

Portland State University

PDXScholar

Anthropology Faculty Publications and
Presentations

Anthropology

12-2017

Review of Arne Olav Øyhus, ed. Recovering From A Disaster: A Study of the Relief and Reconstruction Process in Sri Lanka after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami

Michele Ruth Gamburd

Portland State University, b5mg@pdx.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/anth_fac



Part of the [East Asian Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Citation Details

Gamburd, M. (2017). Review of: Arne Olav Øyhus, ed. Recovering From A Disaster: A Study of the Relief and Reconstruction Process in Sri Lanka after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Kristiansand: Portal Books. *Pacific Affairs* 90(4): 848-850

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthropology Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

eighty-one Dalit activists based in Delhi. Verbatim extracts from the interviews show what motivates the activists and how they are trying to advance the cause of equality. The role of parents in developing political awareness is mentioned and the influence of Ambedkar as a thinker and icon is frequently referenced. The issue of terminology is raised and it is interesting that only forty-two of the respondents identified themselves primarily as Dalits. A large minority preferred the term Buddhist, claiming it was a richer and more distinctive identity, and another large group opted for the more “secular” term Scheduled Castes.

Jodhka concludes the book by arguing for a view of caste analogous to treatments of race and ethnicity. He argues that the *jajmani* system has disappeared and the ideological basis of caste has been weakened yet caste identities are still associated with economic and social inequalities (as is amply illustrated in the case studies). Overall, he argues that the central feature of caste in contemporary India is that it creates and reproduces discrimination.

This is a very useful book that reflects on the general question of how caste might be theorized and makes available new empirical material on the experience of Dalits in north and northwest India. Those unfamiliar with the Punjab will be introduced to this important region. Chapter 6 stands out in this regard. A few omissions should be noted. Relatively little is said about marriage. Some upper-caste perspectives are reported, especially in the chapter on corporate recruitment, but more might have been said about change as it applies to the experience of the upper and backward castes. *Caste in Contemporary India* provides a thoughtful discussion of issues central to the lives of Dalits in India and the larger significance of this aspect of the caste system. It is a book well worth reading.

University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom

ANDREW WYATT

RECOVERING FROM A DISASTER: A Study of the Relief and Reconstruction Process in Sri Lanka after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Edited by Arne Olav Øyhus. Kristiansand, Norway: Portal Books; Portland, OR: International Specialized Book Services [exclusive distributor], 2016. 166 pp. (Maps, coloured illustrations.) US\$40.00, cloth. ISBN 978-82-8314-095-8.

Arne Olav Øyhus' edited volume provides insight on how four different constituencies in the far south of Sri Lanka are faring ten years after the Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December 2004. The volume represents a collaboration between the University of Agder in Norway, the University of Ruhunu in Sri Lanka, and the Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce. Faculty and students in the International Master's Programme

in Development Management at the University of Agder wrote the bulk of the material, with local facilitation provided by Sri Lankan collaborators.

Øyhus, a specialist in global development and planning, provides several chapters of background and introductory material as well as analysis and concluding remarks. These materials frame four chapters co-authored by students that deal with the status of recovery in the Hambantota area of a fishing community, a tourist town, a middle-class residential community, and an urban business community.

The first two chapters of the book introduce the “Ten Years After” study and provide background about the tsunami, including information on the natural hazard, the number of deaths and distribution of damage, and the relief and recovery operations that followed. These introductory chapters also quantify the funds received for recovery operations and outline both the general success of the endeavour and some of the difficulties and infelicities encountered.

The third chapter provides a theoretical framework for analyzing the data gathered in the study. After introducing the concept of vulnerability, it discusses community coping capacity in terms of social capital and agency, particularly focusing on internal community organization (called “bonds”) and external social connections (called “bridges”) that organize the flow of aid and disaster relief and recovery funds. The chapter then touches on governance issues and the importance of bringing disaster risk reduction strategies into mainstream development projects.

Chapter 4 introduces the case studies presented in chapters 5 through 8. These cases compile qualitative ethnographic material gathered in May and June 2014 by teams of master’s students from the University of Agder during a study tour in Hambantota District in Sri Lanka’s Southern Province.

Chapter 5 looks into the situation of the fishing community. Fishers complain that their resettlement housing is far from the ocean, making it difficult to look after their boats and get to the shore to fish. In addition, government caps on the price of fish, combined with the need to purchase expensive fuel, limit the fishermen’s ability to thrive.

Chapter 6 examines the “bonds and bridges” that facilitated recovery in the tsunami-affected village of Kirinda, where local leaders formed a coordinating committee that initially interacted with external organizations with good results for the village, but was later sidelined. Community members’ satisfaction with the recovery process depended on the idiosyncratic qualities of the NGOs that built homes for tsunami survivors.

Chapter 7 explores the recovery of the tourism industry in the town of Tangalle. The industry recovered quickly and has thrived, particularly since the end of Sri Lanka’s long-running civil war. Hoteliers relied on low-interest loans, and they chose to rebuild close to the ocean despite government regulations regarding a no-build buffer zone.

Chapter 8 considers small businesses in Hambantota. Displaced by

the tsunami, many entrepreneurs were thereafter displaced two more times by large-scale development projects in the area that reorganized crucial infrastructure such as roads, harbours, and business complexes. The businesspeople suffered more from post-tsunami urban development schemes than from the tsunami itself.

In chapter 9, Øyhus synthesizes and analyzes the data. A strong emphasis emerges in the ethnographic chapters on the lack of consultation with the local community. In addition, community suspicions about corruption in the distribution of relief materials come through clearly. The volume concludes with chapter 10, in which Øyhus and co-author Kim Øvland explore in a much more theoretical way the importance of integrating disaster risk reduction activities into sustainable development projects. The authors emphasize the importance of community involvement at all levels of planning and implementation.

The student researchers were able to spend only a relatively short period of time in their field sites. Data consists of roughly twenty interviews for each chapter. Scholars who have gathered in-depth qualitative information over a long period of time will recognize that deeper immersion in the community might have revealed additional nuances. In particular, interlocutors may strategically share memories and details to craft images of self and other through narrative. Relying only on short interviews, the University of Agder students lacked additional forms of data from which to evaluate the validity and reliability of their material.

The chapters of the book are relatively short and highly readable. The volume includes a great deal of material published in Sri Lanka in its bibliographic entries, which is a strength of the volume. Material published elsewhere is less well represented, and scholars versed in ethnographically based analyses of disasters will see holes in the bibliography. The volume would have been stronger if it set the situation in Sri Lanka within a wider global context, drawing on a broader range of sources and a larger set of comparable examples. In addition, the entire text would have benefitted from thorough copyediting.

I would recommend the volume to people who are curious to read a brief summary of post-tsunami recovery in the Hambantota area. The volume will appeal to disaster specialists, development practitioners, and people interested in the long-term effects of the Indian Ocean tsunami in Sri Lanka.

Portland State University, Portland, USA

MICHELE GAMBURD