
It is impossible to do justice in a brief review to this outstanding intellectual biography of Edmund Leach, undoubtedly the most adventurous, innovative, versatile and challenging of Britain’s post-war anthropologists. Stanley Tambiah has the appropriate credentials as Leach’s biographer, and, in response to the current autobiographical demands of the subject, he explains in his preface (pp. ix–xiv) how and why he came to write the book. His personal and academic relationship with Leach went back well over thirty years, from 1956 when they first met in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) right up until Leach’s death in Cambridge in early January 1989. Tambiah advises that, in the biography, ‘Leach speaks, writes and narrates – but these representations are filtered, arranged and mediated by my own activity as narrator, commentator and friend’ (p. xiv). In ordering, interpreting and contextualising Leach’s work as a corpus, Tambiah refers in detail to the key published writings, to those of Leach’s followers and critics, to the reminiscences of some friends, former students and colleagues, to information and advice provided by Leach’s daughter, Louisa Brown, and his wife, Lady Celia, and to the unpublished ‘Edmund Leach Papers’ deposited in the Modern Archive Centre at King’s College Library, Cambridge. He also, of course, brings his own insights to the material and, as an eminent scholar of South and Southeast Asian cultures, he has some valuable explanatory and critical points to make about Leach’s two major field studies, in Highland Burma and Ceylon.

Without doubt, the understanding which Tambiah brings to Leach’s anthropology has been enhanced considerably by his time shared with Leach at Cambridge. Through much of the 1960s and into the early 1970s, first as a research fellow, then as a lecturer, tutor and fellow of King’s, Tambiah worked and taught in close association with Leach, and came under his influence precisely at the time that Leach was in intensive dialogue with Lévi-Strassian structuralism. It is also worth pointing out here that this biography of Leach focuses on his ideas, analyses and ethnographies, and to gain a fuller and more rounded view of Leach the man one should read it alongside Tambiah’s complementary memoir of Leach published in the British Academy’s Proceedings in 1998, Stephen Hugh-Jones’s 1989 memoir prepared for King’s College, the special issue of Cambridge Anthropology (1989–90) devoted to Leach (including pieces of Ray Abrahams and Rosemary Firth), and the recently published The Essential Edmund Leach in two volumes (2000), edited by Stephen Hugh-Jones and James Laidlaw for Yale University Press.

Tambiah, then, is primarily interested in Leach’s academic writings and to that end where he records some of the details of Leach’s personal life and background he relates these primarily to their influence on Leach’s ideas and perspectives. They include Leach’s extended, closely interconnected web of Lancashire-based family ties; his comfortable and privileged bourgeois background; his family’s pioneering proclivities and wanderlust; the close relationship with his mother and the more distant one with his father; his early and intense exposure to biblical literature through his mother; his university days at Cambridge and his initial training as a mathematician and engineer (‘a glorious experience’); his early business career in China and his first amateur ethnological expedition to Botel Tobago, leading to his encounter with Raymond Firth in London in 1936 and his ‘conversion’ to anthropology in Bronislaw Malinowski’s LSE seminars in 1937. Aside from these personal details Tambiah also provides substantial biographical information on Leach’s sojourn and travels in Burma, north-east India and southern China from 1939 to 1945, at first undertaking sustained field research and then serving in the Burma army and the Kachin levies during the Japanese occupation; then his early career at Cambridge in the 1950s and his ‘strained personal relationship’ with Meyer Fortes; and,
later, his significant administrative achievements as Provost of King's College, and, in the 1980s the very intimate and moving account of his courageous struggle against skin cancer and, finally, an inoperable brain tumour.

The main part of the biography is devoted to a searching and painstaking account of Leach's work, enormously detailed, sympathetic yet critical, in which Tambiah demonstrates a comprehensive and authoritative command of the materials. Not only does he scrutinise and dissect Leach's key writings but he also places these in the context of the development of Leach's own thinking over a period of some fifty years and in relation to the changing issues and perspectives of anthropology, particularly British and French anthropology, during that time. Tambiah helpfully condenses and presents Leach's 'theoretical positioning' in chapter 4, 'The anthropologist at work'. Leach's perspective was informed by an interest in both structural relations or 'relational systems' as 'transformations' of one another, and the strategies of individual social actors deploying and manipulating 'ideal categories and rules and norms of social conduct in contexts of action to further their interests and goals' (p. 69). Leach explains his own theoretical view in terms of a dialogue between the empiricism and functionalism of Malinowski and Firth and the 'unempirical' rationalism and structuralism of Lévi-Strauss (p. 363). Or as Tambiah phrases it, Leach, unlike Lévi-Strauss 'was more concerned to dialectically relate thought patterns to their social/political/economic and religious contexts to probe their existential logic as well as their contradictions and their ambiguities' (p. 378).

Tambiah divides Leach's work into two main phrases, though there is clearly no sharp divide between the two; the first dates from about 1940 to 1961 (during which time Leach published Political systems of highland Burma, Pul Eliya and Rethinking anthropology), and the second roughly from 1962–5 through to the 1980s. In the first Leach was concerned primarily with social organisation, specifically kinship, alliance and descent, political institutions and economic organisation and ecology, and in this connection he was engaged in a dialogue with British functionalism and structural-functionalism. The second, the structuralist phase, comprises the encounter with Lévi-Strauss's writings and Leach's own structuralist analyses of biblical materials and art and architecture (pp. 70–8). Tambiah points to 1961 as 'a landmark in Leach's intellectual journey' (p. 235), a watershed year which saw the publication of Pul Eliya and Rethinking anthropology and his first attempts at the structuralist analysis of myth. Tambiah's textual commentary follows more or less chronologically commencing with an extended, meticulous and thoughtful commentary on Political systems (chapter 5), and Leach's pioneering essay 'The frontiers of Burma', in which Leach explores the categories 'hill and valley people' and Indian and Chinese political models (chapter 6). Tambiah then considers in detail Pul Eliya (chapter 7), and the related essay 'Hydraulic society in Ceylon' with its critical appraisal of Wittfogel's thesis (chapter 8). We then move to Leach's experimentation with Lévi-Straussian myth analysis, his work on biblical materials exemplified brilliantly in the essays 'Genesis as myth', 'Virgin birth' and 'The legitimacy of Solomon', and the edited The structural study of myth and totemism (chapters 9, 10 and 11), followed by the structuralist analysis of art and architecture with, among others, Leach's ingenious examination of Michelangelo's paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (chapter 12).

Tambiah's final chapters provide an elaboration and drawing together of certain strands of Leach's thinking; his conception of individual action and the presentation of the self (chapter 13); his encounter and increasing dissatisfaction with Lévi-Strauss's structuralism (chapter 14); his six 1967 BBC Reith Lectures entitled Runaway world?, in which he spoke to a wider audience and presented 'his doctrine of evolutionary humanism' and 'a call for creative responses toward a universe that was indeterminate and open-ended in the way it would evolve' (p. 392) (chapter 15); his response, in his paper 'In formative travail with Leviathan', to the criticisms of the relationships between British anthropology, colonialism and the uses of anthropology, exemplified in Talal Asad's Anthropology and the colonial encounter (chapter 16); and finally, Leach, in rather more post-modern mode, contextualising and reflecting on his earlier work and the work of his British functionalist colleagues and drawing the radical conclusion that 'all ethnography is fiction' (chapter 17).

There is, of course, much more that Tambiah could have said, and he refers to 'editorial strictures about length' (p. xvi). However, I was slightly disappointed that Leach's specific contribution to Southeast Asian anthropology did not receive more attention. His influence on a whole range of research undertaken in the region from the publication of his social science survey of Sarawak and his Kachin monograph has been pervasive. Tambiah refers to some of the major
studies which followed on from Leach’s path-breaking study of Highland Burma (including importantly those of Kirsch and Lehman), but there is very little anthropological research on the uplands of mainland Southeast Asia which has not addressed at least some aspect of Leach’s work. Leach’s responses to Friedman’s and Nugent’s reanalyses of Kachin society, for example, do not receive attention, though the exchange with Lévi-Strauss does. Leach’s rebuttal of Friedman’s neo-Marxist approach was especially acrimonious and, I think, worthy of a comment.

Nor indeed should we underestimate the impact which Leach has had on subsequent research in Borneo. Again Tambiah, presumably for want of space, says little about this, but Leach’s Sarawak survey and the studies by Freeman, Geddes, Morris and T’ien which flowed from it, as well as Leach’s later supervision of the work of Jérôme Rousseau on the Kayan, have had, in my view, a formative influence on the direction and shape of research on Borneo. In this connection, I found it especially interesting to read Tambiah’s remarks on Leach’s antipathy towards ‘applied’ anthropology (pp. 261, 447), and certainly wanted to know more. After all, Leach’s social science survey famously set out a plan for directly practical or ‘utilitarian’ research in the then new crown colony of Sarawak. In this enterprise Leach was careful to qualify the appropriate role for anthropologists and the relationships between sociological theorising, generalisation and application, but nevertheless he apparently endorsed, as did Firth in Malaya, the potential contribution which anthropology could make to development processes.

What is Leach’s legacy? Tambiah demonstrates it admirably and eloquently, but, for me it is first and foremost, as Tambiah states, Leach’s ‘forceful, vigorous, direct and clear prose’ (p. 3), combined with the intricate, many-sided and thought-provoking ways in which he handled a startlingly varied range of ethnographic and historical materials and his commitment to the comparative method. The mark of a great book – and undoubtedly Political systems in highland Burma is a great book, and Leach’s greatest – is that one can read and re-read it with profit and continue to learn from it, given that Leach’s interpretations are open-ended and lead the reader in several possible directions. The monograph, Leach’s subsequent responses to reanalyses and criticisms of it, and his later reflections on it, demonstrate his main qualities, again in Tambiah’s words, a man ‘blessed with a creative experimental and reflexive mind that was more concerned with restlessly probing than with consolidating knowledge’ (p. 4).

Tambiah has written an outstanding book, a worthy tribute to his friend and mentor Edmund Leach, but one which probes and reveals Leach’s strengths and weaknesses, and what he both accomplished and also left unsaid and undone. For me, Tambiah has succeeded in his aim of identifying, understanding and explaining ‘the trajectory of [Leach’s] major writings . . . their range, their continuities, transitions, and transformations, their innovative experiments and their new directions’ (p. xiii). Tambiah’s searching biography is sure to become a work of lasting importance in anthropology.

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At one level, Cai Hua has produced a solid, readable and well-researched ethnography of the Na, an ethnic group numbering some 30,000 and living in the south-west of the Chinese province of Sichuan. As such it contains comprehensive accounts of Na history, agriculture, kinship, religion and political organisation. However, the contribution that Hua has made goes way beyond mere ethnographic description. In A society without husbands or fathers he brings to light a highly unusual ethnographic case which challenges many of the theoretical premises upon which conventional kinship theory is built. In their apparent disregard for paternity, family, marriage and alliance the Na are highly distinctive and will undoubtedly join the ranks of those other much-pored-over matrilineal societies which include the Nayar, the Trobriands and the Hopi. Such societies have long been central to the critique of functionalism and its tendency to universalise the nuclear family and accord fathers a privileged place. Indeed, the Na appear to offer the basis of an even more radical critique of these theories in that their normal mode of domestic reproduction is entirely consanguineal.

Whereas Audrey Richards suggested two solutions to the ‘matrilineal puzzle’ (affinity + uxorilocality or viri-avunculocality), the Na would seem to offer a third in which brothers and sisters
form the basis of the household unit and the lineage without recourse to marriage on either of their parts. Looked at through the lens of conventional family structures, as portrayed by Murdock for example, roles appear to have shifted significantly. The husband–wife relationship, characterised by economic specialisation, cooperation, joint responsibility for care and upbringing of children and defined rights in relation to property is replaced by the lifelong co-residence of a brother and sister. Where brother and sister differ from husband and wife, however, is in their strict observance of the incest taboo. The Na practice a ‘strict ban on sexual evocation’ [p. 128] which manifests itself as a highly elaborate code of conduct observed between opposite sex siblings in order to avoid any reference to sexual matters. For example, television programmes are not watched by mixed sex groups for fear that they might witness nudity or intimacy on the screen. In other words, the social and cultural load carried by the brother–sister relationship in organisational terms is considerable, but this appears to be balanced by rigidly observed taboos which smother any suggestion of intimacy or attraction between them.

Finally, if husbands do not figure in the organisation of Na kinship, then neither do fathers. Consequently, the father–son relationship and the father–daughter relationship, each of which have been fundamental in modelling the structure and dynamics of the nuclear family, are both absent. However, if brothers and sisters live together for life and the incest taboo is strictly observed, then the question arises as to how, when and with whom sex takes place? In answering these questions Hua provides us with the most engaging and intriguing aspects of his account. The Na practice four sexual modalities: the furtive ‘visit’, the open ‘visit’, cohabitation and marriage.

The furtive ‘visit’ brings couples together as lovers, who engage in casual sexual liaisons over an unspecified period. Known as açia relationships, these meetings take place at night in the house of a woman and in secret. The man is expected to leave before dawn to return to his own matrilineal home and there is no contact with other members of the woman’s lineage. The açia relationship is based on an ethic of sexual freedom which appears to be shared by women as well as men (although it should be noted that Hua’s account is largely from a male perspective).

The relationships are non-exclusive and non-coercive, with men and women having numerous açia relationships in series or in parallel and sometimes, claim the young and energetic, several ‘relationships’ in one night. Sexual relationships create no bonds other than the shared pleasures of lust and romance. Indeed, fidelity is considered shameful to the Na because it implies exchange or bargaining between people using sex as the currency [p. 214]. Pregnancies inevitably arise from such liaisons and the children born become members of the mother’s matriline. There is no particular attempt to determine paternity and siblings will invariably have different genitors. It is not unusual for paternity to be undetermined or even undeterminable.

These attitudes to sex are underscored by procreation theories which identify women as foundational to the transmission of essence and identity. In a way that is prescient of modern beliefs about the formation of eggs in the female body, the foetus is thought to already exist in the womb and men are needed merely to release or stimulate its growth. The analogies used by the Na are typical of those found in agricultural societies with women being metaphorically associated with the earth – ‘if the rain does not fall from the sky the grass will not grow on the ground’ [p. 226]. Where the Na differ is that men are not identified as being the source of specificity in this process, the seed, and women mere undifferentiated ground, but the other way round. Females transmit the specific identity of the child via the foetus in the form of bone. Men are undifferentiated in their contribution: ‘it makes no difference who does the watering’ [p. 227]. Looked at from this perspective, it is not surprising to learn that the energy that men put into their nocturnal ‘visits’ is seen by them as a kind of charity in which they ardently and anonymously toil to help other people’s matrilineals successfully reproduce. Hua estimates that in 1989, 57 per cent of sexually active people were still participating in the furtive ‘visit’.

The second sexual modality is that of the conspicuous ‘visit’. Such relationships begin with an açia relationship but attain a degree of stability, institutionalisation and public recognition. The relationship is marked by negotiation, with the female chief of the matrilineage, an exchange of gifts and a meal. However, the relationship is still characterised by the ‘visit’, the main difference being that a man can arrive openly and earlier in the evening at his partner’s house, perhaps share a meal with his partner’s kin and, furthermore, he is not expected to have left before dawn. Open relationships are moderately exclusive and accusations of ‘stealing sex’ may be made if a man in an open relationship finds his partner also has an
acía relationship. Nonetheless, even in the open relationships, the emphasis is on respect for individual desire and either party is free to terminate an open relationship at any stage with little social consequence.

Cohabitation and marriage do occur, but these are minority forms that appear to take place as responses to demographic irregularity rather than as stable institutions. For example, a household in which there are only daughters may have labour shortage problems which can be solved by a man cohabitating in his partner’s home. Similarly, where there is only one son or a daughter is infertile, continuation of the line may be threatened and marriage-like arrangements are entered into in order to pre-empt a potential break in the continuity of the matrilineage.

However, it is clear that these are not privileged forms. In the first instance, adoption is a preferred solution to problems of labour shortage or lack of successors. Also, Hua’s detailed genealogical research shows that in cases where marital arrangements are put in place they do not persist; within a couple of generations binary affinity reverts to unitary consanguinity. In other words, there is no accumulation of patterned relationships of the kind which would make generalised, or even restricted, exchange possible. One important exception to the Na’s disregard for marriage, however, is to be found among their chiefly lineages or zhifu. Within these lineages chieftainship is passed in the male line via the eldest son and there is a tradition of marriage to ensure that this pattern of transmission can be maintained.

An important theme running through Hua’s account of Na kinship practices is the relationship between the Na, as an ethnic minority on the margins, and the larger political structures within which they have, at various times, found themselves. At different times in the past the Na have been subject to campaigns to bring their practices into line with those of the ethnic majority Han or, more recently, with Communist Party ideals, both of which favoured monogamy, patrilineality and virilocality. Hua argues that the origins of marriage customs among the zhifu can be traced to just such an encounter. For them, the conscious borrowing of marriage customs among their chiefs was a political strategy to ensure that their power was legitimated and endorsed by the courts of the ruling Han majority. In the three hundred years prior to the communist revolution, the Na thus appear to have been able to use marriage selectively at the interface between their chiefs and the wider state structures against which they brushed, while at the same time preserving their own distinctive kinship systems.

From the 1950s onward, attempts by the Communist Party to bring the Na into line appear to have become more aggressive. In the evolutionary schema of human society which found its way from Morgan, via Marx and Engels, into communist dogma, promiscuity is considered prior, and therefore inferior, to monogamy. As such, the Na were seen by the ruling Communist Party as a kind of atavistic throwback which needed remedial attention. Na practices were labelled as morally offensive, the source of sexually transmitted diseases, adult sterility, deformity in children and, what is more, men spending their nights, if not actually having sex, then wandering around in search of it. This was not thought conducive to a good day’s productivity in the fields.

In the Great Leap Forward of the 1950s, the emphasis was on encouragement of the Na to turn open relationships into de facto marriages. The Cultural Revolution of the 1960s saw more active attempts to break up matrilineages with local government work teams corralling people into registered marriages. In the 1970s the government tried to transplant monogamy by administrative constraint. Those who chose to practice the traditional Na way faced a range of disincentives and penalties. In a move not dissimilar to recent legislation on child support legislation in Britain, mothers were required to register the genitors of their children or else risk loss of state support. Party cadres who were found to have practiced the ‘visit’ were dismissed.

Conversely, incentives were introduced for those who married neolocally. For example, couples were given special dispensations to cut down trees to build their houses. Undoubtedly, these various campaigns to introduce monogamy impacted badly on the Na. They were seen by them as an assault on the essence of their identity and culture; nothing short of an attempt to turn them into Han. However, the net result of each of these campaigns was that their impacts were felt little beyond their duration. Having taken on the appearance of married couples, the Na repeatedly reaffirmed the primacy of the brother–sister unit and slid back to the preferred modality of the ‘visit’ once government officials were off the scene. In the 1980s, under Deng Xiaoping, more liberal and less alienating policies were adopted towards the ethnic minorities and the Na were able to practice their traditions with less harassment. However, several generations of access to education and creeping
industrialisation is bringing change where direct attempts at social engineering failed. Na traditional practices are beginning to incorporate outside concepts, ideas and terms, and Hua predicts a sharp decline in traditional practices in years to come.

Hua’s account brings into question a number of assumptions about paternity, domesticity and reproduction which will no doubt be the subject of debate for years to come, not least because of the changing position of husbands and fathers in western societies. However, one of the more interesting theoretical challenges thrown up by this unusual case is the relationship between the incest taboo and marriage. One of the fundamental tenets of kinship theory as proposed by Levi-Strauss in his elementary structures is that marriage is the necessary and inevitable corollary of the incest taboo. Clearly, this grand narrative fails to encompass the Na who, although rigid in their observance of the incest taboo within the matriline, do not typically engage in marriage outside it. In his conclusion, Hua turns to an explanation, not so much of why, as of how this is the case. In a Benedictian, patterns-of-culture sort of way, Hua opposes the needs of regulated and structured reproduction with those of untrammelled sexual desire, both of which he sees as ‘rooted in the innermost depths of human nature’ [p. 475]. The Na, somewhere along the line, plumped for the latter end of the arc of culture and eschewed the discipline of marriage and its expectations of possession, control and exchange of one human being by another, in favour of pleasure and heterogenous sexual gratification. In so doing, the Na evolved a unique sexual modality, the ‘visit’ and a unique form of domestic organisation based on matrilineal consanguinity. Hua has done a great service in capturing this intriguing pattern of social life in some considerable detail, and before it becomes ground into a featureless homogeneity.

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Water is a fascinating subject to study. It is a vital resource for people all over the world and has been the theme for anthropological studies and theories since the birth of the discipline. Not surprisingly, conflict over water is a common issue in the world of fiction (literature, film, etc.) as well as in the real world (think of the Middle East). Further, in many cultures mythology and rituals are drawn by the idea that water constitutes an existential element in the universe.

Paul Gelles has written a graceful book on the relationship between water and power in an Andean peasant community located in southern Peru. It offers an interesting insight into the intricate ways irrigation shapes the social and cultural life of a society that is caught between global, national and regional power struggles. Tourists may believe that Cabanaconde is a ‘typical’ Andean village that has remained unchanged since the times of the Incas. Well, in some respects you may say they are right, but that shouldn’t lead us to believe that Cabanaconde isn’t part of the modern, globalised world. Almost 500 villagers live in Washington DC. Similarly, the community has a migrant colony of the same size in Lima, Peru’s capital. Hence, whereas the inhabitants of Cabanaconde may appear Andean to the outsiders, they are certainly transnational as well.

Gelles’ argument is that irrigation is an important arena of social interaction. His main concern is to understand the interlocking of social life and the regional and national power structures in the Peruvian highland. The hypothesis of the book is that conflicts over water in highland Peru are not only shaped by the legitimacy and hegemony of the country’s dominant culture and ethnic groups, but that the villagers of Cabanaconde also reproduce these power structures through their struggles to control water distribution. Gelles claims that state officials in Peru and other Latin American countries ignore indigenous models of resource management because of the alleged superiority of ‘modern’ western cultural forms and organisation and because the power-holders and dominant cultures of these nations regard indigenous peoples as racially and culturally inferior. In effect, the cultural logic underwriting irrigation in Cabanaconde is completely coined by ethnic conflict.

Gelles’ analysis is centred on two fields of social and political conflicts in Cabanaconde. One is the state–community relation, the other the relations of inequality that grow out of ethnic conflicts and power struggles within the community. At the heart of the conflicts are issues of local autonomy,
state control and different cultural understandings concerning availability, efficiency and the means by which one can obtain an abundance of irrigation water. For centuries the state has tried to control the social organisation of irrigation in Cabanaconde. In effect, two competing models of water distribution exist in the community today. One model embodies a communicative rationality that structures social practice and production in Cabanaconde. These activities occupy an important place in Cabanaconde’s annual cycle of rituals, and they constitute a powerful medium for transmitting and reproducing beliefs about fertility, disease, power, authority and ethnic identity.

The local model of water distribution reflects not only the villagers’ own cosmological understanding of the world but has been forged within an Incan and Spanish colonial context. Thus over centuries the villagers’ irrigation practice has been appropriated and used in statecraft, first by the Incas and later by the Spaniards for extractive purposes. The main tool these shifting state powers use to control the irrigation system of Cabanaconde has been a dual organisation which has continued to play a crucial role in water distribution up through the twentieth century. The cultural logic of dualism is related to a wide range of semantic and social fields concerned with fertility, complementary opposition and the ritual efficacy of alternating sides. Consequently, our days’ dualism contains a cultural logic concerned with obtaining abundance and fertility through complementary opposition as well as an imperial administrative ideology of control concerned with regulating the production and flow of resources, as well as the reproduction of tribute payers. Ironically, dual organisation today serves counter-hegemonic purposes in Cabanaconde and the ‘state’ model of yesterday has become the ‘local’ model today.

The reason for this shift in ‘local’ and ‘state’ models is the change in power structures that has taken place up through the twentieth century. Thus the ‘state’ model today is based on a ‘rational’ water distribution system introduced by the contemporary Peruvian state. This model replaces the ‘local’ (i.e. the dual-organisation model) by the end of the year, depending on when the first heavy rains fall (the rainy season in the Andes starts in January and lasts to April), and ignores the village’s dual classification. Instead it follows one of two systems. The first of these is the state’s de canto system (i.e. irrigating sequentially, from ‘one end to the other’) which is overseen by controllers who, unlike the water controllers in the ‘local’

model, receive monetary payments to oversee water distribution. The second is an anarchic, informal system known as ‘every man for himself’.

The ‘state’ model in Cabanaconde was introduced by state officials to ‘rationalise’ water distribution. According to Gelles, however, the development of a state model and the transformation of the dual system from an extractive mechanism of Inca and Spanish hegemony to a form of cultural resistance against the contemporary Peruvian state must be studied within the context of the sweeping changes in the community’s authority structures over the last century. In particular, ethnic conflicts within the community have played an important role in the process. Thus, while the indigenous population in general identify with the ‘local’ model of irrigation, the community’s local elites lead by a group of mestizos have been the driving force in introducing the ‘state’ model.

Water and power in highland Peru is an instructive as well as entertaining book. Truly, the author couldn’t have chosen a more fascinating place to study the power struggle between state and community than Cabanaconde – and he couldn’t have picked a more intriguing field to explore this issue than the control and organisation of irrigation. The book is an illustrative demonstration of how anthropologists employ their analytical magic to investigate a particular issue such as water while at the same time unpacking the local culture in which it is embedded. As a result, the achievements of Gelles’ book are two-fold: it examines the historical and political development of water management in a post-colonial society while ethnographically describing how community, power and ethnicity are constructed in the Andes. Without promising too much, this book can be read by both regional experts and anthropologists in general who are interested in state–community relations and the management of common resources.

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These two collected volumes form part of a wider series, 'Senri Ethnological Studies', that are published intermittently by Japan's National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka. While this ethnological series includes a variety of volumes on anthropological themes and geographical areas, the two volumes under review form part of a series within a series. They belong to the string of publications on 'Japanese civilization in the modern world' dedicated to the comparative exploration of Japan as a civilisation.

This Japanese series includes volumes on such themes as cities, religion, technology or amusement. It derives its impetus and large parts of its intellectual drive from the intellectual programmes of the man who was central to the establishment of the museum and acted as its first director, Tadao Umesao. Each volume is based on papers presented at a workshop that takes place at the museum. It includes a majority of scholars from Japan – the workshop is run in Japanese – and a minority from abroad.

The first volume on 'Nation-state and empire' is the more sophisticated in that it offers a host of theoretical and comparative insights. Umesao opens the volume with an essay that expresses his interest in looking at the world not through an Euro-American point of view but from a different perspective. He shows how modernising Japan can be understood through two very different dynamics: state-building (and its homogenising effects) and empire-building (the implementation of suzerainty). He also shows that in the wake of Japan's success it has become a model for China. Yamamuro continues this line of reasoning by attempting to understand how the Meiji state possessed and controlled colonies, concluding that the best conceptualisation would be one of the creation of a national-empire. Murata's contribution explores how Japan (as a successful nation-state) formed a significant other for China and how the comparison with Japan led to a complex set of internal Chinese identities.

Mehl compares nineteenth-century Japan and Germany in terms of the place of the discipline of history in the creation of national identities. Kleinen shows how the severe exclusion policies against Catholicism and Buddhism in the Wilhelmine and Meiji states were related to the development of the present nation-state. Kurimoto's essay focuses on the way in which becoming an imperial soldier allowed pre-war Koreans to join the Japanese state (via a masculinist mode of entry).

The second volume on 'Collection and representation' runs on from the previous one by linking the processes of creating museums to those of nation- and state-building. It does this by dealing with issues centred on knowledge, power and classification. This is also the last volume in the series on Japan, and draws it to a close by bringing the intellectual discussion back to the National Museum of Ethnology. Umesao opens up the volume by contrasting European and Japanese modes of museumification, and by offering a model for understanding the different dynamics of collecting and exhibiting, as they are related to the nation-state and private interests or assumptions about the use of museums. Shirahata provides an historical overview of plant collecting in Japan.

In a fascinating contribution, Screech shows how the logic of plant collecting is related to the categorisation of peoples through ideas about adaptability to environments. Vos traces the origins of the Von Siebold collection in Leiden to the early documentation of Japanese culture and later to the classification systems that underlay European museums. Nishino traces the origin and development of the Louvre in Paris. Lockyer uses the exhibitions of Japan in the late-nineteenth century to show how they were open to diverse interpretations. Yoshida compares the two major museums in Japan – an art museum in Tokyo and the ethnological one in Osaka – in order to show carefully the limits and possibilities offered by the ways in which they choose to exhibit.
focuses on private art museums that have displayed utensils of the tea ceremony but shows the contradiction inherent in passively displaying something that can only be understood through its performance. Kinoshta charts the fascinating process by which weapons become art objects through showing how swords were recategorised during the American occupation. Yoneyama compares two museums in contemporary Japan – the Atomic Bomb Museum in Hiroshima and the Museum of Laughter in Osaka – to demonstrate the interrelations between collection, display and representation in contemporary societies.

What does the world look like when viewed from outside America or Europe? A number of the essays in these volumes provide sophisticated answers to this question. Thus, for example, in the volume dealing with empire and state we begin to understand that many world processes cannot be fully understood as the outcome of western influences (phrased variously as imperialism, colonialism or cultural power). Rather, we see that the complex relations between Japan and China continued long after the incursion of various western powers into the area.

While some of the authors in this volume too easily devolve into emphasising simple dichotomies between Japan and the west, the significance of these publications lies precisely in offering a different perspective on world history and development. The volume on museums raises questions about the kinds of assumptions that surround collection and representation. Some of the essays suggest a basic irony that lies at the root of many western museums: the passive exhibition of objects divorced from their use. In historical Japan, by contrast, while collections were smaller, their display was often linked to their utilisation in actual performances (the example of the tea ceremony is one instance). Such essays thus seem to question the prevalent practice of ‘inert’ displays in many Euro-American countries.

A few words about the wider context of these two edited books. The two volumes – like the whole series – offer an excellent window on contemporary anthropology in Japan. Japan now has the second largest number of practising anthropologists in the world after the United States, and boasts a national ethnological association of over 1,600 members. In this manner it provides what is perhaps the most impressive example of an emerging world centre. The economic development and increasing political clout of Japan are obvious factors that have led to the establishment and growing importance of the National Museum of Anthropology in Osaka. Indeed, it is not surprising to learn that in the past few decades, in addition to the large number of Thai, Chinese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese anthropologists sent to the United States for training, many have been dispatched to Japan as well.

Intellectually, however, the sheer economic and political strength of countries in many parts of Asia is an issue which raises for anthropologists (as for other social scientists) problems related both to the place of resources in fostering the creation of anthropological knowledge and to the understanding of such postulated ideals as ‘East’ and ‘West’ or emergent thoughts about ‘Asian’ identity. The economic success of many contemporary Asian societies such as Japan may force us to ask questions related to modernity (and post-modernity) in ways that African and arguably Latin American societies do not. Here again, the volume on nation and state shows how Japan forms a different route towards modernity and its social and cultural implications.

Today the English language has become – as in all of modern academia – a standardising device, a storehouse of common culture, and a resource and constraint. (To attain international renown one must publish in English.) Through translations of works written in academic centres or by way of international conferences and seminars, external works are filtered into local professional communities around the world. The effect of this situation is both a greater homogenisation of international anthropology and the reinforcement of power relations. Transnational activities, like the work of publishers or of journal editors, serve to reinforce relations between centres and peripheries. It is in this light that the two volumes under consideration should be understood. Japan’s emergence as a world centre has involved the systematic translation of Japanese works into English and the establishment of book series in that language. The publications of the National Museum of Ethnology are just one example.

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Studies of the processes and consequences of what has come to be called the ‘imagining’, ‘constituting’ or ‘constructing’ of identity have become something of a growth industry. Much of the previous work on this subject, which has been influenced importantly by Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Edward Said, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger among others, has concentrated on the creation and representation of regions, nations and national identity, and on the relationships between the state and minorities. There has been much less attention to the ‘making’ of majorities, though the discourse on national representations has usually had to make reference to the role and identity of major populations, or at least to the strategies of the politically dominant groups in society.

This edited collection, which emerged from a workshop entitled ‘Configuring minority/majority discourse: problematizing multiculturalism’, held at the East–West Center in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, therefore seeks to fill a gap in the literature, although it achieves this objective much more directly in empirical rather than in theoretical terms. For those of us interested in issues of race, ethnicity and nation in an explicitly historical perspective, the concepts and analyses employed in this volume, which are concerned with discourse, dialogue, negotiation, representation, reinterpretation and invention, carry no surprises.

The case studies reveal much of interest, but some reveal more than others. The editor, in his preface (pp. vii–viii), tells us that one of the debates which exercised the contributors focused on the appropriate title for the volume, and while there was no dispute over the main title, there was considerable discussion about the sub-title. In my view the specification in the sub-title of the countries selected for the case-studies is about the best that could be done, but it points to a weakness. The several contributions and the empirical examples presented comprise a rather mixed bag, and they do not provide a sufficiently comprehensive view of the Asia–Pacific region.

Gladney reminds us that the series in which the volume has been published is committed to the study of contemporary issues within the Asia–Pacific area from a comparative and cross-regional perspective, but he accepts that the current collection only covers a small part of Asia. I might also add that it includes two contributions on Turkey (by Selim Diringil and Kemal Kirisci), which some observers might wish to locate outside Asia altogether, and that one of the two chapters on ‘Americanness’ (by Richard Handler) concentrates on the eastern regions of North America, namely the French-speaking Quebeccois and the representation of African–American history in the Colonial Williamsburg outdoor museum in Virginia, as well as a comparative case-study of the Breton populations of French Brittany, remote from Asia and the Pacific. The main emphasis of the book is on East Asia, specifically the Muslim Chinese of the People’s Republic of China (Dru Gladney) and the Han Ren of Taiwan (by Hsieh Shih-chung, though Taiwan is not indicated in the sub-title), the Japanese (by Kosaku Yoshino) and the Japanese in relation to the Ainu and ‘special-status people’ (by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney), and the South Koreans (one on Korean shamans by Laurel Kendal and the other on the construction and deconstruction of Korean culture by Cho Hae-joang).

There are two papers from South-East Asia, though both are on the Malays of Malaysia (by Shamsul A. B. and Anthony Milner) and, from the Pacific Islands, two chapters on the Fijians (by John Kelly and Martha Kaplan) and one on American Hawai‘i (by Jonathan Okamura). Of course, the major issues which the volume addresses are amenable to comparison across a wide range of cases and regions, but, in my view, the comparisons would have been strengthened immeasurably if they had been closely controlled in historically, culturally and geographically related countries. For this reason the six contributions on East Asia and those on Malaysia and Fiji hang together much more satisfactorily than the volume overall, and the papers on ‘Turkishness’ and ‘Americanness’ add very little to the comparative framework.

The editor’s introduction reasonably successfully and succinctly sets down the main concerns of the book and the issues raised by the relevant literature. The contributors, most of whom are anthropologists, work on the premise that, in Gladney’s words, majority populations are ‘made, not born’. Nor are they essentially homogeneous: ‘[n]umerically, ethnically, politically, and culturally, societies make and mark their majorities and minorities under specific historical, political, and social circumstances’ (p. 1). Gladney’s summary of the main findings of the collection are well taken, namely that a demographic majority
may not enjoy political superiority while a numerical minority may be politically powerful, that populations do not always aspire to join majorities, that, despite discrimination, minorities may still seek minority status, and that majority status should be examined in relation to such organisational principles as class, gender and power (pp. 6–8). His statement that minority populations are usually defined in relation to ‘an accepted majority’ (p. 2) seems unexceptional, and I do not agree with his remarks that ‘much of Asia is still viewed as somehow culturally and ethnically homogeneous’ and that the ‘general theoretical discussion of ethnicity and cultural identity has largely been absent from Asian nation studies, and from much of Asian studies in general’ (p. 3).

Perhaps he has been unduly influenced by an East Asian or Chinese perspective, but certainly in Southeast and South Asian Studies theoretical and ethnographic considerations of national and ethnic identities have featured prominently in the literature, as has the theme of cultural and ethnic diversity.

There are for me some especially worthy contributions. The chapters by Yoshino and Ohnuki-Tierney together usefully relate ‘Japaneseness’ specifically to dialogues between the majority population and ‘others’, both minorities within the country and also non-Japanese foreigners and cultures (particularly the Chinese and westerners); Yoshino also makes the valid analytical distinction between primary and secondary nationalism. Cho Hae-joang’s paper complements the Japanese contributions by exploring ‘Koreaness’ in the context of decolonisation and globalisation. Gladney’s critique of Samuel Huntington’s ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis in relation to the majority Han Chinese and the Muslim Chinese (Hui) minority, as well as his demonstration of the internal diversity of these two categories, is well argued and illuminating. Shamsul’s and Milner’s examination of the Malay concepts and meanings of negeri, negara kerajaan, bangsa and kebangsaan complement one another nicely, as do Kelly’s and Kaplan’s discussion of indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian relations. The Malay and Fijian cases, both of which were subject to British colonial ideology and action, also raise several interesting comparative questions.

Overall the volume is a most useful addition to the literature on national and ethnic identities; some of the ethnographic contributions are particularly welcome in their exploration of the ways in which certain elements of identity, national culture or tradition are selected, transformed or discarded and the processes by which some of them are essentialised and naturalised. However, the volume, despite judicious editing and ample cross-referencing between the various papers, does lack coherence and would have benefited from a much more focused, controlled and comprehensive regional comparison.

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This collection of articles is mostly based upon the lecture series ‘Psychosocial wellness of refugees’ at the Refugee Studies Programme, University of Oxford. Many of the contributors are researchers well recognised in the field: some of them are anthropologists. In the book they describe their previous research projects mainly from a methodological point of view.

The cross-cultural and multi-professional field of ‘psychosocial health of refugees’, ‘refugee mental health’ or alternatively ‘psychosocial wellness of refugees’ is to a large extent dominated by clinical assessments of traumatisation, health and well-being. Quantitative methods and research instruments based upon so-called western values, assumptions and norms are commonly used, and often regarded as more or less objective and universal measurements. Most of the measures focus upon psychiatric symptoms and health status, but lack scales for psychosocial well-being. Ahearn objects that although cultural background obviously influences definitions and expressions of ‘well-being’, it is often not accounted for in these assessments.

Many of the contributors agree that quantitative methods alone might be insufficient to grasp social and cultural meanings, and should be combined with qualitative methods of investigation. Marita Eastmond, for instance, claims that in the refugees’ own perception suffering is often seen as a moral, spiritual, existential or ideological problem, and not a medical one. In contrast, therapists conceive of this in terms of medical or psychological idioms, and focus on the afflicted individual, abstracted
from social or cultural contexts. She described how ‘survival guilt’ – often recognised as an individual, psychological response to traumatisation, is mediated culturally and is embedded with social meanings – for instance collective moral commitments. In the meeting between the weak part (refugee) and the strong part (therapist), however, the resulting definition might be seen as an expression of unequally distributed power in a process which pathologises and medicalises the refugees’ responses to social, economic and political circumstances.

Eastmond also describes how an increasing awareness of cultural differences has led to a recognition of ethnocentric instruments and assessments, and further to the development of techniques of cultural translation. The goal is to create equivalence or comparability in measures and self-rating scales through eliciting the meanings of terms and concepts with the help of culturally knowledgeable informants. Eastmond claims that this reflects a conception of culture as merely static layers, uniformly distributed within a group and the camouflage of an underlying essence or objective reality.

Ahearn’s choice of the concept ‘psychosocial wellness’ indicates less focus on pathology than is usual in this field. Most literature focuses upon the refugees’ stress, loss, separation, trauma, emotional state and maladjustment as potential sources of physical or psychological problems, in particular the diagnosis PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

One of the purposes of the book, which, however, is not elaborated much upon in the methodological presentations, is to highlight the refugees’ strength, resilience and independence. Using the term ‘wellness’, the editor wants to portray the refugees as active survivors – experts on their own lives, rather than passive, helpless and needy victims. In my opinion the focus on ‘wellness’ cannot disguise the fact that many refugees are suffering as a result of previous experiences in their home countries, during flight or in exile. Many, however, manage quite well without psychological help. A too narrow focus on the refugees’ suffering might contribute to stereotypes which, for instance, influence the possibilities of resettlement in third countries, and access to employment or social contact. Only focusing on the refugees’ strength might, however, result in less acknowledgement of the need for assistance that many refugees actually experience before and after resettlement.

Anthropologists often describe their informants as turning into friends. When you never leave the field, because the refugees are living nearby, dilemmas may arise, such as how to incorporate the new friendships into your already existing personal life. Patricia A. Omidian describes how the special needs of her informants affected her by always having to be ‘on call’ and consequently feeling obliged to help and at risk of burn-out. As with many of the authors, she points to the urge to do research which can improve the life-situation of the refugees rather than merely perform for academic interests.

The ethical aspects of the researcher–informant relation could have been elaborated even more. The role of the researcher might be hard to grasp for an informant. And for the fieldworker it might be desirable that the informants are not all the time too conscious of his/her role as a researcher. This could eventually prevent contact, and access to relevant arenas and sources of data. Many refugees experience loneliness after resettlement, and will probably welcome almost any new friend, including the researcher. But what happens when the fieldwork ends? It might be considered unethical to withdraw from a relation, thereby leaving the friend/informant in isolation, perhaps even with a feeling of having been misused. Increased openness about the intentions of the social contact might be required at all stages of the fieldwork.

The idea of the researcher as neutral might be unknown, unacceptable or even seem suspicious to the refugees. As Didier Bertrand describes, a researcher can be expected to have power to influence the refugees’ life-situation. Failing to meet these expectations might impact on access to data. In addition, data might not be reliable. This is known from other settings as well. Telling lies, however, might become part of the refugees’ survival strategies. Lack of trust, suspiciousness towards questioning, and fear of negative consequences might give rise to strategic answers. Unstructured interviews might also present special challenges related to the experiences of trauma and loss. Bertrand describes how interviews can easily come to serve as ‘therapy’, where the refugee shares his/her traumatic experiences. A researcher who is not trained to cope with such stories might experience emotional problems and need strategies to protect her/himself from difficulties arising from this: nightmares, psychosomatic and avoidance symptoms, intrusive thinking, and so on.

Signs of cultural awareness are almost absent in the quantitative projects presented. Raija-Lena
Research in this field has usually been based upon perceptions of stressful events and circumstances. However, her research is largely based upon measures which seem to be like the ‘western products’ earlier criticised in this book: picture tests for stress responses, dream diaries, unfinished sentences and attitude scales.

A variety of methodological issues related to the use of census data for research on refugees’ economic integration are discussed in the article of Miriam Potocky-Tripodi. The article does not focus on issues directly related to psychosocial health, since variables concerning this are lacking in the census data.

Maryanne Loughry and Nguyen Xuan Nghia investigated the effects of detention on the psychosocial well-being of children, and the adaption of formerly unaccompanied children to Vietnamese society after years of absence. Loughry and Nghia label this a ‘cross-cultural study of well-being’, partly because of the collaboration and discussions with Vietnamese staff who also acted as ‘cultural interpreters’. This, for instance, made them aware of the lack of a concept equivalent to ‘well-being’ in the Vietnamese language. However, it is unclear how this cultural sensitivity influenced the research process. Five fixed psychometric instruments (like Achenbach youth self-reports assessing behavioural adjustment) were selected. But although they were translated back and forth – to ensure lexical equivalence – it seems to me that culturally and socially relevant information might have been lost in this process. Several difficulties were encountered with the measures chosen. Many of the items had to be explained at length because the children were illiterate, lacking formal education, unable to understand the relevance of the questions, unfamiliar with such questions or because, as they state, ‘the directness of the questions on a questionnaire is not very familiar in Vietnamese culture where sensitive topics are approached more gradually. Many children also tired during the interviewing and had to be encouraged to continue’ (p. 174).

Irene Hyman, Morten Beiser, Sam Noh and Nhi Vu present their findings from interviews with Southeast Asian young people in Canada. They focus on the issue of the relationship between resettlement, acculturation and stress. Similarly, Colin MacMullin and Maryanne Loughry focus on the need to take into consideration children’s own perceptions of stressful events and circumstances. Research in this field has usually been based upon children responding to items on predetermined lists. MacMullin and Loughry, however, asked Palestinian children in Gaza to list the things that worried them. Many of the worries turned out to be culturally and contextually specific. A questionnaire was constructed and a larger group of children were surveyed with this. Later on the children were asked to elaborate upon their concerns and coping strategies, and to give advice to younger children in similar situations.

MacMullin and Loughry describe their research method as fruitful, but state that it might be criticised since this kind of culturally – and situationally – sensitive method is likely to bring about different results every time, making comparability difficult. In my opinion, research methods which embrace cultural, social and situational variety might seem to imply a lower degree of comparability. However, if the purpose of the study is to increase knowledge about one specific group, then concerns about comparability might be of less importance.

Having studied the Hmong people in Laos and the USA for over thirty years, Joseph Westermeyer describes his experience as that of at first being inundated with another culture, and then coming to study Hmong people adapting to his own culture. Already familiar with ‘Hmong culture’, Westermeyer studied how different cultural aspects influenced the Hmong’s adaption to the United States and their psychosocial problems. Westermeyer constructed his own structured interview guide based upon viewpoints from the Hmong associations, Hmong co-investigators and his own interests and intuitions. However, Westermeyer also used traditional rating scales, translating them back and forth, and conducted pilot studies with informants of different backgrounds as a part of the process of constructing a questionnaire.

Barbara Harrell-Bond claims in her foreword that this book represents a benchmark in academic publication on the psychological consequences of refugee experiences. It seems tempting to agree with her. In a field where biology, brain structures and medicalisation is gaining more attention, it is necessary to focus on the need for cultural and situational considerations when choosing and developing research methods and instruments assessing the psychosocial wellness of refugees. The necessity of acquiring qualitative knowledge about the groups studied, and the need to combine qualitative and quantitative methods is specifically underlined in the book. Some of this may seem obvious to anthropologists. However, the book is
written for all professionals working in this field, most of them psychologists or psychiatrists. There is no doubt that this book will provoke, but surely also inspire, many of them.

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**A phenomenology of working class experience.**

Most non-Britons when asked to describe something of British culture would probably place class hierarchies high on the list. Britain is imagined as a country where hard-wired class positions dominate all aspects of social existence, past and present. Such visions of Britain, embodied in the cheerful chimney-sweep in Disney’s *Mary Poppins*, Eliza Doolittle’s class aspirations in Shaw’s *Pygmalion* and the unemployed steelworkers-cum-strippers from *The Full Monty* have informed and reproduced these visions of class (especially the working class), for external audiences. On the other hand, mainstream opinion *within* Britain often contends that class position is no longer determining and that for the most part, a sort of class meritocracy has emerged.

However, despite this growing internal public rhetoric that England is increasingly classless, the old rules about access to wealth and power still hold largely true. According to the 1999 United Nations Human Development Report, Britain has a higher rate of inequality between rich and poor than any other ‘developed’ country, even higher than the United States (Browne 1999:12). Furthermore, this gap is a growing one, with net incomes between 1979 and 1995 of the richest 10 per cent of Britons increasing by almost 70 per cent while the incomes of the poorest 10 per cent dropped by 8 per cent (Hetherington 1998:6).

Although these are examples of the unequal distribution of wealth and not purely of class per se, it is the very notion that a group’s shared economic position becomes the basis for a class identity, culture, and politicisation which has formed the heart of anthropological and sociological studies on class (Abercrombie and Warde 2000:146). Accepted in the 1950s and 1960s as a core paradigm for the analysis of British society, the uncertainty in mainstream British society about whether or not class still matters now extends into academic debates as well, where questions have been raised about its continuing relevance in contemporary Britain (*ibid.* 147–8).

A desire to challenge this state of affairs underpins Simon Charlesworth’s *A phenomenology of working class experience*, and he calls academics to account with the accusation that ‘within the contemporary university, it is seen as a sign of backwardness to have any concern about class and one is met with a mixture of disbelief, ridicule and derision’ when attempting to engage with questions of class (p. 14). He claims that this stems from ‘the culture of the university which treats issues of deprivation with a quiet disdain issuing from an arrogance born of security’ (p. 14). One of Charlesworth’s central concerns in this monograph is to demonstrate why it is that class does still matter, and indeed, how it is a fundamental aspect of how people come to experience the world and how they are in turn shaped by that world.

His text, based on sociological fieldwork in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, attests to the dire consequences of post-industrial decay in a traditionally working class area. Rotherham was, until the 1980s, a town built on steel, coal and other heavy industries. With the demise of these industries, contemporary Rotherham suffers from high unemployment (and low-paid work for those who are able to find it) and all the other attendant ills familiar in socially deprived areas. Importantly, however, Charlesworth is not simply documenting social inequality in class relations, but rather examines what the erasure of social reference points does individually and collectively to people’s sense of being and existence.

Driving out of Rotherham one is confronted with the devastated remains of its decaying past, a past that has passed more rapidly than many would have thought: within fifteen years the destruction of major industries in the area has destroyed the culture of labour that had been at the heart of the ethics of the people here, of their way of life, of their forms of self-respect and of care. This destruction has meant the decay of care itself, both for the self, and with that, of care for others (p. 49).

Through the partial transcription of taped narratives and written notes from conversations, Charlesworth aims to illuminate the processes through which ‘working class people (become) recognisable as people of a certain type’ and who come to know themselves and their world in certain ways, ‘ways that have consequences for their life-chances and forms of self-realisation’ (p. 3). Far from being a neutral account, Charlesworth
describes these ways of being which are predicated on social decay as hopelessness, despair, boredom, a feeling of uselessness and violence. Currents of vitriolic anger about this state of affairs flow throughout his text as he tries to explain what ‘the hell of being nothing’ (p. 161) is like and how it comes to be.

Phenomenology is his chosen tool for this task because, as he says, ‘the phenomenological ideas are an attempt to lay clear, to show, the sense . . . (of) . . . “the body lived in as by the subject” . . . and to exhibit this temporal, existential structure for these people’ (p. 15, emphasis original). He draws on the writings of Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Bourdieu towards this end. Bourdieu in particular is used heavily, with long passages from a wide variety of his repertoire of works quoted in full. Charlesworth does this intentionally (p. 70), but the passages are balanced with Charlesworth’s own reflections and often tied to transcriptions from his fieldwork. As such, a sort of call and refrain chorus emerges through this weaving of personal narrative with Bourdieu’s social theory. This is a highly effective use of a theorist who is increasingly mythologised in the anthropological and sociological literatures, but whose work tends more often to be evoked than engaged with.

More problematic is a vision of ‘working class people’ as a monolithic entity that emerges from Charlesworth’s text, one that permits no space for the vagaries of experience. As portrayed by Charlesworth, this group of people also inhabit a world of utter bleakness and despair, a world devoid of any life-affirming aspects of existence. A rare mention of any glimmer of pleasure comes through observation, through a withdrawal from the people and phenomena that are described. It emerges through a reconstruction of the problems that are immanent in this life, written by someone who has faced the same cultural exigencies and done so through the same temporal and existential structures’ (p. 89). The strong contrast that emerges between himself as knowing insider and other academics as blinded outsiders means that Charlesworth is effectively closing channels of debate, and any criticism of his interpretation of working-class experience runs the risk of also being labelled ‘class racism’.

This leitmotif of working people’s experience as being primarily bodily, an emphasis on feeling and doing rather than thinking or reflecting, continues throughout the rest of the text, compounded by assertions about ‘the powerful sense of alienation from human expressivity that seems to mark these lives’ (p. 276), a ‘restricted expressivity . . . (and) the impoverished gestural and postural ranges of many working class people’ (p. 277). Such claims effectively consign working people to a less than fully human experience, with alarming implications.

Alongside the working people in the book is to be found the equally monolithic ‘middle class’, which according to Charlesworth seems to be populated by vicious, preening academics, a career-building intelligentsia (pp. 168), ignorant and arrogant students (p. 268–9), and privileged women who use feminist ideas as weapons of class racism (p. 300, fn. 2). Charlesworth, on the other hand, takes care to emphasise his own position as native-insider throughout the text and claims a privileged form of insight: ‘This is not an account that is built up through observation, through a withdrawal from the people and phenomena that are described. It emerges through a reconstruction of the lives’ (p. 276), a ‘restricted expressivity . . . (and) the impoverished gestural and postural ranges of many working class people’ (p. 277). Such claims effectively consign working people to a less than fully human experience, with alarming implications.

The deep sense of alienation and anger permeating A phenomenology of working class experience is due in part to social injustice that has in many quarters become normalised and erased from daily perception. Such aspects of class hierarchies as they play out in real lives are profoundly important, and are a far cry from the innocuous visions of class in Mary Poppins or The Full Monty. I sympathise with Charlesworth’s agenda for reminding comfortable Britain of the uncomfortable truths it exists on, as well as the
deep significance of phenomenology for understanding daily life. I applaud his emphasis on lived experience and the gaps he is attempting to redress in the sociological literature on class. However, a text that starts out so strongly by embracing powerful ideas about experience and desires to move against an objectified view of the working class ultimately becomes locked into a trajectory which reproduces the same dehumanised view of a totalitarian perspective on the working class that he sets out to rewrite.

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The last decades of ethnographic critique have given much interesting reflection about our craft, but little guidance about how to conduct it. In Dancing with the virgin we find both a good piece of ethnographic work and the particular solutions chosen by its author for managing some of the most conspicuous problems for the ethnography of expressive practice – namely, the position of the observer, the authorial self, the interpretation of embedded meanings and bodily-based knowledge, the slipperness of experience and its relation to ethnographic writing. Most of these topics remain implicit in the ethnographic text and are only explicitly discussed in the last chapter.

Formally proposed as qualitative dance analysis, this book explores the whole religious and sensorial context of the fiesta of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Tortugas, a little community in southern New Mexico close to the city of Las Cruces. By focusing on the yearly performances of the Puebloan natives of the locality who dance in honour of the Virgin of Guadalupe, its theoretical goal is to document the intimate relationship between movement and culture, kinesis and bodily-based understanding, performance and belief. For, as the author states, ‘ways of moving are ways of thinking’. The ethnographic account of a Catholic celebration is intended to show how dancing and other performances can be regarded as a way of constructing religious faith – of bringing the presence of the Virgin and binding together, by means of gesture, rhythm and physical movement, different layers of the participant’s memory and experience.

The history of this festivity goes back to the foundation of Tortugas pueblo at the beginning of the twentieth century by a heterogeneous group of settlers, most of them of Pueblo origin – indios from the mission of El Paso, but also Tigua and Piro immigrants and vecinos, Anglo or Mexican residents. In 1914, a non-profit organisation named Los Indigenes de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe distributed lots of land among the settlers and began to organise communal concerns such as house building, cooperative work, and church and cemetery maintenance. This corporation, which conceived itself ‘as a combination of cooperative land-owning society, church-centred community, and guardian of tradition’ (p. 24), has been the holder of the annual fiesta until our days.

The fiesta consists of a number of activities which combine a canonic Catholic model with local pueblo elements: the communal backstage work for dressing the Virgin, cleaning the buildings and cooking food; the danza devoted to the Virgin and performed during an all-night velorio in front of her icon; the pilgrimage during the next day to the top of a mountain in the vicinity; fires at night; the high mass of the 12th at which a bishop officiates; a banquet for the more than 200 participants; the indio and azteca public dances that are ethnically marked; and a final procession across the village’s space. These activities entail a continuous movement among several ceremonial buildings: a meeting house, a community kitchen, a small chapel and a rest house for the dancers.

After a few pages of theoretical introduction and a short review of the historical and social background of the festival (narrated in first person as ‘travel’), the bulk of the ethnography is presented. The main chapter gives a name to the book, with a detailed account of the danza following the lines of the narrative of La...
**Guadalupe's apparitions to the indio Juan Diego at Tepeyac Hill.** Notwithstanding this rather literal and Catholic interpretation of the dancing (given by one informant) as a *mise en scène* of the Mexican nation's founding myth, the following chapters allow one a glance at the ambiguous constituency of the corporation and the multi-levelled identity of their members. Several readings of the festival and its dances in Catholic, Puebloan, Native American, Mexican or Communitarian are also possible. Indeed, the centrality of dancing with the Virgin for the people of Tortugas comes from the fact that it summarises how ‘the specifics of local, temporal histories collapse into a single story of conversion’ (p. 161).

Sklar's ethnography is sensitive and intelligent. Honestly approached and carefully written, it elaborates on a key problem of contemporary anthropological theorisation: the embeddedness of cultural knowledge, and the hidden connections between body, sense, belief and social identity. This problem is particularly acute in fields like music and dance where the inchoate nature of their expressive format makes it especially difficult to cast in words the nuances and interpretive moves carried by the actors.

The basic narrative which runs throughout Sklar’s text and unfolds in the last chapter is a combination of the anthropology of the senses, performance theory and reflexive ethnography. It constitutes a sound frame of reference. The main conclusion drawn from fieldwork is that ‘spiritual experience in Tortugas came as a doing, a transformation enacted upon oneself through the details of work’ (p. 184). To develop this argument, Sklar elaborates on Mark Johnson’s contention that abstract conceptualisations are built in sensorial orderings (embodied, imagined or *feeling* schemata) (Johnson 1987). This leads to the recognition of a ‘somatic mode of attention’ or ‘proprioceptive awareness’, as the one distinctive of the dancer perception, with an ongoing translation of visual and verbal information into movement sensation. In contradistinction to this is the process of ‘wording’, the matching of embodied schemata with words. For, ‘while we experience and express embodied schemata across all sensory modalities, as images, sounds, gestures, and qualities of touch, we manipulate them predominantly as words’ (p. 186).

This sets forth a sharp difference between ‘propositional thinking’, where names and symbolic representations are split off from embodied schemata and worked as abstractions in relation to each other, and ‘aesthetic and spiritual thinking’, where the words are expected to reverberate with somatic memory. Both kinds of understanding would normally run in opposite directions in the construction of meaning: ‘Whereas propositional understandings depend on excluding somatic effects from what counts as meaningful, both aesthetic and spiritual understandings depend on them’ (p. 187). In line with Roy Rappaport’s union of the sacred and the numinous and Victor Turner’s bipolarity of symbols (Rappaport 1979; Turner 1969), Sklar is looking for the process that gives religious symbols both their power and their lived and immediate flavour, a process which she ultimately finds in ‘the doubling of doing and feeling oneself doing’. The difference between merely aesthetic and spiritual thinking lies in spiritual knowing, otherness, the divinity, provides the doubling’. For that purpose she invokes – but does not fully explain – Robert Armstrong’s category of ‘presence’ (Armstrong 1971).

Although my overall appraisal of the book is generally positive, a number of critical remarks can be made. First, the solution given to the problem of the authorial position is not fully convincing: the writing becomes frequently too self-centred. Self-referentiality may take the form of minute literary references to the childhood memories of the author, or to sensorial confessions in an crudely realistic style – ‘Heat rose from the sand when I stopped the car and opened the door’ (p. 9), ‘Traffic was heavy. No one was walking’ (p. 20). There are other moments when the author speculates about how it must feel to be one of her informants. She even allows herself to imagine their answers to virtual questions. Of course, this is justified in terms of the kind of somatic search (learning through proprioceptive awareness) that is at the basis of the project. But to me it goes beyond the limits of ethnographic empathy and results in an overacting of reflexivity. Moreover, this seems to be a particularly restricted way of understanding ‘reflexivity’, more as self-confession than as a commitment to objectify the observer, introducing him or her within the scope of research. In this sense, I missed in the analysis more careful attention to the political economy of the festival, obviously subjected from its beginnings to a number of local and non-local appropriations (the ethnographer’s included).

The book is addressed to the North American public, and to North American academics in particular. For a non-English reader, the writing easily becomes too literary and lexically dense, demanding the help of a dictionary. On the other hand, the Spanish speaker will find misspellings in several vernacular terms. I cannot say if this is a

Finally, let me indulge in some ‘propioceptive awareness’ of my own reading of this good monograph. As a member of a Catholic culture where fiesta is commonplace, I wonder if, respectful and sensitive to local sensibilities though the book is, it may reflect a new and subtle exoticisation of the inner Others of America – those who are southern, Catholic, traditional, communitarian and true believers.

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References


In this book Elizabeth Edwards brings together a number of essays on the subject of photographs and their relationship to anthropology and museums. Her main focus is on the social biographies of photographs and how these can reveal a multiplicity of perspectives at various levels of reading. Most of the book deals with anthropological photography dating from the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She considers how such photographs related to the visual economy of the day, the material forms in which photographs were produced and viewed, and how these aspects of photographs structured visual knowledge. The way photographs are presented, or ‘performed’, how they focus seeing and attention and the way framing imposes an artificial constraint also form part of her subject matter.

Edwards draws on a variety of models to use as tools of analysis. She considers power relations in photography as well as genres or visual dialects; permeating the whole volume is an awareness of the multiple trajectories and histories which enmesh each photographic object. Her method is to start from case studies, primarily from the Pacific, and from them draw out theoretical insights while maintaining an awareness of theoretical approaches which may usefully be applied to the material under examination.

The book is divided into three parts: the first examines in turn the making of photographic archives in the late nineteenth century and the exchange of photographs between curators, anthropologists and others, and what this interchange reveals about the interpretive community of anthropologists of the period. This section goes on to consider the way ethnographic objects were photographed as part of museum practice and how this articulated ethnographical and museological knowledge during that stage in the histories of anthropology and of photography.

The second part of the book comprises four essays which centre on case studies examining the social biographies of small groups of photographs. Through a set of photographs of the D’Entrecasteaux Islands Edwards considers the relationship between photography and history, challenging expectations of photography as ‘natural conduits for memory’ and demonstrating the potential of the medium for opening alternative histories. Edwards’ discussion of two photographs taken in Samoa in 1883 goes on to show how narrow understandings of context are inadequate in relation to the reading of photographs. She demonstrates through a thorough account of events surrounding the taking and archiving of the photographs how counter-narratives can emerge from silences imposed through the social biography of the photographs which invoke broader spatio-temporal dimensions than those superficially implied. The dialogue between deep and surface readings is stressed, revealing the interrogatory potential of photography. In her third case study Edwards considers photographs taken in response to Huxley’s scheme, well-known in visual anthropology, to document the ethnic ‘types’ found in the British Empire.
Edwards argues for using such photographs for an analysis which goes beyond support of Foucauldian discussions of colonial relations. She considers why Huxley’s project came into being at the time that it did, in relation both to Huxley’s own career and to the state of anthropology as a discipline at the time. She goes on to reveal a pattern of resistance to the implementation of the project which can be seen as analogous to resistance to colonial rule. The ultimate failure of the project, she suggests, is as telling as the photographs themselves. Edwards’ final case study in this section reconsiders the question of truth value in relation to re-enactment, using as a key example a photograph taken in 1898 under Haddon’s direction during the Cambridge Torres Straits expedition. Edwards explores re-enactment as a central tool in the visualisation of anthropological data, with its strong link to the notion of salvage ethnography, whose agendas the photograph can reveal. She shows how re-enactment could become a mechanism through which subjects could to some degree control their own ethnography. In addition, she points out how examination of this example reveals that although re-enactment itself emerged from scientific laboratory practices it could at the same time articulate subjective desires and intersecting histories.

In the third section of the book Edwards reflects on the role of photography in contemporary museum practice in the light of the issues raised in preceding chapters, considering especially the use of photography in ethnographic exhibitions. Drawing on examples from recent years Edwards explores some of the problems of aberrant audience readings of reflexive references in such exhibitions and stresses the importance of allowing interpretive space in relation to genre, expectancy and performance. She advocates a greater use of experimental and reflexive styles which empower viewers to make more engaged interpretations. Such a strategy, she suggests, would result in a decentralisation of ethnographic photography as a category and thus expand the horizons of expectation on the part of the viewer. An emphasis on the materiality of the photograph could contribute to such a project. Finally, Edwards considers more radical departures, such as the use of photographs taken by contemporary artists to challenge museum practice itself.

In the final chapter of the book, she discusses the work of Jorma Puranen, a contemporary Finnish photographer, which explores the ‘intersection of … histories of peoples, anthropology, the archive and the material image’ (p. 211), which forms the subject of the book. Puranen repositions historical images of Sami people from northern Finland within their landscape and requotes them so as to breathe new life into their presence and their positioning. This allows for a critical distance between the viewer and the image, foregrounding the original photographs as material objects themselves.

The book as a whole asserts the need for careful consideration of relationships between photographs and the way in which they are taken, collected, archived and represented. Edwards sees the understanding of historical context as crucial. She argues that if individual case studies are taken as a starting point, general conclusions can be drawn from them, and that this approach is more revealing than an analysis of a body of material which takes a theoretical perspective as its starting point. While she accepts the value of broader analysis, it is small studies looking at what she calls ‘ethnographies’ of photography which can articulate the complexities of the mechanisms of photography and inform more comprehensive accounts.

Despite her emphasis on case studies, there is a strong theoretical base to Edwards’ analysis and her discussion is framed in overwhelmingly analytical terms. The book is authoritative and comprehensive in its grasp and articulation of the issues involved. My only reservation is in the limits imposed on the number of photographs included: Edwards refers to a number of examples in addition to those reproduced in the book, and it would have been useful (though perhaps not practicable) to have been able to see them all.

Elizabeth Edwards has already made a number of important contributions to the sub-discipline of visual anthropology. In this book, perhaps her most significant work to date, she reconsiders many of the ways in which photography has been discussed, deepening the arguments and drawing attention to the rich multiplicities of issues and readings which are embedded in the histories of photographic objects. While photographs have been seen as problematic in their detachment, openness to manipulation and beguilingly realistic appearance, Edwards shows how meticulous research and careful readings can make photographs a rich source of alternative perspectives.

The book has relevance for those interested not just in ethnographic photography but also in all other tools employed in anthropology in relation
to fieldwork and the collection and interpretation of data. It raises questions about veracity, competing interpretations, relations of power and a range of other important issues. Edwards presents the reader with countless avenues for reflection that would provide valuable insights into methodology for anyone engaged in anthropological research or study, within museums and universities alike.

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