

## News

### *Symposium 'Ethnography & Self-Exploration'*

The journal *Medische Antropologie* held its Annual Symposium on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> December 2011 in Amsterdam. Its theme was 'Ethnography & Self-Exploration'. In an article that served as a 'teaser' for the Symposium Athena Mclean and Annette Leibing (2011) had called for papers that studied the various ways in which personal experience, subjectivity and intersubjectivity intertwined with ethnographic work. Three themes were suggested as particularly relevant: (1) exploring the influence of personal life on ethnographic research; (2) exploring the influence of anthropology and ethnographic research on personal life; and (3) the use of ethnography as self-exploration. Self-exploration was an undercurrent of all three approaches, and the explicit focus of the symposium. The call for papers remarked: "Reflecting on ethnography could free us from using it exclusively within the strictures of academic work. It could turn ethnography toward ourselves, as a way of gaining personal knowledge and understanding our selves via the roundabout way of the other. This applies particularly to ethnography in the tradition of medical anthropology, focusing on sickness and health, on well-being, pain, suffering, care and recovery."

As usual, there was no formal presentation of papers. The 35 participants discussed 22 papers, which had been read before the symposium. Some of the papers were very personal, which created an ambiance of trust and togetherness but also raised the question how personal one could be in anthropological reflection. The participants were from Bosnia, Canada, Chili, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, Uganda, UK and USA. The papers were based on research in most of these countries.

A selection of the papers will be published in a special issue of this journal that will appear in June 2012.

### *Reference*

Mclean, A. (with A. Leibing)

2011 Ethnography and self-exploration. *Medische Antropologie* 23 (1): 183-201.

## ***AMMA Winterschool***

The AMMA Winterschool of the University of Amsterdam takes place annually in January. The short courses which are organised in this School are designed to offer students both overview and insight into the state of the art of medical anthropological research in five essential themes in health care.

The executive courses are organised for health and health-related professionals and/or social scientists and taught in English. The (inter)national participants will be exposed to the latest thinking in medical anthropology and will be enabled to discuss and exchange ideas. Groups are small. Teaching style is interactive.

The different two week courses are offered in parallel sessions by experts in their fields. The courses are open to all. The following courses will be offered in 2012:

- Culture, Psychology and Psychiatry (9-20 January 2012)
- Anthropology of Sexuality, AIDS and Reproductive Health (23 January - 3 February 2012)
- Medicine and Human Rights in Cross-cultural Perspective (6-17 February 2012)

In both periods, there is a choice of two courses, the courses are independent. Click for an easily printable overview.

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## ***Obituary Robert Butler (1927-2010)***

July 2010 Robert Butler died at the age of 83. He was a physician, gerontologist, psychiatrist, and Pulitzer Prize-winning author. Having grown up in poverty with his grandparents in the United States, Butler was shocked by the dismissive and contemptuous attitude toward the elderly and their sickness by many of his teachers at medical school, an attitude he later characterized as 'ageism'. He started his career as a principal investigator of one of the first interdisciplinary, comprehensive, longitudinal studies of healthy community-residing older persons, conducted at the National Institute of Mental Health (1955-1966), which resulted in the landmark book *Human Aging*. His research helped establish the fact that senility was not inevitable with aging, but is a consequence of disease. In 1975, he became the founding Director of the National Institute on Aging of the National Institutes of Health. Here he was the first to establish Alzheimer's Disease as a research priority with a dazzling effect. It completely wiped out the idea of senility as an inevitable loss of mind and transformed it into a

multibillion research endeavor identifying and treating the causes of a mental disease in old age. In 1982, he founded the Department of Geriatrics and Adult Development at the Mount Sinai Medical Center, the first department of geriatrics in a United States medical school. For the non-medical public Butler is best known for his 1975 book 'Why Survive? Being Old in America', which won the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction in 1976. And it were the notions in this book that made him found and become the President of the International Longevity Center-USA, a non-profit international organization created to educate people on how to live longer and better. In this position he relentlessly advocated for the social needs and the rights of older people until a few days before he died.

Robert Butler left an impressive legacy. Most importantly an overwhelming life history about which he reluctantly told you some bits and pieces. Several have felt the incredibly warm companionship when together marching up to improve the life of older people. Wise as he was he gave very little advice. He just told us to go forward, on the same track. And that's what we'll do.

Rudi G.J. Westendorp,  
Professor of medicine and Director of Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing