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Review of Schuster, C.E.; Bernardou, E. (illustrator); Bueno, D. (illustrator) (2023) Forecasts: a story of weather and finance at the edge of disaster

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Book Reviews

Ghosh, Sahana. 2023. *A Thousand Tiny Cuts: Mobility and Security across the Bangladesh–India Borderlands*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. 296 pp. Pb.: US\$29.95, ISBN: 9780520395732.

In a world that is increasingly preoccupied with borders, how do people living along these contested lines navigate their everyday existence?

In *A Thousand Tiny Cuts*, Sahana Ghosh grapples with this question. The book takes the reader on an intimate journey into the lives of those dwelling in the Bangladesh–India borderlands. In doing so, it offers a radical reimagining of what borders mean and how they shape everyday experiences. Using dazzling ethnographic description and creative theoretical framings, Ghosh challenges conventional understandings of borders as fixed lines demarcating sovereign territories. Instead, bordering is conceptualised as an ongoing process that unfolds through what Ghosh describes as ‘a thousand tiny cuts across time, space and imaginaries’ (p. 5).

Rather than focusing solely on instances of violence or state power, with the central concept of ‘a thousand tiny cuts’, Ghosh illuminates the subtle yet pervasive ‘thousand’ ways whereby national distinctions and security regimes become embedded in daily life. She depicts how mundane practices like cross-border trade, agricultural labour and religious observance (Chapter 4) – each one of them a ‘tiny cut’ – cumulatively shape the understanding of national belonging and identity in Bangladeshi–Indian borderland contexts.

Building on the idea of ‘a thousand tiny cuts’, Ghosh positions borders as ‘temporal and spatial ruptures’ (Chapter 1). She demonstrates how the Bangladesh–India border transforms a physical space into different contested territories, as motivated by the intense political environment and the competing desires surrounding national identity. She vividly describes deteriorated infrastructure, which serves as ‘archives’ of the borderland’s history and a particularly poignant example of temporal and spatial ruptures. These ruins bear witness to the violent history of border-making and its lasting impact on local communities (Chapter 1).

Ghosh demonstrates the far-reaching consequences of borders beyond issues of territorial integrity. She examines how security practices of militarised borders impact livelihoods, kinship ties, local economies and mobility itself, revealing the complex and often contradictory nature of movement and relationships in border regions. For example, her analysis showing people navigating and sometimes subverting security regimes to maintain familial and economic ties, offers a nuanced view of agency. A story of Shefali, a Bangladeshi woman married in India, is telling. Shefali hoped that this union would allow her to lead a mobile, transnational life. However, that dream never materialised, leaving her with a deep sense of being stuck. During a family celebration



in her native village across the border, she found herself unable to participate. After being denied permission to cross the border to visit her family in Bangladesh, Shefali walked along the border fence – an area now restricted to civilians – in a defiant act, as Ghosh describes. She met her mother and nephews in a warm but bittersweet reunion, overshadowed by the presence of the barbed wire. By telling stories of cross-border kin networks, and demonstrating how familial relationships create ‘counter-maps’ (pp. 92–95) to official narratives, Ghosh shows how borderland residents navigate the tensions between state-imposed restrictions and their need for cross-border connections. The book provides a powerful reminder that borders are not just geopolitical realities, but deeply personal experiences that reverberate through generations (‘an anthropology of bordering might very well be an anthropology of kinship’; p. 92). This perspective reveals new avenues for understanding how the processes of bordering shape intimate relationships and family histories.

Ghosh’s writing style is engaging and effective, making this book accessible for a broad audience. Her rich ethnographic detail and theoretical insights provide a narrative that contributes to anthropological debates on borders, mobility, kinship, infrastructure and security. The book’s methodological playfulness is distinctive, employing an approach that seamlessly weaves together spatial history, walking ethnography and kinship charts. Ghosh’s use of walking as a research method is enabling her to uncover hidden hi/stories embedded in the landscape and access the sensory and emotional dimensions of borderland experiences, offering a more holistic understanding of how borders are lived and felt.

Scholars and students in anthropology, geography, border studies, migration studies and South Asian studies will find it particularly useful. This book will also be valuable to policymakers and practitioners working on border and migration issues to gain the much-needed insights into the lived experiences of borderland communities.

IVANA LJUŠTINA

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Bell, Kirsten. 2022. *Silent but Deadly: The Underlying Cultural Patterns of Everyday Behaviour*. London: Caw Press. 288 pp. Pb.: £11.99, ISBN: 978-1-3999-3632-3.

Kirsten Bell’s *Silent but Deadly* demonstrates how ordinary facets of life show deeper cultural and social meanings. Among the most engaging discussions in the book are Bell’s exploration of cultural responses to farting, the issue of body odour and how advertising works, the symbolic meaning of toilet paper during the COVID-19 period, the social pressures in North America regarding dental aesthetics, and the British tendency to locate washing machines in the kitchen. These issues are primarily related with body and cleanliness, the conceptualisation of ‘dirt’ being one of the threads that links these discussions. Bell also includes more aspects, such as taxonomy through slugs and snails, the cultural obsession with dogs in urban environments, the symbolic and metaphorical origins of ‘bull’ and ‘bear’ in the stock market, the illogical nature of tipping in the USA, subtle cultural traditions of gift-giving, the cultural contexts of

swearing, scientific and cultural perspectives on handedness, and the psychological as well as cultural associations with numbers, broadly dealing with the themes of classification, exchange, symbols and interactions with nature. Bell's selection of these topics is random, stemming from her intriguing experiences across the five countries where she has lived, each one with its own unique cultural nuances.

Bell's primary methodological approach is ethnography, drawing on both her own fieldwork and the ethnographic studies of other scholars. Comparative ethnography is particularly enlightening when Bell picks out attitudes towards body odour across cultures and tipping practices around the world. The author also incorporates autoethnography, considering personal experiences and reflections to provide first-hand insights, such as those on dental practices and her left-handedness. Another example of employing participant observation and personal anecdotes can be found in the observation of cultural subtleties regarding the different ways of giving gifts, and underlying differences in customs like 'shouting' drinks in Australia. Additionally, Bell contextualises her ethnographic findings with historical analysis so as to provide a longitudinal perspective on contemporary norms, such as in the symbolism of toilet paper and numerical superstitions. Furthermore, she resorts to a linguistic analysis of the problematic nature of swearing regarding the word 'cunt' and its cultural variables against which historic and cross-cultural comparisons are drawn.

Kirsten Bell's *Silent but Deadly* has utilised a wide range of key concepts such as social norms, dualism and metaphorical thinking that provide deeper insights into cultural patterns. The concept of social norms is utilised to understand everyday behaviours, from farting to gift-giving, and show how these norms shape and get shaped by societal expectations. The application of the concept of dualism can be found in her discussions on the right vs left hand and pure vs impure. Gift exchange and reciprocity, drawing on Marcel Mauss's work, are also used to highlight the social expectations and obligations that maintain social bonds, challenging the notion of the 'free gift'. Bell also incorporates in her book the perspective of Gillian Tett's *Anthro-Vision* to understand complex modern problems in sectors such as business, and economic and public policy. The author draws on this point of view to analyse the metaphorical use of terms like 'bull' and 'bear' in the stock market and the symbolic significance of numbers to emphasise how it shapes perceptions and behaviour in economic and cultural systems. Finally, Mary Douglas' notion of matter out of place is used to refer to certain actions and behaviours considered impure or inappropriate.

While this book primarily draws from Western perspectives and employs a specialised anthropological lens, Bell's engaging writing style ensures that the content is accessible to a general audience. Her ability to blend humour with academic analysis makes complex cultural phenomena easily understandable, allowing readers from various backgrounds to appreciate the subtle insights woven throughout the narrative. This balance between scholarly rigor and readability allows *Silent but Deadly* to transcend the confines of specialised academic discourse and appeal to a wider audience interested in the cultural intricacies of everyday life.

NIHAL RAJ

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Morris, Julia Caroline. 2023. *Asylum and Extraction in the Republic of Nauru*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 308 pp. Hb.: US\$67.95, ISBN: 9781501765865.

In *Asylum and Extraction in the Republic of Nauru*, Morris presents an insightful ethnographic examination of Australia's offshoring of asylum management. Through an in-depth analysis of life on the island, Morris offers an incisive critique of the pervasive racialising logics that shape the positions of Nauruans and refugees within the reproductive activities of the asylum industry. Nauru, chosen for the offshoring of the refugee industry 'because of its aura of deterrence, distance from activist activity and deep colonial entanglements' (p. 139), bears the environmental, health and economic consequences of the extraction of its natural and human resources. Against this backdrop, Morris' ethnography artfully captures the nuances of Nauru's residents' efforts to sustain the island while trying to pursue their life ambitions both in Nauru and beyond its shores.

In the first two chapters, Morris immerses the reader in the rhythm of Nauru's everyday life, painting a picture of the island as a company town. The old colonial buildings, refugee businesses and phosphate extraction sites, interconnected by busy roads and aesthetic continuities, collectively narrate the story of the 'persistent use of former colonies and dependencies' (p. 33) as extractive sites. This genealogy of extractivism positions the contemporary asylum industry within a complex continuum of economic transformation and upheaval, underscoring the Nauruans' ongoing struggle for community sustainability amid waves of external interests and transient populations of humanitarian and phosphate workers, refugees and colonial traders. In these two chapters, Morris cleverly weaves together continuities in narratives, family histories, environmental challenges, extractivist practices, wealth distribution and landscapes from early colonisation of Nauru to the present, proving her ethnographic depth.

Chapter 3 analyses the intricate dynamics of the asylum industry in Nauru. Morris explores the risk management efforts of the Australian and Nauruan governments to maintain the asylum industry offshored. Moreover, the author provides a thorough examination of how risk managerialism has permeated the daily lives of the islands' inhabitants and has instituted a regime of Kafkaian bureaucracy and constant surveillance under an international audience. Furthermore, Morris focuses on the performative aspect of the global stage, revealing how the attentive gaze of the public allows refugees to leverage their experiences through a narrative of victimhood, reclaiming some agency within the margins of asylum offshoring. The global stage, however, complicates the identity of Nauruans, who are associated with the violent aspects of the refugee industry, making evident the impossibility to 'avoid the hazards that a human extractive sector presents' (p. 113).

In chapter 4, Morris details how Australian politics around refugee reception become embedded into the island's day-to-day, shaping personal relations between Nauruans and refugees and fostering frictions. The chapter provides a nuanced analysis of the fears, concerns and frustrations of both populations. While refugees must navigate their desire of moving forward to Australia while being stuck in Nauru under the position of the 'vulnerable' refugee, Nauruans must secure their future in the moral minefield of the asylum industry.

To illustrate this, chapter 5 constructs a detailed ethnographic picture of the extreme yet precarious efforts by the Nauruan government and refugee resettlement workers on the island to create an illusion of Nauru as a multicultural paradise for both Nauruans and refugees. This vision persistently clashes with day-to-day life experience. Narratives of migrant criminalisation and islamophobia, which portray refugees as dangerous and unreliable, coexist with a rhetoric against refugee offshoring practices that represents Nauruans as cruel and backward. These feelings of distrust and fear are fuelled by racialising debates happening thousands of miles away from the island in the Australian political arena and beyond. Yet, as made clear by the sixth and final chapter, they compound with the complex interests over Nauru's resources and materialise into the island's life. Thus, Morris manages to move beyond essentialising readings of refugee offshoring, bringing resource extraction and the future of Nauru to the centre stage with dust from the phosphate industry symbolising the precarious position of Nauru's inhabitants amid global currents of economic and moral interests.

Asylum and Extraction in the Republic of Nauru presents a rich narrative that guides the reader through a complex web of actors and interests, spanning from the 1800s colonisation of the island to the contemporary global refugee industry. This work significantly contributes to the still largely underdeveloped approach to asylum as an industry and enriches the emerging literature examining colonial legacies in the current governance of migration, as Morris manages to keep Nauruans at the centre of the ethnography while providing a thorough analysis of asylum governance in the Global North. It is an indispensable piece for scholars and researchers engaged in refugee studies and has all the elements to become a pivotal reference for future ethnographic studies of migration governance.

ALÈXIA RUÉ

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Liebelt, Claudia. 2023. *Istanbul Appearances: Beauty and the Making of Middle-Class Femininities in Urban Turkey*. New York: Syracuse University Press. 344 pp. Hb.: US\$80.00, ISBN: 9780815637905.

Over the past decades, Turkey has become a global leader in the number of cosmetic procedures performed per capita, with Istanbul gaining prominence as a key player in both the beauty and fashion industries. Since the early 2000s, the demand for beauty services and cosmetic surgery in Turkey has increased to the extent that such procedures are no longer a luxury reserved for the elite but rather a common practice, particularly among younger and middle-aged women. *Istanbul Appearances* studies Istanbul's 'beautyscape' and argues that female bodies have become a crucial site for negotiating gendered citizenship in Turkey. Liebelt explores the politics of beauty, sexuality and gender in the city, emphasising the dynamism and resilience of these bodies as they navigate societal norms, expectations of modernity and standards of respectability.

Liebelt carried out fifteen months of multi-sited ethnographic research in Istanbul between 2011 and 2015, following beauty practices in hair and beauty salons and clinics. The research vividly details the interactions within these spaces, where concepts of femininity and sexuality are both shaped and challenged.

Drawing from critical beauty studies and feminist approaches that recognise women's beauty practices as a form of work, Liebelt moves beyond earlier feminist critiques that primarily focused on the oppressive aspects of beauty work. Arguing that there is a relational and contextual nature of these practices, Liebelt explores how they are shaped by social, economic and political forces, and considers them as place-specific forms of work tied to broader biopolitical regimes.

In Istanbul, beauty is closely linked to class and gender, and serves as a means for women to both navigate societal expectations and assert their identities. 'The consumption of beauty products and services acts as a form of bodily distinction both within the urban middle class and from what is perceived not to be properly modern, urban, and middle class' (p. 22). Liebelt argues that beauty, as an affective process, is closely tied to the political and moral economy of contemporary Istanbul, where feminine beauty 'can be both an egalitarian promise available to anyone willing to engage in specific body routines . . . and a demand that requires ongoing, multisensory attention and significant investment' (p. 144).

Seven chapters delve into the dynamics of beauty practices in Istanbul, each exploring different facets of how beauty is intertwined with social, economic and political contexts. In chapter 1, 'Istanbul, the "Beautifying City"', Liebelt analyses Istanbul's heterogeneous urban 'beautyscape' and the role of the media and entertainment industry in determining ideals of beauty. She explores how beauty services and cosmetic products have become increasingly accessible across social strata previously seen as marginal; she also charts the rise in cosmetic surgery tourism. Chapter 2, "'For a More Beautiful Turkey": The Urban Beauty Service Sector', explores the changing status of beauty service work in Istanbul, tracing its transformation and detailing the challenging working conditions in the beauty sector, such as long hours and low pay. In chapter 3, 'The Multiple Meanings of Feminine Beauty', Liebelt connects processes of beautification to concepts such as cleanliness, naturalness and attractiveness, and emphasises how beauty is portrayed as a form of moral and social achievement requiring constant attention. In chapter 4, 'Aging "Well" in Urban Turkey', Liebelt discusses the heightened expectations around aging faced by middle-class women and assesses how aesthetic self-surveillance has become a personal responsibility. Chapter 5, 'Reshaping "Turkish" Breasts and Noses', explores the standardisation of bodily features through cosmetic surgery, with a particular emphasis on rhinoplasty and breast augmentation. These procedures are portrayed as expressions of classed, gendered and racialised desires for a normative body image. The exploration delves into how concepts of femininity are linked to notions of respectability, highlighting how working-class women are often scrutinised for their perceived lack of it. In chapter 6, 'Becoming *Prezentabl*', Liebelt explores the role of appearance in Istanbul's evolving labour market and emphasises that beauty work is valued not only for its visible outcomes but also for the emotional and psychological benefits it confers. Finally, chapter 7, 'Feminine Self-Fashioning in Times of Change', shifts the focus to everyday acts of self-fashioning among different segments of the Turkish middle class. Liebelt argues

that in a politically charged environment, even routine self-care practices can carry significant political meaning.

Istanbul Appearances contributes to the expanding anthropological research on the global beauty industry, offering a nuanced examination of Istanbul's significance on the international beauty market. It will be of use to undergraduate and postgraduate students and researchers in the fields of social and cultural anthropology, gender and sexuality studies, and Middle Eastern and Turkish studies.

DAFINA GASHI

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (Germany)

Schuster, Caroline E., illustrated by E. Bernardou and D. Bueno. 2023. *Forecasts: A Story of Weather and Finance at the Edge of Disaster*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 232 pp. Pb.: US\$28.95, ISBN: 9781487542238.

Forecasts: A Story of Weather and Finance at the Edge of Disaster provides an enthralling account of the connections between climate change, farming, financial technologies (fintech) and possible futures. Set in Paraguay, it highlights the multiple entanglements of meteorology, money and monsters in a context of making do. Essentially consisting of two parts, the graphic novel produced by Caroline Schuster and collaborators Enrique Bernardou and David Bueno, provides 'a visual narrative that places disparate processes of financial capture and conversion in the same frame while juxtaposing their effects' (pp. 125–126).

The first part of the book is a graphic novel that depicts the life of Don Wilfrido, an old sesame farmer who enrolls in a drought insurance scheme in an attempt to protect his livelihood from weather-related shocks. The reader learns about the hopes and hardships involved in making a living off the land, which is populated not just by people and animals but also by mythical monsters (*pombero*). Speculating on what the future may bring and his harvest may yield, numerous plausible storylines for the agricultural season are presented. Several turning points, including a snake bite, the weather, insurance indexes and monsters, depict different possible narratives, all arising from Schuster's ethnographic data and grounded in the Paraguayan context. The main storyline sees Don Wilfrido harvest a humble amount of sesame despite experiencing a drought. Without an insurance payout, Don Wilfrido concludes that farmers are at the losing end of the scheme: 'Those who collect always get paid' (p. 100). The story ends after Don Wilfrido loses a lot of money on a horse race bet, revealing yet another form of speculation that shapes his life, albeit one in which he finds enjoyment. Without essentialising, *Forecasts* shows how speculations are infused with and induced by not just changes in weather or available insurance schemes – but also by farmers' own relationships with the multispecies environment of which they form part and on which they profoundly depend. Located in a rural periphery, Don Wilfrido's farm is actually the centre where much larger issues and inequalities play out.

The second part of the book consists of six appendices that elaborate on its creation and contributions. They also contain discussion questions, essay topics and activities to help students digest the material presented. Appendices A, E and F deal with the

book's illustrations, origin story and creation process, highlighting the collaboration between the author and illustrators. Appendix C discusses agrarian transformations, questioning the novelty of fintech solutions by placing them in the long history of interventionism in Latin America. Appendix D details Schuster's ethnographic fieldwork process, providing a highly enjoyable and insightful read. The book's analytical contribution and anthropological argument are discussed in depth in Appendix B. Built around the concept of speculation (*'pronóstico'*, p. 7), which is conceptualised as 'a set of economic practices, as well as wider efforts to understand and control the future' (p. 128), Schuster unpacks different elements from Don Wilfrido's stories and shows how 'speculation is socially embedded and takes many shapes' (p. 133). Moving beyond mere financialisation in drawing these different forms of speculation (that is, weather forecasts, gambling, insurance, *pombero* tales) together, *Forecasts* shows that different (planetary) futures ultimately emerge out of people's situated and socially embedded everyday practices.

The book's graphics in "'Paraguayan gothic' style' (p. 186) are evocative and the depictions of different weather phenomena and landscapes really draw the reader in. Printed in black and white, the details in the drawings are sometimes a bit difficult to connect to the colourful illustrations provided in the preface and appendices. The graphic novel format is used to highlight the multispecies perspective, allowing for the inclusion of animals as active, speaking characters and includes more than that which individual characters might say out loud. This element could have been integrated more throughout, as the ambivalence and nuance in the characters that represent the insurance and fintech officers only really appear towards the end (p. 110). Moreover, rather than stated in the text, the multiplicity and non-linear potential of the narratives could perhaps have been shown more intricately in the graphics themselves.

Forecasts shows us, graphically, the discrepancies between who gets to define what disasters are and who experiences them in practice. In presenting divergent speculative futures and their implications, it renders visible the underlying inequalities that shape our entangled lives, raising bigger questions about risk and responsibility in times of climate change. Revealing that places 'at the edge' may actually find themselves in the eye of the storm, this book will be of interest to students of anthropology and (novice) fieldworkers, particularly those interested in the use of creative methods, and the anthropology of finance and climate change.

TANJA D. HENDRIKS
KU Leuven (Belgium)

Kwon, June Hee. 2023. *Borderland Dreams: The Transnational Lives of Korean Chinese Workers*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 241 pp. Pb.: US\$26.95, ISBN: 9781478025337.

For those who do not study East Asia, the Korean diaspora or matters of ethnic identity, *Borderland Dreams* by June Hee Kwon makes a compelling case why scholars should. The author analyses how the 'Korean Wind', the passion many Korean Chinese have

for the South Korean dream, pulled many people from Yanbian, the predominantly Korean Chinese prefecture, to South Korea as migrant workers. The demographics of these shifts are stark: of two million Korean Chinese, 726,000 left for South Korea. Throughout this innovative ethnography, where the author integrates narratives and life history alongside detailed economic analysis, Kwon shows how the 'Korean Wind' has reshaped the political, economic and ethnic landscapes of the region. Transnational and intranational migration and political economic shifts continue to shape the lives of both Korean and Han Chinese. Through these transformations, the author showcases the increasingly central relevance of ethnographic analysis for theorising significant global change.

The book provides a longitudinal, grounded theory study conducted over several decades. Kwon ties together multiple locations from Seoul, South Korea to Yanbian, China as well as North Korea and places throughout the Korean diaspora. The scope of the project is vast and the division of the book into the three sections of 'The Rising Korean Dream', 'Dreams in Flux' and 'Dreaming Anew', each with two complementary chapters, shows the intersections of history, politics and ethnicity. These themes are explored through the daily lives of the author's research collaborators. For example, in the first two chapters, changing economic relations between China and South Korea opened the door for the Korean Chinese to work in South Korea. What emerged, at least initially, was a growing in-between-ness of these migrant workers – they were not quite Korean nor Chinese. Their ethnic identity became tied to their position as members of a migratory working class. Kwon's ethnographic eye demonstrates how concepts we often take for granted, like ethnicity, are always in flux and relational. The junctures between ethnicity, migration and economics are the centrepiece of the author's ethnography.

Whether one looks at the local, the regional or the international, migrants are 'scale makers' where 'scale is the geographical organizer and expression of collective social action' (p. 128). Throughout the first two sections of the book, Kwon ties together global capital shifts and the various ways these have both opened and closed doors for the Korean Chinese seeking to enter South Korea. International dynamics that extend beyond China and South Korea similarly shape the local experience as the Korean Chinese are relegated to a second-class status compared to the rest of the Korean diaspora. Intra-Chinese migration to Yanbian prefecture reshapes the communities as Han migrants fill the vacancies created by the workers who escape to South Korea in search of the Korean Dream. The final section of the book, 'Dreaming Anew', shows how the political and economic forces that have radically reshaped transnational migration have differentially shaped the experiences of both the Han and Korean Chinese.

Like a landscape changed by winds of the past, this book shows these historical effects alongside their legacies today and makes explicit why anthropology needs history to understand the contemporary. The competing 'winds' she discusses (Korean, Soviet, Market and others) affect the sociopolitical and economic landscapes differently. The author's conceptual framework enables her to dissect the affective, material and embodied dreams of the Korean Chinese as they look for a better future. She uses narrative and immersive fieldwork to unpack these complex relationships. For instance, women who migrate from China to South Korea (chapter 3) experience time

and location differently; ‘work time’ in South Korea entailed long hours with little time off. On returning to China, this new way of experiencing the world created conflict with the slower pace of life at home. Those who wait for the migrants’ return perform a unique form of emotional labour that is intimately connected to the physical and existential mobility in the wake of the ‘Korean Wind’. The very concept of home itself changes and it is through Kwon’s juxtaposition of the migrants’ experience with those they leave behind that expertly reveals these differences.

One weakness is that for a book titled ‘Borderland Dreams’, it did not engage with the border studies/border theory literature as much as one would expect. The book does offer, however, novel ways of theorising the concepts of bodies, money and time. Kwon does an excellent job showing the ongoing negotiation between states (Korea, China and Russia), ethnicities (Korean and Chinese) and political economy (global capitalism and the changing position of socialism in China and Russia). Scholars of China and the Korean peninsula will find this a must-read ethnography. Those who teach about ethnography and methods will find the longitudinal aspect of the book useful. It is appropriate for both the undergraduate and graduate classroom because its prose is engaging and informative without being jargon-laden and unapproachable. I would find this a welcome addition to an introductory course to expose students to ethnographic ways of analysing global phenomena.

JAMES M. HUNDLEY
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Bandak, Andreas and Daniel M. Knight (eds.). 2024. *Porous Becomings: Anthropological Engagements with Michel Serres*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 344 pp. Pb.: US\$29.95, ISBN: 978-1-4780-3028-7.

There are books that ask only to be read, and there are books that ask to be inhabited, to be felt in the spaces between their words. *Porous Becomings: Anthropological Engagements with Michel Serres*, edited by Andreas Bandak and Daniel M. Knight, is the latter. It beckons with quiet insistence, inviting the reader to move through its pages as one might move through water – slow and deliberate, paying attention to the way each idea flows into the next. This is not a book of fixed conclusions or rigid boundaries; it is a book of connections, of spaces where the world, as Serres himself might say, is always becoming. From the very first page, there is a sense that this book is not simply about Michel Serres, but is Serresian in its very fabric.

The book defies any one discipline, weaving an intricate tapestry of anthropology, philosophy, ecology and art. It invites readers to embrace a world in which thought and life are always in flux. As our planet faces ecological collapse, political instability and the erosion of social boundaries, Serres’ ideas serve as a critical lens through which to reimagine these crises. The book offers more than a theoretical framework – it is a call to action, encouraging a radical openness to the world’s unpredictability.

What makes *Porous Becomings* remarkable is its refusal to stabilise knowledge or offer simple answers. It invites readers to live with the discomfort of ambiguity, ask-

ing them to approach life's porousness as something dynamic and full of potential. Each chapter disrupts conventional modes of thought, offering us figures such as the parasite, the trickster and the angel, which act as reminders that life's transformations happen in the unnoticed spaces where boundaries blur. These essays work like artful punctures in our assumptions, allowing new ways of thinking to seep through.

Rather than simply contributing to the existing conversation about Serres and anthropology, this collection reimagines how we might engage with the world around us. The book challenges us to relinquish control, lean into uncertainty and be transformed by the very porousness that surrounds us. *Porous Becomings* opens new possibilities, demonstrating that true understanding comes from release, not mastery.

Section 1: 'Of Parasites and Contracts'

In this opening section, Serres' concept of the parasite is explored as a force of both disruption and connection. Alberto Corsín Jiménez's essay is particularly elegant, offering a delicate exploration of how parasitism reshapes relationships across art, nature and economy. His writing is as transformative as the concept itself, revealing how the parasite creates new possibilities within the systems it inhabits. Michael Jackson follows with a beautifully unsettling chapter on justice, using the figure of Hermes to show how transgression gives rise to a fluid and elusive sense of fairness. Andrew Shryock's work on hospitality is equally brave, revealing how acts of generosity can also be exercises in power and control. These essays collectively challenge our understanding of relationships, urging us to reconsider the porous boundaries that connect and divide us.

Section 2: 'Bodies in Time'

The second section moves us into the poetic and ever-changing realm of embodiment. Elizabeth A. Povinelli's chapter is deeply moving, offering an exquisite meditation on bodies as entities in motion, continuously shaped by the histories and ecologies they inhabit. Her writing flows like the bodies she describes – constantly shifting, never fixed. David Henig's reflection on the lingering violence of war is haunting and raw, showing how the traces of conflict seep into landscapes and bodies, long after the fighting has ceased. His essay pulses with an urgency that is hard to ignore. Steven D. Brown's chapter brings a delicate yet profound ecological perspective, arguing that in a world marked by pandemics and climate crises, safety must be understood relationally, through our deep entanglements with the non-human world. These essays create a powerful meditation on the porousness of bodies and time, reminding us that both are constantly shaped by the forces around them.

Section 3: 'Knowledge Quests'

The final section shifts towards the porousness of knowledge itself. Tom Boylston's chapter is light and airy, almost ethereal, as he draws on Serres' figure of the angel to explore anthropology's role in translating knowledge across worlds. His essay reminds

us of the beauty inherent in the movement of knowledge. Stavroula Pipyrrou's exploration of proximity is striking and thoughtful, asking us to reflect on how physical and ethical closeness shapes not only our relationships but also our understanding of the world. Morten Nielsen's contribution is bold and playful, using humour to show how boundaries can be disrupted in unexpected ways. Finally, Matei Candea offers a gentle yet profound meditation on wisdom, suggesting that true insight comes from openness rather than control. Together, these essays remind us that knowledge is never static but always in motion, shaped by the porous proximities and distances we navigate.

Afterword

The afterword, a conversation between Jane Bennett, Bandak and Knight, leaves the reader with the impression that this book is not a conclusion but the beginning of an ongoing dialogue. It is a conversation that feels unfinished, encouraging us to continue exploring the porousness of life, thought and the world itself.

In the end, *Porous Becomings* stands as an extraordinary example of generous scholarship. It is a book that offers itself as a conversation, filled with intellectual generosity. Each essay, in its artful exploration of Serres' ideas, extends an invitation to further dialogue, deeper engagement and a richer understanding of the world. The book does not merely inhabit the space of academic critique – it opens up a space for connection, thought and transformation, showing that the most profound scholarship is that which remains open, fluid and generous in its pursuit of knowledge.

FIONA MURPHY

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Zeitlyn, David. 2022. *An Anthropological Toolkit: Sixty Useful Concepts*. Oxford: Berghahn. 155 pp. Pb.: £9.99, ISBN: 978-1-80073-535-4.

What is happening to anthropological theory today? Can we still speak of 'theory' as such, in an age of myriad theoretical turns and returns? The explanatory allure of grand theories faded away with the rise of postmodernism. Their main function – to offer a meta-theoretical framing and narrative to ethnography – has been substituted by the trendy theoretical (re)turns that frame and drive ethnographic analysis in a particular direction, in a similar way to their grand theoretical ancestors. But aren't social worlds too complex and messy to be reduced to one particular theoretical perspective, argument or turn? David Zeitlyn's *An Anthropological Toolkit: Sixty Useful Concepts* is a convincingly 'sparse' (to use Zeitlyn's own term) response to this situation.

The book's pocket size and relatively short length are deceptive, given what it actually offers. At one level, it deals with the fundamental question of anthropological research, that of the relationship between ethnography and theory. Its central preoccupation lies with the question of how to write about ethnographically grounded anthropological theory without arguing for and reducing it to a single specific approach (p. 7). But it is also a practical book (hence 'the toolkit' in the title). It offers sixty theoret-

ical concepts and numerous hacks for how to deal with the messiness, inconsistency, vagueness and indeterminacy that are part and parcel of any ethnographic situation or material, and how to connect ethnography with wider theoretical issues. At another level, to paraphrase J. L. Austin, this is a book about how to do (anthropological) things with concepts, and about having fun with ideas.

The book is divided into three parts. In the introduction, Zeitlyn takes stock of anthropological theory today and outlines an argument for his own theoretical position that is resolutely eclectic. This is followed by the main section of the book, 'Sixty Words to Think With'. These are organised alphabetically. The concepts vary in length and in additional (though sadly rather limited) bibliographical resources. Although each concept was written as a mini-essay, all are 'hyperlinked' with other related concepts in the book, outlining a way to spawn a conceptual web and use it to theorise ethnographic material. For example, the concept 'bifocal ethnography' (pp. 28–30) is hyperlinked to 'equivocation' and 'collage', but other concepts from the toolkit are mobilised there as well (montage, projections, partiality, incommensurability). My personal favourites include 'axometric projections', 'boundary objects', 'incommensurability' and 'life writing'. While Zeitlyn casts his conceptual web eclectically and widely, on closer reading, several recurring thematic patterns emerge. These are all clustered around the fundamental issues of anthropological writing, such as representation and translation. In the last section, 'Coda', Zeitlyn draws on his long-term fieldwork with the Mambila people in Cameroon to demonstrate by ethnographic explication how the toolkit can be put into practice in making sense of ethnographic fragments. Here, Zeitlyn sketches an ethnographically dense and multiperspectival description of the royal ritual *Ngwun*. This ethnographic fragment is then connected with theory to show how particular concepts-cum-theoretical approaches can be mobilised (such as exemplars, mosaic, vignettes) to make sense, albeit in an incomplete and partial way, of the ritual. Although this explication is extremely useful and powerful, it is rather limited. Indeed, since the intention of the Coda is pedagogical, it could go a step further. I for one would still like to see more ethnographic fragments and their explications included in the book, or perhaps on the website as accompanying teaching material.

While the book works really well as a pedagogical tool for teaching both ethnography and anthropological theory, it offers more than that. Zeitlyn has written a book that is inspirational for seasoned anthropologists too. Throughout the book, Zeitlyn pushes anthropologists to think more carefully about the logical traps, theoretical gaps and dogmas, and ethnographic challenges that doing ethnography-cum-anthropological theory entails. The book shows us how to be more attentive to them, and how to provisionally and partially resolve them. To do that, Zeitlyn calls on readers to embrace a theoretical eclecticism (p. 7) that is responsive to 'the [ethnographic] task at hand followed by careful choice of the theories best suited to achieve that task' (p. 2). The sixty concepts he offers in the book are an example of such an exercise in anthropological eclecticism. In so doing, Zeitlyn outlines in the book a much broader argument for a 'dappled anthropology' (pp. 8, 87, 136). This is a methodologically and theoretically grounded starting point for appreciating both the complexity and messiness in people's conduct and lives, while also not shying away from trying to appre-

hend the patchworks (or dapples) of ‘discernible patterns in the way that people live their lives’ (p. 8).

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Vevaina, Leilah. 2023. *Trust Matters: Parsi Endowments in Mumbai and the Horoscope of a City*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 224 pp. Pb.: US\$26.95, ISBN-13: 978-1478025399.

Trust Matters taps into the ethnographically underexplored reality of contemporary Parsis in Mumbai. Leilah Vevaina foregrounds the complex issues at stake in one of India’s historical micro-minorities through the unusual prism of charitable trusts and endowment practices. Trusts constitute an endowment system that folds in historical, colonial and post-colonial legal regimes. Nowadays this is a system that does not work, yet ‘cannot fail’. Vevaina accounts extensively for this paradox, drawing on detailed descriptions of major players in the Mumbai landscape, such as the Bombay Parsi Panchayat, as well as the perspectives of philanthropists and ‘everyday’ Parsis.

A charitable trust is an endowment institution in which certain assets and property are managed by a trustee on behalf of the legal owner or donor and for the final use of a third beneficiary. Charitable trusts are endowed in perpetuity, enjoy tax exemptions and, importantly, the property so entrusted stands outside the financial fluctuations and scopes of the real estate market. As the author points out, in ‘global cities’ such as Mumbai, this is no marginal detail, particularly as the neighbourhoods in which many of the Parsi-entrusted estate are located experience today rampant gentrification and privately driven redevelopment projects. It is not surprising, then, that the issue of who may count as the charitable trust’s beneficiaries, ideally the less affluent segments of the Parsi community, is fundamental. It is at this junction that the legal quandaries of trust endowments meet the religious turbulences of a relatively insulated community.

One of the defining characteristics of Parsis has been their centuries-long endogamy, a practice that extends into the present era. A famous (mythical?) anecdote describing Zoroastrians’ arrival in India as refugees from Mediaeval Persia depicts them vowing to a sceptical Gujarati monarch that, rather than overburdening India’s swelling population, they would act like ‘a pinch of sugar’ that would only sweeten and dissolve into the ‘milk’ of India. However, as Vevaina recounts, a second, less known, version of the myth seemed to turn out more accurate over time. This version portrays the migrant Zoroastrian population as a coin in India’s milk vessel. The coin metaphor proved more enticing not only for indexing the outsized economic role that Parsis played in modern India but also for describing the self-contained, insoluble nature of the community. Parsis’ strict – though not uncontested – endogamy is seen as the primary reason for the dramatic decline of this community in South Asia. The scant number of Parsis in contemporary Mumbai adds another element to the paradoxes that surround the running of charitable trusts – namely, the fact that a dramatically shrinking community is attributed the right to be the final beneficiary of property in

upscaling neighbourhoods, at nominal rates unchanged for decades and unchanging into perpetuity.

The book is structured into six chapters, plus a comprehensive introduction that effectively recapitulates the historical condensation of trusts as a legal form in India. The study includes a particularly fascinating chapter 5, in which religious change – through the dilemma of traditional burial, which includes excarnation by vultures, vis-à-vis the use of modern crematories – is brought to the fore, as it intertwines the property management of the Doongerwadi Towers of Silence. The analytical coordinates of the book are presented in chapter 1. Vevaina borrows the evocative image of the horoscope from an interlocutor's comment. Charitable trust endowments are akin to horoscopes in that they fix more or less deterministically the fortunes of certain segments of Mumbai's real estate, including which sections of the population might enjoy it as beneficiaries in the future. Although the notion of natal astrology may be more fitting to the book's case than that of judicial horoscoping, this is a productive image that well describes the *longue durée*, the relative immutability and the relation of causality involved in trusts endowments.

Vevaina also tries another lens for analysing her data, the linguistic category of the subjunctive mood. The author inserts the 'as if' modality intrinsic in legal institutions, such as the *cy-près* that keep trusts afloat even when they have practically stopped working. I find the image insufficiently interlocked with the previous analytical frame – namely, the horoscope – or at least in the ways in which it is mobilised throughout the book. A more compelling path, surprisingly left under-investigated, would have been the insistence on the semantically charged category of 'trust'. Vevaina plays briefly with the ambivalence of the word in chapter 2, through the ethnographic vignette of Tanaz's inheritance conundrum, but it is left under-developed in the rest of the book.

Trust Matters provides an excellent ethnographic window on a crucial historical thread of colonial and post-colonial Mumbai. It is a welcome contribution for students and scholars familiar with legal anthropology, but it is also broadly accessible to a more generic anthropological readership.

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Weiss, Margot (ed.). 2024. *Unsettling Queer Anthropology: Foundations, Reorientations, and Departures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 344 pp. Pb.: US\$29.95, ISBN: 9781478030386.

Amid a changing landscape in Anthropology and Gender Studies departments, as well as in a context in which populist, conservative and seemingly liberal governments are increasingly applying anti-queer policies and worldviews, it is more necessary than ever to make efforts for the visibility and appreciation of the links between queer studies and anthropology. *Unsettling Queer Anthropology*, edited by Margot Weiss for Duke University Press, is a much-needed exploration of the genealogies, current state and potential futures for queer anthropological inquiries, in which we may find refreshing

views into our discipline's history, but also a fruitful vantage point into the many topics, approaches and viewpoints that we may label queer anthropology. Drawing from, yet also going beyond, reviews of the history and state of gay and lesbian or queer anthropologies, such as those by Kath Weston (1993) or Tom Boellstorff (2007), this volume's point of departure is the conceptual link between anthropological research and institutions. Just as the range of locales, topics and approaches change, anthropological organisations and networks reflect radical transformations that signal a shift from a study *of* to a study *from* queer viewpoints and perspectives, just as researchers' methods and roles equally change.

Structure-wise, this volume starts with a most-relevant set of chapters that aptly respond to questions about the queer nature of this subfield or body of research in terms of approach, genealogy and method. The chapter by editor Margot Weiss, 'Queer Theories from Somewhere', is an explicit vindication of the foundational role of anthropological and ethnographical research within Western queer studies, and an argument against the notion that queer anthropology is a mere application of queer theory to ethnographic data. Linked to similar arguments by authors such as Heather Love (2021), this much-needed chapter reasserts the empirical and situated origin of seemingly universal and abstract queer theory pillars, such as antinormativity and gender performativity. Scott L. Morgensen's chapter in this first part, 'Intimate Methods', on the other hand, also tackles the genealogical issue of ethnographic methods' links to racism and colonialism, as it serves as the main example within this volume of a generalised critique of the colonial, situated origins of anthropology as a discipline.

A second section in the book, furthermore, seeks to unravel the queer roots and precedents in traditional anthropological subfields, namely kinship, linguistics, performance, borders and movements, and geopolitics and the state. Most chapters in this section include indispensable reviews of their subfields' history and their current state from the perspective of queer studies, and this approach offers innovative views, particularly on the role of kinship studies in Lucinda Ramberg's chapter, 'Kinship and Kinmaking Otherwise'. Similarly, Sima Shakhsari's chapter, 'Geopolitics and Queer Anthropology', links this volume to recent forays into queer theories of the state or the role of queer visibilities in geopolitics. Tom Boellstorff's chapter, 'Pronoun Trouble', appears relatively disconnected from the rest in terms of exposition and historical review of a subfield, as its comparative view and original structure makes it more akin to the chapters in the third and final section – an incursion into experimental formats, activist- and community-based practices, and writing and research approaches that make anthropology even queerer. Among these chapters, we may find a common thread that relates to the collective and dialogic nature of ethnography and anthropology, not only as group or team efforts, but also as an interspecies intellectual activity, as in Juno Salazar Parreñas's chapter, 'When Our Tulips Speak Together'. The volume's final chapter, 'The Queer Endotic', by Martin F. Manalansan IV, serves as a corollary that may link queer anthropology to the discipline's history, as this author's argument for the 'endotic' or 'infra-ordinary' as a basis for queer knowledge includes but also surpasses Malinowski's 'imponderabilia of actual life'.

All in all, this volume, clearly linked to Margot Weiss's and other authors' previous reflections on queer anthropology, ethnographic methods and genealogy, serves as a

critical and crucial review of this subfield or set of criss-crossing subfields. As in Savannah Shange's preface, we find a palimpsest of differing yet related visibilities of old and new research and ideas, as roots and genealogies are illuminated and vindicated, and as experimental and potential lines of research are projected towards the near and far futures. This volume may thus serve as an introduction to queer anthropology for many scholars, or as a spark that motivates region- or country-specific reviews of queer anthropology, such as that by Jose Antonio Langarita Adiego and Jordi Mas Grau (2017) for Spain, that may complement this volume's North American focus.

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Shrestha, Tina. 2023. *Surviving the Sanctuary City: Asylum-Seeking Work in Nepali New York*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press. 242 pp. Pb.: US\$30.00, ISBN: 9780295751528.

Nepal's diverse cultures share several long-standing literary, poetic and popular folk-song discourses about the suffering (*dukkha* or *dukha*) of migration: the hardship of finding oneself at the bottom of the pile in a foreign land, the distress and poverty that force Nepalis to migrate in the first place, and the agony of being separated from family and homeland. Occasionally, this is combined with stories of making good abroad and coming back as an envied, prestigious and newly powerful returnee. A Nepali proverb claims, 'A man who has never been abroad and a woman who has never given birth, do not know what *dukkha* truly is.'

In this engaging and detailed ethnographic monograph, Tina Shrestha describes how, for Nepalis in New York City, the pre-existing vernacular discourse of suffering is transmuted into, occasionally clashes with and even finds itself erased in the legally constructed discourse of refugee deservingness. Shrestha emphasises how much hard work Nepalis in New York have to endure when 'making paper', that is, going along the long and arduous path from illegality to the right to stay and eventually citizenship, a path that many embark on and many fail to complete.

Shrestha's ethnographic description focuses felicitously on the way in which asylum seekers have to perform credibility: the evidence they provide has to be believable and yet not too obviously rehearsed. Overacting in the court hearing may be interpreted by the asylum judge as just that – a performance. Asylum seekers are coached

and learn how to adapt their narrative to fit the expectations of the court in what Shrestha dubs ‘testimonial coconstruction [sic] prior to asylum hearings’ leading to the ‘active and agentive participation of the claimant in the process of his own subjectification’ (p. 105). As Shrestha describes, in the detailed ethnographic case study that follows, the claimant rehearses their responses so that they don’t deviate from the facts relevant to the asylum claim and also so that they appear confident but not ‘too rehearsed’ (p. 113).

In preparatory meetings with his lawyers, Tshering, a former monastic thangka painter from Solu-Khumbu, has a tendency to wander off and talk about his suffering now, in the USA. This frustrates Tshering’s pro bono lawyers. Shrestha, working as his interpreter, often has to decide what to translate and what to omit as ‘irrelevant’. Tshering’s first hearing had been a failure, because the judge had not been convinced that Tshering was a monastic. So the lawyers decided to focus the appeal on Tshering’s hard work and tax-paying present, rather than on his past. During the hearing the prosecutor focuses on an unexpected detail of the narrative of his abduction by the Maoists. The hearing goes on too long and is adjourned by the judge.

We never find out what happens to Tshering. Does he manage, like some of Shrestha’s interlocutors, to win asylum status, or rather does he end up being deported? We do learn how frustrating and difficult he finds his current life, ‘working like a donkey every day for almost seven years’ (p. 143), saving money to send home. But at least at work he knows what to do and how to do it. By contrast, Tshering points out, the asylum process is an emotional rollercoaster that is hard to bear.

Shrestha places herself very much in the narrative, not in a self-indulgent way, but so that the status of the ethnography is fully transparent. She relates her own relatively more privileged journey and various elements of surprise, for example her discovery that many Nepalis from minority backgrounds are not actually comfortable in the Nepali language, preferring Tibetan (or other local language) or Hindi. Others remark sardonically that they have come to the USA and learnt Hindi, because they are working for South Asian employers who want them to speak Hindi to their children. Shrestha is also reflexive and critical of the NGO, Adhikaar (‘rights’), through which she gained access to the field, devoting a whole chapter to the paradoxes of organising around suffering. ‘The profession of human rights and social justice sustains itself by selling the suffering of others’, one of Adhikaar’s leaders tells her (p. 148).

Shrestha’s frame of reference is principally works on other migrant populations in the USA, usually Hispanic people. Rather little connection is made to the homeland in Nepal, or to the cultural embeddedness of the Nepali ideas about suffering referred to above. The strength of the book is its ability to convey, through thick and sensitive descriptions, what it feels like to go through the asylum process in New York. *Surviving the Sanctuary City* should work well for upper-level undergraduates and above. The discussion of the author’s positionality is both sensitively done and threaded throughout the book. It could be used to generate class discussion, especially for students contemplating their own field research on similar populations anywhere.

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McKinley, Alexander. 2024. *Mountain at a Center of the World: Pilgrimage and Pluralism in Sri Lanka*. New York: Columbia University Press. 344 pp. Pb.: US\$35.00, ISBN: 9780231210614.

Anthropological research on pilgrimage has experienced exponential growth in recent years, resulting in a great quantity and theoretical, thematic and geographic variety of available works. Alexander McKinley's new book, *Mountain at a Center of the World: Pilgrimage and Pluralism in Sri Lanka*, is an original contribution to this expanding field of research, offering both a detailed description of one of the most intriguing pilgrimage sites worldwide and a new way of studying such places.

The mountain mentioned in the book's title is Adam's Peak (also known as Sri Pada and Samanala), located in the southwestern part of Sri Lanka. Although it counts only as the island's eighth highest mountain, its conic and iconic shape, together with a rock formation at its top, identified as the footprint of Adam by Muslims, Buddha by Buddhists, Siva by Hindus and St Thomas by Christians, makes it one of the most recognisable symbols of Sri Lanka and a place visited by thousands of pilgrims annually.

McKinley's central question is 'how pluralism is best conceptually understood and practically managed at the Peak' (p. 2). His complex answer builds on ethnographic and textual research, for which he walked pilgrim trails leading to the Peak, befriended and interviewed religious leaders and local shopkeepers, and analysed huge literature inspired by the mountain, from travelogues and administrative documents to poetry. Drawing on this rich material, the author presents a dynamic picture of the changing power relations between religious groups attracted and attached to the Peak, the Sinhala–Tamil interethnic relations, the policies and politics of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial powers, and much more.

McKinley depicts Adam's Peak not merely as a natural background inspiring human action but rather as a social actor in its own right. In the book's introduction, 'Making the Most of the Mountain', the author proposes that 'thinking through the Peak' and taking it seriously 'means not only recognizing how it structures storytelling but also using its materiality to organize the analysis of those tales' (p. 11). Consequently, he takes inspiration from crystal rocks (from which the Peak is built) used by early inhabitants of Sri Lanka to come up with the concept of 'mytholith', by which he means 'the formation of stories as a cumulative process apart from the intentionality of any one agent, while also showing stories as tools, picked up and modified by a particular person' (p. 12).

This concept serves McKinley well in his scholarly scaling of the Peak, as he cuts through the layers of stories covering the mountain not less densely than a rainforest growing on its slopes. It comes in especially handy in the second – and the central – part of the book, 'A Mountain of Myth', where the author discusses Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim records and narratives appearing, disappearing and reappearing over the last twelve or so centuries. Before that, in the first part, 'A Mountain and its People', he examines how the Peak structures people's lives while they make 'infrastructural interventions . . . into [its] environment' (p. 9). In turn, the book's third part, 'Being Like a Mountain', tackles the issue of pluralism – first interreligious and then interspecies – which, as McKinley often stresses, is far from harmonious at the Peak and in Sri Lanka

in general. Drawing on Buddhist wisdom, the author proposes ‘planetary pluralism’ (p. 186) as an alternative to insufficient tolerance, care and compassion leading now to strained interfaith relations and damage to the natural environment. As his discussion unfolds and the book reaches its conclusion, the Peak changes its role from an *axis mundi* marked by a sacred footprint generating complementary or competing mythologies to a place that shows in sharp relief the dangers of human-made climate change.

Even though the *Mountain at a Center of the World* follows a marked tendency in pilgrimage studies to focus on a single site or route, in other respects the book stands out among recent publications in this research area. One of its distinguishing features is that it draws heavily on poetry for examples of different discourses surrounding the Peak. Another characteristic of McKinley’s monograph is that it barely mentions earlier anthropological studies on pilgrimage and mixed/shared shrines. While this can be seen as a drawback to this otherwise detailed and nuanced study, the book nevertheless has much to offer for students of pilgrimage as a transcultural and interreligious phenomenon. The *Mountain at a Center of the World* will also appeal to specialists in material culture, environmental management and comparative mythology as well as readers interested in Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, especially in the local coexistence and competition of these world religions.

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Thiemann, André. 2024. *The Politics of Relations: How Self-Government, Infrastructures, and Care Transform the State in Serbia*. Oxford: Berghahn Books. 302 pp. Hb.: £99.00. ISBN: 978-1-80539-551-5.

The Politics of Relations is a rich and detailed ethnography in a rural–urban region in central Serbia, based on fieldwork conducted between 2009 and 2013. While the author lived primarily in the village of Donje Selo, the study also included the neighbouring village of Gornje Selo, and two nearby medium-sized urban centres, Moravica and Palanka (anonymised toponyms).

As the two opening vignettes deftly illustrate, the main research issue emerges from the consideration of discourses on the distancing and inadequacy of the state and its bureaucracy, mobilised by citizens distant from the spheres of governance as well as by multi-level state actors (from local to transnational). But while the author repeatedly encounters these narratives, he also observes a series of relational practices at play in the local and sub-local network of statecraft, particularly in municipal politics, in the Local Council (*Mesna Zajednica*, MZ) and in the Centres for Social Work (*Centri za Socijalni Rad*, CSW). The book suggests the essential role of these everyday practices to understand the politics of relations in the post-socialist semi-periphery (p. 4).

To explore the complex relationships of non-political and political actors with the state, participant observation is conducted in public, domestic and work spheres, drawing on the extended-case method of the Manchester School of Anthropology (p. 40).

Inspired by Eric Wolf's modalities of power (1999), André Thiemann proposes four research axes that will be the guiding thread of the book: '*embeddedness* of state actors', '*boundary work* between state and non-state', '*modalities* of state practices' and '*strategic selectivity* of state projects in a wider field of force'. They are carefully presented in the introduction, and each chapter is predominantly focused on one of them. Yet, as the conclusions show with great ability, these four key concepts constantly interweave throughout the book, ensuring its unity and coherence.

Five empirical chapters, organised in two parts, are interlaced by three preludes/interludes that provide methodological information, background on the historical political transformations affecting the field site and theoretical framework on social security and care.

Part 1 focuses on relational practices linked to the Local Council (MZ) of Donje Selo, mainly in terms of *embeddedness* and *boundary work*. It starts by analysing how local state actors play out their embeddedness to navigate 'multiple interfaces' (chapter 1). 'Transversal politics,' inspired by Nira Yuval-Davis's notion (1999), are examined through two modalities of relational practices – football activism and economic care for the village – carried away by a villager, member of Moravica's municipal parliament and allied to the MZ. This leads to exploring how the boundaries of the state are also constantly being redrawn as a political tactic (chapter 2). This is illustrated through the tensions between political actors and citizens during an election and during a conflictual road-building project. Continuing with practices of boundary work, and introducing two relational social care modalities, the case of a villager in need shows how his image switches from 'our refugee', whom the MZ should protect following 'humanitarian reason', to 'a social case' of the CSW, who should assume his debts with the community (chapter 3).

Part 2 focuses on relational social practices in the CSWs, mainly in terms of *modalities* and *strategic selectivity*. First it examines the notion of 'bureaucratic errors' through the case of a Gornje Selo family and the social workers of Moravica's CSW (chapter 4). These 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1980) oscillate between different modalities of social policies in a constant attempt to reconcile their professional values with their bureaucratic obligations impacted by national and transnational politics. Along the same lines, the kin-like nature of the work relationships forged by an elderly caregiver of Palanka's CSW shows how strategic selectivity is used to translate transnational models of senior care (chapter 5). It also demonstrates how these 'social-daughter-care' relationships participate in drawing a boundary from the image of an absent state.

The writing is clear and enriched with relevant references. All opening and concluding parts are neatly summarised, enhancing the reader's experience. One would also highlight the reflexivity that infuses this ethnography, effectively reinforcing the illustration of key concepts.

This book is an example of what a relational focus on the state can achieve. The comparative approach transcends a rural–urban opposition, clearly revealing interconnections between geographical, social and political realities that go far beyond the local scale. It successfully shows the tensions between micro- and macro-political levels. Moreover, it proposes a reading of the politics of relations that brings together the present with the past while opening to the future.

The book is highly relevant to academics and students who are interested in a critical and relational approach to the everyday state, in the fields of political anthropology alongside social sciences in general. The rich empirical content also makes it appealing to social care and policy-making professionals.

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Bond, David. 2022. *Negative Ecologies: Fossil Fuels and the Discovery of the Environment*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. 262 pp. Pb.: US\$29.95, ISBN: 9780520386785.

Negative Ecologies by David Bond takes us into a story about our contaminated planet and its mishmash of nature commodification, corporative and capitalist profit interests, technology, science, policies, human actors, and the more-than-human world. The 'critical dissatisfaction' about the degradation of our planet often entangled with (re)production of eco-anxieties has been widespread among environmental humanities scholars and those dealing with the ongoing ecological 'crisis' of the time we (un)comfortably named Anthropocene. Indeed, these critical tones did not come out of the blue – the carbon emissions are constantly rising, deforestation is expanding and many animal species are in the process of extinction. The promises of eco-technological fixes within the current system seem more unsatisfactory and suspicious than ever, while many people across the globe suffer from environmental harms such as non-potable water and polluted air. However, Bond's ethnographic exploration of 'negative ecologies' is centred primarily around one identified agent of ecological ruin – the oil economy. After all, as the author reminds us, all the chemicals that are to be limited are byproducts of fossil fuel combustion (p. 54). As such, the dialectic of fossil fuels and ecology is at the core of the discussion in the book.

There are quite a few pivotal points or the most exciting threads that one could choose from Bond's deliberation of the deleterious impacts of fossil fuels on the human and non-human world. It spans from (more well-known) aspects such as a notice of unequal societal exposures to environmental harms (p. 43) to the (less-discussed) risk management actors' formalisation of single disruptive events as the generic conditions of all future disasters (p. 78), from unravelling the 'political' within environmental science (p. 60) to acknowledging the ubiquitousness of toxicity within human and ani-

mal bodies (p. 178). The dialectic relation between ecology and fossil fuels is seen in our 'discovery' of the environment; the author is demonstrating – that we essentially know about deepwater because of the BP oil spill (p. 91), while fossil fuels disruption brought us to knowledge about clean air and clean water (p. 165).

That said, I particularly find engaging the author's explorations of the toxic thresholds and impact assessments as anything but 'neutral scientific innovations' (p. 9). In contrast to the vast number of ethnographies of environmental injustice, Bond does not take the toxic thresholds as axiomatic, and he refuses to explore the notion of pollution within the given bureaucratic top-down dispositions of pollution monitoring. On the contrary, he shows that the institutional thresholds play a massive role in the normalisation of contamination and the naturalisation of toxicity. In the same vein, impact assessments deprive citizens of the possibility of pushing for substantial political change. Bond highlights that the historical development of toxic thresholds and impact assessments was deeply tied up with the oil industry.

One could object to methodological nationalism or US-centrism permeating the book as the author mainly focuses on the USA and North America while telling us the story about our 'planetary crisis'. However, it should be considered that his North American-situatedness goes beyond its borders regarding the created influences – political, economic, ecological. His contribution also extends beyond the North American context in terms of practices themselves – even with the recognition of the diversity within the contemporary capitalist and growth-driven system, similar political, market and company strategies, along with business-as-usual practices, are undoubtedly found across the globe.

While the nexus between crude oil and planetary destruction is approached in the book ethnographically, the author's perspective on the material world does not reproduce the epistemologies of radical constructivism and culturalism, often slipping into well-known solipsistic anthropocentrism, at times found in contemplations of 'environment' and 'nature' within Environmental Anthropology. Nonetheless, while one can discern that post-anthropocentric perspectives inform the book, the reader drawn to the ontological turn probably should not expect here a radical breakup from established operating ontologies. Bond's ethnography does not shy away from 'data', but at the same time, he carefully avoided purely positivist scientization, which helped the book stay somewhat within humanities. Although ethnographic, the book is an interdisciplinary or perhaps adisciplinary piece of critical research. It embraces other disciplines' knowledge production and epistemologies, empowering us to do it and perhaps reminding us that anthropologists have always been doing that but with different sensibilities and preoccupations of their times. We could ask – is this still Anthropology in the sense(s) we imagine our discipline? Or perhaps this is inevitably an example of the Anthropology we need in the upcoming times if we want to grasp the link between the fossil fuel industry and the experienced, anticipated and highly material ecological 'crisis' of now.

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Kato, Etsuko. 2024. *Mobile Japanese Migrants to the Pacific West and East: Self-searching, Work, and Identification*. New York: Routledge. 194 pp. Hb.: US\$169.77, ISBN: 9781032539645.

Mobile Japanese Migrants to the Pacific West and East focuses on Japanese migrants who cross national borders in search of their true self. Based on fieldwork conducted between 2001 and 2019 in Canada, Australia and Singapore, this book explores the specificity of Japanese self-searching migration against the background of global migration.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I (chapters 1–3) begins with an introduction to self-searching migration. As a literal translation of the Japanese idiom '*jibun sagashi*' (p. 17), 'self-searching' refers to 'the search for the self (the object) without the *ego* (the subject)' (p. 26). In other words, it is 'a self-quest without a presupposition or hypothesis' (p. 27). Therefore, Japanese migrants proceed to the destination 'without a clear starting point' while 'anticipating that the environment will tell them the answer' (p. 27).

Chapter 2 shows that self-searching (*jibun sagashi*) is highly related to one's work due to historical and sociocultural factors, including the importance of work for reaching adulthood, the linguistic confusion between 'company' and 'society' (p. 46), and the Japanese 'preference or aesthetics to understand the world or self according to place, rather than through *ego* (agency) and its actions' (pp. 46–47). The author characterises this relation as 'self-work identification' – the recognition of one's work as one's self (p. 38). However, ever since the 1990s when Japan entered a 'two-decade (or longer) economic recession' (p. 48), getting a stable job has not been guaranteed. Unable to achieve self-work identification at home, Japanese migrants start their self-searching quests overseas in the Anglophone West. This destination is, for a large part, due to the influence of 'Anglophone-West-centrism' (p. 65).

Chapter 3 details the gendered disparities in Japanese self-searching migration. Among Japanese migrants, women greatly outnumber men, since, as the author argues, for one thing, they suffer more from the shrinkage of the job market at home, and for another, they have achieved more freedom from the public discourse than men to search overseas for their self. To come to a thorough understanding of these gendered disparities, the author has not only tackled this phenomenon from women's but also men's perspectives. The author points out that Japanese men are hindered by gendered domestic mainstream values such as nationalism and corporate-centrism from self-searching overseas.

Part II (chapters 4–6) focuses on the status quo of Japanese self-searching migrants in the two most popular and accessible destinations for them – Vancouver and Sydney. Rather than telling the realities of Japanese migrants in the voice of an omniscient narrator, the author takes us into the field with her from one interview to another. We hear directly from informants about their views of self and work, and their work experiences in Vancouver and Sydney. These interviews demonstrate that Japanese migrants are in the situation of prolonged sojourning in searching for true work, and thus true self, due to visa- and job-related constraints in the host countries. This prolonged sojourning, in turn, blurs the conventional boundary between youth and adult-

hood, since it keeps the migrants suspended in a 'subjective youth', a term referring to 'subjectively being in a preparatory stage before entering what is widely perceived to be adulthood regardless of age' (p. 184).

Part III (chapter 7) discusses Japanese migrants' choice when some of them fail to find their true self in Vancouver and Sydney. The author argues that Japanese migrants' internalised 'West-centrism' (p. 156) prompts them to retreat to Singapore, which provides them with not only a new self-affirmative identification as Asians, but also jobs in an English-speaking environment. This would facilitate their future return to the Anglophone West.

This is a thin book of only 194 pages. However, the seven chapters provide rich evidence in support of the main argument that Japanese migrants 'are engaged in an indefinitely prolonged project of finding their true work and self' (p. 155). Such a 'globally mobile life, not always with a grand narrative' (p. 9) is inadequately explained in 'the narrative approach to self that presupposes a grand autobiography with a linear plot' (p. 186). Therefore, the author proposes alternatively that 'both the self and life must be redefined as something that can naturally be split or fractured more than once' (p. 186). This proposal not only makes a valuable contribution to the renewals in theoretical approach to the self, but also constitutes the basis for a comparative study of transnational migration. For example, does the redefinition of the self in this reviewed book apply to the People's Republic of China whose culture also de-emphasises the *ego*? This underexplored topic might be promising for further study. All in all, this book will be of great interest to scholars and students of East Asian studies, especially to those who are interested in Japanese culture, society and migration.

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