

## Reviews

Review: Kockel, Ullrich; Clopot, Cristina; Tjarve, Baiba; and Nic Craith, Máiréad (2020) *Heritage and Festivals in Europe. Performing Identities*. London: Routledge. 213 pp. ISBN: 978-0-367-18676-0.

Various conclusions can be drawn from reading this book. However, the most general would probably be that, in relation to cultural heritage, in Europe we are experiencing a period characterised by festivals. This period involves citizens, public managers and researchers. As Valdimar Tr. Hafstein stated, in the interesting 'Afterwords' that conclude the book, cultural heritage and particularly intangible cultural heritage (ICH) are being 'festivalised'. We could interpret this as a corollary of what Guy Debord has already described in *La société du spectacle*. However, the studies included in this volume show us that the time for postmodernist criticism – which was probably necessary but maybe abused – has passed, and the distance between observers and the observed, between analysts and actors has narrowed and blurred in the twenty-first century.

To state this in a very simple way, if I may: we no longer find actors on one side who naively consider that they are reviving tradition, and observers on the other side, social scientists, who see inventions or creations that are designed to legitimate a certain identity project. I would say that in the light of this volume, this dualist view has been overcome. For example, we find among the authors of this book, professors such as Simon McKerrell, who are study subject and object at the same time, as they form part of the music group they research. This chapter's authors' involvement with the study topic is considerable. The researchers in this book (folklorists, ethnologists, anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, etc.) have not only helped to promote the patrimonialisation of festivals and the festivalisation of heritage, but also are part of the heritage and the festivals. This is the general conclusion that is reached after reading this book.

Within this general framework, there are other conclusions that can be extracted from this volume. The first, and in my opinion the most important, is that intangible cultural heritage is something that is extremely important for the mosaic of populations that inhabit Europe, which are so socially, politically and culturally diverse. Probably, the smaller the culture and the more threatened with dissolution in a larger cultural magma (whether this is the nation state or



globalisation), the more important ICH is for the people and its public expression in what in this volume are called generically 'festivals'. The traditional musician Carles Belda<sup>1</sup> maintains the hypothesis that there are cultures that 'over-sing' and that this is a consequence of the loss of normal social use of the minority language. This could be applied to any expressions of ICH: the greater need to festivalise ICH reflects the social perception of its loss.

The book gives us many examples of this: singers in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, first under the Soviet regime and then under the empire of branding; the Durham miners, their children and grandchildren in their attractive 'parades' over the decades; speakers of Scots and all the minority languages of Europe; and people who prepare for months to parade in bizarre costumes through the streets on cold winter nights and demand that their existence is simply recognised in the world – their survival, that is, people who go out to express their wish to continue being themselves, in the central Apennines, in Bohemia, in Catalonia, in Shetland ... All of these cases are studied ethnographically in this volume and show us how identities are 'performed' in 'heritage times', to use the notion of Laurent Sébastien Fournier in Chapter 7.

There are other common topics that appear in several chapters of the book and which Alessandro Testa makes evident in Chapter 6 when he mentions 'potential marketability' as an explanation of why certain traditions have been heritagised while others have not. Another recurring theme in the chapters is the difficulty of finding a shared identity, a discourse of a European dimension, as locality plays a central role in the expressions of ICH articulated in the festivals. A clear example appears in Chapter 11 by Cristina Clopot and Katerina Strani on the 'European Capitals of Culture' where, rather than seeking to display or celebrate what it has in common with other European cities, each selected city through the festival seeks a way to position themselves strategically in the hierarchy of cities. Finally, another interesting aspect that appears in the book, and very clearly in Chapter 12 by Kerstin Pfeiffer and Magdalena Weiglhofer and in Chapter 13 by Ullrich Kockel, is the ability of heritage to heal the wounds of history, its capacity to construct stronger, more resilient societies. Therefore, ICH functions as the cement of social construction of European cultures, reaching deeper and beyond any temptations or attempts by the market or the state to appropriate it.

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**Notes**

1. Minute 28:00. Documentary: 'L'Alguer: un pentagrama com un paper', directed by Roger Cassany (2018). [www.youtube.com/watch?v=42t9bmJoR1I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42t9bmJoR1I) [accessed 4 January 2020].

Máiréad Nic Craith, (2020) *The Vanishing World of The Islandman. Narrative and Nostalgia*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, Palgrave Studies in Literary Anthropology.

*The Islandman* (*An tOileánach* in Irish) is the autobiography of Tomas Ó Criomhthain, a poor fisherman who lived on the Great Blasket Island off the coast of the Dingle peninsula from 1856 to 1937. His memoir was completed in 1923 and published in 1929 in Irish. It became a classic of Irish-language literature, portraying a traditional way of life with great literary and anthropological skills. Nearly one century later, the book has been translated into English, but also into Swedish, French, German, Danish, Italian and Spanish, which raises the question of its success. How and why did such an apparently minor and local piece of writing manage to reach an international audience?

Máiréad Nic Craith's project was built up like a quest, trying to unfold the ways a historical, indigenous Irish-language writer could be brought to a contemporary anthropological audience on an international scale. In her book, she adapts the concept of 'literary anthropology' to interpret the work of Tomas Ó Criomhthain, putting her own Irish footprints in this author's tracks. As a result, she reconstructs the whole production process of *The Islandman*, before describing the diffusion of the book and its reception in Ireland and abroad.

In an anthropological perspective, Tomas Ó Criomhthain's book is interesting because it describes the ordinary lifestyle of the Irish islanders, which has been totally destroyed by modernity. It is then connected with the fashion for salvage ethnography, which was especially widespread in the beginning of the twentieth century. Máiréad Nic Craith offers a series of interesting clues concerning the influence of the early folklorists and anthropologists on Tomas's views. Scandinavian folklorists (Carl Marstrand), American anthropologists (Conrad Arensberg) and English scholars (Robin Flower) came to the Great Blasket Island and Tomas interacted with them. These visiting scholars gave him books by Knut Hamsun, Pierre Loti and Maxim Gorki, undoubtedly influencing him in his writings.

The editorial process took a long time, from 1922 to 1929, involving several individuals. Apart from Tomas, who wrote his autobiography, Brian Ó Ceallaigh stimulated him, and An Seabhadh re-wrote the original text in standard Irish language. Within the process, some 'whitewashing' was done: the text was somehow softened and expurgated from its more disturbing aspects. This process continued in the second edition of the book, prepared by Tomas's grandson Pádraig Ua Maoileoin in 1973. The manuscript was then adapted to standard Irish; repetitive or boring portions were omitted; things were arranged in a more fashionable way. In 2002, the third edition by Seán Ó Coileáin led to new choices corresponding to a new context.

The examination of this complex editorial process leads Máiréad Nic Craith to suggest that Tomas voices a collective identity more than his own individual experience as an islander. One of the keys to explain his memoir's success would then be its ability to embody the collective voice of the Irish islanders and of the Irish people in general. Interviews with artist Maria Simonds-Gooding who illustrated an edition of the memoir, and with curator Pat Cooke in the Blasket Interpretative Centre, confirm the idea of a work that goes far beyond its author's autobiographical writing.

In order to understand better this interconnection between the individual and the collective level of the memoir, Máiréad Nic Craith traces a parallel with another book published at the same period in the Native American context, the 1932 memoir by Black Elk among the Oglala Lakota. Autobiographies, she suggests, are always bicultural because they give voice to an individual but they also need a textual space that belongs to an external written tradition. In this respect, the survival of indigenous cultures is possible, but it has to go through writing, which is imported from the outside and belongs to a colonial tradition.

Therefore, there is a paradox here: the success of *The Islandman* is due both to its translations in different languages (primarily English, which is perceived as a colonial language in Ireland), and to the fascination of the moderns for 'primitives' or 'noble savages'. Similarly, the Blasket Interpretative Centre, which opened in Dunquin in 1994 forty years after the final evacuation of the Great Blasket Island in 1953, might be considered as a simulacrum. But Máiréad Nic Craith shows that the modern reinterpretations of Tomas's memoir are supported by much deeper considerations. Indeed, the islanders did not die out: they are still alive through their diasporic legacy in Springfield and Holyoke, Massachusetts, where Irish-American networks keep today the memories of the traditional Blasket Island lifestyle.

Furthermore, there is also a literary legacy, as several islanders have followed Tomas's example and written their own memoirs.

Dealing with nostalgia is never an easy task for anthropologists. In her book, Máiread Nic Craith shows great sensitivity towards her field. She manages to go well beyond a traditionalist or nostalgic interpretation of Tomas's memoir. She eventually shows that different sort of nostalgias are expressed in memoirs, at the intersection between a more local perspective and more external visions.

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Martínez, Francisco and Patrick Laviolette (2019) *Repair, Brokenness, Breakthrough: Ethnographic Responses*. Oxon & New York. Berghahn Books. 340 pp., 69 ill., bibliog., index, ISBN 978-1-78920-331-8, \$135.00 / £99.00 Hb

In the last decade, scholarly accounts of repair and maintenance have grown substantially, leading to the formation of a nascent repair and maintenance studies field. Much of this work has been ethnographic, and so the book *Repair, Brokenness, Breakthrough* is an engaging addition to this existing body of work. This is the first in a new book series entitled 'Politics of Repair', which is an exciting development for social scientists interested in breakdown, maintenance and repair across a spectrum of fields, including anthropology, sociology, human geography and design (which are all represented in this volume).

Martínez's introduction sets out the generative possibilities for studying brokenness and repair. In sum: breakdowns make relations visible; when we understand brokenness and repair as processes rather than states, these become productive starting points for tracing heterogeneous and intertwined relationships that move outwards, involving the constitution of wider social and political orders. This book explores not only the material interrelations of brokenness and repair, but also their ethical and affective entanglements. Many of the chapters within this volume use ethnographic techniques to make wider and more sustained connections to larger-scale political and social changes. This represents the most compelling contribution of the volume as a whole.

A substantial cluster of chapters focuses on post-Soviet contexts, where political epochs are re-experienced and re-made daily through interactions with the built environment. Khalvashi's study of elevator

maintenance in Georgia is a particularly captivating account of how the absence left by the withdrawal of the Soviet state is ultimately filled by coin-operated machines that in turn are circumvented, hacked and stolen by their users. In addition, short form ethnographic ‘snapshots’ give brief but striking glimpses into the complex politics of urban renewal in Astana, Kazakhstan (Laszczkowski), and Moscow, Russia (Murawski), where the literal resurfacing of these cities connects to their rehabilitation in national and global imaginaries. Sgibnev continues the theme of ‘show-off symbolic policies’ (2019: 295), describing the eye-popping handwork involved in manually connecting and disconnecting moving electrified busses in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. In many of these cases we see a practical and metaphorical doubling of repair work, where fixes to urban infrastructure stand for the (dis) repair of political conditions.

A second cluster of contributions tells personal stories: about friends (Crăciun), mothers (DeSilvey) and, most interestingly, grandmothers (Criado, Errázuriz). Rather than setting out to produce studies of repair labour, these scholars are reaching for maintenance and repair as analytic tools to chronicle aspects of experience. These stories are most informative when set into wider contexts. Frederiksen, for example tells the story of a neighbour who lets his house decay rather than admit a treasured daughter will not return home, evoking wider material and affective atmospheres produced by extensive migration away from Bulgarian rural communities.

A third, smaller cluster of work discusses brokenness and repair as they intersect with the fields of art and design. Reno’s riveting chapter uses the example of scuttled warships to theorise the ‘art object’ (2019: 25), where the usual maintenance and preservation work of art is jettisoned, allowing for decay and multispecies collaboration. This theme is continued in stories about voids, cracks in the floor, and puddles which are variously explored by Martínez, Kattago and Busch and Fariás.

Taken together these individual stories provide an impressive account of the (material and affective) state of things across the European continent. Each story adds something meaningful and contributes to the overall atmosphere being evoked in the volume. However, the chapters backed by substantial ethnographic work contribute more as they move from the ethnographic into the theoretical realm. For example, Munz’s detailed account of how Swiss watch repair skills are revalued as they travel transnationally; Seidel’s incredibly moving account of social reparation in the aftermath of the Holocaust

in Austria; and Tschoepe's description of how Romani families are moved into and out of Turkish 'dirtscapes' of purity and pollution.

I had hoped that the epilogue would provide some hints about the orientation of the book series as a whole, but this section is more fragmented; oddly describing the field as 'perhaps overheating' (2019: 320). Lavolette does begin to connect the material stakes of breakdown and repair with our collective climate emergency, drawing on texts from media archaeology and the environmental humanities. For me, Berglund captures the planet-fixing potentialities of repair best in her insightful chapter on 'small mutinies', where an imperfect yet engaged praxis of repairing reflexively from where we are, raises lively critical questions about how to go on, even from 'broken' places.

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Anu Lounela, Eeva Berglund and Timo Kallinen (eds) (2019) *Dwelling in Political Landscapes: Contemporary Anthropological Perspectives*. Studia Fennica Anthropologica 4 (Helsinki: The Finnish Literature Society), 293 pp., ISBN 978-951-858-087-7

When it comes to understanding landscape from the phenomenological perspective, certainly Tim Ingold's conceptualisation of perceiving landscape from within has greatly influenced not just anthropologists, but also geographers and other social scientists. Taking this as its starting point, this book seeks to pay more attention to the material and meaningful political landscapes, to the 'messy entanglement between policy, people and things' (Immonen: 193). It is precisely in highlighting the political aspects of the phenomenological landscapes with anthropological sensibilities that this book is a welcome addition to landscape studies.

The book starts with a theoretical introduction by the three editors, Anu Lounela, Eeva Berglund and Timo Kallinen 'exploring how the material and conceptual are entangled in and as landscapes' (8), followed by a geographically wide-ranging array of ethnographies from Denmark, Indonesia, Estonia, Madagascar, Mexico, Canada, Israel, Peru, Finland, Zimbabwe (former Rhodesia), Ecuador (Amazonian rainforest) and Papua New Guinea. The volume ends with Jason M. Brown's chapter, reiterating many of the theoretical strands that weave the book together and reminding us not to misread landscape as 'a cultural layer atop an objective nature populated with material



or biological objects' (280). Following Ingold, the chapters approach landscape as an object of inquiry as well as a research tool, a simultaneously representational and embodied taskscape, (re)produced by the interactions between human, non-human and material. Theoretical framing is further established by the two reprinted chapters. Philippe Descola discusses landscape as 'transfiguration' both *in situ* and *in visu* (237) and Anna Tsing presents the notion of 'weedy landscapes' (33) as exemplified in her study of a Danish former coal-mining site, a 'disturbed anthropogenic landscape' (41).

One might ask what precisely anthropology can contribute to landscape studies. Perhaps anthropology's focus on the human, as both individuals and members of groups, as well as the way it pays attention to history. Both physical and human geography and physical and socio-cultural anthropology come in handy here: our present landscapes are results of the millions of years of geological developments as well as the history of humans engaging in horticulture and agriculture and domesticating plants and animals. The past and future are always and already part of the present landscapes be it materially or imaginatively. This is evident in the nostalgic landscapes of former colonial Rhodesia (Katja Uusihakala) and in the memory and identity politics of Israel where 'the landscapes have been altered, or even manufactured, with the aim to legitimate the settlers' arrival and sense of belonging' (Järvi, 136). Landscape is a form of remembrance for the indigenous Dene and Métis peoples', whose complex relationships with the oil and gas exploration history in Canada is discussed by Morgan Moffitt, as well as in Papua New Guinea, where, as Tuomas Tammisto shows, it is a continual process of physical and semiotic placemaking and 'an important materialisation of personal and group histories' (247).

Landscapes are often contested and 'related to different interests, meaning-making processes and ways of seeing' (90) as Jenni Mõlkänen shows in her chapter on environmental conservation landscapes of rural Madagascar. Multiple stakeholders from local inhabitants to various NGOs, to representatives of state power can have conflicting interests and understandings of what goes on in any given landscape. Some environmentalist discourses almost disregard the local inhabitants in their entirety, as landscapes become dwelling places for 'NGO activists, scholars, donor organisation staff, state forestry officials and others engaged in mapping species, measuring distances and studying the landscape from a detached point of view' (70) as is evident in Anu Lounela's analysis of the 'disturbed landscape' of Central Kalimantan in Indonesia. Joonas Plaan further demonstrates in his discussion



of the Estonian (is)land-seascape how locals can in turn re-establish their authority by evoking the notions of tradition or cultural heritage, sometimes adding other powerful global stakeholders into the mix in the form of organisations such as UNESCO. We also need to pay attention to what constitutes a landscape: it is not just 'land', other elements such as water, air or weather are included (Joonas Plaan; Francesco Zanotelli and Cristiano Tallè). Tensions can and will arise between the discourses on protecting the 'natural' environment and/or 'cultural' traditions, regardless of how much we would like to avoid such dichotomies in our theorizing or practice. This makes the urgent need to find working strategies and tactics to mitigate the effects of the ongoing climate crisis ever more evident.

Landscape can be understood as a meaningful 'gathering of people and things that is at once social, experiential and, of course, material and not as a representation separate from the thing it refers to' (Berglund, 209). This book is definitely worth reading from cover to cover, as all the chapters work well together in their socio-natural approach. The only thing I missed was a concluding chapter by the editors, as it would have been interesting to see their take on the relationship between landscape, place, space, location, locale and territory in terms of both anthropological and geographical theorising. Perhaps this is a call for the readers to take themselves – after all, the book gives us many conceptual and theoretical tools to engage with both the sensed and imagined political landscapes and landscapes of politics.

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Michał Buchowski (ed) (2019) *Twilight Zone Anthropology. Voices from Poland*. RAI/Sean Kingston Publishing. Vol. 2 of the RAI Country Series (series editor David Shankland)

In the early 2000s, at a European gathering of anthropology students, the participants were asked to say something about the position of anthropology in their home countries. Taking the floor, a student from Cracow said that his institution was proudly continuing the work initiated by Bronisław Malinowski, whom he described as a *Polish* anthropologist. A peer from the UK interrupted him, reminding that Malinowski spent most of his life in the UK and his research and scholarship were connected with British educational institutions (and funds). An Austrian student intervened, too, adding that Malinowski

was a citizen of the Habsburg Empire and got grounded in the Trobriands ‘thanks’ to that.

This in part humorous discussion highlights an important problem which will likely accompany readers of *Twilight Zone Anthropology. Voices from Poland* edited by Michał Buchowski. For this rich and heterogeneous volume, published in the RAI ‘Country Series,’ does not make it clear what ‘Polish anthropology’ means or who ‘counts’ as a Polish anthropologist. Put differently, it is not clear what is the common denominator between the different, albeit very interesting, contributions. I shall thus start by describing what I find most valuable about the book and conclude with some critical remarks.

The volume constitutes a great collection of essays, all of which shed light on the issues important for anthropology *at large*. Buchowski’s introductory offers a very fresh look on different ways of doing anthropology in Poland, which goes beyond long-established distinction into anthropological, ethnological and (qualitative) sociological traditions. Instead, Buchowski divides Polish scholars into different ‘clans’, discussing what inspired them theoretically and methodologically (and at times mentioning some clan wars).

This theoretical-methodological multiplicity is visible in the volume. Take, for example, Anna Malewska-Szałygin’s analysis of ‘górale’ discourse on democracy and Małgorzata Rajtar’s study on Jehovah’s Witnesses’s approach to blood transfusion. Both these scholars draw on fieldwork and recorded interviews, yet pursue their analyses in a very different manner: more sociological in Malewska-Szałygin’s case and more ethnographic in Rajtar’s one. Similarly, both Grażyna Kubica-Heller and Kacper Pobłocki link theoretical reflections with their own experiences (‘auto-ethnographies’) to make claims about the importance of particular topics. Yet whereas Kubica writes her own experience as a female anthropologist into a long trajectory of anthropological scholarship on sex and gender, Pobłocki accounts for his own role in co-creating the field of his study (‘urban movements’). Two other essays, which nicely illustrate Buchowski’s overview, are Marcin Lubaś’s and Katarzyna Kaniowska’s considerations on the scholarship of interwar scholars, Józef Obrębski and Stefan Czarnowski (whom they compare to Fredrik Barth and Pierre Nora, respectively). The remaining essays are all devoted in some way to the challenges of public anthropology, and of anthropology in Poland more broadly. Monika Baer, Agnieszka Kościańska and Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz discuss the difficulty the scholarship on gender and sexuality encounters in Poland. Hana Červinková

and Marcin Brocki, instead, discuss their own experience with public anthropology and reflect on what this kind of engagement ought to mean.

These are all very important and salient topics. And yet, the reader may wonder what lied behind their selection for the volume representing the 'country's' tradition, and why the series' editors decided to include several publications on similar topics instead of expanding the volume thematically. Considering the broader social, political and historical context in which anthropology has been developing in Poland, it is surprising not to find essays focusing on broadly understood economy, class/social identities, religious field, absence/presence of Jews, migrations in and from the country, to mention but some. These are the topics no doubt important for *an anthropology of Poland*. Of course, it is far from obvious that 'voices from Poland' equates with 'anthropology of Poland'. This volume could have also been a presentation of *anthropology-NOT-at-home* and the often-neglected contributions by 'Polish scholars' on other than Polish contexts.

Consequently, this rich and diverse volume simultaneously points to a missed opportunity: an opportunity to thoroughly engage with national categories and national thinking. In his introductory chapter, Buchowski offers a very generous take on 'Polish anthropology': he includes anthropologists trained in Poland, working in Poland, 'foreigners' working on Poland, 'natives' working on Poland but affiliated abroad . . . He even includes some non-anthropologists who work on Poland using qualitative methods. His unwillingness to exclude is understandable. However, this broad take does not leave much space for engaging with the question of structural constraints *and* opportunities, and the complex causes behind what we call different anthropological traditions or genres.

Take again Malewska-Szałygin and Rajtar's essays: they are both extremely valuable, but it would be simply false and disingenuous not to note that Rajtar's rich-in-detail *ethnographic* description is a result of long-term consecutive fieldwork. Malewska-Szałygin has done a different kind of research: a collaborative one, composed of many short-term trips and yielding fantastic insights, simply of a different kind. This is not the question of better or worse anthropologies, but of *different* ones, and I contend the authors should have made more effort to explain this diversity. This is what I mean by engaging with the question of the 'national': realising the national component means also realizing the power of nation-states, broadly understood, in shaping one's professional (scholarly) pathways.

Speaking about diversity and national thinking, it is necessary to mention one more problematic aspect. Throughout the volume, Poland's 'un-appreciated' anthropologists are being compared to their established and renowned colleagues abroad – Burszta to Mintz, Obrębski to Barth, Chałasiński to Bourdieu – and even described as 'predecessors'. What lingers through such comments is the perpetual inferiority complex. *The way* these comparisons are sometimes made do not diminish, but rather reinforce Polish scholars' inequal status. Rather than reading the endless 'Polish scholars had also said X [and earlier!]' I would love to read how Polish scholars' categories enter into dialogue with those proposed by their 'Western' colleagues. This, in my view, is the best way to make the 'voice from Poland' heard.

Agnieszka Pasięka

Tom Scott-Smith (2020) *On an Empty Stomach: Two Hundred Years of Hunger Relief*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 268 pp., Hardcover \$35.00, ISBN: 9781501748653.

*On an Empty Stomach* is a genuinely inspiring book written by Tom Scott-Smith, Associate Professor of Refugee Studies and Forced Migration at the University of Oxford. Although the book was initially motivated by his ethnographic research in South Sudan, the final manuscript takes the shape of a mature historical study inspired namely by the work of Michel Foucault. Scott-Smith's critical comparative examinations combined with an anthropological approach, which takes no social phenomena for granted. The result is a truly significant study that helps the reader gain a better understanding of the history and development of humanitarianism in relation to managing food insecurity and world hunger.

As the author himself writes, the central argument of the book is relatively simple: 'that humanitarian practices, even at the most technical level, reflect the social and political conditions of the age. The way humanitarians feed hungry people, in other words, is influenced by prevailing patterns of power, systems of thought, and approaches to governance' (xii). In order to illustrate his main argument, Scott-Smith undertakes a historical journey, he sceptically re-examines systems for managing hunger and asks 'Foucauldian' questions such as: 'Why measure hunger on the body and judge meals by their nutrient contents?' (xvi). 'Did you really think that modern techniques of emergency feeding were an improvement on the Soyerian soup kitchen?' (16).

Scott-Smith introduces the studied topic by giving insight into his ethnographic research in South Sudan in 2012. While observing a large feeding operation, he noticed that the procedures that the aid workers employed treated hunger as a technical issue alone (xi). They catered for the human need for food in terms of nutritional requirements, but other cultural and societal aspects including the form of food, mealtime rituals, but also local agricultural practices and the division of labour, were neglected (xi). The aim of the aid workers was to get nutrients into bodies as quickly and efficiently as possible, reducing the issue of hunger to a biological problem (xi).

In Chapter 1, Scott-Smith gives insight into the emergence of modern humanitarianism and hunger relief (17–31). He identifies Alexis Soyer as a founder of soup kitchen model, which was used during the Irish Famine and significantly shaped the standardised technology of relief in the mid-nineteenth century and thereafter. Chapter 2 (32–44) explores further the historical contexts of these developments by focusing on two items: Osmazome – a meaty concentrate used by Soyer and Extractum Carnis ‘extract of meat’, promoted by founder of modern biochemistry Justus Liebig (33). Chapter 3 (45–60) explores the ways in which governing bodies employed and used the modern nutritional science within its institutional apparatus (schools, industrial canteens et al.); within Victorian institutions the human body was perceived as a ‘working machine’ running on energy (calories). In Chapter 4 (61–74), concerning the rise of nutritional discourse, the author examines these changing approaches to food in terms of communal relations but also colonisation using the examples of India and Kenya. The following Chapter 5 (75–89) continues exploring the global dimension and shows how these new ideas about food and aid were taken to the League of Nations, which brought nutrition to the centre of international policy.

Chapter 6 (90–105) discusses the role of food aid as well as its development during the Second World War, and Chapter 7 (106–120) analyses the aftermath of war. The Second World War led to profound changes, new emergency feeding schemes were designed and hunger started to be increasingly medicalised. Chapter 8 (121–136) elaborates on the rise of high modernism in the 1950s and 1960s, characteristic for the production of biosynthetic foods such as single cell protein. The last two chapters of the book, Chapters 9 (137–154) and 10 (155–169), explore how the most recent systems of humanitarian approaches to nutrition abandoned high modernist attitudes and adopted a more commercially feasible ideology of low modernism.

Relief in Biafra in the end of 1960s reflects these shifts in hunger management; hunger was increasingly fought with the application of anthropometric measuring tools and fortified blended food (137–139). These last two chapters illustrate these processes by focusing on two relevant examples: the MUAC (mid-upper arm circumference) tape and the high-protein food supplement for children known as corn-soy-milk.

To summarise Scott-Smith's *On an Empty Stomach* is a very important contribution to both socio-cultural anthropology and history concerning food relief. A critical comparative historical overview had been lacking until now. This mature study reveals a complex web of circumstances, discoveries, innovations, individual agencies and collective ideologies which shaped the current forms of food relief and approach to human diet. In addition to this, Scott-Smith also presents several practical suggestions on how to critically re-examine and improve existing hunger relief strategies. Among other things, he argues that it is important that nutritional relief suits existing cultural practices and takes into account local consumption habits. The book can be heartily recommended both to food anthropologists and historians, as well as researchers in the field of development studies and NGO practitioners involved in hunger relief.

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