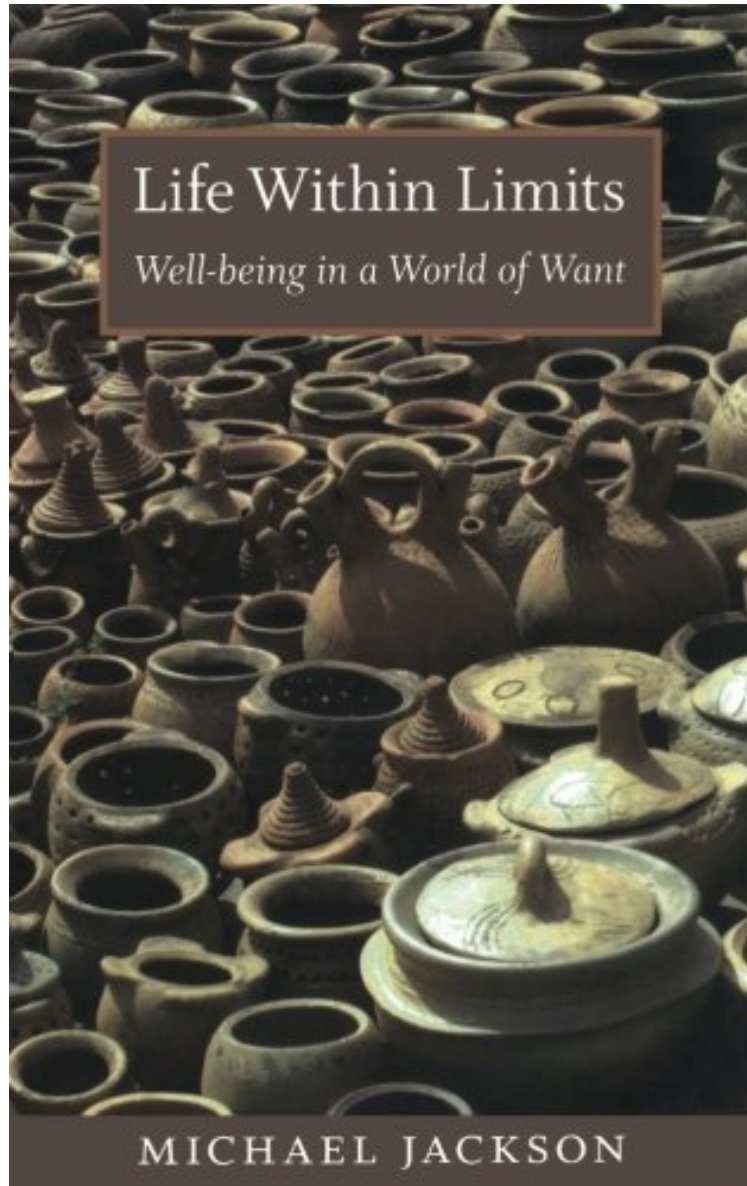


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Life Within Limits: Well-being in a World of Want

Michael D. Jackson

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Michael D. Jackson : Life Within Limits: Well-being in a World of Want before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Life Within Limits: Well-being in a World of Want:

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while describing violence against women. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Inspiring work
By Texas Rose
Beautifully written, Michael Jackson's book *Life Within Limits* beckons the reader to join him in his journey back to Sierra Leone where he explores the concept and the philosophies that perpetuate the ideal of well-being. His essay on this often fleeting human condition gracefully combines his knowledge and respect for the people of Sierra Leone and the ethnographic process in a way that reads like a philosophical love letter. *Life Within Limits* is both introspective and inspiring.

The sense that well-being remains elusive, transitory, and unevenly distributed is felt by the rich as well as the poor, and in all societies. To explore this condition of existential dissatisfaction, the anthropologist Michael Jackson traveled to Sierra Leone, described in a recent UN report as the least livable country in the world. There he revisited the village where he did his first ethnographic fieldwork in 1969/70 and lived in 1979. Jackson writes that Africans have always faced forces from without that imperil their lives and livelihoods. Though these forces have assumed different forms at different times—slave raiding, warfare, epidemic illness, colonial domination, state interference, economic exploitation, and corrupt government—they are subject to the same mix of magical and practical reactions that affluent Westerners deploy against terrorist threats, illegal immigration, market collapse, and economic recession. Both the problem of well-being and the question of what makes life worthwhile are grounded in the mystery of existential discontent—the question as to why human beings, regardless of their external circumstances, are haunted by a sense of insufficiency and loss. While philosophers have often asked the most searching questions regarding the human condition, Jackson suggests that ethnographic method offers one of the most edifying ways of actually exploring those questions.

Life Within Limits is a book on Sierra Leonean realities, but it is also a work that tries to understand the human condition more generally. At its center is a trip to Sierra Leone, where Michael Jackson revisits the village where he did fieldwork almost forty years ago. Between the conversations in the 1970s and those of today falls a brutal civil war with immense human suffering, but also births and deaths, young people growing old, some dreams realized, others not. In its rare combination of accumulated knowledge and ongoing critical self-reflection, *Life Within Limits* is anthropological writing at its best. Sverker Finnström, author of *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*