

anthropology that drives his mission for the discipline to reclaim its place in the public sphere. He instead indicts the rhetoric through which ideas are reported, calling for a stylistic revolution that he believes could, in turn, lead to a revolution for the entire discipline, allowing anthropology to become, once again, a major player in public debate.

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JACKSON, MICHAEL. *Existential anthropology: events, exigencies and effects*. xxii, 216 pp., bibliogr. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, 2005. £50.00 (cloth), £16.50 (paper)

Michael Jackson is a professor of anthropology, a published poet, and a novelist who has written ethnographies of West African society since the mid-1970s, and of Aboriginals in Australia since the mid-1990s. Two of these books – *Paths toward a clearing* (1989) and *At home in the world* (1995) – are widely taught in ethnography courses. Jackson has edited one volume on phenomenology in anthropology – *Things as they are* (1996) – and, beginning with *Paths toward a clearing*, has written about William James's idea of radical empiricism, which could be thought of as a product of the American pragmatist school that is an equivalent of the European phenomenological movement. So it is not surprising that his most recent book, a collection of essays, is entitled: *Existential anthropology*. By that term he means to privilege the question of being, which he argues is universal: 'a dynamic relationship between the human capacity for life, and the potentialities of any social environment for providing the wherewithal of life' (p. xii). But Jackson is adamant that his interest is not to reduce experience to a category term. He does not intend to replace ontology for epistemology or ethics as foundational concept. Humanity, he avers, is *not* 'our individual will-to-be' (p. xii); it is neither an issue of self-realization nor of authenticity. Rather, what is human is an 'endless experimentation in how the given world can be lived *decisively* on one's own terms' (p. xii, original emphasis).

Jackson turns this theoretical orientation into the ethnographic strategy of emphasizing events that can be called critical because they frame the relationship between the powers that work on us and 'our capacity for bringing the new into being' (p. xi).

The ethnographic events that Jackson writes about demonstrate the precariousness of human

existence, the centrality of a sense that life is worth living, the widening gap between expectations and chances (a failure of hope), the turn towards illusion and fortune (in William James's terminology, 'the more' of living that transgresses the boundary of convention), and the foreshadowing by the eventualities and exigencies in social life of the sense that we are up against matters of life and death.

Jackson uses Sartre, Heidegger, and especially Arendt to develop the intellectual scaffolding of this approach. But what is truly worthwhile in this loose grouping of essays is the ethnographic examples. Powerfully presented, beautifully written (the final three pages of the book offer poignantly evocative description of ethnography as a way of living), and loaded with telling detail, these ethnographic vignettes from Sierra Leone (before and after its years of brutal civil strife), the Australian outback, and America post-September 11 achieve two objectives. First, they make the case for the universality of the Roshomon effect in perspectives on lived experience, and secondly, they make the reader consider the possibility that the responsibility of the ethnographer is to say something useful about how to live. But because Jackson is as much poet as ethnographer, and certainly not a moralist, the answers he provides force the reader to conclude that while every one of us must try to do it, nobody has a recipe for how to succeed, and most of us spend our time failing. Which makes the reader wonder if the ethnographic question for moral theorists and policy-makers is not: what is an adequate life, anyway?

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MARCH, KATHRYN S. *'If each comes halfway': meeting Tamang women in Nepal*. xvi, 271 pp., map, figs, diags, illus., bibliogr., CD. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2002. £40.50 (cloth), £16.95 (paper)

March's long-awaited and carefully composed volume on the Tamang people of Nepal, with whom she has worked since 1976, is at once empirically rigorous and stylistically innovative '*If each comes halfway*' is particularly reminiscent of Ernestine McHugh's *Love and honor in the Himalayas* (2001), an ethnographic memoir based on research among the Gurung community. It is also structurally similar to Geoff Child's more recent *Tibetan diary: from birth to death and beyond in a Himalayan valley of Nepal* (2004), an insightful account of the lives of the

inhabitants of Nubri, an ethnically Tibetan enclave of Nepal. In common with these two ethnographies, March's narrative skilfully foregrounds the individuals whose lives she describes, while at the same time painting herself into the social environment. This is an ethnography about fourteen Tamang women, five of whose stories are told in detail, and secondarily about the ethnographer's wonder and admiration at the challenges they confront in their lives.

That this book succeeds at conveying the rich texture of these women's life experiences speaks to the author's skill as a narrator and her palpable commitment to, and love for, the people whose stories she tells. As a reader, one can imagine how the monograph must have been difficult to write. March's knowledge and understanding of the socio-economic lives of these women and of Tamang culture in general is clearly enormous, making it all the more of an achievement that she limits herself to less than 250 pages to present the intricacies of their life stories.

Life history narratives can be presented in several ways, and the format naturally affects the content. March is well aware of the difficulty of compiling a 'narrative of narratives', and succeeds in choosing a path which is both playful and readable without being overly 'meta'. While Tamang culture is introduced to the reader through the life histories of Mondzom, Nhanu, Jyomo, Purngi, and Sukumaya, the narratives also speak for themselves as personal stories of joy and suffering, with comparative asides and analysis by the author. As such, the book is a sterling example of anthropology through individual narrative from which the ethnographer plucks out salient details, allowing the reader to pause and reflect on them. The author's technique is rather reminiscent of an audio recording which one might listen to, then pause, rewind, replay, and stop to discuss, and it is thus fitting that March includes a CD of digitized audio files of the conversations and songs which appear in her book, along with a helpful commentary by the ethnographer herself.

In her introduction, with respectful nods to both Uma Narayan and Lila Abu-Lughod, March entreats the reader to bear in mind that 'what we think we know, knowledge itself, is produced in the human effort and pleasure of listening' (p. 12). Her plea is for care, modesty, and time – all of which the author has invested in large quantity in the community and her work.

If any criticism is due, it may be – rather paradoxically – that March is at times too careful in her description and analysis. The antithesis of extractive anthropology, March's work is about respect, cultural immersion, and shared humanity. In her endeavour to make the narrative come alive to students and scholars in the West, she occasionally over-translates, turning local toponyms and personal names, for example, into their English equivalents. I am unconvinced that such an approach is effective because it distracts from the narrative, even though March's motivation is to enliven the scene. However, students embarking on their first anthropology course, to whom this book is in part directed, will appreciate the effort March has taken to surmount the differences of culture, history, and time to reach out and share these precious moments with disarming candour. After all, as March writes, 'This book is above all, about listening, remembering and coming halfway' (p. 12). 'If each comes halfway' is an evocative and powerful text, and one which can be recommended without reservation to all students of anthropology interested in the lives of women, oral history and South Asian studies.

MARK TURIN *University of Cambridge*

RAFAEL, VICENTE L. *The promise of the foreign: nationalism and the technics of translation in the Spanish Philippines*. xviii, 231 pp., illus., bibliogr. London, Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2006. £14.95 (paper)

How have new possibilities of thought arisen through language? This is one of the questions which connects Vicente Rafael's different writings, including his three monographs, *Contracting colonialism* (1988), *White love* (2000), and the subject of this present review, his most recent work, *The promise of the foreign*; three books which every serious anthropologist ought to read. Their topic, and *raison d'être*, is the recuperation of Filipino historical experience in the Spanish and American colonial regimes. For students of Southeast Asia, the importance of this corpus is obvious, for it develops in new directions insights into the production of nationalism outside Europe initiated by Benedict Anderson, among others. But Rafael's work also has a compelling relevance for scholars of other regions, both for its outstanding grasp of the unexpected ways in which colonialisms may unfold and for its sheer imaginative range. Rafael finds his material in many places, from postcards to cell-phones and from funerals to wartime