

BOOK REVIEWS

STEPHEN CORRY, *Tribal peoples for tomorrow's world*, Cookhill: Freeman Press 2011, 303 pp.

On 13 September 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The culmination of more than two decades of discussion, the event was heralded by the UN Secretary General as a 'historic moment' when governments and indigenous peoples 'reconciled with their painful histories and resolved to move forward together on the path of human rights, justice and development.'¹ The four countries that voted against the text at the time – Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States – have since endorsed it. But what does it actually mean for the estimated three hundred and seventy million indigenous people alive today?

The answer, according to Stephen Corry, will depend on the extent to which the Declaration is accompanied by action from governments and by a far better understanding from their citizens about who indigenous people are and what they actually want. In *Tribal peoples for tomorrow's world*, Corry – director of the NGO Survival International – distils forty years of work into a short, lively and accessible 'beginners guide' to tribal peoples and the challenges they face (p. iv). This is not an academic book: its message is political (proceeds from its sales go to Survival International), and it contains no references or bibliography. But there is still much in it that may be of interest to anthropologists, especially those studying tribal peoples currently engaged in struggles with governments over land and other resources.

Corry begins with a nuanced discussion of the importance, and difficulty, of defining his key terms: people, indigenous, tribal. He settles on defining tribal peoples, the focus of the book, as those 'which have followed ways of life for many generations that are largely self-sufficient, and are clearly different from the mainstream and dominant society' (p. 22). Indigenous peoples, on the other hand, can be defined more broadly – 'partly by descent, partly by the particular features that indicate their distinctiveness from those who arrived later, and partly by their own views of themselves' (p. 18). Definitions here are key: they have real implications for how indigenous and tribal peoples engage with an international human rights system that has, as Corry rightly argues, privileged individual rights over collective ones. They also provide a useful grounding to the chapters that follow.

These chapters can be divided into four main sections: an overview of the origins of tribal peoples; a 'lightening tour' (p. 153) of the different groups of tribal peoples currently living around the world; a general summary of some common features of lifestyles found among tribal peoples; and finally, an introduction to the problems they face and some possible solutions. Corry's forceful critique of short-sighted and ill-conceived development projects runs throughout. Without proper consultation, and lacking local ownership, these projects – whether in health, education, or housing – can inflict 'immense damage' on tribal peoples (p. 230). Development, for Corry, as he argues

¹ 'Historic Milestone for Indigenous Peoples Worldwide as UN Adopts Rights Declaration', United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 13 September 2007.

elsewhere, ‘at least for most tribal peoples, isn’t really about lifting people out of poverty, it’s about masking the takeover of their territories.’²

In the face of these kinds of threats, and in a section that may be of particular interest to social anthropologists, he argues against the politically neutral stance taken by some anthropologists working with tribal peoples (pp. 255-260). In contrast, he cites Mark Münzel’s work amongst the Aché in Paraguay during the 1970s as a positive example of a kind of anthropology that can stand at ‘the forefront of the movement to assist’ those groups (p. 257). This speaks to broader debates within anthropology that remain far from settled: about the nature of politically engaged scholarship generally, and about how it relates to indigenous peoples in particular. The Board of the Society for Cultural Anthropology (SCA) deliberated intensely, for example, before ultimately deciding to sign a 2007 American Anthropological Association (AAA) letter endorsing the UN Declaration. Its members recognised that ‘indigenous and minority status were configured very differently in different regions, such that policies and programs addressed to “indigenous rights” have varied effects, and sometimes occlude critical political dynamics.’³

It is therefore unfortunate that this book’s usefulness for anthropologists is likely to be limited by its lack of references and a bibliography. Corry organises his section on the life-styles of tribal peoples (pp. 150-201) around themes that sit at the heart of social anthropology – law, exchange, language, religion, etc. – and he illustrates his points with dozens of pithy examples. But in the absence of any references, the reader is frequently left wondering which of these are drawn from any particular ethnographic source, for instance, and which from his own wealth of firsthand experience. Certain statistical examples – like his statement that ‘in England and Wales, a child is killed by a parent about every ten days’ (p. 164) – cry out for a reference. At some points, moreover, it may have been more useful to discuss fewer cases, but in greater depth. At other points it feels as though certain concepts might be teased out better: the harm inflicted upon tribal peoples by the forces of ‘capitalism, communism and globalisation’, for example, are all dealt with, for the most part, in one small section under that title (pp. 209-210).

But Corry is upfront about the purpose of the book. As a passionate and highly readable ‘beginners guide’, it more than achieves its aim of articulating ‘some points which might be helpful to a growing defence of tribal peoples’ (p. 296). In doing so, it urges readers to accept ‘that the diversity of humankind, with the knowledge it can bring, is valuable for all’ (p. 301). It is an ambitious goal, but one in which anthropologists can and do engage, and a necessary one if initiatives like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are to have real meaning.

MICHAEL EDWARDS

² Stephen Corry, ‘Do indigenous people benefit from ‘development’?’, *The Guardian*, 25 November 2011.

³ Kim Fortun, Mike Fortun and Steven Rubenstein, Editors’ Introduction to special number on ‘Emergent Indigenities’, *Cultural Anthropology* 25/2 (2010), pp. 222-34, at p. 222.

ROBIN DUNBAR, CLIVE GAMBLE and JOHN GOWLETT (eds.) *Social brain, distributed mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy (Proceedings 158), 2010, ix, 528 pp.

This volume offers an enthralling collection of essays addressing complementary views on the theories of the social brain and the distributed mind. As numerous branches of scholarship increasingly focus on human cognition, the views on its evolution that this book presents provide a crucial contribution to a burgeoning multidisciplinary conversation. By bringing together studies in the fields of archaeology, psychology, philosophy, sociology and cognitive and evolutionary sciences, the volume is itself proof that contrasting approaches can enter into fruitful conversation and benefit from collaboration. The papers were presented at a two-day conference in 2008, part of the activities organized by the British Academy's Centenary Research Project, 'Lucy to Language'.

Different types of evidence are placed under scrutiny to provide a series of fascinating suggestions about the way in which human cognition evolved. The two theories that provide the volume's title emphasise contrasting aspects of our species' cognitive path. The notion of the social brain emphasises the neural circuitry in processes of thought and feeling. That of the distributed mind, on the other hand, goes beyond the brain to focus on interactions among individuals, visible in mediations through material culture. By including explorations from both viewpoints, the authors put forward a convincing case for combining them into a unified model to understand human cognition, dealt with by Mithen in the closing chapter.

While some of the essays are clearly jargon-laden, they nevertheless constitute a valuable corpus of scholarship. The genuine *longue durée* of their range runs from millions of years ago to the Viking Age as well as some comparisons with contemporary hunter-gatherer groups. Some analyses use studies of behaviour among primates to consider social networks and social complexity. Others refer to strategies of collective forgetting in the twentieth century that have proved to be necessary in order to enhance social bonds. The value of such a long-term perspective is not only a reminder of our make-up in terms of biological time, but a challenging immersion into the reciprocal influences between our behaviour and our biology.

From a social anthropological perspective, the relevance of this volume's premises is clear. In order to improve our understanding of contemporary collective behaviours and sociocultural changes, it is useful to have a better grasp of our cognitive scaffolding in respect of both its biology and its wider net of social interactions. Furthermore, perhaps the clearest single dominant theme across its pages is the role of material culture. This attention to objects and the necessary practices that surround them brings numerous analyses in the volume close to recent theoretical approaches of the sort put forward as actor-network, affect and non-representational. Through careful analyses of fragments and objects, as well as their scattering and apparent use, archaeologists provide useful maps of interactions that illustrate the distributed mind viewpoint.

As could be expected, practice is also a central theme throughout the book. Tool making, for example, can be followed through the archaeological record not only in the tools left behind, but in their distribution, modifications, increased complexity and apparent purposes. All these issues point to learning processes that are hardwired in our selves. A long-term perspective using a sizeable data bank of sites and objects allowed Gamble to postulate that ‘technologies of separation’ were the key to the cognitive evolution of humanity. He starts his essay by insisting on his distrust of relying on technology and material culture more broadly as a proxy for the evolving mental capabilities of larger brains. His scepticism is due to a gap in time according to the available evidence of some 500,000 years between significant advances in brain size and the much later appearance of art, architecture, writing and numeracy. He suggests that hominins used ‘technologies of separation’ to deal with pressures of larger numbers both of individuals within groups and of groups themselves. The enlargement of communities required new emotional responses and modified habits of fission (breaking off into smaller groups to hunt during the day, for example) and fusion (coming together again in the evening, for example). He argues that the combination of an external model of cognition with the evolutionary map drawn from the social brain permits a better understanding of continuities and changes in our evolution. Thus, the identified gap is rather a gradual modification of behaviour and technology that ended with the creative explosion of the modern mind.

Fire is the topic of another chapter, in which Gowlett considers the long history and significance of fire for humans. Fire, he says, is deeply tied to our biology, economy and technology, and is even a main motor of the social brain. Through the use of crucial evidence that suggests the use of fire by hominins, he argues that fire is a facilitator in a triangle of diet change, detailed environmental knowledge and social collaboration, which may have fuelled the growth in brain size from about 500 to 1,000 cc between 2 and 1 million years ago. He claims that through fire the day was extended into the night in a way that allowed for longer social lives that also required new skills. The few extra hours marked a continuous change in collective behaviour, which would bring together insights and ideas, and even language. Its benefits in terms of diet and technology may have been similar to those of fuelling the imagination and sociability. Its symbolism, we are reminded, can be witnessed in our delight in candles and open fires.

These short and limited descriptions of just two chapters should provide a glimpse of the range of topics and approaches on offer in this volume. Although more sign-posting would have been appreciated in the form of section introductions, the volume holds together well. It is a valuable contribution to debates on our unique path as a species. It brings to mind Maurice Bloch’s recent provocative invitation for social anthropologists to engage with the cognitive challenge. A better grasp of our biological and social long-term histories will help us frame our inquiries within a holistic perspective.

JÜRGEN WASIM FREMBGEN, *At the shrine of the Red Sufi: five days and nights on pilgrimage in Pakistan*, Karachi: Oxford University Press 2012, iii, 181 pp.

Jürgen Wasim Frembgen's book *At the Shrine of the Red Sufi* is centred around the 'urs (death anniversary) celebrations of the Sufi saint Saiyid Usman Marwandi (1177-1274), popularly known as Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. Born in north-west Afghanistan to a family of Saiyids – his father, Saiyid Ibrahim Kabiruddin came from Iraq and traced his ancestors back to the sixth Shī'a Imam, Jafar as-Sadiq – Marwandi is said to have learnt the Quran at the age of seven. He travelled to different parts of the Muslim world, including Karbala and Iran, eventually settling in the town of Sehwan Sharif, in the province of Sindh, in 1251. In contemporary Pakistan, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar is considered one of the greatest Sufi saints, and his 'urs, held each year in the eighth Islamic lunar month of Sha'aban, is attended by hundred thousands of devotees. Reading almost like a travelogue, the book presents us with a description of Frembgen's journey from Lahore to Sehwan Sharif, followed by a detailed account of the 'urs celebrations and forms of devotion at the shrine.

Although the focus of the book is the yearly 'urs, Frembgen uses his narrative to discuss popular Sufi traditions and beliefs across Pakistan. The account of the festivities at the shrine is thus interspersed with vignettes about other devotees, dervishes and mystics that he encountered during his stay. Through such anecdotes, Frembgen's rich ethnography is able to capture the diversity of the followers of mainstream Sufism. Ranging from stories of prostitutes and dancers to ascetics and beggars and from runaways to police officers and government employees, he not only highlights the continuing popularity of the Sufi saints, but also illustrates how aspects of Sufism are deeply embedded in contemporary popular culture in Pakistan. Tales from the lives of the great Sufis of the past are remembered and discussed (and sometimes contested) in everyday conversations, and the popularity of *qawwali* music in the country far transcends its original devotional purpose.

More importantly, especially in the current context of increased violence against Shī'as in Pakistan, Frembgen's ethnography acts as a starting point for a discussion of the nature of religious identities in the Indus plain. Academic discourse on the subject maintains that in Punjab and Sindh, the heartlands of South Asian mysticism, religious identities have historically been rather fluid, with frequent cross-over and movement between different traditions. This was particularly the case amongst Sunnīs and Shī'as. In most South Asian Sufi traditions, Ali ibn Abu Talib, the son-in-law and first cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, is considered to be one of the first Sufis and has an exalted status. Amongst Shī'as, Ali is remembered as the Rightful successor to the Prophet and the first Imam in Shī'ism. Thus, in the Indus plain, where Islam was largely spread through Sufi saints, both Sunnīs and Shī'as are united in their deference for Ali and have, until recently, enjoyed harmonious relations. Frembgen's work confirms such views: Lal Shahbaz Qalandar is recognised as a Shī'a Sufi, yet the throngs of Sunnī, Shī'a and even Hindu devotees who visit the shrine are not concerned with such sectarian labels or division.

That said, Frembgen's ethnography captures some instances of change and of possible disharmony that he leaves unexplored. For instance, he mentions that a group of young Shī'a men, students of a conservative cleric in Lahore who is funded by the Iranian government, self-flagellate and mourn in different parts of the town for the duration of the *'urs*. He argues that this is done to show to that Lal Shahbaz is a Shī'a saint but does not offer a deeper analysis of the identity politics that may be at work in such displays. Similarly, his description of Pathan Kafi, a nearby site consisting of a dervish lodge and a graveyard, warrants further analysis that is not provided. The oldest tomb in the graveyard belongs to a distinguished servant of the Qalandar, who is said to have accompanied the saint from Afghanistan. Frembgen notes, almost in passing, that the tomb is guarded by Pakhtun dervishes who reject the claim that the Qalandar was a Shī'a and instead maintain that he was of Sunnī origin. Such instances present opportunities for a deeper discussion of changes in Sufi Islam that Frembgen rarely engages in. The ways in which mystics, devotees and visitors represent themselves and their lives is occasionally questioned, but the idea of Sufism as a timeless and unchanging tradition – as propagated by its practitioners – is almost taken for granted and rarely challenged. The strength of *At the Shrine of the Red Sufi* lies in its rich ethnography, although, at times, that is also its weakness. Nevertheless, the book offers valuable ethnographic insight for those interested in contemporary Sufi festivals in Pakistan.

AMMARA MAQSOOD

ALMA GOTTLIEB (ed.), *The Restless Anthropologist: New Fieldsites, New Visions*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2012, vi, 193 pp.

Alma Gottlieb's heralded edited volume fills something of a lacuna among meta-anthropological texts: an engaged discussion surrounding the personal life and career of the jobbing anthropologist, and the formative role this often plays in one's scholarly navigations. The book takes the form of seven insightful chapters penned (or is it *keyboarded* now?) by US-based scholars engaging with 'the emotionally engulfing choice of a field site that marks the life of an anthropologist' and specifically addressing what happens when a mid-career university academic takes the big decision to change where he or she does fieldwork.

The formative period of initial fieldwork comprises a sacrosanct moment in both the imagination and the career of the anthropologist. Given the constraints of teaching and the responsibilities which life tends to drop into our laps, doctoral field research is likely to be the longest continual period of time we get to spend doing ethnography. As a result, the initial places we choose to work in become very much a defining aspect of who we are as scholars. Those realities aside, there can be obvious advantages to engaging longitudinally with one people in one place. For one, real

insight into, and understanding of, human societies can often only come from engagement over a *longue durée* – rarely from a singular, ahistoric exposure to a given people. Secondly, learning to fully function with the social and cultural processes of ‘immersion’ which befit effective participant observation can be extremely daunting in a new environment and language. Furthermore, long-term engagement with, extensive knowledge of and deep connections to a single place and its people are often privileged by the institutions that hire us as anthropologists. University teaching lectureships in social and cultural anthropology often require competency in one region, and grant providers are more given to rewarding extensive knowledge of a single country than less in-depth familiarity across a handful of culturally diverse locations. Anthropologists are regularly expected by their institutions – or the academy itself – to serve as go-to pundits for their particular area of focus, at times effectively becoming stand-ins for their *tribe* (i.e. Gellner *is* Nepal; Herzfeld *is* the Mediterranean; Evans-Pritchard *is* the Nuer). Moreover, deep regional and linguistic fluency in one part of the world can serve as a mark of pride or distinction for many an engaged ethnographer.

But one may not always continue working with the same people, or in the same place. There may be any number of structural as well as personal reasons for not returning to one’s initial field site: civil war or famine; the constraints of institutions and grant-giving bodies, who may be unwilling to repeatedly send a scholar back to the same place to work on the same project year after year; and the duties of home and needs of significant others (children, say, or ageing parents), since an academic anthropologist’s career rarely revolves solely around the lone ethnographer. One could also, of course, simply lose interest (anthropological or otherwise) in going to the same destination over and over again, or feel compelled to test out new theories or follow new engagements that are only possible in certain parts of the world.

And yet, as Gottlieb and her contributors fluidly and engagingly point out, changing field sites does not come without difficulties and regrets. In leaving her long-term village in Ivory Coast to conduct fieldwork in Cape Verde, Gottlieb herself felt ‘misgivings about leaving the site and the people who had become like family to her, even though there were practical, political and theoretical reasons why [she] could not return.’ Reflecting critically and reflexively on the life decisions anthropologists make, the book’s contributions offer valuable insights into the anthropological career, including Michael Herzfeld’s own ‘inaccurate predictions’ about the trajectories his own scholarly life course would take and how Edward Bruner’s experiences of ageing led to his acceptance of wanting to travel in safety and comfort as he got on in years. Linda Seligman details the effect that adopting a child had on her professional and academic life, most notably when her fieldwork took her to look at comparing the experiences of North American families with both birth and adopted children.

The volume’s essays also do well to remind us that fieldwork is not just a fundamental aspect of the discipline of anthropology – it is also foundational to the career of the anthropologist. Rodney Needham and Claude Lévi-Strauss were two eminent anthropologists who effectively ended their *in situ* ethnography days early in their careers, successfully dining out on those formative fieldwork

years for the duration of their academic lives. But few anthropologists manage to successfully cease their work as roving fieldworkers and still produce compelling ethnographic texts that both support and give relevance to their theoretical writings.

One alarming trend that the volume's introductory essay touches upon only tangentially is the normative move towards many anthropologists' communication in English, both with their informants and with other non-Anglophone scholars, in preference to achieving fluency in a local or national language. Though hardly the focus of the book, this provincialist, colonialist tendency – admittedly some might just call it common laziness – is threatening to undermine the entire calling card of our discipline, and is a topic that would certainly merit more thorough discussion elsewhere.

But *The Restless Anthropologist* offers plenty of its own disciplinary insights, including ideas about the value in (and viability of) doing transnational anthropology and anthropology at home, and musings on how the professional capital that stems from doing 'global' or multi-sited ethnography will often depend on what 'deep' ethnographic work one has produced already and on where one is situated in one's career. And, though perhaps inevitable given all the soul-searching narrativized throughout the book, the essayists do present the odd momentary personal gem, such as Michael Herzfeld's disclosure of the departmental admissions committee's initial hesitation to offer him a place on Oxford's doctoral programme in anthropology due to his less-than-outstanding performance as an undergraduate archaeologist at Cambridge.

But most of all, as a reflexive, navel-gazing *tour de force*, Gottlieb's work is both a heartfelt testament to the undeniable role of the self in the anthropologist's narrative – by which I mean the narratives we construct of and for ourselves, and those we produce about others – and a championing of the profound role that serendipity plays in how life works itself out. This book walks us deftly through all the challenges and triumphs that such realizations bring.

ROGER NORUM

MARILYN HERMAN, *Gondar's child: songs, honour and identity among Ethiopian Jews in Israel*, 2012, Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, xvii, 316 pp.

It is fitting that *JASO* should review *Gondar's child*, given that Herman is one of our own: documenting the lives of Ethiopian Jews relocated to Israel, the book is based on Herman's doctoral fieldwork conducted as an Oxford student. In it, she reveals her ability to integrate into the society and lives of Ethiopian Jews, better known as Beta Israel, through her experience as a musician.

Herman sets out primarily 'to present a composite Beta Israel worldview' (p. 257) through the lens of music and song. To do so, she employs the Manchester tradition of network analysis to locate 'her field' in the urban context of contemporary Israel; by joining a Beta Israel band by the name of

Porachat HaTikva (Blossoming Hope) as a participant singer, Herman is able to access band members with an admirable level of participation.

Through an analysis of the band's activities, music and songs, Herman argues that concepts of *kabur* (honour) and *busha* (shame) are central to Beta Israel's self-perception of their identity. While *kabur* is intimately related to land rights and village life, *busha* is associated with town living and the corruption of tradition. Taking the band 'as a microcosm of Beta Israel society in Israel' (p. 83), however, Herman examines how this world view is shifting in the Israeli context, which structures new rural-urban and gender relationships. Such changes are evident in the lyrics of songs, instrumentalisation, performances and interactions with audiences.

After an introductory chapter, which is less an introduction of the argument to follow than an overview of methodology and field experience, the book is divided into two parts: three chapters document Beta Israel's life in Ethiopia, while the remaining eleven address their contemporary experience of Israel.

In Ethiopia (Chapters 2 to 4), Beta Israel occupied a degraded social status owing to a prohibition against them possessing land rights. Branded *falasha* (exiled, wanderer) by Ethiopian Christians, *kibur*, a form of honour intimately related to land ownership, was unattainable. Their occupations as blacksmiths complicated their social status due to association with pollution and supernatural powers; as such, 'They were powerless and yet perceived as dangerous' (p. 48). Beta Israel, however, inverted their degraded status by constructing Ethiopian Christians as impure and avoiding contact with outsiders so as to maintain their own purity (p. 31). As such, Herman argues, they emphasised their distinctive Jewishness against other Ethiopians and rivalled Ethiopian Christians' status as God's Chosen People (p. 42). This is in contrast to academic scholarship which emphasises the Ethiopian identity of Beta Israel over their religious identity.

While in Ethiopia Beta Israel define themselves against Ethiopian Christians, in Israel (Chs. 5 to 15), they are defined by others according to their Ethiopian *eda* (place of origin). Chapter 5 contains perceptions of the Beta Israel community as perceived by the wider Israeli community. Here, Herman argues that constructions of Beta Israel as childlike, dependent and passive constitute an 'invalidation of traditional Beta Israel culture' (p. 65).

Up until this point, Herman's ethnographic data is shallow and her analysis relies on generalized, sweeping observations. Yet Chapters 1 to 5 form merely a fragile foundation for the rest of the book, which really kicks off in Chapter 6. It is here that the band of Porachat HaTikva is introduced, marking the beginning of more sophisticated analysis. After outlining the band's activities in Chapter 6 and its commitment to bringing honour to the Ethiopian *eda* in Chapter 7, Herman addresses issues of gender by examining different types of songs in Chapters 8 and 9. The *fukera* (incitement-to-battle song), she argues, demonstrates an intimate connection between the winning and loss of *kibur*, village life and land rights and the construction of masculinity in Beta Israel society. Love songs (Chapter 9), on the other hand, are less respectable and are associated with the

untraditional, corrupting life of the town. Expressing love for a man or woman is shameful compared with the honourable expression of the love one has for land. In these two chapters, Herman weaves together a close reading of song lyrics with attention to the activities of the band and its members, demonstrating the relationship between words and practices.

Chapters 10 and 11 complement the analysis of song types and lyrics with an examination of performance, dance and music. It is here that Herman's own training as a musician and her participatory methodology pays off; only a practising band member would be able to grasp the nuanced relationships between rhythm, melody, composition and embodiment that Herman brings to light. The Beta Israel concept of *zefen*, she argues, unites song and dance in a way that renders music a form of social interaction between band members and between the band and its audience (p. 171). The participatory nature of Beta Israel music is enabled by its rhythm and melodies, which differ from Western music in so far as they are shaped around words and language as opposed to musical scales; as such, according to the band's members, anyone who speaks Amharic automatically has the voice and knows the melodies of the music (p. 198).

Yet things are changing. Even as the band celebrates 'traditional' Beta Israel culture through music, it is becoming increasingly 'untraditional' in the present Israeli context. In Chapter 13, Herman documents the musical influences introduced by Aklilu, a Christian Ethiopian musician, who arrives to coach the band and render it more professional. With worldly experience and international influences, Aklilu introduces new instrumentalisation, as well as Western scales, keys, music notation and concepts of rhythm. His coaching also shifts the band's emphasis from the social, relational activity of music-making to professional performance directed to audiences. As such, the music of Porachat HaTikva becomes increasingly more similar to Christian Ethiopian music, which is congruent with the way in which Beta Israel is perceived primarily as 'Ethiopian' by the wider Israeli community.

Changes in the band's music run alongside cultural shifts regarding perceptions of rural and urban lifestyles. Despite the cultural ideal of the village and *kibur* being associated with farming, in the urban context of Israel the Beta Israel prefer to live in towns. This is the focus of Chapter 14, in which Herman examines *tizita* songs about homelessness to demonstrate the complexities of the rural ideal and to argue that 'the essential factors which characterise the Beta Israel in Ethiopia are being reversed in Israel' (p. 248).

On the whole, Herman thus presents a tight, neat argument about the changing cultural values of Beta Israel society. Yet, despite her acknowledgement of social change, throughout the book Herman comes dangerously close to an essentialist, bounded conception of culture. Her aim to present a 'composite Beta Israel world view' (p. 257) distracts her attention from real issues of power and inequality within Beta Israel society. Her hope to 'convey...the voice of Beta Israel as received' (p. 18) obscures the multiplicity of voices at play and the power dynamics that render some voices audible over others. This is particularly true in Herman's treatment of gender relations. The world

view of *kibur* and *busha* (honour and shame) that Herman presents is based predominantly on male informants: her male students at Hadassah Neurim, a vocational training institution, and especially her music tutor, Ya-acov, who offers the majority of explanations and deeper-level analysis. Indeed, the 'Beta Israel world view' that Herman presents might equally be described as Ya-acov's world view. Though occasional examples from women's lives are given, such examples are used merely to support Ya-acov's explanations. As such, women's behaviour is said to be regulated by *busha* (shame), and the young women who go to night clubs, change their hairstyles and meet their boyfriends are assumed to be exhibiting behaviour that is 'outrageous and inappropriate' (p. 143) according to Ya-acov and 'from a traditional Beta Israel point of view' (p. 146). These young women are thus either viewed as exceptions to the rule or as challenging 'tradition'. Had Herman accessed women's voices and women's analysis at a deeper level, she might have found a very different Beta Israel world view and developed a more complex conception of 'tradition' and 'culture'.

That said, *Gondar's Child* draws its strength from its honesty. Throughout the book, Herman makes a clear distinction between her own analysis and that of Beta Israel, her own position in the field is always clearly articulated, and fieldwork activities, challenges and limitations are laid bare. Her desire to allow the 'ethnographic data... to speak for itself' (p. 18) enables the reader to form his or her own opinions of Beta Israel society.

It is perhaps this desire for the ethnographic data to be prioritised that leads Herman away from engaging with other theoretical or ethnographic literature (apart from a brief review of scholarship relating to Beta Israel origins in Chapter 2). On the one hand, this is frustrating; one would have liked to see some discussion of how the Beta Israel community compares with other diasporic or transnational communities. On the other hand, the lack of theoretical debates makes for a light, easy read, which is refreshing in a book developed from a DPhil thesis.

The methodological honesty of *Gondar's child* and the attention it pays to the position of the fieldworker makes it a useful book to read for novice anthropologists about to undertake long-term fieldwork. It also offers rich analysis for ethnomusicologists and would be of interest to scholars working on Jewishness. Those interested in migration, diaspora and transnationalism, however, may be disappointed by a lack of engagement with the literature and theory of this field.

LEANNE JOHANSSON

RAJIV MALHOTRA, *Being different: an Indian challenge to western universalism*, new Delhi: Harper Collins India 2011, vii, 474 pp.

Being Different: An Indian Challenge to Western Universalism, is a well-written and concise book that seeks to show how 'India' differs from and relates to 'the West'. Along with five other influential

publications, this hefty 500-page book constitutes another attempt by Rajiv Malhotra, an important American-Indian philanthropist and scholar, to expose, explore and resist the power relationships between East and West that shape not only the way Westerners experience and describe India, but also how Indians look at themselves.

The book kicks off by setting out several goals. First, Malhotra seeks to demonstrate that Western categories (e.g. secular vs. sacred; homogeneity vs. diversity etc.) are neither universal nor exclusive by showing that 'India' has its own autochthonous, *untranslatable* concepts and categories essential to its unique identity. Second, he describes how and why such 'Indian' categories and concepts are being dissolved or misinterpreted by the West to the extent that Indians themselves are adopting such misinterpretations and misrepresentations of themselves. Third, the book seeks to diverge from mainstream literature which seeks to understand 'India' through Western conceptual tools, categories and concepts by 'reversing the gaze', and use 'dharmic categories' to analyse Western life. Fourth, through such 'reversing of the gaze', it is claimed, India could provide effective solutions to some of the destructive contradictions (namely multiculturalism and secularism) that haunt Western society and culture.

The rest of the introduction summarises the author's main thesis. Malhotra argues how Western civilisation is based on Christian cosmology. This, in turn, is based on what he calls 'history-centrism', the fact that at a specific moment in history, an external God provided human civilization with exclusive divine texts, truths and laws. Upon this lie the crucial tenants of the Christian world view: the separation of divinity and humanity, truth and falsity and, most importantly, orthodoxy (truth, good) and heterodoxy (evil, difference). This makes Western cultures deeply anxious about alternative claims to 'truth'. The result is a chronic aggressiveness by 'the West' in its search to dominate, pacify, describe, incorporate, distort, reduce or destroy non-Western cultures. 'India', dominated by dharmic teaching that accepts that there are *multiple decentralised valid* paths and truths that lead to enlightenment, is inherently pluralistic, open to new ideas, and thus especially vulnerable to Western aggression.

Chapter 1 greatly elaborates on the need for India to re-discover its own philosophical and cultural legacy. Malhotra claims that the best way of doing this would be to 'reverse the gaze', that is, to show 'the West' that it *too* can become an object of study analysed through foreign concepts. To accomplish this, the author proposes the use of the dharmic method of *purva paksha*, an intellectual exercise where concepts are systematically deconstructed and compared. This method constitutes one of the greatest strengths of the book, as the author is constantly engaging in the systematic and constant comparison and evaluation of both Western and Oriental concepts and ideas.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 constitute the bulk of Malhotra's book and largely seek to elaborate on the basic argument the author presents in his introduction. They follow the same pattern: the author starts by identifying and exploring a particular fundamental difference between the dharmic and Western

world views and cosmologies (goal 1), and then shows how the latter is undermining the former (goal 2).

The sections explaining such fundamental differences draw upon a huge variety of background sources. Malhotra skilfully weaves through and compares Western and Oriental art, philosophy, cuisine, mythology, politics, economics, sexuality, aesthetics, poetry, music, literature and many other themes and subjects. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that the strengths of this book often turn out to be its main weaknesses. While the variety of sources is large and engaging, anthropologists are unlikely to be satisfied with the information and evidence presented. Ethnographic data are scarce and limited mainly to the author's limited personal vignettes and conversations held with representatives of American Christianity (hardly representative of 'the West'). Furthermore, Malhotra rarely gives grass roots information about people's daily lives. His information stays at the level of ideas, art and theology.

The examination of *how* and *why* 'Indian' categories are being undermined presents the greatest flaw in this work. Again, Malhotra clearly and concisely identifies various processes through which the coloniser can destroy the host culture, namely 'digestion' (the slow incorporation and transformation of a concept or practice), 'annihilation' (banning or destruction of a concept or practice) and 'assimilation' (the adoption of a foreign concept as one's own). Nevertheless, his whole thesis depends on the fact that 'Westerners' are driven by the tortuous anxiety that leads them to fear and despise any alternative morality, knowledge or world view that challenges their own. Malhotra thus reduces the complex phenomena of colonialism, theological production and debate, and western science and philosophy to the level of a simple personality disorder in the western mind. Such sweeping statements are likely to be cast aside by more advanced scholars who see such formulations as attempts to caricature 'the West'. In hindsight, it remains unclear whether such simplifications are deliberate on Malhotra's part. If so, then Malhotra's attempt to 'reverse the gaze' would have been quite effective, giving the West a taste of its own medicine and showing how Indians feel when their own culture is violently simplified. It would be ironic in this case if the book accomplishes its goals through simplistic theory.

The discussion of globalization in the post-colonial age also highlights another strength that is turned into a weakness in this book. The obvious passion with which Malhotra engages with the themes he discusses lends energy and clarity to his descriptions and arguments, but the reader also eventually gets the impression that, despite the author's repeated claims, he never quite manages to shed his pro-Indian bias. The 'West' is simply presented as a troubled, aggressive block destroying a passive and positive dharmic tradition. This becomes particularly acute given that Malhotra fails to discuss the existence of Western human rights (a Western creation) or the presence and exploitation of the Dalits (a traditionally inferior group of castes legitimised by dharmic texts).

Chapter 5, I believe, is the clear highlight of the book, and implicitly tackles many of the book's goals. Here Malhotra advances his argument, claiming that, while attempts by both Indian and

Western scholars to equate Western concepts with dharmic ones (e.g. Dewa – god, Saint – guru, Jesus – avatar) might seem positive and peaceful, such equivalences are simply yet another way in which both Indians and Westerners are destroying the dharmic tradition. The problem here, he argues, is one of cultural translation, as justice cannot be done to dharmic categories using Western concepts. Here Malhotra skilfully uses *purva paksha*, as ‘paired’ Indian and Western concepts are individually scrutinised, deconstructed and thus compared and exposed as fundamentally different. Such an exercise should be especially interesting to anthropologists, who could easily draw parallels with Geertz’s method of ‘unpacking’ cultural constructions, thus tracing in *purva paksha* some elements of anthropological epistemology.

One could easily see how this problem of the violence of translation fosters interesting and important questions. Should gurus, especially where Hinduism is a minority religion, seek to carry out such comparisons for the sake of gaining protection and respect for their traditions? Could integrity be traded for survival? Wouldn’t untranslatability result in closed culture blocks, thus appearing hostile? Such interesting questions, which are begging to be asked, are put forward very implicitly (in the conclusion) or simply ignored. It is unfortunate that that they are not properly addressed, and I would be interested to read Malhotra’s views on such issues.

Ultimately, the book succeeds in fulfilling only one of its four goals. It gives a rather simplistic view of modern colonialism (goal 2) that is unlikely to satisfy most social scientists. The attempt to reverse the gaze and to apply dharmic categories to Western socio-cultural reality, the main contribution claimed for this book (goals 3 and 4), mainly reverts to comparing Western and Oriental structures of thought.

Nevertheless, Malhotra very skilfully traces the difference between Western and Oriental thought (although one needs to accept his uses of vague constructs such as ‘India’ and ‘the West’ – categories which anthropologists have spent decades trying to deconstruct) and provides a clear and concise introduction to the dharmic tradition while constantly reminding us not to slide into Western categories. He shows, in the end, that India still is a repository of important and strong knowledge that does challenge Western universalism. Such warnings, and Malhotra’s great skill in writing clearly and concisely, makes this book a highly recommended introduction to the politics of cultural translation. It will be of great interest to any scholars interested in globalization, (post)colonialism, contemporary religious belief and the construction of Indian and Western identities.

BRIAN CAMPBELL

DANIEL MILLER, *Consumption and its consequences*, Cambridge and Malden MA: Polity Press, 2012, x, 205 pp.

Daniel Miller, champion of material culture studies who is constantly revealing its more complex role in humans' socio-cultural constructions and in reinforcing relationships, takes his research to another level in this new work. Building on his previous research, *Consumption and its Consequences* is Miller's sequel to *Stuff*. He offers up a casual-feeling, yet critical look at consumption. His main goal in exploring consumption lies in 'defining consumption and why we consume' (p. vi). This book is an attempt to spur discussion beyond anthropology.

Miller looks to consumption's necessary connection with the process of production in an attempt to find consumption's sources and, subsequently, its consequences. He takes a critical look at the latter and consciously works to separate them from causes, with which they often become conflated. In the discussion of consumption, production is often overlooked, ignored, or simply taken for granted for its part in a larger system that for most is a matter of 'out of sight, out of mind'.

The book begins and ends with a chapter of dialogue between three academics in the social sciences, representing different views on issues of consumption in relation to global warming. These actors are figments of Miller's fractured views on the topic, but they provide an important component to those within as well as outside anthropology: these scenes give a face to the positions. These two chapters serve a few important purposes. First, they work to make the subject relatable to a broad spectrum of readers, moving the discussion out of the seemingly disconnected pretension of academics debating in their ivory tower. Secondly, they frame the discussion, so that others can join in and build on what the characters have begun, thus providing a realistic starting point for such a wide-reaching and deeply complex set of issues. Finally, the three characters function so as to engage with Miller's work, offering a recap and criticism as well as praise, all before the reader has really finished the book.

These opening and closing chapters are the bookends to Miller's work, which is steeped in qualitative research and the use of an interpretive approach to exploring his extensive data and observations. This method is especially suited to material culture, as it is frequently 'symbolic before it is functional' (p. 18) for those involved. It also offers the benefit of constructing a position based on sets of observations, rather than simply relying on what people say or rationalize as the meaning or purpose of some act or object.

Miller's three major talking points are Trinidad's purely consumer society, an exploration of people's reasons for shopping in the UK, and how people universally express individuality through denim.

On the topic of Trinidad, Miller shows material culture's depth in expressing relationships, as well as refuting the idea of popular culture and other strong global brands snuffing out cultural individuality through examples of how Trinidad has taken in imports and transformed them into

vehicles for expressing personal authenticity (p. 47). Overall this involves him in touching on exchange and showing ‘how goods work within our core relationships’ (p. ix).

While observing Londoners in their everyday shopping, Miller finds numerous oppositions at work in the expression of views on mundane shopping. He finds that, behind the public griping about shopping and the clichés of conspicuous consumption, the ritual of shopping becomes a ‘technology for the expression of love’ (p. 85) through thrift and sacrifice towards the greater good of the household. This juxtaposes ethical shopping decisions made to combat climate change with a moral concern for the household, with one necessarily coming at the expense of the other.

Miller’s next chapter, on denim, explores the seemingly universal intimacy that jeans hold for people across the world. Miller’s research and other resources indicate that jeans provide a certain comfort and culturally constructed flexibility that spans a wide range of dress, from play to semi-formal. Jeans become more intimate over time, as people wear themselves into them, expressing themselves through the likes of rips, stains, fading or creases. Jeans permit the expression of individualism, while also supplying a level of comfort and ordinariness that comes with the pervasiveness of denim wear across the globe.

Before returning to his characters, Miller turns his attention to the topic of political economy. Feeling like some sort of diversion, Miller assaults economists’ wrangling in the authority of the natural sciences (as well as taking issue with other pseudo-sciences), powerful participants who don’t appear to contribute many real solutions for broaching climate change, but simply look inwards by proposing solutions which perpetuate the key perpetrators of climate change, creating more markets or increasing consumer choice through more green products and services. The topic is certainly relevant, but its placement and presentation feel awkward and a bit forced. Miller even goes so far as implicitly offering readers the opportunity to simply move on to the final chapter at the onset of this chapter on political economy.

In the end, Miller’s goal of defining consumption moves us beyond objects’ ‘symbolic relationship’ (p. 107) to people towards a ‘focus upon the way material things express our relationships and our values’ (ibid.), individually and collectively. Miller explores and broaches, through his three characters, the complex reactions involved in consumption and highlights the deeply connected process of production that leads to consumption. He also pays particular attention to positioning consumption as an innately neutral act, a point easily overlooked, with the political and moral undercurrents attached to consumption through its conflation with capitalism and green activism.

Miller offers a very readable text, accessible to a wide range of readers and requiring a slight sense of humour. He leaves readers at a fair starting point, certainly through a highly guided discussion, but it is still a good diverging point for the critical and engaged participant wishing to continue discussion of such a complex subject as consumption and its consequences.

MICHAEL WAHL

FLORIAN MUEHLFRIED and **SERGEY SOKOLOVSKY** (eds.), *Exploring the Edge of Empire: Soviet Era Anthropology in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, Vienna and Berlin: Max Planck Institute and Lit Verlag, 2012, 337 pp.

The foreword to this collection of essays and interviews states that its purpose is to overcome what is perceived as a situation where ‘all too often, Western scholars studying the Caucasus and Central Asia show a striking disinterest in, and occasionally even distaste for, knowledge generated locally. The anthropology of the Soviet era is often dismissed *in toto* as a fabrication of communist ideology and/or a purely descriptive and anti-theoretical endeavour.’

The contributors to this volume make a strong case for taking Soviet anthropology on the region very seriously by giving a platform to scholars who have been engaged in covering the Caucasus and Central Asia. It is a welcome addition to the growing library from the Max Planck Institute’s Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia. Most of the contributions are based on presentations given in a workshop convened at the Institute in 2009 and include established scholars from the regions and from the West, as well as, most interestingly, writings from younger scholars working in the region today.

The volume includes a valuable extensive introduction by the editors which sets the works in the context of anthropological debates in the USSR, discussions about Soviet anthropology, the conditions under which anthropology there was generated and how it is seen by scholars with different points of view. Being themselves scholars in the subject of the volume, they encourage taking a fresh look at it. The collection covers a lot of ground and is broken down under five headings, the first covering the general framework of Soviet anthropology in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Then there are sections introducing Soviet ethnographies, interviews with two established Soviet anthropologists, descriptions of the various national schools in the regions and a chapter that examines the work of three influential figures who worked within the Soviet Union. There is much thematic overlapping across the chapter boundaries, and this binds the whole volume together, giving it a unitary coherence.

It raises a major epistemological problem that anthropologists have to face, concerning the sociological purpose of the discipline and the yardsticks by which scholars judge themselves and others. Contributors to this volume have many criticisms to make of Soviet anthropology as carried on in the regions chosen, but these are really only examples of a reasoned critique of Soviet anthropology as a whole and its Russian period before that, but here we find a more balanced approach than is often encountered. Some of the criticism of ‘omissions’ and distortions of the truth that one finds in Soviet writings could, however, be made (and in my experience of the Caucasus are made) of ‘Westerners’ for having their own taboo topics that were influenced, decided by, or imposed by, colonial rulers. Some of these have been noted (Wolf 1997) in various ‘post-colonial’ discussions (without much follow-up, it must be said). These included the absence of research into the colonial context for much

ethnography, on 'blackbirding' and plantation indenture, of state-building in post-colonial and neo-colonial societies, the notion of 'progress' in changing social relations contrasting with the notion of 'conservation' of pre-capitalist social systems and so-called primitive societies today, and the broad application of a suspension of judgement, the 'methodological agnosticism' that opened up Western anthropologists to the charge of being partisans of the colonial *status quo* and European 'civilising' mission.

The understanding shown of the very different main anthropological schools of Britain, Germany, France and the USA (Barth, Gingrich et al. 2006) could be accorded Russian and Soviet anthropology, and a conclusion from reading this volume is that this is not only justified but long overdue. Indeed, one might refer back to a Soviet anthropological publication (Bromley ed. 1976) on trends in Western anthropology of that time which can serve as an example and which, in contrast to much of Western anthropologists' dismissal of Soviet anthropology, presented Russian-speaking readers (i.e. all peoples of the USSR) with a collection of 'critical studies' of anthropological topics that were then in vogue in the West.

For this reader, the most interesting thread that runs through this book is the evidence it gives of debates, intellectual conflict and of a variety in approaches and interpretations, including opposing ideological standpoints, that were present throughout the Soviet period despite the overwhelmingly centralised, unitary state-imposed requirement for anthropology to contribute to Soviet state-building and be in line with changing government and Communist Party policies. At the risk of stretching a parallel, there are resonances here of the relationships between the state and anthropology in the West that some have described as making anthropology there during the colonial period 'the handmaiden of imperialism.' While there are many references to be found to the rigours with which state policies were enforced in the USSR (varying in severity over time and location), and including purging, imprisonment, banishment and execution, especially in the toughest period of Stalin's rule from the 1930s to the early 1950s, these are not made the centrepiece, the exclusive prism through which Soviet anthropology is examined. The majority of contributors concentrate on and tell us how anthropology lived and functioned and how divisions of opinion were engaged and, through the great variety of experiences and standpoints brought into the writings among these contributors, they go a long way towards explaining how the Soviet period influences today's scholars within the Caucasus and Central Asia, which cannot be dismissed simply as 'nostalgia'.

Among the debates and controversies in Soviet anthropology that are discussed are whether states within the USSR should be citizen- or ethnicity-based; whether culture is to be regarded as class-founded or as a 'social', cross-class phenomenon; the nature of ethnicity, cultural 'survivals', ethnogenesis and the importance or otherwise of historical context, the influences of urbanisation and inter-ethnic relations on culture and the part played by 'national memory' and nationalism; fieldwork methodologies and team-working in the field; phoneme theory and linguistics in general; and whether endogamy underlay the fashioning of ethnic boundaries and historicism versus the 'presentism' of the

Western functionalist school. Some of these topics, which are currently the subjects of discussion throughout our discipline, were on the Soviet anthropological agenda earlier than in the West. Fieldwork for ethnography in the Soviet Union, including in the Caucasus and Central Asia was, predominantly, carried out 'at home', and anthropology was perceived as linked to historicity within a stadialist approach for much of the Soviet era. Taken as a whole, the contributors to this volume provide an anthropology of 'doing anthropology' in the regions focused on and, in all, they add considerably to the work over the years by, among others, Vera Tolz on the roots of Russian anthropology (e.g. 2011a, 2011b) and Plotnik and Howe on Soviet anthropology (1985).

One must bear in mind that universal literacy, whether in Russian and/or local languages, among the home subjects who were studied made their publications available to those subjects and always placed the anthropologist in a different relationship to them than was or is found in the (ex-)colonial areas that have been the most common research field for Western colleagues.

The contributions by Sergey Abashin, Kevin Tuite and Artak Abaghian are outstanding for describing both the debates within Soviet anthropology and, importantly, introducing the national schools of anthropology within the regions, as well as showing to what degree anthropologists could manoeuvre within the central all-USSR state 'paradigms'. Readers might find interesting the passing commentaries on whether the Soviet Union should be treated as an 'empire', with its constituent republics as Russian colonies and their anthropology dominated by that. The editors tackle this issue head on (pp. 3,4) and suggest that it might be worth examining whether there was in place a 'centre-periphery' system of relations, without putting forward the variant of world-systems analysis advanced by Immanuel Wallerstein, whose followers count the sociologist writer on the Caucasus, Georgi Derluguian (2005).

There are many well-argued criticisms made of perceived weaknesses in Soviet anthropology, including its underestimation of the subjective element when carrying out field research, the state's insistence on 'progress' being demonstrated and censoring out evidence of its failures, the purging of scholars and the removal of the works of those who fell foul of state policies at any given time from scholarly access and referencing, among many others that are instanced in this volume. However, Anatoly Khazanov (p. 138) does say that 'Those who wanted to educate themselves were able to read Western anthropological books and journals.' Meyer Fortes' opinion, voiced over thirty years ago, was that, in contrast to 'the ignorance of Soviet anthropological scholarship which is still widespread in the West [...] it was chastening to find how well informed [...] the Soviet participants in our conference were about international anthropological scholarship in English, French and other 'western' languages' (1980: xix).

Readers might find it a little strange that none of the contributors defend once having taken a Marxist approach, and it is to be hoped that quotations from Michel Foucault, Eric Hobsbawm, Jacques Derrida or any other Western scholar will not simply supplant those of Marx and Engels as

Holy Writ for the young and not so young scholars in the Caucasus and Central Asia who now feel freer to write what they think than in the past.

It is to be hoped that future volumes by the Max Planck Institute will further broaden coverage of Eurasia and that the leads given by the authors in this volume will be taken up more widely. There is a tantalizing foretaste in the editors' introductory article (pp. 10, 11) of one aspect that might be developed – that of Soviet ethnography on the countries of eastern Europe which the Red Army liberated from fascism during the Second World War. The area covered in this volume might be extended geographically, especially to the western and northern end of the Caucasus, to Abkhazia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, the Ossetias, Ingushetia and Chechnya.

While there is excellent data in appendices, more of the wealth of the publishing output from, for example, western and northern Caucasian academic printing houses in Sukhum, Nalchik and Karachaevesk might be added in a future edition. The bibliographies that follow each article will give students of these vast regions good secondary sources and, perhaps, a yen to learn Russian and the indigenous languages. Better editing could rectify cases of poor grammar, the omission of words and non-standardised spelling of names that makes following parts of some of the texts needlessly difficult.

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MICHAEL COSTELLO

KARSTEN PAERREGAARD and **NIEL WEBSTER** (eds.), *The byways of the poor: organizing practices and economic control in the developing world*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2012, viii, 261 pp.

The byways of the poor is an edited volume focusing on the agency of the poor in reducing their own poverty, what the authors describe as ‘the capacity of the poor to use organizing practices to improve their condition,’ (p. vii). The work is offered as a sequel to an earlier edited volume written by many of the same contributors entitled *In the name of the poor: contesting political space for poverty reduction*. Whereas the earlier text focused on the importance of political spaces for reducing poverty, *Byways* focuses specifically on the ‘organizing practices’ of the poor themselves. It aims to confront both the view of the poor as passive victims and as ‘idealistically thriving’ in pre-capitalistic solidarity (p. 1).

In the introduction Villarreal explains the reasons for a focus on organizing practices: 1) it draws attention to a process instead of assuming an existing pattern of behaviour; 2) it highlights the generation of meaning and poverty as a social construction; 3) it shows people as active agents rather than as passive victims; and 4) it includes both formal and informal processes of organization (pp. 4-6). All of the articles in the volume discuss one or more organizing practices among the poor and show how these double as a coping strategy or in some cases a strategy of resistance. The relevant theories and discussions of patterns of behaviour are mixed with vignettes and case studies that bring the ideas discussed to life. For example, in Chapter 5 Kirsten Westergaard analyses the way NGO support and microfinance have been used by women in rural Bangladesh to (in some cases) improve their economic conditions and even their statuses within families. In Chapter 6 Amanda Hammar discusses how status, identity and discourses on rights and justice are mobilized by migrants in Zimbabwe to gain access to land and assert economic control.

However, the term ‘organizing practices’ referring to a central theme of the text seems at times vague, like a catch-all phrase used to cover various types of agency. For example, in the two chapters mentioned above, organizing practices range from the purely individual (a mother in rural Bangladesh exploiting microfinance to help feed her family) to the widely communal (a group of evictees working together with a human rights group to appeal to the courts). In other chapters organizing practices may refer to economic relations between client and patron or between employer and employee, and in yet another chapter it refers to the organization of household labour. Despite some lack of coherence as a specifically defined term, the focus on organizing practices seems rather to represent a theoretical stance, the most important aspect being perhaps the processual nature of poverty as described above and the continual construction of power relationships.

There are a number interesting conclusions throughout the text about the nature of poverty and power that spring from this view of poverty as a process rather than the cause of a fixed structure. Villarreal develops the notion of ‘threads’ of control in Chapter 8 on the organizing practices

surrounding debt in rural Mexico, arguing that there are various threads of control and no one holds all of them; both debtor and creditor have some control and are constantly exploiting or collecting such threads to access power. For Webster in Chapter 3 on agrarian organization in West Bengal, while existing structures may shape opportunities, everyday organizing practices provide a way to negotiate additional access. In Chapter 9 on the organization of Peruvian labour migration to the US, Karsten Paerregaard notes that the same practices which may help in one case can also do harm in another: Peruvian herders seek to create a relationship of loyalty with their employers so that they can negotiate access for family members, yet this also opens them up to being exploited later. Also in Chapter 5 Westergaard identifies a potential chain of exploitation in Bangladesh where women who have escaped usurious lenders through microfinance may be recreating the same power dynamic by lending to those who do not have access to the formal finance system. All of these insights are developed by viewing poverty as the outcome of a continually changing process rather than the condition of a particular structure.

While the text provides a number of detailed examples of how the poor can be strategic in influencing their own economic situations and how they seek to become part of the market economy, it does not provide a clear solution for the larger structural problems that continue to reproduce uneven access and poverty. This, however, is acknowledged by the authors in the introduction written by Magdalena Villarreal: 'Our analytical point of departure entails a focus on people's everyday lives in order to explore how economic and social constraints are reworked, but also how they are reproduced by agents within historically constructed power configurations' (p. 4). This is again echoed in the conclusion where Neil Webster writes that, while such organizing practices can deal with poverty or mitigate it, they do not eliminate it altogether (p. 252). While perhaps not providing a wholly new framework from which to understand poverty or a new solution to the problem, the collection presents eight in-depth examples spanning Asia, Africa and Latin America that foreground the important role that the poor have to play in determining their own futures.

RYAN FOLEY