Book Reviews

Aging and the Indian Diaspora. Sarah Lamb. Bloomington, IN:Indiana University Press. 2009. ISBN 978-0-253-35343-6, 360 pp. Price $65/$24.95 (Hardcover/ Paper)

Sarah Lamb's ethnography, Aging and the Indian Diaspora, critically explores changing systems of aging and care provision in India and among Indians in the U.S. By examining the needs and desires of Indian older adults across three constructions of aging: living in an old age home, living alone, and migrating to the United States, the ethnography reveals how understandings of the person, family and the state also are shifting in contemporary India. Lamb unpacks cultural assumptions regarding the "proper" way to age and probes deeply into the multiple meanings of "modernity."

Older adults in India traditionally reside in multigenerational households. Lamb's earlier ethnography, White Saris and Sweet Mangoes, explores the conflicts surrounding aging in such settings, particularly for women. Although multigenerational households remain a cultural ideal, India's economic liberalization, the employment of women outside of the home, and increasing global ideological, financial, and human flows have sparked the development of other forms of aging. Most alarming of these trends to the general public is the growth of private "old age homes" for the urban middle class and the increasing number of older adults living alone, i.e., independent of their adult children.

Although old age homes and living alone are commonly presented in the Indian media as symbols of Western immorality and as "unnatural," many of Lamb's interlocutors view living in an old age home as "liberating." Old age homes provide a sense of security, social support, and the opportunity to engage in culturally valued roles, including extending blessings, receiving "seva" or service, and entering a "forest dwelling life," the third of four life stages in Hinduism that requires a withdrawing from worldly ties. Living alone similarly provides a sense of freedom and an opportunity to form new friendships. As old age homes carefully employ cultural tropes and maintain a construction of seva as a non-economic exchange, Lamb argues that old age homes are not simply a U.S. export, but have become uniquely Indian phenomena.

One of the strengths of Lamb's writing, both here and in White Saris, is her ability to capture the complex, and at times contradictory, viewpoints of her interlocutors. For example, even as interlocutors explain the benefits of living in an old age home or living alone, Lamb makes clear the presence of unresolved feelings regarding such living arrangements. Her interlocutors are disturbed by the disconnect between their long-held expectations of aging in the context of their family, and their present situation of aging seemingly outside of the family.

Lamb also successfully captures the emotional conflict surrounding migration to the U.S. Although parents often view their children's migration as important for material advancement, they lament that migration frequently results in children no longer having time for intimacy and service, even in the form of a simple cup of tea. Joining their children abroad can require inverting traditional exchange flows, with older adults being expected to care for the family, e.g., in the form of childcare or housework, rather than receiving care, and when needed, accepting social service and economic support from the state.

Aging and the Indian Diaspora makes important contributions to understandings of aging and globalization. Lamb challenges conceptualizations of aging as passive, arguing instead that older adults "craft" the aging experience and the meaning of modernity. By revealing the multiple forms of modernity that exist, Lamb further questions assumptions that globalization is leading to the cross-cultural rise of a generic, free-market, western-styled, form of aging.

As in her earlier work, Lamb employs language that is accessible to undergraduate audiences. She clearly operationalizes her major concepts (e.g., modernity; agency, intergenerational reciprocity) at the outset of the text. I would have liked to have seen more discussion on human subject protections, for example, the reasoning surrounding the inclusion of Mr. Datta, who indicated that he did not want his information recorded (p. 107). Such a reflection would be useful for classroom discussions on ethics in qualitative research. However, this is a minor point. The ethnography's solid theoretical grounding also would make it appropriate for graduate courses on cross-cultural aging.

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Anthropology off the Shelf: Anthropologists on Writing. Alisse Waterston and Maria D. Vesperi. Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell. 2011. ISBN 978-1-4443-3879-9, 232 pp. Price $34.95/$79.99/$94.95 (Paper/E-book/Hardcover)

I was a writer long before I became an anthropologist. I wrote my first story when I was eight, turned to poetry in my teens, majored in English literature in college. Anthropology came in midlife. So this exploration of anthropological writing is especially intriguing—no, exciting! for me.

The book's big question: How can we write so that our books fly "off the shelf" into the hands of informed readers? Into the hands, that is, of readers who don't (and won't) read the sometimes impenetrable dialect of academe, with its citation conventions and dense language ("too many syllables and not enough content," Brodkin, 22). The short answer: tell readable stories and avoid "academic high jargon" (Introduction, 4). The dilemma: if you tell stories this way, your academic audience—the "judges of epistemology" (Nordstrom, 36)—may scorn you. But this book's authors do not want to abandon anthropological writing, so there is always tension between writing to impress other academics and writing for the informed reader. So, another big question: how can we be both anthropologists and writers?

Writing anthropology also involves ethical issues: How do we represent those about whom we write? What is our responsibility to them? Are we trying to bring about change, or even, should we think in terms of bringing about change? Is it okay to just tell our stories, "to document carefully and clearly what is happening" (Farmer, 188)?

The book is organized into three parts. Part I, Conceptions, puts forth basic ideas. We can't trace the impact of most writing, but changing the consciousness of individuals is the first step to change (political scientist Zinn). Avoid "lardballs of jargon" with polysyllables galore and "genuflection-by-citation" (Brodkin, 21). Write like The Bard "…who translates the unfettered wilds of raw experience and human interaction into philosophical story" (Nordstrom, 36). Try to reach understanding through anthropological concepts such as race and culture (Baker). Write well, tell stories, use specifics–and publicize (what?! the "M" word? marketing???–see journalist Barnes).

The authors in Part II, Creations, tell stories about writing particular books and their struggles with the academic canon and publicizing (to no avail: Waterston). Signithia Fordham tells of being forced to write "out of voice" and developing her "counternarrative voice." Arthur Spears relates his difficulties in publishing a book about racism in America and how the university press which published it subtly sabotaged it. Ruth Behar used to write for teachers, now writes for her mother "so I could write for the world" (111). And Sharon Ball reminds us of her friend Octavia Butler's advice: "Write your passion"— something anthropologists are likely to do because "our imaginations are in service to real communities we know firsthand" (Behar, 115).

Part III, Reflections, considers the impact of our writing. We write. Then what? Mostly dull thud. Paul Farmer and Eben Kirksey combine their writing with advocacy and activism. For them, just writing isn't enough.

But don't expect your activism to change the world. It rarely does.

The final chapter by Maria Vesperi, journalist and anthropologist, serves as an epilog which sums up themes threaded through earlier chapters. Think about style, voice, audience. Tell stories. Give details. Use dialog. Make statements (as a friend of mine says: "Save your anxieties for your shrink"). Stay away from jargon. Get critiques from others, join a writer's group, take workshops. And above all: WRITE! Write regularly, for a defined time—then walk away for that day. And write creatively, daringly: take chances, leap and soar.

Blessedly, all the chapters are short and non-jargony. They tell stories, mostly without footnotes and minimal or even no references. They are easy to read but offer much food for thought. So, if you're wishing or hoping to become a better writer of ethnographies (or anything else), I recommend this book.

I'll be thinking about the issues these authors raise as I work on current writing projects, which include my spiritual autobiography and family memoirs. How does anthropology enter them? I'm sure it does. I am, after all, an anthropologist and a writer. But that's another story. Meantime, let's all become better writers of ethnographies which might have at least a chance of flying off the shelf. Anthropology Off the Shelf gives us plenty of inspiration for that kind of good writing.

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Book Reviews

Alzheimer's from the Inside Out. Richard Taylor. Baltimore, MA:Health Professions Press. 2007. ISBN 978-1932529234, pp 224. Price $19.95 (Paper)

Dr. Richard Taylor, trained as a psychologist, was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's type dementia at the age of 58. He opens by stating that the book was not originally intended for commercial consumption, rather, he writes for himself to process his experiences (or as he calls it, "therapy without co-pay")(pg xvii). What is produced reads more like an autoethnography than an autobiography. While he acknowledges that his own experience will not capture nor reflect everyone's experiences with the disease, he offers these writings to provide insight from an "insider's perspective".

Through the use of voice recognition software, Dr. Taylor shares his experiences, ranging from the limbo of the diagnosis process (which took over a year of testing), through the loss of his identity as an academic, and eventually, the loss of his status as an independent adult. Though this is only one man's experience with the disease, his work touches upon powerful themes that have appeared elsewhere in the literature (though other sources are commonly from the caregiver or researcher's viewpoint). This book addresses the need for more research that incorporates the direct voice of those with Alzheimer's and related dementias.

The book is divided into four parts: 1) What is it like to have Alzheimer's Disease?; 2) From the Inside Out; 3) From the Outside In; and, 4) Dear Doctor. Also worth noting is the Appendix, which is titled: What You Can Do. Each section includes essays, wherein Dr. Taylor reflects on his experiences, thoughts, and emotional interactions with his caregivers and his environment. Interwoven throughout Dr. Taylor's collection of essays are several themes that an anthropologically minded reader might identify and find useful. Some examples of these themes are the following: 1) The Role of Technology; 2) Curing versus Healing; 3) The Social Construction of the Disease; 4) Changing Social Roles, Identity, Personhood with a Diagnosis of Alzheimer's or a Related Dementia; 5) Recognition and Advocacy.

The Role of Technology

Anthropologists have long been interested in humans and their evolving use of technology over time. Use of online sources is prevalent throughout the book. The use of online sources emphasizes the Internet as a powerful source of information and understanding of the disease for both caregivers and persons with the diagnosis. Not only is the internet used to cite statistical trends, but it is used as means of communication with online support groups, and literature from which he finds context, connections, and meaning. Though some of the online sources for information on Alzheimer's disease may have become dated, even in the short 6 years since the book's first publication, the quotes used are often timeless. Even the references from Dante's Inferno (used to define purgatory and limbo as Dr. Taylor waits for test results) are attended by an online citation.

Curing versus Healing

Dr. Taylor emphasizes the inability of science to "cure" his disease and the complexity of the treatment of his symptoms. In one essay entitled "We Have a Pill. Alzheimer's Can be Treated!"(41), Dr. Taylor distinguishes between treating an illness and curing it. While there is no "cure", Dr. Taylor refers to writing the book as a "therapy", to sort the painful experiences that accompany "what is going on between [his] ears" (3). In this way, he is treating himself by reflecting on his personhood, ("Am I My Brain? Or Is My Brain Me?"(113)), his spirituality ("My Flesh Is Weak(er) but my Spirit is (Still) Strong (108)), and the shifting social roles played by himself ("Am I to Be My Spouses Son?"), his caregivers ("My Champion or my Hero?" (163), and his doctors ("From My Heart to My M.D.'s Ears" (233).

The Social Constructions of the Disease

Dr. Taylor illuminates the limits of science when explaining the causes and halting the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. He writes, "there are no accepted norms for people with Alzheimer's on these tests. There is no agreement on the exact number of stages of the disease. There is no agreement on how long each stage lasts…" (38). In another essay, he describes the variation in the number of stages the disease might have (ranging from three, seven, or nine stages) (21). This variation highlights the contested construction of the disease, as Graham (2006) argues that "[a]nthropologists underline how scientific activity is not always about uncovering 'nature'. It is a fierce fight to construct reality" (83-84).

Changing Social Roles, with a Diagnosis of Alzheimer's or a Related Dementia

Social Roles and Productivity: Early in the book, Taylor describes the loss of his career as successful psychology professor (who continued to work for three years before he was politely asked to retire) (22). He writes about the transition from being an academic to "wandering around the lobby (my house)" (22). There is a genre of

anthropological writings examining disabilities and/or the life cycle that have connected the ability to work and acquire income with social roles such as "adulthood", "personhood" "valuable citizen" in American society. Taylor's book is an interesting addition to this genre because it is evident from his writings that he also sensed the loss of his identity as not only an "academic", but that of "adult" (186). Dr. Taylor explores the loss of his social roles as he begins to require more and more help with his daily activities. He recounts the frustration of losing his highly valued autonomy in essays such as, "Give me your money, your car and…" (181). Social Roles within the Family: Dr. Taylor's writings add to the concept of social roles; he observes his shifting role (and those of his caregivers) an insider's perspective as he describes his growing dependence upon his wife and adult children. He writes, with much chagrin that he feels that his spouse and children are taking on a parental role (164; 189). He writes several essays pleading with his caregivers to see the person that remains within him, such as "A Silent, One-Sided Conversation with My Caregivers" (174) and "Once Again, My Children Believe They Know More Than I Do" (166).

Recognition and Advocacy
The framework, of "recognition," has been recently applied in medical anthropology (see Janelle Taylor 2008) to explore the shift in a person with dementia's ability to recognize family and friends, as well as a person's recognition within the socio-political arena. This framework argues that when a person with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia loses their ability to recognize their caregivers, it is often equated with an inability to reciprocate, express affection, or have a voice. Likewise,

Dr. Taylor writes about his family's search for mutual recognition; that his family, friends, and doctors are seeking to recognize the person he used to be before his memory loss: "Physicians, friends, and family are forever asking me, 'How is it going? Do you still feel ok?...The measures used to evaluate my answers seem to grow from the unstated questions, 'Are you still like me?'" (176). Dr. Taylor insisted upon recognition in the political arena, where people with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias are often neglected. He remains an active member of the Dementia Advisory Committee of the U.S. Alzheimer's Association, "looking at how to better integrate individuals living with the diagnosis in the leadership; program development, and delivery function of the Association and its local chapters" (xiii). Dr. Taylor continues to be a speaker at professional conferences. He also gives informal talks to caregivers, organized chat rooms for people with dementia and caregivers alike. In addition he publishes his own newsletter of, by, and for people with dementia. This is significant as there have been questions about the number of organizations that actively include people with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia in their decision making and advocacy process. Dr. Taylor, through this book and the aforementioned, brings recognition of the person behind the diagnosis.

This book is relevant for anthropologists, students in healthcare professions, gerontologists at both the undergraduate and graduate level. This book can be used to augment the more scientific or heavily theoretical writings that present ideas about this disease in a more distanced manner. It might be especially helpful outside of the classroom as a resource for support groups, for families affected

by Alzheimer's disease and related disorders (including a person in the early stages of dementia). Dr. Taylor brings a very human element to the disease experience, which might offer a more complete perspective of those experiencing the disease.

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