

BOOK REVIEWS

MANDUHAI BUYANDELGER, *Tragic spirits: shamanism, memory, and gender in contemporary Mongolia*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2013, xvi, 314 pp., \$32.50 in paperback.

Native, or ‘nearly-native’, anthropologists tend to always produce impressive ethnographies. Manduhai Buyandelger’s *Tragic spirits* is no exception and is in fact exemplary of the kind of study that brings to life intimate fieldwork exchanges and wider historical forces through a penetrating command of the local language. What we get from *Tragic spirits* is something beyond the ordinary. Buyandelger’s book not only surpasses the expectation for ethnographic fluency that has increasingly become a virtue of today’s anthropology, but it offers a cornucopia of shaman’s stories, intertwined with the local politics that enable these tales to take on a life of their own. The reader thus finds herself holding a living repertoire of memories that reaches practically every field of experience among the Buryats, one of the many ethnic groups in contemporary Mongolia.

Buyandelger’s argument is both classic and new. She argues that the historical and economic legacies faced by today’s Buryats are constitutive of their approach to life and shamanism. Those Buryats who engage with the interlocking mechanisms of post-socialist history and the ‘neo-liberal market’ thus effectively respond to, unpack, and even perpetuate these historical dynamics. I would say, though, that Buyandelger goes beyond the familiar anthropological canons to do something rather new and inviting, which (although she doesn’t put it in these terms) is to show how Buryat shamanism can also become constitutive of itself. Without once dropping the ‘ontology’ word, Buyandelger shows with remarkable clarity how the Buryat shamanic ontology actively seeks out, recovers, builds, and ultimately propagates its immense complex of narratives and genealogies.

Before launching into the outstanding breadth of Buyandelger’s contribution, I want to say up front that her book is effortlessly accessible and aesthetically moving. It has all the graces of a solid ethnography that stands the test of time. I have the benefit of the insider’s view, so to speak, having carried out my first fieldwork in a Buryat district that directly neighbours the one in which Buyandelger conducted her fieldwork. No one, though, needs to be a ‘Mongolian-ist’, ‘Inner Asian-ist’, or even anthropologist to appreciate the fullness of this study. Buyandelger delivers a rounded and thick ethnographic portrait that makes her work versatile.

Tragic spirits has seven chapters and an introduction, which build on not just the typical anthropologist’s year of fieldwork in one place, but also four summers of travelling around the nomadic countryside in advance of that extended fieldwork. These early travels revealed to Buyandelger the politico-demography of gender and memory among rural Buryats. Having witnessed the success of many male shamans living in the nomadic countryside, Buyandelger began asking herself: Where are the women?! Most of the male shamans trace their success to a famous female

shamanic teacher. Women figure prominently in shamanic genealogies for their mastery of shamanic spirits and techniques, their generosity to family, clients and students alike, and their bravery in keeping shamanism alive during the religious repressions that have left a deep scar on recent Mongolian history.

It was not, however, until Buyandelger began her fieldwork in the sedentary district centre of Bayan-Uul, located in Mongolia's far north-eastern Dornod province, that she found the women shamans and wove their stories together with those of their famous predecessors. We receive these stories as the book unfolds, starting with the introductory overview and Chapter one's sobering account of the monumental twentieth-century historical upheavals, including the religious repressions and mass killings of the 1930s, as well as the various forms of collectivisation (state farms and collective farms) under socialism. Buyandelger weaves these historical changes together with the Buryat's own stories of deities, which comprise their 'mobile histories' in the present age of the neo-liberal market. Chapter two moves on to the various technologies of forgetting that were unleashed during the socialist era and that are still part of the Buryat landscape, notably the hidden mass burials of Buddhist lamas exterminated under the Stalinist repressions. These mass burials are just one material manifestation, and forceful reminder, of the spirit presences that haunt the Buryat landscape today in the form of *uheer*, the 'tragic spirits' of Buryat laypersons or shamans executed during the repressions and never given a proper funereal send-off. As forgotten spirits, *uheer* seek to be reintroduced into a family's shamanic genealogy, so they may be remembered and venerated thereafter. Yet, as Buyandelger shows in Chapter three, the generational gaps between *uheer* and their living descendents – many of which are complicated due to the common practice of adoption, amidst the preference for venerating spirits in one's biological kin line – present Buryats with the formidable task of piecing together their own genealogical puzzles, often without access to the missing links needed to complete them.

From Chapter four onward, Buyandelger delivers a rapid and vibrant ethnographic exegesis. Chapter four contrasts the stories of two famous Buryat women shamans who lived during the socialist era, one of whom is widely remembered, while the other is largely silenced and forgotten. Buyandelger shows that there are gendered reasons behind why only some shamans are remembered and made famous. Men and women shamans are nominally considered to be 'equals' in the domain of shamanic practice who can reach the same levels of expertise. Yet this ethos of equality often morphs into a double standard, since the gender relations underpinning men's and women's roles in wider Buryat society are not at all equal.

As Buyandelger shows, the Buryat male shaman is enabled by his wife, and often a fleet of other family members and neighbours, in staging rituals or excusing himself from the home so as to travel to rituals. Male shamans capitalise on the expectation that, as men, they will entertain guests with charismatic storytelling. They share shamanic tales both during and outside of spirit possession, enlivening Buryat historical memories in ways that attract clients and grow their shamanic

reputations. By contrast, the female shaman is often expected to perform shamanic ceremonies in ways that do not detract from her husband's position as 'head of the household'. This expectation often leads women shamans to perform modest ceremonies, decline client requests and keep silent rather than regale guests with exuberant storytelling. Female shamans who run against the grain of these expectations – and especially those who divorce and travel 'unaccompanied' to shamanic ceremonies – risk receiving reputations for being 'loose women', which detract significantly from their shamanic prowess. Buyandelger shows in Chapter five that shamanic success arises in tandem with a reputation for ritual expertise, good morals, material riches, and storytelling finesse. Lasting fame, however, usually comes to those shamans who, after death, have their stories voiced and widely shared by their children – an opportunity lost to divorced female shamans, whose children belong to their father.

In Chapters six and seven, Buyandelger gives numerous case studies of Buryats who use shamanism to strengthen and expand the mobile histories of their particular households. The reader flies through these very rich chapters, captivated by Buyandelger's own storytelling, and eagerly witnesses the complex search of one woman to identify the biographies of two haunting *uheer*, complete her family's genealogy (by uncovering its mobile history of deities), and thereby evade death. Beyond this, the reader is treated to colourful stories of a local shaman who accrued international fame, hosted Italian journalists in his felt *ger*, and travelled to Italy to meet them in their homes (as well as touring France and Germany), before again hosting these Italians and their extended family in the Mongolian countryside. Buyandelger demonstrates how this kind of 'prestige travel' becomes a part of the Buryat shaman's personal biography, fame-building and repertoire of stories – all of which can give the shaman an 'open mind' that 'will understand everything'. Revealingly, though, even shamans who achieve this exceptional status know that their fame, and the material comforts that come with it, will dissipate when they can no longer attract clients with strong shamanic performances. Recalling how old age and infirmity weakened their shamanic predecessors from the socialist era, one locally famous shaman explained to Buyandelger that the enjoyment of shamanic power is ephemeral. Yet Buryat shamans also appreciate that they gain a remarkable degree of immortality, since at death they become 'origin spirits' and members of the 'celestial court' that helps living shamans meet clients' requests. As origin spirits, they routinely descend to earth, possess living shamans, share stories about their personal biographies, and then proceed to answer the most pressing questions of their Buryat inquirers. This is no small feat for, as Buyandelger admirably shows, the shaman's immortality is precisely what enables Buryats to reconnect with, build up, strengthen, and ultimately perpetuate their mobile histories through time.

KATHERINE SWANCUTT

MYTTE FENTZ, *The Kalasha: mountain people of the Hindukush*. No place: Rhodos Publications 2010, 547 pp.

Mytte Fentz's book *The Kalasha: mountain people of the Hindukush* is a rich and detailed study of the Kalash valley in the mountainous Chitral District, part of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Although the polytheistic Kalasha people have been a source of fascination both within Pakistan and outside, there has been little academic research on contemporary Kalasha life. Peter Parkes' work, of course, is a notable exception. Fentz's book attempts to redress the balance by drawing on fieldwork conducted between 1990-1995 along with historical work on the valley by colonial ethnographers and surveyors. Fentz's descriptions of Kalasha life are supplemented by architectural research and drawings by John Harrison. In addition, the book contains more than three hundred colour photographs, taken by the author, John Harrison and Torben Stroyer. The extensive use of photo illustrations gives the book a lavishness usually associated with coffee-table books.

The author's initial interest was in the water-driven production houses used predominantly by Kalasha women, but was later broadened to include a more holistic perspective on both female and male everyday life. Rather than focus on any particular aspect of Kalasha life, Fentz provides us with a general understanding of Kalasha cosmology, the legends and ideas evoked in rituals and healing practices, and the continuing significance of festivals. There are, however, two themes that recur throughout the different chapters. The first relates to the importance of the gender dichotomy in Kalasha cosmology, and the second touches upon the difficulties of being a religious minority in a Muslim country.

The male–female dichotomy has structural significance and is implicated in the way Kalasha society, economy and labour are organised. Fentz explains that there are 'two polarised spheres of society: *onjeshta*, represented by or defined as the male, pastoral and pure, and the opposite *pragata*, the female, domestic and impure' (p. 68). This dichotomy is mostly clearly reflected in the division of labour. The Kalasha are dependent on a subsistence economy largely consisting of small-scale agriculture and transhumant livestock husbandry. Within this system agricultural activities are restricted to women, while animal husbandry is the domain of men. Consequently, the high pastures, where men migrate for five months each summer, are associated with purity. Fentz replicates this dichotomy in her book, dividing it in two sections: the first part focuses on the valley, the second on the high pastures. The chapters in the first section illustrate how the *pragata–onjeshta* dichotomy also comes into play within village life. The way in which social space is organised within the house, the gods worshipped by each gender, and the proceedings at summer and winter festivals all reflect this symbolic dichotomy.

Fentz's ethnography also reflects upon the Kalasha's vulnerable position as a polytheistic community within a Muslim state. Historically, the Chitral region has been predominantly controlled by Muslim rulers since the sixteenth century. In 1570, the Rai Mehtars became the rulers of Chitral. The Mehtars were replaced by the Kator dynasty, which lasted till 1948. In the 1890s, Chitral came

under the suzerainty of the British and then, after Partition in 1947, of Pakistan. In 1969, the semi-independent status of Chitral was abolished and it was integrated into the political system of Pakistan as a district within Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province (formerly known as the North West Frontier Province). The inclusion of Chitral in the Pakistani state has meant that the Kalasha no longer have to give ten percent of their annual production to the local ruler or do service at his court. In addition, this has provided them with an opportunity to benefit from state-provided services and development projects. At the same time, however, being part of the Pakistani state has not resolved religious tensions. For instance, in the section on healing and diseases (p. 414), Fentz writes of an instance at the hospital in Chitral when a Kalasha man was told to convert in order to receive medical attention. Over the years more Muslims have moved into Kalasha areas, and this has resulted in further change and transformation. For example, increasingly watermill ownership has passed into Muslim hands, and the mills no longer signify a 'free female space' (p. 172). Such instances raise broader questions about the interactions between Kalasha cosmology and Islam that the author alludes to, but does not develop further. Although Fentz mentions instances of Kalasha resistance to Islamic influences, there is no reflection on the other ways in which Kalasha life may have been influenced by Islam, on how these two different belief systems co-exist in local Chitrali life, or on the everyday interactions between Muslims and Kalasha. Parallels could have been drawn here with Magnus Marsden's work on religious life in the Chitrali village of Rowshan, where local Islamic beliefs coexist with reformist Islam, made popular by the Taliban in the area.

The religious tensions faced by the Kalasha within the Pakistani state raise questions about citizenship and belonging that are not discussed. In the book, Fentz repeatedly distinguishes between the Kalasha and Pakistanis, referring to the Muslims who have moved into the valley as 'Pakistani immigrants'. It is not clear in the book whether this is a distinction that Kalashas themselves make. If this distinction *is* made locally, it requires further reflection on the Kalasha's relationship with the Pakistani state. There is little mention of how the Kalasha sense of self has been affected by being part of a nation state. In the last two decades, improvements in the transport infrastructure and the introduction of mobile phones and the internet has not only made Chitral more accessible to the outside world, it has also allowed Chitralis to visit and establish connections in other parts of Pakistan. There is no indication in the book of how these trends may have affected Kalasha identity. A lack of interest in such questions means that the book runs the danger of representing Kalasha life, and indeed traditions, as timeless and unchanging. Nevertheless, this book offers an enriching description of everyday life in the Hindu Kush mountains.

AMMARA MAQSOOD

DAVID GELLNER (ed.), *Borderland lives in northern South Asia*, Durham NC and London: Duke University Press 2013, vii, 310 pp.

Since Willem van Schendel's evocative portrait of life in the *Bengal borderland* (2005), borderlands have etched themselves more centrally in the study of South Asia. This 'borderland turn', however, was still short of empirical depth and primarily tuned to the study of the India-Bangladesh borderland. David Gellner's edited volume, *Borderland lives in northern South Asia*, now expands its scope, adding new theories, themes and ethnographic complexities to the study of borders, borderlands and borderlanders. It is the everyday lives of borderlanders, and how these are produced, shaped and at times made to suffer (but also occasionally benefit) by the presence of an international border that binds together the ten ethnographic chapters of the book (excluding the introduction and an afterword).

Theoretically this volume connects three bodies of literature formerly mostly studied separately, as David Gellner points out in his introduction. First, there is a now rich body of literature that shows the multifarious ways in which ordinary people experience, and engage with, the everyday post-colonial state, whose ambitions have become inflated in recent decades. Secondly, there is the recent work stimulated by James Scott's (2009) treatise on the *Art of not being governed*, which rethinks the historical relationships between pre-modern lowland states and upland, often stateless societies across 'Zomia.' And thirdly there are the studies of borderlands, which, it is emphasized, constitute a relatively new field for South Asianists, even though they have been subject to long-standing inquiries in several other parts of the world. David Gellner uses these bodies of literature to build a four-part model of state–people relationships at the borders. What he proposes is a historical and processual 'rough-and-ready typology' (p. 17) that distinguishes different types of borders based on prime variables of population (thin or dense) and whether the state is premodern or modern. The four types that so emerge capture certain key differences in view of state-society-border configurations, creating a conceptual division which, while not deterministic, 'has heuristic value as a point of departure for detailed investigations of particular places and interactions' (p. 17).

The term 'Northern South Asia' coined in the title merits special attention as it provides an addition to our academic vocabulary, as well as a novel way of imagining space and connections in the region. Situating India at its centre, Northern South Asia encompasses the country's northern, often hilly borders with Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, China and Myanmar, while the India-Bangladesh borders also make for two chapters of the book. Borderlands for which no ethnography is included in the volume but which are still seen as part of Northern South Asia are the Nepal-China and the Bhutan-China borderlands. It is argued that there are 'interesting commonalities across the region so named, despite its division into different nation-states' (p. 7). The obvious strength of Northern South Asia as a regional expression is that it undermines the 'methodological nationalism' (see Gellner 2012) that has for long misled scholarship, wrongly reducing our social imagination to relatively

recent and artificial political boundaries. In terms of borderland studies it usefully connects a region criss-crossed by international borders and so better enables its comparative study.

In the introduction, borders are also presented as among the ‘most paradoxical of human creations’ (p. 2). They are paradoxical because they are never natural or inevitable; even the snow-topped Himalaya that separates India and China, and which, because of its nearly insurmountable landscape, is often seen as the most natural of borders, is, as Mathur’s chapter shows, the result of historical and state-led processes, with the mountainous terrain being only one among an eclectic assortment of factors (myths, maps, constructions of illegality, invocations of the sacred, among others) that over time effectively ‘naturalized’ the border in the popular imagination.

Multiple other paradoxes are unearthed across the volume’s ethnographic contributions, which includes a chapter on the India-Pakistan borderland (Gupta), the India-Nepal borderland (Hausner and Sharma), the India-Bhutan borderland (Evans), and two chapters each on the India-Myanmar (Joshi and Farrelly), India-China (Mathur and Mishra) and India-Bangladesh (Cons and Jalais) borderlands. To highlight briefly one more paradox: the India-Bangladesh border is dotted by a series of *chitmahals*, or enclaves, pieces of Bangladesh located in India and vice versa, at times causing conflicting notions of belonging for their inhabitants, besides a wide array of practical difficulties (Cons).

There is one chapter in the volume that does not depict an international borderland and is therefore entitled ‘Borders without borderlands’ (Piliavsky). Its inclusion initially strikes the reader as odd because the ethnography concerns the Kanjar, a caste that practices thieving as a hereditary occupation and whose members reside in Rajasthan’s territorial heartland. Piliavsky’s contribution, and the critique it contains, is nevertheless important. By focussing on the territorial jurisdiction of local police stations and situating these in the context of the shifting relations of hostility, cooperation and connivance that members of the Kanjar fostered with local policemen over time, she shows how borders not only exist on a country’s periphery but also make for a key structuring device of the state everywhere.

The ten ethnographic chapters, although all very different from each other, perhaps allow a few broad observations. First, all borders in Northern South Asia are sites of contestation, intense nationalism (or attempted nation-building) and anxious forms of territoriality. This aggravated territoriality appears to be informed by the contemporary notion that a state’s sovereignty is best reproduced at its margins, thus reversing the centrifugal logic of power that characterized most pre-modern states. In some instances this ‘apprehensive territoriality’ (van Schendel p. 269) has to do with the location of the border being contested, as Joshi shows for the Indo-Myanmar borderland, where nationalist Naga groups are striving to achieve an independent territory that would unite the Naga tribes currently divided between India and Myanmar. But even where the legitimacy of the border is not outwardly contested and citizens from both sides are officially allowed to cross freely, the practice

of actually crossing the border might still evoke a fearful and liminal experience, as ethnography from the India-Nepal border suggests (Hausner and Sharma).

Secondly, while all chapters discuss a borderland which involves India (although the ethnography does not necessarily emerge from the Indian side of the border), each border has both historical and contemporary dynamics that are unique to it. The permeability of the different borders also varies considerably, with some permitting relatively unrestrained flows of goods, peoples and ideas, whereas in Kargil, for instance, intense policing, coupled with a harsh terrain, only permits incidental crossings (Gupta). Levels of permeability may also vary between different stretches of the same border. Taken together, the various ethnographies show how a single country might maintain multiple border regimes. As a result, it becomes nearly impossible, except on an abstract level, to formulate claims that are equally valid for the Indo-Pakistan border as they would be for, say, the Indo-Myanmar border.

Thirdly, while few borderlanders deliberately opt to live in the vicinity of an international boundary, the presence of such a border affects their everyday lives. In what ways it does so depends on the historical context of the border, as well as the contemporary political scenario. Among such scenarios are the militarization of social space in Kargil (Gupta); a state-led attempt to impose a homogeneous national identity on borderland communities, as Evans reports for the Lhotshampas of Bhutan, who are ethnically Nepalis; the creation of ‘nodes of control’, as Farrelly characterizes the border cities of Myitkyina (Myanmar) and Miao (India) where, in the middle of a somewhat unruly area, the state tries to harden itself by concentrating its institutions and by showcasing its power; the presence of a huge variety of Partition stories that are narrated in the India-Bangladesh borderland and which influence the relations between communities on both sides (Jalais); and inflated amounts of development funds channelled by the central Government to Arunachal Pradesh in an attempt to secure local patriotism on its volatile border with China (Mishra).

Taking stock of the various contributions, Willem van Schendel, in his afterword, writes: ‘jointly these chapters constitute the beginning of an important conversation that was impossible just a few years ago’ (p. 270). The conversation van Schendel invites us to have, and for which this volume covers fundamental groundwork, concerns the search for new theoretical insights, narrative perspectives and analytical concepts in order to grasp better the complex, multifarious and intricate ethnographies that have started to emerge from the study of borders and borderland lives. While empirical studies of borderlands long posed an area of neglect in South Asia, *Borderlands lives in northern South Asia* now addresses this lacuna. It establishes an ethnographically informed framework for the future study of borderlands and shows conclusively how the study of a country’s peripheries can provide new insights into our understanding of state–society relations more widely. It is further expected that the arguments and ethnographies advanced in this volume will finally put to rest long lingering notions of methodological nationalism.

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JELLE J. P. WOUTERS

DOUGLAS R. HOLMES, *Economy of words: communicative imperatives in central banks*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2014, 263pp.

‘The motto “never explain, never excuse” and that approach was still firmly in place at the Federal Reserve when I went to work there as a staff economist in 1977’, recounted Janet Yellen, then Vice-Chair of the Fed, in 2013 to an audience of business editors and writers.¹ Since the late 1970s things have changed at the Federal Reserve – and in central banks in general – in matters of communication policy. The latest book by Douglas Holmes unfolds the story of these changes in a clear and compelling narrative which shows how things are done with words, to paraphrase the title of John Austin’s seminal work (1962). In particular, Holmes focuses on communication policies in central banks in order to uncover how ‘markets are a function of language’, as Annalise Riles suggested to the author, thus stimulating the research that underlies this important contribution to the fields of economic and linguistic anthropology.

Grounded in the author’s previous works (Holmes 1989, 2000) and informed by more than fifteen years of research in central banks around the globe, the book delves into the mechanisms of monetary policy as devised and implemented by a small number of ‘central bankers’. In recent decades, this élite group of policy-makers – who have held or hold key positions in national and supranational economic institutions, such as the Bank of England and the European Central Bank – pulled several levers to reach the main target identified by monetarist economics, namely inflation control. Inflation targeting, as it is called in the official statements released by central banks, is not the only monetary policy intervention made at this level. Nonetheless it has become a focal point in

1 In February 2014 Yellen became Chair of the Federal Reserve. The excerpt is from a speech she delivered to the Society of American Business Editors and Writers 50th Anniversary Conference, Washington D.C., 4 April 2013 (<http://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/speech/yellen20130404a.htm>; accessed: 2/10/2014).

economics and, since 1989, the year when the Royal Bank of New Zealand first declared it would pursue such a target, it has been applied all over the world. In addition, it is a field that has been changing following an ‘experimental *ethos*’, as Holmes calls it, that does not differ too much from the *ethos* of many fieldworkers affected by the reflexive turn in anthropology. For these reasons, and probably also to limit the potential analyses prompted by the wealth of data collected in fifteen years of research, the thirteen chapters of the book analyse the practices related to inflation targeting policies at different levels.

Central bankers concerned with targeting inflation have to make decisions in real time, usually on a monthly basis. Despite the quantity of information processed by the various offices for statistics in any country, they operate with highly imprecise data at the moment when they design and implement policies, which in this case consists in adjusting interest rates. Thus, in order to fashion adjustments which will promote economic growth, economists in central banks rely heavily on ‘anecdotal data’ from a vast network of people who are involved in different sectors of the economy, such as top managers, CEOs and bankers in private banks. Specifically, they rely on the expectations of these people and their perceptions of economic trends, which are recorded by officials and reported to the members of the committees responsible for monetary policy. The author forcefully points out that in doing so they make inflation targeting a collaborative enterprise in which the economic agents actually inform the decisions made in central banks. If, in the case of anthropologists in the field, informants shape the perceptions of the anthropologists and vice versa, the same is true for economists ‘in the wild’ and their network of ‘informants’. The relevance of this aspect is that it reveals a new understanding of economic agents by economic theorists and practitioners which is far from the notorious *homines oeconomici*. On the contrary, in this case the economic agents are fully reflexive actors.

It is a closely interrelated aspect of this dynamic two-way process that constitutes the main focus of the insightful analysis carried out by Holmes – that is, how monetary policy-making has become a practice deeply concerned with its own capacity to shape the expectations and perceptions of the public at large. Here the author borrows freely from the body of literature that goes under the name of ‘performativity’ in economic anthropology and sociology (e.g. Mackenzie 2006) and adds a piece to the puzzle of how economics makes its own world. Most of the central banks in the world have opened their archives and, in the name of transparency, have started to publish even the minutes of their meetings so as to orient the trends of the markets. For instance, in August 2013 the Bank of England overtly stated that ‘forward guidance’ in matters of economic expectations has become a standard monetary policy tool.² Holmes analyses policy statements and the minutes of the meetings in depth. In addition, he reports his own encounters with the policy-makers themselves and his participation in some of the meetings of the central bankers in order to explain the inner workings of

2 <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetarypolicy/pages/forwardguidance.aspx> (accessed: 2/10/2014).

inflation targeting and of the economy in general, describing this ‘as communicative action which is performed socially and enacted perspectively’. Whether this tool is effective or not is an open question, and the author explicitly leaves it as such. Nonetheless, the added value of Holmes’s analysis is that it takes into consideration the somewhat frantic meetings of central bankers in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, even though it does not elaborate extensively on what could have been a source of productive insights into the dynamics of communication policies.

Overall, *Economy of words* represents an elegant and thoughtful examination of a topic that has become one of the fundamentals of economic policy-making and that continues to evolve at a rapid pace. In addition, it provides a significant anthropological analysis of what mere words can accomplish in the ephemeral and at the same time very material world created by economics. However, there are two points that are worth considering here as suggestions for a more comprehensive treatment of the subject. At many points in the course of the book the author refers to the work of communicative actions in shaping expectations among the public at large, and in a few instances he speaks directly to his readers as ‘the public’. Now, given that these communication policies do have an effect on the population, it would have been interesting to have been given a more detailed exploration of the connection between the macro level of analysis pursued by the author and actual reception at the micro level of ‘the public’. This is a well-known issue in social studies of the economy (see Mizuchi and Stearns 1994), and it seems that, despite the abundance of monographs and articles, we still lack an approach capable of presenting a thorough appraisal of the social causes and effects of economic activities such as those studied by Holmes. A further aspect that could have been treated is the presence of experiments with words made at the global level by networks of economists who do not share the views of the central banks (here I am thinking of the Attac Network and the EuroMemo Group).³ These networks try to shape perceptions of the economy held by ‘the public’ by producing counter-narratives to the communications issued by the central banks. Bearing in mind the macro/micro divide, it would be of great interest to see how different projects regarding communication policies interact and to look at this intersection from a performative perspective.

That said, Douglas Holmes’s book presents an innovative take on a topic which is rarely treated by anthropologists and offers an analysis carried out with scholarly precision and in an engaging style. Furthermore, it enlarges the existing anthropological literature on the economy and broadens the research horizons of anthropologists interested in economic matters.

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DAVIDE UGOLINI

EDUARDO KOHN, *How forests think: toward an anthropology beyond the human*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press 2013, 288 pp.

That humans represent the world symbolically is a fundamental tenet of social anthropology. From Saussure's linguistic signifiers to Geertz's Weberian webs (1973), our understandings of human thought and communication have long been intimately bound up with notions of symbolism and convention. In a ground-breaking new book, Eduardo Kohn presents a theoretical framework that attempts to radically transform semiotics as applied in ecological anthropology. Based on extensive fieldwork with the Quichua-speaking Ávila Runa people of lowland Amazonian Ecuador, the volume constitutes an attempt to rethink the relationships between humans and their living environments at the most fundamental level. His project, which he has previously referred to as an 'anthropology of life' (2007), is largely concerned with the entanglements of human and other-than-human beings that make up the 'open whole' of life in the Amazon rain forest. Kohn intends to expand the ethnographic panorama from the purely human to include the myriad human-animal relationships that constitute life in the sylvan domain of the forest. Drawing on his ethnographic experiences among the Runa, he sketches out a trans-species theoretical framework that audaciously attempts to go '*beyond the human*'. Far from being sensationalist sloganeering, however, this seemingly oxymoronic proposition (anthropology, in name at least, being humanism defined) has a lot of substance to it.

In the sense that it is staunchly against human exceptionalism, Kohn's book has a relatively straightforward post-humanist political agenda. Echoing Haraway (2008), he argues that 'our exceptional status [as humans] is not the walled compound we thought we once inhabited' (42). This is, then, a post-humanistic enterprise. However, rather than submit to the often overly abstract trends of that body of scholarship, Kohn artfully distances himself from it, carving out an unfamiliar and intriguing space of his own. By engaging with, whilst masterfully criticizing, phenomenology-inspired approaches (Ingold 2000), STS and actor network theory (Latour 1993), perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1998), and Deleuze-influenced thinking (Haraway 2008, Bennett 2010), Kohn demonstrates how many of these paradigms are still manacled to the persistent Cartesian dualisms of

culture–nature, human–nonhuman and mind–body. His new theoretical proposal, so he contends, delineates an approach that can finally allow us, as anthropologists, to transcend the trappings of dualistic thinking. For Kohn, this can be achieved through a fundamental reconceptualization of semiotics, one that provincializes language and emphasises other pre-symbolic referential modes that pervade all life.

As the author states early on, his approach is indebted to two of the principal orchestrators of the ‘ontological turn’ that emerged from Amazonian ethnography in the late nineties, Philippe Descola (1994) and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998). However, Kohn’s project is in itself as theoretically radical as the seismic proposals of those two giants of the field. As a consequence of his more fundamental semiotic focus, he refreshingly manages to sidestep the increasingly fetishized and sensationalized question of ontology. Kohn’s ideas owe more to a different lineage of thinkers, including the nineteenth-century philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1940), Gregory Bateson (1973) and the biological anthropologist Terrence Deacon (1997). Embracing this intellectual etymology, Kohn proposes a framework for a trans-species ‘anthropology beyond the human’, one that literally contends to makes its object of study the relationships that exist between different kinds of living selves. He is interested not merely in those human-centric symbolic webs of meaning, then, but also in the broader cross-species ‘ecological webs in which the Runa are immersed’ (13). Although it is about Amazonian signs, this is not symbolic anthropology or straightforward Amazonian ethnography: the author has loftier ambitions that aim to penetrate the very heart of anthropology as a discipline.

Building on the proposals delineated in his influential article on human–dog communication (2007), Kohn details an eco-semiotic framework that is heavily influenced by Peirce’s trifold semiotic schema of icon, index and symbol. Unlike Saussurean semiotics, which deals almost exclusively with the symbol, Peirce’s formulation incorporates a broader range of signs, including ones that are not unique to the human domain. Rather, as Kohn illustrates with ethnographic material, these more fundamental sign systems are common to life in general. Animals, too, re-present the world. Forms of iconic and indexical semiosis, he argues, pervade all life. They are the currency of communication across species boundaries: ‘Life is constitutively semiotic. That is, life is, through and through, the product of semiosis’ (9). From hunting dogs and were-jaguars to woolly monkeys and cryptic stick insects, the author artfully conveys how human–animal interrelationships are predicated upon these various interrelating semiotic modes. Kohn invokes the ideophones of onomatopoeic language—the sound of a peccary crashing into a river, the word for a hawk’s wings flapping in the undergrowth—as examples of the pre-symbolic sign processes that span the human–animal semiotic divide. He conveys how humans and animals communicate and re-present each other in the experiential milieu of the forest. In doing so, he simultaneously portrays the beauty and poetry of Runa ethnoecology.

How forests think is heavily theoretical. One major criticism that could be levied at the volume is that this theoretical focus comes at the expense of ethnographic description. The reader may occasionally feel that the complexity of Runa ethnography has been reduced to philosophical

anecdotes (poetic and illuminating ones though they may be) that are used primarily to animate the theoretical framework, rather than the other way around. However, Kohn's brilliance as an ethnographer has been displayed in previous work, notably his doctoral dissertation on Runa ecological aesthetics (2002), in which he describes an exhaustive body of ethnobiological data. *How forests think*, however, is not an ethnography of the Runa per se. As Kohn states, the book and the ideas in it are the product of 'sylvan thinking': 'the Amazon's many layers of life amplify and make apparent these greater than human webs of semiosis' (42). Through a series of ethnographic vignettes, he illustrates how the poly-ontological world of the forest is inhabited by beings that not only provoke philosophical insight but can even quell human-specific anxieties. However, Kohn's is a universal proposition, one which in theory applies as much to the sterile spaces of hypermodernity as it does to the biodiversity hotspots of the neotropical rain forest: trans-species semiosis pervades and connects *all* life. Is this, then, 'grand theory'? Yes, but only in the sense that he is searching for 'a way to practice an anthropology that can relate ethnographic particulars to something broader' (67). Kohn's proposal has little in common with those sociological theorists that emerged from structuralism and other twentieth-century grand paradigms. Rather, more in line with Gregory Bateson (1972), he has produced a philosophical treatise on the nature of mind. As the author himself states, '*How forests think* is a book, ultimately, about thought' (21).

Throughout the volume, Kohn repeatedly emphasises the dynamic interconnectivity of life forms. It is curious, then, that plants should be all but omitted from the analysis. In his charge against human exceptionalism, Kohn sometimes veers towards human–animal exceptionalism. Although occasionally making reference to plant life, such as a palm crashing down during a monkey hunt or an epiphytic cactus with a leaf that grows out of itself, they are not afforded the same degree of analytical or ontological significance as animals. Although Kohn states that 'plants are also selves' (75), and although this is implicit in his approach, for the most part they feature only as appendages to human activity. Thus, in purporting to explore 'how forests think'—which, in his Peircean semiotic formulation, is not a metaphor at all—he fails to adequately take into account perhaps the most 'iconic' living selves in the rain forest: plants. This is largely a consequence of focus; Kohn is predominantly interested in animals and hunting. However, there is huge scope for adopting and expanding his approach in order to pay heed to the myriad plant beings that constitute important interlocutors in 'the forest's ecology of selves' (16).

In Chapter one, Kohn further develops the Peircean semiotic framework as first detailed in the introduction. Here, the object of an anthropology beyond the human is sketched out. Chapter two sees the author develop the concept of an 'ecology of selves' whilst dealing with various theoretical themes, including relationality (Strathern 1991), STS (Latour 1993) and perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1998). In the following chapter, Kohn assesses death and the nature of the soul in relation to predation, a central value in Runa cosmology. Chapter four, dealing with human–dog entanglements and the interpretation of dreams, introduces the fruitful notion of 'trans-species pidgins'. Like Ingold

(2000), Kohn is interested in *form* and how forms permeate life. This is the topic of Chapter five, in which he conducts an historical study of the rubber boom in nineteenth-century Ecuador and its relationship to Runa understandings of forest master spirits. In Chapter six, the author assesses notions of mortality, death and otherness through a discussion of Christianity, before concluding with an epilogue that neatly bookends the volume. Overall, the reader is left with a vivid impression of an illuminated cosmos of open wholes, living thoughts, blind souls and alter-politics.

An important publication with wide-ranging implications, *How forests think* constitutes a conceptually innovative, highly original, beautifully written step toward ‘an ethnography of signs beyond the human’ (15), the author’s self-identified goal. It will be of interest to a variety of readers, from students of Amazonian ethnography, ecological anthropology, linguistics and semiotics, to those engaging with post-humanism and the ontological turn. Moreover, the philosophical insight, panoramic scope and radical proposals laid out by Kohn should mean that this new volume constitutes required reading for anyone interested in how anthropology as a discipline is unfolding in an age (the so-called Anthropocene) in which the precarious nature of trans-species relationships is becoming ever more apparent. As Kohn immaculately conveys, human thought and action, anything but humanistic in essence, are always the product of a multitude of interacting selves. It is by emphasising this point that he provokes us to think about some of the most fundamental questions of all: who we are, how we think and what is real.

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LEWIS DALY

GIDEON M. KRESSEL, SASSON BAR-ZVI and 'AREF ABU-RABI' A, *The charm of graves: perceptions of death and after-death among the Negev Bedouin*, Brighton etc.: Sussex Academic Press 2014, xix, 228 pp.

The charm of graves: perceptions of death and after-death among the Negev Bedouin describes patterns of behaviour and decorum associated with death among Negev Bedouin living in twentieth-century southern Israel. The book is based on ethnographic data individually compiled by the authors over a 65-year period. It includes individual observations, interviews with customary elders and leaders (*shuyūkh*) and collective analyses of grave worship, particularly visitations to the shrines of deceased wise men (s. *awliyyā*, pl. *wali*),⁴ local legends about death, and beliefs relating to the afterlife in Negev Bedouin society. The contents of the book are organised into five chapters, including a note to the reader, prologue, appendixes with a glossary of local Arabic terms, a map of gravesites, and list of place names.

The introduction explores the commonalities and diversity of peoples' relationships to death and fundamentals of grave worship according to Muslim law (*Shari'a*), amongst the erudite (*'ulamāa*), and in religious schools (*madāris*). Here, the authors note the increased popularity of 'grave cults' in Negev Bedouin society whilst suggesting similarities to mysticism in North Africa (2014: 6). They posit that members visit *en masse* (s. *ziyāra*, pl. *ziyārāt*) specific graves (*qbūr*) during events such as the Great Festival (*Id al-Fītr*) in order to venerate the dead or request blessings. The authors argue that *ziyārat* have retained significance for contemporary Negev Bedouin for two reasons: first, the shortage of places for conducting formal prayer in the Negev such as mosques has forced members to find alternatives; and second, members are not 'always familiar' with 'appropriate Muslim prayer' and favour having a *awliyyā* serve as their intermediate with 'Allah' (2014: 7).

Chapter One describes rituals performed after death such as funeral protocols and mourning practices. The authors argue that, while some Bedouin customs are strictly upheld, others have changed or only exist in memory. Nevertheless, all customs, whether practiced or not, can be recalled by elders' through oral testimonies today. Chapter Two details forty life narratives of deceased *awliyyā* in two parts, one summarising the 'main' *awliyyā* graves and the other 'lesser' gravesites in the Negev. Chapter Three examines the beliefs associated with *awliyyā* and their ability to work as

⁴ In this review I am not using the same transliterations as in *The charm of graves* but am rather employing the guidelines set out by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

intermediaries for the living with the ‘World of the Dead’, charged with delivering messages to ‘Allah and *vice versa* through blessings or curses. This duality reflects a belief that a ‘righteous soul cannot avoid favouring his patrilineal kin and their descendants, or abhorring their foes to the same degree’ (2014: 112). Chapter Four explores the role of traditional healers (s. *darwish*, pl. *darāwish*). *Darāwish* accomplish their rites with the assistance of spirits who reside at shrines and perform miracles to cure mental and physical ailments. The authors suggest that the appearance of *darāwish* in the Negev occurred in the late nineteenth century and spread from sedentary populations as Bedouin in the area previously labelled these healers ‘persons of secret’ (*ahel al-ser*).⁵

Chapter Five concludes the book with a discussion of the influence of migration on local *ziyārāt*. As pastoral nomads, the yearly migration of herds to desert valleys in the winter and deep wells in settled areas in the summer meant that most gravesites were constructed in the desert. Located on former tribal territories (*dīra*), large *ziyāra* to older cemeteries have been slowly abandoned replaced by smaller groups of agnates (p. 182). The authors argue that this decline is the result of condemnation by many *shuyūkh*, who believe the practice, as a call for ‘*asabiyya* (tribal unity), incites ‘hunger for blood’ amongst their tribesmen, who use it as an excuse to unnecessarily harass other tribes (p. 183). They further suggest that this shift is the consequence of Negev Bedouin society’s ‘progression into modernity’ as it succumbs to newer Islamic models and state enforcement. The authors posit that, despite change brought on by permanent settlement, many tribes still practice older traditions such as burying their dead according to tribal ascription and continue to use the construction of cemeteries to mark or claim tribal territory. They conclude that neighbouring sedentary Muslim cultures and *Shari’a* law have influenced contemporary Negev Bedouin’s burial and mourning practices, though ‘cleavages between sedentary zones and the intra-desert populations that remain have fostered homogenization of contrasting tribal traditions’ (p. xviii).

The charm of graves is a detailed, comprehensive, and knowledgeable study of grave worship, as would be expected of these three well-known scholars of Negev Bedouin culture.⁶ I found their presentation of *shuyūkh* and elders’ testimonies and consistent transcription of local Arabic terms, phrases, and ideologies particularly engaging and astute. In addition to the main text, the authors’ use of footnotes, photographs, maps and a glossary demonstrates their extensive expertise of Negev Bedouin society. However, I would suspect that scholars not familiar with Bedouin life in the Negev might have difficulty following some of the narratives, as several geographical locations such as Kseīfe and Laqīah are not mapped, and terms such as *ṣaff* and ‘*Ashīrat* are left undefined.

⁵ The authors note that *darwish* mostly come from lineages that have produced other *darwish* in the past, as their credentials are supported through heredity. Interestingly, they also note that Negev Bedouin assign special value to *darāwish* of African background (*‘abid*) who are the descendants of slaves brought to the region from Africa.

⁶ The positionalities of the authors should be noted here. Bar-Zvi was previously the Israeli Military Governor of the Negev between 1963 and 1968 (who unfortunately passed away during the writing of the volume in 2012 and to whom the book is dedicated), Abu Rabi’a is a Negev Bedouin anthropologist who studied under well-known Israeli ethnographer Emanuel Marx, and Kressel is an Israeli anthropologist emeritus whose has described blood feuds and static pastoralism in Bedouin society, largely in the northern Negev town of Ramle.

The authors' ethnographic approach and historical treatment of the Negev Bedouin's funeral, burial and mourning customs are refreshingly vernacular. In recent decades, many cultural studies of the Negev Bedouin have tended to concentrate solely on the community's dealings with state government or their Jewish neighbours. In doing so, they often fail to account for cultural practices *within* Negev Bedouin society itself. That said, it would have been helpful had the authors briefly contextualised the Negev Bedouin's position as a Muslim minority in Israel and regional socio-political circumstances (e.g. municipal destruction of Muslim cemeteries and forced urbanisation of the population in southern Israel). Other than occasional references to North African Jewish practices in the *Maghreb* or the mysticism practiced by a Rabbi in Beer Sheba, the population's residence in Israel and its influence on their bereavement and burial practices are absent from the book.

Ultimately, I found their presentation of ethnographic data and contextual analyses indicative of anthropology in Israel. On one hand, the authors' familiarity, access and longevity of fieldwork with the Negev Bedouin (of whom Abu Rabi'a is a member) are remarkable and demonstrate the strength of the ethnographic approach for cultural and historical studies in the region. Bar-Zvi, Kressel, and Abu Rabi'a are part of an impressive league of contemporary Israeli anthropologists who have produced a vast corpus of scholarship on the Negev Bedouin. On the other hand, I found the authors' contextual analysis somewhat challenging and anachronistic, particularly their use of certain descriptive terminology and phrases (i.e. primitive, pagan, hunger for blood, passion, prehistoric, progress, modernity, and imaginary speculations). As the authors endeavoured to analyse the changing nature of Negev Bedouin customs and beliefs throughout the turbulent twentieth century, their use of the above-mentioned binaries are reminiscent of last-century concerns with the *analytic continua* of Middle Eastern societies, which positions primitive Bedouin culture in opposition to the 'eloquence' of Muslim villagers (p. 12).

The authors' conclusion is insightful: that is while grave worship has become more frequent and accepted in recent generations (2014: 6), contemporary Negev Bedouin are 'relinquishing generations-old burial customs in favour of *Shari'a*-driven funeral norms...' (p. 196). Moreover, the authors have been successful in their goal of 'preserving knowledge of these archaic practices in the historic record for posterity – before they are lost...' (p. 17). In all, Bar-Zvi, Kressel, and Abu Rabi'a have produced a notable study of Negev Bedouin grave worship and customs. I would therefore recommend *The charm of graves* to both anthropologists of Bedouin society and cultural scholars of burial, mourning and commemoration rituals.

EMILIE LE FEBVRE

LILITH MAHMUD, *The brotherhood of Freemason sisters: gender, secrecy and fraternity in Italian Masonic lodges*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014, xii, 249 pp.

In *The brotherhood of Freemason sisters*, Lilith Mahmud takes the reader on a journey of discovery that mirrors both her fieldwork experience and the initiation path of the Masons she studies. Her writing is clear and inviting, creating a sense of rapport with the reader as she transitions effortlessly from passages of descriptive narrative, to analysis and theoretical discussion, then personal reflection. The ethnography focuses on the work of self-cultivation and the performance of fraternity that take place among female Freemasons in Italy. It is a valuable addition to existing analyses both because she has been able to access a powerful yet elusive group, responding admirably to Laura Nader's 1972 call to study up, and also because her balanced analysis of the Masons results in findings that are interesting for society at large and anthropological theory alike. Rather than producing a narrow description of a subset of an esoteric group, Mahmud draws out connections, relations of power, and processes that are broadly relevant. For this group of female Masons, who are by definition excluded from recognition by the central male-only lodges and also from notions such as fraternity that are universals for Freemasons but also exclusionary because of their gendered nature, the work of being a female Mason is found to be particularly cumbersome, and therefore also illuminating. As a feminist anthropologist Mahmud is interested in exposing the role of gender, though she pursues this goal throughout the book by focusing on issues that are important to the Masons themselves rather than forcing an analysis built around questions of gender.

The structure of the book complements the twin paths of discovery for Mason and ethnographer. It is divided into five chapters plus an introduction, a coda and three short narrative sections called passwords, which Mahmud cleverly uses between chapters as 'an interpretive key to decipher the chapter that immediately follows' while also serving to 'crystallize some of the knowledge' provided previously (18). These act as tools for the reader to engage with the analysis and ethnography, while also mimicking the structure of the masonic path, where passwords are used as part of the process to move from one degree of initiation to the next. Mahmud uses the introduction to provide context for the ethnography, introducing the reader to her intellectual path and role as ethnographer, rather than beginning 'suddenly' in the field – a Malinowskian convention that has gone largely unquestioned, she argues (1). The following five chapters unravel key themes that are relevant for the Masons: 'Spaces of Discretion', 'Initiations', 'Brotherly Love', 'Speculative Labor' and 'Transparent Conspiracies'. The structure mirrors such pathways to knowledge in less obvious ways as well, for example, passages of deep theoretical analysis are likely to be more readily accessible to someone who already has a base of anthropological knowledge, while the practice of revealing additional facts in the endnotes, 'hidden in places where they are in fact meant to be found by those in the know' (2), exemplifies academic indoctrination while also sparking a curiosity in the reader to find out more by leafing through to the final pages of the book – not unlike the secrets of

Freemasonry, which are hidden from the profane audience, but revealed over time as one becomes fluent in the language of esoteric symbols.

In the first chapter Mahmud describes the physical spaces within which Masonry is practised and also chronicles her own journey of entering into these spaces, both of which are mediated by the concept of discretion, a practice which allows Masons to inhabit the profane and esoteric worlds simultaneously: 'With the use of discretion, Freemasons could learn to see a second version of reality superimposed over the existing one, neither concealed nor explicit' (30). Despite being a 'profane' individual who has not been initiated into the Masonic brotherhood, Mahmud was welcomed into these spaces as an 'honorary sister' and began to learn the language of discretion. As opposed to secrecy, which aims to be entirely hidden from view, discretion highlights the performative aspect and relational positioning of both Masonic spaces and knowledge within the rest of society, which are not hidden but have a 'coded visibility' (44).

Mahmud develops the concept of discretion further in the second chapter, 'Initiations', which analyses the subjectivity of the Masons: 'who they are and who they want to be' (57). She describes a journey of self-cultivation and becoming, in which discretion plays a key role in a process of active learning. Knowledge is shared or concealed 'with discretion' because, without the correct prior understanding, some knowledge could be overwhelming or even misunderstood (66). The ability to display discretion in conversation or in practice also becomes a measure of distinction among Masons, one aspect of the constant process of becoming (194). Although Mahmud develops the notion of discretion as a specifically Masonic practice, I can imagine this notion being used as an analytical tool by others who seek to examine how (high) culture is learned and enacted.

What they seek to become, Mahmud concludes, is in fact an 'intersubjectivity', to be '*like them*', to be a brother (79), a conclusion which leads neatly to the third chapter, 'Brotherly Love', where she engages directly with the contradiction of becoming a female brother. This chapter interrogates the Masonic principle of fraternity, which she defines clearly at the start using etymological, historical and ethnographic information. Unlike the English language which allows for a female version, sisterhood, no such equivalent to *fratellanza*, 'fraternity', exists in Italian (93). Women Masons literally become brothers, *fratelli*, in an attempt to erase their difference (94). This kind of thick explanation of key terms is another strength of the work, which is peppered with clear descriptions conveying emic meanings beyond just translations, and she provides historical exposition expertly as and when needed. Her analysis of the experience of female Freemasons enables a broader critique of the discourse of fraternity as a central precept of liberalism. In her own words: 'Situating this project within the geopolitical borders of Europe and amid white subjects, a consideration of the ignoble paradoxes of modernity can serve to expose the precariousness and internal contradictions of liberal humanist discourses even among what might be considered their political base' (85). Mahmud goes on to explore fraternity's resilience by asking why female Freemasons choose to pursue this ideal, which is exclusionary by definition. Relating the experiences of one key informant, Mahmud

points to one potential answer, namely ‘deeply felt experiences of closeness, trust, and bonding,’ even though this comes at the cost of sexism from the brothers: ‘She liked to say that Freemasonry would have been perfect, had there not been human beings in it’ (90). This comment points to the critical importance of yearning, the process of working towards an ideal which may, however, never be achieved.

Before concluding, ‘Brotherly Love’ also deals directly with the topic of feminism in a section Mahmud playfully labels *The F Word*. For most of the women Masons, Mahmud found that feminism was viewed as irrelevant, or even seen to be offensive in some of its machinations, such as so-called ‘pink quotas’ to guarantee females representation in political office (101). Instead, she finds that the neoliberal paradigms of competition and meritocracy are in play. In this section in particular, there are many parallels with Louis Dumont’s theory of hierarchical opposition, particularly as it is described by Parkin (2000) in relation to the West, though Mahmud does not bring out this comparison herself. Parkin identifies three different ways that hierarchical opposition may apply in the West, all of which, in fact, seem to be relevant in this case. First, where egalitarianism is a supreme cultural value, hierarchy still exists, and in fact is often found in groups which exist in theory to protect egalitarian ideals. Parkin (2000: 247) points specifically to the government and the military, but the same logic would seem to apply also to the Masons. Secondly, making a distinction in itself is tantamount to specifying a preference, ‘that is, to allocate different values’ (ibid.: 250). Although Mahmud argues that female Masons reject feminism because they accept a natural difference between men and women (99), the rejection of ‘pink quotas’ which mark the female politicians as being less worthy than their male counterparts, paired with their desire to literally become brothers in an unmarked category of universal fraternity, also fits with this conception of hierarchy. Thirdly, the relation of ideology to practice can also be viewed as a hierarchical opposition where daily tasks ‘may conflict with ideals while at the same time supporting them’ (Parkin 2000: 250). In fact, one of the key themes running through this ethnography is the mismatch between egalitarian ideals and the actual practices of the Masons, so a further analysis that takes advantage of this theory may be elucidating.

The fourth chapter finally starts to answer some of the curious reader’s questions about Masonry: ‘What, exactly, do Freemasons do, profane minds have inquired for centuries,’ is how Mahmud begins the chapter on ‘Speculative Labor’ (123). Here, she describes some of the rituals and the thirty-three degree path that represents a life-long pursuit of self-cultivation. Her analysis pulls out the importance of social capital, which is produced through Masonic work, and she shows how this pursuit reproduces existing inequalities – despite the egalitarian ideals of Masonry, there is a requisite knowledge of high culture, including Italian literature, the classics, history and philosophy. Yet to achieve this *cultura*, it is not enough to learn the subjects as they are taught in all public secondary schools: one must learn how to perform it appropriately, with discretion, she argues, referencing Bourdieu (132). Such high culture, according to the dominant Italian discourse, while technically

available to all, can only truly be learned in the home by relying on existing social and cultural capital (131).

In the final chapter, 'Transparent Conspiracies,' Mahmud presents a skilful analysis of the practice of transparency using examples from both the past and the present. Faced with accusations of organizing the 1980 bombing of the Bologna train station, and the discovery of a covert lodge known as Propaganda 2 (P2) that was membered by many elite members of Italian society, allegedly including Silvio Berlusconi, Freemasons faced a hostile profane world and were subjected to surveillance, searches and being publicly outed in newspapers (161-3). Freemasons, however, responded by practicing transparency with discretion, pre-empting the system of surveillance by providing just enough information. In the coda Mahmud presents the notion of transparency as a tool to 'other'-ize: 'In the name of security and in the name of transparency, a formidable apparatus of surveillance and discipline can be deployed against a variety of subjects to make them "other,"' (191). In this way, even members of a privileged group such as the Freemasons can suffer just as much as 'guerrillas, Muslims, insurgents, students' and other subjects of surveillance (ibid.).

In *The brotherhood of Freemason sisters*, Mahmud presents a comprehensive and balanced analysis of the female Masons, placing them expertly within the broader contexts of Freemasonry, Italian society and Western liberal ideology. It is an enjoyable read which develops important concepts in anthropology, and it may also teach us to open our eyes and begin to notice hidden meanings in our own lives.

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RYAN FOLEY

PHILIP M. PEEK (ed.), *Twins in African and diaspora cultures: double trouble, twice blessed*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2011, 366 pp.

This is an ethnographically rich and fascinating collection of papers on beliefs and practices to do with twins and set in a wide range of sub-Saharan African and diaspora communities. It will be of enormous value to those interested in ritual practice, symbolism and belief. The volume is edited by Philip Peek, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Drew University. It arises from a panel on the representation of twins in African arts at the 13th Annual Symposium on African Arts (2004) and a special issue of *African Arts* on twins (41:1, 2008). The individual essays adopt a variety of analytical

and methodological approaches, at times implicitly antagonistic, and are divided into four sections: Roots; Doubles and Dualities; The Centrality of Liminality; and Transformations.

The seventeen essays in this edited volume encompass references to the classic arguments of Schapera, Evans-Pritchard, Griaule and Turner, as well as ethnographic research from the mid-1970s to the present. This *longue durée*, some nine decades, of anthropological enquiry into African twinship ritual practices and belief offers much material for a critical review of the historical trajectory of the interplay of approaches to the topic. Victor Turner's resilient ideas about myth, ritual and symbols underpin many of the contributions to this volume. This is particularly the case for Allen Roberts' essay on Tabwa twinship, set in an ethnographic present resting on fieldwork undertaken in the 1970s. The following and outstanding paper by Mary Nooter Roberts on twins in the art and ontology of the neighbouring Luba moves things on by presenting linkages between fieldwork amongst the Luba undertaken in the late 1980s and the diaspora, as well as more dramatic recent events. Luba twinship in ritual practice, twin songs for the guardian spirits of kingship and their representation in the plastic arts present complex ambivalences and ambiguities in the duality of power. They provide a template for understanding contradiction in a difficult and politically fraught world. Twins are associated with spirit mediumship and divination. Roberts draws out this association with divination in terms of its contemporary extension from rural Luba communities in Katanga to the diaspora in USA and the prediction by 'The Twins', divination artists claiming Luba origin, of the destruction in 2001 of the Twin Towers in New York.

The key themes of ambivalence and ambiguity are at the core of all the contributions to this volume. In his paper on twins and intertwinement, Steven van Wolputte takes this as his point of departure for his reflection on twinship among the Himba of north-west Namibia. Following Peek's persuasive suggestion in his introductory chapter that more positive perspectives on twinship be explored, Wolputte steers away from the dominant view of twins as disturbing anomalies. In an essay which skilfully engages with the classic literature on twins, as well as presenting rich contemporary ethnographic data, he argues convincingly that twins embody an ambivalence that lies at the heart of Himba culture and sociality.

The first essay in the section titled 'Roots,' by Pascal James Imperato and Gavin Imperato, presents some informative biological data on twin rates, albinism and intersexuality. It then goes on to offer a rich and informative elucidation of the relationships between creation myths, anomalous beings, transition to adulthood and beliefs in the light of practices to do with twins and other double beings among the Bamana and Maninka of Mali. The systematicity of the described cosmology, providing the cultural frame in which these anomalous and double beings are set, does take us back to 'roots' of a sort, but not in an entirely positive way. Rather, this revisits a point in time in anthropology writing that represented systematic beliefs and practices set in a timeless ethnographic present reconstructed by means of salvage ethnography. With fairness the authors themselves state clearly that key practices were already disappearing in the 1960s and 1970s, taking the view that these

things were being swept away by the advance of Islam. However, their argument becomes somewhat rebarbative as they take a swipe at the sceptical views of Jean-Paul Colleyn and his assertion that most Bamana were ignorant of any creation myth and that there never was a systematised complex religion here. This rejection of Colleyn's views is not undertaken with reference to substantive data but rather by pouring scorn on his predilection for Derridean deconstruction, relativism, subversion of received knowledge and bent for revisionist narratives. This is not entirely helpful to the authors' argument, which is further undermined by the assertion that what classic French structuralists, including Marcel Griaule, saw and recorded in the past is now lost and that this loss is misconstrued by Colleyn as evidence of absence. Griaule's writings are indeed fascinating for many of us, but perhaps for the wrong reasons. As Walter van Beek wrote⁷ about Griaule and his interlocutor Ogotemeli, 'The Dogon have no creation myths...An anthropologist some decades ago probed his informants so insistently that the Dogon, polite as ever, obligingly produced them'.

In his own contribution to this volume van Beek, following Turner and more recent theoretical directions in ritual studies, approaches ritual as a self-referential system that opens up a semantic vacuum that invites both participants and the analyst to attribute meaning themselves, underscoring the key point that the outcome depends greatly on the analysts' 'proclivity toward systematization'. He presents beautifully written ethnographic passages on the Kapsiki/Higi of North Cameroon that elides the wider African fascination with ambivalence towards twins with the different approaches anthropologists like Dugast and Schoffeleers have adopted. He poses the question of how the rituals and symbols associated with twin births address the problems of liminality and ambivalence inherent in the identity construction of two people who occupy the same social space and time. He goes on to draw some useful generalisations from his ethnography, including the point, seldom made in the literature on twins, that unlike other children they are not merely a link between lineages but stand apart with a distinct identity as twins. He also underscores the general principle that twins are an essential symbol of liminality and hence represent archetypes of ambiguous symbols. Van Beek is regarded as a clansman in his fieldwork community and has witnessed twin births at first-hand. This is reflected in the richness and authenticity of his writing.

Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers' essay on twinship among the Ubangians is an excellent contribution that brings fresh thinking to this rich volume. The author reviews changes in theoretical approaches and, in analysing shifts in actual ideas and practices associated with twins, he successfully counters the all too common tendency towards social and cultural reification in this field. Grootaers neatly weaves the ethnographic details of Ubangian twinship and symbols with the key themes of ambivalence and ambiguity in the context of a critical discussion of the ideas of Evans-Pritchard, Schapera, Dampierre, Turner and Diduk. One salient ethnographic point raised here relates to gender and seniority so that the first-born twin is 'male' regardless of actual biological gender to the extent

⁷ Van Beek, W. 2001. Dogon: African People of the Cliff, Harry Abrams.

that an otherwise female first-born twin may take up stereotypically male occupations such as blacksmithing or hunting. Grootaers picks up on Susan Diduk's welcome critique of much of the anthropological treatment of the ethnography of twins and twinship as a cultural text of elusive meaning that needs decoding through anthropological analysis. In this respect the author calls for a more historically grounded view of belief and practice that takes into account, *inter alia*, the influences and interferences of both missionary ethnography and missionizing on belief. In the local context this may have led to a greater ambiguity in thinking about twins and a shift from the idea that twins are associated with snakes or other reptiles to the notion that twins come from God.

Frederick John Lamp's essay on sexual fantasy in the culture of Temne twinship offers a further intriguing and new way of looking at twins. Posing the question as to why twins should be unspeakable and yet both attractive and repellent, he focuses his analysis on Temne art, architecture, ritual and oral literature set in the frame of psycho-analysis and the fear of sex, transgression, incest and homosexuality. Temne twins, as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, are associated with ambivalent powers. They have the power to kill witches but may also perform harmful witchcraft. They promote fertility and may perform 'miracles', but also cause misfortune if the necessary rituals are not performed. It is striking that – unlike most other accounts of African twinship beliefs which generally do not draw stark distinctions between monozygotic and dizygotic twins – Lamp stresses that here monozygotic, same-sex twins are greatly feared. The fieldwork which underpins this essay was undertaken at the end of the 1970s, and the references to Griaule and to his interlocutor Ogotemmeli give the flavour of that period in anthropology. In a more contemporary vein, Lamp bravely and ambitiously proposes a homosexual theory of African religious practice, and while his discussion of male same-sex eroticism has an authentic ring about it, it is, perhaps, not sufficiently closely or analytically linked to his presentation of ethnographic data on Temne twinship.

In her essay on twinship, doubles and the interplay of spirit-human identities amongst the Win (Northern Senoufo) of Burkina Faso, Susan Cooksey also raises the issue of same-sex twins. As elsewhere, both monozygotic and dizygotic twins here are powerful beings, but she suggests that same-sex twins are even more threatening, since they engage the oedipal complex more aggressively and threaten one parent more than the other. Opposite-sex twins are less dangerous since they counteract patricidal and matricidal desires. The relationship between gender complementarity and doubles is well drawn out in this paper. Cooksey deals in depth with the iconography of the material culture association with divination and propitiation rituals, and she grounds her account in local notions of persons and their pre-birth spirits, and makes the explicit point that this principle of personhood underlies much of West and West-Central African ideas to do with twins.

Angelo Micheli offers the long view in his rich and well-written art-historical analysis of twinness in West African photographic studio portraiture based on an extensive but meticulous study of 600 photographs from the 1960s up till the present. These take one of two forms. The vast majority concern simulation of identicalness through dress, pose, etc., while some 10% are paired figures

largely created in the darkroom by double exposure. Micheli tackles this as a specific aesthetic production in the wider context of double portraiture in European and African photography and their plastic arts. For example, Yoruba twin photography borrows its aesthetic forms from the sculpture of the widely known Ibeji material forms and by means of the replication of this widely understood cultural scheme, hence it is highly successful. Micheli relates the common ambivalence of twins in West Africa to a world order where twins play a key role in an unstable binary of same and opposite. His contribution to this volume is set apart in the welcome manner in which he contextualises his analysis in the broader world-cultural frame. In addition to linking West African twin portraiture to Western traditions of double portraits in photography, he also links the African twin to influences from the world religions. He raises the significant points that Christian missionaries extolled all births and that both the Bible and the Koran offer templates for conventional names for twins: Cosma and Damian, and Hassan and Hussein respectively.

Although Micheli rightly points to the influence of missionaries in mitigating negative attitudes to twin births, this is not an entirely satisfactory explanation of how some societies, including the Yoruba, are claimed once to have killed twins at birth and have now come to venerate them. Babatunde Lawal, in his essay on Yoruba twinship, raises the question as to when the Yoruba reversed their approach to twins and relates this, in part at least, to the actions of kingly heroic figures in an undetermined past. The focus of his paper is on how duality ('a universal from the dawn of human history') is reflected in Yoruba attitudes towards twins. He relates notions of personhood that resonate more widely with West-Central African conceptions. For the Yoruba all living persons have an unborn spirit double in heaven, while twins represent both these entities here on earth. Since they are the same, they must receive equal treatment as well as being treated as sacred.

In her own contribution on the ambiguous ordinariness of Yoruba twins, Elisha Renne takes up the issue of the apparent change in the treatment of Yoruba twins. She notes how formerly Yoruba twins, associated with danger and misfortune, were killed or abandoned and how in the twentieth century twin-killing was transformed into twin-worship associated with special rituals, objects, names and other practices. Renne links this radical change to the 'enlightenment' that came from engagement with things from the outside and a move from religiosity to secularity, but at the same time she emphasises the significance of religious conversion to Christianity, particularly to Pentecostalism. The Yoruba are associated with very high rates of twinning, so twins are relatively common, but they remain extraordinary in that they may cause harm or bestow blessings – they are tricksters. Renne extends her analysis to popular representations of twins in musical videos and novels. In exploring how twinship is used to think through questions to do with dual nationality, transnational citizenship and multiple identities, she opens up twinship as a window on these contemporary expressions of ambivalence and ambiguity.

Perhaps the most impressive contribution to this rich volume is Ysamur Flores-Pena's essay on the worship of sacred twins in the Yoruba diaspora. This is a skilfully written and beautifully

composed exploration of the meaning of twins in the religious practices of the Lucumi among the Yoruba diaspora in Cuba. We are privileged in being offered an insider/participant's view driven by the author's longing for a lost twin through his initiation into Lucumi religion (as a priest) and spiritual encounter that arcs back to the analysis of sacred twins through the transformed eyes of the ritual practitioner. Flores-Pena examines ritual art, narrative and religious performance in terms of their reflection of a dual universe understood as twin revelation. The author stresses the complementarity of twins as paradigms of balance, of harmony between opposites and as archetypes of duality. Lucumi twinship is set in its web of wider links to external religious practices. Here the author draws on Herskovitz's ideas of syncretism, but downplays the perceived links to Roman Catholic visual representations while stressing the importance of syncretic ritual practice. Links made with Yoruba divination practices resonate with ethnographic accounts of linkages between twins and diviners elsewhere in this volume. In this essay the notion of a Lucumi cosmology that emerges from complementary identical opposites is hauntingly reflected in the author's personal journey, experience of a missing twin, and exploration of what it means to simultaneously experience being and not being.

The theme of twinship in the diaspora is further played out in an outstanding essay on twins and the trickster in Haitian Vodou by the late Marilyn Houlberg. In many African cases the child born immediately following twins is the trickster considered to be troublesome and to have special powers. This is carried over into Haitian Vodou practices, which, following Clifford, Houlberg characterises as hybrid and heteroglot, combining elements of Catholicism, French Freemasonry, West and Central Africa and Creole vocabulary, as well as entirely modern elements and technologies. As in much of Africa, twins in Haiti represent one element of a broader category of sacred children that includes a wide range of anomalous births. Ritual practice, art and symbols centre on sacred children in Haitian Vodou, especially at Christmas, when most ceremonies occur. Feasts for twins involve trance and the appearance of trickster gods, which underscores Houlberg's idea that two equals three, reflected both in the significance and complementarity of the third born and in the symbolic representation of twins in the three elements of the bowls used for twin feasts. Houlberg's arguments here are richly garnished with close ethnographic observation and her concluding remarks that 'Twins walk with all nations from Africa' entirely apposite to the depth and range of this volume.

The final contribution to this volume brings it to a close on a strong note. Paulo Granjo's essay on twins, albinos and vanishing prisoners is set in the context of Mozambican political culture. Here social anomalies, including albinos, twins and other abnormal births, cause general misfortune. They 'dry the soil' and, hence, are subject to prohibitions and exclusions. Anomalies include strangers, and Granjo plays out the theme of liminality and ambivalence in a striking and effective analysis of the distinction that is drawn in local Mozambican theories of political power between vanishing political prisoners and internal political deportees. The latter were the unfortunate product of a post-liberation campaign to remove non-productive elements from Mozambican society in what was termed 'Operation Production'. These deportees were not perceived to threaten the social order. On the other

hand, the 'disappeared' prisoners of the former colonial regime were seen to threaten the social order and, hence, were assimilated in the political order to twins and albinos.

Philip Peek is to be congratulated on marshalling such a diverse range of papers on the topic of twins in ritual practice, belief and the arts. Edited volumes are always troublesome for whosoever is doing the editing. In this case Peek does not set out to impose theoretical or methodological consistency on his many authors, but rather takes the view that 'no single analytical approach can account for such a diversity of response to twins'. He succeeds entirely in including sufficiently diverse approaches to the topic to annoy and satisfy everyone in equal measure. The broad range of views and wide ethnographic coverage of twins in sub-Saharan and diaspora communities encompassed here makes this an indispensable work for researchers, lecturers and students alike.

IAN FOWLER

COLIN SAMSON, *A world you do not know: settler societies, indigenous peoples and the attack on cultural diversity*, London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies 2013, 270 pp.

Colin Samson's volume *A world you do not know* tells about the hardships suffered by the indigenous Innu of Labrador, Atlantic Canada. It is an engaged and at times melancholic account by a sociologist and filmmaker, who worked over a span of twenty years with the Innu of the Labrador-Quebec peninsula. Samson elucidates the tragic and all-embracing consequences of the arrival of settlers in the woodland region, describing the problems these hunter-gatherers have faced in adapting to new ways of life imposed by an allegedly ignorant and indifferent settler community. Samson's story has been told before, but deserves to be retold.

Moved by messianic sentiments and inspired by the idea of progress, which the author locates in a long tradition of Enlightenment thought, the settlers set out to transform a world they did not know. The values that this settler community – a community that is largely left undefined and unrepresented in Samson's volume – transported into new areas and transplanted on to native peoples facilitated their self-asserted sovereignty. This was not without its consequences. Land speculation, resource extraction and hydroelectricity generation have decreased and polluted the Innu's hunting grounds and affected their intimate relationship with the natural environment. The loss of lands has coincided with unemployment and social breakdown. And, as the highly varied Innu diet of caribou, moose, bear, porcupine and beaver, waterfowls and a large variety of birds and fish has been replaced by canned and microwaved foods, diet-related diseases abound.

The encounter between settlers and native peoples, the author argues, has led to an unjust dialogue in which the terms and conditions have been dictated by the former. The hesitancy between adaptation and rejection, crucial in shaping the response of indigenous people to settler activities, could have been brought more to the fore. Father Fred's statement that as soon as the Innu 'get the

taste of chips and TV, they go ahead to another way of doing things' (cited on p. 23) hints at a pertinent ambiguity between adaptation and rejection. As the author notes, the Innu also aspire to material comforts and stable occupations. On the other hand, they value their hunting and gathering traditions, in particular the older generation. The nostalgia of the elderly conflicts with the enthusiasm of the young to pursue Western things. This generational chasm could have been fleshed out more. If young people were to go to the country to hunt, the priest Tshenish says, they would 'catch up' with the Innu way of life and familiarize themselves with the land, activities that would help redress social distress (p. 29). Intensely involved in the struggles of the Innu community, the author is at times too preoccupied with loss – loss of culture, loss of customs and linguistic diversity, loss of vitality and freedom – and forgets about the keenness of young Innu to acquire modern objects and novel ways of living. They too are agents in transforming their own life worlds.

One of the main contributions of the book to the anthropological literature on the encounter of native peoples with settlers or colonists is the link drawn between Enlightenment ideas of social evolution, scientific progress and economic development, and the settlers' civilizing mission. Samson draws important parallels across time and space. The experiences of Luther Standing Bear, the early twentieth-century Lakota author to whom Samson refers in the preface, are very similar to the present-day sufferings of the Innu, as are the attitudes of settler communities. Much like the native populations of the Great Plains of America, the Innu, who according to Samson have chosen a path of cultural continuity, did not fit into the world as it was imagined by settlers. Cultural revitalisation, built upon indigenous knowledge and practices, would allow for a more open dialogue, the author suggests. He is hopeful: at a time of 'deep ambivalence' (p. 197), the search for cultural continuity persists. By organizing cultural revitalisation programmes, members of the community have fought for the preservation of Innu traditions and at the same time strengthened community life.

MIRIAM DRIESSEN

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