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Switek, Beata. 2021. Reluctant Intimacies: Japanese Eldercare in Indonesian Hands. New York: Berghahn. 242 pp. Book review for Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale: Journal of the European Association of Social Anthropologists.

### Citation for published version:

De Togni, G 2024, 'Switek, Beata. 2021. Reluctant Intimacies: Japanese Eldercare in Indonesian Hands. New York: Berghahn. 242 pp. Book review for Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale: Journal of the European Association of Social Anthropologists.', *Social Anthropology*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 103-104. <<https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/saas/32/1/saas320108.xml>>

### Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

### Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

### Published In:

Social Anthropology

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## Book Reviews

**Goldman, Mara J. 2020 . *Narrating Nature. Wildlife Conservation and Maasai Ways of Knowing*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press. 304 pp. Ebook: US\$60.00. ISBN-13: 978-0-8165-4194-2.**

In Tanzania, Maasai who live near national parks are excluded from these spaces they could use freely before they were demarcated. Although they and their cattle may not enter these areas that are reserved for wildlife and tourists, the protected animals are not confined to these parks. They can cross into neighbouring Maasai areas where they may compete with cattle for scarce food, damage crops or attack and eat their beasts. Moreover, the authorities in charge are inclined to facilitate such movements through additional conservation measures. For them, income generated by international tourism is more important than supporting pastoralism. Data collected by conservation scientists are not designed to understand these problems and are often incompatible with the way Maasai experience them. This book is based on an intensive study of these topics in 2002–2005, supplemented in subsequent years by investigations in other parts of Tanzania and Kenya and repeated revisits.

The area selected for closer study consisted of two adjacent villages with approximately 3000 inhabitants. They occupied a narrow strip of land connecting two national parks and were wedged between a lake on one side and a ranch on the other. This ranch had been run by the National Ranching Company and came up for sale in 1999. The Maasai requested that it be returned to them as it had originally been their land. However, it was leased to a trust for the joint benefit of migratory wildlife and local communities. Representatives of the villages together with an expatriate manager formed a steering committee, but they were put off by the bureaucratic way the meetings were organised and their lack of formal power to influence decisions.

Apart from collecting quantitative ecological data that showed much more clearly the influence of differences in vegetation and seasonal changes than scientific surveys of larger areas, Mara Goldman relied on 'deep ethnographic engagement' (p. xiv) to understand Maasai ways of knowing the environment. She discovered that whereas conservation science is concerned with replication of uniformity and implementing measures without considering the diversity of the circumstances, Maasai rely on the organisation of diversity when confronted with local problems. Their favourite solution is to call people together for an *enkiguena*, the *Maa* (Maasai language) word for an assembly in which everyone may express opinions on whatever aspects they believe to be relevant. Ideally, the extended discussion should result in a consensus that is acceptable to everyone. This is not always the case. People may boycott meetings when they believe that the well-being of the community is endangered by the way they are run or they may leave the issue unresolved for the sake of retaining unity.



Goldman adopted the *enkiguena* format to confront Maasai points of view with scientific research by outsiders, thereby hoping to realise her ambition of decolonising conservation knowledge. However, when applying this model she did not analyse the power dynamics that would inform such discussions in real-life situations. If she had done so, she might have avoided the use of Swahili as the main medium of her fictional discussions (complicated by an English rendering), as Swahili concepts that have no *Maa* equivalent are now asymmetrically imposed. In this rather artificial way, she covered: (1) presence of wildlife in the two villages that should not be simplified in strictly bounded categories, such as wet and dry season dispersals in time and place; (2) coexistence of wildlife and livestock; and (3) establishment of wildlife corridors. Although she used some material of actual meetings, the dialogues never took place in the way they are presented in her book. Nevertheless, she took care to use only data that are based on her own interviews and observations as well as published and unpublished scientific texts. These are turned into written presentations of oral performances by people who are often characterised rather perfunctorily. It is also unclear how she assesses the oratorical skills of the protagonists without any linguistic analysis.

With her book, Goldman wanted to tell a different story from those that depict Africa as worth visiting and saving as a living romantic relic of wild nature and pre-modern society. Although the hybrid nature of her endeavour requires attentive and close reading, she certainly succeeded in doing that. It should be of interest to anthropologists who may not be aware of the limitations of scientific wildlife research, but may also encourage scientists to realise the value of taking everyday local knowledge into account. Let us hope that she will continue this project in close collaboration with local researchers, which has already resulted in promising co-authored publications.

JAN DE WOLF

*Utrecht University (The Netherlands)*

**Winchell, Mareike. 2022. *After Servitude: Elusive Property and the Ethics of Kinship in Bolivia*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. 352 pp. Pb.: US\$29.95. ISBN: 9780520386440.**

Mareike Winchell's book, *After Servitude*, emerges from an apparent paradox: her Quechua-speaking interlocutors from Ayopaya (Bolivia), who endured the oppressive hacienda system, showed deep scepticism and mistrust towards the 2010 MAS government program that aimed to regularise land ownership through formal titles. Winchell shows how Ayopayans of varying social backgrounds question and distrust the notion that formal land property is a powerful instrument for indigenous emancipation. In order to understand this scenario, she explores several contexts and talks with a variety of actors who experienced the hacienda land and labour arrangements and their demise, as well as the contemporary forms of aid and relatedness as forms of grappling with past abuses aiming for redress.

*After Servitude* is based on 2011–2012 fieldwork in the city of Cochabamba and the province of Ayopaya. This Quechua-speaking region had a strong presence of haciendas and was a focus of indigenous revolts against them. The information was produced through participant observation of everyday life, public events and the work of state functionaries, as well as informal conversations, interviews and archival research. Her interlocutors involved a wide range of people, among them state functionaries, descendants from hacienda masters and different types of servants, local authorities and mining entrepreneurs.

The book has three parts, each corresponding to a key theoretical concept of the study: kinship, property and exchange. These concepts receive comprehensive coverage in an extensive introduction that establishes the book's conceptual framework.

The first part (chapters 1 and 2) delves into how kinship was used as a form to negotiate relationships and obligations between indigenous servants and mestizo masters, and how it is used now between their descendants. For example, female descendants of a master assumed the role of mother of some servants' descendants, inscribing in the language of kinship the affective obligations emerging from the past. This includes forms of adoption that recast those out-of-wedlock descendants of old masters – that could have involved rape – reframing biological ties into godparents' obligations. Mestizo elites found themselves beholden to these kinship obligations. These affective bonds, acknowledged by both mestizo elites and indigenous peasants, carried the potential to mend historical injustices, offering a moral basis for indigenous calls for reparative actions today. These kinship practices, far from being vestiges of a feudal past, emerged as tools for addressing the burdens stemming from it. Winchell's analysis underscores how these asymmetrical affective relations are central to understanding property and access to land, as they mediate land access of different types of descendants of hacienda 'servants'.

The second part (chapters 3 and 4) delves into the distinct perspectives held by state functionaries of the Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria (INRA) and the residents of Ayopaya concerning property. Winchell shows that while the state's project to regularise property seeks to allocate clear individual ownership and delineate plot boundaries, as well as disentangle these plots from the practices of the hacienda past, the processes by which these plots are defined – mediated by historic maps, GIS software, interviews and field visits – inevitably remain intertwined with the hacienda's historical context and its land distribution methods. Even though formal property promises to eliminate abusive practices, it risks solidifying disputed land allocations and nullifying asymmetrical networks of assistance, which serve as a means of redress.

Though state functionaries perceive the asymmetrical aid practices between the descendants of landowners and those of labourers as remnants of an exploitative hacienda regime requiring eradication, these practices are, locally, strategies for addressing the repercussions of a history marked by abuse and violence. Eradicating them could potentially foreclose the opportunities for restitution that they, to a certain degree, offer. This section also examines how Ayopayan farmers recontextualise state initiatives encompassing both property rights and indigeneity. While the state's definition of indigeneity draws from abstract expressions of racialised authenticity, the peasant

unions instead root it in the local history of hacienda servitude and the struggle against the hacienda system. The state and local people engage in a dispute over what constitutes legitimate ownership and how they face their own history.

The third part (chapters 6 and 7) is focused on exchange. Through a careful examination of the region's recent mining endeavours, Mareike Winchell underscores the inseparability of formal property from the historical backdrop of the hacienda era. Mining projects are unavoidably intertwined with the infrastructure and labour dynamics of the past, thus they become entwined with their historical debts. Entrepreneurs who failed to recognise these ethical obligations encountered staunch opposition from local residents, dooming their ventures. Ayopayans also harnessed the ethical responsibilities tied to wielding influence, utilising them to challenge and critique the discourses put forth by the MAS government regarding the correlation between land ownership and indigeneity, as well as the reification of racial identities.

*After Servitude* stands as an ethnography that not only encourages a profound reconsideration of the implications tied to the formalisation of land ownership in rural Andean regions or elsewhere but also highlights the intricate connections these processes share with the historical fabric of land and labour relations. Moreover, it underscores how local communities engage with this history, seeking redress of past injustices. It is a call to question homogenising state blueprints that carry problematic assumptions and re-inscribe forms of coloniality beyond well-meaning intentions. The book holds immense relevance for scholars and graduate students specialising in anthropology, history and affiliated fields. It specifically caters to those with an interest in property regimes and the enduring ramifications of colonial legacies.

GUILLERMO SALAS CARREÑO

*Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Peru)*

**Barua, Maan. 2023. *Lively Cities. Reconfiguring Urban Ecology*. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press. 382 pp. Pb.: US\$30.00. ISBN: 978-1-5179-1256-7.**

This book explores how animals take part in the construction of modern cities. The six chapters could be placed in three distinct parts: chapters 1 and 2 cover macaques in Delhi, chapters 3 and 4 parakeets in London, and chapters 5 and 6 cows in Delhi. In the chapters on cows, Maan Barua describes, among others, the daily itinerary of Kaali, a cow dwelling in a residential neighbourhood. She begins her day by eating in a municipal corporation, she forages in a market, enters a settlement, feeds on food left by people intentionally for free-roaming cattle, she drinks water from a plastic trough, grazes and ruminates in a public park, and finally, at night, she returns home. This very short description is enough to show how bovine affects – the cow's *Umwelt*, to use Jakob von Uexküll's notion – are not just superposed to a city that would exist as such before cows began inhabiting it. On the contrary, the itinerary reveals how the needs of the cows are taken into consideration in the day-to-day construction of the city: people placing a trough or leaving food for cows take part in the construction of Delhi – those acts are part of the infrastructure of the city (in line with AbdouMalik

Simone, Barua understands infrastructure ‘as a verb’). The infrastructural acts observed during Kaali’s itinerary are political since they contribute to creating a *polis* that takes a form from which animals are not excluded.

Those political or, to use the author’s term, infrapolitical acts – *infra* because they are not recognised as political by the actors themselves – are acts of resistance against the Masterplan. The Masterplan is the design the bureaucrats want the city to conform to, a design where roads are no longer ‘tracks for cattle’ but ‘an apparatus for the circulation of machines’, in the words of the renowned French urbanist Le Corbusier when he set, in 1925, the agenda for the modern (‘luminous’) city. That design, first imposed by the colonial government, is still at the core of the Masterplan, a plan for a city rid of cows and other animals considered hindrances to capitalist value production and bourgeois aesthetics.

The cows in Delhi exhibit a pastoral mode of existence: they have an owner but roam freely in the city. The parakeets in London instantiate another mode of existence, that of ferality, the mode of existence of animals that once were domesticated but that fled and continue living outside of the *domus*. The rose-ringed parakeets arrived in the UK following colonial routes linking India to Europe. The parakeets proved very difficult to domesticate, but some bird lovers at the beginning of the last century were successful in keeping and breeding them. Once the domestic parakeet population grew, they became a commodity as pet birds. Starting in the 1980s, the importation of parakeets also developed.

Since animals are used as commodities, Barua argues that the analytical tools of Karl Marx should illuminate their ‘production’ and ‘circulation’. In a simple model, Marx explains how money is converted into capital, which is put into a production process thanks to machine power and labour power; the production process transforms the capital into capital plus commodities that can be sold. This brings new money, which allows the whole process to begin again. This is the process by which capitalist dynamics produce surplus value. If we try to analyse the parakeets with that model, it would give something like this: the money is invested to buy or to catch some parakeets in the wild. Through a process (that is not necessarily easy), the parakeets breed. The new parakeets can be sold in order to make money with a view to breeding or catching more parakeets from the wild and repeating the process.

Animal capital appears as a simple transposition of material capital, a transposition without significant inflexions. However, Barua argues that the process is more complex due to the agency of animals (a central tenet of the book is precisely that animals are active agents). Some bird amateurs could clandestinely free parakeets or an accident could allow some parakeets to escape. The author draws on Gilles Deleuze’s concept of ‘lines of flight’ to describe such opportunities taken by animals to flee from the preordained sequences of action. The author’s detour by Marx was useful to make explicit the preordained sequences of action from which the birds flee. It also allows underlining that the lines of flight are not independent of capitalist dynamics; it is the capitalist enrolment of the parakeets that made the lines of flight possible and even necessary. This is only one example where Barua uses a concept by Deleuze, who does not exactly serve as a philosophical underpinning of the book but as a major inspiration that pops up in each chapter.

The macaques present still another mode of existence, that of commensality: they do not live with humans, but rely predominantly on the food provided by them. In Delhi, macaques drink water from public taps. This causes problems because they often leave the tap on after using it. Some people have changed the type of taps to those with buttons that deliver water only for a limited time, preventing waste of water. Some observers have noticed that macaques are also learning to turn off the taps after use. Both material changes to taps and cultural transformations of macaques could alleviate some conflicts between humans and macaques.

The book's main interlocutors are urban theorists, but also urban anthropologists and social scientists interested in the relationships between humans and animals. By looking at the city through the eyes of animals, Barua provides a new perspective on the continuous formation of urban ecologies. Even if the three case studies could have been published separately, in three distinct books, their conjunction makes clear that the modalities of multi-species coexistence are not uniform and simple, but vary depending on the species' capacities and needs, and their ability to induce some humans to take care of them. One of Barua's achievements in this work is in aptly balancing theory and empirical research, both archival and ethnographical, to assess the specificity of each multi-species configuration.

THIBAUT DE MEYER  
*Université de Namur (Belgium)*

**Stafford, Charles. 2020. *Economic Life in the Real World: Logic, Emotion and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 196 pp. Pb. £22.99. ISBN: 978-1-108-71655-0.**

I must confess that when I offered to write a book review for *Social Anthropology*, Charles Stafford's *Economic Life in the Real World* was not my first choice of monograph, or even my second, third or fourth. However, other anthropologists had already called dibs on the books I was interested in, and the subtitle of Stafford's book eventually caught my eye – at first glance, I had dismissed the title itself as somewhat yawn-inducing.

My initial reaction to the book's title speaks to precisely the issue that Stafford is trying to address, which is that economics is so thoroughly enmeshed with other domains of life that we should all be much more interested in it than we are. Whether your focus is classic anthropological domains such as politics, kinship or religion, or your interests are in more contemporary concerns like AI and the environment, Stafford convincingly demonstrates that anthropologists need to be thinking a lot more about economics. In doing so, he argues, we must move beyond our standard culturalist and materialist talking points and explicitly attend to individual psychology: a topic that most of us shy away from as simultaneously Not Up My Alley, Outside My Expertise and Completely Irrelevant to Anthropology.

Despite my initial hesitance to review it, I found the book to be an insightful, illuminating and entertaining read. But first, some caveats. As I think should be abundantly obvious by this point, I am not an economic anthropologist, nor am I a specialist in

China or Taiwan: the two regions where Stafford has conducted intensive fieldwork for more than thirty-odd years. It's possible that a regional or topical specialist will find points to quibble with, but I honestly couldn't find much.

Stafford's goal, as he makes clear from the outset, is to bring anthropology, psychology and economics into conversation with each other, and he does this in an extremely readable, witty and convincing way. As Stafford illustrates, Taiwan and China provide a fascinating lens through which to explore economic life, because of the vast economic changes they have experienced in the past four decades; both, of course, have frequently been touted as economic miracles, albeit of a very different order. The book also has an interesting structure, containing seven substantive chapters that include detailed case studies embedded in a discussion of anthropological and economic psychological literature, as well as illustrations of the very different kinds of logic embedded in anthropological and economists' approaches – an aspect I particularly enjoyed.

It's clear that Stafford has a bugbear with prevailing anthropological approaches to economics and our tendency to dismiss the field of economic psychology without engaging with the questions it explores. In his words, 'anthropologists who specialise in the study of economy largely proceed as if the neighbouring (and arguably complementary) field of economic psychology simply did not exist' (p. 14). Although Stafford is much too polite to call it arrogance, this is basically what he's talking about. In his words, 'I think we should have the humility to see what can be learned from other disciplines, including those about which we have scientific and/or moral misgivings' (p. 21).

As Stafford observes, anthropologists generally hold an intense antipathy towards explaining any phenomena in terms of individual psychology – especially in contexts where an evolutionary and universalist dimension is being posited. But in our disciplinary aversion to evolution and universalism, anthropologists have mostly inferred that economic life is not psychological. By focusing on the logical, emotional and ethical aspects of economic agency, Stafford illustrates how we might think about economic psychology from an anthropological and ethnographic standpoint.

Stafford argues that if economic psychologists have been guilty of ignoring culture, anthropologists have been equally guilty in bracketing off the psychological as an area that we don't need to understand, despite the ways it contributes to the behavioural patterns we see in our fieldwork. In making an argument for the necessity of a middle ground between a complete disavowal of the relevance of psychology or a wholesale embrace of the primacy of the individual actor that rational choice theory is founded on, he ushers in luminaries such as Marx and Weber to illustrate the ways in which they both considered individual agency, despite the avowedly materialist and culturalist perspectives we currently attribute to them.

Taking the view that 'anthropologists should show some intellectual generosity toward other human scientists who are treading a very different path from our own' (p. 114), Stafford argues that the questions being asked by economists, and the methods being used to answer them, need to be taken seriously in their own right, even when we fundamentally disagree with their conclusions. One of my key takeaways of the book, this point arguably holds much more broadly for the discipline, given the



contempt (sometimes healthy, sometimes not) with which we often treat the fields we compete with and critique in our own research.

This isn't to say that the book is perfect. I found the last two chapters (on the politics of cognition, and numbers and structure, respectively) a little out of place, primarily because they raise a fascinating, albeit larger, set of issues that extend beyond the explicit focus of the book on economic life. Although this makes sense on one level – after all, Stafford's point is that economic life is never *just* about economic life – this content felt a little under-developed compared to the earlier chapters. I also think the book would have benefited from a more traditional conclusion (although this strikes me as a rather churlish criticism from someone who has terrible difficulties in wrapping up books myself!). However, I strongly recommend *Economic Life in the Real World*, even if – actually, *especially* if – you think it's not the sort of book you'll be interested in. Whatever your specialty, I think you'll find this an engaging, stimulating and enjoyable read.

KIRSTEN BELL

*King's College London (UK)*

**Świtek, Beata. 2021. *Reluctant Intimacies: Japanese Eldercare in Indonesian Hands*. New York: Berghahn. 242 pp. Pb.: US\$34.95. ISBN: 978-1-80073-016-8.**

The phenomenon of foreign migrant labour unequivocally permeates the realm of paid eldercare worldwide. Nevertheless, Japan distinguishes itself among advanced nations with a unique stance marked by its apprehension to integrate foreign caregivers. Projections indicate that by 2050 Japanese citizens aged 65 or older will constitute 36% of the total population (AARP 2022: 2). Despite this impending demographic shift, the entrenched conservative government, which has maintained an almost uninterrupted rule for 70 years, persistently reinforces narratives advocating the automation of care rather than embracing changes in migration policy or raising salaries for care givers. This approach overlooks the irreplaceable role of (Japanese and non-Japanese) human caregivers and the intricate nature of caregiving practices, which current AI and robotic technologies are not adequately equipped to address.

Amid dominant discourses, foreign caregivers labouring in Japan remains marginalised, while their numerical insufficiency remains striking when compared with other countries. To address this issue, anthropologist Beata Świtek offers her excellent ethnography, *Reluctant Intimacies*. Świtek immersed herself in the world of Indonesian care trainees operating under the auspices of the 2008 Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). Her book offers a timely exploration of the intersections between ageing, immigration and care in contemporary Japan. A central motif emerges in the form of 'reluctance', encapsulating the intricate terrain of 'intimate encounters' unfolding between foreign bodies and elderly Japanese residents within nursing homes. These encounters, alongside the dynamics governing the nursing home environment, serve as a lens to contextualise the reception (or rejection) of otherness in Japan.

Świtek's linguistic fluency in both Japanese and Indonesian facilitates her communication and understanding of interactions between Indonesian trainees and Japanese care providers, care workers and residents. She also decides to follow the Indonesian trainees as they visit their families, transcending the confines of conventional ethnographic methodologies often rooted within a single country. The resulting multi-sited and cross-cultural exploration casts light on the transoceanic odyssey of her interviewees, who are lured to Japan predominantly by the promise of financial stability and the pursuit of an aspirational 'good life'. However, their expectations are swiftly met with disillusionment as they grapple with the challenges of assimilating into Japanese society as linguistic and cultural outsiders. Indeed, despite their previous training and although some of them are certified as nurses, the Indonesian trainees very often find themselves relegated to menial tasks such as changing beds, cleaning floors and serving beverages to the residents.

As Świtek points out, the barriers that the Indonesian trainees must overcome extend beyond mere language or cultural disparities; they are deeply rooted in the insular nature of Japanese society, which perceives itself as homogenous, and its citizens as the sole bearers of a distinct 'Japaneseness'. Świtek's interviewees from Indonesia express feelings of undervaluation and a sense of being 'invisible' amid unexpected institutional and interpersonal hurdles they face in Japan. These circumstances lead most trainees to leave Japan on completion of the training programme. Even those who successfully navigate the exacting language proficiency examination required for remaining in the country in the end decide to leave. The monograph concludes with the revelation that Świtek's Indonesian collaborators leveraged their Japanese language proficiency and training to improve their livelihoods on returning to their home country.

This nuanced ethnography stresses the inherent challenges of caregiving, while also highlighting the additional obstacles caregivers – particularly foreigners – encounter in Japan. The hesitancy in embracing foreignness/otherness reflects Japan's ongoing revaluation of its deep-seated cultural homogeneity under the pressures of an evolving global landscape. This is an evocative subtext that reverberates throughout Świtek's narrative. In the penultimate chapter of the book, Świtek revisits the portrayal of Indonesian candidates in the media within the broader context of national dialogues surrounding immigration, internationalisation and the intricate tapestry of Japan's collapsing economy.

While it is evident that initiatives like the EPA alone are insufficient to alleviate the impending dearth of eldercare providers, *Reluctant Intimacies* demonstrates how such initiatives possess nonetheless the potential to foster intercultural exchanges that may challenge and reshape perceptions of foreignness. This exemplary ethnography adeptly navigates the intricate trajectories of caregiving and immigration, emerging as a guiding light for anthropologists studying the complexities of the social care sector in Japan.

GIULIA DE TOGNI

*University of Edinburgh (UK)*

**Bubandt, Nils, Astrid Oberborbeck Andersen and Rachel Cypher (eds.). 2022. *Rubber Boots Methods for the Anthropocene. Doing Fieldwork in Multispecies Worlds*. 432 pp. Pb.: US\$34.95. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. ISBN: 978-1-5179-1165-2.**

This collective book follows on from the symposium held in 2018, which marked the end of the collaborative and interdisciplinary AURA (Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene) programme, launched in 2013 and led by Anna L. Tsing. The general idea was to approach the Anthropocene via the ‘undramatic mundaneness’ of its simplified landscapes (p. 1). As such, it can be seen as the methodological counterpart to the more theoretically oriented book published by Anna L. Tsing, Heather Anne Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt in 2017, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (University of Minnesota Press).

In their introduction, the editors highlight the importance of interdisciplinary work between biology and anthropology, arguing that the Anthropocene (seen as a multispecies phenomenon and crisis) raises the question of social justice and inequalities (social, racial, gendered) through the prism of historical forms of violence and the entanglement of these inequalities and histories in landscapes inhabited by a multitude of species. The book’s proposal is therefore to reflect on the methods, tools and disciplines we need to work with in order to appreciate the multispecies forms of life and death once human exceptionalism has come to an end: ‘studies of more-than-human life in the Anthropocene, in short, require new kinds of multispecies fieldwork methods’ (p. 5). The idea of talking about a ‘rubber boots methods’ refers to the importance of taking account of the latent warfare and colonial historicity in scientific methods to make them conscious in their practical application: a way of indicating that scientific methods are always implicated in the phenomena they aim to study, and thus to ‘stay with the trouble’ (following Donna Haraway).

In the broadest sense, rubber boots methods are an injunction to engage with methodology in a new way: an invitation to get out to follow the more-than-human tracks that crisscross the landscape of any field; an invitation also to get outside of one’s own disciplinary comfort zone by experimenting with other methods; and an invitation, finally, to ‘get out of’ the field itself by seeing the landscapes of one’s field as particular landscapes-in-the-making connected historically, politically, and ecologically to the other multispecies landscapes that came before and that exist beside it. Rubber boots methods are an invitation to the critical, curious, and collaborative study of multispecies landscapes. (p. 12)

The Anthropocene can thus be approached, at least metaphorically, as an ‘uncanny valley’ requiring non-human and non-secular methods, taking landscapes as the basic unit and appreciating them in their fragmentations and therefore the patchworks they make up (p. 18).

The methodological experiments proposed in the book share three common features: a descriptive and empirical approach with an emphasis on critique, a curiosity for multispecies worlds and a collaborative ambition that seeks to transcend disciplinary and epistemic divides (p. 21). These three characteristics organise the three parts

of the book. Comprising four chapters, the first one ('Critical descriptions') presents the research of Andrew S. Mathews in the Italian forests, Colin Hoag in the Lesotho Highlands, Pierre du Plessis in the Kalahari Desert of Botswana and Daniel Münster in southern India. The second part ('Curiosity') also comprises four chapters, and includes contributions from Jon Rasmus Nyquist about Australian fires, Nils Burbandt on coral reefs in West Papua (Indonesia), Harshavardhan Bhat about monsoons in Delhi and Karnataka (India) and Rachel Cypher on cattle ranching in the Argentinian pampas.

The final part ('Collaboration') includes five chapters. John Klein, Stine Vestbo, Peter Funch and Anna Tsing talk about aquariums and holobionts. Kirsten Hastrup, Janne Flora and Astrid Oberborbeck Andersen describe what it was like (for them) to live in north-west Greenland. Meredith Root-Bernstein, Filippo Bertoni, Natalie Forssamn and Katy Overstreet consider disturbance as a method of thinking about disturbed landscapes. Nathalia Brichet presents her investigation into a bottle containing cholera bacteria. Heather Anne Swanson considers the possibilities of using rubber boot methods in university teaching. The book does not end with a formal conclusion, but with a written account of a round-table discussion involving Kirsten Hastrup, Ursula Münster, Anna Tsing and Nils Burbandt. The aim was to discuss the ways in which methods can be troubled, following on from the issues already presented and focusing as much on critical description as on the mixing, decolonisation and desecularisation of methods.

It is, then, clear that this book, which is particularly dense in its reflections, proposals and perspectives, is a valuable contribution to the methodological renewals that anthropology is, on another note, constantly undergoing. Through the presentation of surveys carried out, this book provides food for thought on advanced conceptions of multispecies ethnography and takes on board the metaphorical aspect of the concepts proposed. It enters a dialogue with various considerations on the possible ways of carrying out ethnographic research with animals, minerals or plants. The open-ended nature of the developments presented in this book is undoubtedly the best way for various audiences to grasp them and draw up new configurations for investigation.

ÉTIENNE BOUREL

*National Museum of National History (Paris, France)*

**Dewan, Camelia. 2021. *Misreading the Bengal Delta: Climate Change, Development, and Livelihoods in Coastal Bangladesh*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press. 224 pp. Pb.: US\$32.00. ISBN: 978-0-295-74961-7.**

There is probably no other country in the world that has been so consistently framed in terms of flooding and natural disasters as Bangladesh. This image has become all the more compelling in times of global climate change and sea-level rise. Camelia Dewan's important monograph offers a powerful critique of this dominant portrayal of Bangladesh, without ever downplaying the region's environmental vulnerabilities. The central argument of the book is that the ecological complexities of the Bengal Delta have

been consistently misread and simplified by international development actors, leading to interventions that sometimes end up doing more harm than good.

*Misreading the Bengal Delta* shows that the common perception of Bangladesh as an archetypal victim of climate change fits into a longer history of ‘victimizing, pauperizing, and condescending’ media portrayals of the country (p. 7). Dewan both interrogates and complicates this narrative of Bangladesh as an aid-dependent climate hotspot. She does so by combining environmental history, elements of ‘aidnography’ and a careful ethnographic inquiry into coastal vulnerabilities.

An important contribution of the book is that it firmly situates climate change adaptation policies within the context of international development and its lingering legacy of colonial modernity. This is aptly illustrated by the history of flood-protection embankments that is discussed in Chapter One. Dewan shows that whereas foreign donors often present permanent embankments as a form of adaptation to climate change, this framing rests on a misguided simplification of the dynamic landscape of the Bengal Delta. The underlying assumption behind such interventions is that floods are inherently disastrous.

In Bangladesh, as Dewan explains, this is only true for certain types of flooding such as waterlogging or flash floods caused by torrential storms. Annual monsoon rains, on the other hand, lead to forms of seasonal inundation that are crucial to the deposition of silt and the elevation of floodplains. For this reason, it used to be common for coastal communities to construct (temporary) earthen dikes. These dikes protected their agricultural fields from the influx of brackish tidewater during the dry season but would break during the monsoon to allow for inundation. Dewan shows that this practice fell into disuse during British colonial rule when all floods were increasingly framed as damaging and watertight embankments became the norm – effectively trapping all silt within the banks of the river. The paradox that Dewan teases out is that, while permanent embankments are often promoted as a form of climate adaptation infrastructure, they actually disrupt the very processes of sedimentation that have long served as a natural counterweight to sea-level rise.

This paradox can be explained by what Dewan describes as ‘climate reductionism’, a term first coined by Mike Hulme (2011) to describe the tendency to attribute all environmental and social changes to climatic factors. Such reductionism averts attention away from local environmental dynamics and obfuscates the role of capitalist land-use practices in causing environmental degradation. Dewan skilfully illustrates this point in Chapter Three, which focuses on the devastating impacts of brackish tiger prawn aquaculture in South-West Bangladesh. She takes us to a village where the influx of saline water has turned the area into a ‘barren desert’ – rendering all water unusable for cooking, drinking and bathing. While brackish aquaculture is framed as a form of adaptation to sea-level rise by tiger prawn capitalists, Dewan shows that salinisation is not an inevitable or irreversible result of rising sea levels. Instead, the inflow of saline tidewater is caused by the purposeful destruction of existing embankments during the dry season. The fact that such interventions are intimately connected to processes of privatisation, water grabbing and the enclosure of communal wetlands substantiates Dewan’s argument that what counts as ‘adaptive is always political and contested’ (p. 75).

The ethnographic focus of *Misreading the Bengal Delta* is twofold. On the one hand, the book hones in on coastal communities and their complex interactions with the dynamic Bengal Delta. On the other hand, this monograph also sheds light on the struggle of Bangladeshi NGO workers as they try to reconcile their own knowledge of the delta with the narratives of foreign donors, who often understand sea-level rise to be the ‘main causative agent for environmental problems in the coastal zone’ (p. 56). In Chapter Two, Dewan provocatively argues that Bangladeshi development workers, in an act of effective brokerage, have learned to add climate change as a ‘spice’ to funding proposals. The chapter poignantly highlights how a highly unequal development industry, which consistently values the labour and expertise of Western consultants over that of Bangladeshi NGO workers, prevents the origination of more truthful and layered stories of environmental vulnerability.

What unites the different chapters is a critical, decolonial perspective on development. In the final two chapters, which deal respectively with food security and gendered structures of inequalities, the focus on climate reductionism fades somewhat to the background. Chapter Four offers a fascinating account of how human health and soil health are entangled through the production and consumption of food, whereas Chapter Five makes an important point about the legacy of structural adjustment and microcredit programmes in individualising strategies for poverty reduction and putting pressure on gendered and reproductive relations. While these final chapters also push back against the simplification of lived vulnerabilities, they are less convincing as accounts of how the Bengal Delta itself has been misread and misunderstood.

*Misreading the Bengal Delta* is a must-read for every (social) scientist, journalist, activist or development worker who has ever evoked Bangladesh as an instant image of sea-level rise and climate change disasters. It expertly outlines how ‘adaption regimes’ reproduce existing postcolonial inequalities and adds some much-needed complexity to our understanding of climate change and environmental vulnerabilities in the global South.

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**Adams, Vincanne. 2023. *Glyphosate & the Swirl: An Agroindustrial Chemical on the Move*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 184 pp. Pb.: US\$24.95. ISBN: 978-1-4780-1675-5.**

*Glyphosate & the Swirl* is a riveting and engaging book following glyphosate, an elusive chemical agent that precipitates a swirl of contested scientific and political knowledge production. The swirl is perennially unsettled; it is shaped by academic capitalism, ardent activism, and controvertible science; and its movement mimics glyphosate’s

diffusion through more-than-human worlds and their materialities. This book is a critical follow-up to Vincanne Adams' 2017 activist-orientated book linking GM foods, glyphosate and children's gut health.

In Chapter 1, Adams introduces the reader to glyphosate, the main chemical agent in Roundup, the most successful herbicide produced by Monsanto (acquired by Bayer in 2018). Since its introduction to markets in 1974, glyphosate consumption has consistently increased globally. Tracing harms and accountability from glyphosate is a complicated affair, adding to its evasiveness. Adams' attention to glyphosate was initially prompted through neighbour and integrative paediatrician, Michelle. Through the symptoms and sicknesses of her young patients living with an array of chronic diseases, Michelle is convinced of a glyphosate-induced public health crisis. For Adams, however, glyphosate's boundless swirl is more complex than these clinical experiences suggest. Competing scientific claims reorientate Adams' gaze to ways of knowing glyphosate beyond its materiality as a toxic chemical substance with a not so linear story of exposure and harm effects. Here, Adams presents her conceptual argument for glyphosate's agency, partially located in glyphosate's power to reveal or disguise its different capacities depending on *its* interlocutor, whether patient, clinician, scientific panel, or regulatory body. This argument becomes progressively convincing as the book unfolds.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Adams traces glyphosate's success in part to the epistemic power of its identification as chemical rather than biological agent, such that 'Chemistry enabled Monsanto to attempt multiple crossings-over between toxic chemical and edible things because it allowed scientists to treat all of them as ontologically similar' (p. 19). Monsanto later turned to biotechnology to develop 'Roundup Ready' genetically modified seed varieties resistant to glyphosate, deepening its chemical presence in the everyday lives of US agricultural environments. Regulatory bodies did not recognise glyphosate-rich foods as biologically different, thereby fixing glyphosate as chemical and foreclosing possibilities of glyphosate's ontological multiplicities as it resides in food sources, infiltrates human and non-human tissues, and saturates soils. This rendered glyphosate's chemical interactions and effects and its multiple animacies invisible, thus sustaining the swirl.

In Chapter 4, Adams locates glyphosate within the broader context of our deeply chemical world and the intersectional inequities of environmental harm. Chemical life is fraught with complexities and necessitates 'moving beyond assumptions that there are innocent victims and guilty perpetrators in the chemosocialities we now inhabit' (p. 53). Clinical consultations are one mode of apprehending glyphosate's effects. Returning to Michelle's clinic, Adams illuminates glyphosate's suffusion into bodies through ethnographic encounters. While Michelle traces glyphosate's toxic aetiological pathway through gastrointestinal effects and microbial depletion, these mechanisms are under-researched and lacking in the scientific archive. Uncertainties arise in the clinic too where bodily manifestations of glyphosate toxicity differ, or glyphosate elimination regimes do not necessarily work. Glyphosate relentlessly unsettles epistemologies, clinical encounters, policies and scientific communities.

In Chapters 5 and 6, Adams dissects the instability of glyphosate's 'scientific consensus', revealing how ambitions of epistemological certainty are contrived by scien-

tific communities themselves, and that consensus is shaped by how scientists manage heterogeneous evidence as much as the research data itself. The stakes have been high for scientists from the 'counterfactual archive' (p. 73) who have provided evidence and articulated the potential harms of glyphosate – jobs have been lost and scientific papers withdrawn. As Adams poignantly demonstrates, scientific debates on glyphosate are highly polarised, and lack balanced renditions of glyphosate's multiplicities and inconsistencies. I am left wondering whether this can be understood where so much is at stake for science on glyphosate: global dominance for industry or scientists with a vested interest in agrochemical and GM-technologies, and, for counterfactual scientists, proving their scientific case in face of the global hegemony of industry actors such as Monsanto. This muddy corpus of glyphosate research may be further traced to academic capitalism and to glyphosate's ontological swirl itself. How glyphosate acts within diverse experimental settings creates distinct grey zones, constraining any certainties of its safety or harm. The plurality of consensus is co-produced by the interplay of glyphosate and human actors, and not by the facts themselves. Glyphosate's swirl (imagine a murmuration of starlings, writes Adams) is as such comprised of varying ontological clusters that are both separate and part of the whole, affecting each other, pulling and pushing to thrust the swirl in different directions. These clusters never settle, bearing the possibility of critically transitioning to create opportunities for glyphosate to disrupt, repair and transform in new ways.

In the last two chapters, Adams develops the concept of glyphosate as a pluripotent activist as it circulates through new consensus statements affirming its carcinogenic effects, and courtrooms deliberating regulations for maximum safety exposures and compensation for health effects of human exposures. Adams proposes glyphosate as an agent of care for human and non-human allies as it uncovers and disrupts contemporary arrangements of global agricultural and food systems and their inequitable, racialised, ecologically destructive modes of operation. Glyphosate cannot be simply concealed, paid off or silenced. It continues to dance in and around us and our more-than-human companions, keeping us attuned to its presence and the ethical possibilities entailed.

Adams' book is highly readable and a vital contribution to a wide audience, including graduate students, researchers and scholars of disciplines such as critical medical anthropology, public health, and science and technology studies. It highlights the methodological and epistemological advantages of anthropology in critically engaging with scientific knowledge production and science's limitations in grappling with evasive and contested objects such as glyphosate. Adams draws on a broad corpus of literature and empirical data between which she moves seamlessly. Deeper ethnographic engagements with farmers, who perhaps encounter glyphosate's materiality most intimately, would further enrich this work. I would also welcome a further analysis of the inequalities and power dynamics that shape the glyphosate swirl, its push and pull, and how glyphosate knowledge is produced and circulates – how we come to know glyphosate in the first place. Adams' book is very relevant in a time when glyphosate contestation is ongoing, and the swirl lives on.

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Kravel-Tovi, Michal. 2017. *When the State Winks: The Performance of Jewish Conversion in Israel*. New York: Columbia University Press. 320 pp. Hb.: US\$75.00. ISBN: 9780231183246.

With Israel, the nation does not coincide with the state. Jewish people scattered across the world have the right to migrate to and are all potential citizens of Israel. They are a nation at large. Territory too has no inherent and inextricable links to the idea of Israel: consider, for example, early Zionist imaginaries of a Jewish homeland in Africa or Latin America and the relative ease with which portions of land are exchanged for peace (the return of Sinai to Egypt). Religion is not conceived here as an adjunct to geography but as its alternative. This raises *the* constitutively fundamental question for Israel: Who is a Jew? How to define Jewishness? In this excellent and insightful ethnography under review, Michal Kravel-Tovi goes into the production of Jews through religious conversion in contemporary Israel. She argues that, more than a theological question of change of minds or sincerity, conversion is a biopolitical problem for the Zionist state. A fear of small numbers – of Jews becoming a minority, especially vis-à-vis the Palestinians – propels the Zionist ‘national mission’ targeted at the population ‘to produce and reproduce the Israeli nation as Jewish’ through institutional means (p. 53). The state targets a particular section of the population, non-Jewish female immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU), for this project. The author focuses on the drawn-out process of conversion and the three institutional sites of the state that facilitate this process – the schools (*ulpan*) where conversion candidates are taught the precepts and practices of Judaism, the rabbinic courts which examine each candidate’s preparedness for conversion and the ritual baths (*mikveh*) where the last rite-of-passage act of immersion is done to confirm one’s conversion. In so far as it concentrates on these state institutions, the book can be read also as a contribution to the anthropology of the state.

Kravel-Tovi points out that, in contemporary Israel, suspicion is pervasive about the sincerity of FSU converts, but adds that this theme (which also dominates the larger literature on religious conversion, especially in relation to Christianity) misses the complexity of the conversion process. The popular notion of ‘*wink-wink conversion*’ (p. 16, emphasis in the original) implies that converts and state agents collude in enabling the distinction between opportunistic imposters and genuine converts. But the ethnography, drawing on Erving Goffman’s sociology of performance, shows that winking relations ought to be understood differently as ‘win-win conversions’ (p. 21) in which ‘converts learn from teachers, rabbis, and other bureaucrats how to present a persona sufficiently worthy of conversion despite, but precisely because of, the public and rabbinic suspicion toward them’ (p. 19). That is, while agents of the Zionist state advance its biopolitical goal by increasing the number of religiously and institutionally recognised Jews, converts gain the rights to legally identify themselves as Jews and avail the rights to marriage etc. that comes with that identity. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 give plenty of examples of how this collaboration (rather than collusion) works. While instructors at the conversion school (*ulpan*) teach aspiring converts the history, theology and practices of Judaism, they also teach them how to ‘manage appearances’ (p. 129). ‘Candidates learn that Jewish conversion not only encompasses a religious

change but also an intelligible performance of that change' (p. 129). At the rabbinical courts, judges' suspicion and incisive cross-examination of the candidates' knowledge and sincerity are intimately entangled with judges' tacit assistance to 'cultivate those particular dramatizations they believed they could trust' (p. 164). It is by 'relying on both trust and suspicion' (p. 164) that the court reproduces its legitimacy as a gate-keeper and develops confidence in its 'ability to approve sincere-enough conversions' (p. 164). Finally, narratives of conversion – to be submitted by the candidates to their evaluators at the rabbinical courts – are the outcome of a 'scripting' process wherein 'subtle gestures, feedback, and narrative cues provided by teachers and court agents' (pp. 204–205) play crucial facilitating roles.

Kravel-Tovi concludes the book by outlining how her research contributes to the anthropology of the state. The metaphor of seeing dominates the discussion of the state. Power accrues and control is maintained through increasing capabilities of surveillance, for instance. It is a story of the state's life on the surface. The book intends to nuance this account by putting forward the metaphor of winking. Focus on the seeing metaphor in the case of Jewish conversion in Israel might have missed the 'kinds of "as if" sensibilities that emerge within relationships between states and subjects' (p. 247). '[T]he seeing metaphor places exclusive emphasis on questions of power, thereby providing insufficient analytical vigor for exposing interactions and transactions held within the institutional semblance of the state' (p. 247). I do not read the author as calling on researchers to plumb the depths (as if that provides access to some essence) in contrast to scanning the surface of the state. Kravel-Tovi writes early in the book that Goffman's 'backstage [does] not necessarily contain a greater inner truth . . . but merely express another layer' (p. 20). What we need to focus on is the various dimensions of the state (its length and breadth rather than depth, so to say) and what interactions within and between them enable the state and its actors to do. It is still a story of the state's life on the surface but one that account for its extents. This book would be ideal reading for scholars working on the anthropology of state and religious conversion, and Jewish and/or Israel studies. It may also be useful as a text for advanced Master's or PhD students in sociocultural anthropology.

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