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# REVIEW: Global Health in Times of Violence

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## REVIEW: Global Health in Times of Violence

**Global Health in Times of Violence.** *Barbara Rylko-Bauer, Linda Whiteford, and Paul Farmer, editors. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2009. 288 pp. USD \$29.95.*

This volume effectively demonstrates the interconnectedness of structural violence and health. While the main goal, to “use the power of ethnographic narrative to make the case that it is important to see violence as it happens to others” (p. 5) appears simple, each author skillfully demonstrates how difficult it is to identify and dismantle the forces that seek to mask human suffering.

In the introduction, the editors reference the growing literature on health and structural violence and express their hope that this volume will contribute in three respects. First, the editors advocate for a critical analysis of structural violence. Second, the authors in the volume integrate a political economy approach to their individual analyses of health and structural violence. The combined effect of these two approaches is an understanding of structural violence as a deeply imbedded social reality. This leads to the third unique perspective of this volume, which is to understand that violent events should not be depicted as “...unusual moments or places in history. Violence, unfortunately, is enduring, pervasive, ubiquitous” (p. 13).

These perspectives, along with the case studies presented by the authors, result in a complex and somewhat bleak overview of the relationship between structural violence and global health. However, the editors have one final goal for their authors and the volume as a whole: They argue that we must understand something in order to change it, leaving this volume as a somewhat indirect call to action. Individual chapters meet this diverse set of goals to varying degrees, but the volume as a whole succeeds in demonstrating the usefulness of exploring broad forces like structural violence through case studies and personal narratives focused on health and suffering.

In chapter two, Philippe Bourgois presents an overview of his various fieldwork sites over the past 30 years. He offers reflections on how he would have conducted his fieldwork differently had he been aware of theoretical approaches to structural violence. Through these reflections Bourgois develops a useful summary of core concepts in violence theory, including a discussion of the components of invisible violence (e.g. structural violence, symbolic violence, normalized violence), although his focus on health is more limited than subsequent chapters.

Paul Farmer (chapter three), Carolyn Nordstrom (chapter four), and Linda Whiteford (chapter five) each employ a powerful narrative style as the framework for a critical analysis of the connections between global and local forces. Farmer constructs an analysis of the Rwandan genocide by focusing on a boy who is injured by a landmine. He exposes the structural violence that created conditions in which genocide could occur and draws attention to the intersection between global and local through the landmine, as landmines are rarely manufactured in the same countries in

which they are installed. Nodstrom follows what she identifies as a “fault line” in the life of a street girl in Angola and explores the global and local actions that have impacted her life. For example, the girl and her friends each suffer from a variety of medical conditions due to their unsanitary and dangerous living conditions and rely on pharmaceuticals to treat those conditions. The children often earn money to purchase these drugs through prostitution or other exploitative means—no matter how the money is obtained by the children, the foreign pharmaceutical companies still profit. Whiteford focuses on rape and the reproductive health of women and girls in refugee camps, demonstrating that these elements can be traced to a variety of complexly connected local and global practices or policies, effectively arguing for the need to identify structural violence in order to understand physical violence. Whiteford is particularly critical of American politics, in the form of international aid, as a primary, and often restrictive, force in reproductive health policies in refugee camps.

In chapter six, Didier Fassin discusses AIDS in South Africa and the government’s response (or lack thereof) to this health crisis. Fassin focuses on two case studies as a means to explore the intricate history of apartheid and its impact on health in South Africa. The first, of an AIDS patient, illustrates how treatment beyond traditional health care is needed, and the second, of a government official, illustrates how the government is faced with many difficult choices on how to treat AIDS.

Merrill Singer (chapter seven) and James Quesada (chapter eight) discuss the impacts of neoliberal policies on two very different communities. Singer focuses on Hartford, Connecticut, detailing high crime rates and economic poverty, among other factors, and their lasting impact on health. Singer is highly critical of neoliberal policies that leave many in Hartford without options for escaping poverty. Quesada tells the story of a boy growing up in Nicaragua as power shifted from Sandinista rule to the post-revolutionary administration. As neoliberal policies take hold in Nicaragua physical violence has diminished, which leads many to consider these policies a success. Quesada argues, however, that these same policies increase the pervasiveness of structural violence. He points out that reform in Nicaragua is often based on macro national economic indicators but the consequences of these policies “...are disproportionately carried on the backs of the poor and imperil their social and health status” (p. 167).

The last two individually-authored chapters have perhaps the strongest emotional impact. In chapter nine, H. K. Heggenhougen tells the story of a community health worker he came to know during his fieldwork in Guatemala. Heggenhougen, like so many of the authors in this volume, argues that in order to understand health in Guatemala he needed to understand violence. He found that disease in Guatemala is often the end result of a complex set of factors impacting the lives of individuals. The death of the community health worker demonstrates “...the direct link between

health and inequality, structural violence, and...overt physical violence” (p. 182). In attempting to improve the health of community members, health workers like the one Heggenhougen befriended are seen as a disruption of the status quo and therefore targets of violence.

Barbara Rylko-Bauer (chapter 10) focuses on her mother, who was forced to serve as a physician in a Nazi concentration camp. Rylko-Bauer’s chapter demonstrates how medicine can be used as a tool of oppression as well as a “...space for survival and resistance” (p. 202), as Rylko-Bauer’s mother was able to make individual choices as a physician that could temporarily alleviate the suffering of her fellow prisoners. While a chapter focused on the Holocaust initially seems slightly out of place among the other more contemporary case studies, Rylko-Bauer argues that we must explore historical cases in order to more fully understand the potential of medicine to be used as a tool of violence or oppression in the present. She demonstrates this through her critical analysis of the role of members of the medical community in facilitating torture on U.S. prisoners accused of terrorism.

The majority of the authors devote a portion of their chapter to a discussion of what can be done to address structural violence and its impact on health. The editors return to these suggestions in the conclusion, arguing for the need to “...consider and advocate for real change, change generated by realigned political ideologies” (p. 229). Above all, the editors believe in the need to “witness, advocate, [and] expose” in the hopes of making “even a small difference in perspectives, policies, and ultimately, peoples’ health in these times of global violence” (p. 231). This spirit of optimism and advocacy grounded in theory, as presented by some of the leading anthropologists researching health and violence, make this volume a significant contribution to the ever-growing literature on violence studies.

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