

Thornton's work holds its greatest value for three groups of readers: 1) medical/scientific researchers who fail to understand that science and medicine alone cannot supply the answers needed to combat this epidemic; 2) social health workers and government and private aid agencies who do not understand that whatever they have understood about the epidemic in their own societies and cultures is not necessarily applicable in other societies and cultures in the world; and 3) students interested in learning about the huge challenge that the HIV/AIDS pandemic poses to anyone concerned with modern Africa. This is not a definitive study, but it is a useful introduction to this very complex problem.

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Van Dongen, Els, and Ruth Kutalek (eds.): *Facing Distress. Distance and Proximity in Times of Illness*. Wien: Lit Verlag; Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007. 155 pp. ISBN 978-3-7000-0622-0; ISBN 978-3-8258-0171-7. Wiener ethnomedizinische Reihe, 4) Price: € 14.90

This collection of papers published by the Department of Ethnomedicine was first presented at the 8th Biennial EASA Conference in Vienna in September 2004. The seven articles are dealing with the conditions of intersubjectivity and human relationships in times of illness and the balance between reaching out for social contact, while taking care not to lose individual integrity. This balance is addressed in various ways in the articles with a shared reference to the moral obligation of both medicine and anthropology to be sciences of consequence and responsibility.

The volume opens with a thorough methodological discussion by Sylvie Fainzang addressing the relationship between empathy and knowledge in medicine and anthropology. Drawing on concrete and illustrative examples from her research in various African and European settings, Fainzang uses a comparative perspective to show the complexity of different positions that the anthropologist is faced with while doing fieldwork. Participant observation as a central method implies that the researcher is able to engage in the social lives of others in a delicate balance between proximity and distance. Proximity in order to understand and build relationships of trust; distance in order to construct knowledge and pay respect to different positions and interests.

The discussion of politics and positions in fieldwork is taken a step further in Els van Dongen's chapter dealing with the ethics and difficulties of taking positions when fieldwork is carried out in societies with extreme violence and intra-group conflicts. Examples from her study of elderly peoples' memories in the context of the New South Africa show that the anthropologist may have to remain at distance from social secrets and to search for proximity beyond the said. Although proximity is contested and limited by the circumstances the small but well-chosen bits of ethnography in the article show that interpersonal engagement and empathically understanding is not impossible after all. Van Dongen argues for an applied and responsible anthropology where

reflections on the consequences of anthropological work are based on moral confidence.

The challenges of an applied and responsible anthropology in the sense of making good moral and practical judgements suggested by Els van Dongen become appallingly clear when reading Ruth Kutalek and Armin Prinz' chapter on witchcraft and violence in present-day Africa. The authors understand witchcraft as a way to gain control over situations that are otherwise unbearable in a context of immense poverty: From the people's perspective something can be done against witchcraft, while disease and misfortune often leave you helpless. What follows of this reasoning, however, is that both victims and sorcerers, accusers and accused, suffer from the social disruptions and violent reactions to witchcraft – forces that seem to hit the most vulnerable members of society. The theme of distance and proximity is two-sided in this thought-provoking article where the dark side of kinship and social relations is revealed as well as the dangers of anthropological exoticism.

The next chapter takes us from Africa to Europe with an interdisciplinary group of researchers, practitioners, and activists working with experiences of sexual violence among refugees seeking asylum in the Netherlands. Annemiek Richters, Marian Tankink, Hishamah Bel Khodja, Janus Oomen, and Marianne Cense have combined their experiences as professional health care workers and insights as researchers in a strong argument for a more integrated and contextual understanding of the mechanisms of disclosure and silence when dealing with memories of sexual violence. Victims of sexual violence are often caught in a dilemma between asylum procedures and legal hearings demanding them to reveal traumatic experiences, and the cultural censorship and fear for social expulsion that demand their silence – a dilemma that seems to be poorly understood and handled by immigration officials. In situations where empathy and an atmosphere of trust would be appropriate, the refugees are met with inquisitorial distance and distrust.

Inquisitorial demands, dilemmas, and paradoxes are also central themes in Charlottes Bredahl Jacobsen's chapter on proximity and distance in Danish forensic psychiatry. While proximity between patients and nursing staff is considered a necessary and valuable basis for building authentic social relationship, it is also a strategic role-play performed by patients as well as staff to secure personal integrity and proper distance. In trying to strike a balance between these opposed demands, patients find themselves caught in situations where they are unable to deliver the kind of proximity required by staff or the kind of relationship that they might benefit from. In psychiatry proximity and knowledge is closely related to surveillance and control, making disclosure and social engagement a risky business.

Jónína Einarsdóttir's chapter takes us to a very different setting within the medical establishment: a neonatal intensive care unit, where popular theories about maternal bonding and mother love are contested. The universal naturalness or culturally determinedness of certain emotions such as mother love has been a subject of in-

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