

Long, Nicholas J. and Henrietta Moore. 2013. *The Social Life of Achievement*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books. 238 pp. Hb.: \$95.00 / £60.00. ISBN: 9781782382201.

On the International Day of Happiness, March 20th, one of the websites (<http://www.dayofhappiness.net/happy/>) devoted to this day argues that happiness is not about consumption, beauty or fame, and not about growing the economy, but about giving, relating, exercising, appreciating, experimenting, direction, resilience, emotion, acceptance, and meaning. There is no particular reason to disagree, but at the same time, what is the “direction” and “appreciation” for one person may be the opposite experience for another person. There are many ways to experience those hints of happiness, because they depend on various factors that situate human sense of well-being *here and now*. This book is not about happiness *per se*, but it is about its achievement that is so ‘resistant to definition’ (p.3).

Achievement is one of the norms that should help to measure humans’ engagements with the world. Moreover, it is presumed that whatever one has achieved a pleasant sense of achievement should be experienced, but the reaction, effect or importance of achievement are unpredictable matters. In order to explore the concept of achievement, focussing on ‘the entire social life of achievement’ is suggested (p. 26), because such approach would inform us how imaginatively the world is experienced, as much as before and after the materialised achievement.

The volume consists of a complex theoretical overview of ‘the social life of achievement’ by Nicholas J. Long and Henrietta L. Moore and of ten chapters: the first five focus on affective, physical, embodied forms of experience, and the next two on linguistic transmission of knowledge about it; the final chapters explore how achieving maintains and transforms person’s relations in the world. The authors of this volume do not provide normative definitions of achievement, because they are more interested in how achievement is grounded in a complex human sociality through self-making, self-stylisation, and self-understanding in a particular time and place.

The social lives of achievements are represented through culturally, socially and emotionally diverse case-studies, and the authors suggest that they are more than hedonistic principles, and what is recognised as achievement is an intersubjective and ethical matter, which depends on various dynamic relational factors.

For example, Kathleen Steward focuses on her mother’s life and is interested in ‘how individuation itself happens and how a self achieves whatever counts as “a life”’ (p. 31). Rebecca Cassidy writes about gambler Brian, and how betting on horse races has changed since 1960; it is an enquiry on how the embodiment and materialisation of betting within broader political and economic changes are related to individual reformulations of how achievement is understood and enjoyed.

The next chapter discusses opportunities to acquire performative masculine social identities and reputation by attending bird-racing. Birdsport, which is a sport of luck, is an affective way for men in Guyana to provide and experience a common ground of passion, masculinity, and personality. This common ground circulates different regimes

of achievements and can be heard through a ‘trained’ bird song, or be expressed as an ability to transport or trade birds.

Nicholas Lang analyses achievement as a highly political issue by focusing on what makes a person “an achiever” in various official contests. He questions how in the Indonesian province of Kepri a political agenda may shape beliefs about achievement: how it should be experienced, understood and responded to.

Joanna Cook examines how achievement in meditation practice is understood as “non-self”. Though “non self” is an opposite of what is generally considered to be personal achievement, the author understands it as a personal-making process within cultural and religious narratives that are transforming “meanings”, which are always dialogical and emerging in practices. Olga Solomon explores the relation between autism and success and questions whether particular talented people happen to be autistic, or their success is because of autism. Another chapter is dedicated to the role of money in private equity activities among successful businessmen in the UK.

Susan Bayly focuses on personal success and affective collectivities during the transformation period in Vietnam. By linking families and patriotism, she unpacks how achievement is a diverse and dynamic concept, which coexists with spiritual, commercial, scientific, and empirical realms. The next chapter discusses middle-class culture and schooling, and illuminates how an educational system produces individual achievements through the “hidden/unwritten curriculum” in systematic, relational and ideological schooling conditions. The final thought-provoking chapter is about the experience of achievement as loss by Black girls in American high schools.

In different ways, the volume offers theoretical and conceptual analysis of context-specific experiences and perceptions of achievements. However, there is no concluding section that links diverse chapters. The editors of a book hoped that the readers would individually figure out the conceptual toolkit (promised in the introduction chapter), which would help to understand the nature and effects of achievements. This reviewer is not sure if the toolkit could be grasped, but certainly she has learnt that the focus on the social life of achievement could show various “ways of being” beyond a broad and common scale of “culture”. This reviewer recommends this volume for graduate students and scholars who are interested in the themes of well-being, norms, success, and anthropology of emotions or achievements within various cultural, political environments and economic regimes around the world.

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