

may not have been viewed ironically by the man in whom it occurs.

In the other three articles, Andrew Lakoff examines the ironic effects of the use of medication in a psychiatric ward in Buenos Aires, where, he argues, 'medication acts as much on expertise as on the disorder of the patient' (p. 82); Paul Antze discusses the irony inherent in the psychoanalytic encounter in which the importance of the patient's monologue 'lies less in what it shows than in what it betrays in spite of itself' (p. 103); and Lawrence Cohen meditates on senility, irony and old age. Vincent Crapanzano provides a commentary and critique in his Afterword.

Whether or not the reader is convinced by the various arguments conjoining illness and irony, or persuaded by Crapanzano's comment that the critique of anthropological praxis implied by these essays is more radical than even the authors acknowledge, and whether one considers the volume as a whole, or simply enjoys the insightful analyses provided by each of these (deceptively) brief essays, *Illness and Irony* offers a rich meditation on its subject matter.

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Brad R. Huber & Alan R. Sandstrom (eds). 2001. *Mesoamerican Healers*. Austin: University of Texas Press. xiii + 403 pp.

Between medical anthropology, ethnohistory and ethnography, this edited volume assembles the research of scholars from multiple disciplinary perspectives, bringing their methods of inquiry to bear on an in-depth discussion of the nature of wellness, illness and healing in Mesoamerica. Particularly welcome is this volume's expansion of the application of medical anthropology beyond the con-

ventional biomedical or clinical setting, and its implementation in Mesoamerican indigenous fields of care, e.g., shamanism, midwifery and bonesetting – areas historically taken up in the anthropology of religion and ethnography. Though this methodological shift is significant (i.e. acknowledging indigenous healing as legitimately medical in addition to social and/or spiritual), equally important is the volume's treatment of Mesoamerican healing as heterogeneous, involving both indigenous and non-indigenous practitioners, and spanning a remedial continuum that stretches from 'traditional' to 'scientific' and back.

In chapters 2 (Hernández Sáenz and Foster) and 3 (Treviño), ethnohistory becomes a complement to medical anthropology, sketching the historical stratigraphy of change in Mesoamerican healing and providing an account of its regional variation and distribution. Chapters 4 (Dow) and 5 (Lipp) explore present-day regional comparisons in Mesoamerican healing, noting the challenges presented by discovering comparable categories (e.g., shaman and shamanism) across disparate healing practices (even within the same region). Taken together, their detailed discussions of variation and uniformity among Mesoamerican healers and healing, both at the levels of structure and of practice, amount to regional ethno-taxonomies of Middle-American indigenous healing.

Mistress of *Lo Espiritual* (chapter 6) raises questions about the resiliency of 'alternative' medicine, pointing out that early promises that biomedicine (once sufficiently advanced) would someday completely obviate other medical models remain unfulfilled. Though the observation that 'alternative' medicines have undergone something of a revitalization (accompanied by renewed socio-cultural efficacies) is well taken, that they remain



'alternative' speaks to the degree to which biomedicine has successfully co-opted the term 'medicine', defining all other medicines as 'alternative'. Chapter 6 also makes an important socio-scientific distinction between sacred and secular healers and healing (and their relationship to status) in Mexico, but perhaps its greatest contribution to the volume is its approach to healing as not merely an object of science (observations), but also as the subject of lived experience (participation).

A comparative analysis of gender, its relationship to healing roles, and the socio-economic status of Mesoamerican healers occupies a central focus in this volume (portions of chapters 2, 7, 8, and 9). In their discussion of the political economy of midwifery, Huber and Sandstrom's examination of midwife recruitment, training and practice in Central to Northern Mexico and the Southern United States (chapter 7) resembles an ecocultural or medical-ecological approach, implicating ecocultural context and demographic variables (quantitatively and qualitatively).

Arguably, one of the most pressing issues facing the survival of Mesoamerican healing and indeed indigenous healing in general is the processes and products of medicalization. Cosminsky's chapter on Maya midwives in Southern Mexico and Guatemala (chapter 8) contributes much to this important discussion, as her thirty-plus years of research on Maya healing and midwifery in Mesoamerica offers a unique perspective on the role of women at the front lines of this largely silent battle. Chapter 9, Hurtado and de Tejada's research on the relationship between government agents and agencies and midwives in Guatemala, also offers a crucial perspective on the multiple ways in which midwives and women are at the center of the conflict where biome-

dicine covertly competes and conflicts (sometimes shockingly) with indigenous healers and healing.

Paul and McMahon's chapter on bone-setters (chapter 10) begins to fill a long-standing gap in the research by providing a welcome comparative ethnographic sketch of the distribution of gender and therapeutic patterns and practices among bone-setters, organized according to Maya language-groups or speech-communities (a novel approach). The volume is rounded out by Harrison's discussion of the biomedical health system in Mexico (chapter 11), which offers an intra-cultural comparison of university-educated Mexican physicians, nurses and social workers, and makes significant observations regarding the relationship between gender, lower status and lower pay in the Mexican healthcare system.

Arguably the most consequential contribution of this work is its exploration of the complexity of Mesoamerican healing at the intersection of diachronic and synchronic influences, of scientific and sacred practices, of medicalization and indigenization, and of gender and socio-economic power. Significantly, it does this without following well-worn socio-scientific paths that offer convenient conclusions attesting to the inerrancy of science in biomedicine, the fallacy of naïveté in indigenous healing, or conclusions that vilify biomedicine or romanticize 'native' cures. In the tradition of great regionally focused works on Mesoamerica, like the *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Wauchope 1967) or *Legacy of Mesoamerica* (Carmack, Gasco and Gossen 1996), *Mesoamerican Healers* covers some of their geographic breadth, and by placing its topical focus squarely on healing, its analyses reach greater depths on that subject.

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Jennifer S. Hirsch. 2003. *A Courtship after Marriage: Sexuality and Love in Mexican Transnational Families*. Berkeley: University of California Press. xxi + 376 pp.

This book confirms yet again that gender and sexuality represent a rich field for exploring processes of social change in Latin America. In this instance, they are intertwined with such encompassing phenomena as identity, declining fertility, migration and modernity. The research upon which the book is based has been carried out in transnational migrant families in rural Mexico and the USA, with a comparative intention between the two geographically separate places, while simultaneously stressing that the families belong to the same social space. This effort at contrasting life worlds and opportunities not only makes evident some significant differences (between sending and receiving communities) but also, and perhaps more significantly, illustrates how these two worlds are mutually imbued. An overall concern with reproductive health practices, contraceptive use and fertility underpins this research. These major issues, however, are broached through examining microsocial processes, which in turn are contextualised within a broader socio-economic framework. Migration and generation are two central dimensions.

Hirsch states 'One of the main themes in my story is the way younger Mexican

men and women in both Atlanta and rural Mexico are striving to reinvent intimate relations as a way of expressing that they are modern people.' (p. 12). Hirsch explores the shift towards what she terms a companionate marriage, that is, a marriage characterised by intimacy and trust rather than respect and convenience, where sex is the language of love. Through her interviews with older and younger women, she contrasts marital practices before and now, revolving her discussion around two key concepts: *confianza* (trust, confidence) and *respeto* (respect), while also touching on concepts of shame (*vergüenza*) and honour. She argues that there is a generational difference in discourse which suggests a real cleavage in gender ideology (p. 87). Her exploration of sexual practices and their meanings serves to substantiate her claims, as do her findings with regard to courtship. One empirical finding – indicating a major reordering of relations – is especially noteworthy, though its ramifications are not explored in full. Hirsch says that 'The ideal family has become one in which the primary bond is the parents' relationship' (p. 231) suggesting that the conjugal relation is given priority over the parental relation. If that be the case more generally, it is a trend which certainly undermines the traditional values attached to male virility and female virtue, expressed through motherhood and meanings of suffering.

This book is dense and rich in details, moving between levels of description and analysis. Hirsch's discussions are nuanced, taking into account empirical ambiguities and contradictions. She addresses such topics as the public/private divide, the linking of seeing to knowing, the significance of education and not least the significance of women's employment, and illustrates how these phenomena influence women's and men's lives in Mexico and the USA. That said, I think that the

