

JACKSON, MICHAEL. *How Lifeworlds Work: Emotionality, Sociality, and the Ambiguity of Being*. University of Chicago Press. 2017. 240 pp. ISBN: 9780226491820 (cloth); ISBN: 9780226491967 (paperback); ISBN: 9780226492018 (E-book).

Michael Jackson, Distinguished Professor of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, has spent his lifetime with ethnography and existential anthropology. Employing a phenomenological approach, he is one of the strongest voices in contemporary anthropology. His writing is beautiful and at times almost poetic—it is not surprising that Jackson has also published verse. In *How Lifeworlds Work: Emotionality, Sociality, and the Ambiguity of Being* Jackson takes the reader to West Africa, among the Kuranko, where he has conducted extensive fieldwork.

Jackson, who has previously written about existential anthropology, now explores the emotions, sociality, and ambiguity, which are examined through different accounts of kinship and ritual. The essence of Jackson's book is the interplay between the social and personal. Social lifeworlds are mutually constituted, and the reciprocity of relationships is between the inner and the outer worlds; thus, social and personal accounts are entwined.

The book is divided into two parts. In Part One Jackson discusses different ritualized forms of redressive action taking place among the Kuranko; in Part Two he looks at the intersubjective dynamics of their kinship organisation. Even though Jackson did his field work decades ago, it is, as he argues, still relevant today; furthermore, he also includes newer insights from the fieldwork of other anthropologists, together with his own discussions with African migrants in

Europe. The account also includes rich detail of philosophical discussions, references, and recent findings in psychology, all aspects which make it both informative and a pleasure to read.

Among the redressive actions Jackson describes are the rituals connected with crossing the threshold from childhood to adulthood which, he argues, tend to be remarkably alike in all societies. This seems to be one of Jackson's arguments: the universality of emotions is augmented more than once by being referred to as simply human. As he notes in the second part: 'It is, perhaps, our human difficulty in harmonizing emotionality and sociality that accounts for the ambiguity of existence, and the ambivalence we feel about overpowering emotions as well as impersonal political power' (p. 136).

The intersubjective dynamics of kinship are also very much universal, as are the emotions they inflict. The second part of the book complements the first in the same way as Jackson's two theses: 1) human relationships must be understood as changing in time and in relation to critical events instead of having a stable essence; 2) this dynamic tension reflects a continuous process of cybernetic adjustment between affect and order, whereby affect is assumed to include emotions, moods, feelings, impulses, desires, and dispositions, and order is assumed to include social norms, traditions, valued, customs, and rules. Jackson aims to describe the relationship between these two dimensions.

Discussion of social identities and the processes of social differentiation also contributes to the interest of the volume. The manipulation of social categories, such as male/female, is used as a magical strategy for managing inner feelings among the Kuranko. This example, one among many in Jackson's abundant account, illuminates the close links between public behaviour and private emotions. The tension between affect and order is also processed through the Kurankos' storytelling, tales which are shared with the reader, wherein norms are transgressed and suppressed emotions dramatically expressed. The aim of the stories, Jackson observes, is to motivate the listener to process and clarify unresolved tensions *in their own minds* (p. 152). The power of the stories is that they can change our experience of the world even though its structure remains firmly unchanged (p. 157).

Jackson does not shy away from narrating his personal experiences and opening up about his own emotions, which makes the account strong and intimate. While living in the field, he reflects that his emotions cast light onto the toughness and depth of field work: 'it did not occur to me that the emotions I was experiencing in the field were replays of emotions I had experienced as a child' (p. 197). I believe this is what makes Jackson's work so intriguing; it is as if he has taken down the barriers put up by many scientists—and, indeed, people in general—and exposed his own emotions. The feelings he experiences and reflects on are presented and are also a part of the social world he examines

through himself; this is extremely important in a scientific field which for many decades focused solely on studying the other. 'Yet this tension between an empathic identification with the other, in which one allows oneself to get lost, and separateness from the other, which allows one to retain a strong sense of one's self, is as difficult to resolve in fieldwork as it is in everyday life.' (p. 40). Through the reflection on and exposure of the self, Jackson's skill becomes apparent—he not only invites the reader into the lifeworld in West Africa, but also to examine the inner world, allowing us to understand others better.

As noted, Jackson's previous texts have focused on existentialism, among other subjects. These previous publications support Jackson's newer book which is a great piece on its own, but also a logical continuation to his earlier work. It is written by a talented anthropologist who has not only delved deeply into examining the other but also what lies within—a work that is, perhaps, only possible from an author who has as much life experience as Jackson. The result is a beautiful read of the social and personal and the reciprocal relationship between the two, which I can warmly recommend to anyone interested in the Kuranko, planning to conduct fieldwork, or simply intrigued to reflect upon the relationship between the social and personal, the inner and the outer.

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