

thor sees the fact that “priests” of the Lahu temples are married as a clear influence from Mahāyāna, as there is a tradition here of non-monastic clergy. An equally valid explanation would be that subsistence economies (such as many “highland” peoples in Southeast Asia still are) cannot support a full-time (monastic) clergy that is why nearly everywhere in the region religious experts are also farmers and live a normal family life. Apart from that, children, fertility, and patri- or matrilineages are very important in this context and could also account for the low desirability of a celibate lifestyle.

Lauren Drover

Whitehead, Neil L., and Sverker Finnström (eds.): *Virtual War and Magical Death. Technologies and Imaginaries for Terror and Killing*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. 290 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-5447-5. Price: \$ 24.95

This collection of essays is mainly comprised of papers originally presented in a session of the same title at the 2009 American Anthropological Association meetings in Philadelphia (PA, USA), organized by the editors and Koen Stroeken. “Virtual War” is composed of an introduction by the editors and eleven essays by anthropologists who have distinguished themselves as analysts of violence and contemporary politics.

The editors’ introduction frames the volume with two general perspectives. First, they situate contemporary killings into the increasingly “virtual spaces” of warfare, writing that these are “created by news and cinematic and gaming media as well as the mediating and mapping technologies of contemporary military violence – such as airborne attack drones, satellite surveillance from space, stealth airplanes and helicopters, nightvision equipment, and the associated use of politically covert assassination operations” (1). They urge that these spaces can profitably be analyzed by recognizing the “blending of the ‘techno-modern’ and ‘magico-primitive’” (6), arguing that by doing so one can apply to analytic advantage more traditional ethnographic categories like witchcraft, magic, and sorcery. The editors secondly advise anthropologists, and thus their contributors, that they must “first and foremost ... remain engaged and self-reflexive observers ...” (11). Despite these two desiderata, the editors did not ask their contributors to follow a common framework. The result is an engaging but theoretically and empirically uneven collection.

In chap. 1, Neil L. Whitehead challenges what he describes as professional assumptions about the nature of ethnography and ethnographic knowledge. Arguing that the epistemological character of ethnography has been shaped, perhaps deformed, by its relationship with state power, one might ask if there is only one such relationship, but that is not a question which Whitehead engages. Rather, he moves directly to considering the ways in which ethnography, and perhaps especially the ethnographic interview is not just like torture but *is* actual torture. He concludes with a brief hortatory section about anthropologists’ responsibilities in relation to the milita-

rization of many aspects of the contemporary world, including humanitarian, emergency, police, and peacekeeping operations.

The specter of the United States Army’s Human Terrain System (HTS) haunts the entire volume. Chapters 2, 3, and 4, by David Price, Roberto J. González, and R. Brian Ferguson engage HTS directly. Price considers in chap. 2 the historical roots of the HTS and pays particular attention to the work of Montgomery McFate, the anthropologist most responsible for its development. Price is at pains to excavate the colonial and counterinsurgency ideas that animated McFate’s work, reaching back to her doctoral dissertation and beyond.

Roberto J. González shifts the discussion somewhat in chap. 3 by considering the implications of the use of the technologies of role playing, video gaming, and the use of computer-based modeling by the United States Department of Defense. González raises concerns about the implications of social scientists’ involvement in the development of such programs and calls for a more “critical and relevant social science” (83).

In chap. 4, R. Brian Ferguson extends the analysis of the HTS that he began developing elsewhere, and turns his attention explicitly to the effects anthropology has as a discipline that might follow from the Department of Defense’s turn toward culture and anthropology. Like Price, Ferguson begins with McFate, but he moves on to consider other Department of Defense related anthropologists (however, some only by implication), and military officers as he catalogs the ways in which concepts of culture and the social have been used and abused by militaries. The final section of Ferguson’s article details the ways in which the Department of Defense’s efforts will deform academics, from the militarization of campuses, through the distortion of funding, to the corruption of research agendas.

Sverker Finnström turns the volume’s ethnographic attention to Uganda revisiting what he describes as “a few months of intensive fieldwork conducted in late 2005” (111) in chap. 5. He discusses that fieldwork, but shifts to discussing what he calls human terrain mapping (though this *is not* the HTS of Price, González, and Ferguson) as a way of connecting to witchcraft and the United States’ Africa Command (which was not established until 2007).

In chap. 6, Antonius C. G. M. Robben considers how the technology of night vision transformed the battle space in Vietnam and Iraq. He considers the link between these technologies (there are two types of night vision discussed) and swarming tactics. These lead to the creation of certain kinds of imaginaries both for the civilian population and those in the military.

Chap. 7 by Robertson Allen returns us firmly back to virtual reality through the window of the U.S. Army’s video game “America’s Army.” He explores the ways in which the development team was recruited and shaped through “five days of ‘mini Basic Combat Training’” (161). Allen’s purpose is to explore the ways in which video games contribute to the militarization of society generally.

Jeffrey A. Sluka considers the disconnect between the hype and reality of drone warfare in Afghanistan – its cost

effectiveness, accuracy, and accountability. In chap. 8, Sluka argues that drone warfare had none of those characteristics, creates “collateral disasters,” and loses hearts and minds rather than winning them. He argues, too, that use of drones converts war into a spectator sport for which he coins the term “spectacide” which he says “is *virtual* killing, such as by remote-control drone pilots” (192).

In the ethnographically closely observed chap. 9, Victoria Sanford explores the imbricated use of violence by “gangs, drug traffickers, organized crime, the army, police, political parties, and elite capital” (195). She shows how the resulting lawlessness creates a sense of impunity because there are no consequences to violating the law and those who should be administering it are themselves corrupted.

Chap. 10 presents Matthew Sumera’s analysis of the ways in which music intersects with war. Sumera offers an ethnographically rich analysis of music and video. He describes the ways in which these media lead to the normalization of war, and the creation of imaginaries to support that normalization.

“Virtual War” concludes with an ethnographically reflexive account of rural Tanzania by Koen Stroeken. He looks at the ways in which miners and magic mix to create spaces of violence.

Collectively these are engaging and engaged contributions. The book contains both sparkling ethnography and tightly argued theoretical analysis. Yet, it also includes essays that are not well grounded ethnographically and are largely polemical. Along with much useful and interesting information, careful readers will note many instances where data are selected for their polemical value, seemingly without concern for systematic data collection, levels of reliability, or appropriateness. Similarly, they will find in the pages of “Virtual War” analyses that open interesting lines of careful thought. But the reader will also find a rhetorical casualness that elides distinctions and stretches analogical reasoning beyond its breaking point. At those times, it is not at all clear whose imaginaries are being presented, those of the researchers or those of the people being researched. For these reasons, readers will find this a challenging book from which they will gain much insight and frustration. Robert A. Rubinstein

Yu, LiAnne: *Consumption in China. How China’s New Consumer Ideology Is Shaping the Nation.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014. 207 pp. ISBN 978-0-7456-6971-7. Price: £ 15.99

As Yu states in her introduction, this book is based on “observations and ethnographic research” gathered over a 20-year period, and its style is indeed that of a text that ponderously and rather skillfully weaves its way through the past few decades dropping ethnographic anecdotes along the way, rather than a more structured study. As a result, it is very readable and opens up many areas of ex-

ploration for those relatively new to studying China and/or consumption. It is not perhaps such an ideal text for those who have been working in these areas for some time as it resists exploring many of the philosophical questions turned up in any detail. For example, Yu argues that sometimes consumption in China is deeply personal, and other times (for example with the boycotting of Japanese goods) intensely political. The (apparent) divide between the personal and political, and discussions as to whether the nature and structure of this has changed in the post-Mao period is not interrogated. This said, the rich ethnographic detail, presented in this almost montage style, may add much enjoyable color and depth to the factual knowledge of more advanced students.

The introduction is an excellent way for less advanced students to gain first access to key theories of consumption – Miller, Maffesoli, Bourdieu, Baudrillard, Veblen, Marx, de Certeau, Friedman, Ritzer are all signposted in ways that make their key points clear. None of these classics are explored in any depth, but then that is not the purpose here. There are interesting reflections on the difference between Chinese conspicuous consumption and that of Veblen’s leisure class, specifically the way in which the Chinese version is about being seen to be “moving up” rather than “having made it” – “conspicuous accomplishment” as Yu rather effectively calls it. The seamlessly integrated role of the Internet when it comes to consumerism is also usefully explored, as is the changing nature of shopping spaces from the Mao period to the present day, and generational differences in attitudes towards consumption.

Towards the end of the book, the reader may well be yearning for a more definite stance to emerge, following the (albeit skillful, enjoyable, and useful) array of theories mentioned and contrasted with each other in quick succession. Fear not, this does eventually happen to some extent. Essentially Yu sits towards the agency side of structure-agency see-saw, acknowledging the strong state that seeks to control (i.e., encourage) consumer behavior, but asserting that consumers are asserting their agency by demanding consumer rights and making consumer choices. She takes the view that consumerism unites people (especially the younger generation) and provides opportunities for creativity and a burgeoning online public sphere. This popular view is briefly pitted against other more classically Frankfurt School-related rhetoric, but not in any great philosophical depth. For example, the *nature* of this state encouragement to spend (compared say to the Keynesian advocacy of consumerism in the West), and indeed this agency is not investigated. Again though, to be fair, this is not the purpose of the book. It does not set out to be a deep, philosophical investigation; it is, however, a very well-crafted, interesting, and accessible insight to contemporary China and the way in which Western thought on consumerism can (or cannot) be related to it.

Alison Hulme