

# BOOK REVIEWS

## CONTEMPORARY LEGENDS IN SLOVENIA

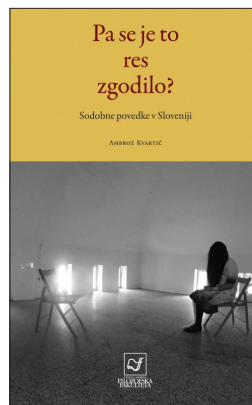
**Ambrož Kvartič. *Pa se je to res zgodilo? Sodobne povedke v Sloveniji*. Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2017. 272 pp.**

The monograph titled *Pa se je to res zgodilo? Sodobne povedke v Sloveniji* (So Has This Really Happened? Contemporary Legends in Slovenia) is the first book dedicated to the topic of Slovenian contemporary legends, and can therefore be considered as a turning point in this genre in Slovenian folkloristics. The book was written on the basis of Kvartič's doctoral dissertation on contemporary legends in Slovenia.

The book is divided into two parts: in the first, largely theoretical part the author discusses key concepts for research, recognition, analysis, and general understanding of contemporary legends worldwide (mostly in the Anglo-Saxon world) and in Slovenia. The theoretical part is divided into eight chapters and comprises the majority of the book. It starts with an introduction in which Kvartič introduces his methodology and research question, explaining what contemporary legends can be found in Slovenia, how and which processes influence these materials, and who tells contemporary legends, to whom, and why these legends are told. He tries to answer these questions from theoretical and empirical, textual and contextual, comparative and interpretative, emic and etic viewpoints, and illustrates his findings with material collected during fieldwork. The main methodology for collecting contemporary material was fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2014, which included interviews, observation, and organization of storytelling events (3–10 people), which were audio-recorded. The author focused on cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants.

The introductory part of the book is followed by theoretical issues with a comprehensive overview of previous theoretical research on contemporary legend in Slovenia and abroad. He first introduces definitions of contemporary and urban legends, emphasizing that such legends spread mainly in urban environments and to a somewhat lesser degree in rural ones. He understands contemporary legends as “incredible, bizarre, unusual, disgusting, frightening, terrifying, but also humorous stories that continually emerge and vanish in daily conversations and are repeatedly installed in the real experimental world of their narrators”. Kvartič brings into initial focus the terminology issues that have so far remained unresolved. He uses the term ‘contemporary legend’; however, he does not ignore the term ‘urban legend’, which he introduces as a genre, a referential framework, and metonymy, and as a signifier of identity.

In terms of genres, types, and intertextuality Kvartič finds contemporary legends as specific and recognizable phenomena. He brings forth also examples of the use of contemporary legends in screenplays, comic texts, and fine arts. When discussing typology, Kvartič emphasizes that although motifs might be similar, there is a huge problem with linguistic and cultural differences, and therefore the typology presents a specific challenge.



The author turns special attention to the synchronic and diachronic migration of motifs in contemporary legends as well as to the reality and beliefs. His findings are predictable: most of the motifs are to be found in different cultural and language areas. Contemporary legends travel through time and place, through languages and different places of identifications, and therefore both synchronic and diachronic migrations are extremely vivid.

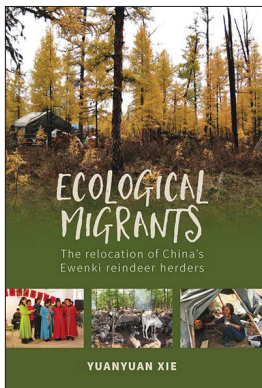
In the second part of the book, titled “Contemporary Legends in Slovenia: Examples with Interpretation”, Kvartič puts material into focus. Considerable attention is devoted to *interpretation* as a process of finding the meaning, which also gives us a deeper insight into the culture and underlines the characteristics of the contemporary legend: they change and adapt to concurrent history and chaotic social environment much faster than other folklore genres. He presents the material of contemporary legends, that was collected during fieldwork, and categorizes it by themes: *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, *Trickster in Contemporary Legend*, *The Failed Stag Party*, *The Couple Caught in Flagrante Delicto*, *Tourist Experience*, *Foreigners/Other in Contemporary Legends*, etc. In all the themes Kvartič aims to find variations, a general motif, rationalization of legends, localization of the migration motif, and socio-historical context.

As a finalizing conclusion, Kvartič states that contemporary legends constitute a source for never-ending research – not only because of their huge variety but also because they change and adapt the stories to the context.

Contemporary legends were neglected in Slovenian folkloristics for a long time; therefore, this book, with its strong theoretical and highly professional approach, fills in a big gap in Slovenian folkloristics. But not only that – the book is also highly inspiring and interesting for a wider readership as the language the author has used is very fluent and vivid, with many examples and outlines of stories. Due to its good theoretical insight into the scholarship of the subject, it also provides valuable support to all researchers of contemporary legends and contemporary folklore in general.

Saša Babič

## STILL ECOLOGICAL MIGRATION? AN EWENKI CASE



**Xie, Yuanyuan. *Ecological Migrants: The Relocation of China's Ewenki Reindeer Herders*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015. 220 pp.**

The book under review is one in the already impressive list of the latest publications based on socio-anthropological research among the Ewenki – a relatively large but dispersed Tungusic-speaking ethnic group, which still retains the practice of reindeer herding in a number of places in Siberia (Russia), Mongolia, and China. Every year, for the last 6–7 years, one or two monographs on the Ewenki are published, which almost immediately evoke a lively response in the academic environment (Funk 2014; Napol'skikh et al. 2014; Ventsel 2014; Mamontova 2016).

The monograph of the Chinese researcher Yuanyuan Xie is dedicated to a small group of the Ewenki of China, known in the literature as Yakuts (Yakut Ewenki), Reindeer Ewenki, Reindeer Using Tribe, and other similar names (using the word ‘reindeer’), as well as Aoluguya Ewenki Hunters. The latter term, speaking of exoethonyms, is by far the most accurate, since it determines the ethnic identity of the group (Ewenki), and the place of their compact residence (Aoluguya, or Ao Township, Genhe County, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China). However, it is certainly doomed to failure when it comes to defining the specifics of the economic activities of this group with one concrete term (it does not matter whether it is reindeer herders or hunters). And it is not only because the mono-economic group is, in principle, difficult (perhaps impossible) to imagine, but also because in the case of this group of Ewenki we are dealing with a marked change in all patterns of economic activities over the past 60 years: from the taiga hunting using the deer for transportation purposes, fishing, and gathering, up to the marginal position of the inhabitants of the stationary settlement, depending more on the state guardianship than on their own labour.

Xie’s work is a kind of complement to the earlier, also published in 2015, collective work, *Reclaiming the Forest: The Ewenki Reindeer Herders of Aoluguya*, edited by Åshild Kolås and Yuanyuan Xie (see review in Mamontova 2016: 141–143), but at the same time this is an entirely independent study, with its own logframe for the presentation of the material, and in general is purely an author’s study, based on a long stay in the field, and literally on every page imbued with a touching authorial attitude to the object of her scientific interest.

The monograph titled *Ecological Migrants* consists of a general introduction and five chapters, the last of which serves as a sort of detailed conclusion, as well as a list of literature and index.

The first chapter, “Living with Ewenki Hunters” (pp. 14–55), is entirely based on the description of the field experience (from September 2003 to October 2004) of the author who came across the “exotic culture” (p. 11), and the complexities she overcame herself and with the help of informants. Although sometimes the text is alarming, especially after the reader has learnt how the author prepared for her long fieldwork (“after briefly browsing through books about Ewenki history and their local traditions and customs, I packed up my things ...” (pp. 13–14)), on the whole, it nevertheless redeems itself by being open and frank, and thus it sets up a trusting attitude to what the author is going to tell forth in the future. The abundance of voices of informants inscribed in the narrative strengthens this trust.

The second chapter, “The Culture of Reindeer Ewenki and Historical Settlements” (pp. 56–84), gives a general idea of the main (from the point of view of the author) characteristics of the Ewenki society and its traditional culture (in the text they are called “historical characteristics”, p. 60), and also reveals, albeit briefly, the background of the ecological migration of 2003. The large first section of the chapter includes paragraphs titled “Population and Living Environment, Traditional Lifestyles, Ethnic Characteristics, Religious Beliefs”, and finally, separately, “Views on Life and Death”. Despite the presence, in some cases, of important ethno-historical information, the author’s comments would also be beneficial for the logic of the section. The text itself, in a number of cases, also raises questions. There are, for example, timeless adverbs such as *originally*, *later*, *in the past* (however, such ‘definitions’ of time are found throughout the text; see,

for example, p. 186), as well as terms not quite familiar in modern anthropological language, such as “early tribes” (p. 65), or stylistically awkward, such as “[they] believed in shamanism” (p. 66). The last section of the chapter, “Historical Settlements under New China”, shows the whole tragedy of the small ethnic group that has been exposed, it is difficult to say otherwise, to the “loving care of the (Communist – D.F., S.D.) Party and government”<sup>1</sup>.

The author consistently expounds the history of the first two migrations of this group of the Ewenki, to Qiqian (Rus. Ust'-Urov) along the Argun River in 1957–59 and from Qiqian to (Old) Aoluguya in 1965. Nevertheless, without focusing on this, the author was able to show how great was the strength of the collective irresponsibility of the country's governing bodies of the time; for example, she could not find in the published sources a detailed description of the event (the so-called Surrender-to-Revisionism-Treason Incident), which, according to the Ewenki themselves, became the reason for the second resettlement, and therefore Xie had to rely entirely on the memories of her informants.

The third and fourth chapters, “Ecological Migration Path” (pp. 85–124) and “Post-migration Issues” (pp. 125–182), can be considered as the main part of the study under review. In the third chapter, the author consistently presents the views of officials and ordinary Ewenki on the reasons for the origin of the resettlement plan and on the very process of preparing and implementing this plan, including a description of the celebration of the success of the whole event, which took place on the 40th day after the resettlement, on September 28, 2003. The chapter concludes with a brief description of the social transformations that have occurred among the Ewenki who found themselves in New Aoluguya, in comparison with what is known about the inhabitants of Old Aoluguya. The about 260-kilometre-long path within the same province, Genhe County, led, as can be seen from the author's data, to a significant transformation of the social structure of society. The next chapter, like the previous one, is filled with the author's materials. These materials show what opinions about resettlement and related problems different participants in the process had, what contradictions and conflicts there were, what measures the local government took to resolve the problems, in particular, in reindeer husbandry and, especially, in the process of cutting and marketing reindeer antlers. Long stay in the field allowed the author to reveal a number of essential details. For example, Xie managed to find out that cutting reindeer antlers and purchasing them from the Ewenki for “medical use” was always a kind of profanity, because “according to the traditional *Chinese Medicine Pharmacopoeia*, reindeer antlers cannot be used as a medicine” (p. 180). These antlers were purchased solely for mixing with the red deer antlers (whose uncalcified antlers are called velvet antlers), which allowed to increase the overall mass of antlers and to sell them at the price of red deer antlers (p. 178 ff.). We can only guess why the local authorities decided to support the process of cutting and purchasing deer antlers.

No less important are some of the author's remarks, sometimes unexpected and with no detailed explanations, which, however, seem to be important for understanding the essence of the whole process, which has been defined as “ecological”. Thus, it turns out that in order to ensure the resettlement of 62 Ewenki households to New Aoluguya (previously called Sanchejian), local authorities evicted (yes, indeed!) more than 100 families from there – they were “primarily migrant workers, drifters, or family members of the township government employees” (p. 120), to whom compensation was paid and who found housing in other settlements. However, we cannot say that we

as readers were satisfied with the explanation proposed by the author: “It is evidence of the government’s attempt to provide special assistance to this [Ewenki – D.F., S.D.] ethnic group” (p. 115). What this confidence is based on and why the good of one group of people should be provided by eviction to another group, is not explained in the text.

Even more important for characterizing the process of ecological migration is a small fragment of the text on pages 95–97, almost entirely represented by the translation of one of the administrative documents and the comments of an anonymous official, as well as a couple of other comments, scattered all over the book. Judging by these comments, this process of resettlement was only a convenient way for local officials who, using the existing state environmental and socio-economic programs (in particular, the Grand Western Development Plan, proposed in 2000 by the Central Committee of the party; p. 12) and the rhetoric of the preservation of ecology in the western regions of the country (it is worth noting that Genhe County is not to the west, to put it mildly; it is the extreme north-east of Inner Mongolia), as well as the rhetoric of “development”, could thus fit in one of the state programs and obtain additional funding for the region. This migration, in fact, had nothing to do with the environment (p. 97). The information, given by the author in one of the notes to the third chapter, looks as a mockery of people – a toy in the hands of Big Brother:

*The county government clandestinely sold the old Aoluguya site to a real estate development company. Ironically, the land and ecosystem “protected” through the ecological migration plan will now be used by the real estate company to open a for-profit trophy-hunting ground for rich urbanites. They will undoubtedly claim this will stimulate economic development.* (p. 124)

The final chapter, “Aftermath and Future” (pp. 183–210), is a summary of the author’s reflections on the essence of the occurred ecological migration, and its role in the preservation or transformation of the Ewenki culture, and also, in general, about the meaning of the planned modernization.

In general, the book makes an ambivalent impression. On the one hand, it is certainly important for a better understanding of the ethnic policies that have been and are being implemented in China and, of course, it is significant in terms of bringing a good amount of relatively fresh field material into indigenous studies. On the other hand, there remain questions concerning, first, the language of description in which the party and/or the government are represented as a kind of collective body that can *believe, initiate or develop plans, take steps, assist*, etc.; as it seems to us, that is why some of the passages in the text resemble the style of newspaper texts in which argumentation is not required; and secondly, the lack of comparative material on other small ethnic groups of China and/or the Ewenki in other regions of Asia,<sup>2</sup> which would certainly help to better understand the social processes reviewed by the author, and place the material in the context of contemporary debates, for example, in the field of indigenous studies, Siberian anthropology, applied or practising anthropology, migration studies, and, particularly, forced migration. And yet we would recommend reading this book. It will be extremely interesting to everyone who studies other groups of the Ewenki, or – more broadly – ethnic groups that are under the influence of the state and/or business. Being filled with unique field materials, this work itself can become a source for further comparative studies of a similar orientation.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Quotation from the monograph of 1994 by F. Kong, given in the book under review (p. 76).
- <sup>2</sup> The only exception is the seven lines in the fifth chapter, referring to the example of the Oroqen ethnic group in connection with reflections on forced lifestyle changes (p. 189). However, reference to other reindeer-breeding groups is also found in the introduction; although it is accompanied by a reference to individual publications of anthropologists, it is too general and contains inaccuracies (for example, the Buryats and Eskimos are listed here as reindeer breeders) (p. 4).

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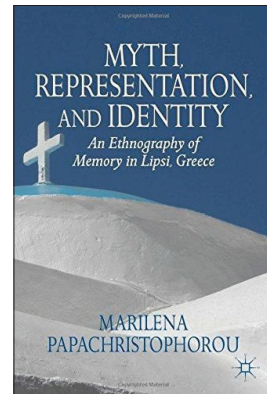
## LIVING ORAL HISTORY TRADITION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY EUROPE

**Marilena Papachristophorou.** *Myth, Representation and Identity: An Ethnography of Memory in Lipsi, Greece.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 198 pp.

This is a beautifully and slightly philosophically written book about community identity building in a society with a strong oral tradition. Marilena Papachristophorou is Assistant Professor of Folklore at the University of Ioannina, Greece, and has published a monograph based on her fieldwork on a small Greek island, Lipsi, where she has conducted fieldwork over a decade. Over this time period the author was able to observe changes in the local community and how these changes reflected in local narratives that constitute the basis for identity building on the island. Lipsi is a small Greek island with one village, with a population of less than seven hundred people. Traditionally, inhabitants of the island have been engaged in fishery, agriculture, and tourism. The first inhabitants of the island were monks and until today the Monastery of Patmos possesses a big part of the island.

The focus of the book is well summed up on page 13: "In the following chapters I shall attempt to explore the oral tradition of the island as I perceived and recorded it over these ten years, often "working" within entire families and "tracking" narratives and worldviews across three or four generations. [...] The presentation of my ethnography and the relevant anthropological interpretation are structures along three areas: (1) the *history* of the island according to collective representations; (2) *religion* experienced, both as narrative and as ritual; and (3) *everyday* narrative occasions." The main thesis is presented on page xi: "Symbols, as verbal representations of physical objects, can obviously survive in narrative and cultural practices much longer than religions themselves and even when the ritual contexts [...] no longer exist." Therefore, not unsurprisingly, the author leans heavily on the structuralist approach, looking at narratives and symbols as the "total fact" of Claude Levi-Strauss.

The tone is set in the first chapter which is dedicated to the Hellenic legend about Odyssey and of how Greek legends about the goddess Calypso and wanderings of Odysseus or Ulysses are related to the island, but also a template of the narrative of the creation of the community. Marilena Papachristophorou shows that the myth of the creation of Lipsi, Christian by its nature, repeats elements and narratives from the *Odyssey*, and that geographically several key events from both narratives take place in the same locations. Throughout the book she refers to Elias or Old-Lios, who is the ancestor of the people from Lipsi, but at the same time also to a Trickster whose biographical facts draw from Ulysses' short stay in Lipsi. Chapter two compares Elias' story with that of Ulysses and shows how the origin of the people is connected with how and when they received their allotments of land from the monastery. The author concludes that the history of the island is not merely facts but a shared worldview of the islanders (p. 45).



A big part of the book is dedicated to how local cosmogony is reflected in landmarks and toponymes. To sum it up, the island of Lipsi is viewed as a polarised world – there is human territory and wilderness. Wilderness is inhabited by devils and the human sphere by saints. Saints in local history are personified and related to particular families. Myths about saints are linked to legends of hidden treasures and events of deceased ancestors. As it appears, the islanders' relationship with the environment is often defined through visions and miracles, which mark certain life events (like birth of children) but simultaneously symbolise a bond with a particular saint. In chapter four the author shows that life in Lipsi is a constant struggle between “impure land” and the human space, the appropriation of wilderness is linked with good and bad supernatural powers and therefore has a transcendent dimension. The author also talks about how different places become meaningful when they are given names that connect them with concrete persons or events. This approach is similar to that discussed by Keith Basso among Western Apache or Alex King among Koryaks. In Lipsi, such personification of the landscape is mainly related to the appropriation of the land from the wilderness or to some key events in the life of an ancestor. In one way or another, such a social bond to the space symbolises land ownership. This is a social construction of landscape but the strength of such a tradition in modern Greece is surprising.

In chapter six Papachristophorou comes back to everyday practices, talks about people, and demonstrates the strength of the community's oral culture. Narratives and myths are transmitted and reproduced through chatting over coffee or at family celebrations. Analysing changes from the past decade, the author shows how communal rituals (dancing, celebrating, visiting the cemetery) are essential in creating a sense of solidarity and unity within the villagers. The author, however, argues that communal rituals are not to be understood as a revitalisation of traditions but as renewing the imagined community. When rituals remain the same, then their meaning and related personal or communal narratives are in a constant flux. Every generation relates different stories to dances and other celebrations and these commonly shared narratives renew the social bond between islanders. Additionally, chapter seven discusses how long traditions help to create continuity and history of the community.

What renders special value to the monograph is the auto-ethnographic approach of the author. She discusses how she and her son became related to the community, what they felt and how they reacted to things. The islanders are depicted in a way the reader feels the atmosphere in the village and the warmth of community rituals. Apart of being an interesting read, the book made me wish to visit Lipsi as a tourist.

As a Siberianist, I found the book interesting and necessary due the fact that similar processes can be observed everywhere. In light of the culture of narratives in Lipsi we should revise the concept of modern traditional culture since it has been related to non-Western culture. As the book shows, we can conceptualise the traditional culture through Christianity and still find enough material to compare it with non-Christian and non-European people. This book is highly recommended not only to folklorists but also to anthropologists and even to a wider range of social scientists, such as political scientists. Understanding various ways of establishing and maintaining local identities is helpful in creating a bigger picture when you study, for example, nation building or social movements.

Aimar Ventsel



## AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF OUTER SPACE: PLANETARY IMAGINATION AND PLACEMAKING PRACTICES

**Lisa Messeri.** *Placing Outer Space: An Earthly Ethnography of Other Worlds.* Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2016. 248 pp.

*There's been a lot of great work by NASA and other organizations in early exploration of Mars and understanding what Mars is like, where we can land, what's the composition of atmosphere, where is the water or ice... But we need to go from these early exploration missions to actually building a city.*  
(Elon Musk in September 2016)



The above excerpt from Elon Musk’s lecture at the International Astronautical Congress in Guadalajara, Mexico, on September 26, 2016, reveals his intentions to move from the research of Mars to the colonizing of the planet, also demonstrating the engine, fuel tanks, and other elements of the interplanetary ship his company *SpaceX* is working on. The book by Lisa Messeri, *Placing Outer Space: An Earthly Ethnography of Other Worlds*, reveals the transformation in modern astronomy and planetary science which makes this shift possible – the distant planets in the solar system and around distant stars are not abstract space objects anymore, but rather concrete places that humans could inhabit one day.

The book represents an important step in anthropology, approaching a new field of modern society – space exploration. Messeri affiliates to “a small field that can be called the ‘social studies of outer space’”, seeking to understand what the cosmos can tell us about ourselves. She refers to the works of D. Valentine, V. Olson, and D. Battaglia as founders of this new field, who explicitly argue about the need for an anthropological approach to outer space as “a crucial site for examining practices of future imagining in social terms, and for anthropological engagement with these practices” (Valentine & Olson & Battaglia 2009: 11). The field could be considered as a branch of anthropology of science, which emerged more than forty years ago, becoming one of the engines of the profound transformation in social sciences today. However, the study of outer space touches the very roots of anthropology as a science – simply because in a strange way it resembles the foundational studies of ‘primitive’ and traditional cultures, and this also provides an alternative or ‘outer’ perspective to the modern (Western type of) societies. The book repeatedly hints at this, showing how the strange habitable places imaged by planetary scientists differ so radically from the way of life here on the Earth.

Messeri considers as her main contribution the deepening of our understanding of ‘cultural connectivities between cosmic worlds’, and where ‘Earth becomes part of a vast interplanetary network’. Focusing on planetary scientists as the main target of her ethnographic study, she identifies and analyses the practices and techniques that allow them to transform planets from abstract objects in astronomical space into places full of meanings and considered from the point of view of (potential) human presence: “[P]lacemaking at a planetary scale resists homogeneity... [and] transforms the planetary from the perceived to the experienced. A place-based orientation, rather than passively gazing at the globe from the outside, allows for an imagination of being on/within/alongside,

of experiencing, the planet” (p. 12). Her notion of ‘planetary imagination’ catches the core of this process, because it captures the “holistic conceptions that scientists have of the planets they study. The planetary imagination includes scientific understandings of the planet and conceptions of planetary pasts and futures, as well as notions of what it would be like to be on and live on other planets” (ibid.).

Messeri’s basic achievement consists in identification, description, and analysis of several different activities, or techniques, of placemaking: narrating, mapping, visualizing, and inhabiting, used by scientists “to imagine themselves on other worlds” (p. 19). In her own words, *narrating* builds a rich story that connects Earth with another world; *mapping* and *visualizing* other planets translates the strange and unknown into the sensorially relatable; while *inhabiting* and *forms of embodiment* are tools of placemaking, employed even when the place being made is physically inaccessible. Each technique is presented in a separate chapter, so the four chapters constitute the structure of the book.

Based on her fieldwork at the Mars Desert Research Station (MDRS) in Utah (chapter 1, “Narrating Mars in Utah’s Desert”), she reveals three different placemaking practices: 1) building ‘informal maps and marked GPS waypoints’; 2) (geological) visualizations necessary for figuring out where researchers stay in place and in time; and finally 3) the very inhabiting of the MDRS and coping with its infrastructural hardships. She summarizes the life of planetary scientists at the MDRS as ‘double exposure’, where Earth and Mars, present and future, acquired data, and bodily experience of living at the MDRS merge. Here “the entire planet finds its materiality through the landscape and ordering narratives woven by participants” (p. 33). Using Tom Moylan’s interpretation of Mannheim’s notion of utopia as well as the notion of heterotopia (M. Foucault), she describes the MDRS as a utopian narrative comprising “stories of geologic history, the ideal of fieldwork, the frontier and the American West, and scientific and speculative stories” (p. 68). This general utopian narrative embraces four specific landscapes and related *geological*, *astrogeological*, *areological*, and *science fiction narratives*.

We find especially revealing her science fiction narrative behind the idea, architectural design, and the way of life of the MDRS habitat:

*Just as the Utah desert made the most sense to Mars scientists once elements of Martian geology were present in the landscape, [the habitat] cylindrical living space makes complete sense when viewed through the lens of science fiction. For those who have spent decades reading about future colonies on Mars, it is a joy to bring those elements into the present. (p. 66)*

Experienced anthropologists could find a strange parallel between a science fiction narrative describing Mars habitat, and classical anthropological texts, describing the worlds of the Bororo or Ewenki, where the mythological narrative exteriorizes in material culture and social life.

In chapter 2, “Mapping Mars in Silicon Valley”, Lisa Messeri brings the reader to a small group of IT researchers called Mapmakers, who inhabit NASA Ames Research Centre in Silicon Valley. Established during one of the numerous restructurings of Ames and as a sign of its opening towards the public and business communities, the work of the group of Mapmakers indicates an important change in the exploration practices of planetary scientists. Using an open source code developed by NASA, they are aiming at the democratization of a huge amount of data accumulated from NASA’s robotic missions on Mars. They produce interactive maps integrated in Microsoft and Google

software, which depart from abstract and purely objective visualizations of traditional scientific maps, bringing into them the perspective of a living human body with its curiosity and meanings, where the local perspective dominates. Messeri skilfully traces the challenges and contradictions in this work since ‘democratization’ is embedded in the ‘imperial strategy’ of NASA as a government agency and presupposes an educated and curious public with basic IT-skills.

In chapter 3, “Visualizing Alien Worlds”, and chapter 4, “Inhabiting Other Earths”, the author expands the techniques and patterns of activities of planetary imagination she identified at the MDRS and Ames in the new settings – at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (exoplanet scientist Sara Seager), and at Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory (CTIO) in Andes Mountains, Chile. However, unlike on Mars, in these new settings the scientific exploration based on new technology made a step that was almost unimaginable a few decades ago: now the planetary scientists were able to observe planets around distant stars many light years away from the Sun. They learned how to measure the orbit, size, mass, and chemical composition of the planets passing in front of these stars, thus causing miniscule changes in the spectrometric data.

This way an entirely new branch of planetary science – exoplanets, along with research groups studying them – emerged. Lisa Messeri is maybe the first anthropologist who carried out her fieldwork among these groups. Interestingly enough, she identifies the same basic pattern of placemaking, using different techniques and ‘rhetoric’:

*For exoplanet astronomers, a planetary imagination helps make worlds as meaningful as an intimate, local place. This is a difficult task requiring a rich imaginary. Without high-resolution pictures of the planet, like those we have for Mars, exoplanet astronomers produce abstract representations... [...] Yet these images do not obviously represent places but are made into places through the social and technical practices around which this new scientific community has coalesced. In constructing and discussing visualizations, astronomers engage simultaneously in practices of professionalization and of place-making. (p. 118)*

The group of MIT focuses on exoplanets whose characteristics sometimes substantially differ from the planets in the solar system. The author had a rare “privilege of observing the community at a time when the techniques of seeing were still being developed”, discovering unique semiotic, rhetoric, and perceptual patterns summarized as three different “modes of seeing” – “seeing with the system”, “seeing beyond the signal”, and “seeing through language”. In search of concepts to frame her findings she found useful resources in the works of anthropologist Ch. Goodwin, psychologists D. Gentner and M. Jeziorski, sociologists of science like M. Lynch, S. Woolgar, B. Latour, A. Cambrosio, M. Hesse, M. Kemp, and some others (pp. 119–123).

Lisa Messeri completes her anthropological study of placemaking practices in planetary science by returning to the notion of ‘inhabiting’. The group of exoplanet astronomers at the CTIO is chasing a particular type of planets – those resembling the conditions on Earth and where humans could potentially live. Similar to the MDRS, this is another unique object of anthropological study, whose job is to identify the most distant places suitable for inhabiting, thus setting the directions in which our “grand-grand-grandchildren will direct their ships”. Oscillating between Heidegger’s notion of ‘dwelling’ and Doreen Massey’s ‘fluid’ notion of home, relevant to the 21st-century waves of migration, the exoplanet astronomers search for a “perfect Earth-like planet” and at the

same time are “entrenched in ideas of unboundedness, multiplicity, flows, and networks... never about a single world but about the potential for all planets to be worlds” (p. 187).

We would like to end our review with a critical note. Lisa Messeri considers ‘exploration’ as a bound to classical modern type of colonization, i.e., as a preparatory step to industrial, political, or military expansion. This refers to anthropology itself, which also emerged as a tool of colonial powers to cope with the local population. Latour’s anthropological notion of ‘centres of calculation’ also describes this type of modern science, in which with each circle of going to the ‘field’ and coming back to the centre with new data, the asymmetry between the metropole and periphery increases, and the centre becomes stronger than the locals. However, late modern, 21st-century relations between science and power substitutably change, as reflected in the notions of ‘science in wild’ and ‘hybrid forum’, describing situations when scientists are not superior to the public, but have to take it as an agent who has enough capacity to enter into dialogue and start collaboration with them (Callon & Lascoumes & Barthe 2009). This and other studies have questioned the distinction between laymen and experts, and pointed to the fact that in contemporary societies the share of population between 25–64 years of age with university education is well above 30%, and in some societies even 50% ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_countries\\_by\\_tertiary\\_education\\_attainment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_tertiary_education_attainment)). This means that scientific knowledge and scientific instruments are not anymore the privilege of a handful of people in aristocratic courts and the Academy of Sciences, like it was in the 18th century. Hence it is possible that exploration may serve as a new, ‘non-imperial’ type of colonization carried out by communities and similar to the colonization of the Pacific by Polynesians, Ancient Greek colonies, and even the colonization of Quakers and Puritans in America. ‘Mars Underground’ and ‘Mars Society’ movements that Messeri mentions in her books, or David Valentine’s ethnography of New Space entrepreneurs seeking colonization of space in a way ‘orthogonal to profit’ support such an option. Maybe this is one of the reasons why ‘frontier’ metaphor is so popular among space explorers.

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