

BOOK REVIEWS

Mikael Aktor and **Robert Deliege** (eds.), *From stigma to assertion: Untouchability, identity and politics in early and modern India*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press 2010, 230 pp.

This edited volume contains eight chapters, most revised versions of papers originally presented in a panel at the European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies in Prague in 1998. Mikael Aktor tells us in the Preface that the papers seek to ‘put the colonial and post-colonial notion of Untouchability in a wider temporal perspective covering pre-colonial textual material as well as present-day debates over Dalit rights and identity’. Untouchability is thus considered within a vast time frame and from various contrasting angles: from an analysis of ancient Hindu scriptures to the manipulation of caste by slum dwellers in Dharavi. One might think that this wide coverage would make for a disjointed text overall. In fact, the papers relate to each other surprisingly well and together make an original, interesting, insightful and highly readable contribution to the topic.

Robert Deliege’s introduction is characteristically provocative. In his distinctively frank style, he argues that Untouchability is ‘largely a problem of the past’ (p. 24), and that today’s Untouchables cannot be considered as such in the strict sense of the term. Deliege is highly critical of what he calls ‘Dalit ideology’ (a problematic term, in my view) and suggests that contemporary changes to caste have produced a set of paradoxes: first, Dalits have become most assertive at the very moment when Untouchability is most diminished; second, Dalit militants are generally not oppressed themselves, and yet they claim to speak on behalf of the masses about oppression; and third, instead of annihilating caste, activists perpetuate caste distinctions (and prevent class alliance) in pursuit of state benefits. Ultimately, Deliege argues that Dalit rhetoric exploits Untouchability to gain advantage over low-caste groups with whom they are competition.

Aktor’s chapter considers Untouchability in Brahminical law books. Aktor argues that ‘Untouchability in the law books cannot be explained simply in terms of impurity and status’ (p. 58). Untouchables are a distinctive group, he says, represented by a set of avoidances exclusively applied to them. But avoidance is based not simply on impurity, it is also based on ‘inauspiciousness’, a concept that he elaborates in the chapter. Aktor is careful to point out that,

while the law books provide important information about the rules of treatment of Untouchables, they cannot tell us how seriously these rules were taken in practice.

Eleanor Zelliot's illuminating chapter complements Aktor's by analysing some of the work of four extraordinary Untouchable poet-saints of the Bhakti movement: two early Tamil saints, Tiruppan Alvar (Vaishnavite) and Nantanar (Shaivite), the Marathi saint Cokhamela, and the best known of the Untouchable saint-poets, Ravidas. Their legacy not only speaks of the nature of devotion, it also tells us about Untouchability in the medieval period as experienced by Untouchables themselves.

Moving into the post-colonial period, Jocelyn Clarke argues against the tendency to treat the issue of Untouchability as a 'footnote' in the dominant narrative of Indian nationalism and instead cogently discusses anti-Untouchability and anti-Brahman movements alongside the genesis of the Indian National Congress. She examines the attitudes of the major political figures of the period towards the Untouchables, showing how these changed and evolved at the turn of the century with the advent of Independence.

Wyatt's chapter presents current research on Dalit theology and the politics of the Indian Christian churches. This is a welcome contribution to a subfield which is under-studied and often opaque. Wyatt's critical approach is particularly helpful.

Simon Charsley's rich and nuanced chapter builds on his 1996 *JRAI* article in its concern with the construction of Untouchable identity and the possibilities presented by caste-based assertion. Charsley discusses Dalits' creative construction of *jati* identities as a feature of present-day Dalit politics. These identities have meant that 'a common or Untouchable identity has no more than marginal significance for many' (p. 171). He suggests that 'the resilience of *jatis* as major units of collective identity in the society generally means that, instead of "Dalit" displacing those separate identities, it is something added to the available repertoire' (p. 156). Importantly, he also points out that it is the weaker and less organised castes that are least able to assert a distinctive caste identity and are more likely to rely on a common Dalit label. As such, Charsley's chapter provides an important analysis of this cultural turn in Dalit identity formation.

Kathinka Froystad's ethnographic chapter presents research from suburban Uttar Pradesh. She argues that the extension of reservations under the Mandal Commission recommendations has led to a 're-legitimation of discriminatory practices against Untouchables' in urban Uttar Pradesh (p. 180). She presents evidence to suggest the existence

of ‘upper-caste retaliation’ against the recipients of reservation (p. 193), and makes an important point about the re-entrenchment of caste-feeling against lower castes and Dalits.

The final chapter examines Dalit slum-dwellers’ manipulation of caste as a political tool. Based on fieldwork conducted in Dharavi in Mumbai, Saglio-Yatzimirsky shows how Cambhars, Dhors and Holars use caste as a ‘mobilizing agent, a community, a movement’ (p. 226). Illustrating the complexity of political organisation in Dharavi, she highlights the primacy of caste identification and the way in which such loyalties are manipulated by both political parties and Dalits themselves. Like Froystad, she argues that already intense caste rivalry is exacerbated by the reservation policy. But despite these rivalries, interestingly, she predicts an affirmation of Untouchables as a ‘pan-Indian political force’ (p. 229).

These latter chapters beautifully illustrate the forms of complex self-fashioning in which Dalits are currently engaged. The chapters corroborate scholarship on the ‘substantialisation’ (or ethnicisation) of caste and show how the *jati* identity of some (though not all) Dalit castes have become increasingly important in the competitive arena of Dalit and electoral politics. They point to the increasing fragmentation among Dalits, as well as the centralising pulls towards a common ‘Dalit’ denominator. They also highlight the problems with any label that claims to represent and unify those castes that have suffered Untouchability, and the way in which the state has been implicated in categorisation.

This intense concern with issues of identity in contemporary India makes it difficult for scholars to imagine and understand Untouchability as it existed in the past. Reading the second half of the book alongside the first is helpful in this regard and reminds us of the historical specificity of Untouchability as it is understood today.

Predictably, my criticisms concern the coherence of the volume. In this regard, each of the authors might have made more effort to link their own papers with others in the volume. It also would have been helpful if the editors had discussed the papers both thematically and theoretically at the start. Moreover, although Aktor discusses the contributors’ choice of terminology (p. 12; somewhat inadequately in my view), given the topic of the volume, a more detailed discussion of the very words ‘Dalit’ and ‘Untouchable’ would have been useful. As it is, the authors’ use of ‘Untouchable’ gives a somewhat out-dated feel to otherwise up-to-date descriptions of a contemporary scenario.

On the whole, however, this is an engaging, original and important intervention into the field. It makes a critical, finely observed and empirically based contribution to several debates

on the ‘Dalit question’. It presents new material from different parts of India and is provocative and stimulating in its arguments. Taken together, the papers encourage a Dalit-oriented re-reading of history, while also prompting us to consider the usage and indeed the applicability of the term ‘Untouchability’ in contemporary India.

CLARINDA STILL

Dawn Chatty and Bill Finlayson (eds.), *Dispossession and displacement: forced migration in the Middle East and North Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, xiii, 298 pp. £21.99.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region encompasses a complex history of population displacements, and recent forced movements resulting from wars in Iraq and Afghan underscore the importance of further research on the topic. In *Dispossession and displacement*, the editors, Dawn Chatty and Bill Finlayson, present eleven case studies from this diverse region, grouped into four themes: displacement, repatriation, identity in exile and policy. The volume’s chapters, drawn from a 2008 British Academy conference, encompass multiple disciplinary approaches and research on a range of displaced populations – Turkish Cypriot, Palestinian, Sahrawi, Afghan and Iraqi – in several MENA countries, namely Cyprus, Palestine, Algeria, Iran, Jordan and Iraq.

In her legal analysis of the prospects of the Turkish community settled in northern Cyprus, who face pressure to repatriate to a country most of them have never entered, Yaël Ronen assesses the proposed relocation within a comparative framework of international human rights law, concluding that the arguments for repatriation may override settlers’ rights to stay settled as they are. In another view on Cyprus, Peter Loizos and Tobias Kelly compare its peace process with that between Israel and Palestine, focusing particularly at the roles of refugees in both protracted conflicts. By systematically comparing the historical, legal, economic, political and geopolitical frameworks of each conflict, the authors show that the importance of refugees for the achievement of peace depends on political and economic power: Greek-Cypriot refugees are comfortable enough that ‘solving’ their situation through return is neither needed nor sought, whereas Palestinians are widely marginalized, making their situation a much more pressing concern in conflict resolution.

The extent of this marginalization is the focus of Maher Anawati Bitar's chapter on internal displacement in the occupied Palestinian Territories. Whereas the topic of Palestinians living as refugees throughout MENA is reasonably well researched, little attention has been paid to Palestinians, either as internally displaced or as 'internally stuck'. Bitar examines the direct and indirect triggers of such displacement, showing how the government of Israel acts to expand its territory – most dramatically its ongoing construction of a 700-kilometre concrete and fence barrier, known as 'the Wall' – have amounted to a systematic process of depopulation. Given the humanitarian implications of this, Bitar's argument for greater attention to internal displacement in the occupied Palestinian Territories is well-taken, especially as he lays out initial strategies for further research.

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh provides a compelling examination of the relationship between Algeria-based Sahrawi refugees and the Spanish groups that provide direct aid and host Sahrawi youth for education in Spain. Based on extensive fieldwork and interviews, the author argues that enthusiastic Spanish solidarity with the Sahrawi is predicated on a particular and problematic representation of the refugees that frames them in contrast to the rest of the Middle East, particularly with regard to Islam and gender equality. Sahrawi political leadership has adapted to this 'conditional solidarity' in order to ensure its continuation, despite the tensions it creates – most dramatically in the case of three Sahrawi girls living in Spain who became the centre of a political storm when their parents asked that they come home.

Four chapters of *Dispossession and displacement* provide views of the dynamics of Afghan forced displacement, from the macro to micro levels. Alessandro Monsutti uses multi-sited fieldwork on international Afghan migratory networks to illustrate the importance of transnationalism in the anthropological study of forced migration. Mamiko Saito and Paula Kantor examine the 'return' of second-generation Afghan youth from Pakistan and Iran to a little-known homeland, arguing for anthropological perspectives and methods to inform more appropriate policy responses and reintegration programming. Zuzanna Olszewska takes a literary approach, examining poems by Afghan poets in exile to illustrate the ambivalent identity and confusion faced by young Afghans in Iran and upon their return. Sarah Kamal contributes a yet finer-grained view with her longitudinal study of four Afghan young people over five years, from their existence in Iran to their return and eventual reintegration into Afghanistan. Taken together, these chapters complicate any notion of simple push and resolution in Afghan refugee movements.

Unlike the Afghan-centred chapters, the three papers concerned with Iraq complement rather than build on each other. Géraldine Chatelard argues that the popular framing of the post-Saddam Hussein refugee crisis conceals a long and complex history of Iraqi and regional politics, relationships and migratory patterns; she takes a historical approach that ‘re-embeds’ recent movements in the context that shapes them. Laura Hamblin and Hala Al-Sarraf’s paper is in contrast ethnographic and brief, analysing the oral histories of seventy Iraqi women in Amman to highlight their views on class, religion, gender roles and child-rearing, and how each of these identity elements has been challenged by their precarious legal and economic statuses as refugees in Jordan. Nabil Al-Tikriti focuses primarily on the war in Iraq, critiquing the policies that have cleaved the diverse country into three parts along artificial ethnosectarian lines, fuelling violence and destroying social capital in the process. Al-Tikriti chronicles the breakdown of social and political order through a review of policy milestones, concluding with their impact on population displacement.

The forced displacements discussed in *Dispossession and displacement* are wide-ranging but by no means the sum of forced migration in MENA. Instead the volume aims to identify issues and situations for further research, which, as Chatty argues convincingly, is both urgent and important. In the epilogue, she examines how ‘the past is prologue’ with a historical review of displacements in the region, from the end of the Ottoman, Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires to the mass displacement of Palestinians. In the call for continued research, Chatty highlights the situation of Iraq’s exiles, and, acknowledging the limits of the book, refers to some of the refugee-hosting countries – Pakistan, Syria and Egypt – not addressed in it.

The volume will be most useful for anthropologists interested in themes of identity, transnationalism, gender, migration and exile, and for those studying the populations or countries it covers. It is an accessible reference, with notes on each contributor and a section of abstracts easing the review of its contents.

Although it certainly contributes valuable ethnographic and policy analysis to discussion of its four themes of displacement, repatriation, identity in exile and refugee policy, *Dispossession and displacement* is primarily descriptive. Its contributors engage in theory to varying degrees – especially Monsutti, with his discussion of transnationalism – but the volume as a whole does not make a particular theoretical argument, nor does it attempt to. However, what it does, and does successfully, is bring to its topic the fundamentally anthropological

principle of comparison. As such, the volume is strongest when its authors converse with each other. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Kamal and Olszewska each refer to other texts in the volume or to the volume as a whole. This is a practice that the editors of any collection of diverse papers would do well to encourage, developing as it does an internal cohesiveness, a sense of conversation, and the building of themes and knowledge across a volume.

A book on displacement in MENA might seem at first glance superfluous in the face of the considerable, if frequently policy-oriented body of research on forced migration in the region. *Dispossession and displacement* is a rare and important effort, however, considering the absence of work of its scope since the recent mass displacements in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the generally disparate and geopolitically stratified character of existing research. Too infrequently, particularly in urgency-imbued fields such as refugee studies, do we step back from our particular areas of focus in order to reflect on their implications, similarities and differences. Chatty and Finlayson have done so by presenting the selected papers side by side and discussing them in their wider regional context, thus both contributing to and advocating further research into forced migration in the Middle East and North Africa, and opening up a space for discussion and comparison within this field.

NORA DANIELSON

Rebecca M. Empson, *Harnessing fortune: personhood, memory and place in Mongolia*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press and British Academy 2011, xv, 408 pp., £65.00 in hardback.

Harnessing fortune offers a welcome overview of Buryat Mongol notions of *hishig*, a polysemic phenomenon that may alternatively mean ‘blessings’, ‘grace’, or in Empson’s analysis, ‘fortune’. Studies on Mongolia have long shown that *hishig* is part of an extensive repertoire of idioms about the contingency of events, such as *buyan* (merit or virtue), *khiimor*’ (fortune or vitality), *az* (luck), *zavshaan* (opportunity), *khuv zaya* (fate) or *üiliin ür* (karma). The title of Empson’s volume immediately evokes its namesake, Krystyna Chabros’s (1992) seminal volume *Beckoning fortune: a study of the Mongol Dalalya ritual*. Empson, though, offers a new window on to how Hori Buryats in Hentii Province conceive of *hishig* and

produce their sociality and livelihood through it. In this spirit, *Harnessing fortune* contributes to the wealth of anthropological knowledge that has recently emerged on the different kinds or ‘shares’ of fortune – including the lack of fortune – in present-day Mongolian households (Buyandelgeriyn 2007; Hamayon 1995; Højer 2009; Humphrey 1996; Pedersen and Højer 2008; Swancutt 2003, 2006, 2007 and 2008).

The book’s strength is its new ethnographic findings on the household chest, photographic displays, embroideries, rebirths and even arson attacks within Mongolia. Empson grounds her analysis upon the ‘separation and containment’ of both human relations and *hishig*-fortune, although she also contrasts the visible/hidden and attached/detached relations between people, objects, forces, etc. She highlights how these different registers of Buryat life hang together through a ‘tension’ which renders them mutually constitutive (p. 321). To this end, she builds upon perspectival approaches from the anthropological literature on Amazonia, Strathern’s oeuvre on personhood in Melanesia, and other works that emphasize how the *processual person* lives through ongoing processes of change. Whilst Empson says that her analysis ‘avoids a dual idea of bone versus blood, elders versus shamans, or centre versus periphery, district centre (or city) versus countryside’, I feel that she actually gives ethnographic contextualisation to these oppositions, showing their overlaps and mutual dependence, rather than merely collapsing the distinctions between them (p. 19).

Each part of Empson’s book presents useful findings for the anthropology of Mongolia. The Introduction discusses the modes of social and economic livelihood within the present-day Mongolian district centre called ‘Ashinga’ and its remote countryside. Within it, Empson suggests that Buryat social relations are never static, but are reconfigured over time through ever-shifting constellations of new and older contacts. Chapter 1 gives a thorough description of Buryat history – especially in relation to Ashinga – connecting narratives of migration, dislocation, persecution and loss from the first couple of decades of the twentieth century to the present-day pressures of navigating within the neo-liberal Mongolian economy. In Chapter 2, Empson describes how *hishig*-fortune is alternately beckoned through everyday popular religious practices and sacrifices undertaken during seasonal rituals held at stone cairns (*ovoo*) on mountain tops. Drawing on a term coined by Piers Vitebsky, she argues that there is an ‘aesthetics of propriety’ surrounding the handling of *hishig*-fortune, which is first gathered in accordance with ideas about ‘the right way of doing things’ and then contained in brightly

coloured fortune bags sewn for the purpose, which are occasionally opened to disperse and receive its contents (p. 95; see also pp. 93-4).

Revealingly, the heavy emphasis which Buryats in Ashinga place upon the proper means of beckoning fortune appears to be specific to *hishig* – which is conventionally translated not as ‘fortune’ as for Empson, but as ‘blessing’, ‘grace’, ‘favour’ or ‘boon’. I feel it is important to flag that, in addition to *hishig*, the Mongolian field of fortune contains a vast repertoire of related notions, which are ontologically distinct enough to require different modes of engaging with them. So I offer just some brief examples from my own work here, to highlight these subtle differences. Fieldwork that I carried out in 2000 among Hori Buryats in the Evenk Nationality Autonomous Banner of Inner Mongolia, China, showed that ‘blessings obtained through merit’ (*buyan hishig*) are ideally *not* pursued as a transaction, or with the aim of extracting any kind of fortune from the spirits or gods (Swancutt 2003). Instead, these very Buddhist Buryats emphasised that *hishig*-blessings should be obtained through modest and upright labours – a notion which resonates with Empson’s ethnography about the ‘right way’ of beckoning *hishig*-fortune.

By contrast, my long-term fieldwork among the more shamanic Aga Buryats of Dornod Province – who live about 500 km east of Empson’s research district of Ashinga – gave rise to different findings. These Aga Buryats hold that, when shamanic spirits or Buddhist gods observe people behaving especially virtuously (*buyantai*), they often send them boons of *khiimor*, which literally means ‘wind-horse’, but refers to ‘fortune’, ‘vitality’ or even the material incarnation that fortune assumes when printed as a galloping horse on the fortune-summoning flags flown outside the home (*khiimoriin dartsag* or *khiimoriin tug*). Accordingly, these Aga Buryats consider that some people might act virtuously, with the hidden intention of attracting ample boons of *khiimor*-fortune (Swancutt in press-a).

One last point of difference is worth mentioning here. Both my Aga Buryat friends and Empson’s Hori Buryat friends share the ‘more general perception that there are certain “right” or “correct” ways of doing things and these should not be innovated upon, nor do they need to be elaborated with different meanings’ (p. 99). However, Aga Buryats do not belabour these points about propriety whenever the ‘correct’ practices fail to raise their *khiimor*-fortunes, but instead promptly produce innovative magical remedies to improve them (Swancutt in press-b, 2008 and 2006). I feel that, among other things, this difference is traceable to the fact that *hishig*-fortune and *khiimor*-fortune have different semantic and moral registers. This makes

sense in light of the fact that, at different historical moments, *hishig*-fortune, *khiimor*'-fortune, and other kinds of Mongolian fortune – such as *süld*-fortune (the 'battle-standard' fortune which conveys 'militant strength', 'might' or 'majesty') – have appealed to specific groups of Mongols and attracted different responses from them. Taking account of this rich range of difference within the Mongolian field of fortune is therefore essential to gaining a full understanding about it.

In Chapter 3, Empson describes how seasonal movement creates an ongoing reconfiguration of homes, personal affects and interpersonal relations, especially between the district and far countryside locations. This is the backdrop to her discussion about the household chest, photographic montages, embroideries and photo albums as media which convey elements of relationships that are 'separated' from or 'contained' within the household. Although I would have liked to have seen more in-depth discussion about the academic literature on montage, Empson usefully compares Buryat photographic montages and genealogical diagrams, showing that each of these are formal media with specific aesthetic criteria that are meant to be looked at, so that they comprise a 'photographic event' in Pinney's sense of the term (Empson, p. 132). Similarly, she demonstrates that embroideries may display women's aspirations and hints of their personal sentiments. In contrast, Empson reveals that photo albums offer spontaneous, un-posed configurations of people, which are contained within the household chest until their owners wish to share them privately within the home.

In Chapter 4, Empson highlights the 'liminal' qualities of life experienced by Buryat infants, young children and daughters-in-law. Here, she describes the 'umbilical relation', or close connection felt between mothers and children, which is often protected by storing the child's last trace of umbilical cord inside of the natal household chest. Importantly, on pages 172-4, Empson also links dangers surrounding the liminal phase of childhood to more general anxieties about trust within Ashinga, thus calling to mind Lars Højer's (2004) study of the 'anti-social contract', enmity and suspicion in northern Mongolia, which I felt it would have been especially fruitful to engage with here.

In Chapter 5, Empson launches a discussion of figure-ground reversals which is heavily influenced by Roy Wagner, showing that different kinds of Buryat mirrors may trap elements of the person or cause that person to adopt different perspectives. Two diagram-led discussions reveal that the Buryat who looks into the mirror displayed on the household chest receives an 'exemplary' view of him- or herself, surrounded by family portraits (and their reflections)

which flank either side of the mirror (p. 197; see also p. 185). But while the portraits and the viewer's reflection cast a collective gaze back on to the Buryat person – which 'separates the viewer from his gaze' in an oddly tête-à-tête experience – different elements within this assemblage of viewer, mirrors, portraits and chest comprise the shifting foreground or background of the total experience (p. 197).

Some parts of Chapter 5 could have been enhanced through comparisons with parallel works in the field. Empson's discussion of the exemplary Buryat person, whose image appears when looking at the household chest, hinges upon the idea that 'the figure revealed through the chest is impossible for a living person [to become], who, although a mother, daughter-in-law, and sister, etc., cannot visibly enact all these relations at a single moment in time' (p. 197). Her point is that only the artificial technology of the mirror placed on top of the household chest can reveal the exemplary view of the Buryat person because the mirror displays the sum total of that person's qualities, capacities and achievements. The mirror on the household chest, then, offers a view on to the Buryat person from all angles at once. Ideally, Empson would have linked her thoughts to Holbraad and Willerslev's (2007) penetrating 'Afterword' to a special issue on perspectivism in *Inner Asia*, which she co-edited together with Pedersen and Humphrey. Holbraad and Willerslev draw upon works by Merleau-Ponty, Holenstein and others to show that the 'view from everywhere' is actually the 'normative ideal' which no person can fully match, so that 'not all perspectives are of equal value' (2007: 340). Their findings would have underscored Empson's argument that the exemplary image cast by the household mirror 'idealises the subject's real position' *precisely because* that image is the normative ideal from which all other views of the Buryat person deviate (p. 198).

Later in Chapter 5, Empson offers the important insight that 'separation is an ontological precondition for harnessing and increasing fortune for the household and its herds' (pp. 200-1). Empson's argument is very convincing in the cases of *hishig*-fortune that she describes, 'such as extracting the tail hair from a cow, [where] something [i.e. the cow for sale] has to be given away in order for a piece [i.e. of the sold cow's tail hair] to be kept back to support and increase fortune for the household' (p. 200). This finding in particular expands our knowledge about the different ontological foundations of the field of Mongolian fortune. For instance, just as Empson shows that *hishig*-fortune follows the principle of 'separation', I would suggest that *khiimor*'-fortune improves or declines in response to a running streak of good or bad *khiimor*', so that it follows the principle of 'like attracts like' (Swancutt in press-b).

Shifting the focus to rebirths in Chapter 6, Empson demonstrates how children or possessions may act as temporary ‘vessels’ which carry a specific Buryat’s personhood across space and time. This emphasis carries over into Part Three of her book, titled ‘Absent Presences’, which could have been taken a step further by engaging with Lars Højer’s (2009) work on ‘Absent Powers’. From Chapter 7 onwards, Empson explores the influence of movement and animistic capacities within the Hori Buryat environment. She reveals the anxieties of Buryats in Ashinga about extracting resources through hunting or mining. Significantly, she also discusses local shamans’ efforts to uncover sites of long-term historical importance in Ashinga, to which Hori Buryats give offerings, in the hope of underscoring their attachments to what could be called their ‘new homeland’, borne out of recent migration.

Chapter 7 is well worth reading, although some of the discussion about the ‘land’ merits further clarification. On page 238, Empson draws upon Pedersen’s (2007) study of Darhad perspectivism, which describes the ‘vast unmarked territory that is not inhabited’ by people as a ‘void’. Building upon this finding, she describes the ‘tension between movement across a void and fixed locations in a centred stillness’ that arises when Buryats disperse from their homes to hunt, collect nuts or berries, watch after children in the district centre, travel to the capital city, and so on (p. 238). Soon afterwards, though, she wants ‘to stress that people do *not* see the land as some passive background setting or empty void’ (p. 252, my emphasis). The inconsistency highlights the importance of pairing an indigenous term for places outside of human habitation – such as the Mongolian phrase ‘wilderness terrain’ (*zelüüd gazar*), which is the abode of land masters or nature spirits (*gazrin ezed*) – with finer definitions of what is meant by an abstract concept, such as the ‘void’. This is not to challenge the use of abstract thought, but to encourage (wherever possible) the most precise and ethnographically appropriate application of it.

The book reaches a dramatic highpoint in Chapter 8, where Empson introduces ethnography about the arson attacks in Ashinga, which simultaneously ‘level out’ wealth differences in the neo-liberal economy and revive the unspoken surveillance from socialist times. She calls attention to the fears that anyone might unleash an arson attack or be suspected of setting fire to a home in Ashinga, which is the *only* district at present within Mongolia where arson is regularly used to attack neighbours (pp. 281-2). We read that one Buryat household warded off these attacks by consulting a shaman, who advised ‘that they create a magical fence around the house that would protect the family against future attack’ (p. 282). This striking

ethnography echoes my earlier findings on Buryat curse-blocking and vampiric imp-blocking remedies that operated as magical fences around the home, which I describe in two different articles about shamanic innovations in the *JRAI* (Swancutt 2006 and 2008).

Tellingly, Empson views arson attacks as a means of unleashing ‘an extra element that is not always obvious with cursing and gossip-spells, namely *public* humiliation’ (p. 310, original emphasis). Her points about launching arson attacks to ensure public defaming, soothe envy and undercut the accumulation of wealth in the neo-liberal economy are all well-taken. But I wonder too whether houses are targeted in Ashinga because it has a flourishing house-making industry, which is fairly specific to Hentii Province, where logs are sourced and houses are built before being sent off to other parts of Mongolia? Like herd animals, these houses built for sale are meant to be ‘separated off’ from the total fortune of any given household in Ashinga, as a means of wealth-building. Conversely, locals in Ashinga live within homes that are wealth-receiving, so that they ‘contain’ the profits acquired through the housing business. It may well be, then, that the impact of the housing industry on arson attacks offers another avenue for Empson to explore in future. By way of conclusion, Empson draws together her main themes in Chapter 9, which is followed by several colourful and photo-rich appendices.

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KATHERINE SWANCUTT

Arthur W. Frank, *Letting stories breathe: a socio-narratology*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2010, 209 pp.

What are stories, and what do they do? Stories can certainly be very diverse, ranging from jokes to autobiographies, from news reports to gossip, or indeed, stories about stories. Anecdotes, personal accounts and myths are just a few kinds that have traditionally dominated anthropological fieldwork. Not every narration is a story, and stories are more than just narration. Socio-narratology, as proposed by Arthur Frank, is ultimately concerned with how life becomes social, and as such offers an alternative take on what was always of greatest interest to anthropologists. This ongoing creation of the social takes place through the common symbolic work of stories and humans working together. According to Frank, stories are our companions, and do not just reflect life but actively shape it. Building on the premise that openness is one of the main properties of stories, he rejects the idea of a definition in the strict sense and, armed with a rich collection of examples, instead focuses on what stories are capable of doing, that is, their *capacities*.

Most stories share a common sequential form. A typical story begins with an *abstract* which attracts the listeners' attention and may indicate the genre, followed by an *orientation* setting out main characters, time and place. Then something out of the ordinary happens: a *complicating event* requiring a response, leading eventually to a *resolution*. This may be followed by an *evaluation*, or commentary provided by the storyteller, and a *coda* that eventually brings the story to an end, indicating that others may take their turn at speaking. The central part, or *complicating event*, which may or may not present a problem or difficulty to the characters, refers to something out of the ordinary that starts the development of a plot. This is why one of the most important capacities of stories is *trouble*. Stories offer us ways to deal with trouble, but can also make trouble, as, for example, when stories of the past are used for political indoctrination or military mobilization.

A related capacity of stories is to make one *point of view* particularly compelling. While this may expand our understanding of another's situation and help to develop empathy, listeners can at times get 'caught up' in a story. If it is too compelling, they might feel that the point of view presented is the only one that matters. Stories captivate people through their capacity for *suspense*, through which people are reminded of possibilities for different developments and various endings. Stories are centred around characters and have a capacity to reveal people's *character* along with different possibilities for action. People can work with these as resources for their own identities. Stories show how to act and how not to act, they distinguish good and bad through their *inherent morality*. They tell the *truth*, but they also have a capacity to perform it, not just to report it, and by including various voices they convey the truth that there are many truths. Above all, stories have an open quality, being open to various interpretations. This *interpretive openness* enables them to transmit a form of knowledge that is versatile and can be used in situations that could not have been predicted. Stories themselves can thus get *out of control* and act in ways that storytellers did not anticipate.

Socio-narratology might offer a way of looking at people's lives through the stories they live with, since stories seem truly to shape everyday experience – what people do in the world, not just how they see it. This active aspect is well captured in Frank's description of stories as 'material-semiotic companions' to people, drawing on the ideas of John Law and Donna Haraway. Stories have a semiotic quality, just like the material world; they are made of signs and sometimes take a material form. They are also the companions of humans, in the sense of the 'companion species' explored by Haraway. Companion species take care of each other and shape each other in the process, developing together and allowing each other to be what they are. Frank's claim here resonates with recent anthropological interest in human-nonhuman relations and hints at a way past prevalent distinctions between concepts and things, objects and agents, or the material and the psychological. Stories stand between these opposites and make the distinction irrelevant.

Being material-semiotic companions of humans, stories allow humans to be. They do this in a variety of ways, by connecting people and providing collective identities, for instance, and by calling for collective action. Because of their openness, they can mobilize people who can recognize their differing interests, in various guises, within the same story. Stories can tell people who they are and shape their narrative identity through identification with its characters. Frank acknowledges that this identification is not simple or straightforward and that different

stories succeed at capturing people to different extents, depending on their prior knowledge, or rather the other stories they already know. Stories that do not seem to ‘speak to’ those we already know might fail to register. Stories help make sense of the world, as they provide us with a guidance system for selection and evaluation, thereby enabling us to focus our attention. In short, stories provide us with an apparatus for seeing the world, without which judgement is impossible.

Frank’s arguments in this regard might usefully be traced to Gadamer’s notion of prejudice, a central notion in his project of hermeneutics, which is as much a study of interpretation as a theory of knowledge. Prejudice in Gadamer’s work does not have the strongly negative connotation it has in everyday usage but refers simply to all the prior knowledge and beliefs one holds that enable us to focus on some things and not others. While undoubtedly restrictive, this is also indispensable for any form of understanding, a prerequisite for making sense of what is interpreted, but also the world at large. One simply cannot make any sense of the undifferentiated mass that is the world. But to achieve understanding one must be open, and both the restrictiveness of our knowledge and this openness to the new and the other are summed up in the idea of our knowledge as our horizon. The process of understanding the other involves the merging of these horizons.

Frank explicitly acknowledges the influence of Gadamer when discussing the interpretation of stories, using his ideas to move away from simple decoding towards nuanced *understanding*. Yet one could argue that Gadamer’s influence is much more pervasive, since it underlies Frank’s own theory of knowledge. In fact, it underpins his ideas in two ways: in terms of how knowledge is acquired, enabling humans to understand the world; and in terms of how the interpretation of stories can proceed: through openness and striving toward understanding of the other. This is not unlike the work of anthropologists.

Based on hermeneutical insights, Frank proposes a method for working with stories which he calls dialogical narrative analysis, which stresses openness and dialogue. Dialogue is important because it helps us to avoid fixing things, pinning them down, giving a final verdict on the meaning of the story or its content. Finalization sums everything up to the point there is nothing more to be said, either about the story or the storyteller. It makes a total pronouncement: ‘there is nothing more to be said about you’. But stories resist finalization. Like humans, they are ‘always *more*’.

IZA KAVEDŽIJA

Keith Hart, Jean-Louis Laville and Antonio David Cattani (eds.), *The human economy*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2010, xvi, 371 pp.

Economics is often called the dismal science, a dismissive attitude that has had a certain tendency to be translated on to anthropology as well. However, one man who has pioneered its study as something far removed from dry statistics and formal models is the anthropologist Keith Hart, well known in particular for his work on the so-called ‘informal economy’, precisely that aspect of the economy which escapes such statistics, not to mention the state’s taxation, permits, borders, etc., yet is vital in sustaining livelihoods the world over. Now he has joined two professors of sociology in editing a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary volume of shortish general essays on aspects of the contemporary world economy. The overall framework in which the book is set is the recent world financial crisis starting in 2008 and the severe, though not yet fatal challenge and shock it has presented to neo-liberal, exclusively market-oriented economic models and practices. However, its genesis actually goes back way beyond that, to the World Social Forum held some ten years previously in Porte Alegre, Brazil, which sought to chart an alternative pathway for economic development than that mapped out by the still western-dominated Bretton Woods institutions and the more recent World Trade Organization, a pathway designed to do more than these institutions seem able to do to improve economic conditions for the millions of the world’s marginalized and disadvantaged. The Forum, therefore, like this book, highlighted third-world and alternative (i.e. mainly non-Anglo-Saxon) perspectives on the world economy and its biases towards wealth-production for the already wealthy at the expense of poverty-production for the already poor. This led to a series of publications in other languages (chiefly Portuguese and Spanish because of the pioneering influence of Latin America, but later also French—the language of another variant sceptical of Anglo-Saxon neo-liberalism), before developing into the present text. This focus gives overall coherence to the otherwise disparate themes brought together here, preventing the book from being just another encyclopaedia or dictionary of economics.

The book is therefore not a purely anthropological text – indeed, only six of the 35 authors are anthropologists, most of the rest being sociologists, economists, activists or other types of specialist – nor does it pretend overall to be a ‘neutral’ academic text, since it does take a specific oppositional stand against neo-liberal, laissez-faire economics, structural adjustment programmes, the unfair combination of western import restrictions and dumping on

the world's poorer economies, and the like. That said, the essays are still uniformly intellectual products and highly informative about current world conditions and prospects concerning a whole range of economically relevant issues. It would be invidious to single out any particular essays for detailed discussion here, but some examples follow, concentrating on the anthropologists involved: Catherine Alexander on 'The third sector', T.H. Eriksen on 'Globalization', David Graeber on 'Communism', Chris Hann on 'Moral economy', Keith Hart on 'Informal economy' and (with Vishnu Padayachee) 'Development', and David Lewis on 'Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)', to which might be added the sociologist John Urry on 'Mobility'. But there are also essays by non-anthropologists on a range of other issues, including so-called 'alter-globalization' or anti-capitalist movement(s), feminist economics, community and parallel currencies, and the digital commons.

Undoubtedly a timely volume, this book is certain to stimulate debate regarding the alternative economic futures the world is faced with, which will have an impact on many contemporary themes in anthropology, as in the other social sciences, and not limited to the purely economic.

ROBERT PARKIN

Ruth Marshall, *Political spiritualities: the Pentecostal revolution in Nigeria*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2009.

I have been a fan of Ruth Marshall's since first hearing her deliver a paper about ten years ago and therefore was eager to read her long-awaited book, discussed here, not least because there can be few people better qualified to write a definitive tome on the tidal wave of Pentecostalist Christianity which has swept across most of West Africa in the last three decades.

Pentecostalism is doubly challenging to the social researcher, first in its ubiquity across the region, and secondly because of the challenges of encountering it and writing accounts of it when we originate from the perspective of secularising academic discourses and have to engage with such spiritually charged holistic understandings of the world and its works.

Marshall's book is a close-up examination of the nature of this movement as it has evolved, spread and reinvented itself in its biggest single national environment, Nigeria. It

benefits from nearly two decades spent tracking the Pentecostal movement, interacting with both its ordinary adherents and some of its leaders in thought and theology, as well as its texts, both core and marginal, including the often hyperbolic ‘grey literature’ of popular testaments and what Marshall terms their ‘radical excess of meaning’.

Central to the book is Marshall’s theoretical approach, set out very thoroughly in the first chapter, on *Rethinking the religious and the political in Africa*. In what follows, the author says, Pentecostalism is not to be approached (as certain other sociologists have done) as being ‘really about’ – or an expression of – something else, but *sui generis*, as a particular historical subjectivity. Pentecostalism is to be treated here as nothing less than a fully inhabited way of being in the world, as well as a way of *understanding* being in the world. The whole is built upon a tightly argued and theoretically solidly constructed Foucauldian framework to which the concept of history as event is central and which is ‘political’ in its very broadest sense.

This approach makes sense first because it respects the material, analysing without reducing the faith of the Pentecostals with whom Marshall has interacted, and captures the material in its fullness; secondly because being ‘born again’ as a way of *being* is how it is experienced by its adherents; and lastly because Pentecostalism is explicitly a project about remaking the self completely in Christ. The authorial voice is agnostically respectful while letting the nature of believers’ faith shine through, thus setting it far apart from and above the implied secularist sneer which certain other authors have failed to disguise.

The next section deals with the evolving theologies and institutions of Nigerian Pentecostalism, an open window into the strands and debates within this faith movement that is very welcome to those of us who are not otherwise in a position to discern the subtle ebbs, flows and constituencies. Marshall’s work is particularly strong in charting the rise and transformation of particular churches, tracing the Deeper Life Bible Church and Redeemed Christian Church of God from campus meetings and Yoruba-language minority sects respectively to multinational million-member organisations with bureaucracies, schools and even, in the latter case, a university of its own.

Although adamant that Pentecostalism is not ‘about’ something else, Marshall sees clearly that the boom in this kind of faith is intimately related to social transformations, political stresses and economic cycles of boom and bust throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Chapter 3, on *Revival and the postcolonial crisis of government*, engages with this, gathering together the threads of the metaphysics of decline and fall and the evolution of a culture of

shortage, aspiration, desperation, seeking and self-empowerment, and connecting the chaotic realities with their spiritual responses. Yet it neglects to lay out the prosaic material basics which chart that story, and because of that is not entirely successful as an explanation. Granted, crude indicators may have their weaknesses, but some information on incomes, inflation, emigration and declines in life-expectancy or literacy would have helped greatly to enlighten us on the context. As it is, I, a reader familiar with Nigeria, just about managed, but much of the religious studies readership at which this book seems squarely aimed would surely struggle to be clear about the connection between lived reality and the embracing of a Pentecostal approach to engaging with it, which Marshall does neatly capture – but elsewhere – as ‘the sense of the apocalyptic that contemporary life in Nigeria inspires’.

The rest of the book deals with what we might call the ‘lived theology’ of Pentecostalism, as God’s Subjects (Ch. 4) shape their spiritual citizenship through conduct and participation, and as the author deals with the linkage between ethics and political economy (Ch. 5) in its very broadest sense, including fraught underlying tensions such as debt and obligation. Chapter 6 deals more explicitly with political convictions, where divine grace and miracles are introduced most abruptly to strike at the core of immoral contemporary politics, and where discourse and institutions combine in the form of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria to give a material community to the new conceptions of spiritual sovereignty. It covers the particular dynamic introduced into Pentecostalism by oblique reference to the influence of Islam at the national level through the period of military rule, as well as the rise of a kind of authoritarianism by the Overseers within the Pentecostal movement itself. Despite the exhortations to government by and of the righteous, she describes the very muted role that, she contends, such churches took in organising opposition to dictatorship, as well as the indiscernible difference which has been made when prominent Pentecostal Christians have occupied high public office. Much more than that, though, she ties these institutional events to a historical consciousness imbued with the endlessly deferred potentiality of God’s grace.

In fact, as one would expect from an author with such familiarity and careful insights, there is little to fault in the book. The problem lies in what *isn’t* in it. Three major issues are glaringly notable by their absence. First is the issue of embodiment: a faith movement which accents and *politicizes* dress, bearing, particular ways of speech, trance, possession, speaking in tongues, dance and comportment surely suggests giving more than just a little anthropological attention to these issues.

Secondly, and more problematically, the book contains barely a mention of an issue related to embodiment, namely sexuality (like ‘promiscuity’ and ‘virginity’, it does not appear in the index). The construction of gender, relationships, personal sexual conduct, and especially issues around promiscuity and abstinence are key to Pentecostals’ ways of being in the world and of dividing the saved from the immoral, especially as regards the huge youth demographic and the accent on virginity and chastity amidst the highly commodified sexuality that looms large on the cultural landscape, certainly too large to reasonably exclude.

Thirdly, while the book does not ignore the relationship between Pentecostal Christianity and the electronic media, it certainly under-addresses it. Marshall documents, for instance, the progression of media used for the Pentecostal message from the church and word of mouth to tapes, television and newer media and the dissemination of testaments and confessions, and she notes the central place that spectacle and music has had in the success of churches like House On The Rock. But this is not enough: as other scholars’ research hints, the relationship between Pentecostalism and the electronic media seems as central as the relationship between the rise of early-modern Protestantism and the printed word (and thence, with new publics and their politics). To underplay this is to leave out something central to the development of this particular historical subjectivity.

As it stands, however, the author has produced a great work which gives us perhaps as much insight into the experienced world of Pentecostalism and its political subjectivities as is possible without being oneself a believer; but because of its selected purview, that definitive work perhaps remains to be written.

OLIVER OWEN

Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead, *A sociology of religious emotion*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, vi, 270 pp.

This book is an outcome of a joint project by Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead, both sociologists of religion whose main interest is in the religion of modern Western societies. The primary aim of the book is to serve as a contribution towards reviving the study of emotions in social-scientific scholarly inquiry. The authors enthusiastically argue for ‘taking emotions seriously’

in the study of religion and offer a new conceptual framework for a systematic study of religious emotions. Along with a critical analysis and reconciliation of existing theoretical approaches, the reader is provided with various case studies of religious emotions, both from their own research and from a range of other studies and disciplines, as illustrative examples throughout the book. The book consists of six chapters, enriched with an appendix addressing issues of method and practice, and a smaller photographic section.

The first step the authors take towards developing this new conceptual framework is a reconsideration of emotions as a focus of academic interest. In debates about the approaches to emotions in major social-scientific theoretical perspectives, they outline how the influence of positivism and a lack of systematic study have rendered emotions marginal to the mainstream, dismissing them as irrational, subjective and unsuitable for scientific inquiry. The authors argue against the opposition of reason and emotion, advocating instead their complementarity and using sociological arguments to disprove the reduction of emotions to private inner states accessible only to introspection (p. 17). The debate is not aimed to provide an overview of existing approaches, but covers just a number of themes selected in order to formulate a brief and straightforward legitimization of emotions in the focus of the social sciences.

The first chapter presents a revised understanding of emotions in general. The authors establish one of their cornerstones by suggesting a relational account of emotions as constructed in the interplay between individual agents, social structures and cultural symbols. Instead of characterizing emotions with reference to a particular feeling, they introduce a revised concept of 'emotional regime' that holds together all kinds of different emotions, which are now characterized by constituting the social and cultural relationships in which they arise. The relational approach to emotions is not a novel idea, but this book interestingly goes beyond the general scope of sociology by incorporating material culture into the analytical framework. This enables the authors to operationalize the study of emotions within a broader social setting and generate a more complex picture of emotions that might be informative for other social-scientific disciplines. Indeed, the authors attempt to provoke a critical debate of the proposed agenda on a multidisciplinary basis.

The concept of an emotional regime serves to characterize religious emotion in the same way. It is not understood as a distinctive experience unique to religion, but as any kind of emotion that arises within the relations of a religious community and its symbols. The authors follow the social-constructivist approach in order to distinguish religious emotional regimes from non-religious ones, but they provide an interesting compromise in relation to social-constructivist reductionism by claiming characteristic features of religious emotions. Based on the assumption that religions typically offer a frame of reference by which to interpret and live the everyday world, the authors describe religious emotional regimes as related to an ‘alternate ordering’ of reality, which in turn gives religious emotions the characteristics of ordering emotional experience, offers emotional transcendence and provides orientation and inspiration in life (p. 70). The argument is elaborated in the second chapter, though the clarity of the argument could have benefited from a more careful choice and organization of examples. Even though the authors claim generality for these characteristics, the predominance of illustrative examples from the Western Christian tradition, which might simply be a consequence of the research focus of both authors, leaves the claim vulnerable.

Chapters 3 and 4 introduce the conceptual scheme to analyse the inner emotional dynamics of religious communities. The chapters are more ‘technical’ in the sense that the reader is provided with a description of a model of dialectical relations between the constituent parts of religious emotional regimes. First, the principle of dialectically balanced regimes is clarified, where relations are mutually constitutive. In this case, symbols represent collective feelings and individual experiences, where on-going adjustments serve as regulations for maintaining the balance. In dialectically unbalanced regimes, on the other hand, one or more constituents fail to address the others, and such cases lead to extremes of intense emotions on the one hand (e.g. ecstasy) and tempered or absent emotions on the other (e.g. hypocrisy). The framework is pretty well elaborated, without evident inconsistencies, and presented in a comprehensive manner. Clear explanations of particular cases and an insightful choice of examples keep the reader engaged despite the ‘technical’ nature of the chapters.

The discussion of the general conceptual framework culminates in Chapter 5. Religious emotional regimes are presented in relation to the concept of power, understood here as the capacity to make a difference and incorporated into a broader societal context. The authors

discuss how the dynamics of religious emotional regimes are related to emotional regimes in other parts of society. Being able to identify the nature of these interconnections, either complementary or dissonant, they argue, can illuminate the issues of the legitimizing, rejection and transformation of religion in society. However, the authors are not 'blinded' by their own interest in emotions and regard the developed framework to provide enrichment for existing approaches in the ongoing investigation of these issues.

The last chapter is empirically the most interesting one and provides the application of the proposed analytical scheme on the concrete examples of religious emotional regimes in late modern society, mainly the transformation of Christianity in today's world of multiple modernities. The material provided does not create a compact picture, but even the partial analysis presented here demonstrates the utility of the approach for articulating the role of emotions in transformative processes. I see the greatest advantage of this project in the stress on the dialectical character of the processes within the schema that puts all constituent parts on the same level of importance. The research on the individual, societal and symbolic levels of culture thus welcomes methodological pluralism as a way of obtaining data from which to draw the explanation for each level individually, and it does not seek to formulate a meta-emotion describing the society, which is often just an empty expression to enrich the rhetoric, but not the explanation.

Ending with an appendix discussing practical methodological issues, the book presents a compact framework that may serve as a helpful tool for incorporating emotions into the overall analysis of ongoing processes in society. Apart from minor opacities caused by the weaker organization of empirical examples in some parts, the authors successfully argue that there is much to be gained by including emotions in the focus of the study of religion and other dimensions of social life. Even though the title of the book indicates its direction towards the sociological community as its audience, it is relevant for anybody who is looking for inspiration concerning how to approach emotions in their research on society.

ALEXANDRA ĎURČOVÁ

Hairong Yan, *New masters, new servants*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, 328 pp.

In this innovative and entertaining ethnography, Hairong Yan examines post-Mao migration as an ethnographic site. Focusing her project on ‘interpreting the world’, Yan skilfully debates issues of development, modernity, neo-liberalism, post-socialism (p. 23) and consumer citizenship in the process of post-Mao reform. Treating ‘post socialism as an unstable process in which the emerging hegemony of capitalism in China must deal with living socialist legacies, claims, and structures of feeling that surround the current relations of production and sociality’ (p. 13), Yan focuses on the discursive power experienced during the rural to urban migration of domestic workers in post-Mao China.

The fieldwork for the book was undertaken between 1998-2000 by Yan, who also incorporates the views and experiences of her own parents. Yan also draws upon her fluency in Mandarin to develop a rich ethnographic tapestry. Noting that she interviewed 104 migrants (p. 27) and ‘thirty-five or so’ employers (p. 54) in Nanjing, Tianjin, Hefei and Shanghai too, Yan successfully conveys the importance of maintaining trust with her informants, noting that she never interviewed domestic workers and employers in the same households (p. 55). Yan also maintained contact through reunions and embeds her experience of having worked as a Chinese interpreter who was privy to numerous meetings between US economists and Chinese officials in the ethnography. She is well positioned to analyse the keywords used by economists to refer to post-Mao reform processes such as ‘structural adjustment’, ‘global governance’, ‘efficiency’, ‘development’ and the like. In addition to examining the emic dimension of the terms used by the elites, Yan is also easily able to develop thick descriptions of salient Mandarin concepts such as ‘*ren*’ and ‘*suizhi*’.

Yan includes gripping informant testimonies of the deferential master–servant relationship and the falsehood of fictive kin or familial relationships through a generational lens of two cohorts of migrants from the late Mao period of the 1970s and the later migrants of the 1980s-90s. Her use of case studies and numerous informant testimonies, poems, journals and media reports gives a great deal of texture to the ethnography. Juxtaposed against this are rich informant testimonies from the female migrants themselves. For example, one migrant recalled how her employers referred to her as one of the family and yet in practice treated her as an outsider: ‘When they would bring goodies back from their daughter’s home, they would share the goodies among themselves and urge each other to eat more. They would never ask

me to eat, even if they couldn't finish it. Sometimes when fruit began to rot, they would ask me to eat it' (p. 214). In another example, Yan notes the classic and well-known predicament of the domestic worker's labour having to sustain two families, and yet in the process she cares for her employer's family more than her own (p. 215). Her family depends on the wages that she sends home; for example, in Wuwei almost one third of households are dependent upon the wages sent home by migrants, and many villagers complain that farming is a waste of effort (p. 226). By sending wages home, the migrant worker earns her family's respect for the economic contribution that she is making (p. 215), yet in her employer's home her value is very low. For example, the part on 'Baomu's diary and her employer's response' outlines the suffering of the female migrant and shows that her employer does not see that suffering. In the margins of the worker's personal diary, the employer writes: 'What if you're hungry? [...] What's wrong with making you look after the child when you're not yet full? Remember you're not one of our family. You're only a *baomu*. We have paid you, and you have to work!' (p. 218).

Demographic change is a fact of labour migration, and Yan notes that the Chinese rural areas developed the classic layout of larger proportions of children and elderly (p. 222). As in India, Yan's informants also note how major festivals and events are no longer well attended and are shrinking year by year, making the countryside seem 'dismembered' (p. 222). One of Yan's informants notes that Chinese New Year was a major event and that 'sometimes there were almost a hundred of us...now just a few youngsters get together – only three or five, at most seven or eight' (p. 227).

As already noted, Yan also contributes a generational analysis of post-Mao migration by examining two cohorts of women who migrated in the late-Mao period in the 1970s and the neo-liberal period of the 1980s to 1990s. While the generational aspect is vitally important to many social phenomena, it is seldom incorporated into most ethnographies. She begins her analysis by introducing the concept of *ren*, 'a possessor of socially validated and meaningful personhood or subjectivity' (p. 35) that is only realized through social action. *Ren* is essentially inculcated and learned behaviour. Only about three to four thousand women migrated from Wuwei to the cities in the 1970s, but by 1993 this number had increased to 263,000. In order to reduce the gap between country and city, the post-Mao state decided to achieve rapid industrialization, a process that left rural female migrants vulnerable. While the 1970s generation of women faced food shortages, patriarchy and the devaluation of their productive work (pp. 32-3), the subsequent cohort experienced even more significant social ruptures, due

in part to the fact that the Mao and post-Mao projects were different, ‘with Mao-era modernization based on the improvement of national self-sufficiency and post-Mao modernity defined as the nation’s reinsertion into the global capitalist market’ (p. 37). Regarding Chinese migrant women during the post-Mao era, Yan was most interested in exploring the relations between rural and urban, which she explained in terms of the modernity and transformation of self-identity and how they are working together to, in turn, transform society. This is an example of how ideas, words and discourse can change and modify reality, as Hegel and his followers like Max Weber, Raymond Williams and Michel Foucault were trying to show. Yet she also asserted the ways in which these migrant domestic workers felt tension and discontinuity in the social processes in the Mao and post Mao-eras and did not experience the promise of neo-liberalism as a pleasure, but as a process of eating bitterness. Some of the women from the 1970s felt some security, even amidst the patriarchy of the Mao period, and in the 1980s they longed for that security. Some workers cried due to that tension and the embrace of the post-Mao privatization of factories.

Successfully captured are the tensions between status mobility and superficial class ‘transformation’ and the harsh reality of being a migrating domestic worker. It is also notable that, although she employs a Hegelian analysis of the power of discourse, she also retains a healthy scepticism toward Hegel’s idealism (p. 120). For example, she is very clear that post-Mao reforms have ‘violently destabilized old structures of identity and security’ (p. 200).

In this book, Yan presents a rich and fascinating ethnography that exposes the lived realities of women migrants in post-Mao China. Yan shows, quite forcefully and eloquently, the importance of discourse in shaping society, while at the same time recognizing that neo-liberalism is not a finished project, nor a just one. Yan’s ethnographic humanism offers an exciting way forward for other anthropologist to continue their fascination with the exploration of emic categories in transforming global economies.

REDDI SEKHARA YALAMALA