

in rural livelihoods from pastoralism to petty trade and external labor migration as a result of the devastating experiment in privatization; and the undermining of state capacity through the development of a family-government under Presidents Akayev (1991–2005) and Bakiyev (2005–2010).

While each of these themes has been touched upon in the extant ethnographic literature on Kyrgyzstan, Petric's monograph is novel in digging into the ideas and practices of those at the sharp end of this project of political and economic reform. In the Introduction, for instance, we see the shifting configuration of power at village level, as the former kolkhoz director turns into an entrepreneur who is able to profit disproportionately from newly-privatized kolkhoz machinery, while the former *murab* responsible for water-allocation drives a Lada Niva donated by the World Bank and teaches his fellow villagers a "new ideology encouraging individual initiative and responsibility" (22). In chapters 3 and 6, which focus on democracy promotion and election monitoring, respectively, we see how parliamentary elections become an opportunity for the circulation of newly-acquired resources and the site for competing articulations of power, as economic elites seek to secure newly-gained wealth through parliamentary immunity.

Some of the most illuminating detail concerns the emergence of a market economy, in the sense of an economy spatially and politically oriented towards the *bazaar* and the trade in goods from China. In chap. 5 Petric explores the emergence of the *bazarkoms*, market directors, from among an elite of Communist Party members with access to specific resources in the early 1990s. These figures were able to transform their comparative advantage in the form of knowledge, political contacts, and access to newly-privatized land and buildings to sudden and dramatic wealth, such as the well-travelled head of the Kyrgyz SSR sports committee, Askar Salymbekov, who used his newfound familiarity with markets in Moscow and Odessa to turn a bankrupt sheep-tanning factory into a vast open trading ground on the outskirts of Bishkek: one that later became "Dordoy," Central Asia's largest wholesale market and source of livelihood to around 150,000 citizens.

Such cases provide illuminating material for an understanding of how privatization and a narrowly-conceived electoral democracy (which often simply meant votes-for-cash) undermined faith in the government and its elected representatives. This is not, however, just a story of Kyrgyzstani elites taking advantage of economic liberalization to concentrate public goods in their hands.

Indeed, it is the missionary zeal of the white-jeep-driving international "experts," high on the prospect of "coloured revolutions" and convinced that democracy could be imported sufficient technical expertise, who are the particular target of critique, such as the jobbing Serbian election observer who proudly announced that "I did Georgia and Ukraine, and I can't wait to see what are we going to do here."

This is a passionate and at times polemical book, pitched for a broad audience largely unfamiliar with the region. Scholars of Kyrgyzstan may wish for more nu-

ances in his treatment of political dynamics in the country: the international actors tend to come across as rather caricatured and ideologically-driven, ignoring the complex forms of ethical reasoning in which they might be engaged. At the same time, the ethnographic narrative points to, but does not really explore in comparative or theoretical terms, the unexpected alliances, and opportunistic complicity in process of political and economic decimation in which local communities were also enrolled. It is notable in this respect that while the book's original French title, "On a mangé nos moutons" (We Have Eaten Our Sheep) points to this ambivalence of unwilling collusion in a series of opaque and ideologically-driven reforms, the English title, "Where Are All Our Sheep?" implies rather a sense of helpless shock at the scale and speed of a transformation over which one has little agency. This is partly a question of narrative framing: bibliographic references are few, and while reference is made to other scholars, Petric is ultimately aligning himself in opposition to popular stereotypes about the country rather than situating himself deeply within an anthropological conversation about experiments in state transformation that have been introduced in a variety of post-Soviet settings. In the preface, for instance, we learn that "bordering the former USSR and China, this small country is imagined to be the perfect anthropological playground" (viii): a straw-man claim that does not really do justice to the considerable body of ethnographic literature to have emerged on political life in Kyrgyzstan over the last decade. Nonetheless, this is a wide-ranging and engaging book, which provides a vivid portrait of the fall-out from two decades of economic and political experimentation in this "laboratory" for democratic reform in Central Asia.

Madeleine Reeves

Ram, Kalpana, and Christopher Houston (eds.): *Phenomenology in Anthropology. A Sense of Perspective*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015, 318 pp. ISBN 978-0-253-01775-8. Price: \$ 35.00

Phenomenological approaches in anthropology have, with the exception of individual figures like Irving Hallowell, gained a certain visibility only in the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, Thomas Csordas's work on embodiment and Michael Jackson's existential anthropology were instrumental in this rise to prominence. Both these anthropologists connected their individual work with those of others in an effort to consolidate phenomenological anthropology as an established field of study. Csordas published an edited collection in 1994, titled "Embodiment and Experience," Jackson followed 1996 with "Things as They Are." Kalpana Ram and Christopher Houston's "Phenomenology in Anthropology. A Sense of Perspective" not only follows in this tradition, but also features texts by Csordas (a regular chapter) and Jackson (an afterword). Moreover, the collection also includes contributions by a number of other well-known phenomenological anthropologists, Robert Desjarlais, Greg Downey, and Jason Throop. The rest of the 12 chapters of the volume is authored by anthropologists whose ties to phenome-

nology are less well established, either because they are emerging scholars, or because they have more recently discovered phenomenology for themselves. Like the editors and Downey, most of these contributors come from Macquarie University in Australia.

The collection is therefore well suited to give testimony to the vitality of this particular subfield of anthropology, and to demonstrate a continuous development, even progress from its beginning stages. In his afterword, Michael Jackson echoes this sentiment stating that when he wrote his introduction to “Things as They Are,” very few anthropologists had methodically engaged with phenomenology, although many had addressed phenomenological themes. Indeed, the number of anthropologists referring to phenomenological philosophers has grown in recent years, and the time seemed ripe to take stock of the state of the art, and possibly sketch a vision for the future of phenomenological anthropology.

In their introduction, Ram and Houston claim to produce such a vision through what they call a narrowing of the meaning of phenomenology. They argue – somewhat counterintuitively, as they acknowledge – that a restricted version of phenomenology based on a limited selection of philosophers leads to greater applicability to anthropological topics. Phenomenological conceptions of experience, so Ram and Houston, are too diverse and sometimes even contradicting each other to be of concrete empirical use. Even phenomenology itself acknowledges its own heterogeneity, and they feel therefore justified in picking the perspective that seems most useful to their intentions as anthropologists. Ram and Houston identify their “preferred version of phenomenology” in a line of tradition that goes from Husserl to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty; these three authors they see as united by a shared aim “to deconstruct and decenter the figure of the subject” (7) and as recognizing the “limits to a knowing consciousness” (4).

There is of course a concrete and serious problem in the background of Ram and Houston’s attempt to narrow anthropologists’ understanding of phenomenology, the intimidating breadth of phenomenological scholarship and the daunting complexity of this philosophical style of thinking. Not only are there many other important phenomenological figures, Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, Alfred Schütz, to name but a few. Moreover, phenomenology is not easily separated from other strains of 20th-century thought, like structuralism, radical empiricism, pragmatism, post-structuralism. Finally, even the work of the philosophers Ram and Houston is more diverse and heterogeneous than they acknowledge. It might be possible to extract Merleau-Ponty’s conception of experience from “Phenomenology of Perception,” or Heidegger’s from “Being and Time,” but to do the same for Husserl is a much more difficult task.

The volume’s own contributions contradict the editors’ efforts at reduction as authors draw quite liberally on whoever theorist they find intriguing in regard of their particular interests. Thomas Csordas (ch. 2) refers to Bourdieu and Foucault, besides Merleau-Ponty, in characterizing various disorders as different types of body-world rela-

tionship. For Jason Throop (ch. 3), Wittgenstein and the notion of “aspect-dawning” becomes central to his argument that the sacred is not an existentially separate sphere of experience, but already discernible in the indeterminacy of everyday experience. Ian Bedford (ch. 6) draws for his reflections on unmeasured music in various traditions on C. S. Peirce, whose association with phenomenology is disputable; and Deborah Van Heekeren (ch. 11) finds Jean-Paul Sartre useful for her discussion of magic and sorcery among the Vula’a of Papua New Guinea. In view of this variety one wants to ask whether restricting one’s understanding of phenomenology to selected authors was really the right strategy to pursue.

Similar questions can be asked regarding the structure of the collection. The book is divided into three parts: part I is the largest, containing six chapters, and is titled “The Body as Constitutive Horizon of Experience”. Considering that Ram and Houston claim to extend the field of phenomenological anthropology, it seems surprising that half of the chapters in the volume is subsumed under this traditional heading. Equally surprising is that part II, “History and Temporality” only contains two chapters, as Ram and Houston stress the importance of “impersonal forces” in their version of phenomenology. The last part is dedicated to “The Poetics and Politics of Phenomenological Ethnography” and consists of four chapters.

When one takes a closer look at the two main sections of the book, part I and III, one discovers another rift running through the volume, one which concerns the conceptualization of phenomenological anthropology itself. There seems to be a deeper opposition between texts using phenomenology for theoretical purposes (assembled in part I), and those who make methodological claims based on phenomenology (assembled in part III). The two approaches can, of course, not be categorically separated from each other, but they nevertheless indicate different visions for phenomenological anthropology. The theoretical variant regards the role of phenomenology as that of a source of heuristically fertile concepts for more adequate interpretations of other life-worlds; the relationship between researcher and researched, however, is not necessarily affected in this type of phenomenological anthropology. The methodological variant, by contrast, demands that the anthropological research process, from theorizing to fieldwork to ethnographic representation is reconceptualized in terms suggested by phenomenology. As the distribution of articles shows, the collection remains undecided as to what vision of phenomenological anthropology it proposes. Ram and Houston do not discuss the opposition between theoretical and methodological variants, but they title their introduction “Phenomenology’s Methodological Invitation,” suggesting that they side with the latter conception. On the one hand, Ram and Houston confirm that this is their objective when they state that their volume strives to make “a more radical claim for phenomenology in anthropology” (3). On the other hand, the way they describe this radical claim remains vague: “It seeks to show that any anthropologist who engages with the method in a sustained manner over time will find it illuminates aspects of their own work” (3).

Other tensions prevent the emergence of a coherent vision of phenomenological anthropology. Some articles, like that of Monica Dalidowicz (ch. 4) on the difficulties of learning (and teaching) Indian classical dance across cross-cultural boundaries, or L. L. Wynn's reflections on the representation of love in anthropology and phenomenology (ch. 10), present rich ethnographic details and accounts. But this tends to go to the detriment of in-depth engagement with phenomenology (or vice versa: in chapters leaning towards phenomenology, like those of Throop and Downey, detailed ethnographic descriptions tend to be less prominent). Either one or the other seems to serve as an attachment to the author's main concern; a genuine synthesis is rarely achieved, or even sought. Robert Desjarlais's essay on the use of photography as phenomenology in his long-standing fieldsite in Nepal is an exception to this rule, combining a nuanced phenomenological discourse with rich ethnographic information. The same applies to Christopher Houston's (ch. 12) reflections on the relationships between phenomenology, poetry, and ethnography, using Michael Jackson as example for their interweaving in the work of a particular writer.

In Wynn's article, the aforementioned tension between the ethnographic and the phenomenological expresses itself in a quite unjustified, yet telling criticism of phenomenology itself. She accuses Merleau-Ponty of having described, in his chapter on sexuality in "Phenomenology of Perception," love and desire in "unrealistic", because experience-distant ways: "what it [the chapter] completely fails to convey is the emotion, the affect, of love and desire" (240). Whoever has read the book, or phenomenological philosophy in general, realizes immediately that it was not Merleau-Ponty's intention to evoke emotion and affect, but to understand its significance in human existence.

With this I do not intend to say that anthropologists should not criticize phenomenology; but I think such criticism should be based on an awareness of the specificity of phenomenology. It needs to acknowledge that phenomenology and anthropology are different kinds of projects. To spell out this difference: anthropology is fundamentally concerned with understanding the aspects of human lives relating to the concrete conditions in a specific space and time; phenomenology as philosophy, by contrast, aspires to formulate the conditions under which human beings are able to transcend this relativity, to make statements that are "true" regardless of circumstance. In short, while anthropology stresses the particularity, phenomenology emphasizes the universality of human existence. Of course, one wants to object, these differences are not clear-cut: anthropology inevitably must make a universalist assumption (about the anthropologist's faculty to communicate across cultural boundaries), and conversely, phenomenology's reflection on experience departs from the paradoxical insight that every kind of universal claim is necessarily connected with a particular perspective. But that does not mean that the two projects can simply be identified with each other, as is implied in Wynn's and other contributions to the volume.

There is thus indeed a great affinity between phenomenology and anthropology, and potential of mutual enrich-

ment in form of a phenomenological anthropology. But for this phenomenological anthropology to materialize, one has to do the groundwork of formulating the essences of both projects and, on this basis, develop a clear understanding of the relationship between them. This might be too much to ask from an edited collection, but Ram and Houston themselves establish this standard through some of their more far-reaching claims (see also Ram on page 30), and their collection, viewed as a whole, does not live up to it.

All of this is not to say that "Phenomenology in Anthropology" is not worth reading, that it does not contain well-crafted and carefully argued contributions full of interesting ideas and insights. What it is supposed to mean is that reading it, I found myself asking the question whether there has indeed been a conceptual refinement of phenomenological anthropology in the last 20 years. Is there really some kind of progress in comparison to Csordas's application of Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body to anthropology, or to Jackson's vision of phenomenological anthropology articulated in his introduction to "Things as They Are" (frequently cited in Ram and Houston)? I am inclined to answer the question negatively, and I am wondering whether an anecdote from Michael Jackson's afterword could not also be applied to the ways in which anthropologists relate to phenomenology. The story is about a famous natural scientist who recalled how she discovered as a five-year old that eggs in a basket do not fall out if the basket is swirled around fast enough, even when it is upside down. When she reported her discovery of an "anti-gravity force" to the grown-ups in her life, they reacted dismissively, to her great disappointment, and treated her experience as an instance of a familiar law. Jackson uses her reaction to illustrate central features of the phenomenological perspective: "But, she thought, it is still my discovery, because I made the discovery on my own. The discovery was mine" (298). Reading "Phenomenology in Anthropology," one sometimes gets the impression that a new generation of anthropologists has discovered phenomenology for themselves, and pronounces excitedly, "this discovery is mine." While this is commendable, one would wish that there was something to which this excitement would lead, the formulation of a principle or "law," some kind of shared understanding of what phenomenology is supposed to mean for anthropology. Only when such an understanding has been produced, one will be able to say that the field of phenomenological anthropology has entered the stage of maturity.

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Rogers, Chris: *The Use and Development of the Xinkan Languages*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016. 262 pp. ISBN 978-1-4773-0832-5. Price: \$ 29.95

Mesoamerica is one of the World's major areas of linguistic diversity, evidencing a considerable number of seemingly unrelated families. Mesoamerican languages promise many insightful linguistic reconstructions, supported by colonial descriptions and pre-Columbian texts, implying a lot of details on language contact in the deep