

**Ethnographica Moralia: Experiments in Interpretive Anthropology**, edited by Neni Panourgia, and George E Marcus, New York, Fordham University Press, 2008, £12.50 \$25, (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8232-2887-4

This is a set of conference papers, with a Greek theme, on different aspects of post-Geertz ethnography. Its rooting in the work of Clifford Geertz is exemplified by the inclusion, published elsewhere, of a conversation with Geertz on his general interpretive methodology. The contributors are multi-disciplinary, from art, music, history and classics as well as anthropology; they see themselves as exploring the cutting edge of practice and interpretation. The starting point is their awareness of the difficulty of representing cultural experience as scientific text.

Geertz began his interpretive turn in studies of religion and culture, particularly contrasting religion and culture in Morocco with Bali. Not all studies in this book are rooted in religion, but all are located to some degree in the human dimension of beliefs and values. Further there are methodological insights that could potentially help researchers of religion, beliefs and values. A fundamental assumption is researchers need to recognise the multi-voice complexity of culture and society, and the importance of not privileging the voice of the ethnographer but in contrast seeking out the voices of the unheard. Second it presents an anti-positivist view of ethnography, from which no facts can be ascertained and no concrete answers can be found: ethnography is a community endeavour, aiming to gain insight within the constant flux of change. The crux is how people, the actors within the ethnography, negotiate their social world and equally importantly how single ethnographic case studies can enable scholars to say something about the human condition (p.3). The title is a joining of Theodore Adorno's *Minima Moralia* from 1974 with Michael Jackson's more recent *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project* which both emphasise that it is morally important for researchers not to privilege their own experiences, education and culture but to be open in discussion to the insights of others.

Such an open approach to the study of religion has been advocated both as phenomenological (after Ninian Smart) and ethnographic (notably the work of Bob Jackson's Centre in Warwick University). A strength and a weakness of such research is that it tends to be descriptive, each processing what people say without research interference, without necessarily testing and challenging the views given through discussion, debate and dialogue involving a range of views. There are risks when people debate religious and political topics, leading to sociological and philosophical richness (not to mention theological ingenuity): facilitating critical dialogues requires such skill and tact that they are not often found. Such dialogue tends to take believers, and perhaps researchers, far beyond their comfort zone. Taking these risks rather than avoiding them gives the potential not only for critical and post-modern analyses but for deeper inter-faith dialogue between religious groups which discusses differences as well as similarities.

The projects in this volume are generally collaborative, and include studies in art aesthetics; classical and anthropological literature as *performance*; from James Frazer to current anthropological practice; monstrosity post Oedipus; post-war rehabilitation camps as colonialism; carnal hermeneutics; canonicity and anti-canoncity; semiotics in politics; Northern Cyprus as no-man's land; interactions between ethnography and the media; and the importance of vision and visionality, including self-evaluation of research by self-observation and reflection. In all, *power* is a dominant theme for exposition. Picking out "carnal hermeneutics" as pertinent to this journal, Greek Orthodox funerals with public display of the dead and kissing of the corpse have led some in Greece to seek to avoid this embarrassing 'spectacle' by offering their corpse to science. This paper proposes *somatization* as a new concept and explores *somatic intersubjectivity* as the dialogue focuses on the human body from different perspectives.

This is a research text rather than a student book. For the advanced student of religion, beliefs and values, this book provides significant caveats about power relationships and their abuse, about representations of cultures, and about research as empowering dialogue. These can fundamentally inform practical research projects which include observation of practice.

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