Mary-Jo Delvechhio Good, Sandra Teresa Hyde, Sarah Pinto, and Byron J. Good (eds.): Postcolonial Disorders
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This book is composed of contributions by participants in the weekly seminar of Harvard's long-standing program in clinically relevant medical anthropology, and will stand as a mark of the program's stature as a prime intellectual locus in which anthropological reflection on illness and suffering has generated results of profound significance for contemporary social thought. The volume is a wide-ranging examination of subjectivity, a concept that has in recent years moved to the foreground in social theory after a long time away from the spotlight. Insofar as it is often the case that when a theoretical term becomes popular it comes to be seen everywhere and its meaning gradually becomes attenuated, the most compelling feature of this volume is its thematically consistent and sustained attention to defining and circumscribing the notion of subjectivity in a way that will preserve its discursive value. More specifically, the volume develops an analytic sensibility that repeatedly traces the connections between subjectivity as the experience of individual social actors and the global social conditions under which that subjectivity takes form. This is indeed its greatest service to contemporary social thought in general, beyond the significant contribution to the substantive themes it engages—politics and the state, madness and disorder, borders and marginality—and beyond the uniformly vivid arguments of the individual chapters. A thoughtful introduction by the editors nicely synthesizes the contributors' approaches to subjectivity, carefully deconstructs the eponymous concepts of "postcolonial" and "disorders" and justifies the organization into discrete sections.

The volume is dedicated to the memory of the first chapter's author, Begoña Aretxaga, but there is good thematic reason for the chapter's placement as well. It broaches the subject of madness, the ultimate form of problematic subjectivity, by creatively juxtaposing its individual and collective forms and its possible locus in

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the dynamic between a state and its people. It also approaches the problem of political violence from the standpoint of psychoanalysis and from that of figurative language (metaphor and metonym) in a valuable way. The chapter by Mary-Jo and Byron Good is an engaging examination of “fantasizing the state” on the part of contemporary Indonesian political artists who use their “own subjectivity, and at times bodily experience, to constitute a space for critical reflection on the state.” The accompanying set of reproduced paintings is a visual feast of pigs and ducks, surrealism and expressionism, bodies distorted and dismembered, and the artists’ own explanations of their works are an interpretive feast for the anthropologists. Particularly intriguing is the figuration of the state itself as a kind of “subject” in the context of collective running amok, political violence and the struggle for democracy. Again from Indonesia, the contribution by John MacDougall analyzes the career trajectory of Soleh, a populist political activist in Lombok caught up in the fragmentation of the political imaginary after the fall of Suharto and the crisis of Megawati’s democracy movement. The emergent local political (dis)order in Lombok came to be organized around anticrime militia groups that exercised a “ritualized and doctrinal power of moral militarism” in the context of ethnic Sasak religious practice and militant Islam. Soleh’s conspiratorial understanding of his political marginalization and its relation to pornographic films creates an uncanny impression of a paranoid and delusional situation the ambiguous locus of which is completely in neither Soleh’s fantasy nor the surrounding political ethos.

The notion of a “culture of insecurity” is central to Erica James’ analysis, in Chapter 4, of Haiti’s frustrated transition to democracy through the lives of violence victims from the radically unstable period of the early 1990s. James introduces her research assistant Sylvie and, in part through Sylvie’s eyes, presents the case study of Danielle, a woman James treated at a clinic in the Port-au-Prince neighborhood of Martissant as part of her dual work as physical therapist and ethnographer. In Chapter 5, Mariella Pandolfi features an approach to subjectivity that involves “laying bare the dynamics of humanitarian intervention” in the politically troubled Balkans. She exposes the modulation of ethical subjectivity between intervention defined as military and humanitarian and the modulation of methodological subjectivity between issues that are frequently approached from the journalistic rather than the ethnographic standpoint. The outlining of the nature of political agency exercised on the world stage by nongovernmental organizations as a kind of “mobile sovereignty” is engaging, and the brief portrait of Kosovo political activist Veton Surroi provides an interesting contrast with the Indonesian figure of Soleh in the chapter by MacDougall.

The chapter by Sandra Hyde shows how, in the case of China, subjectivity is spatialized by being mapped onto certain border localities and incorporated by being localized in risky people instead of risky behavior. Hyde gives an excellent introduction to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in China while focusing on the complex interplay of ethnic identity, cultural tourism, political autonomy, sexual stereotypes, exigencies of the market economy, religious practice and infectious disease in a specific border region where China, Laos and Burma intersect. She also offers an accessible portrayal of political subjectivity through the eyes of four government officials who play a role in the attempt to manage the spread of HIV/AIDS. In

Chapter 7, Johan Lindquist focuses on a particular kind of structural violence in the borderless transnational economy. The target population is Indonesian migrant women moving through maid and prostitution industries in the region of Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. The discussion cuts through the institutional analysis of the situation with a brief but compelling narrative of women caught in the transnational dynamic, highlighting the relation between the objectivity of migration and the subjectivity of shame. David Eaton's chapter deals with the curious absence of AIDS from public discourse in the Republic of Congo, where the disease is highly prevalent and where the government is ostensibly progressive in its stance toward the epidemic. Eaton analyzes denial of the disease's existence and accusations of the West for introducing the disease with respect to their effects on HIV testing, physicians telling patients their diagnosis, and family and community dynamics. The conclusion reflects on the possibilities for instilling hope as an antidote to silence. Michael Fischer, dealing with violence and subjectivity in the interface between Palestine and Israel, offers a compelling image of "living with what would otherwise be unendurable." He achieves this by juxtaposing the discourse of sophisticated Palestinian psychiatrists dealing with the situation and the discourses of gender and political transformation articulated by the socially detonator-rigged Palestinian and Israeli joint patrols of the post-Oslo period.

Chapter 10, by João Biehl, examines a historical incident from nineteenth-century Brazil concerning the German immigrant community in the southern part of the country. Framed around a mythos of German culture, Biehl examines the creation of an ostracized subgroup called Mucker and recounts the violent destruction of this group in an appalling massacre that lives on in the contemporary political imaginary. In fact the group was a healing cult, and Biehl shows how it was subverted by the "Germanist" authorities by being cast in terms of madness, criminality and animality. In Chapter 11, by Jamie Saris, we see the world of small-town Ireland through the eyes of the village madman. The discussion reflects on the social being of this man, whose status is both town "character" and psychiatric patient, showing how this social being reflects the subjectivity of the community in which he is both marginal and emblematic. This is an exercise not in understanding the subjectivity of the patient, but in using the patient as a projective test, a Rorschach image through which the collective subjectivity can be assessed and the recent history of psychiatric deinstitutionalization understood. The chapter by Stefania Pandolfo weaves among several levels of analysis, including that of biopower in the postcolonial nation-state, the ethnography of psychiatry and its interaction with indigenous Islamic religious sensibility and the tortured subjectivity of an afflicted patient. Set in contemporary urban Morocco, it is both a psychoanalytic reflection on experience that dialogically engages the predominantly psychoanalytic cast of Moroccan psychiatry and a philosophical reflection on disenfranchisement and despair that is at once grounded in the lives of disaffected youth in the Moroccan streets. Based on work in rural India, in Chapter 13 Sarah Pinto examines the subjective experience of infant death by comparing health narratives and death narratives. The discussion tacks between concrete instances of specific women confronting their personal tragedies and interpretation invoking the writings of theoretical thinkers such as Freud, Kristeva, de Certeau and Nandi. In

doing so, it traces the experiential space that lies between fatalism and grief for these women.

Janis Jenkins and Michael Hollifield invoke reverberations of the powerful political ethos generated by the Vietnamese civil war in the subjectivities of former supporters of the fallen regime who have become refugees in the United States. Identifying the importance of alterity, trauma and memory in the emergence of contemporary anthropological thinking about subjectivity, Jenkins and Hollifield use this near-paradigm case of postcoloniality to plumb the subjectivity of two refugee men who were deeply involved in the conflict. Their chapter ends with a reflection on region, religion, political affiliation and human cruelty that psychoanalytically questions the paternalistic dynamic linking the personal and political subjectivity of the former South Vietnamese refugees and that of the America in which they have sought refuge. Chapter 15, by Kathleen Allden, brings the sensibility of a socially engaged psychiatrist to examination of the social suffering and mental health sequelae of the experience of Burmese refugees in Thailand who were displaced as a consequence of the building of an oil pipeline by American and French multinational corporations. Caught between an oppressive postcolonial state and the forces of transnational capitalism, local residents were subject to abuses such as forced labor and rape. The author, who performed psychiatric evaluations on several of the refugees as part of an international lawsuit intended to assert their human rights, recounts two vivid cases and gives summary conclusions about the intense hopelessness and fear that characterized the subjectivity of this group of people.

In sum, this is a work of superior scholarship that will be of wide interest across disciplines including anthropology, sociology, political science, history and psychiatry. Its existence is a compelling demonstration of the broad area of overlap between medical anthropology and social theory, and it should have a prominent place on the bookshelf of anyone interested in postcoloniality, global health, political and/or psychiatric disorder, subjectivity and the cultural analysis of contemporary civilization.

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