

tense debate in anthropology – a debate that Einarsdóttir has engaged in elsewhere in relation to her studies of maternal reactions to child death in Guinea Bissau. In this chapter she presents the experiences of parents' first encounter with their extremely low birth-weight infants in Iceland. In this setting where an immediate postpartum contact between mother and infant is not possible, the first face-to-face encounter becomes an important moment for evaluating the mother's ability to bond. While some parents were shocked and reluctant to touch the infant at first sight they seemed to adapt to the infant's appearance very quickly. Distance was overcome and parents found their own ways of becoming attached to their infants. "Bonding begins at home" one of the mothers claimed, stressing the social rather than natural character of emotional relatedness.

The last chapter by Josep Comelles turns our focus from patients to physicians and problems of distance between professional identity and patients' demands. With his historical perspective Comelles reminds us that questions of proper professional attitude are not new. Based on doctor's autobiographical narratives the crucial changes in the relationship between doctors, patients, and their relatives introduced by modernity and the birth of the clinic are summed up. Removing the patient from the domestic sphere into the confinement of hospitals changed the context of medical practice to a setting where patients became strangers in a space controlled by doctors. Nevertheless, the image of the good old-fashioned doctor practicing bedside medicine has remained an ideal type in representing the doctor-patient. New constructions of doctor-patient relations, however, are traced in present-day mass media showing the dissonance between ideals and practice. Thus, the chapter ends the circle by taking us back to the issue of empathy and professional work ethics brought up at the beginning of this volume.

The theme of distance and proximity serves very nicely as a shared focus for the articles of this volume. The editors have done a good job in integrating the very different ethnographies of the various chapters in a meaningful theoretical discussion without violating the uniqueness of each contribution. The volume shows richness in comparative perspectives and the value of bringing together European scholars. Earlier this year, one of the editors of the volume, our good colleague and friend Els van Dongen, died from cancer. Over the years she worked tirelessly and ambitiously to create proximity instead of distance among medical anthropologists in Europe. I think this little book demonstrates the success of her efforts.

Vibeke Steffen

Whitten, Norman E. Jr., and Dorothea Scott Whitten: *Puyo Runa. Imagery and Power in Modern Amazonia*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 2008. 305 pp. ISBN 978-0-252-07479-0. Price: \$ 25.00

Drawing on several decades of their research among the Puyo Runa, a subgroup of the Canelos Quichua, Norman and Dorothea Scott Whitten present the readership

with an original ethnography of those indigenous people of Ecuadorian Amazonia, who are frequently omitted, or "not seen," by anthropologists and development planners because they fall in the cognitive interstice between the "Andean" and "Amazonian" fields of professional endeavors. Culturally, the Canelos are "frontier people" in the sense that their social arrangements and cosmological imagery as well as contemporary political strategies have been shaped for centuries by Andean and Amazonian influences, first documented in written sources as early as the sixteenth century. Consequently, their cultural identity hinges on Amazonian hermeneutics expressed by the cognitive categories of an Andean language (231). In spite of multiple "times of destruction" – the term by which the Canelos aptly describe leveling policies of the modern Ecuadorian state – they continue to think of themselves as a distinct people, which they express through the semantically multilayered Quichua phrase *causáunchimi* – "We are living!" And this is also the Leitmotif of the Whittens' committed scholarship as they seek to make those people "visible" and "audible," and thus contribute to their empowerment for the ongoing participation in regional and national politics.

The book is divided into nine chapters that present principal aspects of Canelos culture in their mutual interconnection and historical transformations. The Whittens view this culture both as a dynamic social and cosmological template for contemporary political involvement and as the axis that regulates the Canelos' interaction with other cultural systems (xii). The authors begin their ethnography by recounting the "story of origin" of the Puyo Runa; they counterpose the indigenous mytho-history, based on the seminal myth of Nayapi, the culture hero of the Canelos, which still serves as the reference for interpretation of contemporary events, to the official story of the foundation of the town of Puyo in 1899 that draws on the national mythology of "Mestizo, Christian, and civilized" Ecuadorianness (itself stemming from the then dominant *doxa* of progress). To highlight the contrast between these two modes of understanding history, the Whittens indicate the points, or events, in which the past "projects" into the present, for instance in the person of Javier Vargas – a contemporary "manifestation" of Nayapi – who was the legendary nineteenth-century leader of the Puya Runa, and the powerbroker between them and the holders of political and religious power.

What I find particularly valuable in this book is the authors' insightful analysis of indigenous concepts. One of them is the notion of time/space, crucial for understanding of their whole account. The notion has several dimensions, one of them being the "mythical time/space" – the beginning of time and of the universe, when all things have been "sentient and human-like" (39). However, this concept also includes the reality "seen" in dreams or induced by hallucinogenic drugs, without any graspable "spatial/temporal" dimension, as well as the state in which one finds oneself after physical death. Time/space may be also conceptualized as "the

present and immediate past,” and as “the right now, right-here.” Only with those multiple semiotic layers of the idea time/space in mind, the reader is able to interpret the “ethnohistorical” events recounted throughout the book in the way the Puyo Runa experience them – namely, not as occurring according to the linear, “historical” logic but rather in the way their memory works – that is, as evoked by, relived, and reinterpreted in specific places, and in relation to concrete persons. Some other Canelos Quichua concepts analyzed and explained by the Whittens throughout the following chapters are *ushana* (empowerment), or ability to respond properly to uncertainties of life; *yachaj* (one who knows) – a knowledgeable person, especially a shaman, who is able to cross boundaries between “worlds,” thereby exploring the “other” while maintaining and enriching one’s own inner integrity; and *muscu* (dream) – vision induced by hallucinogenic agents that enhance the ability to “see” reality in its multiple dimensions.

In the final chapter, the authors reiterate the main theme of their book recapitulated in the idiom *causáun-chimi* – “We are living.” They argue that in spite of the centuries-long and multiple attempts to “reduce” the Canelos – first by the Incas, and then by the Spaniards, the post-independence national governments, missionaries of various persuasions, and anthropologists – they continue to exist and express themselves through the intercultural diversity of their ancient, and yet constantly rejuvenated ways and, most recently, through their political activity.

In the course of their argument, the authors also critically address some inveterate methodological questions of cultural anthropology, such as for instance the Lévi-Straussian distinction between Nature and Culture. Drawing on the indigenous notions of *sacha* (forest) and *chagra* (swidden garden) – two complementary realms “unified by cosmological and ecological principles” – they contend that the neat contrast between the “natural” and “cultural” domains “does not work in Amazonia, and probably not elsewhere either” (42). Instead, among

the peoples of the tropical lowlands of South America, the praxis is shifting periodically between the natural (*sacha*) and cultural (*chagra*) poles, which also points to a cognitive “transition field” suppressed by the dogma of binarism. However, even such dynamic and nonlinear relationship between nature and culture does require clear “natural” and “cultural” phases, represented by the very concepts of *sacha* and *chagra*. Furthermore, one may also argue that although the model of periodical shifts between the cultural and natural stages is appropriate for the study of Amazonian swidden garden economy, it would be rather difficult to see it work in an urbanized environment that – as Max Weber noted half a century before Lévi-Strauss – frees agents from immediate constraints of nature.

Nonetheless, this is a remarkably innovative ethnography. The authors skillfully captured and conveyed the social dynamic of the Canelos region as the cultural switchboard for peoples whose histories converge there: the Shuar, the Jívaro, the Záparo as well as the Peruvian and Ecuadorian mestizos. Such view defies a simple classification of those societies into clear-cut ethnic categories – a form of symbolic violence that ignores the intricate cultural reality of that region and makes the “real people,” in this case the Canelos Quichua, “invisible.” The Whittens are also able to “see” the described cultural reality in the way in which the indigenous people view it – namely, as a network of places/times, or coincidences of past, present, and future events, associated with genealogies and life histories of specific individuals (18). In this way, the authors present “real” Puyo Runa as they see themselves – that is, as multidimensional human beings, who possess the ability to see, to know, and to reflect on events that occur around them on day-to-day basis (16). Finally, the ethnographic account of the Whittens is also supported by rich and interesting documentation: detailed maps, photographs, charts, glossary, and an exhaustive bibliography, which makes it a valuable resource for students of Amazonian cultures.

Darius J. Piwowarczyk