

mance” (though Judith Butler is only mentioned in passing). This is where ordinary language philosophy comes in: Wittgenstein’s interest in language games and Austin’s idea that human beings *do* things with words when interacting with each other lays out the ground for a study of ethics that is claimed to be “immanent” to action. Finally, Rappaport’s reflections on the performance of ritual is invoked to bridge all this with anthropology. For Rappaport, the point of ritual is to “substitute public clarity for private obscurity or ambiguity, that is, to establish beyond question the relevant criteria” (249) according to which human acts are evaluated. Lambek takes this understanding of ritual and applies to all ordinary social interaction. Everything seems to become ethics and ethics is everything (except indifference, p. 257) – following the philosopher Stanley Cavell (290).

The essays brought together in this volume cover several decades. This takes the reader on a journey through anthropological debates of the past – e.g., on women’s agency and social norms (chap. 2); on the link between taboo and personhood (chap. 3); on remembering and morality (chap. 4); anger and justice (chap. 6); irony and the art of living with spirits (chap. 7); or sacrifice and myth (chap. 9). Every essay is introduced with a paragraph laying out the context in which it was published and briefly explaining what the debates were at the time. This gives a rare insight into the backstage dynamics of anthropological publishing.

The anthropological strengths of the book lie in the instances where Lambek draws upon ethnography. In chapter 2, Lambek discusses virgin marriage in Mayotte and argues – long before Saba Mahmood – that subjecting oneself to established norms can be a sort of agency, whereby one can shape social constellations in one’s own favour. Virgin marriage cannot be grasped in terms of submission to social rules that are followed “blindly.” It rather needs to be understood as an “act” involving gifts, payments, and obligations between the parent of the groom and the bride (46). There are complex links between female defloration and the general respect for social order. In this vein, women are said to deploy the value of their own sexuality in order to gain a certain social power. The argument that moral orders can also enable a certain degree of autonomy is nowadays widely accepted.

On an analytical level, the insight that ethics must be studied in *situated context* (ix) is perhaps the strongest point. The episode of the granary collapsing on top of a trader in Mayotte (291 f. – described at length in Lambek’s famous ethnography “Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte”) illustrates this most convincingly. Having survived the incident, the trader first casts the event in terms of Islamic discourse, “declaring the narrow escape and rescue as signs of God’s grace.” Talking to the community members, he mentions that he was weeping – as this is an accepted sign of Islamic piety. When his daughter unexpectedly dies, people of the community frame the same incidence differently. The weeping becomes interpreted as a sign of unmanliness, which can invert the moral order and bring about disaster. Finally, people adduce narratives of spirit possession to make sense of events. Anthro-

pologists should accept that different moral orders can be incommensurable to each other and that people can live well without reconciling them.

The weakness of the book lies in Lambek’s ambiguity with regards to the question whether the anthropology of ethics is a normative project (manifesting a hitherto “repressed moralism” as Bruce Kapferer and Marina Gold have argued) or an undertaking to enhance the discipline’s analytical horizon with a view to the empirical study of what it means to become good at something and to take on a given role in a given context – which can include becoming a good torturer in a warzone prison or a respected drug dealer. Lambek thinks that “the ethical is not in the first instance what it done right or what ought to be done, but the conceptual possibility of doing right and of discriminating right from wrong, or better from worse” (7). On the other hand, he seems tempted by the desire of philosophically clarifying matters of the “good” writ-large (x, xiii, xvi, xvii). Casting the study of ethics in such normative terms – as a general inclination towards “the good” –, inevitably limits the approach’s analytical and empirical potential. After all, “bad” people have ethics too.

This book is for anthropologists flirting with philosophy – as well as for people with a special interest in Mayotte and Madagascar. The essays hardly serve the purpose of introducing readers to the anthropology of ethics, but they do offer bridges between ethics and other anthropological debates. The essay “Value and Virtue” beautifully illustrates how the anthropology of ethics can enhance more situated ethnographic studies of the tension between the calculable and the incalculable – or economy and morality.

Emanuel Schaeublin

**Lipset, David:** *Yabar. The Alienations of Murik Men in a Papua New Guinea Modernity*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 253 pp. ISBN 973-3-319-51075-0. Price: € 96,29

Yabar is a Murik term that appears in precontact times referred to the mightiest of ancestor spirits. They were respected and feared for their abilities to change people and the rest of the world. Nowadays Europeans and middle-class Papua New Guineans are called children of Yabar. People well connected to so-called modernity are said to live in Yabar. Lipset informs us that this is spoken in both admiration and moral critique of perceived effortless wealth, in contrast to traditional subsistence life. Murik men feel they cannot access this life of ease, and as such feel themselves alienated from the promise of a capitalist economy. Yet, Lipset observes, their use of a concept from archaic Murik tradition to label this condition of modernity indicates that they also feel alienated from the power of traditional life. They are in a double-bind.

By *alienation* Lipset means wanting without being able to get. He explores the ways in which Murik men feel this toward both their precontact culture and modernities. He uses the plural to underline cultural variation in a broader pattern. For Lipset, modernity is not a time marker, it is a constellation of cultural traits that take somewhat different forms in different cultural settings and

moments. This “modern” pattern includes a sense of newness based on reason in which the past is illegitimate. Individual desire is supposed to supersede social goals. Materials are used as alienable capital rather than interacted with as social objects and subjects. A final characteristic of modernity, that Lipset sees as definitive, is an uncertainty of what is correct action.

The ethnographic description, while sometimes burdened with theoretical concerns and concepts, is highly informative. In the last 25 years, Murik men have gone from being well-off and central in the traditional economic and social life to disconnected and impoverished in the modern milieu. Their vast fish reserves have diminished in value in favour of canned fish. The formerly robust and all-encompassing male cult continues to exist in a pallid form following conversion to Christianity. One of the strengths of this book is the selection of topics within which the themes of men’s double alienation is explored.

The second chapter concerns young men’s courtship stories in which fate and events rather than mental states are described. Although they have some “modern” elements such as bus trips and money, in general they are in keeping with precontact Murik narrative rather than modern romantic love stories with which young Murik men are also familiar. Lipset interprets this to mean that young men are alienated from both modernity and archaic tradition. Lipset uses the concept of alienation to imply regret and dissatisfaction with being cut off. However, evidence that young men in fact wish to participate in romantic ways of talking about their love experiences is not demonstrated.

The third chapter focuses on the place of a new and illegal smokable, marijuana, in male society. While tobacco has morally positive links to traditional sociality and trade, marijuana or “white people’s tobacco” is consumed in private and is associated with youthful hedonism. Elders consider marijuana largely negative, while youths regard it as a magical agency enhancer, supposing it to improve their athletic performance. When police confiscate marijuana only to sell it themselves, the modern state appears to elders like untrustworthy pot-smoking youths. Lipset interprets the situation for old men as alienation from both the state and the local society. He finds that young men and boys, in contrast, enjoy characteristically modern personal pleasure, secular agency, and individual expression, although one that is still alienated by being illegitimate.

The fourth chapter shifts from village life to that on the edges of town as mediated by recently introduced mobile phones. The technology has in some ways allowed people to better connect to traditional ideals by communicating with exchange partners and kin. It also has enabled a degree of connection to modernity by, for example, promoting a new form of greeting: asking about subjective states rather than destinations. On the other hand, mobile telephony also exacerbates alienation from traditional life in facilitating nefarious individualism and marital infidelity. Lacking funds and sometimes signal access are some of the ways in which mobile phones alienate people from the desires of modernity.

The fifth chapter on folk theatre is a particularly rich

exploration of creativity as a means of trying to overcome painful separations that come about through death and unrequited attraction. It concerns images of impossibly ideal womanhood in a proprietary pagan performance. The performance’s author understands the play and its accoutrements as mimicking spiritual revelations of a dream he had rather than his own creation. As always in this book, the analysis concerns how these developments express dual alienations from both archaic and modern cultural complexes. Despite rather opaque analytical language, Lipset’s insights on creativity, mourning, and theatrical mythmaking are stimulating. For example, Lipset analyzes lyrics and carvings as expressions of the more or less hopeless quest to create desire in others that favorably complements one’s own. His explanation is plausible, but more exegesis and details on the featured play in place of some of the convoluted theoretical work might have made the chapter’s insights clearer.

Chapter 6 concerns signifiers, by which Lipset means symbols that enable moral orders by disguising their true nature. Such signifiers include mask identities of the pre-Christian but still functioning cult, introduced money, and Yabar. The chapter ranges from changing sleep technology to mobility. Among the phenomena it considers is the replacement of traditional exchange of youths’ wives’ sexual favors to initiators for ritual advancement with cash in response to Christian disapproval. Here money is used in a way that outwardly mimics modern sensibilities of alienable possessions, but in actuality the amounts and forms of the exchange continue the archaic, non-capitalist social exchange. The analysis prescribes another dual alienation from both archaic and modern cultural constellations.

Chapter Seven concerns Murik men in the Anthropocene, used to refer to a set of external conditions associated with a period of time as well as an associated constellation of partly interchangeable cultural traits. Sea level rises are progressively inundating low-lying Murik lands. Lipset describes the Anthropocene as a physical result of certain cultural traits characteristic of modernity, including an inaccurate sense of human mastery over a separate natural world. He addresses Murik cultural versions of Anthropocene culture via their magical practices. Although belief in magic seems on the surface to make one feel empowered, its effective limits nevertheless underline magicians’ vulnerability and inability to solve the problems that beset them. The Anthropocene’s effects, such as fossil-fuel-driven climate change and radioactive pollution are caused by humans bearing certain cultural scripts of confident mastery and dominion over nature. However, these problems are not reversible by the same overconfident and erroneous sense of mastery and separation from nature. What strikes me as I read this chapter is the ubiquitous human tendency to misunderstand our own powers. We are both more and less powerful than we think.

Lipset provides an example of a traditional belief that if while on a trading voyage, the canoe begins dangerously bobbing up and down, this is regarded as obvious evidence of the steersman’s wife’s sexual infidelity. The mariners quickly replace the steersman, who beats his

wife upon his return. Lipset of course analyzes this constellation in terms of the perceived loss of the steersman's wife's desire for him: the alienatingly hopeless quest for the desire of the other as it manifests in archaic, modern, and Anthropocene cultures.

In the "Afterword," Lipset expands this analytical approach to several other ethnographic cases from around the Pacific islands, underlining the view that we humans spend much of our lives and cultures attempting to feel sufficiently loved by those whom we love. According to this view, we trick ourselves to feel more powerful or more satisfied under the power of others than we are, but are left with a haunting sense of alienation.

Roger Ivar Lohmann

**Meintjes, Louise:** *Dust of the Zulu. Ngoma Aesthetics after Apartheid.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. 338 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-6265-4. Price: \$ 26.95

"Dust of the Zulu" chronicles the lives and exploits of *ngoma* dancers from rural esiPongweni in South Africa, tracking their voices, bodies, and careers over the course of nearly three decades, and situating their performances in the context of South Africa's violent transition to democracy. The brutal legacies of colonialism and apartheid cast long shadows over contemporary *ngoma* practice and its commodification. This chronicle of *umzansi* – one of several distinct styles of *ngoma* danced in the province of KwaZulu-Natal – raises urgent questions about South Africa's impoverished rural communities and the status of migrant labor in its urban ghettos. Louise Meintjes's fluid ethnographic writing melds analytical precision with a depth of cultural insight gained through long immersion. The book's dialectical force is sustained by the richness and intimacy of Meintjes's collaborations. Zulu voices saturate the book's textures. This raises difficult questions about the ethics of representation and the nature of reciprocity in the reporting of highly sensitive information; especially for a society rent apart by moral conflict, disease, poverty, and violence. How to write reflexively within the boundaries of scholarship when confidantes become scholarly sources? Such challenges seem to be resolved only off the page.

The most important of Meintjes's collaborators is Siyazi Zulu. He is the dance leader, composer, choreographer, and entrepreneur who first invited Meintjes to esiPongweni in 1991. His voice and the voices of his dance team imbue the book with its distinct vernacular intonations, and help to bind its eight chapters into a tightly woven alloy. The nuanced polyphony of voices counters simplistic constructions of Zulu identity. For instance, the stereotyped image of the Zulu male "warrior" is subjected to a thorough critique. This is accomplished in part through the use of language. Meintjes's embrace of indigenous Zulu terms like *isigqi* (power) and *ulaka* (righteous anger) as aesthetic principles invigorates the writing without mystifying the culture. The transcription of song lyrics adds to the study of Zulu oral literature, but it is frustrating that some of the original isiZulu texts are not included in the book except in English translation.

Photojournalist TJ Lemon's photographs more than complement the text. The images record in arresting detail the cast of characters and their exploits in and around the dancing. Lemon's photos on pages 73 to 75 show men flying through the air in ways that capture the visceral power of *isigqi*. These are but a handful of the 142 illustrations illuminating the text. Meintjes's own images are an important supplement to Lemon's. Her video stills narrate the movement and shape of dance sequences. There are moments of great poignancy recorded here. The intimacies conveyed in these words and images imbue the book with pathos, and resilience to, its themes of violence, disease, poverty, and exploitation. The prose itself is beautifully wrought. Meintjes employs contrasting registers to embody the hyperreality of *ngoma* aesthetics. Places, voices, and temporalities are combined in alternating discursive modes. The improvisatory quality of dance is evoked using mimetic writing whereas an analytic mode is used for reportage, commentary, historiography, and cultural analysis. By stitching these yarns to the rich visual narratives of dancers, singers, admirers, and politicians, Meintjes has succeeded in creating an enthralling piece of writing.

In chapter 1, "Turning to be Kissed," Meintjes writes about conceptions and projections of masculinity focusing on dance events at esiPongweni. The dialogue between dancer and community is a play of expectations in a socially sanctioned space for courting. Meintjes deftly conjures the sensuality and desire made manifest in the flirtation of the admired and the admiring. The aesthetic principle of *isigqi* is introduced here and sustained throughout the book as a leitmotiv. "Isigqi describes that magic moment when a groove absolutely works because its components coordinate tightly" (48). On page 50 there is a brilliantly fluid musical description of Siyazi's dancing that explains his artistry as a play of duration and movement. This type of close analysis will hold special appeal for ethnomusicologists.

Chapter 2 considers the importance of the "unwavering voice" as an aesthetic principle in *ngoma* competition. "Unwavering" refers to "the stressed quality of the techniques of the vocal production as well as the focus and commitment required of the singer to produce a powerful sound" (68). The voice must not break. "Sustaining one's control at the edge is a marker of steadfastness" (65). This analysis is tied to team organization and discipline. Dance captains manage factors of violence, politics, and disease by exerting strict yet careful control over their dancers. Violence is a recurrent theme explored in a study of military aesthetics and the politics of reconciliation in chapter 3. Dancers call themselves *amasosha* (soldiers) and are directed by an *igoso* or *ukaputeni* (captain). "The blend of military styles, sounded, gestured, adorned, personalized, and differently figured in various contexts, marks the soldiers' performance of violence as performance" (103). Terrifying details emerge on faction fighting in Msinga, but always *ngoma* performance is read as a means of managing this violence and its threat to the moral order (113).

The politics of South Africa's political transition is discussed in chapter 4. "The relationship of the world of