Archipel

Études interdisciplinaires sur le monde insulindien

100 | 2020

Varia

Gregory Forth, *A Dog Pissing at the Edge of a Path: Animal Metaphors in an Eastern Indonesian Society*.
Montreal & Kingston McGill-Queen's University
Press, 2019, 388 p., ISBN: 978-0-7735-5922-6 (cloth),
ISBN 978-0-7735-5923-3 (paper)

Clifford Sather

Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/archipel/2247>

DOI : 10.4000/archipel.2247

ISSN : 2104-3655

Éditeur

Association Archipel

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 15 décembre 2020

Pagination : 246-248

ISBN : 978-2-910513-84-9

ISSN : 0044-8613

Référence électronique

Clifford Sather, « Gregory Forth, *A Dog Pissing at the Edge of a Path: Animal Metaphors in an Eastern Indonesian Society*. Montreal & Kingston McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019, 388 p., ISBN: 978-0-7735-5922-6 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-5923-3 (paper) », *Archipel* [En ligne], 100 | 2020, mis en ligne le 28 novembre 2020, consulté le 04 décembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/archipel/2247> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/archipel.2247>

Association Archipel

Sino-Indonesian performance and display.

But these minor quibbles aside, *Minority Stages* is a fine piece of scholarship that successfully advances our understanding of the diverse Sino-Indonesian performance genres from colonial times to the present. The greatest strength of this book lies in the acuity and vividness expressed through the author's descriptions of performances by the Sino-Indonesian communities. Stenberg's compelling ethnographic account dives readers straight into the lively and effervescent performance practices. After reading this book, I, for one, feel enticed to visit the Cap Go Meh festival in Singkawang. All in all, *Minority Stages* will be particularly useful to those who are interested in Indonesian studies, Chinese diaspora studies, and performance studies. Despite being a serious study on performing arts, I found the book extremely entertaining and fun to read.

Jack Meng-Tat Chia
National University of Singapore

Gregory Forth, *A Dog Pissing at the Edge of a Path: Animal Metaphors in an Eastern Indonesian Society*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019, xvi + pp. 388. ISBN: 978-0-7735-5922-6 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-5923-3 (paper).

Animal metaphors, the subject of this admirable book, characteristically use animals to talk about things that are not animals—most often human beings, their physical appearance, morals, or behavior. Gregory Forth, its author, has written extensively on eastern Indonesia, particularly on the Nage, a small society of subsistence cultivators in central Flores. In addition to a general account of Nage society, cosmology and religion (*Beneath the Volcano*, 1999), his recent work has focused largely on ethnobiology, including his last book before this one, *Why the Porcupine is Not a Bird* (2016, review in *Archipel* 98, 2019), an exhaustive study of Nage folk zoology. In introducing the present book, Forth tells us that he originally intended to include a discussion of animal metaphors in this prior book, but that their sheer number as well as the centrality of metaphors in recent anthropological debates persuaded him that they deserved a book of their own. We can be grateful for this. The present study represents not only an exemplary ethnography, thoroughly exploring the cultural significance, variety and complexity of metaphoric expressions in a single society, but also offers a timely account of the various ways in which anthropologists have defined and used the concept of metaphor.

At the heart of the book are 566 Nage animal metaphors relating to some 140 individual “categories” (almost all scientific species). The largest number corresponds to “mammals.” Mammals are divided, one chapter each, between

domesticated and wild mammals. Together the two categories comprise the largest single source of metaphors, accounting for 42% of the total. Forth plausibly argues that this is because, being mammals ourselves, we share more in common with mammals generally than with other animals. Among mammals, the dog is the most common source of metaphors, followed closely by the buffalo. Both live in close proximity with humans and the latter serves as a prime measure of Nage wealth. Bird metaphors comprise a third chapter and account for a surprisingly large 31 % of all Nage metaphors, including the single most prolific source of all: the chicken. Buffaloes, dogs, and chickens also form a set of signifiers indicating the relative size or worth of things, including other animals; the word “buffalo” attached to the name of a thing indicating the largest or most eminent of its kind, “dog” those that are middling, and “chicken,” the smallest or least important. A fourth chapter deals with reptiles and other non-mammalian animals and a fifth, completing the corpus, with insects and other invertebrates.

Metaphors are instances of symbolic thought that, in the case of animal metaphors, use animals as symbols, or in the terminology that Forth adopts from Lakoff and Johnson, as “sources” (or vehicles) for something else: namely, for a referent or “target.” Again, following Lakoff and Johnson, Forth argues that symbolic relationships are almost always, in some measure, “motivated,” that is to say, are determined by some property of the symbol that is accepted as being similar to some attribute of its target. As Forth demonstrates, drawing on this large corpus of Nage animal metaphors, over 80% are motivated by fairly straight-forward empirical observation. “A dog pissing at the edge of the path” provides an excellent example. Here, the motivation is established by observation and requires no special knowledge of Nage culture. Any dog owner will recognize at once a dog’s habit of straying from one side of a path to the other in order to urinate. The Nage apply this expression to persons who are inconstant, veering from one project to another (i.e. like the English expression, “pissing around,” p. 94). In addition, as here, metaphors are typically asymmetrical. Humans may share attributes with dogs, but this does not make dogs humans. Similarly, while the things dogs do may be undesirable in humans, they may be perfectly acceptable in dogs. Moreover, metaphoric relations refer to specific, typically external attributes, not of animals and humans generally, but of particular animals and of specific classes or individual persons. Most metaphors also have what Forth calls a “moral import” (p. 337). Hence, they reflect social values, usually in a negative sense, and so oftentimes serve as an indirect way of expressing criticism, censor, or even ridicule.

Metaphors are not the only way in which the Nage employ animals symbolically. Metaphoric expressions are regarded by the Nage as an instance of *pata péle*, literally, “cut-off” or “screened off” speech, a way of speaking

that conceals the speaker's true meaning. Recognition of similar forms of speech appear to be widespread in the Austronesian-speaking world. Thus, the Iban, with whom I did fieldwork, describe metaphors in a similar way as an example of *jaku' karung*, literally, "enclosed," or "concealed speech." Some animals, Forth tells us, are perceived by the Nage to be manifestations of spirits. The same is true of the Iban, except that the Iban draw a semantic connection, describing these animal manifestations as *karung*, "containers" within which particular spirits regularly conceal themselves. Similarly, both the Nage and the Iban make use of chickens as their principal sacrificial animals, and both describe themselves, in terms of their dependence upon the gods, by analogy with their tending of chickens, as the "chickens of the gods" (p. 43). While neither of these associations motives metaphors, both reveal I think the fine line that often separates metaphors from other forms of symbolic representation, an important point the author reiterates at throughout the book.

While metaphors have long been of special concern to anthropologists, in the last two decades this concern has become bound up with questions of comparative ontology, notions that different societies have different understandings regarding the sorts of things—human and non-human—that exist in the world and how these things are related to one another. In the concluding two chapters, Forth surveys these notions, particularly in the work of Tim Ingold, Viveiros de Castro and Philippe Descola, arguing that while people hold differing ideas about animals, there is no evidence that these differences reflect separate, radically different ontologies. On the contrary, the abundant evidence he presents of Nage animal metaphors suggests that the Nage, in fact, understand their metaphors in essentially the same way that Westerners do, not as expressions of differing ways of experiencing and making sense of the world, but as a form of figurative speech in which they use animals to talk about things that are not animals, most often about themselves and other human beings.

Clifford Sather
University of Helsinki (Emeritus)

Gabriel Facal, *La foi et la force. L'art martial silat de Banten en Indonésie*, Paris, Les Indes Savantes, 2018, 226 p. ISBN : 978-2-84654-467-2.

Ce livre de Gabriel Facal⁶ s'inscrit dans la continuité de sa thèse de doctorat d'anthropologie sociale, soutenue en 2012 à l'Université d'Aix-Marseille. Cette

6. Il est à noter que le livre en question a donné lieu à une traduction indonésienne (financée par la Fondation O'ong Maryono) qui est finalement sortie avant l'original français, eu égard aux délais éditoriaux (*Keyakinan dan Kekuatan. Seni Bela Diri Silat Banten*, Jakarta, Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2016).