

and narratives of pioneering village formation has moved into the domain of property rights within the context of Africa nations states seeking to balance national political-legal authority with that of pluralistic approaches to traditional leadership and chieftaincy. Here again, Lentz is contributing significantly to the growing literature on territoriality. The author treats the territory marked out by a lineage's land claims and connection with the earth shrine as part of the process that transforms space, as abstract category couched in the idiom of ethnicity, into a meaningful economic and legal quotidian reality. This process is, of course, frequently bloody and fraught with conflict and Lentz details many of the so-called ethnic disputes of northern Ghana within an ethnographic frame that evokes both autochthonous conceptions of "belonging" to a place and very clear ideas that different ethnic groups and communities have about who owns the land.

Lentz's work is Africanist ethnography and history at its finest and is a masterfully compiled piece of scholarship on issues of land rights, property regimes, and ethnicity in Africa. In wonderful ethnographic detail, the author presents a stimulating and historically rich treatment of ethnic group mobility and the ways in which different societies legitimate their land claims. This volume should be considered essential reading to all scholars working on the interface between land and identity in Africa.

Allan C. Dawson

**Lockyer, Joshua, and James R. Veteto** (eds.): *Environmental Anthropology Engaging Ecotopia. Bioregionalism, Permaculture, and Ecovillages*. New York: Berg-hahn Books, 2013. 329 pp. ISBN 978-0-85745-879-7. (Environmental Anthropology and Ethnobiology, 17) Price: \$ 110.00

Did you ever wonder what ecovillages and similar "intentional" communities are really all about? The edited volume by the anthropologists Joshua Lockyer and James R. Veteto focuses on three currents of experimentation and counter(agri)culture emerging since the 1960s; Bioregionalism, Permaculture, and Ecovillages. While the introduction argues, that "we do not know exactly what a sustainable society looks like" (1), the book is fundamentally about particular social experiments with well-defined sustainability agendas and practices. After waves of anthropologists addressing mobility, speed and global connection, the volume offers a welcome portrayal of countermovements oriented towards slowing down and going "local" in a critique of global capitalism. The book boldly aims to be "solutions-focused," and seeks to strengthen anthropological engagement with such experiments and alternatives. Does it succeed? How does it engage with "ecotopia"?

Divided into three sections, the 16 chapters are authored by a stimulating mix of activists and scholars combining new and old scholarship, activist texts and ethnographic description. The volume admirably displays the intermeshed theories and principles of these movements including their anthropological affinities. Bioregionalists thus question the arbitrariness of political bounda-

ries working instead through eco-regions and watersheds. Permaculture stresses "earth care, people care, and fair share" with a set of methods to design agricultural practices that mimic natural patterns. Eco-villages are "intentional communities," settlements designed to do no ecological harm, while continuing into the indefinite future. While a well-meant contribution, do such experiments really need further theory and anthropology? The editors propose several relevant frameworks from ethnoecology to political ecology. Yet, in some respects, the editors are rather suggestive and programmatic in this respect reflecting the novelty of the subject matter. As they note: "... we seek to help construct an anthropology that can productively contribute to an understanding not only of how the world is and how it got that way, but also of how the world could be and how we can get there" (104).

Several chapters offer interesting ethnographic descriptions of specific movements, experiments, and activities. While examples are predominantly North American, cases from Europe and South America illustrate how ecotopia means different things in different places. Most authors are generally both sympathetic to the movements. This raises the question of problematising ecotopia and the underlying aspirations. What are the limits, problematic areas, and messy social aspects anthropologists may encounter? The engagement gets particularly interesting in the sections where authors move from celebratory language towards analytical engagement. Dawson, former President of the Global Ecovillage Network, for example, notes how the concerns of ecovillages have become mainstream, yet how the very model is being challenged by escalating landprices and regulations. Jenny Pickerill underlines the difficulties that "Low Impact Development" faces in Britain when taking up permaculture. Guntra A. Aistara shows the dislike of weeds among Latvian farmers despite permaculture prescriptions as well as the challenges provoked by surrounding intensive agriculture.

Finally, the book illustrates how human creativity and ability do not only move towards more sustainable pathways despite obvious contradictions, but equally recast questions in new terms. Whereas some experiments treasure autonomy and isolation, others are firmly networked. Can such experiments be scaled up? Networks, NGO-funding in some countries, and the central role of training point in that direction. Still, the editors remain cautious, even when arguing against mobilizing mainstream agricultural research on such themes. Their concern is the risk of top-down mainstream agendas undermining grassroots efforts (110). Yet, need we stop there? Are there not ways of bringing these social and environmental experiments in closer dialogue with the rest? This book offers a thought-provoking and excellent set of case studies, which starts to answer the question.

Peter Bille Larsen

**Luehrmann, Sonja:** *Secularism Soviet Style. Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. 275 pp. ISBN 978-0-253-22355-5. Price: \$ 27.95

Since the McCarthy era, if not earlier, Sovietologists

debated whether or not Communism should be considered something akin to a religion. Communism requires belief, it has a utopian and almost messianic vision of the future, and ritual forms to sustain it. And yet, one cannot reasonably refer to an ideology that is so explicitly and emphatically atheist as a religion. This debate has continued among anthropologists, historians, and sociologists, myself included, who are attempting to understand the resurgence of religion in the post-Soviet world. Sonja Luehrmann's book "Secularism Soviet Style" offers an elegant and more importantly, an extremely productive solution to this impasse by recuperating Max Weber's idea of "elective affinity." Luehrmann focuses on both religion and atheism not as "ideology" but as modes of practice that attempt to effect change in individual lives. She examines the methods and methodology that both atheist propagandists and religious proselytizers used and continue to use in order to convince others of their truths. Once refracted through this lens, the differences and similarities between religious practice and Soviet atheism become brilliantly clear. Atheism and religion share certain elective affinities – convictions about the way in which knowledge will change subjectivities, as well as particular ways of seeing and teaching, but the ends to which these methods are directed are different, and "elective affinities" are not spread evenly across all forms of religious practice.

Luehrmann's analysis is grounded in painstaking archival work and countless hours of interviews in the multiethnic and multireligious national minority Republic of Marij El, a Volga republic that is home to one of the only pagan indigenous communities in Europe. The setting is particularly compelling for two reasons. Throughout most of the Soviet period, national minority republics like Marij El were the focus of particularly intense educational campaigns. One of the ideological justifications of the Soviet regime was its claim that, unlike capitalism, the Soviet Union offered minorities the possibility of full inclusion. Bringing "civilization," which included scientific atheism, to these republics was an important marker of success for the regime. As a result, residents of Marij El experienced more than their share of atheist didactic education. Secondly, since Marij El is a multiethnic and multireligious republic, Luehrmann is able to compare Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Pentecostal Protestantism, and traditional Mari (Chimarij) practices. While there are many post-Soviet ethnographies that examine how particular denominations responded to state-sponsored atheism, there are few that compare across denominations. As Luehrmann shows, comparison across denominations gives us a deeper understanding of the secular framework within which these religions were practiced.

Chapter 1 explores the history of ethnic and religious coexistence in the Volga region through the concept of "neighborliness." She contrasts preexisting modes and limits of coexistence between groups to new forms introduced in the Soviet period. Chapter 2, introduces atheist didactic practices and their post-Soviet transformations, as former atheist educators become religious proselytizers. Chapters 3 and 4 trace "affinities" in the rhetorical methods and institutional structures, that Soviet atheist

and Post-Soviet religious projects share. Chapters 5 and 6 trace "fissures" between the practices. Chapter 5 is a fascinating discussion of *nagljadnost* – the capacity of an image to convey information and transform subjectivities. Again, comparison proves key here, as Luehrmann demonstrates differences between the ways in which Soviet atheists and Russian Orthodox icons engage with "visual aids." Chapter 6 explores the differences in pedagogical purposes. While all these practices seek personal transformation, the kinds of transcendence they seek to produce are vitally different. The final chapter reaches back to the first, examining the ways in which secular and religious commitments coexist, within communities and within individuals, on the ground in contemporary Marij El.

Each chapter traces a concept, an "elective affinity," through rich descriptions of how that concept is instantiated in practice across time and across a multireligious social field. The result is new and productive lens through which to understand the relationship between religion and communism.

Justine Buck Quijada

**Lynch, Caitrin, and Jason Danely** (eds.): *Transitions and Transformations. Cultural Perspectives on Aging and the Life Course*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2013. 270 pp. ISBN 978-0-85745-778-3. (Life Course, Culture, and Aging: Global Transformations, 1)

This book, 270 pages long and divided into 13 chapters with an afterword is grouped into five sections and is the first volume in the new Berghahn Series on the Life Course, Culture, and Aging edited by Jay Sokolovsky under the auspices of The Association for Anthropology and Gerontology and the American Anthropological Association Interest Group on Aging and the Life Course. The series draws attention to the universal extension of the life span and the impact of this demographic transformation on the cultural and institutional organization of the larger society.

The framework for the book is provided by book editors Lynch and Danely and by Bateson. Lynch and Danely show how, as different from geroanthropology's narrower focus on the span between old age and death, the life course perspective allows us to dynamically document the interplay of biography and society as a strategy to uncover change, small and large. Anthropologists have, however, always relied on informants' narrations of personal trajectories from birth to death to understand culture. What I believe to be novel in the 21st century as we add years to the life span is the probabilistic increase of transitions that translate into multi-generational networks. Bateson contributes to framing the issues by adding a new stage to Erikson's life cycle model: Adulthood II which, if repeating issues confronted at earlier stages, is still marked by a search for life's meaning, and thus generativist rather than signaling an end.

It comes as no surprise that close ethnographic scrutiny is the primary method employed by the authors in the collection. The experience of change can be expressed in the body, in both material and social connotations, as individuals struggle to overcome the limitations of conven-