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Cruel Attachments: The Ritual Rehab of Child Molesters in Germany. John Borneman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2015. 255 pp.Hound Pound Narrative: Sexual Offender Habilitation and the Anthropology of Therapeutic Intervention. James B. Waldra...

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**Hound Pound Narrative: Sexual Offender Habilitation and the Anthropology of Therapeutic Intervention. James B. Waldram. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2012. xvii – 261 pp.**

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Nurse G, as I'll call her, is one of the nurses at the jail where I am conducting fieldwork. Even when inmates are difficult – whether from mental illness, drug addiction, or a just generally malevolent temperament – Nurse G is remarkably calm and kind. One way that she is able to keep her wits, she told me, is by never reading the arrest records of the inmates. Twenty years ago, she had spent a good deal of emotional energy on one inmate, a sweet man who was sick with AIDS. Then one day she read his file. He was a pedophile. She was horrified that she had developed a strong empathic relationship with such a man, a monster. “I have children,” she stated simply. In order to do her job, she said, she realized that she couldn't know anything about what the inmates have done. Some of their crimes are so awful, caring for the criminal would be impossible. It's easier to care for the seemingly blank slate.

In modern Western culture, sex offenders, and particularly pedophiles, are both irredeemable and radioactive. Even after serving time for their crimes, sex offenders must register with the state, their addresses and criminal histories always easily available on the Internet so that the general public can know how to avoid them and pressure them to move far away. Even though sex offenders are much less likely to repeat their crimes, it is assumed that they will always do it again. Sex offender registries exist in every state, while registries for murderers and other violent criminals only exist in a handful of places (though the number is increasing). Empathy for sex offenders is not only unheard of, it's not allowed. They have been described as the lepers of postmodernity, untouchable and totally shunned. But while Jesus cared for the lepers and asked his followers to do the same, virtually no one is asking for pedophiles to be treated as worthy of such care. Instead, they have become our culture's ultimate bogey man, the result, Roger Lancaster argues, of a cascade of panics about sex, risk, and victimization over the last 50 years, panics to which we are now addicted (2011, 14).

Anthropologists, drawn to the marginalized and stigmatized, have studied prostitutes, gangsters, undocumented migrants, drug dealers, people with schizophrenia, heroin addicts, the homeless, child soldiers and those who have killed for violent dictators – classically, the “strange” who we can make familiar. But anthropologists, with very few exceptions, have resisted looking for common ground with men who have molested five-year-old girls, with serial rapists of prostitutes, with fathers who have had sex with their teen-aged daughters. Maybe they couldn't imagine any common ground; maybe they couldn't stomach their research subjects. As

self-aware and self-reflective as many of us are, anthropologists are not immune to the discourses we study, nor to the problems of empathy not found. (I once sat on an AAA panel on just such a topic, where anthropologists discussed both simply disliking their cantankerous or conservative informants as well as fearing those who might be psychopaths.) The incest taboo, of course, has been studied extensively, but as John Borneman points out in his new book, *Cruel Attachments: The Ritual Rehab of Child Molesters in Germany*, actual incest has not. Borneman's book, along with James B. Waldram's *Hound Pound Narrative: Sexual Offender Habilitation and the Anthropology of Therapeutic Intervention*, are the only full-length ethnographies about sex offenders to date. Both researchers meet their interlocutors in likely the only way practically and ethically feasible, through the corrections systems. Borneman's German fieldsite and Waldram's Canadian site are influenced by similar discursive structures about sexuality and psychopathology. The legal systems in the two countries, however, are as starkly different as Borneman's and Waldram's approaches.

In the deeply empathic but rather idiosyncratic *Cruel Attachments*, Borneman argues that sex offender rehabilitation has become a ritual, but one with key differences from those analyzed and described by Van Gennep and Turner. The life stage rituals that those classic studies focused on, such as coming of age and marriage, were the methods through which the public person changed formal roles, such as from child to adult. Sex offender rehab does that, theoretically transforming the offender into law-abiding citizen, but the ritual "also accesses and unsettles the interiority of that person, the *self* that is never fully under conscious control" (62, emphasis in the original). And whereas Turner famously examined the liminal state between fixed points of rituals, sex offenders always stay liminal in some way, because they retain the stigma of their offense and seldom reintegrate fully into society. Following Moore and Myerhoff's seminal work on secular ritual, Borneman states that "modern rehabilitation rituals attempt to effect a transformation in the interiority of the offender, with the aid of the knowledge industry and the apparatus of the state" (2015, 63).

American readers will be surprised by how the German state manages this process. Germans put many convicted pedophiles in minimum security prisons and treatment for sex offenders "has become in fact a legal right and duty" (58). Unlike in the United States, minimum security is actually an accurate descriptor for these institutions: the less dangerous inmates are free to leave during the day to work, so long as they return to the prison to sleep – and so long as they go to therapy. Borneman sat in on group therapy sessions for pedophiles at a clinic in Berlin over many months, and it is his observations from these sessions that form the bulk of his ethnography, along with various archival research he did on past offenders and cases. Each chapter of the book includes one or two case studies: Karola had had a lengthy sexual relationship with his teen-aged daughter; Konrad, a depressive gay alcoholic, had a several year relationship with a teen-aged male prostitute, who lived with him; Reinhard, who had been traumatized by his experience in an East German prison, had molested the daughter of a single mother he had befriended; Suleyman, a Syrian immigrant, was accused of molesting his two daughters and beating his son, but all three had lied.

Borneman's retelling of these men's stories are finely and richly detailed. They are situated historically, both geopolitically and personally, and Borneman's contextualization of their lives, their crimes, their interactions with law enforcement, and their rehabilitations provides rare accounts of pedophilia without strident moral judgments. Nevertheless, I imagine that reading these case studies will be, for many, a test of the limits of empathy. This alone makes *Cruel Attachments* a valuable addition to the ethnographic literature.

While it has much to offer, it is also, in many ways, a decidedly odd book. Borneman offers no introduction, but rather a 50-page "Prolegomenon" about a therapist (an old friend of Borneman's) who wrote a German bestseller about his patient, a notorious pimp who was sexually abused by his mother between the ages of six and 14. Since it is about the victim of pedophilia and his interlocutor, the Prolegomenon doesn't make much sense as evidence for the ritualization of rehab. The following chapter lays out the ritual argument, but the chapters that follow rarely engage ritual, instead focusing on mostly psychoanalytic (and mostly Oedipal, without acknowledging the current disfavor of that paradigm) analyses of the case studies. The book ends not with a conclusion that might tie together all of the disparate elements of Borneman's argument but rather with a collection of "Loose Ends," short vignettes and theoretical musings that he says didn't fit in the rest of the book. Some of them are fascinating, but others are, honestly, bizarre, particularly a five-page description and rebuttal of the reviewer comments he received during his National Science Foundation application process. Some of the comments were of course ridiculous; there's a reason academics have created the mythic villain called "Reviewer #2." But he mocks others for being silly or absurd that are anything but. His hostility to the kind of informed consent and confidentiality that American Institutional Review Boards mandate – particularly when doing research on the incarcerated, mentally ill, and children – would likely raise the eyebrows of most prison ethnographers, who are usually well-versed on the history of abuses faced by prisoners used as research subjects.

James Waldram, in his mostly positive review of *Cruel Attachments* (Waldram 2015), points out that Borneman does not seem to be engaging with prison ethnographers, whose work he rarely cites and whose methods and theoretical positioning are so different. Additionally, with his focus on psychoanalysis and his uncritical descriptions of the cognitive behavioral therapy methods of rehabilitation, Borneman seems not to be talking to scholars focused on improving therapy. Waldram doesn't mention it, but Borneman dismisses Waldram's own *Hound Pound Narrative* in an endnote as being focused on different things, that Waldram's Canadian rehab was not a "(more radical) ritual transformation of self" (Borneman 2015, 229n6). But this is precisely the goal of the cognitive behavioral therapy that Waldram details – and it's the same method that the Germans were using. No, Waldram doesn't refer to it as ritualized, but the goal of CBT rehabilitation is just such an interior conversion. Waldram's argument is that the methods produce problematic results.

Like *Cruel Attachments*, the detailed, nuanced descriptions of the lives, experiences, and narratives of sex offenders in the *Hound Pound Narrative* are much-needed additions to the anthropological record. It is also an important contribution to the conversations between social scientists, both critical and applied, working in not only corrections institutions but in any

cultural milieu focused on behavior change, such as substance abuse treatment facilities, psychiatric out-patient programs, or even self-help groups. Waldram spent two years in the sex offender rehabilitation clinic, nicknamed the Hound Pound by its residents, embedded in a Canadian federal prison. (Canada's strict treatment of sex offenders is much more like that of the United States.) The offenders come from other corrections facilities for an eight-month long cognitive behavioral therapy program that is meant to reduce the likelihood of recidivism. Since "rehabilitation" implies that there is an ideal state that one can return to, which for most sex offenders never existed, Waldram favors the term "habilitation": creating "moral individuals ... 'fit' for society, rendered safe to be among us" (11).

The residents are more likely to be granted parole if they complete the program, which is the major impetus. The theory behind the program is that it will help transform both their behaviors and thoughts, and Waldram's person-centered, experience-near analysis of nearly 40 inmate patients depicts the "tension between subjective experience and personal agency, on the one hand, and a positivist, science-based 'best practices' model of treatment on the other" (2012, 7). The program is greatly focused on engaging the sex offenders' cognitive distortions, "simplistic, reactive, and primal ways of thinking that serve to distort the subjective interpretation of external stimuli and information" (59), through intensive group therapy where the men's autobiographies and criminal cycles are interrogated and reinterpreted. The new narratives that the men develop, Waldram argues, are partly the outcome of changes in cognitive schema but mostly the result of strategically crafting stories that the nurse therapist approves of. Perhaps more problematically, some of the program modules, such as the conflict-diffusing "assertiveness" training, encourage behavior that would probably be dangerous in the prisons where most of the offenders will return.

*Hound Pound Narrative*, a much more traditionally (and more coherently) structured ethnography, presents an enormously convincing argument. Empirical evidence shows conclusively that cognitive behavioral therapy interventions reduce recidivism, but recidivism is more a measure of arrest rates more than of psychic change: "Indeed, the viability of the program is based on demonstrating improvements in public safety, not improvements in cognitive or emotional or morality of the inmates" (237). This is the kind of conclusion that would be unlikely to come from the typical quantitatively focused researchers focused on this population – criminologists, epidemiologists, and research psychologists. Waldram's ethnographic analysis, like Borneman's, presents historical, psychological, and emotional contextualization of what we consider criminal, disordered, and immoral sexual behavior.

I don't fault Nurse G for her need not to know the details of her patients' crimes; she is both self-aware and dedicated enough to know how to prevent her feelings from compromising her work. But few people are as careful with their moral reasoning or as contemplative about their feelings of disgust and fear. The kind of work that Waldram and Borneman have done – along with the work of scholars such as Philippe Bourgois, Angela Garcia, Joao Biehl, among others – complicates and disrupts our understanding of human phenomena that Western discourses have deemed evil, disgusting, or irrational: emphatically black and white. This is important work, for the field and for our society, and I hope anthropologists will be inspired to

go to more difficult and more challenging places. Such work has the potential to help more people think like Nurse G.

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