Chris Gregory & Jon Altman (eds.). *The Quest for the Good Life in Precarious Times: Ethnographic Perspectives on the Domestic Moral Economy*. Acton, ACT: ANU Press, 2018. Pp xix +22, AUD$45 (Pb.), ISBN 9-781760-462000.

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In the introductory chapter of this book, co-editor Chris Gregory sets out by stating that ‘the study of the quest for the good life and the theoretical questions about morality and value it presupposes is not new’ (p. 1). This is a very welcome and refreshing admission. I focus here on what is notable or innovative about this edited collection. *The Quest for the Good Life* primarily interrogates the epistemological nature of questions relating to domestic moral economies, alongside narratives of how mundane manifestations of globalisation are maintained, or disrupted in varying locations across the Asia-Pacific region.

Strategies of responding to, and ‘feeling out’ capitalism are threaded throughout this edited collection present as one major theme, although, it is also concerned with issues of climate change, labour migration, institutional racism, and alienation more broadly. As such, there is an uncanny coherence to this edited collection, owing to the book’s practical origins. Many of its chapters began their lives as a series of workshops and conferences. Although the book retains a purposeful, narrowed focus on moral imperatives of value, its words evoke the reality of socioeconomic worlds and kin across Fiji, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, India, and Australia. Gregory and Altman should be commended for their commitment to a renewed examination of domesticity and precarity, and for championing the work of junior and senior scholars equally (p. xvii), in what is an increasingly unstable and economically disparate global context, and uncertain times for early career researchers in general.

Each chapter offers a valuable contribution to this already-familiar field, however, there are some notable contributions to this edited collection. These include an examination of respect and exchange at Fijian funerals, by Matti Eräsaari – whose ongoing work on temporalities continues to delight and entrance; Rachel E. Smith’s paradoxical confluence of moral ‘goods’ with ‘bads’ for Vanuatuan seasonal workers and housing standards; and Rodolpho Maggio’s exploration of Solomon Islands’ ‘kastom’ and moral hybridities.

Overwhelmingly, the most notable element of *The Quest for the Good Life* is the affordances of humanity each author compassionately gives to their fieldwork interlocutors. Jon Altman’s *in situ* Kuninjku conversations with John and Kay (p. 189), Chris Gregory’s parallels (and emotional, devastating variances) between the lives of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi and his interlocutors Gurumai and her daughter Babita (pp. 221-2) are weighty and emotive. Equally empathetic are Keir Martin’s empathetic portrayal of relocated residents, land planning, and renewal in East New Britain (PNG), and Fiona Magowan’s analysis of disparate moral economies between Balanda and Yolngu in Galiwin’ku and need for institutional embracement of a complexity of worlds. A recurring theme of shifting moral goal posts or rules changing underfoot are some of the key strengths of this edited collection (see p. 45, 93, 186, as some examples).

People remain at the forefront of these stories. The authors appear as intermediaries, relayers of stories, or narrators, via a series of tender, careful, and systematic portrayals. This relationship is particularly evident in Karen Sykes’ chapter on the complex metaphor of Papua New Guineans ‘working other gardens’. As part of the process of circular labour migration to Australia (pp. 105-138), she intertwines migrants’ practices of mobility with the notion that ‘morality is a living, unfolding moral fact, and not just a social norm instituted by the ideal of a distributive morality in liberal democracy’ (p. 136). In these actions, I am reminded of João Biehl and Ramah McKay’s provocation: ‘as anthropologists, we can strive to do more than simply mobilize real-world messiness to expose predatory practices and complicate ordered philosophy’ (2012: 1223).

Towards its concluding chapters, the accounts found in *The Quest for the Good Life* begin to meld together, as the collection presents itself as part-exercise in ethnographic representation, part-analytical storytelling, part-sophisticated oscillation between everyday live and theoretically significant work. Overall, the book would be a valuable addition to the personal libraries of various readers: those working throughout the Asia-Pacific, or those interested in thinking more deeply about the subjectivity of morality, or elsewise, those searching for examples of positive authorial responsibility. Whatever the ‘good life’ may be, this happily-recommended edited collection is a much-appreciated addition to scholarly work.

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REFERENCE:

Biehl, J and R. McKay. 2012 Ethnography as Political Critique, *Anthropological Quarterly* 85(4): 1209-1228.