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Elspeth Probyn proposes that “eating the ocean” in a responsible way is about more than the common tropes of eating lower on the food chain and buying fish from Marine Stewardship Council certified fisheries; it is a much broader concept of relatedness or relationships. Being mindful about fish or, better yet, the ocean means recognizing the multiple relationships within what others have called the ecosystem or the social ecological system. Not that Probyn never uses the term ecosystem; rather, it is that she prefers to examine multiple theoretical positions and concepts to elucidate the essentials of an ecosystem from different perspectives. Her work is, in that way, “good to think.”

Probyn has broad intellectual interests, and Eating the Ocean comes out of foci that include food consumption and production, theories of embodiment, and social science methodologies, among other topics. What struck me most about this book is its ability to blend and weave marine biology, feminist studies, queer theory, and a thorough understanding of ecosystem complexity into a usable framework for thinking about the sustainability (she notes the many problems with that term) of marine food webs, human communities, and economies. Of course, this complexity means that the most theoretical sections of the book, especially chapter 1, “An Oceanic Habitus,” require slow, careful reading. This is not a book to be skimmed. Readers will need to work their way through the various connections Probyn draws and think through how they feel about her assumptions. But they will be well rewarded for the time and thinking they invest. The strength of the book, however, comes especially in the case studies in chapters 2 to 5. Each takes a marine species and uses a mix of ethnography, oral histories, archaeology, literature, historical accounts, and marine biology to embody and center the theoretical points made in the introduction, “Relating Fish and Humans,” and the first chapter. The five-page conclusion, “Reeling It In,” then draws it all together for the reader. Illustrative photos and graphics are provided throughout.

The first case study, “Following Oysters, Relating Taste,” is framed through the concept of taste “as a connector between history, place, things, and people” (59). Probyn takes us from Scotland to the US Pacific Northwest to Australia, as we ponder the subtle differences in flavor of various species of oyster, reflect on the many cultural properties assigned to oysters (their status as aphrodisiacs, for instance), learn about oyster zoology (they all begin life male and may at any point in their lives, depending on environmental factors, suddenly one season lay eggs), and see how some specific communities and local economies are using oysters to support livelihoods and cultures.

“Swimming with Tuna” focuses on the bluefin tuna, a powerful species that traverses the globe and an iconic species for sushi lovers worldwide. In the wild, bluefin tuna swim at speeds of up to 50 miles per hour. They are both caught wild and ranched. Ranching involves catching smaller tuna live and raising them to full adult size in large ocean pens. Financially, this makes sense, because bluefin tuna are managed via individual transferable quotas set as pounds of fish, so if you catch your pound limit in smaller fish and feed them up to full size in pens, you end up with many more pounds’ worth of fish to sell. To Probyn, the transformation of bluefin tuna extraction is “a story of technology and taste” (85). Once rejected by Japanese as too fatty and bloody for sushi, bluefins are now revered as the premium sushi species, with a single fish selling for US$1.76 million in 2013. Because of the cultural importance of the bluefin to Japan and its economic value on the world market, subsistence fishermen in West Africa find their quotas being squeezed even though they are far from the primary source of tuna mortality. We also learn of the role in these issues played by the international organizations that govern tuna fishing. We visit South Australia, where increasing costs and restrictions on fishing have led one local tuna baron to leave fishing and turn to ranching, with a side business where tourists swim with the bluefins.

In “Mermaids, Fishwives, and Herring Quines,” Probyn notes that the iconic fisherman is in fact a man (sidebar: many English-speaking women who fish prefer to be called fishermen rather than the gender-neutral fishers that Probyn uses), though this ignores the fact that much of
the world’s inshore fishing is done by women, and women are often the fish sellers, the bookkeepers, and the processing workers who deal with the fish once landed. This focus on men also conveniently forgets that women are most often the food buyers and food preparers. These issues frame a historical study of the roles of women in Scottish and Canadian fishing communities. In 19th-century Scotland, women abandoned their role as net tenders and began baiting hooks and hauling boats, even carrying the men through the surf to their boats so the men wouldn’t get their feet wet. As the fish moved along the coast, the women went with them. In these large groups of unmarried women living, working, and traveling together, women had a freedom from male control they had never before experienced. In Newfoundland, women have historically worked in the fish-processing plants and done the books for their fishermen husbands. When the great cod crisis of the 1990s came, and the cod fisheries upon which most Newfoundland communities depended were closed indefinitely, some thought to ask why no one had taken advantage of the knowledge women would have had about the size of catches and the size of the fish that were being landed. The answer lay in local culture and gender relations, where women were assumed not to be worth asking about fish.

“Little Fish” takes us from wild-caught forage fish in the United States and Peru to farmed forage fish in Asia, but the case study focuses on the Peruvian anchoveta (a species of anchovy) to illustrate the idea of eating lower on the food chain as one way to be more sustainable. This concept of eating from lower trophic levels is not new, but here Probyn provides insight into a campaign that succeeded in changing the way that Peru catches and eats these small fish, which form huge schools off the Peruvian coast. La Semana de la Anchoveta, Anchoveta Week, began with a marine biologist and a well-known chef who convinced the president of Peru and his cabinet to eat anchovetas on television, and they liked them. Subsequently, the president signed a law “affirming the strategic importance of promoting the consumption of anchoveta and its nutritional properties among Peruvians” (147), and the government invested 30 percent of its food security budget toward producing and promoting anchovetas. The Peruvian anchoveta fleet was transformed from one focused on catching fish for fertilizer and animal feed to one focused on catching fish for human consumption. This type of large-scale transformation benefits the ocean and the people, much more so than the industrial reduction plants that employ few people and waste so much to provide animal feed and nutraceuticals. But remaking the fleet and dietary habits required large amounts of time, money, and planning.

_Eating the Ocean_ offers a provocative perspective on how we consume the ocean and how we can do better.


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At the 2018 American Anthropological Association meetings, the Association for Queer Anthropology awarded the section’s first Lifetime Achievement Awards to pathbreaking lesbian anthropologists Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy (my mentor) and Esther Newton. At the presentation ceremony, Tom Boellstorff’s shirt proclaimed “ESTHER NEWTON MADE ME GAY,” playing with the title of Newton’s 2000 *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay*. As Mead opened the world of anthropology to Newton with her revolutionary scholarship on gender and sexuality and her position as a woman who centered women in her work (and also had romantic relationships with them), Newton similarly opened the world of anthropology to those of us who are openly queer and choose queer subjects. *My Butch Career* chronicles the difficult path she forged in the academy and offers an important herstory of American anthropology in the 20th century. Detailing the first 40 years of her life from 1940 until the early 1980s, it is structured around the conditions of possibility for Newton as a butch—or as she says, using the language of the time, someone who is “homosexual” and “gender ‘deviant’” (3)—to have a career as an anthropology professor.

Newton’s family background set her up for a professional life, if not specifically for the professoriat. Compared to working-class butches whom she met in bars as a college student, she had relative access to wealth, parents who valued women’s pursuit of higher education, and the maternal inheritance of an inclination to lead a writer’s life. Despite these and other advantages, Newton’s early career was marked by tumult, humiliations, and setbacks that impeded the recognition that would have made her a star or, at least, ensured some semblance of job stability. Her first book, the classic _Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America_, met with what she describes as “initial failure” (175) in the years before queer and transgender studies. Newton was denied tenure at Queens College, and her second attempt, at SUNY Purchase, started with a split vote in the department. “I was almost completely alienated from the whole notion of having a career just when I should have been notching accomplishments” (3).

*My Butch Career* adeptly portrays the conditions of Newton’s alienation from an American academy permeated by homophobia and structured by heteropatriarchy: the suffocating constraints of gender expectations for women, the mandate for homosexuals to lead a double life, the complete lack of women and “out” gay faculty mentors,
of sex between women that is rare to find in texts by academics. Newton's personal sexual development reflects broader social changes and opportunities for butches—from bouts of "enthusiastic humping" (120) and going down on partners to get them off to the years of "lesbian feminist-approved sex" (175) that—among other things—valued reciprocity (i.e., orgasms for everybody), then to breaking with newly calcified rules in the years of the Sex Wars to make sex more playful, experimental (especially with "dangerous" and "taboo" scripts), and less politically correct.

My Butch Career beautifully portrays the vital necessity of queer sexual histories. Newton sought out these histories in relationships with older lover-mentors, biographies of her butch predecessor Gertrude Stein, and the cultural work of Radclyffe Hall, Oscar Wilde, Audre Lorde, and others who "gave [her] courage, solace, and exemplars. . . . These writers . . . also wanted to be a portal through which readers could see others like themselves and take hope. This is the tradition I aspire to, and this memoir is an homage to those who came before, with the hope that it will help others find and express their voices as they carry on" (247–48).

Clearly my career as a queer academic with a doctorate in feminist studies and a tenure-track job in anthropology was made possible by Esther Newton's trailblazing work. Reading her memoir, I nevertheless feel deep resonances with her expressions not only of pleasure but also of frustration, anger, anxiety, ambivalence, and alienation as she built a professional life in the discipline of anthropology and the American academy. Things have changed, but not enough. Newton's butch career is an inspiration to continue the struggle.


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In this well-written ethnography, Janet McIntosh focuses on white Kenyans—also called settler descendants—as they negotiate the structural contradictions of their positions vis-à-vis the heritage of Kenya's racially ordered colonial past, from which their social ontology and contemporary privileges undoubtedly emerge, and as they proclaim their genuine desire to fully belong to the postcolonial Kenyan nation. They want to belong either as individuals in a utopian, racially unmarked national population or as members of one of Kenya's "tribes," as they interchangeably suggest according to the situation or conversation. The book's
narrative pace is captivating in its analytical descriptions of white settler descendants’ sociopolitical terms of engagement in one majority-black African nation-state. Here, settler descendants do not control the state apparatus.

As a seasoned, reflexive ethnographer, Janet McIntosh—a white woman (an important detail that no doubt made this ethnography possible)—has spent extensive periods of time among Kenya’s settler descendants in Nairobi and on the coast, easily inserting herself into white Kenyan social networks to gather information from participant observation in social events, conversations and interviews, and popular culture and the media. While progressing through the book, the reader meets the same research participants several times in different circumstances that follow the arguments and the contents of each chapter. This makes it possible to appreciate the personalities and evolving perspectives of multiple settler descendants, perspectives that at first glance appear to be contradictory sentiments that each individual nonetheless manages to combine using both an attenuating mechanism, which McIntosh calls structural oblivion, and a peculiar process of double consciousness. To paraphrase, I would say that structural oblivion refers to the settler descendants’ ability to ablate the white supremacy and white commanding violence inflicted upon African bodies and minds so characteristic of European colonialisms in Africa (particularly in Kenya) from their narratives that memorialize the colonial past and the economic development it would have brought. After necessary adjustments, McIntosh quotes W. E. B. Du Bois to explain settler descendants’ double consciousness: it is “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (5–6).

The book brings together linguistic and psychological anthropology as it probes white Kenyans’ double consciousness when faced with critiques of their colonial ancestors. McIntosh explores the techniques that settler descendants use to defensively respond to such critiques with expressions of Kenyan nationalism in attempts to claim to belong to Kenya. That nationalism includes drawing distinctions among the types of whites in Africa: the “expatriates, those do-gooders” (210) who come for two years to work in an NGO, the white South Africans and Zimbabweans (who look down on black Africans), and them. Addressing the fundamental question that white Kenyans ask and answer positively about the possibility that white folks can be Africans (and Kenyans), McIntosh writes, in her very last paragraph: “Settler descendants . . . are wrestling with the incoherence of a consciousness founded on colonialism that is confronted with the imperative to renounce it. They struggle with the simultaneity of wishing to ‘connect’ with black Kenyans, and their lingering residues of felt superiority and aversion to certain African lifeways. All of this disconcerting doubleness, all of these very contradictions, are part of being a white Kenyan” (223).

Chapter 1, “Unsettled,” starts the analytical narrative with the 2005 and 2006 cases in which the same white Kenyan, Thomas Cholmondeley, twice killed a black Kenyan man whom he suspected of poaching wildlife on his family ranch. The outcry that surrounded the legal case that followed the second murder both exposed white Kenyans’ continued privileges and incentivized many settler descendants to dissociate themselves from the shooter, whom they constructed to be an excellent illustration of what they didn’t want to be: Kenyan cowboys. Chapter 2, “Loving the Land,” explores the many linkages between land/“territory” and ethnic and racial identifications in Kenya as they have played out during colonial and postcolonial times. The chapter also uncovers the mystical narrative that settler descendants have developed to explain their attachment to the land their relatives “acquired” during the colonial period and to its wildlife (including safari guiding), which provides an architecture to their claims to belong to the nation.

In chapter 3, “Guilt,” McIntosh discusses the concepts of legal, moral, individual, and collective guilts and emphasizes the fact that although “most early white settlers apparently felt little guilt about mistreating Africans because their racist, Social Darwinist ideological frameworks did not inspire much empathy for African suffering” (87), most contemporary white Kenyans feel much differently toward black Kenyans and feel vulnerable to collective guilt by projection, which fragilizes their claims to belong to the nation. Chapter 4, “Conflicted Intimacies,” uncovers the tortuous and limited intimacies that white Kenyans continue to have with black Kenyans, as the former want to belong to a multicultural Kenya. They want to be loved by their domestic staff, but this affection comes through “a structure of economic dependency, sometimes obscured by their own good feelings” (150). Chapter 5, “Linguistic Atonement,” discusses settler descendants’ linguistic strategies (and their use of a particular brand of Kiswahili) to atone for the colonial past and assert belonging. Chapter 6, “The Occult,” concerns white Kenyans’ relations with black Kenyans’ systems of belief in supernatural forces from the colonial period on. It traces white Kenyans’ constant negotiations between rejecting black Kenyans’ beliefs in magic and witchcraft altogether and attempting to keep those close to the heart while maintaining “good appearances” and a Judeo-Christian perspective.

Unsettled is an excellent ethnography that should be of use in graduate seminars on contemporary African societies. It should also be useful in courses on settler colonial studies and in African diaspora studies graduate discussions of multiscalar identity formations and Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness.

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The Mediterranean Incarnate takes up old tools from classic anthropology to explore the categories and frames with which people make worlds in today’s Mediterranean, a sea that both connects and divides. The book is anchored in Mazara del Vallo, the Sicilian town that has made a name for itself in Italy as a contemporary center of Mediterranean cosmopolitanism in reference to its Norman and Arab past, but the bulk of the narrative follows the meandering path of the Naumachos, a mechanized trawler with a crew of Tunisian and Italian fishermen aboard. Moving between past and present and between land and sea, Naor Ben-Yehoyada uses the trawler and its port city to reveal how individual and institutional actors form a region held together by a constellation of shared contingencies and inheritances.

As the narrator, Ben-Yehoyada remains at the center of the dialogue throughout the text, acknowledging how his own identity shapes his incursions into the often terse relations among a small group of men on a boat for 37 days. This is very much an ethnography of life at sea: having managed to secure a post as a deckhand, Ben-Yehoyada gathers his ethnographic material mainly from time spent sorting fish, preparing crew meals, and trying desperately to sleep for more than an hour or two at a time. The rhythms, techniques, alliances, and codes of fishing life come into focus for the reader as Ben-Yehoyada learns them himself. As with much ethnography, the author’s experiences inflect the analysis: struggles to establish frames of power, terms of affinity, and forms of difference are omnipresent both in the drama of data collection and in the findings it yields. At the same time, he is attentive to the constant work of translation and performance that he is part of, telling a story that unfolds in Italian, Sicilian dialect, Tunisian Arabic, and English without losing the nuances of these utterances.

The past is omnipresent—a fact of daily life in Italy—and Ben-Yehoyada focuses on the ways that his interlocutors reference versions or pieces of it to give meaning and order to the present, from medieval empires to recent maritime conflicts. He traces the political developments that have restructured power and geographic imaginaries among Europe, Italy, Sicily, and Tunisia, working from archival research and echoes of these events in Mazara del Vallo today. Moving from the midcentury economic boom that transformed Italian industries to the Fish War between Sicily and Tunisia and the Transmed pipeline project to the boats of refugees that link the Mediterranean’s shores today, he highlights the instability of allegiances in the region and the terms on which they are forged.

As a historical and political anthropologist, Ben-Yehoyada is particularly concerned with how certain concepts and categories persist through time and space while others outlive their usefulness in making sense of social worlds. In order of appearance, labor and class, patronage, family and kinship, honor and rage, and cosmopolitanism or “terms of transcultural affinity” (27) structure his analysis of life onboard before he stretches them out onto the broader contexts of Mazara del Vallo and the Channel of Sicily. While he does not reject any of these lenses as outdated, he does suggest that each can be rethought and rescaled to reflect contemporary worlds. Indeed, scaling and framing—whether by his interlocutors or in his analysis—are what allow him to claim that a fishing boat materializes the limits of Italian sovereignty or to use a tray of frozen seafood to lay out structures of class and power in Mazara.

Both days at sea and time spent ashore are shot through with drama as fishermen, shipowners, and politicians negotiate, resist, and reorganize power. With theatrical flourish, Ben-Yehoyada focuses on the performances and stages through which actors decry broken promises or subvert hierarchy. While this focus on machismo-infused conflict initially appears to have little to do with region formation, by the final chapters it becomes clearer how each drama—whether interpersonal or between states—is key to his analysis of just how people remake regions across national boundaries. “Constellations” as a metaphor is useful here: just as people create constellations by projecting imagined connections onto selected stars among infinite others, so do people conjure terms of affinity by marking themselves as related to particular geographic or cultural Others. This is the element of Ben-Yehoyada’s analysis that I found most compelling: strategic marking of difference is not outside of or antithetical to creating forms of relatedness but, rather, is central to that process.

The role of establishing forms of difference and affinity emerges from all elements of Ben-Yehoyada’s ethnography, from regional historical developments to small talk while sorting a catch of fish. The richest ethnographic moments come mainly from his time at sea, while descriptions of life in Mazara del Vallo are more limited. Ben-Yehoyada alludes to activities and time spent outside the world of boats and fish—but those spaces and voices are not prominent in the text. Nor does any direct experience in Tunisia, the other geographic half of his central claim, feature in the book. As such, Tunisia is represented only through the eyes of Italians and immigrants—we never see Italy from the southern shore itself. A more robust background of daily life on land would add depth to the vignettes at sea, as these events are always discussed in relation to one shore or another.
All in all, *The Mediterranean Incarnate* is a carefully crafted ethnography of a region woven by often invisible but powerful threads: the wake of fishing trawlers and seabed pipelines, invocations of kinship and racist insults, and vanished empires that continue to blur the boundaries of nations and Otherness. As the Mediterranean becomes an increasingly policed and contested space, these may well serve as critical tools for conceptualizing new regions and relations.


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It is in the diets of medieval popes, kings, and holy women that we first hear of the existence of citrus fruits in Europe, and this association may account for the fruits’ sacred status in the early modern imagination. Or was it because of their sacred aura as something set apart and exogenous that these fruits came to be associated with those who were themselves sacred—part of the mundane world but external to it? Not referred to in classical antiquity, oranges and other citrus fruits are thought to have been bred from the Persian apple or *citron*, a highly scented but bitter and inedible fruit first referred to by Theophrastus around 313 BCE. If they did not bring the fruit itself to Europe, the Arabs introduced the name for the sweet orange, the Persian *naranj*, from the Sanskrit *narangah*, to the Iberian Peninsula. Returning crusaders later contributed to the spread of the fruit through Italy in the 13th and 14th centuries.

At once new and exotic, the genus was viewed ambivalently in early modern Europe, leading Cristina Mazzoni to refer to it as a *pharmakon* for the Christian era: a potent substance that, according to the humoral theory of the day, could either cure or kill. As the appearance of citrus fruits coincided with the birth of Italian vernacular literature, they were used to develop a symbolic language free of any of the antecedents that had for centuries established the associations of pomegranates, grapes, figs, and all the other fruits of Greco-Roman myth and biblical reference. In this virgin literary landscape, a varietal of other fruits of Greco-Roman myth and biblical reference. In the chapters that follow, we learn of the 14th-century visionary and patron saint of Italy Catherine of Siena’s letter to Pope Urban VI, calling him to spiritual awakening through metaphors of the sweetness and sourness of bitter oranges. When another visionary saint, Teresa of Ávila, fell ill in her convent two centuries later, she too resorted to a diet of oranges. The symbolism of the orange tree in Saint Catherine’s letter evoked Jesus himself, the tree of life, as well as the “sweet” tree to which he was nailed to save humankind, overcoming the bitterness of the tree of Eden. Taste, Mazzoni reminds us, in the medieval imagination as in the book of Genesis, was closely associated with knowledge, an association of which Romance languages retain the memory, as in the Italian *sapere/sapore*.

From medieval religion to Renaissance art, bitter oranges, harbingers of lovesickness, featured predominantly as symbols of the absent beloved and of the evanescence of beauty and of life itself. The color connoted by the term *orange* shifted through time from burnt sienna or burnt umber to today’s bright hue because modern transport allows us to consume the fruit in a fresher state than it was contemplated by those who originally came into contact with this rare luxury, such as the wealthy owner of the semidesiccated examples on the chest and windowsill of van Eyck’s *Arnolfini Portrait*. The Renaissance orange thus symbolized not only in its etymology and its bittersweet
flavor but also in its darkening catabolism the fragility of affection and of earthly existence. So too in the literature of the period, which took its inspiration from classical sources, did the fruit of love come to be reinterpreted as the orange. In 1501, Giovanni Pontano’s *De hortis Hesperidum, “on the garden of the Hesperides”* (in which the golden apples of Greek myth originally grew), combined horticultural science, classical mythology, and contemporary folktales to establish a classical past for a new botanical genus, and Giambattista Basile’s “The Three Citrons” of 1634 set in print a cognate folktale that had perhaps for centuries been spreading through the oral tradition of the Mediterranean.

The potency of the genus was overdetermined through the centuries by the fruits’ tendency to mutation, including the navel orange’s enclosure of a smaller but identical fruit within a fruit—a fact that led to the anthropomorphization of the genus as the archetypal fruit of the womb. Mazzoni’s final chapter addresses the ambiguous status of oranges in modern Italian folklore and literature as a result of the social reality of picking oranges in conditions of near slavery.

Throughout her monograph, Mazzoni provides captivating asides to a number of theoretical texts, but it is when she is steeped in the first sources of the patristic period, the quattrocento, and the early botanist-philosophers of the Renaissance that she is most engrossing, revealing through her interdisciplinary approach the simultaneous emergence of a new flavor and a new intellectual and emotional landscape in Renaissance Europe.


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*Living with Animals* contributes to the rapidly growing literature on the intertwined lives of humans and other animals by conveying the diversity of human-animal relationships, challenging readers to reconsider how humans think about and interact with animals, and portraying animals as agents in their interactions with humans, whether by describing and interpreting meaningful animal actions or by imagining animal voices and perspectives.

The book assembles 19 essays in diverse styles and genres about different kinds of animals living with humans. Half of the 24 authors are anthropologists, with the rest representing fields such as sociology, gender studies, science studies, and philosophy; among them are also a poet and a data librarian. They cover domestic animals (nine chapters) and wild animals (five chapters), as well as captive wild animals (leeches, oysters, and birds) and animals originally wild but here bred in captivity (gorillas, ferrets, and mice). Cases are set on every continent except Antarctica, with special attention to North America (11 chapters) and Africa (three chapters).

The essays are organized by subject area: fieldwork, communication, commodities, science, and conservation. This arrangement brought out important connections among the essays, with one exception: the conservation set was only weakly coherent. In their introduction, Natalie Porter and Ilana Gershon helpfully highlight four issues that crosscut these five sets. First, how do humans wield the power they often have to save or kill animals? Second, how do humans work to standardize animal lives in the interests of science or capitalism? Third (and this is an animal-centric rephrasing), how do animals negotiate relationships with humans and with each other in human-dominated settings? Finally, how does culture shape the way humans understand and interact with animals? Notwithstanding the editorial labor involved in grouping the essays and highlighting the resonances among them, the editors invite readers to consume them in any order desired. I accepted their invitation, reading essays as they appealed to me via points of connection to my research, teaching, or personal interests. The experience was both educational and enjoyable. The essays are all relatively short and highly readable; many are both descriptively detailed and thought provoking.

Some of the essays take a conventional ethnographic form. In the fieldwork set, Andrew Halloran and Catherine Bolten must figure out how to study chimpanzees in Sierra Leone who avoid people to survive, while Marcus Baynes-Rock must figure out how to establish intimacy on safe terms with hyenas habituated to people feeding them in Ethiopia. In the other fieldwork essays, the animals are more research assistants than ethnographic subjects: Yasmine Musharbash explains how having pet dogs in the field helped her better understand how Aboriginal Australians live with dogs and how their approach contrasts with Western dog ownership and training, while Alex Nading describes how conversations about his pet cat helped him develop closer relationships with his neighbors in Nicaragua. In the communication set, Marie Sodikoff explores why and how people sacrifice cattle to their ancestors in Madagascar.

Other essays take more unusual forms. Two are written as letters of advice: Aleta Quinn’s letter to a young person considering a career as a zoological taxonomist and Nicholas D’Avella’s letter to an activist explaining how birds and birders might help her protect an urban park based on his experience studying conservation in Buenos Aires. Three others—Robert Kirk’s guide to healing with leeches aimed at early 19th-century physicians, Alex Blanchette’s standard operating procedures for employees working with
industrial pigs, and Natalie Porter's manual for volunteers working with rescue dogs—are written as guidelines for interacting with working animals.

Some essays incorporate animal voices. Agustin Fuentes and Michael Alan Park note that humans can use their imaginations to consider what animals might be perceiving and thinking, and the authors of eight chapters do exactly this. We hear from experienced lab ferrets (via Heather Alfeld and Lesley Sharp), research mice (via Nicole Nelson and Kaitlin Stack Whitney), service dogs (via Leslie Irvine and Sherri Sasnett-Martichuski), and zoo gorillas (via Christena Nippert-Eng) as they offer their advice to newcomers, while expert cows (via Scout Calvert) explain to bovine interns how to manage human reproduction on Planet Bovine. We learn about a ritual bird release to bovine interns how to manage human reproduction; the vets and their assistants argue that “it’s passed” (22), says one of Lambek’s informants, referring to the rapid change experienced by the people of Mayotte at the turn of the 21st century, during which the islands transitioned from a marginal colony into a full département d’outre mer of the French state. This unusual postcolonial trajectory is not the focus of the book, however, nor does the book dwell on the rapid population growth, urbanization, and immigration crisis for which the islands are known today. Instead, Lambek seeks to capture the ordinariness of change and examine the ways in which historical transformation was anticipated, received, and interpreted in a community of two closely related, adjacent rural villages, Lomben Be and Lomben Kely. Ultimately, he is interested in presenting what leading a life has meant in these villages during the period under study, and he remains attentive throughout to the differences in perspective between different cohorts—whose pasts, presents, and futures are not homogeneous.

After a depiction of the community as Lambek first encountered it in 1975, the book progresses chronologically, taking the reader from a reconstruction of the founding of Lomben in the 15th century, through the economic, societal, and political changes of the late 20th century, and up until the time of writing. One of the most novel elements of Lambek's ethnographic history is the fact that he wrote several of the chapters just after the events they describe (30–40 years ago) or with the use of detailed field notes. As such, the concerns of the ethnographer and the community reemerge through a succession of ethnographic presents even as their horizons shift from chapter to chapter. As
Lambek writes: “The material in each chapter is like a wave, overlapping with, but extending a little farther up the shore than the previous one” (278)—a wave that leaves a trace, even as it recedes. This palimpsestuous technique allows him to capture both “the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous” (278) and the continuous motion of social life.

Lambek approaches history as a series of acts that includes those oriented toward the past (recollection, representation) and those oriented toward a future (anticipation, expectation). Weaving through all the chapters are themes of tradition—“a long conversation composed of successive and diverging interpretations of a common and emerging corpus” (8)—conviviality, competition, citizenship, religion, mutuality, and virtue. Mahorais are revealed to be actively engaged in their own unfolding history and philosophical dilemmas, making use of this historical consciousness in order to understand their place in the world. The chapter on spirit possession and mediumship is worth mentioning both because Lambek has written extensively on this in the past, and because it captures the lived historicity of Mahorais by showing how former rulers or spirit beings come to life in the bodies and minds of the living.

The book examines the relationship between social reproduction and societal transformation. In a series of chapters focusing on ritual and ceremonial acts and exchanges as well as on acts of care and mutual acknowledgment—visits, invitations, prayer, hospitality, labor—Lambek argues that the telos of life is reproduction, and that acts of social reproduction are what preoccupy people and constitute social life. Throughout, he uses evocative prose to attend to the timbre and texture of acts of social reproduction and to the musicality of history: the speeding up and slowing down of rhythm, repetition, refrains, and climaxes. The book is also notable for its analytic dexterity, and the ethnographic chapters are beautifully framed by the introduction and a final chapter, which outline how Lambek’s theoretical approach mobilizes the concept of horizon and a final chapter, which outline how Lambek’s theoretical approach mobilizes the concept of horizon and draws on thinkers like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Reinhart Koselleck to theorize historical subjects and interpretive acts in Mayotte.

Beyond its empirical depth and theoretical mastery, Island in the Stream is also a profound meditation on the nature of ethnographic work. As Michael Jackson notes in his foreword to the book: “Anthropology is a social science; as such, its worth is to be evaluated not on intellectual grounds alone, but in terms of our social life in the field and the repercussions of our findings for those whose hospitality we enjoy and whose lives benefit us” (x). Lambek reflects on his relationship to the field over time, from the young ethnographer’s romantic and intense initial period of research that remains most vivid in his imagination to this day to a more mature relationship that is less about observing and more about the existential questions he shares with the people of Lombeni, questions that he argues cannot emerge from a single period of research.

This is a book of great humility and wisdom, one that beautifully illustrates the immense contribution that long-term ethnographic studies have to offer. I can only hope that this new genre will take root in the discipline and grow.


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In the 20 chapters of Methods That Matter, we learn the benefits of stepping out of the polemic comfort zone of the research methodologies that historically mark disciplinary boundaries. Increasingly understood as a third methodological paradigm, a mixed-methods approach “matters for producing more reliable, more valid, or at least more convincing research findings” (157). Each author offers variants on how mixed methods are defined or operationalized, indicating the flexibility of this approach.

Written for social scientists, Methods That Matter covers a broad range of disciplines, each focusing on child and family well-being that engages with ecocultural theory. Ecocultural theory, Carol Worthman writes, is a “powerful tool for understanding and investigating the sources of human diversity” (13) that results in studies consistently connecting cultural practices with stress physiology and emotional regulation. The book is divided into seven parts that explore mixed methods in diverse research contexts associated with two dominant themes: one, the importance of interdisciplinarity to mixed-methods research and, two, ecocultural theory.

Robert Levine, in the first part, considers interdisciplinarity and the history of mixed methods that emerged out of child development research. Following this, Carol Worthman emphasizes the impact that ecocultural theory has on addressing the problem of human psychobehavioral diversity. As both authors show, mixed-methods research is inextricably bound to both interdisciplinarity and ecocultural theory.

Part 2 presents multiple narratives of how mixed methods influence new findings. M. Cameron Hay demonstrates how using standardized measurements alongside ethnographic data was instrumental in a research outcome that would have otherwise remained undiscovered. Similarly, Andrew Fuligni deploys ethnographic data and statistical analysis to support telling the same story of family significance in the academic success of immigrant children.
same pattern can be seen in Ronald Gallimore’s essay; focusing on childhood education in small Hawaiian communities, through a mixed-methods approach he discovered the importance of peer and sibling assistance in literacy education. All three authors demonstrate the importance of mixed methods for driving the nuanced understandings that emerge from ethnographic and statistical data.

Variability between cultural values and concepts can also be revealed through mixed methods. For example, Richard Shweder argues that context matters and that focusing on the broader units of analysis captured in interviews can provoke deeper discussions that surveys do not fully capture. Grounding her work in evolution and neurobiology, Heidi Keller stresses the cultural variability of parenting in relation to images of infancy and their importance for children’s development. Using the developmental niche framework, Sara Harkness and Charles Super are concerned with cultural context in children’s health development. The authors contend that mixed methods are essential for assessing interventions that apply randomized control trial outcomes to new groups of people. Edward Lowe applies an ecocultural framework in concluding that poverty should be understood as an indexical measurement of social connection and societal inclusion. Ethnographic descriptions of participation are key to interpreting statistical data to better inform notions of poverty.

Mixed-methods and research tools are argued to be instrumental in collaborative projects. Eli Lieber asserts that numbers alone fail to capture the complications of life, especially as they pertain to US families and how well they support their young children’s literacy development. In partnering with a local stakeholder organization, Tamara Daley documents a study of parental experiences of autism through their adult autistic children in India, where rich descriptions alongside comparisons resulted in more compelling findings. In an exploration of what makes for the best clinical care, Hay et alia involved physicians as collaborators from the outset. In this two-phase mixed-methods design, trigger films were found to be beneficial for communicating what best clinical care looks like.

Longitudinal studies combined with mixed-methods strategies lead to unique insights. Ashley Maynard describes ethnographic observation and interviews alongside the Activity Settings Analysis in a longitudinal study of Zinacantec Maya siblings. In a study of child maltreatment within a neighborhood context, Jill Korbin uses statistics to develop a neighborhood stratification sample and ethnographic data from children within these strata over a 20-year span. Similarly, James Vigil documents his use of statistical data regarding neighborhoods followed by interviews and observations. These methods were deployed for investigating “multiple marginality” (285) to understand street gangs. Lucinda Bernheimer et alia use mixed methods to assess child development status at various ages to understand developmental delay and the ambiguity underpinning the expression “catching up.”

Interventions and policies are also shown to benefit from an application of mixed methods. Aletha Huston et alia illustrate four large-scale mixed-methods studies regarding the challenges and successes of families in poverty. Mixed methods matter because they shed light on the ways in which the goals of policy makers and the goals of participants may or may not converge. In order to understand parenting styles, with the aim of developing early childhood education and intervention methods, Carolyn Edwards uses quantitative data derived from assessments and qualitative, longitudinal data based on interviews. Brian Wilcox accounts for research within a virtual community of clients of transgender sex workers in Brazil in order to develop an improved safe sex practices intervention. Reaching these clients was challenging because they wanted to remain invisible. Therefore, participants engaging with survey methods were atypical, and Wilcox argues that relying on that limited data alone would have been a mistake.

Methods That Matter concludes with a commentary from Thomas Weisner, progenitor of ecocultural theory. Weisner’s key points include the fact that findings that matter transcend studies qualified as applied, policy, clinical, evaluative, or intervention as well as a warning that a mixed-methods approach still receives resistance. This latter point has implications for funding, publishing, and scholarly acceptance. Nonetheless, these chapters are nothing short of innovative in their use of mixed methods to address wider social problems and questions.

This volume serves as an introductory textbook for mixed methods. However, for detailed robust mixed-methods research design, the reader must seek out other literature. Whatever the interest, this volume does deliver the promise of providing insight into how and why integrating mixed methods for more effective findings in social science research matters.


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Sex, Love, and Migration makes a significant contribution to the anthropologies of postsocialism, migration, and gendered labor. Using the concepts of affect, emotional labor, and structures of feeling, Alexia Bloch skillfully and engagingly guides readers through many of the positionalities
comprising multinational and multigenerational networks of migrant women and those they leave behind, which she mapped while conducting fieldwork in Istanbul and the former Soviet Union over the course of more than a decade. While her main periods of extended fieldwork in Istanbul and southern Moldova’s Gagauzia region took place between 2002 and 2007, Bloch also includes material from her earlier project, in Siberia (part of the reason for the subtitle’s the Arctic), as well as conversations with her “consultants” (a word she uses instead of the more common “interlocutor”) held up to the final stages of writing the book.

Bloch’s introduction situates the ethnography among studies of, on the one hand, postsocialism—primarily, as a set of orientations to modernity that her consultants from across Eurasia shared—and, on the other, literature on the gendered emotional labor undertaken by migrants doing the labor of intimacy in Japan, South Korea, and the United States as domestic workers, “dancers,” girlfriends, mistresses, and wives. While other anthropologists familiar with the former Soviet sphere will recognize many of the social and cultural phenomena they encounter in the book and will have their perspectives on these greatly enriched, theoretically speaking the book contributes more to the second, much less regionally linked literature on migration, gendered labor, and the receipt of remittances.

Much of the book concentrates on relations among post-Soviet women and Turkish men and Turkish society. In her initial chapter, Bloch nicely lays out the history of connections as mutual desire in the region from a scholarly perspective as well as from the points of view of the post-Soviet women working in Istanbul, who avidly consume Bollywood films as well as The Magnificent Century—a globally successful Turkish-produced melodrama about Suleiman the Magnificent, his female relatives, and his harem, including Hurrem Sultan or Roxelana, a Ruthenian woman who became the chief consort of the Ottoman sultan. The second chapter concerns shuttle or suitcase traders, mostly women, who travel back and forth across borders to buy manufactured goods, especially clothing, wholesale abroad to sell at home, a prominent feature of the earlier literature on postsocialism and an earlier phase in the economies linking Russia, Turkey, and Europe.

Through these women, Bloch became acquainted with Moldovans employed as shop attendants, domestic workers, and “dancers.” The following chapters much further develop the theme of the mutual desire that contributes to post-Soviet women’s migrations to and work in Istanbul and the Turkish “friends” who sponsor, “keep,” and marry them.

Bloch consistently describes not only individual personalities and families in all their uniqueness and contexts, wrapping up most of the chapters with extended portraits of particular women and their networks, but also the legal and geopolitical contexts involved—these are also expressions of the desires that the individuals in her book demonstrate for modernity, international relationships, and socioeconomic mobility. Handling these aspects simultaneously, Bloch is able to critique narratives about trafficking while showing how people around the world are increasingly being pressed by the economic necessity of migration as, simultaneously, migration is increasingly being constrained and policed.

A middle chapter based on Bloch’s fieldwork in Vulcănești, a village in the southern Moldovan semi-autonomous ethnic region of Gagauzia associated with the Orthodox Christian but Turkic-speaking Gagauz, especially emphasizes the dire straits that continue to characterize postsocialism across Eurasia and the global economy more broadly. The former collective and state farms have utterly disappeared, and locally wage labor is attainable only at three internationally owned wine-bottling plants paying in the range of 50 dollars a month. While differences between those who own productive agricultural land and those who do not—those who work as computer programmers or in call centers—are evident and important, everyone’s social networks include close kin engaged in labor migration who send remittances home, becoming bound up in further intimate relations in their homes as well as abroad.

The final chapter, “‘Other Mothers,’ Grandmothers, and the State,” draws on older anthropological classics such as the work of Carol Stack (Margaret Mead could also have been included) as well as the feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins. Though not foreshadowed in the introduction, this chapter is a particularly strong contribution to studies of circular migration; Bloch uses the multigenerational history of interregional migration involving Gagauz, Bulgarians, and Albanians in a convincing deconstruction of classed ideals around the nuclear family and mother-child bonding. Bloch, whose daughter, mother, and stepmother often accompanied her into the field, counters widespread narratives about mothers’ employment abroad being damaging to their children. With their mothers’ remittances, children are able to prepare for university (which is also paid for with their parents’ remittances) and themselves aspire to work abroad. Parents and grandparents recounted the need to engage in illegal market activity to survive during the early Soviet period, and how they were sent as children to the homes of various relatives around the Balkans whose property they often inherited. Unlike migrant mothers described by other anthropologists, who strongly stress the difficulty of being unable to care for their children in terms of physical presence, Bloch’s consultants complained about the children’s daily routines being disturbed when mothers visited and rarely spoke about missing their children, though they generally kept in daily connection by phone and text.

Bloch focuses on a particular set of networks in a particular set of places, but she powerfully portrays and analyzes patterns of economic and emotional precarity evident

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Liberia, South Carolina is at once an ethnographic and a historical account of an African American Appalachian community and the land its residents call home. African American experiences are underrepresented within Appalachian studies, so the book widens our understanding of Appalachia—a region that, especially in the public imagination, is associated with whiteness—and also has the potential to expand the spatialization of blackness in the United States. By weaving together historical documentation and the voices of his interlocutors, John Coggeshall develops a chronological account that spans the antebellum period to the present day. He connects the dynamics of life in and around Liberia to larger theoretical concerns, specifically the tactical means by which racially marginalized communities persevere even when they are surrounded by a threatening racial majority.

Coggeshall’s account owes much to Mabel Owens Clarke, a descendant of the formerly enslaved people who founded Liberia during Reconstruction. Although he interviewed multiple members of the community, the voices of Clarke and other African American women connected to Liberia are prioritized within the text. The persistence of black countermemories is a key theme throughout, refuting their erasure and silence in the white narratives that are invested with greater institutional authority, such as white-owned newspapers and books on local history written by white residents. Coggeshall positions the oral histories of Clarke and her family in conversation with these other sources, providing context, depth, and perspective. He employs Michel Foucault’s understanding of capillary power, coupled with James Scott’s concept of hidden transcripts, to show readers the role of countermemories in the context of resistance. A second key theme is one that runs throughout Appalachian studies literature: the significance of familial lands and the attachments that draw people back home. In the case of Liberia, these attachments are strengthened by the history of enslavement and the struggle of residents to maintain ownership of familial lands. While both of the book’s main themes appear throughout the text, the second theme is more subtly evoked.

Half of the book is a historical account of Liberia before Clarke was born that draws from both documentary sources and family memories. The interplay among the memories of Liberia’s African American community members, archival sources, and published local histories from prominent white families reveals the tensions between official and marginalized discourse. White historical accounts and obituaries of formerly enslaved people in the local newspaper portray a harmonious interracial landscape of “congenial cooperation” (104) between black and white residents. Though Coggeshall’s interlocutors describe many meaningful engagements with “good white folks” (108), these are punctuated with episodes of racism and racial violence. For example, a grandson recalls that his grandmother “had a big knot on her head . . . where the white man hit her . . . because she didn’t give up no ‘goodies’” (77)—meaning that she narrowly escaped an attempted rape.

The public white transcript of pleasant interracial relations is further complicated in the second half of the book by the retelling of events witnessed by Clarke and other family members. Clarke describes how, when she was a girl, Ku Klux Klan members assaulted her uncle in an effort to run him off his land. The Klan members appealed to a white store owner to raise a mob. But the store owner—who had befriended Clarke’s father, Chris Owens—told them they were “messing with the wrong families” (162) and instead called the sheriff. The sheriff told Owens to kill any Klansmen who came to his house and to lay their bodies on the porch for him to deal with. Coggeshall frames “white friendships” (162), such as that between Clarke’s father and the store owner, as fueled by more than fondness. They can also be seen as hidden transcripts, as a means for negotiating a white supremacist power structure. He thus provides readers with an example of how these hidden transcripts are written into everyday practices, emerging within the zones of contention between subordinate and dominating peoples.

The discussion of the book’s second theme—attachments to land—is less explicit until the reader reaches the conclusion. As such, it feels like an afterthought. In order to theorize cultural attachments to place, Coggeshall draws from several works, including essays from Senses of Place, the collection edited by Steven Feld and Keith Basso. But he pairs this with sense of place literature from Appalachian studies, and these feel like a just-so story, where descriptions of attachment—family, memory, genealogy—stand in for the historical processes of attachment so evident throughout the rest of the text. Acknowledging that these works do not go far enough analytically, Coggeshall ends by detailing a six-step process whereby land becomes anthropomorphized—symbolically transformed into a member of the family.
He begins with the struggle of black families to own land in Liberia, then details the ways in which they occupy their land by “physically connecting their bodies to their ancestors” (204). After so many years of occupation, the landscape evokes family memories so that the ancestors become synonymous with it, making the land kindred as well.

This book is a welcome addition to Appalachian studies, particularly given Coggeshall’s focus on African American Appalachian experiences of place. It also contributes to African American and black studies by offering perspectives from African American Appalachians that complicate and expand our understanding of space, power, and race. In terms of broader readership within social and cultural anthropology, the book’s use of memories to illustrate the ideas of Scott and Foucault makes it accessible for undergraduate students learning to distinguish myriad forms of resistance. Readers hoping to gain theoretical insight into the processes of place attachment might be disappointed, given that this discussion is left until the end of the text rather than incorporated throughout. Altogether, however, Liberia, South Carolina is an engaging historical and ethnographic account of a community that is all too often invisible within broader regional scholarship.


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The Spirit and the Sky is a welcome contribution to the ethnoastronomical and archaeoastronomical literature. In this well-organized and thoroughly researched work, Mark Hollabaugh sets out to provide “a comprehensive treatment of the astronomy of the nineteenth-century Lakota” (xii), something that has been lacking in Lakota studies until now. To my knowledge, only a handful of scholarly books, articles, and book chapters explore ethnoastronomy in native North America, and many of them are general or regional in scope and often tied to mythology, folklore, and calendars or winter counts. Most of the specific studies focus on more or less sedentary, horticulturist tribes such as the Pueblo, Navajo, Apache, and Pawnee peoples and the Iroquois and Algonquian cultivators of the Northeast. Other studies would be labeled archaeoastronomy and focus more on ancient peoples’ star knowledge and less on the present. Aside from a few other contemporary studies of Ojibwe and Dakota star knowledge, few scholarly works have tackled the ethnoastronomy of specific nomadic tribes. The Spirit and the Sky is distinctive in that it approaches the ethnoastronomy of a formerly nomadic hunter-gatherer tribe and also incorporates valuable ethnographic research with contemporary Lakota people.

Hollabaugh accomplishes his goal of entering the world of Lakota ethnoastronomy by delving “deeply into the history, language, culture, religion, and thinking of the Lakota” (xii). Importantly, he emphasizes the inherent diversity of Lakota belief and thought, a reflection of the fluidity of Sioux social organization and the individualism characteristic of Sioux religious belief, philosophy, cosmology, and, more generally, epistemology. His book is by far the best and most comprehensive exploration of Lakota ethnoastronomy—“the interpretation of celestial phenomena in the context of Lakota culture” (2)—to date. It is also a real contribution to the ethnoastronomical literature in general, building on pioneering works in the field by Von Del Chamberlain, When Stars Came Down to Earth: Cosmology of the Skidi Pawnee Indians of North America, 1982; Ray A. Williamson, Living the Sky: The Cosmos of the American Indian, 1984, and “Pueblo Ethnoastronomy,” 2014; Claire R. Farrer, Living Life’s Circle: Mescalero Apache Cosmovision, 1991; Williamson and Farrer, Earth and Sky: Visions of the Cosmos in Native American Folklore, 1992; and George E. Lankford, Reachable Stars: Patterns in the Ethnoastronomy of Eastern North America, 2007. Again, Hollabaugh’s focus on a particular formerly nomadic hunter-gatherer tribe, combined with his ethnographic fieldwork in contemporary Lakota communities, sets this book apart from its peers.

The Spirit and the Sky begins with a useful introduction to the Lakota people and their history and culture as they relate to ethnoastronomy. Hollabaugh goes on to consider a number of interconnected topics, including the stars and constellations, the sun and moon, time concepts, eclipses and the aurora borealis, meteors and comets, the sun dance, and contemporary Lakota astronomy. Importantly, he engages with New Age interest in and sometimes misappropriation of Lakota culture, spirituality, and astronomical knowledge. In particular, he explores the 1992 work of Archie Fire Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, which has been adopted uncritically in some New Age circles, and questions some of the findings in Ronald Goodman’s Lakota Star Knowledge: Studies in Lakota Stellar Theology, which has gained somewhat of a cult following since its publication in 1992 but is based on questionable scholarship. Goodman relies primarily on memory ethnography with little attempt to corroborate data with ethnohistorical sources. Some of the basic categories in Lakota Star Knowledge are also questionable, departing from traditional (ethno)astronomy and geography in many ways. As Hollabaugh concludes, “Lakota Star Knowledge, while an important contribution to contemporary ethnoastronomy, runs into difficulty with
its interpretation of material the [Lakota Star Knowledge] project collected” (166–67).

Throughout The Spirit and the Sky, Hollabaugh demonstrates a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Lakota culture and thought, based on his research, numerous friendships with Lakota people, and experiences in Lakota communities over many years. Particularly fascinating to me, as someone interested in the literature on Black Elk, the Oglala Lakota holy man from Pine Ridge Reservation renowned for the 1932 classic Black Elk Speaks, was Hollabaugh’s discussion of the extraordinary auroral display visible in Manderson, South Dakota, on the night of Black Elk’s wake in August 1950.

A unifying theme throughout The Spirit and the Sky is the realization that there is a connection or a relationship between the earth and the sky, the human and the nonhuman, the microcosm and the macrocosm. This widespread belief is expressed in the hermetic traditions by the axiom “as above, so below.” Indeed, much of Lakota ritual aims to unite these two interrelated domains, the microcosm and the macrocosm, and to strengthen community and kinship among all life-forms. Mitákuye oyáti (all my relatives, we are all related), the most famous and pervasive of all Lakota maxims, affirms this interrelatedness of all things, extended beyond the human even to a cosmic scale.

If pressed, my only criticisms of this very useful and enjoyable work would be that there are a few typos and issues with the use of the Lakota language, and that every time I saw the title I was reminded of Norman Greenbaum’s inescapable 1969 hit “Spirit in the Sky.” All joking aside, Hollabaugh has made a real contribution to ethnoastronomy and the literature on Lakota culture, history, philosophy, religious belief, and star knowledge, and the final product is quite insightful, interesting, and readable, suited for scholarly and popular audiences alike.


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In this groundbreaking volume, editors Elissa Bemporad and Joyce Warren bring together 14 new essays that apply gender analytical frameworks to examine the multiple roles of women in genocide. Dominated by contributions from historians, the book also includes research by anthropologists, sociologists, lawyers, and women’s activists. Many of the authors are leading experts in genocide studies. The book contains three essays on the Holocaust and eight on genocides committed against indigenous people in the Americas, Herero and Nama in Namibia, Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, Tutsi in Rwanda, and Bosnian Muslims in the former Yugoslavia as well as genocides in Cambodia, Guatemala, and Darfur, Sudan. The editors have incorporated essays on mass atrocities that are less widely recognized as genocides, including the Holodomor famine in Ukraine under Soviet occupation and violence against women in the Bangladesh national liberation struggle. The volume’s geographical and historical breadth of coverage is refreshing.

Several themes run throughout the collection. Most authors show how women are targeted because of their gender and how gender roles are exploited to increase their agony. As Joyce Warren notes in her preface, “history has written of genocidal mass killings in the same way—speaking generically of the horror of mass murder, but not taking note of the gender-specific nature of much of the horror” (xi). Marion Kaplan illuminates the ways that Nazi assaults on the Jewish people and Jewish reactions were gendered. For example, the Nazi state first targeted Jewish men through beatings, arrests, and forced labor. In response, many Jewish women took on new roles in the family and community, which transgressed patriarchal norms. Another important theme concerns the ways that preconflict cultural norms persist during war and genocide and shape expectations for women’s behavior. Trude Jacobsen shows how the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia insisted that men and women were fully equal in every respect, yet female cadres were still expected to cook, clean, and care for the men after a long day of work. Cultural gender norms also affect recovery in the aftermath of mass atrocities. Virtually all the essays engage with feminist research methods in one way or another. Michelle Kelso, for example, uses life histories to clarify how the intersections of ethnicity, gender, class, and age influenced Romani girls’ experiences of the Holocaust. Donna-Lee Frieze attempts to recover the silenced voice of Aurora Mardiganian, a survivor of the Armenian genocide who briefly became a famous actor.

Many essays address rape as a weapon of genocide and war crimes. Victoria Sanford, Sofía Duyos Álvarez-Arenas, and Kathleen Dill show how the Guatemalan army under José Efraín Ríos Montt’s dictatorship trained its soldiers to use rape and other forms of sexual violence against Mayan women. They highlight how racism against indigenous people and patriarchal ideology combined into a “racist patriarchy” that objectified Mayan women “as enemy property deserving cruel destruction” (214). Bina D’Costa focuses on the centrality of Bengali rape survivors to the collective national memory of the liberation struggle and the survivors’ simultaneous marginalization in contemporary society because of their “damaged” status. Elisa von Joeden-Forgey traces the widespread sexualized violence against African women in German South West Africa (present
day-Namibia) before, during, and after the genocide against Nama and Herero between 1904 and 1908. Many essays explore the ways that cultural expectations around female chastity generate long-standing stigma for survivors of rape, sexual torture, and sexual exploitation. As a result, many survivors prefer to remain silent about the abuse they suffered in an attempt to preserve some scrap of dignity, as Samuel Totten describes for Darfur. This silence, however, impedes justice for women, as Selma Leydesdorff shows in the case of Bosnia and Bina D’Costa shows for Bangladesh.

Women’s silence about sexual assault evokes another significant theme: female agency during and after mass atrocities. While the literature on conflict and genocide has tended to portray women only as victims, the essays in this book capture the many ways that women responded when their husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons were imprisoned, beaten, or killed. Several essays also consider women as perpetrators of or bystanders to mass atrocities (e.g., Wendy Lower, D’Costa, Jacobsen, and Georgina Holmes). D’Costa highlights the public secret surrounding abortion among sexual assault survivors. Throughout the volume, the authors assess the pursuit of justice in the aftermath of genocide. Lisa Davis and Cassandra Atlas, Sanford et alia, Leydesdorff, and D’Costa examine the conditions that female survivors of genocide and war crimes need to seek justice or to testify before war crimes tribunals. Andrea Smith addresses the centuries of repercussions of genocide committed against indigenous peoples in the Americas and the ways that racist violence persists against American Indians. Olga Bertelsen recovers women’s voices as victims of the Holodomor famine in Soviet Ukraine.

In an edited volume of strong contributions to the literature on gender and genocide, a handful of essays stand out for their excellence. Marion Kaplan makes the case for using gender analysis as a crucial tool in genocide research. As she notes, “gender analysis reveals dimensions in private life that are otherwise untouchable” (97). Elisa von Joeden-Forgey applies gender analytical frameworks to the Nama and Herero genocide in German South West Africa and traces the ways that German colonization produced a gendered concept of power that led German authorities to turn to a policy of genocide. Commonplace sexual violence perpetrated by German men against African women illustrated the colonizers’ disregard for African personhood and created the conditions for the Herero anticolonial rebellion. These essays along with the contributions from Jacobsen and Sanford et alia illustrate the insights generated by incorporating gender analysis into the study of genocide.

Women and Genocide is an important contribution to the growing body of work in comparative genocide studies that focuses on women and gender at the intersections of race, ethnicity, and class. It should be widely read by scholars interested in women, gender, genocide, conflict, and mass atrocities.

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Dreamers attempts to capture the zeitgeist of the demographic that comprises over half the population in India today: young people under the age of 25. Journalist Snigdha Poonam argues that this is “a generation of Indians hanging between extremes” who are “hitting adulthood with the cultural values of their grandparents . . . but the life goals of American teenagers” (24). She chooses North India’s second-tier cities, small towns, and villages as the vantage point from which to understand this generation’s aspirations and their limits in contemporary India.

Over the course of seven chapters, we are introduced to a number of characters, mostly male, who have figured out novel ways to hustle in places often obscured in media and scholarship. Poonam calls these young people dreamers. For her, dreamers hold very particular aspirations: to have money and to hold influence. They are prepared to acquire both through a “whatever works” or jugaadu sensibility. Jugaad is a vernacular Hindi term that, in the contemporary moment, can be glossed as “a hack” or as “hacking.” A jugaadu, then—as Amit Rai shows us in Jugaad Time: Ecologies of Everyday Hacking in India—is someone adept at making something out of nothing, a bricoleur, if you like. Jugaardu and jugaadu, once terms associated with India’s poor and their strategies for survival, have been zealously picked up by corporations and the new business elite to promote an entrepreneurial India in an era where stable wage labor is hard to come by, particularly for the generation Poonam identifies as dreamers. In clear and lively prose, Poonam describes how jugaadu ingenuity is embraced by youthful actors outside the metropolitan centers of India. Moreover, she illustrates how the digital world emerges for these young people as the key site where dreams can be imagined, made, and frustrated.

By narrating the stories of dreamers who start a digital content farm in a former princely state; run an English-language school for aspiring technology workers in Ranchi; take the role of the intermediary or fixer in an increasingly digitized state-citizen matrix; become a political fieldworker producing digital content for the ruling BJP party; engage in online and offline campus politics; or act, model, or manage events in India’s booming culture industries,
Poonam shows us how the affectively charged aspirations and pragmatic tactics that link young people from different backgrounds across India are located in the digital infrastructures that have exploded in the last decade. Yet while she offers rich ethnographic accounts of contemporary digital jugaad, she takes for granted the infrastructures and public pedagogy of digitality and their effects as a starting point from which to understand these youthful aspirations. The advent and rapid spread of information and communication technologies and their cultural impact in India, however, are anything but givens.

Consider, for instance, the first chapter, which introduces us to Singhal, a young man who moves from his village to the former princely state of Indore. Singhal, after a serendipitous moment when he sees his brother’s Facebook page documenting “amazing Indian things” go viral, starts a content farm called WittyFeed whose clickbait, in short order, has acquired more than a billion followers on Facebook and produces much of the short-form content that circulates in the United States. In fascinating detail, Poonam illustrates how Singhal eschews conventional metrics that might indicate success, such as education or previous employment, when hiring content producers for WittyFeed. Rather, he makes his hiring decisions based on whether applicants can, on the spot, perform their potential to think outside of the caste, religious, and class positions they have inherited.

While the stories in this chapter and indeed in all the chapters were fascinating, I found myself wanting to know more about how these young people develop the kinds of repertoires necessary to successfully perform, in the case of WittyFeed, the kind of individuality that someone like Singhal values in the first place. What media forms, for instance, are they consuming that prime them toward such unconventional performances, and how did they access them? While a discussion of popular cultural consumption and sociality comes out a bit more in some of the chapters (chapter 6, for instance), more attention to the experiences of these young people’s exposure to digital technologies and their emergence among the dreamer generation would have been helpful.

Even more than a call for more ethnographic detail, of which I think there is plenty in this book, a deeper engagement with the key concepts that emerge in the narrative—digitality, gender, content, and so on—would have helped clarify how dreamers engage with and even create the new aspirational labor opportunities that exist in digital India today, the limits to accessing them, and the affective toll it all takes to become a digital jugaadu. An analysis of gender is particularly underdeveloped. For instance, there is only one key female interlocutor in the book, Richa Singh, whom Poonam problematically dubs the angry young woman as a way to describe how she capitalizes on caste, gender, and tribal politics at Allahabad University to make a name for herself as a student politician. Given the number of young men who appear in the book, Poonam should have explored the gendered implications of what it means to be a dreamer in India today. Who gets to dream, and are these dreams, themselves, gendered?

That said, Poonam’s gift for storytelling, her ethnographically rich descriptions, and, in moments, her sharp analysis make Dreamers a fantastic book to assign to undergraduate students engaging, perhaps for the first time, with India, youth cultures, and the digital world. For teaching purposes, it might be most fruitful to pair Dreamers with monographs that delve more deeply into digitally inflected youth cultures, gender formation, and emerging labor opportunities in contemporary India. When put into conversation with other texts, such as Jocelyn Chua’s In Pursuit of the Good Life: Aspiration and Suicide in Globalizing South India, Poonam’s storytelling will lead to fruitful discussions that highlight how insightful journalism can be enhanced by anthropological analysis.


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For many contemporary citizens of Nepal, the realm of formal politics is considered a dirty game. To call someone a neta (political leader) is not a compliment, as the leaders of Nepal’s political parties are widely considered to be incompetent at best, corrupt at worst, and more committed to their personal advancement and their party’s goals than to the public good. Yet leaders often begin their careers haloed by hope and aspiration. By tracing the political lives of five student activists over more than a decade, Amanda Snellinger makes an important contribution to political anthropology and South Asian studies as she illuminates the motivations that drive these young people’s entry into formal politics as well as the obstacles that they encounter in their efforts to realize their ambitions in the “ever-shifting terrain of collaboration, cooperation, and competition” (24) that characterizes Nepali politics. More broadly, her book is an insightful analysis of how political structures reproduce themselves by socializing young people into their organizational practices, disciplining youthful idealism with the pragmatics of party politics.

The relationship between political parties and their associated student organizations is a key feature of the Nepali political landscape. During the era of officially partyless
Panchayat democracy in Nepal from 1960 to 1990, student organizations were still allowed to operate. In the name of working for the benefit of their fellow students, leaders learned the skills of building organizations, influencing administrations, dictating policies, distributing resources, and using strong-arm tactics such as strikes. After the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, many student leaders eventually moved into leadership roles in mainstream parties, and the connections between mainstream parties and student organizations continue to be strong, although occasionally somewhat fraught, as the party leaders sometimes follow a strategy of allowing their student wings to pursue relatively radical agendas and then stepping in to negotiate more pragmatic compromises. Because only a small minority of the country’s population is university-educated, and those who have access to higher education are disproportionately high-caste Hindu men, the student-organization-to-party pipeline contributes significantly to the elitism of Nepal’s political sphere.

If politics is a dirty game, then why do idealistic young people become involved? Students understand their activism to be selfless service to shared democratic ideals. Here again, however, the ideal of politics as service reflects the elitism of the political system—only those who have the backing of family wealth are able to “selflessly” devote themselves full-time to the movement, whereas those who must make a living are perceived to be acting out of self-interest. Student activism through protests and strikes provides aspiring leaders with a path to legitimacy by allowing them to demonstrate the ideal of selfless service and connecting them to a shared lineage of struggle. Being arrested and jailed for participating in street politics is practically a necessary rite of passage for those who hope to become leaders: “by jointly claiming the title of āndolankaśri [activist], political actors connect across the generations, mapping the glory of the ongoing political movement onto the past and using it to make claims on the future” (62). However, in order to successfully transition from student leader to party leader, young people must learn to accept the fact that the mainstream parties’ practices, agendas, and internal procedures are ultimately shaped by their leaders’ personalities and networks of influence, rather than by the ideals that attracted them to politics in the first place.

Student leaders fall into the political category of youth, which in Nepal expands far beyond the 18 to 30 age range accepted in many parts of the world. In Nepali political culture, seniority is a key element of authority, and thus many former student leaders—designated as youth leaders long after they have left their university days behind—are unable to take on major party leadership roles. As one 45-year-old politician put it, “I am still a youth because my aspirations remain unfulfilled” (74). This holding pattern keeps activists and aspiring leaders in a state of deferral, in which they must maintain relevance by emphasizing their own future potential as the leaders of a new Nepal. However, “while they may provide the public with hope by offering alternative visions of the future, they simultaneously encourage reproduction of the political status quo” (96) because they must serve their elders while awaiting their turn. This long holding pattern helps explain why youthful commitment to ideals of democracy, service, and radical social change is considerably diminished by the time former student leaders get a chance at real power.

Women and members of marginalized ethnic or religious communities, as relative newcomers to the arena of formal politics in Nepal, are expected not to advocate for the interests of their own groups, as the parties deem this behavior to be self-aggrandizing. Rather, they must assimilate to the norms of high-caste Hindu male sociality to the extent that they are able: as one Madheshi man put it, “if you are a person belonging to a lower caste or religious group, you have to transform yourself into an elite in order to make it in politics” (129). This strategy is generally more accessible to men than it is to women. Gendered norms of propriety prohibit women from socializing freely with men and from speaking their own opinions clearly and forcefully, thus limiting their opportunities to develop as political leaders. Women who do manage to rise to high positions are often able to do so because of familial relationships with politically powerful men; moreover, women who do not have such family connections are often cast as fictive daughters of more senior men in their political parties. This relational dynamic makes it nearly impossible for women to exercise political leadership in their own right.

Given the dynamics of elitism that Snellinger describes, it is not surprising that the only one of her five main interlocutors who has successfully made the transition to mainstream political leadership is a high-caste man who grew up comfortably middle class in Kathmandu. As a reader, I would have liked for the stories of these five student leaders to be somewhat more central, as their voices sometimes disappear for lengthy stretches. I am also curious about Snellinger’s decision to give pseudonyms to these five people—she points out herself that their identities will likely be known to readers familiar with Nepali politics. Her lack of explanation for this choice feels like a missed opportunity to reflect on the ethical considerations of privacy, recognition, and respect that are central to ethnographic writing. Nonetheless, Snellinger’s analysis of the complicated terrain of Nepali politics is conceptually clear while remaining refreshingly free of jargon. Her book makes a significant contribution to South Asian studies and to the anthropology of youth and politics.

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I treasure The Cow in the Elevator for its sparkle and its positive news about hope and creativity in often bleak circumstances. Rich in original analytic insights, this book is not a tidy package but a cornucopia from which all kinds of sweet and bitter products may be extracted, tasted, consumed, and transformed: high-powered caloric fuel for interpretive intellectual energies.

Tulasi Srinivas’s work is based on almost two decades of intermittent research in her hometown of Bangalore (now officially Bengaluru)—years during which she published other books on other topics. Two temples in the neighborhood of Malleshwaram and two articulate priests associated with these temples are major sites and voices to which the text repeatedly returns. Festivals, processions, practices of adornment, and displays of deities are central to Srinivas’s observations. Out of these emerges her surprising and adventurous anthropology of wonder. But this book also addresses much else in South Asian urban contexts, including class, caste, and the consequences of unchecked growth.

While reading The Cow in the Elevator, I happened to be teaching the well-known Hindu myth of the churning of the ocean of milk, a cosmic creative undertaking requiring divine and demonic energies. An irresistible analogy came to mind: Srinivas in her book performs a kind of ethnographic churning of the ocean of urban hypermodernity, from which diverse items emerge. In the ancient tale, these items include a magical wish-fulfilling cow as well as nectar, poison, and Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity. Similarly, in Bangalore the present churns up wonders, money, and infinitely gorgeous divinity as well as threats to ongoing viable life. The title of Srinivas’s book alludes to a housewarming ritual on the eighth floor of a luxury apartment complex that necessitated the presence of an auspicious cow. Srinivas helps the officiating priest, Dandu Shastri, entice this recalcitrant animal into a mirrored elevator. That actual cow has the same name, Kamadhenu—evoking the fulfillment of desires—as the mythic cow who emerged from the primal generative churning.

The Cow in the Elevator makes significant contributions to understanding Hindu thought in the context of twenty-first-century urban life with its characteristic globalized economies and ecologies. Above all, Srinivas elucidates in rich detail the aims, uses, and implications of ritual action, dimensions that are performative, aesthetic, and efficacious. Early in her book, she asks potent questions: “What if the desired state is not stability but fracture? What if today the pursuit of wonder is the point of ritual rather than the quick return to the solidity of structure?” (5). Such questions provoke creative rethinking in the anthropology of religion. In posing the possibility that the end point of ritual is no longer to deliver revitalized participants back to established solidarities, Srinivas suggests a disruption of some time-honored analytic models. She speculates that the point of ritual may be to inure contemporary actors to ongoing instability and even to render that perpetual instability desirable. Her coined phrase “rupture-capture” helps readers grasp this not-so-easy concept.

The Cow in the Elevator worked a particular magic in my fall 2018 graduate seminar. The seminar focused initially on postcolonial critiques of religious studies and anthropology as well as possibilities for decolonizing methods. I had strategically placed Srinivas’s book at the point in the semester when—having trudged through swamps and muck to find all that was wrong in the world exemplified by the anthropology of religion and its inevitable complicity with colonialism and imperialism—we were ready for positive moves.

Daniel Kimmel had entered our PhD program just a couple of months earlier. I cite with permission his unpublished comments on The Cow in the Elevator, posted on our course’s discussion forum. He stresses his “relief in reading not just another ‘dark anthropology,’ and yet a project that thoroughly takes the ‘darkness’ seriously even as it tries to imagine what ethical, responsible, wondrous hope would look like in practice despite the darkness … relief from the quagmire of theoretical and methodological conundrums we have been discussing in order to catch a glimpse of something real and hopeful.” I could not say it any better.

As an anthropologist of the rural and provincial, I found myself wishing that Srinivas had clarified what there is in contemporary urban temple ritual that totally departs from rural practices. The use of currency in offerings and ornamentation is commonplace in village shrines, but nothing like the masses of artfully arranged coins and bills Srinivas observes in Bangalore. First it appeared to me that urban ritual excess masked genuine continuities with rural worship, but could it also be that excess itself defines rupture (and capture)? Chapter 3, “In God We Trust: Economies of Wonder and Philosophies of Debt,” presents a discussion of wealth, poverty, and karma that can seem discordant with the book’s overall approach to contemporary religiosity as benign. Here Srinivas notes that “the pursuit of wonder led not to the ethical goal of inclusivity but to individual gain and the criminalization of the poor” (128). Better-off persons in Bangalore pass judgment on those who, for whatever reasons, have failed to participate in an Indian-shining vision. There is a bit of a disconnect between this frank observation and the author’s evident reveling in the

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With the rise of the financial sustainability doctrine in development, decreases in funding from traditional donor organizations, and the entrance of new players like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, solutions to poverty are increasingly sought in the operations of the market. Microfinance is the paradigmatic example of a market-based poverty alleviation strategy, one that is seen as particularly effective at lifting women out of poverty. But what happens to these ideals when for-profit institutions start to see microfinance as a win-win proposition—as a way to do well financially by doing good socially?

Based on 14 months of fieldwork with a commercial microfinance institution (MFI) she calls DENA and the slum dwellers who borrowed from them in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), India, Sohini Kar argues that for-profit microfinance draws the residents of impoverished neighborhoods into the global financial system without significantly improving their situations. Financializing Poverty demonstrates how borrowers in Kolkata are tied into international systems of debt and risk mitigation through their increasing dependence on small microfinance loans “to make ends meet in a situation of constant lack” (9). Meanwhile, MFIs engaging in what Kar terms bottom-of-the-pyramid capitalism extract capital from the poor that fuels speculation, circulation, and profit making at the top.

Drawing from the broad social science literature on financialization and ethnographies of microfinance, Kar seeks to look beyond “the simple transaction between the borrower and lender” to explore the “intricate network of financial flows” (10) in which MFIs and their borrowers are embedded. She uses Lieba Faier’s concept of sites of encounter, from her 2009 Intimate Encounters: Filipina Women and the Remaking of Rural Japan, to incorporate global finance, state and institutional norms and regulations, and people’s everyday practices into her analysis. This lens allows her to trace the connections between a meeting of frustrated borrowers seeking new loans from DENA staff, who had no money to lend, and the history of microfinance and banking regulations in India. A liquidity crunch among Indian MFIs was triggered by a regulatory change in a single state where many were headquartered because the national government had yet to clearly regulate this interstitial financial sector.

The particular experiences of DENA staff and borrowers illustrate broader trends in urban microfinance. DENA workers struggled to generate loans and maintain high repayment rates while distancing themselves from the image of the moneylender, whom they had supposedly replaced for the better. Kar asserts that microfinance has been domesticated in the Kolkata slums because it has been enfolded into women’s domestic responsibilities—poor urban women relied on microfinance debt to perform middle-class identities through consumption. These women had to manage a variety of relationships in their homes and neighborhoods to maintain access to loans and microfinance groups. For example, DENA required a male guarantor for loans to female borrowers, so women needed to maintain good relations with their husbands or sons to ensure continued access to credit. Using the labor demanded from both microfinance workers and female borrowers to make microfinance happen, Kar demonstrates how financialization remains enmeshed in personal relationships despite the alienation and abstraction of debt that are the focus of social studies of finance.

To maintain high repayment rates and continued access to bank financing, DENA needed to mitigate the risk of lending to the poor. When global financial technologies and “objective” measures of creditworthiness fell short, DENA workers relied on Bengali moral economies to evaluate borrowers. Loan officers used social hierarchies and classed behavior norms to judge whether a borrower had the capacity to repay a loan—something that could not be captured by the quantitative information sought in the official loan application. As commercial microfinance has moved away from the group-lending model, MFIs have sought other strategies to mitigate the risk of default. For example, DENA used life insurance, which borrowers were required to take for the duration of their loans, as a way to “collateralize life itself” (168) and ensure repayment in the face of increased mortality rates among the poor. While this entanglement of death and debt can have tragic consequences, Kar argues
that the popular focus on debt-related suicide “obscures the reality of living in increasing conditions of precarity” (29), where credit has become a necessary means to access privatized services.

Financializing Poverty attempts to tackle the long-standing tension in anthropology over how to adequately analyze the influence of global structures on the local lives that are the stuff of ethnography. The sites of encounter methodology that Kar employs provides a way to incorporate global phenomena into anthropological analysis. However, it also overburdens the analysis with histories and literatures that do not leave Kar enough space to fully engage with the specificities of her field site. The history of poor banking in India, while certainly important to the story of microfinance, is not as important to Kar’s story as the history of a specifically Bengali identity and its marginalization within the wider Indian polity, which shapes how the process of financialization unfolds in Kolkata. Bengaliness, the hierarchies it contains, and the ideals it promotes fundamentally shape how borrowers enfold microfinance into their domestic lives and how loan officers determine creditworthiness.

In her ethnographically grounded chapters, Kar offers useful insights and analytical concepts that benefit the study not only of microfinance but of other global financial processes. Her engagement with the struggles of loan officers to maintain a moral identity while extracting repayments from desperately poor borrowers is an important addition to existing work on microfinance, which tends to focus on borrowers’ experiences. Her analyses of how financialization intersects with everyday practices in Kolkata’s slums, specifically in terms of the collateralization of life and the domestication of microcredit, are significant scholarly interventions that can direct future inquiries into the very human dimensions of other globalized abstractions.


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In A Village Goes Mobile, Sirpa Tenhunen investigates the relationship between telephony and social change in the village of Janta, West Bengal, in the northeastern part of India over a period of approximately 15 years between 1999 and 2013. Intervening in theoretical discussions about phone use contexts and mediation, she offers insights into how mobile phones became ubiquitous in a remote rural place in a developing country and what the social, cultural, political, and economic effects of incorporating them into everyday life have been. The book is divided into eight chapters: chapters 1 and 8 constitute the introduction and conclusion, chapter 2 situates the book in the relevant scholarly literature, and chapters 3 to 7 examine the arrival and incorporation of mobile phones into everyday life in Janta, their economic consequences, gender and kinship relations, political organization, and shifting village intersectionalities.

A unique feature of this ethnography is the fact that Sirpa Tenhunen could witness the successive transformation of everyday life since the very first mobile phones arrived in the village at the turn of the century until about 2013, when they had become nearly ubiquitous and were increasingly being replaced by smartphones. Yet as she demonstrates, the implications of greater acceptance of phones into everyday life have been less than straightforward. On the one hand, societal dynamics around mobile phones have been similar to other contexts: better possibilities for social and economic coordination, the ability of farmers and entrepreneurs to expand their information bases and economic opportunities, and the subtle challenging of social hierarchies and gender roles. On the other hand, however, Tenhunen argues that this is hardly the kind of networked individualism that scholars such as Manuel Castells attribute to increasing ubiquity of information and communications technology into the network society. Rather, even as mobile phones afford increased economic opportunities, for example, they also enable greater competition that effectively undercuts these increased opportunities. Similarly, even though mobile phones were crucial to enabling the political opposition to cohere and displace the ruling political party after nearly two decades in power, political organizations nonetheless continue to build from, rather than against, existing understandings of politics and authority (deriving, in particular, from local leaders’ ability to mediate disputes on the ground).

Interestingly, in spite of the increased use of smartphones in Janta, many rural citizens use them not so much for connecting to the internet—since calling and using data services remain relatively expensive commodities—but rather as a source of entertainment by acquiring a wide range of audiovisual content from local shopkeepers. Thus, mobile phones mediate not only existing contexts of residents’ social interactions enacted through visiting each other but also other speech and action contexts, such as using loudspeakers in public spaces and watching television. In this, Tenhunen argues against the model of rational individuals searching for information to better their condition that the discourse of development portrays. However, following Arjun Appadurai, she contends that smartphones might nonetheless serve developmental purposes by activating rural citizens’ capacity to aspire through the consumption of media.
Beyond its ethnographic content, this monograph is also a useful resource for understanding the anthropological and allied literature on mobile phone use. It provides a thorough overview of related literature (in technology studies, for example), and throughout Tenhunen identifies both where she builds on existing scholarship as well as where her text differs. She also provides succinct articulations of different theoretical approaches to the study of media that will be useful for new entrants to this domain of research. Because of this, her book can be used both for graduate seminars as well as for undergraduate courses across a wide variety of fields, especially to complicate deterministic and often uncritically celebratory narratives of the role of technology in development.

I did, however, miss the kind of thick description characteristic of ethnographies. The author’s voice tends to dominate the text, often at the expense of more fully illuminating the everyday social lives of Janta residents. This is particularly unfortunate precisely because Tenhunen potentially has material to richly detail changing societal dynamics in Janta over a period of almost 15 years, unlike other ethnographies that are much more limited in the scope of their fieldwork. Interesting ethnographic categories such as “exchanging news” (*khabor neua*) and “talk time” also remain unexplored. Some copyediting oversights are especially unfortunate, such as the categorization of “low and high” men and women instead of “low-caste and high-caste” men and women. A few translations from Bengali to English seem off the mark—for example, *poriborton* is translated as “progress” rather than “change”—but this might be a function of readers having access only to a very small excerpt from the interview.

These limitations notwithstanding, *A Village Goes Mobile* makes significant contributions to our understanding of mobile phone uses and impacts, especially outside dominant Western contexts. The text will be valuable in graduate seminars as well as an accessible resource for undergraduate teaching.


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Migrants return to the places they left, and this has a lot to do with the affective labor that keeps families together despite the distancing that migration entails. In the Philippines, return migrants are called balikbayan, and Eric Pido follows them as they return from long sojourns in the United States. With the money they have made, they have become crucial catalysts for urban renewal in Manila.

Balikbayan as a generation of retirement returnees have a strong influence on life in Manila that spans the economy in their investments in real estate, ethnicity in their nostalgic return to their ancestral homeland, and leisure and consumption in their participation in tourism ventures. At the same time (and this is similar to what other studies of return migration demonstrate), the affective complexities that evolve exacerbate a mixture of feelings from nostalgia to alienation as well as, by extension, intense emotions of ambivalence and discomfort. Pido expertly unravels these and other complexities through a rich ethnographic account of homing as he illuminates the connectivities of globalization, development, and transnationalism with the social and cultural geographies of return migration to the homeland, which remains an aspirational and often not quite arrived at place.

The book is divided into two sections. The first covers departures, outlining the trajectories of Filipinos’ overseas working lives within the American dream; the second covers returns, outlining the performativities of returnees as tourists, retirees, and homecoming diasporas and the national discourse regarding their relocation to their homeland. Throughout Pido unmasks the messiness of materialities in the everyday lives of returnees by articulating the subjectivities shaped by capitalist landscapes of migration and relocation. He dissects some of the obvious binaries that reveal important power entanglements, such as capitalist enterprises and exploitations of laborers, senders and receivers of remittances, periphery and core, and host and homeland. And he eloquently traces the material and cultural landscapes of all these transnational connectivities and uncovers the parameters of migrants’ and returnees’ intentions as they are shaped by aspirations, dreams, frustrations, and negotiations.

Pido expands the mainstream scholarly gaze into the literature on social remittances by offering insights into how transnational ties unfold. Here some of the historical findings about the cultural geographies of kinship ties and obligations are stretched far beyond the geographic boundaries of the Philippines. The impact of remittances appears to be equally important for those sending them, not just for those receiving them. Pido poignantly asserts that “remittances directly reconfigure balikbayan into ambivalently regarded figures within the cultural fabric of everyday life in the Philippines” (52). While they shoulder the responsibility for providing economic support for their families, some of the participants paint a portrait of complexities and inequalities in the relationships between Filipinos in the United States and those in the Philippines. Some of their experiences vividly illustrate how these relationships are further constrained by friction in the household, compromises
that wider family members have to make, and the burdensome angels of familial obligations.

While return migrants are challenged and confronted by what the author calls the immigrant moment upon resettlement in their homeland after years overseas, they paradoxically sell the American dream in the Philippines by way of transnational real estate transactions. Filipino realtors often assume the role of “emotional counselors” (82) in addition to their usual responsibilities. They must help return migrants envision ways to refurbish local housing stock to make it feel more homelike—that is, more American—to people who would rather imagine that they are, despite their new tastes and habits, merely coming home. One focus is the living room—without traditional gendered segregating spaces—where family members, friends, and visitors can eat, drink, sing, gossip, joke, and share stories in the midst of a cluttered room showcasing American livelihoods and various familial accomplishments in the form of objects that immigrated with the returnee. Vignettes of home decor are vividly replete with symbolic materialities and quirky domestic idiosyncrasies that fuse notions of modernity and locality.

Balikbayans also assume new roles through their participation in their homeland’s tourism economy but, again, with elements of ambivalence that require emotional negotiations. In addition to navigating the state administrative bureaucracies, they tell tales of assault, kidnapping, theft, and other kinds of crime that turn everyday life into a new narrative of contagious anxiety. These tales have a powerful impact on how balikbayans imagine their return and, while exaggerated, are just fictional projections. “Balikbayan paranoia” (122) ironically transforms nostalgia into anxiety. While the fantasy doesn’t exactly materialize into a nightmare, such elements nevertheless shape return stories.

There is also an overarching national discourse of homecoming that shapes the retirement landscape of returnees into a “geography of exception” (163). This by extension strengthens the retirement industry in the form of retirement villages that encapsulate economic development, tourism, and migration in one setting. Hence, Migrant Returns is a paradigmatic illumination of the multiple landscapes—personal, familial, social, and cultural—created by re-settlement, representation, and ultimately return that are emblematic of any relocation ideology. Pido shifts conceptual attention to the practices producing all these changes in the social, built, personal, and public environments in Metro Manila and the modes of mobility livelihoods of balikbayans. His conceptual interventions embrace discourses of globalization and transnationalism without losing sight of the microsocialities of migrant relationships with the state, affective labor, and social inequalities. By articulating the multiple logics of global economies and local social geographies, he has given us a nuanced ethnographic plunge into the multidirectional complexities and paradoxical positions of the current global diasporic moment.


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Elif Babül’s Bureaucratic Intimacies is a masterful ethnography of human rights training programs for state officials in Turkey. Babül begins with the chronological story of Turkey’s efforts to obtain membership in the European Union since 1987, a point when the government began to undertake the legal reforms required for membership. This ethnography of 11 human rights training programs from 2007 to 2014 is situated in an era when Turkey’s ascension to membership still seemed possible. The training sessions reveal how workers react to, interpret, deflect, and attempt to reframe the messages of human rights received from the outsider, foreign, EU trainers. Training programs prove to be fruitful sites of ethnographic encounters as police officers, judges, prosecutors, prison guards, teachers, religious officials, and health care professionals struggle to reframe their understanding of the role of the state and their position in it.

Babül supplements an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion with insightful ethnographic interludes. In the first interlude, “Setting the Stage,” we learn how state government offices, such as a courthouse in Ankara, overlay official functions and duties with paternalistic hierarchical structures of authority and nurturance, resulting in social relationships that are simultaneously comforting and condescending. The highly educated, cosmopolitan university professors who often work with the training programs are given appropriate deference, as are outside experts from the European Union to whom even the professors must defer. The dynamic of insider-outsider, between Turks in terms of class and between Turks and foreigners, is the ethnography’s central theme.

One goal of the training programs is to connect people and create an international community, shaped through EU frameworks of governance. Babül recounts how the opposite is achieved. From the viewpoint of the government workers, being international means being out of touch with the realities Turkey faces, politically and economically. Tensions over who will dare reveal the inner workings of the state are ever present in the sessions. A strange double self-colonialization process happens in the training programs,
with layers of people trying to get the upper hand and establish who has legitimacy.

Another goal of the sessions is to implement policies and procedures that make government officials perform specific tasks. By disconnecting from Turkish politics—and thereby delegitimizing the hard work of human rights activists in Turkey—the EU trainers hope to disable the expressions of hierarchy and power in offices and persuade the workers to fulfill their job descriptions. Yet the trainers also tell the workers that they need to act with a conscience and practice empathy as part of their service. Asking the workers to act within a moral framework while ignoring the political context creates unresolved contradictions. The workers, feeling that they embody the power and authority of the state while expressing their powerlessness under the system, are insulted that a foreign outsider would tell them they need further instruction. The trainers try to manage the workers’ sense of pride and play to their sense of status in communicating their messages.

Translators are squeezed between the foreign trainers and the workers, who express disappointment over the translators’ alliance with the foreigners and their implicit support for the program. Translators learn to reframe the trainers’ messages in an indirect and polite language and style to navigate this bumpy terrain. Babül recounts what the workers say to each other in front of the uncomprehending training leader. Expressing solidarity with the implicit attempts to make the foreign-led techniques of governance irrelevant, translators frequently claim that some of the terms, such as amnesty, are untranslatable. This becomes an effective strategy for defusing tense situations in which the workers are being asked to confront real outcomes of EU policies.

Unbeknownst to the foreign trainers, the government officials who deliver periodic pep talks during the training programs also subvert their authority by indirectly communicating with them through a younger translator even if they are fluent in the trainers’ language. As one informant put it, “government workers in the audience ‘perform Turkey, perform their institution’” (155). Though the trainers may not be aware that they are being dismissed, the audience, Babül relates, understands this performance to be a declaration of political superiority.

The upshot is that the human rights training sessions generally do not achieve their goals, but Babül entertains two examples of how they do. By asking the workers in the police and security services to empathize with individuals they have abused and tortured, some realize the pain they have caused. These revelations accompany a desire to confess in the sessions. The resulting catharsis leads the workers to reevaluate their behavior. In the second example, Babül recounts how female government workers draw encouragement from the human rights messages regarding gender- and sex-based discrimination to work toward empowerment, finding that they can forge an alliance with the foreigners and benefit from that alliance.

What is most significant to Babül about the training sessions is the fact that they reveal the texture of the collective secrets that underpin Turkish society. In the sessions, secrets are revealed, concealed, mistranslated, and knowingly unspoken. But what to do with these secrets? Will the workers be moved by their conscience to right the wrongs of the past, or will they uphold the structures of authority of officials, managers, bureaucrats, and dignitaries that implicitly justify the arbitrary use of power?

Babül concludes that the training sessions need to engage an explicitly political agenda for reform. By focusing on procedures alone, with no recognition that government must include morality, empathy, and conscience, there is no need to change how power is used. Rather, techniques learned in the sessions justify more precise and exacting state violence. Further, the sessions reinforce the perception that EU officials do not know or understand the realities in Turkey. Their ideas are untranslatable, virtually unthinkable, so how could they be implemented? Babül’s ethnography raises the bar for what a critical analytical work can achieve by drawing from finely observed, precisely recorded, and incisively rendered data. Her book makes a significant contribution to the ethnographic literature on Turkey as well as studies of human rights as bureaucratic process.


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A key feature of the Islamic resurgence that has swept Muslim lands over the past generation has been a heightened concern among believers to understand and enact the ethical and legal traditions known as sharia in personal and public life. The consequences of this project have been particularly striking in Muslim-majority countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, where sharia initiatives have coincided with equally transformative projects of state making, capitalist globalization, and citizenship contention.

It is this broad historical backdrop that informs Timothy Daniels’s welcome book on the varieties and politics of sharia in contemporary Malaysia. Daniels is a professor of anthropology at Hofstra University in New York and the author or editor of four highly regarded books on Islam, ethnicity, and cultural performance in Malaysia and
Indonesia. His research in Muslim Southeast Asia, begun in the late 1990s, includes more than three and a half years of residence in East and West Malaysia as well as another year of research in Java. This new book builds most directly on ethnographic research he conducted in six states in Malaysia from 2010 to 2012.

Not insignificantly, Daniels is also a Muslim American, a fact that allows him to bring a subtle reflexivity to the twin tasks he sets for himself: “first, to describe and analyze various conceptions of sharia distributed among Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysian society and the manner in which these notions articulate with various other forms of cultural knowledge; and second, to discern the ways these discourses and related knowledge and practices are enmeshed in broader sociopolitical processes” (5–6). The actors around whom Daniels weaves his ethnography include Muslim feminists and non-Muslims as well as Muslim jurists and Islamists. One of this book’s many achievements, then, is that it provides a vivid account of the meanings of sharia for pious Muslims while highlighting its significance and political implications for non-Muslims.

A trademark of Daniels’s scholarship has long been his commitment to integrating a symbolic anthropology sensitive to the distributional variation in forms of cultural knowledge with a cognitive anthropology responsive to the fact that meaning is not cut of a single cognitive cloth but constructed and lived in different ways. The theoretical project that unites these concerns is what he describes as a “redrawn anthropology of knowledge,” which aims “to not only produce rigorous descriptions and analysis of conceptual phenomena, but also to build insightful . . . interpretations of the immediate and broader contexts” (18).

It is this broad theoretical mandate that underlies the range of topics Daniels addresses in this impressively comprehensive book. In chapter 1, he reviews the history of sharia traditions in the region known today as Malaysia, emphasizing the interplay between popular varieties of tasawwuf mysticism and sharia legalism in the precolonial period. He then considers the ways in which Portuguese, Dutch, and then British colonialism brought about a “reduction of the scope of sharia laws to Islamic family and personal laws” (33). The chapter ends with a discussion of competing models of sharia in postcolonial Malaysia, including the ways in which these are and are still today intertwined with “alternative senses of cultural citizenship” (38).

Chapter 2 turns its gaze to family law and the tension between state-sanctioned sharia and alternative varieties proposed by, on the one hand, liberals and Muslim feminists and, on the other, members of the religious bureaucracy and conservative Muslim civil society. Daniels examines controversies in contemporary Malaysian society with regard to polygyny, child marriage, and interreligious marriage as well as the freedom to leave one’s religion. He also highlights key features of the broader sociopolitical context. These include the fact that members of the state religious bureaucracy “consider the secular format inherited from the colonial era as increasingly problematic” (74) and persistently if quietly work to extend the influence of sharia norms. Interestingly, although state officials have in recent years stiffened their opposition to liberal human rights proposals, they have been more open to dialogue on gender issues with Muslim feminists, like those active in the globally influential organization Sisters in Islam.

In chapter 3, Daniels is concerned with alternative models of sharia toward criminal law. Here, too, state officials have sought to present themselves as proponents of a moderate middle way. However, the overall trend in state policy has been to increase penalties for sharia criminal offenses in what many people hope is a prelude to a full application of hudud penalties for such crimes as theft, fornication, and apostasy. Notwithstanding protests from Muslim feminists and liberals, Daniels shows that there is a broad consensus in Muslim society that there is no human right authorizing Muslims to violate divine commands.

Chapter 4 examines the ways in which “religious ethical models . . . articulate with other notions and ideological formulations” (141) in the marketplace. In recent decades, these issues have caught the attention of state officials and societal actors seeking to turn Malaysia into a global center of Islamic finance, insurance, and halal certification. Chapters 5 and 6 consider the pro-sharia and contra-sharia perspectives respectively, showing their links to rival visions of citizenship and nation. These contests have contributed to a “growing polarization of liberal rights and normative sharia projects,” a development that has in turn “only added impetus to the move of dominant Malay forces toward a more-sharia-oriented state and Malay-dominated hierarchical image of nation” (180). Chapter 7, the book’s last full chapter, examines all these trends from the vantage point of individual interviewees. These accounts lend a rich personal dimension to the chapter’s overall conclusion: “the widespread cultivation of pious dispositions” has created “an upward pressure on authorities to formulate discourses and policies that are more sharia-compliant” (189).

Living Sharia is one of the most theoretically sophisticated, rigorously empirical, and ethnographically engaging works in the anthropology of Islam in years. At a moment when “discourses about sharia are integral to sociopolitical dynamics in American society” (5), this is a book that deserves to be read by anthropologists and everyone concerned with the challenge of religious ethics and citizenship in our late modern world.
As we study mobility in a moment of global extremes, some of us find ourselves drawn to commuter journeys. We choose as objects of study the bicycle ride, the street crowded with motorbikes, or, in the case of Caroline Melly’s *Bottleneck*, taxi drivers and others navigating traffic jams in Dakar, Senegal. As her book shows, these everyday mobilities can themselves be social infrastructures through which individuals reach to access transnational flows of capital and bodies.

Melly’s ethnography of gendered experiences of economic (im)mobility unfolds around the central paradox of “rapid change and inexorable stasis” (74) in poststructural adjustment Dakar. Her research subjects used the term *embouteillage* (*bottleneck*) both on the street and in the office. Following it across these settings, Melly articulates “how diverse actors harness bottlenecks of all sorts to cultivate projects, networks, and identities that help them lay claim to the city and its future” (10–11). The actors she develops at length are the *taksimann* (taxi driver), the inside-out house, the myth of the migrant-investor, and the missing men who sailed away in fantastical pirogues. These characters illustrate how, given the lack of local opportunities to build wealth, “one must in fact *migrate abroad* to be fully present in contemporary Dakar” (93; emphasis in original). Conducting her fieldwork at a time when pathways to migration were increasingly dangerous and inaccessible, Melly found seeming incongruities inhabiting the same spaces. Local and global hitched the same ride.

For example, when Melly went from seeing her daily commute through gridlocked streets as time away from research to viewing the taxicab ride as a field site in itself, her attention was drawn to her *taksimann* informants’ “everyday efforts to make sense of a rapidly changing city and to assert themselves as present in meaningful ways” (57). Inside a vehicle stuck in Senegalese traffic, she learned that taxicab ownership was a symbol of the ability to get away from it—that is, the ability to access transnational migration and transcend the need for a more streamlined local road infrastructure. The influx of money from abroad then went into the houses under perpetual construction, whose imaginary inhabitants had no commuting needs. However, Melly does not portray her informants as frozen or absent; rather, “they cast urban belonging as a process, an ongoing, shifting, and complex relationship to transnational mobilities of labor and capital” (95).

*Bottleneck* contributes to anthropological literatures on structural adjustment and its aftereffects, money and finance, and infrastructure. Its special contribution, though, is to the interdisciplinary field of mobilities. In bringing together the everyday scale of urban wayfinding with the global scale of money migration, Melly’s ethnography parallels the growth of interest in mobility justice, Mimi Sheller’s concept asserting that these mobilities are both interrelated and inequitably distributed. In focusing on the bottleneck as the object of study, Melly suggests that we consider it to be its own global type rather than an aberration or a roadblock to the real research destination. This is a productive step beyond the typical approach to transportation development, which tends to portray non-Western street behaviors as barriers to safe streets. In my own work on bicycle advocacy in the United States, I have frequently encountered advocates and urban planners promoting bicycle lanes and other infrastructure projects with little regard for diversity among communities’ own traffic cultures. Ethnographic co-presence in the bottleneck, understanding what it is to be stuck in a global gyre, presents an alternative to simply condemning those who cannot afford to be hypermobile or at least mobile in the right way.

Melly’s ethnography also offers a case study of the phenomenon wherein, through the development of new mass mobility systems, elected officials flirt with the global capital flows from which the masses are excluded. Her book contrasts the marketing of a new autoroute symbolizing Senegalese mobility futures with its bottlenecked present. Whether announced by national politicians competing for global development investment or mayors competing for creative-class industries, infrastructure projects tend to hold value for individuals other than the existing inhabitants of the urban zones they service. Imagined, wealthier, future users are the target audience for these projects. Melly could have drawn out the future-oriented parallel between the autoroute and the inside-out house in order to contrast corporate and individual visions for Senegal.

Melly makes a strong case for the *embouteillage* as a global type, since the space-time skipping between local and global, familiar to our research subjects, is also familiar to ethnographers. Her interlocutors were aware of her ability to travel between California and Senegal with ease and wished they too could do so. As hypermobile subjects, we flow across the national borders that stymie so many others; at the scale of the street, we can be as stuck as any other commuter. We both empathize and struggle with the privilege of getting to leave the bottleneck behind us. Our individual hypermobility does not give us the power to end borders, but we carry stories across them. Ethnographers know that human infrastructures keep working alongside global infrastructures inaccessible to locals, who adapt around them as needed. Ready to cocreate counternarratives complicating the expectation that
only physical infrastructures can confer civilization, perhaps ethnographers have professional insights to contribute to social movements intent on building the new.


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Technically, a fistula is a connection between two anatomical spaces that should be separated for proper physiological functioning. An obstetric fistula is a rare and feared complication of childbirth, implying a postnatal connection between the bladder or the rectum and the vagina. Fistula results in chronic incontinence and is a disabling condition. More frequent in low-income countries, it is associated with women whose labor was pathologically long, counting in days rather than hours, and who did not receive appropriate care. Fistula and incontinence do not strike randomly but follow the lines of economic inequities. Women who suffer from obstructed labor without access to appropriate care are overrepresented in rural and poor populations. Transportation and obstetric care must be paid for, and many families cannot afford this cost. For Alison Heller, fistula in Niger is a revealing example of the inequitable access to care intrinsic to global neoliberal health politics.

Yet as Heller points out, talking about fistula can also reveal symbolic inequities. When used by mass media and relief agencies, the term *fistula* stereotypes the lives of hundreds of women. In accounts that emphasize their misery, women living with fistula are portrayed as victims of stigma, victims who can be saved by surgery financed through Western humanitarian organizations. Heller recognizes the good intentions of many of these organizations and acknowledges their successes. But she also recognizes that women living with fistula are at the center of vested interests from many stakeholders and that this does not always serve their needs. In this rich ethnography, she deconstructs both the rhetorics and the politics of fistula as well as the situational nuances that affect these women.

As disruptive as living with fistula can be, the condition alone does not define the lives of women affected by it. After several stays in Niger and multiple conversations with women living with fistula, Heller explains that the condition does not constitute an absolute causal factor for stigma and isolation. As with many other injuries and despite its toll on the lives of women, fistula speaks to the former social and familial environment of women. This finding should not astonish any medical anthropologist; however, as Heller hints, the association of fistula with stigma tends to be taken for granted, leaving many complexities behind in media discourses.

Women explained to Heller the importance of having their mothers living close by. Mothers were held to be the strongest advocates for their daughters before and after birth. Mothers may insist on a timely transfer of their daughters to a hospital in case of a complicated labor, contributing to the prevention of fistula. The women interviewed stated that their mothers protected them against social stigma associated with fistula and mitigated negative reactions of relatives. Mothers are also said to provide affective and practical support to their daughters. In contrast, when their mothers were absent or deceased, women with fistula felt more vulnerable to exclusion from their other relatives.

Heller also noted that the type of marriage and the quality of marital relationships influenced reactions to fistula. The marriages of women living with fistula had often been arranged by the family, but for several women it had been a union by choice and for love. In a survey conducted by Heller, women living with fistula endured less exclusion when their marriages had been supported by their family, be it a marriage of love or an arranged one. Similarly, women who had lived in close relationships with their husbands prior to the traumatic birth were not rejected after the fistula occurred. In such cases, husbands continued the relationships with their wives and showed support for them. Relationships with cowives—polygyny is possible in Niger—added complexity to the situation of women with fistula. The condition may provide a rationale for pressuring one’s husband to divorce a rival wife. However, women with fistula, who are seen as less menacing, may also experience a truce in a competition between cowives.

After having detailed the diverse fates of women living with fistula, Heller engages in a critique of the fistula politics that she witnessed during her fieldwork. Much of her ethnographic work was conducted in the centers where women waited for surgery. If patience seems to be a local dimension of Muslim humility, this quality is abused when it comes to the organization of fistula care. The lives of women are suspended for months or even years while they wait for surgery. In some centers, surgery is not offered but is falsely promised. In other places, surgery is not performed regularly, and the institutions are unable to cope with the number of women waiting. For political reasons, one center that is operational does not receive clients from other facilities and functions below its capacity.

Women with less severe fistula who have not yet been operated upon are given priority in the centers, because these women present better chances of healing. Women with complicated fistula and more severe incontinence thus
wait for longer periods of time in the centers, facing the risk that their social and marital relationships drift apart. Many women never heal despite the intriguingly high number of operations they undergo. For Heller, the situation in Niger contrasts with that in other African countries, where women with fistula are healed in a timely manner. She points out the different organizations of the health systems stemming from the intervention of global financial institutions into national health policies. Women with unresolved fistula are failed twice: first when they go into labor and do not receive the care that would prevent the injury itself and, second, when their condition results in endless stays in fistula centers where they receive little information and care.

Heller is very convincing when she describes the trajectories of the women she met. Through her we hear the nuanced voices of women that are rarely heard, especially when their stories do not fit into Western rhetorics of misery and rescue. However, she is less persuasive when she writes about the politics of fistula. Her hypotheses about the intervention of global institutions into the Nigerian health system make sense, but some of her affirmations could be supported by thicker ethnographic material. Overall, however, this essential book is a must-read for medical anthropologists and health care professionals dedicated to studying and improving reproductive health in low-income countries.


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"All in all, what we are observing in Russia today is what the world looks like when journalism is made superfluous . . . where disregard for factual truths leads to a suspension of reality" (219). With these ominous words, Natalia Roudakova sums up her study of the unraveling of professional journalism in Russia over the past 30 years. Hers is a nuanced institutional study of journalism during the post-Soviet period that elucidates what happens when journalism is monetized and co-opted for new political ends. Of particular interest to anthropologists is Roudakova’s use of ethnographic data to contextualize the shifting meanings that journalists themselves assign to this process of unraveling. The book also serves as an uncomfortable but timely cautionary tale for contemporary Western liberal democracies that have their own issues with the instrumentalization of journalism by extremist ideologues.

The book is a combination of journalism studies, anthropology, ethics, and moral philosophy that focuses on the ethical and epistemic dimensions of post-Soviet political change. Roudakova moves beyond stereotypical representations of Soviet journalists as “cynical careerists, spineless yes-men, or closeted dissidents” (3) as she carefully examines the intersections of and divergences between journalism and propaganda. She contests the standard narrative that depicts a short-lived “free” Russian press (circa early 1990s) derailed by powerful elites (presidents, oligarchs, media moguls), noting that such a scenario obscures the broader sociocultural dimensions of the transformation. To explore the complexities, she introduces an ethics-based vocabulary to the discussion with a focus on the central trope of truth seeking and truth telling.

Roudakova begins her analysis with an alternative conception of truth that emerges out of trust rather than mistrustful skepticism. Citing Steven Shapin’s 1994 A Social History of Truth, she defines knowledge as a collective good, a joint effort based on integrity, honesty, and civility among a network of individuals. In this manner, she maintains, Soviet journalists shared a truth- and justice-seeking ethic, even under Communist Party censorship, which their readership recognized. Borrowing from Michel Foucault’s discussion of the concept of parrhesia—frank and courageous speech delivered with risk—she shows how journalists earned this trust by monitoring government actions and publicizing abuses of power, while taking care not to criticize the communist project or its top leaders directly. Roudakova asserts that the party accepted the oversight of lower and mid-level managers and administrators by whistle-blowing citizens as disseminated in the press because it depended on publicity generated by the press to enforce social conformity. Journalism in the Soviet era served as an imperfect but still important fourth estate in terms of its watchdog role. Roudakova dedicates nearly two chapters to documenting these features of parrhesia speech and the political and cultural tensions involved.

The unraveling of professional journalism begins, in her analysis, with the transition to capitalism, the privatization of the media, and the commodification of journalists’ labor. For the first few years of this transition, journalism celebrated unprecedented freedom from censorship and record-high levels of public trust. However, public trust quickly declined after 1992 through a combination of media law changes, pan-Russian economic woes, struggles for profits in media organizations, and most notably the monetization of electoral coverage, namely, paid incentives to publish pro and con pieces about candidates that blurred boundaries between news and advertising. Roudakova presents several case studies from the Nizhny Novgorod region (formerly Gorky) that highlight the economic, political, and cultural forces at play in the
privatization of media ownership. The instrumentalization of the media in the hands of emerging cross-institutional groups—financiers, businesspeople, state agents, and security agencies operating in a private capacity—set the stage for the deprofessionalization of journalism. Truth seeking was replaced by the goal of pressuring opponents and business competitors. Concomitantly, a national spiral of cynicism emerged in the 2000s fueled by disenchantment with ideals, apathy, passivity, disengagement, and irony. By the time Putin rose to power, Russian officials had become proficient at cynical distancing and disinhibition as a form of domination—including mocking and bullying journalists and disagreeable others on Twitter. A loss of “the world in common” (188), consisting of shared meanings and norms of human relations, led to moral disorientation.

Within this setting, the journalists Roudakova interviewed and followed produced new meanings for normative behavior in the public realm. In the chapter titled “From the Fourth Estate to the Second Oldest Profession,” she notes how journalists openly use the metaphor of prostitution—linking power, honor, shame, and public exposure—to describe their new role. Just as Karl Marx characterized capitalistic wage labor as analogous to prostitution, journalists also found it a relevant metaphor to describe their new relations of subordination to cross-institutional groups and other actors. Roudakova provides details of the eroding value of truth seeking in the post-Soviet era, citing examples of fabricated stories, parody through hyperidentification with authoritative discourse—a late Soviet invention that anticipated Stephen Colbert’s hyperidentification with American flag and Republican Party swagger as a mode of comedy many years later. There is no lack of fascinating material in this overview

The inclusion of ethnographic close-ups in each chapter is another purposeful pedagogical feature. The
ethnographic close-ups are most often based on Rethmann's personal experience, and as such they provide a kind of immediacy and an emotionally evocative picture to go with the conceptual apparatus that surrounds them. For example, while discussing the culture of protest in Vladimir Putin’s Russia, Rethmann asks students to consider what kind of agency citizen-critics of the current Russian state have at their disposal when (case in point) they disagree with the ostentatious gentrification of certain old neighborhoods in the center of Moscow. If Clifford Geertz’s famous interpretation of the Balinese theater-state is more or less applicable to Russia—that is, Putin has created a theater-state with a “poetics of power that dramatizes [the state] as blessed, stable, and sacred” (58)—then what forms of public protest are possible or effective? Rethmann recalls an argument between two friends, one of whom set out on July 12, 2013, to stand in protest of the gentrification policies (30 protestors were subsequently arrested) and one who declared that the demonstration was nothing but a ritual with a foregone conclusion. Yet the activist who went to the aktion (this text uses the Russian term for a “public action in protest”) believed that it is precisely because of the theatrical, ritualistic assertion of state power that people have to find innovative ways to challenge and subvert the intended scene of nondissent.

One potential downside to the highly condensed juxtaposition of anthropological theory and vivid ethnographic close-ups is that the latter are highly specific, perhaps even exoticized, while the former can remain underdeveloped. Fortunately, for the most part, Rethmann tries hard to amend this tendency. The section on memory, loss, and religion includes material from the author’s project of photographing Russian (and non-Russian) families with impersonators dressed up as Stalin and then interviewing them. In a decidedly different vein, Rethmann includes a sketch of the resurgence of interest among post-Soviet Buryat women in the tantric practice of chöd, “ejecting one’s consciousness from one’s body” (31).

While these two examples don’t particularly cohere, we can certainly buy into the overall argument that these and other such phenomena index post-Soviet society’s painful lack of reconciliation with past trauma and the kind of asymmetrical nostalgia (as Svetlana Boym pointed out, more “sickness”—alos—that desire to return to the Soviet “home”—nostos) that might predictably plague communities plunged into chaos and poverty by the transition to the democratic free-market economy promised by advocates of neoliberalism. As Rethmann notes, many Westerners were surprised when post-Soviet Russians began to mourn the loss of a system that in the Western mind was synonymous with totalitarianism but for the majority of Russians was equally associated with ideals like equality, community, and work and concrete achievements like affordable public transportation, education, and health care.

Given the way that many people in the political class in the United States talk about Russia today, it would be very helpful if more Americans were less surprised about how Russians feel about their past. Russia: Anthropological Insights tries valiantly to be clear yet wide-ranging, highly scaffolded yet hoping for critical thinking. In the end, however, this textbook only deepened my sense of the “introduction to” genre’s weakness as a classroom tool in general. If anything, the primer is a helpful tool for the professor, who has collected and organized the best parts of previously delivered classroom lectures in one place. But some of the details—precisely the ones that were originally most contemporary and vivid—quickly go out of date. If our aim is to entice a new generation of diverse students to find out more about Russia, anthropology, or the anthropology of Russia, then introductory primers may have a place as long as they do not replace forays into primary materials, even if the latter are more ambiguous and require more classroom time and patience.


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Anyone wondering about the effects of austerity—in Europe, the Middle East, the Americas, Africa, or Asia—should read Living under Austerity: Greek Society in Crisis. The 12-chapter edited volume assembles scholars trained in anthropology, sociology, history, political science, criminology, and psychology to trouble accepted tropes about the meaning and effects of economic crisis through the case of post-2008 Greece. One of its most powerful contributions is its complication of the crisis framework. The other is its demonstration of the effects of that framework on people actually living in Greece.

Echoing anthropological work on humanitarian and economic crises elsewhere, several chapters articulate how the label “crisis” bifurcates historical consciousness into a before and an after. Bifurcation does several things. One, as anthropologist Aimee Placas shows, it sets the stage for past knowledge to be rendered false and imbues the future with the morally superior promise of revelation and redemption. Two, it gives the characteristics of the after an aura of newness that can ignore important continuities—for instance, according to Evdoxios Doxiadis, Greece’s long-standing indebtedness to foreign lenders as well as the fact that, as Heath Cabot and Tracey Rosen remind us, Greece has been a migration destination throughout its history.
Three, it reifies the assumption that crisis is an ontologically distinct episode with distinct characteristics rather than a constantly produced and politically productive discursive formation.

Anthropologists will appreciate how tethered to historical and social contexts each chapter is, whatever discipline informs it. From that unflinching commitment to austerity’s specific, contingent workings emerges a refreshing argument about the relationship between neoliberalism and austerity in contributions by Franklin Hess, Placas, Rosen, and Alexandra Zavos, who reveal that neoliberalism and austerity are not the same animal, even if they share logics easily pegged as part of a single global trend. In “Disrupted and Disrupting Consumption,” for example, Placas details subtle differences between the neoliberal consumer and austerity’s consumer. Drawing on fieldwork since the early 2000s, she argues that neoliberal Greek consumers were required to be consumer entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs of the self, educated, evaluative, and discerning models of Michel Foucault’s Homo œconomicus aiming “to bring anticipated good life into the present through credit spending” (332). Austerity’s consumers are “thrifty and careful,” their thirst for status and economic growth supplanted “by a set of practices that seek to control the uncertain future through careful management of finances” (338). Self-discipline remains under austerity, in other words, but its imaginative horizons and material outcomes differ.

This shift in imaginative horizons preoccupies Björn Bremer and Guillem Vidal, Noëlle Burgi, Kostas Kanellopoulos and Maria Kouisi, and Placas as they examine how overt dissent against Europe’s harshest austerity policies has quickly fizzled into political apathy and normalization. The book offers a model for asking why people fail to mobilize politically and why political mobilizations fail to effect change, in particular showing the role austerity policies play in both cases. In doing this, it echoes early anthropological investigations of what Émile Durkheim called anomie and what Max Weber called charismatic leadership (and its absence) at the turn of the 20th century (especially the chapter by Harris Mylonas), while adding consideration of austerity governance and the role austerity governance to more recent conversations about failed political mobilizations in places as different as post-Fukushima Japan (e.g., Aya Hirata Kimura’s 2016 Radiation Brain Moms and Citizen Scientists: The Gender Politics of Food Contamination after Fukushima) and occupied Palestine (e.g., Lori Allen’s 2013 The Rise and Fall of Human Rights: Cynicism and Politics in Occupied Palestine).

But the story the authors collectively tell is neither entirely grim nor entirely optimistic. In this sense, it propagates what I think of as one of the most useful anthropological sensibilities: the insistence on dwelling in the discomfort of not knowing who the good guys and the bad guys are and whether a practice is a manifestation of an oppressive system or a hopeful alternative to it. Placas, Zavos, Rosen, and Doxiadis most explicitly tackle this ambiguity. Doxiadis shows how foreign debt has simultaneously bolstered and undermined Greek sovereignty since Greek independence. In Zavos’s ethnography of female entrepreneurs who run Beaver, a queer bar in Athens, work practices “depart from usual profit-making market rationalities” (265) by stressing collectivism and fairness vis-à-vis producers as well as consumers—who are dubbed participants or collaborators—and a feminist ethic of cooperation and active engagement in producing the commons. Yet they also function according to gendered notions of (financial) tidiness, orderliness, and good customer service.

Thus, while the book is in direct conversation with current scholarship on precarity and human suffering, its moral is indeterminate. This is especially pronounced in the chapters on right-wing nationalism (Kostis Karpozilos), crime (Sappho Xenakis and Leonidas Cheliotis), asylum (Cabot), and the Chinese presence in Greece (Rosen). These chapters show among other things that xenophobia is just as unpredictable in (economically unstable) Europe as white supremacy is in the United States or as sectarianism is in the Middle East. Rosen’s ethnography of Greek perceptions of and orientations toward Chinese businesses, tourism, and investment in Greece reveals, for example, that Greeks bemoan the Chinese “invasion” as exploitation and have attacked Chinese people and shops. Yet the fact that islands like Santorini have oriented their tourism activities to attract Chinese tourists, which allows those visitors to mark their social status, inverts the typical narrative of exploitation, while the fact that a growing number of Greek businesses are exporting goods to China reveals that China articulates Greece’s complex, multidimensional experience of Europeanization and its larger form of economic globalization.

There are some potential problems with the book’s structure, especially an inadvertent reification of the very categories the authors wish to disrupt. The disciplinary approaches are separated along subject areas, so that (largely male) political scientists, historians, and sociologists cover party politics and nationalism in the book’s first half, while (only female) anthropologists and queer theorists cover such spheres of society and culture as consumption, gender, and migration in its second half. Front-loading five chapters covering the same analytical units one finds in mainstream representations of Greece’s crisis—foreign loans, leadership, political parties, elections, and mass demonstrations—reifies assumptions about which actors, processes, and affects matter most in Greece’s austerity story. It presents society and culture as units separate from such units as loans, leadership, and political parties and as derivative of them or as affected by them in a kind of domino effect model of causation rather than as part of a dialectical process. The order also reifies the naturalized divide between the public (as the masculine sphere of...
politics and debate) and the private (as the feminine sphere of care, consumption, and provisioning). I wonder how a different organization would have affected the volume's analytical force and creativity, if it had begun, for example, with Zavos’s “Gendering the Crisis” chapter, with its particularly powerful analysis of relationships among debt, gender, nation, and democracy.

Given recent moves toward thinking about ecologies, materiality, and the nonhuman more broadly, including in postcolonial and economically precarious contexts, I was interested to see that the chapters barely addressed these issues. It was similarly noteworthy to find little on tourism, real estate, and housing, given that thousands of Greeks are moving (back) in together to save money, selling properties to foreign investors, and renting out properties on home-sharing platforms like Airbnb. Yet the absence of these topics speaks more to the breadth of austerity’s reach—and to the impossibility of covering it all—than to the volume’s shortcomings. It suggests, in fact, that a sequel volume would be a welcome extension of the work begun here.


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In a celebrated 1986 samizdat paper, János Kenedi asked why “the Gypsy” had replaced “the Jew” as the favored racialized scapegoat in communist Hungary. Ingeniously, he argued that under “goulash communism” it paid to kick down and not up. But nothing that Kenedi or others (notably, US anthropologist Peter Bell) wrote at that time could have presaged the wave of anti-Romany hysteria that rose up after the transition and then swept over Hungary between 2006 and 2012. It is one of the many merits of Kristóf Szombati’s outstanding ethnography of noninstitutionalized politics in modern Hungary that he provides a wealth of new data about and many plausible explanations for what he calls redemptive anti-Gypsyism. Szombati has an eye for telling ethnographic detail, for the pertinent life history, for the quiddity of the local. And he uses such evidence to build a compelling comparison of the contrasting fate of political anti-Gypsyism in two radically divergent settlements.

Győngyös páta is a small village in a region of northeast Hungary devastated by the post-1990 transition. Between 1990 and 2007, 66 percent of individual agricultural producers went out of business here, and with them the last vestiges of employment for unskilled Roma workers also disappeared. According to Szombati, a series of well-intentioned policies from the 2006–10 socialist government—notably, promoting a cack-handed and counterproductive human rights desegregation discourse as well as amendments to police procedures that decriminalized many petty crimes—was the proximate cause of popular revolt in Győngyös páta. Old forms of implicit, selective treatment were now anathematized as racist and anti-Gypsy. Many villagers reacted defensively, allying themselves now with politicians who were openly anti-Gypsy. At the same time, an increasingly self-assertive young generation of Roma took over the public spaces of the village. A sense of chaotic decline was intensified as the local council began to promote heritage tourism in a village that Magyars felt had been taken over by Gypsies. It was an easy task for a local candidate from the nationalist Jobbik Party to step into this zone of multiple (including political) deprivations with a promise to redeem village life for the “decent” majority by “cleansing” the public realm of the “intruders” who menaced it and so end the spiral of decline.

Szombati chronicles both the Jobbik Party’s rise and rapid fall in Győngyös páta, but his most interesting case was Devescer, a small town that was home to an important number of successful entrepreneurial, Romany-speaking Roma whose role in the local economy as suppliers of cheap consumer goods was widely acknowledged. Devescer had weathered the economic transition far better than Győngyös páta, thanks to a brilliant entrepreneur who headed the local (communist) agricultural cooperative in the early 1980s. Then, in 2012, when a neighborhood feud broke out over a Magyar and a “Gypsy,” Jobbik forces popped up in the town to demonstrate in solidarity with the “defenseless” Magyars. But unlike Győngyös páta, here the local political elite denounced the staged protest as an unwanted intrusion that threatened to upset the social peace. Jobbik’s work was made more difficult because residents could draw on powerful memories of Romany businessmen standing at the community’s side during a devastating flood that inundated the town in 2010. While state rescue services were nowhere to be found, the Romany businessmen were on the scene within minutes, in their vans, bringing residents to safety.

*The Revolt of the Provinces* is an uneven work—indeed, one might say it has a certain schizophrenia of theoretical approach. Szombati convincingly rejects simplistic explanations of populism and anti-Gypsyism as exclusively driven *either* by culture *or* by economics. The durability of redemptive anti-Gypsyism rests, ultimately, on the ability of political leaders to plausibly attribute social breakdown to an ethnic Other, and the social forces that encourage electorates to adopt exclusionary political projects are always multiple: economic, social, and cultural. Some of the best passages in the book explore the profound sense of
abandonment, dislocation, and loss felt in provincial Hun-
gary in the aftermath of the collapse of the old, prosperous, 
late communist order. In these pages, Szombati is openly 
Weberian. But it is a different matter when he tries to place 
right-wing Hungarian politics in a general picture of the Eu-
ropean Union today. Here he falls back on the canard of 
neoliberal globalization. As in so much contemporary 
antropology, neoliberalism here acts as a bugbear label for 
rapid technological, economic, and social change—change 
of the sort that has been part of human existence for at 
least 200 years, maybe far longer. And with this turn to class 
(puzzlingly only ever used by the author in scare quotes), 
the quiddity of current Hungarian political responses to 
such change is lost.

Since 2012 or so, anti-Gypsyism has been replaced— 
both for Jobbik and for Viktor Orbán’s ruling Fidesz Party— 
by anti-EU and antimigrant politics alongside a revived 
rhetoric of national decline rooted in the imagined na-
tional tragedy of the now century-old Treaty of Trianon, 
which ceded large parts of historic Hungary to its neigh-
bors. Szombati presents the global lesson of Fidesz rule as 
showing how to consolidate “bourgeois class power on the 
EU’s periphery” (238) and so entirely misses the (Austro-
Hapsburg?) specificity of Orbán’s clientelist political system 
with its antimarket policies. Indeed, it is less Orbán’s sup-
posedly Thatcherite neoliberal attack on the welfare state 
than his transformation of this into a welfare state for the 
middle class (as Julia Szalai has long argued) and his fos-
tering of a distinctively national capitalism that provide the 
structural basis for his successful transformation of political discourse in Hungary into one rooted in the symbolism of a 
wounded nation.

As for the Roma, one is left with the thought that per-
haps Kenedi was right: it is hard in the modern world to 
sustain an ideology of national redemption through the 
exercise of state power against an implacable foe if the 
most salient representatives of this existential enemy are 
impoverished, marginalized citizens who live in isolated 
rural ghettos. George Soros and his “international banker 
friends,” Jean-Claude Juncker, and the EU leaders who wel-
comed the masses of Muslim “migrants” who flooded into 
Hungary in 2015 do the job so much better. Elites that might 
be imagined to actually threaten Hungary provide a more 
compelling enemy. For this reader, the broader lesson of 
Szombati’s acute ethnography is this: Hungary lacks the vi-
sionary, modernizing leaders who might direct it away from 
the myth of national tragedy, a scaled-up version of the man 
who transformed the fate of Devecser, for instance.