Books Forum: Ethnographic Expeditions into Psychiatry

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We dedicate this forum to three books that have enriched our understanding of psychiatry by expanding both the geographical and the methodological range of anthropological investigations into the modern condition of mental illness. Anne Lovell reviews Emily Martin's *Bipolar expeditions*; Veena Das offers a commentary on João Biehl's *Vita: Life in a zone of social abandonment*; and Philippe Pignarre reviews a book that he has recently translated into French: Andrew Lakoff's *Pharmaceutical reason*.

These three books offer compelling and heart-breaking journeys into the private and public worlds of mental illness in the United States, Brazil and Argentina. What is most striking about their juxtaposition is the variety and richness of their methodological approaches to mental disorders, and the multiplicity of paths that can and must be taken if we want to investigate how individual and institutional lives are caught up in psychiatric diagnosis and treatment.

Distinct geographies of psychiatry and psychopharmacology emerge from these ethnographic expeditions, whether in the peculiar cultural life of manic depression in the United States, the fight of Argentinean psychoanalysts against a new transnational platform for the diagnosis and treatment of bipolar disorder, or the experience of the mentally ill in a 'zone of abandonment' in southern Brazil. And yet some elements crisscross these narratives, most notably psychiatric drugs, and the companies that develop and market them. Read together, the books make strikingly evident the truly global nature of the networks in which these drugs circulate. Yet, at the same time, the drugs provide a sort of anthropological key with which the authors can unlock stories and struggles that are inextricably local, and identities that emerge through the encounter of global forces and the local practices of psychiatry.