

## BOOK REVIEWS

**ARJUN APPADURAI**, *Banking on words: the failure of language in the age of derivative finance*, London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2016, 180 pp. ISBN 9780226318776.

Arjun Appadurai's latest book is a brief pamphlet on a social form called the 'derivative', which the author sees as central for understanding the way financial capitalism operates. The derivative can essentially be seen as a promise, made between two parties, about the future price of a certain asset – a profoundly secular phenomenon whose origins can be dated back to the mid-nineteenth century with the growth of insurance industry. In the spirit of good analytical anthropology, Appadurai is able to reduce this form of contract to its rudimentary elements and argue that the financial crisis of 2007-8 was ultimately a failure of language made possible by the increased use of derivatives that function as written agreements. Thus, Appadurai's undoubtedly original claim is to suggest that we can understand what went wrong within the financial industry by focusing primarily on language.

His suggestion is certainly compelling, but not defined well enough. Thus, over the course of the book, it becomes clear that Appadurai is talking about the linguistic form of the derivative and not necessarily about its linguistic contents. This enables him to synthesise authors like Durkheim, Weber and Mauss and apply their ideas to contexts that were in their infancy when these men were still producing their scholarship. Through Durkheim, he is able to position the 'market' as the totalized external force we used to call 'society'. Through Weber, he discusses how uncertainty – the unknown non-measurable future – is secularized into risk: the unknown but measurable future which enables risk to be treated as an independent source of profit. Through Austin, Appadurai is able to ground the discussion in its linguistic elements, pointing to the performativity of derivatives and the way any trade between two sides creates a market and thus the conditions of its possibility. Thus, it was the inability to make new promises in the face of all the failed promises in 2008 that led the world to the brink of collapse.

Nevertheless, Appadurai never addresses the linguistic contents of derivatives. While free of any financial jargon, the book features discussions on collateralized debt obligations, credit default swaps and the like, explaining their functions, but not problematizing their very linguistic

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features. Language always appears as a background to most of the analysis carried out, but it is not tackled directly as an issue of power. Thus, in Appadurai's text, language was a condition of existence for the financial failure, but not necessarily a means, a strategy or a tactic that precipitated the crisis.

In addition to the analysis of the new financial social forms, Appadurai also advances certain political positions. At the heart of this project is his observation that the nature of the financial subject is primarily dividual, echoing the anthropological analyses from Melanesia. The financial subject is sliced and diced by quantifying the qualitative elements of a person's life in the form of loans, family and health crises, education etc. These can be bundled, repackaged and revalued, sold again and again, creating a chain of derivatives. He is simultaneously critical of political projects like the Occupy movement, arguing that they posit 'the individual' as their basic unit and claiming that only a project that assumes the dividual form will be successful in beating finance players. While I appreciate the analysis of the financial dividual, I feel this is the weak part of Appadurai's otherwise incisive book.

For one thing, it assumes that these political projects operate without any notions and conditions of dividuality, but in fact its endorsements of mutual aid, personal and social autonomy, etc. certainly have these elements. Secondly, even modern finance has to operate with some idea of the individual, if only to break it down into dividual parts – it seems that Appadurai might acknowledge this through his discussion of the ritual as that process which constitutes dividuals as individuals. Thus, the trading event can easily be seen as the ritual which consolidates the individual. Thirdly, it is not clear why any political projects based on individual subjects would be doomed to fail in the face of the financial dividual. This assumes that the financial dividual is already the hegemonic subject and not just an analyst's inference.

So instead of rejecting the debt-driven economy, Appadurai calls for the means for the production of debt to be seized, which has obvious Marxist undertones. I think it strange that the author does not offer some reflections on how this 150-year-old socialist project would develop along different lines. So while Appadurai does succeed in making certain processes legible, offers some interesting re-readings of anthropological giants and convinces the reader that the derivative form is creating contemporary society, his political positions are undeveloped, not entirely clear and remain only theoretical in their nature. Nevertheless, his ambition to develop a social science of calculative action may very well have a solid analytical basis already. Without

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understanding its basic feature – the derivative form – we are by definition unable to understand the way finance capitalism works.

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**LORETTA A. CORMIER and SHARYN R. JONES**, *The domesticated penis: how womanhood has shaped manhood*, Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2015, 256 pp, ISBN 9780813718741.

*The Domesticated Penis* challenges the long-held assumption that, in the evolution of male and female humans, form follows function alone. Instead, anthropologists Loretta A. Cormier and Sharyn R. Jones argue that form is the bidirectional coalescing of social, historical, evolutionary, and cultural factors. Principally, they trace the impact of 'female choice' (9) on the modern male phallus. In this sense, Cormier and Jones argue against traditional prototypes of human evolution. It is not merely male preference among females that dominates human evolution; so too does female choice. And thus it seems that 'domestication' (7) – traditionally understood as human-directed change in the evolution of plant and animal species – can be turned on its head: according to Cormier and Jones, males and females can also come to co-domesticate one another.

A rigorous compilation of ethnographic evidence in the disciplines of cultural and medical anthropology, archaeology, primatology, and evolutionary theory, *The Domesticated Penis* is at once a history of the male penis and a narrative of human sexuality, gender identity, and patriarchy. The book itself is broken into five sections. Beginning with 'The Sexual Penis,' (pp. 9-44) Cormier and Jones describe the characteristics of the penis that are distinct to male humans, tracking the evolution of these traits to female preference and pleasure. In 'The Patriarchal Penis,' (pp. 45-87) Cormier and Jones work backwards, articulating links between agricultural societies and social patterns of phallocentrism common to so-called 'penis cults.' 'The Cultural Penis' (pp. 88-112) is a continuation of these trends, locating broad cross-cultural complexes in the way the penis has been conceptualized in ritual, mythology, and cosmology. In

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‘The Erotic-Exotic Penis,’ (pp. 113-131) Cormier and Jones critique common tropes of indigenous and race-based human sexuality, situating nakedness and male/female sexuality as culturally defined concepts. Finally, ‘The Domesticated Penis,’ (pp. 132-146) drives the cultural relativism of anthropology home; it is here where Cormier and Jones investigate modern domestication(s) of the human penis, particularly in the area of technology and medical modification.

The case for ‘female choice’ is made most powerfully in ‘The Sexual Penis.’ Cormier and Jones describe a number of characteristics distinctive to the human penis (such as its spineless and flexible morphology, which contrasts the knobby bristles common to most primates). According to Cormier and Jones, the evolution of these characteristics reveals the impact of female participation: a smooth, non-irritating penis maximizes female pleasure at the cost of enhanced male sensitivity. This suggests that female agency in reproduction, and thus evolution, is often under-estimated. Indeed, it sits in dramatic opposition to the modern intrasexual trope of ‘alpha-males’ (pp. 31-35) competing with one another and thereby dominating the consequential genotypic lineages.

But Cormier and Jones also argue that ‘female choice,’ and the evolutionary legacy it leaves, is masked by the agricultural revolution and its associated changes in ownership, social hierarchy, and gender-based lifestyles. According to anthropologists, shifts toward farming led to concrete claims of ownership of land and possibly of people, thereby enhancing social stratification and interpersonal violence. The erosion of egalitarian relationships, replaced by the rise of patriarchal societies, may have sedimented the penis as a symbol of male authority and dominance. Cormier and Jones trace ethnographic analogues of hunter-gatherers and archaeological data among Ancient Egyptians, Mayans, Greeks, Romans and the Indus Valley civilizations to argue for a link between practices of agriculture and phallic cults. Although the argument sometimes appears simplistic, the depth of Cormier and Jones research, and its temporal and geographical cross-cuts, is impressive.

In situating the penis as a powerful tool to be deployed for the creation of productive societies, Cormier and Jones also have to cover the range of mythical, ritualistic, and cosmological powers the penis has come to assume. They do this well in ‘The Cultural Penis,’ which offers a comprehensive review of the deification of the penis across a range of human cultures. A difficult if not impossible task, the two identify particular ‘complexes’ (88) common

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to the treatment of the penis. Simultaneously, Cormier and Jones maintain their focus on female choice. They highlight rites such as penis sheathing and modification (i.e. circumcision or castration, pp. 99-105): traditions that impart masculine qualities but that also change the penis in a way that can be viewed as a form of feminization (such as subincision, which gives the penis a similar appearance to the vulva). Although buffeted by their comprehensive range of ethnographic and ethnohistorical evidence, Cormier and Jones have to tread carefully here: their conclusions, while provocative, sometimes come across as generalizing.

Any risk of generalizing, however, subsides in the final two sections, 'The Erotic-Exotic Penis' and 'The Domesticated Penis,' which together debunk dubious claims about indigenous and race-based sexuality. In acknowledging anthropology's misguided tendency to eroticize 'the other,' Cormier and Jones note the dominance of this lens in analyses of human sexuality and reproduction. They argue that tales of exotic-erotic behavior, invented out of whole cloth by poor training and research, have been passed down for decades, perpetuating their way into modern interpretations of nakedness and sexual lust and in turn propagating an anxiety about the 'uncouth' subject in the first place. Ultimately, it is these tales that filter down into modern preoccupations with penile size, erectile dysfunction, and sex reassignment. It is this last section where Cormier and Jones may fall short. While erectile dysfunction and the like are characterized as 'culture-bound syndromes' of the West (akin to those proposed by Arthur Kleinman in 1987), an argument for Peter Conrad's medicalization, whereby regular and common human processes or actions come to be defined 'in medical terms, using medical language ... and a medical framework', may have made more sense (Conrad 1992: 211).

That said, *The Domesticated Penis* is an astonishing treasure trove of ethnographic research and evidence. In transcending normative gender stereotypes, Cormier and Jones give balance to contemporary concepts related to biocultural evolution and natural selection. Most importantly, they steer clear of neatly packaged conceptualizations. Just as culture cannot be nearly described from biology, neither can the evolution of female and male form and function.

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**PETER LARSEN**, *Post-frontier resource governance: indigenous rights, extraction and conservation in the Peruvian Amazon*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, xiv, 185 pp. ISBN 9781137381842.

In *Post-frontier resource governance: indigenous rights, extraction and conservation in the Peruvian Amazon*, Peter Larsen takes on a paradox all too familiar to those who study environmental conflict, development and resource extraction across the global South, namely that the past four decades have seen an intensification of processes of deforestation, rights infringements and resource frontier creation, while simultaneous movements for territorial reserves, protected areas, and the organization of indigenous rights have emerged. As Larsen explains, in the present era of resource extraction at the world's frontiers, the issue is not so much that notions of rights, conservation and sustainability are simply absent, but rather that they are now embedded within the technologies, practices and institutions of contemporary resource extraction (p. 2). This inconsistency lies at the core of Larsen's ethnographic description and theoretical analysis, which take as their object of study what he calls the 'post-frontier', that is, the recent emergence of 21<sup>st</sup>-century resource frontiers wherein new regulatory processes are restructuring what was previously formulated through the language of extraction alone (ibid.). The concept of the post-frontier, then, challenges us to view post-frontier closures, as Larsen puts it, 'not merely as poorly implemented sustainability solutions;' instead we should 'interrogate the entanglements of post-frontier sustainability and frontier expansion' (p. 3).

Larsen's text emerges from extensive work outside of academia and, more specifically, out of his experience with the development sector in the Peruvian Amazon. As such, he draws on his

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professional involvement with the topic as a means of asking ‘where and how the post-frontier is found’, pushing beyond simple criticism of a failing post-frontier in order to track the shifting terrain of regulation and its effects on the ground (ibid.). This leads him to reject a number of simplistic assumptions about what exactly goes on in frontier and post-frontier regions. Larsen argues that the post-frontier is much more than merely a site of environmental chaos and disorder marred by unmediated capitalist forms of extraction, as previous anthropological depictions might have assumed; yet, he also challenges a more optimistic portrayal of the post-frontier as having been transformed by discourses around indigenous rights, conservation, sustainability and protection. Instead, drawing on Anna Tsing, he argues that today’s post-frontiers are best understood as a site where both of these perspectives must be considered jointly, with the post-frontier as a locale where ‘making, saving, and destroying resources are utterly mixed up, where zones of conservation, production and resource sacrifice overlap almost fully...’ (Tsing 2005: 32, quoted by Larsen, p. 5).

How the dynamics described by Tsing are experienced and negotiated at the grassroots level by a range of actors situated differently in relation to post-frontier institutions is the question that lies at the core of Larsen’s ethnography. In this regard, Larsen’s work moves beyond the more theoretical or hypothetical explorations of scholars who have previously written on this topic, as his ethnography speaks to the experiences of state officials and NGO workers, as well as those of local indigenous populations like the Yánesha, whom Larsen researched. Larsen’s work will be of interest to others concerned with a wide range of topics—indigeneity, conservation, governance, development—but especially those whose research emphasizes the ‘frontier’. His work picks up where much anthropological work on the frontier has left off, proposing a new means of understanding the constellation of powers at play in modern-day environmental struggles—struggles that incorporate a range of discourses beyond just those of extraction and profit.

While a large portion of Larsen’s text is historical in nature—tracking the formation of a Yánesha political organization and its outcomes in terms of new legal and environmental regimes—he does offer three particularly valuable theoretical proposals that scholars in the field will certainly find relevant to contexts beyond the central Peruvian Amazon. The first is, as referenced above, the notion of the *post-frontier*, which proceeds from former frontier narratives to take account of the ways in which contemporary frontiers are no longer simply chaotic,

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deregulated wildernesses, but instead are also ordered and regulated. This brings us to Larsen's second proposal, which is that 21<sup>st</sup>-century post-frontiers might best be understood as socially embedded *assemblages* in that post-frontier institutions cannot be evaluated simply as weak or poor instruments alone, but must be understood instead as particular modes of governance intertwined with specific social practices, moral economies and hierarchies of norms and practices (p. 29). As a result of this social embedded-ness, Larsen argues that scholars must take seriously a third proposal: that analyses of post-frontier governance must move away from assumed *linear* narratives of conquest, control, extraction and 'civilization' (p. 17). In this regard, Larsen aligns his work with the proposals of Latour and others in calling for a 'bottom-up ontological model' that does not take linear properties as its starting point (p. 152) but instead acknowledges the non-linear processes through which the post-frontier is created.

Larsen's book is a valuable piece of work, offering not only a close ethnographic reading of understudied reality—wherein calls for collective rights and environmental safeguards exist alongside continued accumulation and environmental destruction—but also a number of theoretically rich proposals as to how anthropologists might study the post-frontier moving forward.

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**MARGARET LOCK and GISLI PALSSON**, *Can science resolve the nature/nurture debate?*  
Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press 2016, viii, 177 pp. ISBN 9780745689975.

Although the relationship between ‘nature’ and ‘nurture’ has been debated for centuries, since the discovery of DNA it has become popularly accepted that nature precedes nurture. However, in this volume, Margaret Lock and Gisli Palsson significantly challenge this paradigm. Not only do they argue that nature and nurture are so intricately intertwined that they cannot easily be delineated or separated, but they also make the case for reversing the dichotomy and placing nurture before nature. The book takes us through the history of the nature/nurture debate, up to, and ultimately beyond the point when DNA was discovered and came to be seen as determining the life of organisms. The account culminates in the ‘major conceptual shift’ (79) that is currently ongoing in the field of epigenetics, in which nurture is coming to be seen as ‘the active, initiating force, to which the genome reacts’ (79). According to Lock and Palsson, there is a growing recognition among researchers in the biological and social sciences that environmental, social and political relations significantly impact on the expression of DNA, creating changes in the human body that can be transmitted from one generation to the next. As they point out, this amounts to a paradigm shift that has the potential to revolutionize the field of biology.

While the book is written in a language that is also accessible to those uninitiated into the world of biology, this is firmly a book about medical anthropology. ‘Traditional’ anthropology – namely, anthropology concerned with the social body, and thus with nurture – only appears in the last chapter, where anthropological examples illustrate how historical, political and economic conditions affect the lives and embodied experience of individuals. A particularly striking example is taken from studies of First Nations in Canada, where the trauma of a colonization that started five centuries ago still leads to widespread substance dependence, depression, violence and high rates of suicide (140-145). Lock and Palsson point out that experiments in epigenetics are generally unable to account for complex influences on the body, such as those experienced by the Canadian First Nations, as social environments are usually ‘miniaturized’ in lab settings in order to enable the researchers to establish direct correlations between environmental stimuli and changes at the molecular level. On these grounds they argue that the nurture/nature debates cannot be resolved by science alone. Rather, they suggest that anthropologists and other social scientists are crucial to discovering how nurture affects biology, as anthropologists can

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contribute historical, social and political background information for individuals involved in studies – information that researchers in epigenetics tend to set aside for practical reasons.

The book therefore reads as an urgent call to action for anthropologists who may be interested in how society ‘writ large’ affects the expression of DNA and the embodied experience of humans. For those who feel called to this undoubtedly important work, this book lays out the nature of the task ahead, although Lock and Palsson do not elaborate on how it may be accomplished. The cooperation of biologists and anthropologists across the disciplinary divide does indeed appear to be useful in order to create a more complete picture of how specific environments affect biology. However, the task of accounting for the effect on individuals’ genomes of the complex and highly subjective understandings of each individual’s specific historical, social, political and economic circumstances seems so painstaking and complicated that it inspires some sympathy for the epigenetic researcher who feels compelled to miniaturize environments for testing purposes. It also raises the question of how results may be generalized for the purposes of medical practice, for instance, if each individual’s biology is uniquely shaped by his or her biography and subjective understanding of that biography. That is not to say that such anthropological work and cross-disciplinary cooperation is impossible or futile – quite the opposite. It is only to point out some apparent difficulties in accomplishing what Lock and Palsson envision.

Besides this call for action, the book also contests the traditional division between the biological and the social body that is built into the foundation of anthropology, traceable back to Durkheim. While anthropologists such as Mauss (1979), Bourdieu (1977, 1984) and others have concerned themselves with the relationship between the body and the mind, Lock and Palsson point out that ‘these theorists do not delve beneath the skin; universal interiority remains intact – an assumed given’ (121). The field of epigenetics, however, forms a significant challenge to anthropologists’ habit of concerning themselves almost exclusively with the social body, as it demonstrates ‘at the molecular level a fusion of the material and the social’ (118). Lock and Palsson argue that this has repercussions not only for biology and medicine, but also for anthropology, which they believe needs to take more account of how the interiority of the body, and concepts concerning the body and its afflictions, are influenced by specific times and places to create ‘local biologies’ (128). Anthropologists seem particularly well placed to consider how,

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for instance, the political decisions of governments affect such local biologies, as epigenetics rarely manages to look beyond the family unit or the household.

While this study serves as a compelling eye-opener with regards to how profoundly entangled the biological and the social are, it also perhaps confirms what many anthropologists already felt to be true, namely that the social should be given a greater role in understanding human 'nature'. As Lock and Palsson's example from the Canadian First Nations illustrates, anthropologists have long been aware that social circumstances and political events can be imprinted in the body for generations.

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**ELENA MIHAS**, *Upper Perené Arawak narratives of history, landscape, and ritual*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2014, lxxix, 402 pp. ISBN 9780803245372.

The disruption of the world's most vulnerable languages has impacted the transmission of oral knowledge, making it critical to situate the historical memory of a people within their own voice. Elena Mihás has provided a valuable collection of narratives, offering insights into the passage of time as experienced by the speakers of an endangered Amazonian Arawak language called Ashéninka. Mihás explores the relationship of orality and personhood to the many transitions experienced by an indigenous population throughout their history, and also strongly writes about the relationship of place to identity: 'From the Upper Perené animistic perspective, landscape is not a mere static setting for people's daily lives, it is part of a dynamic process of their perennial

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engagement with the outside world, inseparably tied to a complex web of relationships with its omnipresent spiritual beings' (Mihas 2014: 117).

Mihas explores how forced historical movement affected ways of knowing, and of understanding belonging. She strongly notes that the oral knowledge of stories and history are often bound into the landscapes of a people, with physical landmarks acting as mnemonic devices for linguistic transmission through storytelling. For a people, the sense of place is often integral to protecting and recalling the memory of profound interactions between human beings and their lived cultural worlds. Mihas also explores how performativity and landmarks are understood in a non-literate society that has undergone migration. The text is organized into three sections, each section describing what is understood about history, landscape, or ritual through the voices of the upriver people of eastern Peru. Each narrative is translated into both Ashéninka and English, being the first bilingual narratives specializing in the documentation of historical and linguistic memory for this population. Mihas begins each section by providing some context about what she has understood about the texts, and also the relationship of the narratives to the speakers of this language.

Mihas introduces the section on historical narrative by giving context to the relationship between the passage of time and history. She importantly notes the distinction between the ancient past (including the mythic past) and what has, by contrast, occurred within the realm of contemporary time: 'When there is talk about the past, a boundary will often be drawn between *pairani* (long ago) and *iroñaaka* (now), emphasized by the speaker' (Mihas 2014: 3). Oral narratives within this text are described largely as marking significant events and significant patterns of movement, though they are not necessarily woven together with a temporal precision that is marked by Western conceptions of time-keeping and history. They are instead indexed by their cultural significance for speakers. Interestingly, the beginning of modern times is perceived as being related to the destruction of natural landscape and heritage. It is also marked by heightened global market economies, early military conquests, the usurping of resources, and the dislocation of indigenous people from ancestral lands and into undesirable territories marked by dark and perilous figures like snakes. This movement affects the sense of belonging for a people, and also their interactions with oral knowledge. She notes that the Seer Inca, Api Inca or 'Apinka' is an important figure in the narratives.

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In an opening narrative, we are introduced to the story of Apinka. He is described as a powerful force, and as a god with often contradictory traits. He is a fierce warrior, but he also limits the consumption of food for the people. He is described as a figure shrouded in power, and is esteemed as a force among the people. They fear him, yet also look to him in awe. The story describes his memory, and his downfall. A line on page 40 reads: ‘When outsiders came, they took away the gold, it all ended, it disappeared, and we don't know where Apinka's gold is.’ This is particularly striking, because it can be likened to the disappearance of aspects of cultural knowledge. Similarly, in the *Apapanani* story, the storyteller references the origin of the name of a river. He finishes the story with ‘Now, I say, we are forgetting it...’ (Mihás 2014: 72).

In the introduction to narratives on landscape, Mihás references the many ways people leave cultural traces in the places they inhabit. The section begins by noting the many ways people ‘inscribe’ themselves into their environments and references how landmarks and other environmental symbols are related to relevant sociocultural knowledge. This section also describes landscape transformations, human settlement and changing patterns of life among people. Much of the section also notes the struggles of human beings against spirits and other forces that are believed to interact with humans in the natural world: ‘Oral tradition maintains that the spaces of the river, the hills, rocks, caves, lakes, and other landscape features are inhabited by supremely powerful beings, unsympathetic to humans’ (Mihás 2014: 339).

Mihás follows landscape with a section on ritual and writes about the performativity used to reinforce cultural behavior. She notes that the word *Ametapintari* is used to refer to cultural behaviour that has become habitual with the Upper Perené people. The narratives included in this section describe rituals that were practised in the past, and also contemporary rituals to heal the afflicted. She describes ritual interventions used by shamans that are related to health, animism, and offerings to spiritual beings. Mihás notes that seasonal rights mark calendrical changes, such as changes in the light in the sky and agricultural habits. Much of the introduction to ritual focuses on the rituals involved in the transitional state between girl and womanhood. The difficulty in the onset of menstruation is accompanied by certain ritual activity, as well as by marriage. Mihás writes of ‘the transitional state of her social existence’ (Mihás 2014: 232) in preparing a woman for marriage.

This text offers the linguistic anthropologist an insight into features of orality and memory that have persisted through history, and also draws on the perceived relationship of Ashéninka

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speakers to their linguistic landscape. Mihas successfully collected and translated meaningful narratives and participated in description that both embodied the words of the speakers and built upon her anthropological observations. I think that she could have more clearly defined traditions that were practised in the past, as opposed to the traditions that are still practised. However, the writing is marked by a precision that gives much rich context to the reader. A strong point in this text is her ability to communicate the interactions between language and place in a way that connects social memory directly to the relevance of landscape. The text is a strong text for any student of linguistic anthropology looking for an introduction to Upper Perené history as seen through their own eyes, and as spoken through their own voices.

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**ANDREW RUSSELL and ELIZABETH RAHMAN** (eds.), *The master plant: tobacco in Lowland South America*. London etc.: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing 2015, xx, 259 pp. ISBN 9781472587541.

*The master plant: tobacco in Lowland South America* is a collection of ten recent ethnographic studies offering different perspectives on the importance and meanings of tobacco use, specifically among different native groups in the Amazonian lowlands. Since Wilbert (1987) published his fundamental text *Tobacco and shamanism in South America*, little research has been conducted regarding the deeper significance of tobacco use among Amazonian Indians, primacy being given instead to other ‘master plants’ such as *ayahuasca*, which has been incorporated into Amerindian shamanism much more recently. Since the heavy commercialization and global spread of tobacco during the colonial period and the realization of the seemingly incommensurable health risks associated with the plant, tobacco has acquired a bad reputation and frequently been placed on the backburner of ethnobotanical and anthropological research in the Amazon. This collection of essays by various Amazonianists has re-taken tobacco by the hand and dragged it centre stage, where it belongs. This most recent work on the subject is strictly devoted to new anthropological analyses of tobacco in lowland

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South America and new ways of looking at the past and present conditions of the plant that will spark new ideas for future research.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I is dedicated to new research regarding the origins and historical uses of tobacco, as well as archaeological data on the plant's ecology. Historical overviews are presented giving primacy to spatial and temporal domains and the changes and/or resilience of Amerindian uses and meanings of tobacco in both past and present contexts. Augusto Oyuela-Caycedo and Nicholas Kawa analyse tobacco's origins and its contemporary perspectives while including detailed charts of consumption techniques (taken from Wilbert 1987) and geographical distributions of the *Nicotiana* species in the Americas. The circulation and commercialization of tobacco from its global economic movement during the colonial period to its present uses and meanings in rural Amazonia today are discussed in fair depth. There is a detailed description of the plant species, with different arguments relating to the origins of its use and consumption, and descriptions of different techniques applied to archaeo-botanical remains. An archaeological weakness in the lowlands is stressed regarding the lack of primacy given to the floatation techniques 'that would allow for the recovery of the carbonized seeds' (32), which has consequently led to few findings of specific *Nicotiana* specimens. Different species of *Nicotiana* residue found in recovered pipes and artefacts have been left unidentified; however, the article importantly suggests that the spread of *N. Rustica* (the medicinal species used) from South to North America predates agriculture, hunter-gatherers having been responsible for such diffusion.

To complement this background, Peter Gow's case study uses a 'controlled comparison' to analyse the now different uses of tobacco among two Arawakan-speaking peoples, the Piro and Apurinã on the Purús river in Brazil. He defends a 'structural diffusion' approach showing that similar groups speaking related languages can express increasingly contradictory methods of tobacco use. The fact that the Piro have changed to smoking tobacco, while the Apurinã have retained the use of snuff, he suggests, is due to a dramatic change in shamanistic practice among the Piro. While using ethnohistorical data concerning specific instruments/pipes and tubes of tobacco use, Gow sees prior transformations of tobacco uses as the imperative reasoning for the adoption of *ayahuasca* 'by certain people and not by others' within such a 'general field of diffusion' (46). Such differences are presented not as '*ad hoc* borrowing or non-borrowings by two neighbouring peoples...but [as] complex transformations within systems of transformations

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that are aware of each other at some level' (61). As Gow successfully argues, Lévi Strauss's 'neglected canonical formula' casts a new spotlight on such currently proposed ethnohistorical complexes and present shifts in tobacco use.

Similarly, Françoise Barbira Freedman, writing on 'tobacco and shamanic agency' among the Keshwa Lamas, also uses a combination of ethnohistorical and ethnographic sources to demonstrate the resilience of the plant's shamanistic and everyday uses against all the odds. Although shamanic practices have been subject to frequent transformations, tobacco has persevered and has even been ossified—in addition to being the stepping-stone to *ayahuasca* use—through the growing adoption of *ayahuasca* shamanism in the region. Freedman compares and contrasts present tobacco uses between hunters and shamans and finds ethnographic answers to its liveliness within ethnographic material of 'both indigenous and non-Indian syncretic "vegetalismo" as intertwined through centuries of diacritical oppositions yet of dialectic integration' (83). This chapter does a thorough job of incorporating the ritual use of tobacco for curing and illness treatment by blowing, conducts an analysis of shamanic agency within an animist ontological perspective, and of non-indigenous forms of shamanic medicine, transformation and body complexes, and explains psychosomatic alterations through tobacco smoke.

In Part II, 'Shifting perspectives' (89), Bernd Brabec de Mori guides us through the negative reputation of tobacco as having being associated with the bad side of shamanism (i.e. sorcery) for quite some time. Stressing the continuous primacy of *ayahuasca* studies in literature, he attempts to re-establish the importance of tobacco, giving primacy to Viveiros de Castro's perspectivist ontological approach within his analysis. Brabec de Mori uses an ethnomusicological method in his wonderful article, contributing to a new scholarly emphasis on tobacco use through an analysis of 'tobacco songs' that is directly linked to the act of smoking and blowing tobacco itself. Such tobacco-smoking represents major transformational significance, where the smoke directly represents the words or message of the song that is being used as a medium of communication to spirits, human, or non-human entities. Coinciding with perspectivism, Brabec de Mori stresses the importance of seeing from the 'other's' perspective. To cure or defeat an illness, one must enter into communication with the 'other'/the sorcerer who has inflicted the illness in the first place, and then symbolically defeat them in the battle to heal the patient. The argument, then, highlights a crucial reciprocal relationship between warfare and

sorcery on the one hand and curing and illness on the other, stressing a current ‘morally ambiguous’ position on perspectives regarding tobacco.

In the second article in the section, Juan Alvaro Echeverri uses two elders’ perspectives to discuss tobacco use and meaning among ‘the people of the center’. Here, indigenous awareness of tobacco consumption is key. Alvaro Echeverri shares with the reader the information that one of the elders had given him advice on smoking. Although Alvaro Echeverri had been a heavy smoker, the elder, Kinerai, did not tell him to quit in so many words, but had instead advised him to gain a perspective on the ‘spirit’ of the plant. This brings up crucial Amerindian ways of knowing, namely that ‘a man *must* smoke and needs to know what smoking is for because tobacco *has a spirit*’ (109). Within the people of the centre, since tobacco is mainly processed and made into a paste before it is licked—smoking is only secondary—such symbolic meanings and ways of making the paste are crucial in understanding the cosmologies and myths of these societies. Alvaro Echeverri shares an important myth marking the origin and dangers of tobacco and linking the latter with the predatory capabilities of menstrual blood. The significance of heating and cooling and the symbolic process of adding ash salt—representative of semen—to the tobacco juice—representative of the dangerous menstrual blood—is part of a larger binary relationship between gendered, double-sided, ‘culinary spaces’. One of these spaces represents ‘meat’ foods and is categorized within a male domain also including coca and tobacco, while the other is symbolic of the women’s ‘non-meat’ domain, and includes such items as cassava bread and chilli sauce. ‘The chilli sauce is licked, as is the tobacco paste, and is complimented with coca powder...such complementation is attached to the proper construction of a person’ (119-120). These ingested substances are thus fundamental to personhood, fundamental to the making of a ‘true person’. Tobacco, coca and salt are harmful unless processed and subjected to the very specific and symbolic techniques of heating, filtering and pounding/ or cooling to render them safe and maintain ‘a healing capacity in the heart’ (125).

The final article in this section focuses on similar fundamentals regarding ‘tobacco smoke blessings’ and the process of making and maintaining a person and a body. Focusing on infant-‘making’ among the Xie river dwellers, Elizabeth Rahman stresses the use of tobacco smoke, spell-blowing and bathing as *longue durée* processes during stages of perinatal care in a unique and personal way. Such processes, which are concerned with the cooling and forming of the child, are fundamental to the technique used to protect babies’ ‘chronically unstable bodies’

(Vilaça 2005), whose souls—or *anga*—can easily be lost to many different phenomena, including fright and chronic crying. Rahman does well in providing vivid examples, including references to her own new-born baby and her ‘fright’ diagnoses, which were cured by a tobacco-smoke blessing given by a shaman. Assessing the ‘mindfulness’ refined within tobacco-smoking, how it is used and in what exact contexts also benefits the chapter. Tobacco smoke here is importantly witnessed as able to ‘mediate domains of existence and facilitate relations with others, traversing borders and acting as a broker, in the same way in which a shaman does’ (148). This demonstration of its affect towards people goes well beyond simple analyses of psychosomatics and symbolism.

The final section, Part III, eases itself in as central to identity and landscape and the role of tobacco in sociality. Renzo Duin focuses on the Wayana and their appropriation of commercial cigarettes. His central questions reflect whether or not commercial cigarettes have affected the present-day role of the shaman, and whether traditionally rolled *tamĩ ale* cigarettes have now been replaced with commercial cigarettes. Duin uses ethnographic and cinematographic material to determine the significance of both ways of smoking. He shows that smoking commercial cigarettes and *tamĩ ale* serve very different functions and both contribute to different social fields. Commercial cigarettes have not replaced *tamĩ ale* but have been incorporated into a changed expression of sociality: ‘Tamĩ ale is directly related to the Guiana tradition of conviviality, whereas commercial cigarettes are mostly used by young individuals who have an insecure identity’ (165). Thus, among the Wayana smoking commercial cigarettes is seen as merely recreational, not as having a deeper shamanic significance.

Similarly, writing on the Yanomami in the Venezuelan Amazon (Ocamo Basin), Alejandro Reig describes tobacco as an everyday recreational tool and indispensable product for building social and exchange relationships with other groups. Unlike many other Amazonian societies, tobacco use among the Yanomami is a non-ritual and purely social act. Here, ‘consumption and sociality display complementary aspects’ (168). In the bigger picture, Reig successfully investigates how such social relations between people, places and ‘desires’ through mobility are lubricated and fostered by tobacco. Such place- and relation-making further ‘constitutes a marker of identity’ (171) in contrast to neighbouring groups. These markers of difference are crucial, and Yanomami frequently visit other groups, which positively ‘affords the possibility of incorporating the perspective of others, doing what they do, eating what they eat’ (172). Such

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ways of knowing heavily rely on the perspectivist approach concerning the maintenance of identity. While using examples of myths, smoking is stressed as a social and public act that is 'likely to be an aspect of the performance of a "civilized" individual' (179). The process of making bodies—an incorporation of otherness—and the need for commensality and exchange forms individual societies and identities within them. Tobacco is shown as indispensable to this process.

Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti also addresses the significance of different everyday uses of tobacco for Ashaninka well-being or '*kametsa asaiki*'. Unlike many other studies of the plant, Barletti concerns himself less with the ritual aspects and issues of personhood and more with its non-ritual uses. Tobacco has played an important role in reconstructing cosmological and social relations as a form of reconciliation for the bloodshed and displacement caused by the Peruvian civil war (1980-2000). The Ashaninka use tobacco as a way to attract the good spirits that were consequently exiled. Deeper meanings of the incorporations of commercial goods and cigarettes are very well addressed, suggesting a fault in acculturation theories and a representation which goes beyond mere utilitarian value. Deeper analyses of consumption, identity and modernity begin to converge but in unexpected ways when Barletti argues that tobacco is an empowering tool, and that cigarettes could be a tactical instrument for becoming both Peruvian and a civilized indigenous person.

Finally, Paolo Fortis focuses on the Guna people on an island off the coast of Panama, also adopting a perspectivist approach to assess the relationship between the uses of sweet and bitter *chicha* drinks respectively as part of an analysis of curing rituals. Sweet *chicha* is linked to notions of conviviality and body-making and is significantly associated with the sweet *chicha* of auxiliary spirits, which from the Guna point of view takes the form of tobacco smoke. In contrast, for the Guna, animals' bitter *chicha* takes the form of tobacco ashes. This also constructs important Guna associations of foods and anti-foods. Similar to other arguments described above, 'different ways of smoking correspond to different forms of sociality' (212). Commercial cigarettes have also been enthusiastically adopted in a way which has also come to fit within the structure, incorporating different modes of sociality and transformation complexes: 'Tobacco does at the metaphysical level what *chicha* does at the physical one; they both index consubstantiality with beings to be made similar and mediate predatory relations with 'others'' (213).

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These ten chapters could have a fundamental impact on new anthropological, ethnobotanical and archaeological findings concerning the deeper meanings of tobacco use in Lowland South America. *The master plant* is a crucial read for those studying Amazonian peoples and/or the complexity of tobacco. The purpose of this book was to present new perspectives and shed more light on the importance of tobacco by introducing new ways of looking at the plant's uses at the present day. It is now up to future research to expand on these subjects of interest. *The master plant* can be used as an important stepping-stone toward the improvement of tobacco studies, not only in scholarly analysis, but also in acquiring a deeper understanding of the peoples we wish to learn from.

## References

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