adherence to the divine are conceptualized as continuous processes in Lubavitcher thinking. One is continuously falling and rising again” (p. 91). Songs further removed from the inner core often were often taken from Eastern European folk repertoires; occasionally secular texts were retained and re-presented as allegories of spiritual precepts, but as one moves further outward through the corpus of the Sefer Ha-Nigunim, these songs increasingly shed their “Hasidic-ness.”

The book’s second major section, “Inside the Performance,” is comprised of four chapters, each of which addresses how a central Lubavitcher belief is “given form” through music and performance. While each chapter in this section includes musical transcription and analysis, Koskoff continually foregrounds the social significance, rather than the textual structure, of the music. The chapters treat, sequentially, the importance of the past, gender, lineage, and how Lubavitchers negotiate the value placed on tradition with the exigencies of contemporary life. Koskoff takes great care to link facets of musical performance to these key Lubavitcher beliefs. In describing how musical performances in farbrengens seek to evoke the raucous gatherings of the past, for example, she minutely describes exaggerated musical features and gestures (pp. 109–110) that signal the hypnotizing of the nonhuman animal soul so that the human soul can engage in self-reflection. Similarly, the chapter on gender identity and performance carefully dissects the dictum that a woman’s voice is a kal b’lisha ervah (sexual enticement) and how this leads to performance conventions that are different for men (boisterousness, aggressiveness) and women (comparatively greater modesty). The chapter on lineage returns the focus to the importance of closeness to the inner circle; lifetime Lubavitchers are more closely constrained to performing and listening to nigunim, while among the Ba’alei Teshuvah such musical practices vary according to the degree to which the individual has moved toward the inner circles of Lubavitcher life. Those most marginal—who move physically in and out of the community or who have not adopted an observant life—retain a greater connection to non-nigunim music than those fully on the inside. The final chapter of the section addresses means by which “modern” nigunim enter the repertoire and Lubavitcher attitudes toward such “modern” sounds, presentations, and their associated technologies. Here, in fact, Ba’alei Teshuvahs are crucial to the continued vitality of Lubavitcher musical life by drawing upon popular culture source material that can be incorporated into the repertoire via the processes Koskoff details in chapter 5. While not all inner circle Lubavitchers are completely comfortable with forms that too brazenly draw on popular music (e.g., rap), Koskoff points to a tolerance—perhaps even an encouragement—when such materials are aimed at bringing nonobservant Jews to Hasidic life; thus musical practices are recognized as crucial to the maintenance and propagation of Lubavitcher life. For the Lubavitcher, Koskoff concludes, music serves as a “protective shield” (p. 197): Its performance allows the contemporary Lubavitcher the ability to mediate the animal and divine souls in pursuit of devekut and to mediate between the potentially threatening, contemporary world, and a spiritually centralized Lubavitcher past and present.

The work is, above all else, a sensitive and revealing ethnography of musical practice, and a reminder of the importance of expressive culture in the constitution of sacred and secular contexts of everyday cultural practices. The book is not without its limitations—missing, for instance, is a truly diachronic analysis of Lubavitcher life over the 20-plus years of Koskoff’s research, or a comprehensive analysis of how Lubavitcher music/culture relationships are different from those of other religious groups that accord music a spiritually central position. On balance, however, Koskoff is to be applauded for a work that makes clear, to lay and academic readers, why music matters in Lubavitcher life.


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The preamble to this book describes bioarchaeology as an “emerging field.” As a mineralized tissue biologist, the opportunity to read something of the permeation of biology into the fabric of the social sciences is indeed a pleasure. So what is bioarchaeology?

Its apparent predecessor, human osteology, is characterized as dwelling relatively more on the descriptions of skeletal remains than their biological implications: the commonplace task of determining age, sex, pathology, measurements, and so on. Bioarchaeology places increased emphasis on, for instance, enamel developmental defects, disease and wear, dietary indicators implicit in disease or measured by isotope analysis, and activity levels surmised from skeletal changes. These variables are placed into larger societal contexts in order to understand intra- and intercultural relationships, population dynamics, and living conditions, to name a few. This is a very important advance over traditional approaches, and research results presented by Clark Spencer Larsen and others in the scientific literature have been enlightening. How does the book shape up?

If nothing else, Larsen has been comprehensive regarding the conceptual breadth of the field. This is the strength of the book, which, as a reference, many will find useful. However, it also contains several shortcomings.

First—and I admit to greater sensitivity in this area—there were several foibles of logic and comprehension regarding hard tissue biology. For instance, “Tooth formation rates are free of environmental influence” (p. 23) is not consistent with “most workers agree that environmental influences on tooth size are significant” (p. 24). They are small points, but hard tissue biology is not a strength of the book.
Second, I would question the extent to which the “bio” is manifested in bioarchaeology. As far as the simple reference to living systems goes, it is justified, but the field as outlined is hardly the application of biology to human behavioral questions in the archaeological record. For instance, regarding activity levels and trends of femoral and humeral cross-sectional geometry through time, there is little more biology in the recording of cross-sectional geometry properties than there is in assessments of osteoarthritis severity (cross-sectional geometry properties provide important details of the mechanical milieu of the human living system, but few would argue, in the absence of a more integrative approach, that our appreciation for the biology of humans was significantly enhanced). A biologist motivated to examine the human condition via trends in cross-sectional geometry would consider the energetic consequences of altered bone mass, the impact of population level changes in activity on the environment, and the probable effects that such activity levels may have had on various life history parameters. That would be interesting, that would profoundly touch on the biological foundations in social context as perceived through the hard tissues, but we get virtually none of this.

Similarly, more than 200 cranial and some 30 dental non-metric traits (not listed) are said to be potentially useful for statistical estimates of “biodistance.” What do we really know about the biology of these characters? Practically nothing is the answer, yet statistically significant separations are said to represent differences in “biological backgrounds.” However much these traits may be useful for the purpose of determining population affinity (as important and necessary as this is), there is very little one can say on the basis of these traits about differences in population biology.

Third, a great difficulty with the book is that it was written as a rather monumental research paper. This makes the 89 pages of references useful for bolstering the foundation of this field, but a great read it is not. Consider this paragraph:

Studies of pre- and post-agricultural populations in a wide range of settings, including East and South Asia (Fujita, 1995; Inoue et al., 1986; Lukacs, 1990, 1992; Lukacs & Minderman, 1992; Lukacs et al., 1989), the Middle East (Littleton & Frohlich, 1993; Smith, Bar-Yosef et al., 1984), Europe (Bennike, 1985; Brabant, 1967; Brinich & Meller-Christensen, 1949; Brothwell, 1959; Corbett & Moore & Corbett, 1971, 1973, 1975; O’Sullivan et al., 1993; Töth, 1970; Wells, 1975; Whittaker, 1993), northeast Africa (Arielagox, 1969; Elliott Smith & Wood Jones, 1910; Rose et al., 1993), Ecuador (Ubelaker, 1984, 1994), and elsewhere reveal similar trends to those in North America (e.g., Larsen et al., 1991), irrespective of the type of cultivuses consumed. [p. 70]

The style of the book does not do justice to Larsen’s presumed intent to convey this emerging field to a generation of researchers eager to get the most out of their skeletal collections, though the book can offer something for students already motivated and appreciative of the kick-start review. I say this with the following caveat, however: The hundreds of occurrences of words such as may, suggest, likely, would, and indicates reflects either the infancy of this field or its inadequacy. My recommendation for future research in bioarchaeology is for this field to standardize its methods and to come to actually “know” some things about the larger human biological context from the osteological and archaeological record (as far as one can know in the historical sciences). That will be an achievement of colossal worth to this emerging field.


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This is an important and much-needed ethnography into the lives of second-generation South Asian youth living in New York City. Although there has been some, albeit sparse, scholarship on the subject of the second-generation South Asian diaspora, this book is novel in that it is an attempt to deduce and articulate the cultural forces and structures that shape young desis’ (South Asians) lives, all in a single compendium of cultural theory. Like most other investigators of the South Asian diaspora, Sunaina Maira bases her arguments in the framework of the essentialism of authenticity and the concomitant cultural nostalgia for tradition.

Although there were trickles of prior entry, most South Asian immigrants arrived in the United States in the post-1965 wave of professionals, followed by another wave in the 1980s and 1990s. These immigrants brought with them essentialist notions of Indian culture and authenticity, and these notions have been largely communicated and imbedded into the psyches of the second generation. This social phenomenon continually resurfaces as interviewees refer to indicia of “Indianness,” counterpoised by notions of “fakeness” or “selling out,” reflecting what Maira calls an uncritically and illusory nostalgia for tradition.

In order to alleviate traditionalist and also assimilationist pressures from popular U.S. culture, second-generation South Asians have quite actively created their own (relatively apolitical) subculture, which Maira describes as a remix culture. This remix culture is a hybrid entity, located in the dialectic between U.S. youth culture (coolness) and the nostalgia inherited from parents (reified ideas of authenticity). This dialectic is emblematized in the situational switches that second-generation South Asians must perform, for example, adopting different speech and behavioral patterns at home versus at school or at parties. Incribed in this dialectic are numerous contradictions regarding gender roles, upper-class aspirations, and racialization in general, the analysis of which make up the theoretical focus of this book.

Strikingly, the second generation’s remix culture has its own markers of subcultural capital, which can be accumulated