive stance to celebrate the women as war heroines. At first hearing, this sounds positive, but in fact the results were paradoxical, if not distinctly negative, for the women concerned. (I am trying to avoid using the word ‘victims’ because the word is already loaded; indeed, one of the lessons of this nuanced account is that it becomes impossible to speak publicly about such matters without using language that is freighted in one way or another.) Thus the book is in large part about what happens when the subjects of violence are appropriated as national symbols, itself another form of unasked-for subjection, and about the unacknowledged gap or wound that opens up between public persona and private experience.

The first half of the book traces the effects of the state policy on rural women. In a compelling and tactful account, Mookherjee follows the experiences of a few women whose marital and domestic lives suffered initially after their rape, even though people came to understand that the women were not at fault. Their circumstances became immeasurably worse once the women followed the request of the state and publicly acknowledged what had happened. Although the intent was to honour them, to fellow villagers this was at least as shameful as the original attacks, and something for which the women did bear responsibility. Hence they were shunned and insulted. It was, in effect, as if they were violated a second time or lived a life of recurrent social violation. The women did not understand the intent was to honour them, to fellow villagers this was at least as shameful as the original attacks, and something for which the women did bear responsibility. Hence they were shunned and insulted. It was, in effect, as if they were violated a second time or lived a life of recurrent social violation. The women did not understand the intent was to honour them, to fellow villagers this was at least as shameful as the original attacks, and something for which the women did bear responsibility. Hence they were shunned and insulted. It was, in effect, as if they were violated a second time or lived a life of recurrent social violation. The women did not understand

The second half of the book is taken up with public responses. A series of chapters describe, respectively, rehabilitation programmes, the gendering and racializing of depictions, and a lengthy analysis of representations found in the press, the arts, and among activists in the three decades following the war. This ends with an account of the subjectivities these discursive forms imagine and possibly induce, including the transformation of the ‘war heroine’ into ‘traitor’ or ‘whore’. These chapters proceed primarily by means of discourse analysis, thereby showing the different strengths of this procedure in comparison to fine-grained ethnography. One conclusion that is evident is that matters of class and social mobility have played a big role both in the representations of the raped women and in what happened over the life-course. Another is that the effects of state intervention are far from consistent as the representations become subject to intense party politics. A third point is that the vivid symbols and coherent plots of public representations differ from the uncertain, fragmented, and diverse ways women recount, understand, and live their lives. Here Mookherjee might have enhanced her fruitful conversation with Veena Das (who offers a foreword) with reference to her distinction between the voluble and the voiceful. Mookherjee herself draws on the metaphor of combing. A famous photograph shows a woman entirely covering her face with her hair. Combing, by contrast, straightens and reveals, a form of violently rendering visible even as it simultaneously conceals and searches through the past to make sense of it.

In the concluding chapters, Mookherjee brings the story up to date, noting the relevance of her account for the recent new wave of violence in Bangladesh. She asks, ‘What would it mean for the politics of identifying wartime rape if we were to highlight how the raped woman folds the experience of sexual violence into her daily socialities, rather than identifying her as a horrific wound?’ (p. 251). That is the central question of this powerful and perceptive book.

Michael Lambek
University of Toronto


‘The main problem of our country is that we always look back. It’s all about history, never about the future. The past, the past . . . And we
irritated man whispered these words to Michaela Schäuble during a ceremony commemorating Croatian victims of massacres committed during the Second World War. The comment speaks to central themes in Schäuble’s excellent ethnography, namely the ways in which present-day rituals commemorating past events are utilized by rural Croatians to present themselves in history, generate narratives of victimhood, and shape local identities. Unlike the commentator, however, Schäuble argues that these processes are not so much about the past, but rather strategies to comment on present sociopolitical developments and to negotiate the country’s future status within Europe. These complex interrelations are very well researched and presented through detailed ethnographic examples that bring to light how concepts such as ‘history’, ‘locality’, ‘economic globalization’, and ‘transnational political integration’ become meaningful in the everyday as people mobilize them to establish a sense of belonging and formulating aspirations for the future.

The book begins with a complex historical overview discussing wars and border disputes fought out in Dalmatia since the fifteenth century when the Turks annexed the region into the Ottoman Empire. Particularly remembered is how in 1715 the Turkish army attacked Sinj to recapture its fortress from the Venetian Republic. Although greatly outnumbered, the inhabitants defeated the Turks; a victory that could only be described as miraculous. And so it is: a Friar is believed to have prayed for days with his congregation in front of a Marian painting when suddenly a lady in white appeared floating at the fortification wall, forcing the aggressors to flee. In honour of the divine intervention and successful defence, the inhabitants developed a chivalrous game known as the Sinjska Alka. Schäuble vividly describes the Alka as an annual event performed by men demonstrating their capabilities in combat. It has become a symbol of Croatian heroism, self-defence, and national independence, and an arena associated with resistance to the authority of the state, which is blamed for trading in the country’s hard-won independence for domination by Europe.

Besides politics, the Alka includes important elements of Marian devotion as citizens pay respect to the painting depicting Our Lady of Sinj and remember its role in the legendary liberation of their region. The interactions between politics and Catholicism also become apparent at other key events such as the ceremonies commemorating the massacres committed by partisan troops during the Second World War. Yet ethno-nationalist sentiments are expressed not only during national and religious holidays, but also in the realm of the everyday, where they are negotiated in complex and gendered ways.

Schäuble critically analyses how villagers glorify and celebrate their male war heroes and veterans for their manliness, honour, and heroism while, at the same time, silencing their involvement in war crimes during the Homeland War. However, as this discourse is built up, it is concomitantly undermined, since many who returned as war heroes are now physically and psychologically disabled, receive little state support, and often live in poverty. At the same time, women who had taken on male roles during the war are relegated to perform traditional gender roles and, thereby, obscure the fact that their husbands do not live up to national ideals of manliness and national honour. As such, the families themselves are constructed into sites of memories that mirror their country’s marginal status and perceived existence of victimhood while, simultaneously, holding up Croatia’s mythico-history, celebrating religious traditions, and safeguarding the unity of their community in a time of political and economic insecurity.

Schäuble’s book is a thick and critical description of complex interplays of ethno-nationalism, religion, and social communication through which rural Croatians present themselves in history. This history, in turn, is based on collective memories pertaining to cyclical (self-)sacrifice, (self-)victimization, and (self-)defence, on the one hand, and the emergence of taintless Croatian victors, on the other. Schäuble convincingly shows that what could be dismissed as the self-mythologization of a marginalized people is in fact a powerful means to create and strengthen ethno-national identity, political self-positioning towards Europe, and resistance to foreign domination. I highly recommend the book for courses and projects dealing with political transformation processes in southeastern Europe, but also more broadly with the anthropology of ethno-nationalism and identity as well as collective memory studies in contexts of war, violence, and trauma.

HANNA KIENZLER
King’s College London


During the Sierra Leonian civil war of 1991-2002, when the contending forces needed
logical support for their respective war efforts, they found it natural to recruit children and deploy them in this role. This was the product of local concepts of who and what children are, and of a society in which children were expected to perform useful labour. Children who were forced to bear arms and commit atrocities were also located within that wider cultural conception of children’s work. As Susan Shepler comments in her excellent new ethnography: ‘[E]ven those children who did more soldierly things – shooting guns, chopping hands – were doing it within a system in which it made sense for children to work alongside adults’ (p. 32). When children were compelled to do these ‘soldierly things’, however, this was deeply traumatic for them, their victims, and for the wider society. It was in this context that ‘childhood’ was first ‘deployed’ in ways that challenged older concepts of youth, childhood, and adulthood. This deployment of childhood continued into the postwar era, as new efforts (both local initiatives and those of foreign non-governmental organizations) to rehabilitate and reintegrate child soldiers proliferated. Children’s participation in war involved a terrifying inversion of normal social hierarchies, and this created major challenges for postwar Sierra Leonian society.

An early chapter of Shepler’s book is therefore devoted to an exegesis of what ‘child’ and ‘youth’ mean, and have meant, in Sierra Leone, and what they meant for the country’s postwar reconstruction. Local cultural concepts of children and childhood, she argues, were in many cases incompatible with the models of children and their reactions to trauma which foreign non-governmental organizations brought to Sierra Leone. Many of the therapeutic interventions offered by such NGOs in postwar Sierra Leone relied on definitions of trauma and the self which were by no means consistent with local cultural definitions, thus impairing their effectiveness. Shepler documents how efforts for the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers have highlighted the strong disjunctions and differences, and even contradictions, which exist between local conceptions of the child (as expressed, for example, in local programmes for child soldiers’ rehabilitation) and those offered to Sierra Leone by foreign NGOs.

In other words, as Shepler notes, the concept of the ‘child soldier’ was a diverse and contested one, produced via an interplay of structures and strategies. These in turn determined the way child soldiers were and are conceptualized, the results of efforts to help them, and their efforts to help themselves. And children did seek to help themselves: Shepler documents how they displayed and developed their own forms of agency as they struggled to negotiate what she calls ‘a very tricky social landscape’ (p. 90). Agency was needed to deflect consciousness of one’s role in atrocities, for example: this meant claiming non-agency, through claims that there had been no possibility of acting other than how one did. To understand the relationship between structure and agency, Shepler employs ‘practice theory’ to grasp ‘the sum of practices, where practices are habits of thought, or action, or body’ – habits deployed in this or that particular ‘field’, in which institutional structures and individual strategies meet (p. 7).

This conjunction of the individual and the institutional in postwar Sierra Leone could be difficult. First, although eyewitnesses estimate that ‘roughly equal numbers of girls and boys were abducted by the rebels, the percentage of girls in forced demobilization programs was about 5 percent of the total’ (p. 150). Girls seeking reintegration found little in formal programmes that could help them. Their goals of restored ‘respectability and marriage potential’ were better served, it appears, via strategies of ‘secrecy and hope’ (p. 150). Secondly, little appears to have been done for those former child soldiers who fought against the rebels, even though they, also, may have burdensome memories of acts they saw or committed. Postwar agency is here impeded by persistent cultures of youth subordination to elders. These points complicate the postwar scene, and emphasize one of Shepler’s fundamental arguments: that in the post-civil war dispensation, ‘new definitions of youth are being forged in contradictory and extremely political ways’ (p. 154). Her account of these struggles will not only be of relevance to Sierra Leone. It will also be highly relevant to those parts of the world where, unlike in the case of Sierra Leone today, the use of child soldiers in war still persists, bringing new challenges (social, political, theoretical) in its wake.

DAVID O’KANE Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology


In Rifle reports, an ethnographic history of Indonesian independence in the Karo Highlands of North Sumatra, Mary Steedly sets herself the task of retelling the struggle for Indonesian
independence from the ‘outskirts of the nation’ (p. 67). As an ethnographer, Steedly finds her attention drawn not only to the content of the stories, songs, conversations, and local histories that are the basis of her revisionist account of the struggle for independence at the fringes of the nation, but also to the power relations that shape the forms that these narratives take, and the particular subjectivities that they serve to reinscribe through their telling.

Examining storytelling ‘both as memory practice and ethnographic genre’, her aim is not the accurate retelling of events, people and places. Rather, as she puts it, it is to show ‘how stories inhabit social space and how sociality abides in stories’ (p. 27). She does this wonderfully well, artfully weaving together ethnographic insight and reminiscence to bring to life the hardship and struggle of her interlocutors, and reflect on the ways in which they made sense of their experience of independence. In the retelling of these accounts, Steedly embraces her ethnographic sentimentality. On her account, she was ‘seduced by the narrative’, and making this plain is more than just an act of anthropological contrition on her part. Methodologically, the relatedness that she shares with people in Karoland is the reason why she is able to tell these alternative histories, and to do so with such grace and compassion.

The book title is taken from a patriotic Karo song popularized by the independence movement, a tale of romantic sentimentality in a time of war with which Steedly foregrounds her account of nationhood in Karoland. In doing so, she highlights a ‘male-dominated historiography and nationalist hagiography’ in which tales of masculine prowess and heroic sacrifice are central to accounts of Indonesian independence. Rarely are women associated in these histories with anything other than passive domesticity (p. 53). Steedly thus lays bare the gendering of wartime experience to offer a more balanced account of ‘an entire population, male and female, in a period of intense political mobilization’ (p. 54).

One of the most important contributions this book makes is to reposition women in narratives of Indonesian independence to overcome their thematic elision in nationalist accounts of the war. The moving story of Nandé Ndapet illustrates the double burden that family and national struggle placed upon women, both being dependent on the ‘productive and reproductive labour of women’. Steedly cleverly positions Nandé Ndapet’s retelling of the trials of leadership during the struggle for independence, and the personal cost to her, including the tragic loss of her son as a consequence, to illustrate the unresolvable tensions between alternate sites of ‘desire and responsibility’ (p. 207) that feminine sexuality presented to nationalist imaginaries. In doing so, Steedly presents us with the cruel irony of independence in Karoland, and that is the degree to which the nationalist movement sustained itself through the ‘extraction of an extra surplus of women’s economic and social value to sustain itself’ (p. 202).

A further highlight of the book is Steedly’s sensitive analysis of Sinek beru Karo’s sung narrative of the 1947 evacuation, through which she shows the ways in which collective memory is mapped onto a scorched landscape of suffering and the loss of homes and villages burned to the ground in the retreat from Dutch military advances. The experience of independence, she argues, marks a rupture with a traditional past, and thus constitutes a transitional moment for the Karo through which they locate their ‘collective move to modernity’ (p. 282) – a temporal shift made tangible through loss. Steedly concludes the chapter with a glimpse of her own imaginary of a Karo past experienced with friends as they listened to a tape she played them of Sinek’s performance. In doing so, she reminds the reader of the possibilities of remembered pasts generated through their communal retelling.

Rifle reports is an important book: not just because of the ways in which it gives voice to narratives of Indonesian nationhood occluded from official state histories; or because of the considerable theoretical and methodological contribution that it makes to the study of social history through remembered pasts. Rather, it is a wonderful example of the craft of ethnography, and of the importance of storytelling made possible through long-term commitment to people and place.

LEE WILSON University of Queensland

Nationalism, ethnicity, and identity

BERNAL, VICTORIA. Nation as network: diaspora, cyberspace and citizenship. 199 pp., bibliogr. Chicago: Univ. Press, 2014. £17.50 (paper)

The study of the role of websites in the constitution of identity amongst a diaspora population is now a well-established topic of anthropological inquiry. But the situation of the Eritrean diaspora stands out as extraordinary in a number of respects. It would have been enough
simply to dwell on the extreme elements of this story. But this excellent book manages instead to use this more particular perspective to make a series of general observations that could pertain much more widely as foundational ideas in studying on-line as an arena of citizenship and sovereignty.

Central to this work is the idea of infopolitics based around the management of information. In this case, we pit an unusually strong state that demands complete subjugation of its own population justified by almost continual war and a desperate struggle for survival. It commands an ideology where only martyrdom fully encompasses the duty of its citizens. This is what helps sustain what the author calls an outsourced citizenship that has identity cards and continues to pay tax to the state while living abroad.

Against this is set a diaspora that, constituting a third of the population of Eritreans, is an increasingly powerful component of that nation. The infopolitics in question therefore concerns what in effect are the political remittances of the diaspora, which are reflected in the website that is the initial focus of the book: Dehai, which proclaims the continued responsibilities of the diaspora to the state. But, not surprisingly, over time the diaspora also exploits its greater capacity to question a state which internally proclaims itself as unquestionable, and the book gradually shifts to an emphasis on two other websites, Asmarino and Awate, which become important for the ensuing debates. But in order to do so, they retain much of the underlying ideology. So one chapter is devoted to the establishment of an alternative memorialization of dead soldiers, whereas the final chapter shows a still deeper split that one assumes will become more extensive over time, concerning the sexual ill-treatment of female soldiers within the state army.

Bernal convincingly displays the potency of this sacrificial citizenship and the pervasive and continued adherence, which is important in showing just how far the Internet today, in certain instances, can retain a sense of statehood notwithstanding a highly dispersed population. The book is not faultless. Although the ethnography was not exclusively on-line, I would have liked to see more balance between the on- and off-line components. For example, in London, Eritreans now commonly claim asylum status by recasting their army service as a form of modern slavery, which is alluded to but not really given its due as a counter-narrative of the off-line world.

Generally, however, this book serves as an important update of debates about how the media constitute community and how far such debates have progressed since the time of Benedict Anderson’s Imagined communities (1983). It is a valuable contribution to any contemporary discussion as to the nature of sovereignty and the on-line public sphere. As the author notes, on-line is often seen as a space apart and less tangible than physical territory, but the passion revealed by the quotations and the levels of contestation, including humour and satire, help exemplify the substantive nature of this phenomenon. She shows how websites can make things concretely manifest that territory cannot. There is a strong section on gender that develops as the book progresses which needed sustained research partly because, as in so many areas, women are under-represented in this public domain.

As is often the case with the strongest contributions to studying on-line phenomena, this book never tries to reduce this to a reflection of the off-line; rather it shows how people exploit the particular nature of this very different kind of space. It is not just that the text is clearly and well written, but the author provides us with a good number of genuinely helpful new terms and phrases, which, along with several of her academic insights, could and should be employed much more widely in such studies in the future.

Daniel Miller University College London


At first glance, a historical account of sport in a country that has seldom played above the lower levels of sporting mediocrity, whose athletes have yet to win a single medal in Olympic competition, might seem an unpromising venture. Fortunately, this misapprehension is dispelled by this perceptive and richly documented study of the social and political implications of state-promoted athletic practices and physical culture in twentieth-century Laos. In this inquiry into the linking of sporting practices and political objectives, the reader is deftly guided through a series of Laotian sporting and political events, initiatives, and spectacles mounted between the 1920s and the early twenty-first century. What ensues is a work that will interest a broader range of readers – anthropologists included – than might initially have been anticipated.

Unconcerned with athletic accomplishments or disappointments per se, the author asks why and how sport and physical culture came to be
promoted so diligently by leaders of successive Laotian political regimes. Organized sport, Creak shows, afforded French colonial authorities, their Vichy successors, and subsequent nationalist, socialist, and postsocialist Lao governments with popular expressive means for materializing preferred identities, ideologies, and sociocultural imaginaries. In Laos, athletic victories and medals have remained secondary to the elaboration of sporting relationships, meanings, and dispositions that have literally embodied representations of the Laotian nation as a coherent and sustainable social and political entity.

Creak touches on an array of anthropological concerns. In addition to engaging with approaches to physical cultures and sport that range from the insights of Marcel Mauss on techniques of the body to those of John MacAlloon on sport as spectacle, he carefully dissects the interplay between colonialism and early ethnographic studies of sport in Laos. Despite differences in Charles Archaimbault’s and Paul Lévy’s anthropological accounts of the indigenous mallet game of tikhi, Creak points out that both served to advance the interpretation of tikhi as a uniquely Lao game. Not merely a matter of ethnological debate, this finding buttressed the colonial claim that since the precolonial Lao kingdoms comprised a ‘particular’ civilization, France was justified in acting to maintain the territorial integrity and cultural distinctiveness of Laos rather than leaving it to be merged with either Siam, to the west, or the rest of Indochina.

At the core of this study is an extended assessment of the capacities of sport and other forms of embodied practice to inform and reinforce national consciousness and, through it, state power. What was nurtured through officially sponsored practices of sport and physical culture in Laos during the twentieth century is likened by Creak to an evolving, hybrid form of ‘muscular Buddhism’ that sought to produce bodies that would be rich, abundant, and disciplined. Yet as well as resonating with Buddhist monastic values, the emerging form of Lao physical culture also reflected aspects of nineteenth-century British muscular Christianity, a credo that spilled over into French sport and colonialism. Creak notes that although colonial and postcolonial sport and physical culture ‘stemmed from and informed a new type of physical awareness, it did not facilitate wholesale epistemological transformation’ (p. 15).

Taking a critical approach, Creak urges that attention be directed to the particular and varied historical circumstances that create conceptualizations of sport and ritual as meaningful terms. His judgement about the importance of sport in Laos not relying upon conventional measures of sporting success sets him on collision course with an oft-cited, yet problematic, thesis within the interdisciplinary field of sport studies. This occurs as an outcome of Creak’s detailing of how Laotian sporting pastimes – including the game of tikhi – have been systematically merged with the political spectacles and doctrines constructed upon them. This point casts doubt on the merits of preserving a formular distinction between the sacred and the secular in modernist depictions of sport. Perhaps, he suggests, sport can be and do more than one thing at a time.

The strengths of this book rest on Creak’s ability to combine varied documentary sources on Laotian sport and physical culture with a nuanced reading of pertinent regional, historical, and anthropological literatures. None the less, a question that remains unasked is how ‘ordinary’ Laotians – those outside the ranks of the political leadership corps – actually experience and think about sport. When and how do individual Laotians make sport a part of their everyday lives or instead give it a wide berth? While Creak’s final chapter offers some personal observations of the 2009 Southeast Asian Games staged in Vientiane, underlying distinctions between textually based and ethnographic depictions of sport remain to be tackled.

Noel Dyck  Simon Fraser University

Graham, Laura R. & H. Glenn Penny (eds). Performing indigeneity: global histories and contemporary experiences. ix, 431 pp., illus., figs, bibliogrs. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2015. £21.99 (paper)

To be indigenous or to perform indigeneity – that is no longer the question. The multiple branches of constructivism have taught us that there is no national, ethnic, or gender identity without the effort to imagine and to invent it. Identities are largely self-declared, and so largely indisputable, but the concept of performance leads us to a social theatre where all audiences are expected to bear a judgement about casting, acting, and script. Every performance has its discontents, and this book deals with a wide array of them.

When the matter is indigeneity, a good deal of these discontents focus on unlikely actors. This is the case for Randy Borman (Cepek’s essay), the son of a Christian missionary couple, who was raised in a Cofan village (in Amazonian Ecuador), speaks the Cofan language fluently, and acts as
an outstanding spokesperson of Cofan people. Ironically, Borman, who is not a Cofan from white people’s point of view, is seen as such from the point of view of many Cofans. Identity, for many indigenous peoples, must be permanently built and sustained. On their side, the German hobbyists described by Penny do not pretend to be Plains Indians; however, they spend weekends and holidays disguised as Indians, performing Indian dances, and practising Indian crafts, not for an audience but for their own enjoyment, or as a hands-on way to acquire knowledge of the other. Penny focuses on the relationship between hobbyists and real Native Americans, which started in the immediate post-Second World War period by means of some Native American US troops who were invited to their meetings. Not uncommonly, such special guests – as has also been the case in more recent times – lost their initial distrust and came to acquire a more sympathetic view of the hobbyists, admiring their intense research work, their care for accuracy, and, not the least, their enthusiasm devoted to a borrowed tradition that ‘real’ indigenous people had often lost.

Real indigenous people, indeed, can find the performance of indigeneity a cumbersome duty, as long as ethnic identity, it seems, must transcend, and must remain identifiable, in a way other identities do not have to. This is, I think, the main issue at stake in the essays by Perley and Hodgson. Maybe performance is overrated? Johnson’s essay manifests discontentment with the saliency that performance bears in current anthropological descriptions of ethnic movements. He suggests a difference between skin and bone performances: that is, the spectacular happenings with plenty of indigenous garments, dances, and video cameras, and the more discrete political or legal actions needed to substantiate ethnic pleas.

The same anthropology that celebrates present-day ethnic demonstrations as achievements of indigenous peoples’ political wit depicts past-time performances as a murky spectacle of the worst colonialist and racist prejudice. The essays by Perrone Moisés and Baglo focus on some early, ground-breaking examples: the two Tupinambá festivals celebrated in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the nineteenth-century Sami exhibits; and the well-known Buffalo Bill Wild West shows. Should they be seen as displays of colonial domination or infamous human zoos? Perrone Moisés reminds us that the Tupinambá and the French were economic and political allies against the Portuguese, and both performances were intended to express this. In the cases examined by Baglo, the performers – well paid and well hosted – envisaged their performances in a very positive and proud way: they were a chance to show their culture at its best, to reinforce or regain ethnic pride after a deep crisis. These old exhibitions provided a tool for empowerment and a chance to communicate with other native peoples. This assessment invites us to adopt a careful evaluation of indigenous agency in these episodes of colonial history. Moreover, the blurring of the differences between old and contemporary ethnic exhibitions can be interesting the other way around: I wonder whether some activities in contemporary multicultural forums might be seen in a few years with a much more critical eye. Many contributions to this book indeed present, here and now, some uneasy approaches to them.

Myers examines the harsh controversy around Australian Aboriginal art, whereby ethnic militants claim that too much esoteric knowledge has been revealed in exhibitions open to non-initiated subjects, especially women, thus breaking the most sacred norms. His essay makes a point against Michael Brown, who envisaged this controversy as part of the contemporary and abusive trend to amplify intellectual property rights. In Myers’s opinion, what is at stake in this controversy about the rightful use of native art is not property as such, but the continuity of agency. The controversy about the limits of artistic expression continues on a wider (indeed, global) stage the same search for strength and prestige that it embodied prior to its objectification as ‘art’.

Postcolonial performances of indigeneity can be subject to appropriation by national states or societies, and to sheer misrepresentation. This is the case with Hakka, the Maori ‘war dance’, which in recent years has been adopted as a prominent sign of New Zealand national, specifically male, identity. This male bias is to be found in many ethnic performances, a feature intended to balance what some ethnic militants perceive as the feminization of autochthonous cultures (see also Tengan on the Hawaiian case). In fact, ethnic performances are not bound to a narrow iconography of nature, spirituality, and warrior courage. Graham’s essay explains how the Xavante – a famously warlike ethnic group in Central Brazil – are able to conceive two very different performances of their culture, one of them a classical show of male assertiveness and bellicosity, allied with a taste for primitive scenery, and the other a wholly diverse one, gender balanced, cosmopolitan, and set against an urban...
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background. Ethnic performances, indeed, do not need to be set in some version of Arcadia, or to deal with a glorious past. Watson’s essay, for instance, addresses urban ambiances and the re-signification of negative symbols.

Performing indigeneity is a book as diverse as the ethnic landscapes on which it focuses. Sometimes the engagement of the authors in ethnic politics – nowadays largely an ethical and political prerequisite of ethnographical research – favours a sort of anthropological assessment of performances, discussing how they should be rather than how they are. As a whole, this book shows us – and I consider this to be its main interest – how many hidden angles remain in these overt displays of ethnic agency.

**Óscar Calavia Sáez** Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

**JONIAK-LÜTHI, AGNIESZKA. The Han: China’s diverse majority.** xiii, 186 pp., bibliogr. Washington: Univ. Press, 2015. £41.00 cloth

Do the 1.2 billion people called ‘Han’ in China constitute the world’s largest ethnic group? ‘Yes’, if we regard the Chinese state’s official categorization of its population into fifty-six minzu as representations of ethnicities. ‘Maybe’, if we listen to how Chinese citizens with ‘Han’ stamped on their ID card talk about their own ethnic belonging. Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi is one of the few scholars who have traced what – if anything – it means for an individual Chinese citizen to be categorized as a member of the overwhelming Han majority. While many studies of ethnic identities in China have argued that the characteristics of the majority Han are constructed, first of all, through the contrasting image of the minority ‘Other’, Joniak-Lüthi has explored the meaning of being Han through more than 100 interviews and observations mainly with Han living in Beijing and Shanghai.

The book starts with a good overview of the existing literature on how the ethnic entity of ‘Han’ was re-created as part and parcel of the state- and nation-building process from the late nineteenth century. The category of Han goes back to the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), but it was the nationalistic revolutionaries during the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) who actively sought to bolster the identity of Han as a major ethnic force against Manchu rule. As Joniak-Lüthi reminds us, Han-ness is by no means the result of a continuous linear history. Who was Han and what it meant to them has differed profoundly in various historical periods and locations. Nevertheless, in Chinese official and even academic discourse the idea of linearity and ethnic unity, based in common ancestry and cultural heritage, continues to rule. By the late 1950s, the Communist party-government had completed its national project of ethnic classification and the identity of ‘the Han’ as the ultimate ethnic majority of China was formally sealed. This sets the context for Joniak-Lüthi’s investigation into the multiple ways in which individuals talk about their own and other people’s Han-ness. She points to highly flexible premodern markers of Han-ness, such as patrilineal descent and family name, script, home-place, and occupation, as a backdrop for understanding also how contemporary Han identity is perceived and formulated. Most of her informants in Beijing and Shanghai come from different areas of China, and have education at least at high school level, which implies that they have been thoroughly imbued with the official discourse on ethnic groups and differentiations in China. Through a careful interpretation of interviews in which people were asked, for instance, what in their view characterizes the Han, and if they have enough in common to be officially recognized as one minzu, Joniak-Lüthi finds that the categorization of Han as a majority minzu is internalized by Han themselves. Most interviewees agree that there is such a people as ‘the Han’ and that this category is as justified as any of the minority minzu. This, Joniak-Lüthi argues, is not enough to understand what it really means to be Han today. I particularly enjoyed reading the chapter about home-place identity, which shows clearly, and with a lot of nuance, how complex notions of nativity continue to play a major role in people’s understanding of belonging. Home-place could be a person’s birth-place, a place of ancestors, and even a recently adopted home, but it has always suggested a place of belonging rooted in a sense of primordiality. For the majority of interviewees, Han-ness was grounded in attachment to such a home-place, and, interestingly, the sheer size of the Han minzu prompted quite a few of them to state that since there are ‘too many Han’ – regional nativity is what really counts.

Joniak-Lüthi convincingly concludes that at one level the state-driven nationalist Han-making project has been successful. People who are themselves officially categorized as Han seem to find that since ‘the Han’ are not only the largest ethnic group in China but also the most widespread and ‘modern’ one, they should be at
the centre-stage in the making of the larger Chinese national narrative. At the same time, as Joniak-Lüthi rightly points out, the Minzu identity of the Han is clearly too abstract and fragmented to mediate the profound divisions of power, class, and the rural/urban that constitute the core of daily lives (also) for the people called Han. The book shows beyond doubt that while monolithic representations of ‘the Han’ have served an important political purpose, people’s lived and perceived identity as Han remains fluid and relational – and, we may add, it is often insignificant.

Mette Halskov Hansen University of Oslo

Shakow, Miriam. Along the Bolivian highway: social mobility and political culture in a new middle class. 259 pp., maps, figs, tables, illus., bibliogr. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. £42.50 (cloth)

This richly detailed monograph offers a welcome insight into the role of the emergent middle classes in the production of political life in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Bolivia. Given the prevalence of polarizing national narratives that posit ‘two Bolivias’, contrasting ‘wealthy whites’ with the ‘poor indigenous’, Shakow evokes the complexities that imbue local attempts to live out ‘middling’ pathways. In the absence of idioms that attest to this middle ground, how do those who identify with neither of these poles, but locate themselves somewhere between them, narrate their aspirations and craft their social and political relationships? In particular, Shakow shows how such middling folk negotiate the ambiguities of their position in relation to the political claims of the MAS (Movement for Socialism) party, which entered government with Evo Morales at the helm in 2006. She argues that MAS rhetoric, orientated towards shaping a new form of collective life that elevates the Bolivian campesino and celebrates equality, fails to acknowledge the ambivalent positioning of Bolivia’s middle classes, minutely describing the often painful tensions that emerge as they attempt to marry their aspirations for individualistic, upwardly mobile professionalism with the MAS’s emphasis on collective well-being and wealth redistribution.

Shakow focuses on the municipal zone of Sacaba and its rural localities, which lie on the fringes of Cochabamba, and are strung along the highway that heads northeast from the city towards the coca-growing Chapare region. Her introduction observes that the movements of local people between ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ areas along this highway denoted their quest for upward mobility, and challenged MAS-promulgated notions of the rurally rooted campesino living in bounded communities. The shifting forms of Sacaban personhood that materialized in different sites along this highway set the scene, she argues, for the hybrid identities enacted by those she calls ‘middling’ Bolivians. However, after the introduction, the highway, both as trope and as infrastructure, recedes. This is a pity, since tracing the shifts between the distinct forms of social and political practice that play out as Sacabans travel along the road might have served as a powerful lens onto the material and spatial dimensions of middle-class hybridity.

A particular achievement of Shakow’s book is its tracking of the disjunctures between the abstract representational framings of political processes and rhetorics at national scales and the complexities that arise as they interact with local life. The new MAS government as projected via national television emerged as a rather different animal to the party politics unfolding in Sacaba. There, hopes that the MAS would herald a better politics were disappointed as it became clear that its local face continued to be shaped by the clientelism and envidia that had long characterized the politics from which the party distinguished itself. Yet Shakow is careful to show how clientelistic practices in Sacaba could not readily be differentiated from the actions associated with a healthy grassroots democracy. For example, where individual Sacabans who deployed client-patron relations for self-interested purposes were often derided, acts of collective clientelism – as when a women’s group expected access to jobs and funding. Such contradictions point up how Sacabans drew on multiple and often paradoxical frames of reference in narrating political life. But they also attest to the ways in which MAS idioms of grassroots democracy and political leadership mimicked and reworked prior models of patronage. Shakow’s authoritative grasp of Bolivian political history supports an astute analysis of the difficulties of constituting a new kind of politics within contemporary formations of power that are shot through with the shaping effects of prior and long-standing political practices.

If the juice of Shakow’s monograph lies in the quality and richness of her ethnographic storytelling, it is perhaps not quite matched by...
the book’s theoretical contribution, which seems somewhat conservative in its reach. Perhaps the most thoroughgoing theoretical intervention concerns the need to recoup the multiplicitous ways in which patron-client relations are conceived and practised. Yet Shakow’s ethnographic work on the matter could prompt conclusions more compelling than those she gives, which sometimes tend towards the generic: ‘One of the lessons we can learn from Sacabans’ frustrations with envy and self-interest is that there is no way to eliminate self-interest from political life’ (p. 153). Shakow is scrupulous in pinpointing the contradictions that imbue Andean political life, but she might have done more to explore the conditions of possibility they open up – as diverse scholars of Latin America have shown (e.g. P. Harvey, ‘The materiality of state-effects: an ethnography of a road in the Peruvian Andes’, in State formation: anthropological perspectives, eds C. Krohn-Hansen & K.G. Nustad, 2005; K. Hetherington, Guerrilla auditors: the politics of transparency in neoliberal Paraguay, 2011; D. Poole, ‘Between threat and guarantee: justice and community in the margins of the Peruvian state’, in Anthropology in the margins of the state, eds V. Das & D. Poole, 2004). Similarly, whilst the ethnography makes it clear that the ambivalent forms of personhood that constitute ‘middleness’ are not stable, emerging through a variety of relational encounters, the tension between this continually shifting ground and the stabilization implied by the term ‘middle class’ merits more discussion. A closer engagement with the work of de la Cadena and Weismantel on race and hybridity would perhaps have supported this, whilst also helping to clarify how Shakow constitutes class in relation to Andean scholarship on race (M. de la Cadena, Indigenous mestizos: the politics of race and culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919-1991, 2000; M. Weismantel, Cholas and pishtacos: stories of race and sex in the Andes, 2001).

However, these are small complaints given the depth of Shakow’s ethnographic work, which meticulously evokes the shaping effects of class (and racial) ambiguities on everyday interactions, the morally freighted nature of political claims to legitimacy, and the incursions of politics into the intimate spaces of Sacaban lives, embodied in locals’ perplexities regarding marriage partners and conflicting aspirations. This impressive, well-crafted ethnography will be of enormous value to scholars interested in citizenship, class, and everyday political life in the Andes.

Annabel Pinker
James Hutton Institute

Protests, social movements, and political performance


The Arab Spring is still an ethnographic unknown. An increasing number of political analysts have attempted to unpack the uprisings of 2011. Only a few anthropologists, however, have tried to do the same. Fosshagen’s edited volume thus stands out as a brave, though succinct, attempt that deserves praise. The work – a collection of six chapters by different authors – is highly informative. Descriptions are delivered clearly, and the analysis takes nothing for granted. Actors and events are thoroughly contextualized, making the book a valuable resource for anthropologists.

The strongest aspect of this publication is its broad geographical scope. The authors touch not only on areas commonly associated with the revolts, but also on contexts that have been informed either by the aesthetics or by the politics of the insurrections: Spain and Botswana, amongst others. This approach is developed particularly in the chapter by Werbner, Webb, and Spellman-Poots, who trace a web of interrelations between these different milieus. In doing so, the authors shed light on how protesters in different locations borrowed audio and visual material from each other, thus presenting the Arab Spring as a transnational exercise in intertextuality and citation.

The desire to read the local through the global is shared also by other authors. Sabour, for instance, dexterously documents the impact of the uprisings on Palestinians, showing how the revolts reignited hopefulness in their consciousness. Conversely, in an attempt to reverse the approach and read the local through the global, Humphrey capably explains how in response to the Libyan case Western powers devised new modes of international law aimed at exporting neoliberal values.

These reflections are also developed by Fibiger, who demonstrates that the measure of success of the protests in Bahrain – a country often forgotten by analysts of the uprisings – fluctuated according to the different responses by the international community. In a similar vein, Fosshagen successfully shows how the West has conveniently elected Turkey to be the exemplary model of the modern Muslim state: an outcome

Annabel Pinker
James Hutton Institute

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that neoliberal powers wished for the North African uprisings as well.

The volume is rich. It presents some limitations, however, particularly in the introduction. In this piece, Fosshagen offers a comparative framework, tracing a similarity between the Arab uprisings and the riots that took place in Europe in 1848. The comparison has already been proposed by Alain Badiou (The rebirth of history, 2012). Fosshagen, however, does not engage in detail with the Marxist philosopher. More importantly, he presents a model of comparison that, though interesting for the historian, is potentially misleading for the anthropologist.

Fosshagen argues that both with the Arab Spring and with the European Spring the revolutionary spirit of the riots was hijacked by the liberal upper-middle class. Even though this analysis is difficult to disagree with, the vocabulary in which it is framed is highly problematic. The various actors that took part in the Arab revolts are portrayed merely as forces that did not develop a unified political consciousness, failing to offer an alternative to the regimes they attempted to overcome. Throughout the volume, the Arab Spring is therefore described as a disappointment: a missed opportunity. But this conclusion is reached from a distant point of view informed by European expectations.

The volume thus fails to make the most natural contribution an anthropologist could make: analysing indigenous conceptualisations of revolution, and local parameters of success and failure. Though never explicitly stated, the volume makes use of a classic Marxist definition of revolution. This is refreshing given that liberal analyses of the subject dominate both the media and political science departments. It is through this framework that the book succeeds in voicing the tales of the Arab working class, as in the chapter by Abenante, which provides a skilful portrait of the artistic expressions of an Egyptian carpenter in Tahrir. However, there is no account of the tension one encounters when comparing one’s own understanding of revolution with that of the informants.

In addition to this, the volume does not engage with other authors of Marxist proclivities who have proposed convincing and more optimistic analyses of the Arab Spring (e.g. H. Dabashi, The Arab Spring, 2012). At times, these failings overshadow the strength of the book. Even though the volume is a very valuable contribution, one cannot help thinking that – regardless of whether the Arab Spring was a missed opportunity or not – the book itself has missed the opportunity of developing its true potential, perhaps owing to a brevity dictated by editorial necessities.

IGOR CHERSTICH
University College London


Wrapped in the flag of Israel is an important and provocative book that deserves to be widely read well beyond anthropology. The central question it addresses – the relationship between the rise and fall of social protest movements in Israel, and the wider conflict in the Middle East – is of crucial importance not only for people interested in the region, but for all those with a concern with progressive politics more generally. The central event in the book is the march of Vicky Knafo, a 43-year-old single mother of three, from her home in an impoverished town in southern Israel to Jerusalem. Knafo is part of the 50 per cent of Israeli citizens known as Mizrahim: Jews with origins in the Arab and Muslim world, who have long been pushed to Israel’s economic and political margins (p. 4). Knafo was marching to Jerusalem to protest against welfare cuts against single mothers. And she did so wrapped in the flag of Israel.

The book focuses on the ‘failure’ of social protest movements against the neoliberal restructuring of the Israeli state that has taken place over the past fifteen years. In particular, it focuses on the role of Mizrahi single mothers, asking why their loyalty to the state remains undiminished, even though they have faced decades of deep-seated exploitation and discrimination. One of the central arguments of the book is that the Israeli state produces a ‘divine cosmology’ that effectively excludes any form of meaningful agency by those on the margins.

This is a deeply personal text – written as a contribution to ‘World Anthropologies’ – ‘refusing to reappropriate informant vignettes’ (p. 86) in order to build an abstracted theory, and is all the more thought-provoking for that. Running through the text is an account of Lavie’s own struggles on welfare, which coalesce with and diverge from people like Knafo. Lavie is a scholar with a global reputation, an anti-Zionist, and a leading Mizrahi feminist activist. She is also, like Knafo, a single mother and forced onto the margins of institutional academic life in Israel, relying on welfare to support herself and her son.

The book’s six chapters take us through the tensions of Mizrahi protest in Israel. Chapter 1
provides a general background on the history of Mizrahi single mothers and then shows why Mizrahis have historically supported right-wing political parties. Chapter 2 shows how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict constantly eclipses other forms of politics that might challenge that Israeli status quo – the protests of single mothers amongst them. Chapter 3 argues for the similarity between the bureaucratic experiences of single mothers and torture. Chapter 4 is a ‘thickly described’ version of an op-ed written for an Israeli daily newspaper looking at welfare discrimination in Israel. Chapter 5 is a much more personal account of the bureaucratic pain experienced by single mothers in their encounter with Israeli welfare bureaucracy. Finally, chapter 6 returns to the ways in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict trumps all other forms of protest through an account of the fall of social protests.

The book has two main contributions. The first is to take us away from the Israel-Palestinian binary in the study of Israel/Palestine. In doing so, the volume provides an analysis of the potential and limitations of forms of identity politics that move beyond the opposition between Arab and Jew, Israeli and Palestinian. The second, major contribution is to add political economy to our understanding of the religiosity of the state. It does so by showing how enchantment and discrimination are intricately linked to the shrinking of state welfare and the economic restructuring of the state. This is, of course, an issue that is not simply limited to Israel/Palestine.

There is no easy take-home message by the time you get to the end of the 202 pages. There are no neat and easily summarizable analytical points. There is no moment of redemptive hope in the text. Instead, we are left with what Lavie calls ‘ragged edges’ that highlight the tensions and contradictions of the region, showing why we have ended up as we are, and why it is going to be so difficult to make progressive changes – and the book is all the stronger for that. Wrapped in the flag of Israel is recommended to researchers, postgraduate students, and undergraduates who are interested in Israel/Palestine, political protest, discrimination, and the anthropology of the state.

Tobias Kelly University of Edinburgh


Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney is the doyenne of symbolic studies of Japanese society. Flowers that kill brings together her greatest hits from the past thirty years into a single accessible volume which will be appreciated and treasured by all of those who work on Japan. These include her two classic studies of the Ainu in Hokkaido (first published in 1974 and 1981); her analysis of illness and culture in Japan (1984); her examination of the symbolic role of the monkey, particularly in relation to Japan’s untouchable (burakumin) community (1987); her study of how rice has traced symbolic transformations in understandings of Japanese identity over more than ten centuries (1993); her interrogation of the role of cherry blossoms in the construction of Japanese nationalism in the Second World War (2002); her extraordinary exegesis of the diaries of the kamikaze pilots who flew – not, as we have been led to believe, willingly – to their deaths (2006).

Ohnuki-Tierney’s oeuvre has a number of distinctive features which make it instantly recognizable. She takes apparently mundane features of Japanese society (monkeys, rice, cherry blossom) and examines how their symbolic meaning has been contested, imposed, and manipulated over the breadth of Japan’s recorded history. As well as providing historical depth and geographical breadth, Ohnuki-Tierney incorporates ideas from across the anthropological field. Her list of acknowledgements for Flowers that kill is a veritable Who’s Who of the past thirty years of anthropology in North America, Europe, and Japan: Edmund Leach, Stanley Tambiah, Terry Turner, Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Sidney Mintz, Eric Wolf, Tim Ingold, Ernest Gellner, Marc Augé, Pierre Bourdieu, Irokawa Daikichi, Amino Yoshihiko – among many others. These acknowledgements are not in any way gestures only. Ohnuki-Tierney has a gift for incorporating complex theoretical ideas into a seamless narrative which does a great service to those upon whose work she draws. Indeed, in some cases, her examples make the idea of others more accessible than their original accounts. For those of us who work on Japan, she has provided another great service, which is to have brought the study of Japan into the mainstream of anthropological analysis, from which, perhaps with the exception of the work of the medical anthropologist Margaret Lock, it has generally been omitted.

The origins of the current book can be found most clearly in Kamikaze, cherry blossoms and nationalisms, which Ohnuki-Tierney published in 2002. In that book, she showed how cherry blossoms have played an important symbolic role in Japanese society for a long time, a role which
has always been the subject of multiple interpretations around poles that stretch from life to death and from reproduction to non-production. By the end of the feudal period in Japan in the 1860s, cherry blossom had become a dominant symbol for the Japanese people as a whole, in opposition to the Chinese use of the symbol of the plum. Indeed, it became so interconnected with ideas of Japanese national identity that some Japanese today still believe that the cherry tree is unique to their country.

Ohnuki-Tierney’s study of cherry blossom was originally intended to be a companion volume to her book *Rice as self* (1993). In the process of researching it, however, she came across the diaries of those who took part in the *tokkotai* (kamikaze) operations at the end of the Second World War and shifted her attention both in that book and her subsequent 2006 book to those who had written the diaries. In *Flowers that kill* she extends her original study by introducing a direct comparison with the use of flowers in times of war and conflict elsewhere, specifically the rose in Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union. She is somewhat nervous about making the comparisons, fearing that “[e]xperts in other cultures and societies might well find my material too thin’ (p. 203). But this fear is misplaced, since the comparisons do indeed give us a great amount of material ‘to think with’.

As Ohnuki-Tierney shows, the power of flowers as symbols lies in their opacity. Different flowers carry different meanings in different spaces at different times, but those meanings always appear immutable and unchallengeable. *Flowers that kill* gives us multiple examples of how those meanings are constructed and then made to look so natural in the political sphere, and hence why they carry so much power. It is a fine example of political symbolic anthropology, a tradition which can indeed trace its roots back to Edmund Leach’s and Victor Turner’s work in the 1960s and is as important a part of the anthropological project today as it has ever been, if not more so.

ROGER GOODMAN University of Oxford


This edited volume presents fourteen empirical analyses of the popular uprisings that occurred around the world in the wake of the Tunisian revolts. It includes Arab states, Europe, and the United States, as well as India and Africa. The introduction argues that this wave of protests displays the emergence of ‘a new embodied and aesthetic way of doing politics worldwide’ (p. 13) that necessitates new analytical conceptualizations of politics. In line with this, the collection is declared to be part of an emerging anthropology of protest movements.

The five first essays analyse Arab uprisings (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya), with a focus on the role of imagery, iconic and constitutive space and time, music and poetry in mobilizing people and constituting new political imaginaries. Hawkins provides a particularly thought-provoking analysis of the complex tension between local and international audience orientation through the shifting mediated imagery in the Tunisian revolt. Caton et al.’s article likewise stands out, tracing the changed contexts, technological mediation, and role of tribal poetry and its impact on the Yemeni revolt.

The second section of the book deals with the aesthetics and organization of uprisings in Israel, India, and Botswana. Three essays stand out as a result of their intriguing ethnography and analyses: Pinney on mediation and citationality in the Indian anti-corruption movement; Webb on mediation, branding, and self-reference in the same movement; and Werbner on tradition, innovation, and the transformation of labour strikes into a ‘new social movement unionism’.

The third section concerns American and European protests. The essays deal with Wisconsin Labour rallies, the Occupy movement, performance activism in London, and ‘indignation’ protests in Spain and Greece. The first three essays emphasize carnivalism, performativity, and humour as constituting experiences and imaginaries of the political. Postill’s analysis of the mediated aesthetics in the Spanish *Indignados* movement presents a fascinating, although mainly empirical, account of the aesthetics and the organizational, imaginative, and experiential impacts of social media dynamics. Theodossopoulos’ analysis of the poetics of ‘indignation’ shows how people’s political discontents are grounded in established political moralities.

The introduction and many of the contributions argue that aesthetic and embodied performances create experiences of unification and new political imaginaries, with varying theoretical references, in a broadly American postmodern landscape. In the heated debate over
the revolutionary potential of the uprisings, the book positions itself alongside celebratory analysts who consider the mass occupations and temporary unifications as creating new powerful potentialities and imaginaries, despite their failure to produce lasting organizations or changes. The book does not situate the uprisings in a single metaphysical historical or anthropological scheme but has an ethnographic approach, and that is its great strength. Its common analytical claim is nevertheless that the political is constituted through performative and embodied aesthetics that create a sensory experience and imaginary of unity and an alternative social order, however vague and transient it may be. The protests are filled with references to other protests, creating a ‘cosmopolitan’ awareness. Most of the essays draw mainly on postmodern theories of subjectivity, imagination, and emotions and focus less on the social formations underlying the claimed political potentialities. To this reader, the essays that most convincingly argue for significant protests are those that demonstrate the grounding of protest forms in existing social dynamics that prefigure and surround them.

The central claim of the book is that the mass occupations, non-violence, transitory unifications, aesthetics and humour, ‘citational travel’, and cosmopolitan awareness characterizing these protests constitute a new form of doing politics. This claim can be disputed, however. Firstly, the 1848 People’s Spring seems to parallel all these aspects. Secondly, E.P Thompson’s The making of the English working class (1963), which is curiously absent from the discussions, describes non-violence, music, sarcasm, caricatures, and international references in the mass riots in Britain from the eighteenth century onwards. The impact of the French Revolution on the Haitian revolution and European riots was also formidable.

This is not to deny the novelty of anything in the revolts. What intrigues this reader is the audience consciousness, the extensive and intensive mediation of events, the branding of protests, the technological means to mobilize and evade state control, and the international power assemblages that the mediation mobilizes.

These critical remarks aside, the volume is a valuable contribution to the literature on protests. It presents a collection of intriguing ethnographic analyses that are consistently co-ordinated, but sufficiently different to provoke critical thinking.

Kjetil Fosshagen Bergen University College

Religion and belief

LIN, WEI-PING. Materializing magic power: Chinese popular religion in villages and cities. xiv, 203 pp., maps, tables, illus., figs., bibliogr. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2015. £29.95 (cloth)

The profound socioeconomic transformation in both mainland China and Taiwan has significantly impacted Chinese popular religion and contributed to the formation of its new features. This has attracted wide interest from both Chinese and Western scholars and triggered numerous publications. Among these is Wei-Ping Lin’s Materializing magic power, which researches a form of popular religion practised by Taiwanese people in both rural and urban social settings and examines its reinvention during the process of industrialization and urbanization.

In the first part, the author takes a close look at the way popular religion is followed by Wannian villagers. It reveals how the rural populace materialize deities into statues and form a long-term relationship with them in order to overcome life’s difficulties. In the process of materialization, the locals conceptualize gods by personalizing and localizing them. This, as Lin points out, is based on traditional Chinese thought, as personalization is associated with the Chinese idea of body/soul and the social person in which kinship relations are stressed, and localization is built upon the traditional cosmological model. In this part, the author also demonstrates the role that the spirit medium plays in associating deities with their adherents. By examining initiation ceremonies and consultation rituals, Lin reveals how the spirit medium enables deities to take human form and enter the social context of their devotees, who can then concretely sense the existence of the intangible god.

Taiwan’s rapid economic development from the 1970s onwards, as Lin suggests, has led to the rise of the individualism and utilitarianism which have reshaped the popular religion brought by people from the villages to the cities. When a large number of the rural populace moved to urban areas, the traditional form of popular religion was forced to modify itself in order to adapt to the new sociocultural environment. In the second half of the book, therefore, the author focuses on the way in which popular religion is being reinvented by its practitioners – both ordinary people and spirit
mediums. It is very interesting to see how for migrants in the city of Bade traditional kinship-based social relationships have become less important; instead, people intimately associate with each other and re-enhance their social coherence by joining a religious worshipping group.

The author also shows how the spirit medium in the city modifies village religious practices to fit the needs of the adherents’ new urban situation. This is perhaps the most interesting and important discussion in the book. In the city, as Lin points out, petitioners’ social relationships or places of residence frequently do not overlap with the shrine or with the shrine’s core members. To avoid the risks entailed by his unfamiliarity with the shrine followers’ social contexts and homes, the spirit medium re-invents the traditional religion and attributes misfortunes to accidental causes, rather than those associated with kinship, marital, and ancestral problems as well as factors related to place of residence. Also, unlike a traditional spirit medium, who apprehends the deity’s messages through dreams and then racks his mind to guess and fathom the divine will, the urban medium utilizes divination blocks in order to obtain the cause of misfortune quickly. Moreover, the spirit medium uses substitutes in the place of persons who are unable to attend rituals and commands talismans in advance for use during his extended absences.

All these details show how Chinese popular religion is constantly re-invented by its practitioners in an ever-changing sociocultural environment. In this sense, Lin’s book has made a significant contribution to anthropological studies on popular religion in contemporary China. However, it seems to me that a wider and deeper analysis of the new phenomenon could have been developed in the book. Industrialization and urbanization mark a significant socioeconomic development in society as they change migrant people’s lives in many ways, such as their sociocultural concepts, the way they are organized, and the social relationships they form among themselves as well as with others. It would have been better had the book provided readers with a richer and thicker description of how migrant people deal with new sociocultural settings, how their religious needs have altered, what the driving force is behind the urban spirit medium’s modification of traditional popular religion, and how the reinvention of popular religion has impacted on the process of Taiwan’s industrialization and urbanization over the past few decades.

Despite this limitation, Lin’s book still deserves a strong recommendation as it provides fresh data and a fresh analysis of the new phenomenon of Chinese popular religion and can inspire further research in the area that will help people understand this rapidly changing society from a religious perspective.

LAN LI University College Dublin

Palmié, Stephan. The cooking of history: how not to study Afro-Cuban religion. xii, 360 pp., bibliogr. Chicago: Univ. Press, 2013. £19.50 (paper)

One can describe Stephan Palmié’s masterful contribution to the anthropological debate about cultural continuity and change as an attempt to take the image of the book’s title – that of cooking – as far as it will go. As Palmié explains, the image is owed to Fernando Ortíz, the towering intellectual of the twentieth century in Cuba, who famously compared his country to an ajiaco: a seasoned dish made of various legumes and pieces of meat cooked at length to produce a thick and heterogeneous stew. This was Ortíz’s answer to twentieth-century debates in the anthropology of Afro-American culture about such ideas as ‘acculturation’ and ‘mestizaje’ (in more recent debate, ‘syncretism’ and ‘hybridity’), which tend, paradoxically, to reaffirm as cultural essences the traditions (‘African’, ‘European’, ‘indigenous’) that social life in the Americas is seen as blending. Ortíz’s point was not just that cubanidad, as he called it, could be compared in its heterogeneity to an ajiaco (an image often contrasted to the North American homogenizing notion of a ‘melting pot’). It was also that the process of its cooking provides a better metaphor for the inherently dynamic character of Cuban cultural becoming: different elements cooking at different speeds, their tastes and substances blending into each other, producing varying textures and consistencies in different parts of the pot, with new ingredients and seasonings added over time to produce novel and unexpected effects.

Drawing lightly but to good purpose on science studies theorists such as Ian Hacking and Bruno Latour, Palmié extend’s Ortíz’s image to include in the ajiaco, as one of its prime ingredients, the very process of its study. The story of the emergence of such a thing as ‘Afro-Cuban religion’, then, is told as a complex interaction involving ‘loopying effects’, as Hacking calls them, between all the different cultural and social constituents that make up the historical
Space, place, and environment


Fabiana Li’s innovative ethnography breaks new ground in conceptualizing the political ecology of mining controversies. Across Latin America, activist networks disrupt government and corporate plans to expand and develop new mineral projects. Although mining conflicts are often understood as a clash of political ideologies or development priorities among what appear to be internally coherent groups (i.e. peasants, corporations, and the state), Li skilfully illustrates the role that agentive landscapes play in organizing such disputes.

The multi-sited ethnography traces the proliferation of mining conflicts in the central and northern highlands of Peru, focusing primarily on the Yanacocha mine, one of the largest gold mines in the world. Li argues that modern mining has ‘unearthed new entities’, whereby nonhuman agents such as water, pollution, and mountains have become visible and politically relevant (p. 4). These entities are central actors in the expansion of conflicts as they organize collaboration and opposition around mineral extraction. Moreover, Li suggests that mining conflicts are never resolved, but, rather, they proliferate because the mechanisms that corporations use to address problems only generate more conflicts.

The book is organized into three parts – ‘Mining past and present’, ‘Water and life’, and ‘Activism and expertise’ – with some chapters that are more ethnographic than others. Each chapter is well framed conceptually to illustrate how entities such as pollution or water come to ‘matter’ both materially and politically. Collectively, the chapters focus on dynamic contests over knowledge practices, illustrating how people come to know and understand entities such as pollution or contamination in ways that have different social and political implications. Landscapes, including bodies of water, are not pre-existing and natural, but emerge through contested knowledge practices.

The book is particularly exciting in those ethnographic moments where the conceptual drive emerges from the everyday lived experiences of the author’s field collaborators. For instance, in chapter 3, Li visits the community of Porcón, who depend upon water from Cerro Quilish, which is slated for mineral development.
She describes first-hand conversations with peasants to illustrate how Cerro Quilish emerges as a boundary object whose capacity to accommodate diverse viewpoints and interpretations enabled alliances across geographical and political divides (p. 111). For some, like Margarita, Cerro Quilish is at once a former child-eating mountain that her grandfather told her stories about and the aquifer that scientists (aligned with the NGO campaign) talked about on the radio (p. 132). Although the multiplicity of relations and connections to Cerro Quilish enabled a victorious alliance against Minera Yanacocha’s expansion plans, activists underscored Cerro Quilish as an aquifer, setting the stage for the mining company to provide counter-claims to concerns over water.

Through contested knowledge practices, water is transformed into an important actor, becoming, as Li suggests, an ‘obligatory passage point, obligating all sides to make their respective arguments with reference to water’ (p. 98). This is evident in Chapter 4 where Minera Yanacocha addresses peasant concerns about reduced water quality and quantity by providing them with treated water. Here, the limitations of corporate social responsibility practices are exposed through the logic of equivalences: ‘the forms of scientific and technical tools used to make things quantifiable and comparable’ and ‘the constant negotiation over what counts as authoritative knowledge’ (p. 149). Peasants reject the technical equivalence between treated water and ‘natural’ water by pointing to visual and sensory changes. Collaborative frictions multiply as more people are enrolled in the registry of canal users and deploy their affiliation to demand compensation benefits. New opportunities are incommensurable to what is lost, but provides them with a compromised future.

Li’s skilful use of actor-network theory generates a new understanding of collective politics that accounts for complexity, heterogeneity, and ambivalence without undermining the diverse political agenda of activists. This is largely achieved through a critical view of how corporate practices, even those that purport to address health and environmental problems, tend to impede efforts of rural and urban activists. For instance, in chapter 5, Yanacocha’s Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) forums incorporate mining critics without fundamentally addressing their concerns.

Since the approach focuses on the roles of nonhuman entities in mining conflicts, including the knowledge practices that bring such entities into view, readers interested in understanding the political and social history of peasants in the Peruvian Andes should consult previously published works in the region. The book makes a significant contribution to the field of political ecology by rethinking the ways in which landscapes take on political significance. It is highly recommended reading for students and scholars interested in environmental politics, corporate social responsibility, and social movements.

Teresa A. Velásquez California State University, San Bernardino


In lucid and compelling prose, Tania Murray Li tells a poignant tale in Land’s end. Set on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, the book traces how Lauje highlanders’ adoption of a new cash crop, cacao, catalysed the privatization of common land and the displacement and impoverishment of those Lauje who did not manage to accumulate land and capital.

The book is based on twelve months of research undertaken in multiple short stays stretched over a twenty-year period. As such, it may provide inspiration and serve as a methodological model for ethnographers who find professional and familial demands constraining them to brief stints of fieldwork. During her visits over two decades, Li was struck by the emergence of capitalist relations, a socioeconomic shift that highlanders themselves found banal (p. 17). The book’s title reflects the turning-point that Lauje found more significant: the end of land. In the highlands, Lauje conventionally understood land as temporarily attached to individuals who expended their labour power on it; left to fallow, land reverted back to a collective and potentially claimable status. Once highlanders began planting long-term cacao trees rather than annual crops, however, land became the property of individuals with the labour, capital, and political power to claim and maintain it. This effectively spelled the ‘end of a customary system of land sharing, and the end of the primary forest that had served as highlanders’ land frontier, the place in which they could expand when need or opportunity presented’ (p. 2).

Those Lauje who did not secure land for agricultural commodity production faced a dire predicament: capitalism displaced them from their subsistence resource base, but it did not...
absorb them as wage labourers. Surplus to the requirements of capital for rural labour, they faced a bewildering dead end. Their plight is figured in the rickety home and fatigued and malnourished bodies of Kasar and his son in the first pages of the book. Later we learn of other highlanders who have managed to enrich themselves through cacao production, building solid homes and gaining access to forms of consumption that allowed them to reverse the stigma that lowlanders conventionally applied to highlanders (including stereotypes of highlanders as wild, backward, unproductive, violent, primitive, and generally inferior, pp. 32, 40, 43-4). This newfound prosperity is, however, insecure, resting as it does on the fate of a tree crop that is vulnerable to weather, disease, pests, and price volatility.

In attending to the Lauje desire for access to roads, schools, and health clinics, as well as more general inclusion in the national mainstream, Li (p. 33) calls into question James Scott’s depiction of Southeast Asian highlanders in The art of not being governed (2009) as resisting the state and seeking autonomy, and his focus on the coercive dimensions of state practice to the exclusion of the attractive and channelling elements that work to ‘produce subjects who desire particular ways of living’. Li’s discussion of Lauje desires is part of an analytical framework that attends to the specificity of the conjuncture in question: the economic inducements and constraints of Lauje life; the material qualities of the milieu; the character of crops; social boundaries, values, and meanings; customary and official rules and institutions; and the actions of unseen spirits (pp. 4, 16). In this layered account, land enclosure and capitalism emerged in a gradual and piecemeal fashion, by stealth rather than by a scheme orchestrated by an obvious villain (e.g. a rapacious agribusiness corporation, a state department, or a misguided development programme, p. 9).

The book is meant to challenge both development programmes that treat primary commodity production as a recipe for poverty reduction, and social movement agendas that fail to recognize disenfranchised rural subjects who do not fit into alternative development narratives as potential heroes or victims. Li calls in the conclusion for a new politics of distribution that would shift the current conjuncture (p. 185).

Land’s end is an engaging and thought-provoking contribution to ongoing debates in international development, agrarian studies, Asian studies, history, geography, and anthropology.

MARINA WELKER Cornell University

MEDDENS, FRANK, KATIE WILLIS, COLIN MCEWAN & NICHOLAS BRANCH (eds). Inca sacred space: landscape, site and symbol in the Andes. vii, 309 pp., maps, tables, figs., illus., bibliogr. London: Archetype Publications, 2014. £65.00 (paper)

Interestingly, the title of the volume under review does not actually include the key term that drives the text: namely the category of the ushnu. For the uninitiated (i.e. those not especially familiar with Andean archaeology or ethnohistory), this word is usually understood to refer to a kind of Inca ritual platform or altar, or a conduit for libations set inside such a structure. In the archaeological imagination at least, it is archetypically represented by the masonry-retained platforms found at sites like Huánuco Pampa and Vilcashuamán in the southern Peruvian highlands. However, as the volume in question makes clear, there can be no simple definition of the ushnu phenomenon. Essentially, then, the volume offers a detailed consideration of the category of the ushnu from a multidisciplinary perspective, drawing on insights from archaeology, ethnography, and ethnohistory.

The volume has twenty-four chapters in all, so even the briefest summary of each would exceed the space available. Generally, however, the various authors seem interested in the ushnu less as an architectural entity (the traditional framing) and more as a focal point within a wider ritualized landscape – with an especial emphasis on documenting lines of sight and ritual connections to other important topographic features, especially mountains. The chapters by Gutiérrez and Fernández and by Zuidema, Meddens, Moyano, and McEwan all stand out in this respect. This landscape approach is a welcome one, and provides a strong connective thread that runs across many of the chapters. Several chapters also look at the ushnu stratigraphically: that is, in terms of its internal (often highly heterogeneous) soil composition. In this regard, Ferreira’s discussion in particular of what he terms ‘ritual mixing’, whereby materials from diverse geographical contexts are recombined within ushnu platforms as a microcosmic iteration of material flows, is especially interesting. In a related fashion, Ogburn’s essay considers the more general logic underpinning the movement of ritually potent substances around the Inca Empire, thereby offering a useful bridge between the broader landscape scale and the narrower stratigraphic scale. A rather different tack is taken in Arnold’s chapter, which provides an ethnographic treatment of ushnu in the social
memories of schoolchildren in present-day Bolivia – and it is a marker of the degree to which the volume’s editors have sought to cover their topic as comprehensively as possible.

It is difficult not to compare Inca sacred space with another recent edited volume, namely Tamara Bray’s 2014 collection of essays on The archaeology of wak’as. Another fundamental Inca category, wak’as are often thought of as shrines, particularly in the form of modified rock outcrops – although, like ushnus, the exact nature of the wak’a is hard to pin down. The usage of terms like wak’a and ushnu can often be rather loose in archaeological scholarship and it is therefore to be applauded that we now have two volumes that do justice to their complexity and range of manifestations. Still, it is perhaps worth drawing a contrast between Inca sacred space and Bray’s aforementioned volume on wak’as, since the latter is much more heavily invested in contemporary theoretical debates, including those around questions of ‘animism’, ‘nonhuman persons’, and ‘relational ontologies’. This is generally not the case with the volume presently under review, with the notable exception of the chapter by Allen (who, incidentally, contributed a chapter to the wak’a volume as well), whose chapter links the ushnu phenomenon to the increasingly influential concept of Amazonian perspectivism as articulated by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.

Speaking as an archaeologist or an anthropologist (rather than an Andeanist), to me the volume feels very much like a text written for regional specialists. It contains few gestures to a comparative analysis, and a relatively limited number of citations to the broader theoretical literature on sacred space and ceremonial landscapes. To be clear, this is not a criticism: there is nothing wrong with articulating research around problems that are geographically restricted. None the less, while universally relevant themes could certainly be drawn from the various chapters, these remain largely implicit, and it is for the reader to connect them to global archaeological debates. As an Inca scholar, however, I found myself both fascinated and better informed by the rich and detailed studies included within the volume. I therefore suspect that although it will have a more limited appeal beyond the Andes, for scholars working in that region it offers a comprehensive treatment of the ushnu phenomenon, for which it will immediately become the indispensable reference.

Darryl Wilkinson University of Wisconsin-Madison


Oxford Street reconceptualizes the African city by arguing that ‘ephemera’ – fleeting moments of oral, aural, visual, and social interaction – are the primary undergirdings of space, rather than the visible built environment. While drawing on current literature about infrastructure, informality, and theory from the South in work by AbduMaliq Simone, Filipe de Boek, Rem Koolhaas, and Jean and John Comaroff, Quayson argues that these approaches remain restricted to understanding the ephemera of daily life as a creative response to what is usually framed as the principle shaper of urban space, namely the material built environment. Quayson turns this assumption on its head, exploring how histories and contemporary analyses of urban spatial production can be more richly undertaken by accepting these ephemera as having equally significant weight to the descriptions of decaying infrastructures. The result is a book which, by melding literary analysis with anthropological approaches, rethinks the relations of space, capitalism, and self-making by focusing on the taken-for-granted quotidian practices and aesthetics of urban life.

A central methodological intervention in Oxford Street is the framing of Accra as a transnational and hybrid space, so as to understand how a uniquely African urbanism emerges at the articulation of local and global. To do this, Quayson extends Accra’s hinterland to include the migratory circuits of the Atlantic, contemporary soundscapes, and literature. These themes are most obviously explored in chapters 1 and 3, which interrogate ‘the processes by which a stranger group becomes African’ (p. 63, original emphasis). Chapter 1 considers the integration of Tabon, Afro-Brazilian returnees, into the Ga ethnic group. By maintaining a distinct identity within the Ga, Tabon hybridize the historical constitution of Ga ethnicity and index Accra’s transnational history. Chapter 3 explores the history of Euro-Africans in the Osu area, home to present-day Oxford Street, showing how they impacted the area’s spatial and aesthetic constitution.

It is precisely the articulation of global processes with local worlds that is the focus of chapters 4 through 6, which exemplify Quayson’s understanding of the relation between structural processes and the sensorial experiences and everyday practices of urban life. Quayson is
interested in how seemingly unconnected ephemera are manifestations of the same global structural processes. Thus, in chapter 4, the book approaches Oxford Street as an archive of neoliberal policies. Quayson probes its visual, oral, and aural records to reveal how the slogans of tro-tro (lorries used for public transport) and billboard advertisements intersect with megachurch prosperity gospels to create a spatial sensorium of enchantment whose roots lie in the impact of structural adjustment programmes on urban space and life. Chapters 5 and 6 show how the seemingly unrelated scenes of salsa dancing and gymming are equally products of contemporary capitalism’s influence on the use and understanding of time, articulated with local class differentiations. Salseiros are immersed in the offerings of middle-class transnational leisure practices and spaces. In contrast, the gymmers, mostly young men, are trying to manage the burden of free time that accompanies chronic unemployment.

The fragmented quotidian manifestations of contemporary capitalism produce urban space and are haunted by remnants of earlier moments of spatial planning and production. Chapters 2 and 7 examine the material, affective, economic, and social aspects of urban planning. Key here is the argument made in chapter 2 that Accra’s spatiality is defined by ‘multi-synchronicity’. By this, Quayson means that different historical moments of urban planning do not subsume one another, but continue to coexist in unevenly integrated ways. The result is a spatial reorientation away from vertical relations between planners and users, towards a vision of spatial production which places these actors in the same sphere so that spatial relations are made horizontal. This reveals how discrepant space-times are created and coexist with one another in everyday life. In chapter 7’s analysis of Ghanaian literary representations of urban space, the consequences of ‘multi-synchronicity’ are most tellingly explored. Quayson traces how middle-class characters grapple with the contradictions induced by their confrontations with Accra’s slums. In showing their difficulties in tackling the coexistence of slum conditions with their privileged experiences of urban space, he illustrates the consequences of Accra’s material differentiations on everyday life and the emotional, social, economic, and psychological contradictions induced by spatial difference. He thereby explores the internal contradictions of urban self-making by rendering space as constituted through multiple ephemera rather than only the built environment.

CLAUDIA GASTROW University of the Witwatersrand