

Izabella Main. 2018. *Lepsze światy medyczne? Zdrowie, choroba i leczenie polskich migrantek w perspektywie antropologicznej*. [Eng. *Better medical worlds? Health, sickness, and healthcare of Polish female migrants in anthropological perspective*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, pp. 208, ISBN 9788373839502.

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Poland's accession to the European Union in May 2004 has led to the largest emigration flows in the country's post-war history. Much has been written about this exodus. Authors analyzed the heterogeneous migration flows (unskilled and semi-skilled migrants, students and recent college graduates seeking short-time employment, young professionals wishing to start a new career or set up their own business, and intergenerational families), emphasised high levels of mobility (transnational and circular migration), and variegated settlement patterns (Burrell 2009; Okólski 2012; Goździak and Pawlak 2016). In this sea of publications, there are few that center on migration and mobility of Polish women. Izabella Main's monograph *Lepsze światy medyczne? Zdrowie, choroba i leczenie polskich migrantek w perspektywie antropologicznej* (Scholar 2018) is a rare exception.

Focused solely on women and their health, the monograph is a result of anthropological research carried out over a decade in three European cities: London, Barcelona, and Berlin. The book is an excellent example of multi-sited ethnography, a method of data collection that allowed the author to follow a topic and social and cultural problem through three field sites and analytically explore Polish women in motion and their ideas related to infertility, pregnancy, child labor, and postpartum care that extend over multiple locations (Marcus 1995). Additionally, the book incorporates self-reflection and elements of auto-ethnography. As the author confesses, her own battle with infertility provided the original inspiration to extend the personal into the social and cultural.

Arthur Kleinman, a prominent American medical anthropologist and medical practitioner, argued some 30 years ago that human experiences with sickness and healthcare are socially constructed and culturally determined (Kleinman 1988). The rich ethnographic detail in Izabella Main's book provides ample support for Kleinman's thesis. The narratives of Polish women residing in London, Barcelona, and Berlin

include a multitude of cross-cultural comparisons as well as reflections on the effects of emplaced medical practices on how they conceptualized their pregnancies and pre- and post-natal care. While on occasion, the women essentialise the cultures they speak about, by and large their narratives emphasise the differences in care affected not by culture writ large, but by variegated health care systems, cultural characteristics of individual health care providers, and different philosophical approaches to health and wellness. Main makes sure that these nuances are presented appropriately and that the reader knows that there are different medical practices both between and within different cities, that the women are cognizant that as transnational migrants they have many more choices in designing the best care package that suits their particular conditions and preferences than their sisters or friends living in Poland.

Although not trained as a medical anthropologist, Izabella Main “gets medical anthropology”. Her book exemplifies the goals of contemporary medical anthropology – to better understand those factors which influence health and well-being, the experience and distribution of illness, the prevention and treatment of sickness, healing processes, the social relations of therapy management, and the cultural importance and utilisation of pluralistic medical systems – almost to a T.

Following the tenets of applied anthropology, Main has studied up, down, and sidewise. The reader gets a very good understanding of the different healthcare systems, including health insurance schemes that expand or limit migrant women’s access to care. The author analyzes access to healthcare both as a basic human right and as a commodity. There is an inherent contradiction between these principles. In the case of migrants, their ability to access care is not only affected by the healthcare system of the destination country *per se*, but also by the repertoire of rights they are accorded or denied. These rights are very much affected by their immigration status, type of residency permit, etc. Once the reader understands the nuances of the intersectionality of migration and healthcare, she is able to understand the individual choices Main’s interlocutors have made when it comes to their pre- and post-natal care. The ethnographic data collected across three cities allows the reader to understand these issues comparatively.

Izabella Main is also a great fieldworker. We get to know Teresa, Edyta, Ewa, Dagmara, and several other women through extensive interview quotes and synopses of their health and well-being conditions. The quotes, in particular, indicate that the author had developed an excellent rapport with the women she studied. They shared intimate details – often topics that are taboo in “Polish culture” – related to their reproductive health; details that a researcher doesn’t always get to learn unless they know how to draw people out, how to share experiences that might be similar to those of the research subjects.

Izabella Main reflects on her own positionality in this research as a mobile Polish woman, as a woman trying to conceive, and as a mother to a young child. When

research is spearheaded by and combined with personal experiences, certain ethical issues come to the forefront, writes Izabella Main in the Introduction (p. 23). Excellent rapport with research subjects often morphs into personal friendships maintained long after the anthropologist leaves the field. Main wonders what are the ethical ramifications of using continued correspondence via e-mail and social media to inform one's study. Does the research truly end when the anthropologist gets on the plane to return home? Or has "the Field" changed in the 21st century and now also includes exchanges on Facebook and e-mail? I hope anthropologists continue to interrogate these issues as they seem very important, especially when we conduct research on migration in transnational space.

The impact of Izabella Main's book extends beyond anthropology. It includes a lot of observations and analyzes that can be useful both to medical practitioners – nurses and doctors – and to women who plan to settle outside of Poland. As an applied anthropologist, I enjoy the practical scope of this monograph. As a reader, I also appreciate Main's style of writing: very accessible to interdisciplinary audiences, academics, students, and lay people. My wish is that in her next project, Izabella Main studies slightly older women who grapple with middle age chronic diseases or to continue the reproductive health theme, with menopause. Both provide excellent opportunities for cross-cultural investigations.

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