
is to be "order in an age of chaos." "Sovereignty has become more permeable," Moynihan argues, in such places as the Balkans, where external intervention in domestic politics constitutes not aggression but humanitarian necessity. "Just how much horror can be looked upon with indifference, or at least inaction?" he asks. "To which the answer, of course, is plenty. But," Moynihan concludes, "civilizations with claims to universal values do, in general, try to uphold them, if only after a point."

DEATH WITHOUT WEEPING: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil. By Nancy Scheper-Hughes. Univ. of Calif. 614 pp. \$29

Anthropology during the 1980s, inspired by the deconstructionist vogue in literary criticism, grew painfully self-conscious. Dissecting ethnographic writing, practitioners dispelled the notion that the anthropologist was a neutral observer. Yet after a decade, such textual self-scrutiny became repetitive and threatened to turn anthropology into an armchair discipline.

It may seem odd that a book titled *Death Without Weeping* augurs new life in what looked like a moribund discipline. To Scheper-Hughes, an anthropologist at Berkeley, the convulsions of history are not simply material for aesthetic critique. The sugar plantations of the Brazilian Northeast were born in slavery, and, as she puts it, they are now maintained by slavery of another kind. The region never experienced Brazil's "economic miracle." Quite the contrary. Today its landless peasants suffer from the combined effects of deforestation, regional decline, and agricultural mechanization—a fate shared with much of the Third World.

In Bom Jesus da Mata, where Scheper-Hughes studied everyday life for more than 25 years, a rural worker's average daily caloric consumption is less than that of an internee in Buchenwald. A medical anthropologist, the author describes how the local clinics treat the symptoms of hunger and malnutrition by prescribing medication, thus indirectly helping to maintain terrible social conditions. She goes beyond the usual denunciations of the role of conservative Catholicism in maintaining this status quo; in-

deed, she shows how the progressive liberation theology, which promulgates the church's teachings about female sexuality and reproduction, leaves poor mothers who cannot raise all the children they conceive in a state of "moral and theological confusion."

Scheper-Hughes is most original in her discussion of motherhood. Much recent feminist theory—as expressed in Nancy Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982), and Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* (1990)—promotes a nostalgic, almost mystical image of the mother-infant relationship. The behavior of the poor in Bom Jesus is a living—and dying—refutation of any universalist myth of motherhood. With resources too scarce to support all their children, shantytown mothers not only do not mourn the death of sickly babies; they hasten the dying of those unlikely to survive. These undernourished mothers make cold-blooded judgments about their children's chances in a slum environment, practicing what Scheper-Hughes describes, with both shock and sympathy, as "selective neglect" or "passive infanticide."

Scheper-Hughes makes some use of anthropology's recent self-conscious turn, employing critical theory to justify her role as an advocate for real people in real troubles. Her own voice—by turns womanly, muckraking, passionately engaged, and analytical—does not crowd out the many voices of her subjects, but it does contribute to a multitextured, experimental ethnography. Her work, in fact, stands as an invitation to fellow anthropologists to quit their armchair critiques and return to the field.

Arts & Letters

WHERE THE BLUEBIRD SINGS TO THE LEMONADE SPRINGS: Living and Writing in the West. By Wallace Stegner. Random House. 227 pp. \$21

In 1964, a middle-aged Wallace Stegner declared the West to be "the New World's last chance to be something better, the only American society malleable enough to be formed." This pronouncement was characteristically self-effacing.