

# INTRODUCTION

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The forces of relative purity, of goodness, of fortune, of life . . . are inextricably linked with the forces of pollution, of evil, of misfortune, and of death.

—Bruce Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*

Inoculations of evil are crucial to human rights violations because they become part of socially accepted notions of common sense.

—Carole Nagengast, "Inoculations of Evil in the U.S.-Mexican Border Region"

In this volume, we explore the anthropology of evil as an empirical human phenomenon—an existential/moral feature of human thought and communal or social relations—and the value of evil as a methodological construct—a meaningful tool for comprehending the actions, thought, and coordinated behavior of human communities. Our purpose is to show how evil is situated within culture as a lynchpin of what Cornelius Castoriadis (1998) called the imaginary institution of society, emblematic of the tension between creation and destruction in human affairs. We thus attempt to show the usefulness of treating evil as a descriptive reality where concepts such as violence, criminality, and hatred fall short of capturing the darkest side of human existence. In doing so, we argue that a moral anthropology concerned only with ethical priorities and how people strive to do the right thing lacks depth and is at best two dimensional, or, put another way, misses not only the dark underside of life but also the shades of gray between its blacks and whites.

How do we identify evil, and where does it reside? Epidemics of AIDS, SARS, Ebola plagues, political corruption, state-terror and dirty wars, structural violence and swelling poverty, necro-politics, terrorist massacres, ethnic cleansing and death squads, human trafficking, clerical sex abuse, global slavery, imperial invasions, genocides, and child-soldiers create a tableau of expansive horror and suffering. Evil may appear closer to home as people lose control of financial, political, military, economic, and mystical forces. These events, seen to be both evil in themselves as well as the result of evil conduct, and their locus is difficult to pinpoint insofar as at times they appear structurally anonymous and at other times the works of larger-than-life perpetrators. There is, in addition to these social evils and trends, a more intimate interpersonal evil that though not as visible is equally social and cultural. Here, evil is the operational common denominator of cruelty, abuse, neglect, genocide, betrayal, or domination, which are inherently destructive. This is the everyday evil of personal and subjective problems whether they are explicitly blamed on the malicious intent of others or exhibit the effects of malevolent destructiveness.

This book addresses dimensions of evil in various social settings, including particular kinds of human suffering, and what is done in response. As editors, we eschew any essentialist definition with universal application. Rather, we seek to provide a forum to examine qualifying attributes of what would count as a realization of evil. We argue for a “situational evil,” which “identifies the specificity or singularity of evil in discrete events,” and which provides contexts for understanding how actors respond to those circumstances (Csordas 2013, 527). With an eye to anthropology’s affinity with philosophy, this volume asserts that evil may be pursued from an ontological and existential perspective that enriches and enlivens the empirical and comparative data of ethnography. Cases of genocide and the holocaust, child victimization, organ harvesting, torture, political terror, rape, and murder “constitute anthropology’s primal scene” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, 5). These actions may be immediately intuited as evil. In this Introduction, we attempt to explain why this is so and why anthropology should be interested in the topic.

One enduring feature of anthropology is attention to quasi persons and to marginal social circumstances. The range of the anthropological project includes the idiosyncratic as well as the less familiar. We research what is sometimes auspicious and also what may be disturbing. Anthropology informs us of purposive collusion with the occult where victims of sorcery suffer from tumors, menstrual cramping, and TB, but also laziness, alcoholism, addiction, and sterility

(Buchillet 2004). We can read of medicines in Lesotho derived from human body parts used to increase social power and for curing illness (Murray and Sanders 2005); or we may read of dismembered bodies and cannibalism in the Killing Fields of the Khmer Rouge (Hinton 2005). Anthropology tells of “sex thieves” who steal genitalia simply by a handshake (Bonhomme 2016). It shows how eating the roasted flesh of the dead is regarded as an act of compassion toward one’s kin (Conklin 2001). Attention to such topics demonstrates “the generalization of moral concern within the discipline” (Fassin 2008, 337) and highlights moral or ethical features of existence including the uncertainty, ambivalence, variation, and ambiguity of social life, human exchange, and meaningful acts (Lambek 2010).

The quintessentially anthropological *modus operandum* of capturing fundamental aspects of society by attending to its margins is played out in striking and alarming detail by Jean La Fontaine as she writes about alleged Satanists in the UK who are presumed to be occultists, pagans, and witches. Rumored to dwell in both London and the Midlands, these groups are said to advocate the occult as self-proclaimed worshipers of the devil. They are low-income householders reputed to perpetrate clandestine ritual abuse based on creeds fetishized in the allegations of other British populations. By accounts of those who speak of them, they are involved in acts contrary to human sensibilities, and in behaviors that denote “Western society’s symbol of the most hideously evil and anti-social form” of abuse, sexuality, and terror (La Fontaine 1998, 80). Their supposed ritual performances and beliefs in *maleficium*, night-witches, support such a premise; and these actions define them as less than human. La Fontaine notes how, “The Satanist of the modern allegations . . . also combines in this image the attributes of two other personifications of the illegitimate and the antisocial: the terrorist and the pedophile. . . . Their combined characteristics added to their inhuman acts make the Satanists the essence of the monstrous stranger” (186). Likewise, the abuses and havoc wreaked by witches in the Bocage region of western France identify a surreptitious network comprised of associations with the malignant and nefarious. French witchcraft is found not merely among extreme marginal cases such as the “irrational” or within a world of “fools and madmen.” Rather, witches comprise a furtive and “distant world of the poor, the backward or the insane” (Favret-Saada 1980, 42). The behavior of those who are active in witchcraft goes beyond the irrational, however. As one man in the Bocage said of their vicious actions, “Those I am talking about possess a power to do evil, they make people suffer” (1980, 49).

In another vein, Caton and Zacka (2010, 207) identify photos of torture at Abu Ghraib prison and modes of creativity and suffering. The “grotesque” carnival of torture is a “kind of excess, of too much body or flesh, of the monstrous and the hideous.” Some top brass themselves identified the events as “hideous.” Others in the George W. Bush administration referred to the photos simply as “disgraceful” or with words that expressed regret. These rhetorical invocations of ugliness and shamefulness converge toward what we would call evil, and their immediacy requires “that we revisit the original urgency of the drive to make ‘the social’ component of our lives an explicit object of critical inquiry and moral concern” (Wilkinson and Kleinman 2016, 9). We pursue cultural formulations that account for the “perceived ambiguities, puzzles, and paradoxes in human experience” (Geertz 1973, 108). We also agree with Kiernan (1982) that the problem of evil may be insolvable, and for precisely this reason we research meanings and modalities of evil by strategically deploying anthropological tools to optimize the methodological tension between moral engagement and theoretical indifference.

Whatever shock or dismay moves us to turn away from the stark realities of exploitation, horror, dread, and abuse, we are yet compelled to comprehend how such things exist in the contemporary world either as social practices or modes of discourse, and how human life survives at the social margins and discursive limits. We want to know where these things are common and where unusual. Are they identifiable with our own categories of thought and language, or are they beyond description? Are they real or fantasy; routine or spectacle—or maybe both? Are such actions part of a moral and ethical system, or are they its antithesis? Can we realistically identify human behaviors as forms of evil; and can evil be understood in reference to the actions and deeds of human persons? Does anthropology carry a unique charge to report circumstances of evil to the academic community and to the entire world? Is evil—like violence, like madness, like suffering, like pain—a continuum? Political forecasters speak of a deterioration of living conditions under neoliberalism. There appears a “sense of declining fortunes, loss of optimism, and great insecurity” about the future. Ortner notes how these dark moods “must be included in any broad definition of ethnography” (2016, 55). An anthropology of evil is best situated within what Ortner has called a “dark anthropology.” Lives wrought with pain and suffering, violence and oppression “very often stand at the center of anthropological work” (Robbins 2013, 448). Engaging evil as an anthropological category implies recognizing evil as something more human than nonhuman. To speak of

unspeakable suffering and unmask the face of monstrous destructiveness is not an exoticizing move but a critical exercise in understanding what Jenkins (2015) calls “fundamental human processes.”

Yet, with noted exceptions (Parkin 1985; Clough and Mitchell 2001; Ter Haar 2007; Csordas 2013; van Beek and Olsen 2015), anthropologists have been wary of directly addressing evil as such, even while documenting evil or concepts of evil in ethnographic work. It is perhaps because the Christian idea of evil is so hegemonic that even though confronted by a thousand varieties of evil in the field, anthropologists are anxious that their perceptions might be skewed by the Judeo-Christian underpinning of rational thought, so anxious that they are tempted to discount the notion of evil altogether. This is not the case for philosophers, who are less shy of evil—and it is not a foregone conclusion as to whether philosophers are more or less in the thrall of Euro-American intellectual conventions (Badiou 2001; Bernstein 2002; Cole 2006; Dews 2008; Midgely 2001; Ricoeur 1986, 2007; Rorty 2001; Sheets-Johnstone 2008). Their approach, in part, pays close attention to the internal diversity of evil as an ethical, cosmological, ontological, and existential category. Amelie Rorty (2001) identifies multiple subcategories or varieties of evil, each of which expresses incommensurable concerns and has its primary place in a specific outlook, with distinctive preoccupations and questions, theories of agency and responsibility, all of which are historically, contextually, and semantically marked: abominations, disobedience, vice, malevolence, sin, wanton cruelty, immorality, corruption, harm, criminality, sociopathology. Rorty prefers to emphasize the specificity of these multiple forms of evil rather than treating it as a general category, and Lars Svendsen agrees that with respect to evil, “it’s a mistake to reduce a manifold of phenomena to one basic form” (2010, 82). He begins with Leibniz’s distinction among metaphysical evil inherent in the world’s imperfection, physical/natural evil that is suffering, and moral evil that is sin. He subcategorizes moral evil based on the type of motive involved: demonic evil for its own sake; instrumental use of evil means to accomplish a goal that may in itself be good, evil, or neither; idealistic evil perpetrated ostensibly in the name of some presumed good; and stupid or banal evil in the form of thoughtlessness or absence of reflection. Yet the question remains of whether specific forms of evil have something in common, and what we would call that something in common other than “evil.”

Anthropologists’ wariness about evil may have to do with the risk of essentializing a general category of such existential consequence. This is compounded by deep uneasiness that evil may be a

fundamentally or exclusively Christian concept (it is not) and hence inherently ethnocentric, or in a more nuanced sense by unease on the part of anthropologists of Judaeo-Christian background that they may be subconsciously susceptible to a hegemonic Christian idea. Indeed, the figure of Christian evil recurs as problematic in a variety of ways among the chapters of the present volume. For our purposes, it is necessary to observe not only that evil has a role in the imaginary institution of society (Castoriadis 1998), but also that it may have an inherently mythical component. Here, Paul Ricoeur's later essay on evil as a challenge to philosophy and theology is also relevant for anthropology. Ricoeur stresses the contrary but complementary features of sin and suffering in the existential structure of evil: the first is perpetrated and the second undergone, the first elicits reprimand and the second lamentation. At issue for anthropology is "the parallel demonization that makes suffering and sin the expression of the same baneful powers. It is never completely demythologized" (2007, 38).

Recognition of this is the first step in confronting evil from the standpoint of theoretical reflection, and not a reason to shy away from the topic. From a purely quotidian and relatively unmarked position, as Susan Neiman has observed, "Every time we make the judgment *this ought not to have happened*, we are stepping onto a path that leads straight to the problem of evil" (2002, 5). Evil was in question in the aftermath of the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755, and even that ought not to have happened in a good world, and reflection on which led to the modern understanding of natural disasters with no inherent moral content. What is of interest is that currently, more than three hundred years later, we are in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake of 2010 and the Nepalese earthquakes of 2015. Whereas the question after the Lisbon quake was how such evil could happen, in the present, it is not the quake itself that raises the question of evil. It is the fact that, given the capacities for humanitarian relief in contemporary twenty-first-century society as compared to eighteenth-century European society, we could allow the victims of these quakes to suffer for as long as they have in the aftermath. Hannah Arendt identified a banality of evil. This included Holocaust death camp operatives whose engagement with horrors of genocide saw only minimal levels of brutality even though their work produced body counts and sadistic bodily experiments. To these we can add the short attention span to natural disasters such as earthquakes or the myopia that keeps the suffering of displaced populations out of focus. Insofar as evil flows from the "thoughtlessness" of human agents and

their tools of hate and power, Arendt wrote, “What I propose is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.”

### **Evil as a Counterpoint in Morality**

Especially in the last decade, the place of morals and moral systems has evolved to become a central concern within anthropology. Recognition of morals as part of the social framework and as a legitimate topic for research and writing is provided within several recent pivotal and theoretical arguments. These include D’Andrade (1995); Fassin (2008, 2012); Stroeken (2010); Hallowell (1955); Pocock (1986); Wolfram (1982); Zigon (2008); Humphrey (1997); Overing (1985); Mayer (1981); Parish (1994); Heintz (2009); Laidlaw (2014); Faubion (2011); Lambek (2010); Robbins (2007, 2013); Csordas (2013); Keane (2016); Mattingly et al. (2018); and Kapferer and Gold (2018) to name just a few. Hallowell declared that human society consisted of not only social facts, but also of a moral order. Ethnographic investigation includes coming to terms with intentions, objectives, and motives as well as what people say, comprehend, and believe to be true: something identified as the actor’s “moral universe” (Overing 1985, 4). Howell claims that morals include reason, judgment, and ambiguity or confusion. Fortes uses the premise of the morality of the self by noting that the self includes also a recognition of the other or the “stream of social relations.” This interchange assumes the individual’s “volitional control” over his actions; and these actions mostly conform to social norms and values (Fortes 1987, 122). For Lambek (2000), people make routine assessments of their lives in reflection of ideas that are good. Signe Howell’s premise is that anthropology has always held the study of morals as a central focus with the aim of understanding comparative culture and ethics; however, there has been consistent reluctance to identify such concerns as an interest in morals (Humphrey 1997, 6). Howell cites as examples of the anthropology of morals the well-known studies of honor and shame in the Mediterranean and early concerns for the values of crime and custom in the Pacific. One conclusion drawn from these examples is that “humans everywhere are cognitively and emotionally predisposed towards moral sensibility” (1997, 10). We concur with these findings. We find evidence of this moral commonplace in the writings of numerous anthropologists. Social systems contain moral provisions and models for those living within a community or nation. Morality becomes a part of the individual

consciousness. For the sake of argument, we might add that morality also includes the acquired attitudes, emotional responses, and individual dispositions of the human person throughout their life span (Zigon 2008, 17). “Embodied morality” is not reviewed by continuous self-reflection. It is embedded in the habitus and done simply as an accepted course of action. Seeking to understand what is most basic to human actions also helps us focus on the foundational precepts of being human (Csordas 2013, 524).

James Laidlaw observes that anthropology has produced a significant number of excellent ethnographic accounts that make fundamental use of moral systems in their descriptive contents. However, though there are notable examples of a moral anthropology, these accounts remain unattached to a continuous stream of internal intellectual argument, such that there is “no anthropology of ethics . . . no sustained field of enquiry and debate. There is no connected history we can tell ourselves about the study of morality in anthropology” (Laidlaw 2002, 311). Laidlaw’s premise is that people’s conduct is shaped by intentional action in regard to the kind of person they think they should be or become; and this valuation is in conformity with “ideals, values, models, practices, relationships, and institutions that are amenable to ethnographic study” (2002, 327). Wendy James wrote in the 1980s: “Without the presumption of a level at which a conversation on some such fundamental moral principles can at least be sought, I do not see how the tasks of ethnography, and of analytical social anthropology, can be properly carried out” (James 1988, 153). The disciplinary absence may be due to perspectives of moral agency which have been associated more with populations in more complex societies. “The idea of ‘morality’ *per se* evokes the notion of personal consciousness and the autonomous agent: a figure too often assumed to belong only to our own age and to be quite incompatible with ‘earlier’ and other supposedly underdeveloped forms of society” (1988, 154). Lacking a clear definition of a locus of moral agency, ethnographic accounts of morals have not produced an “analytical framework for an approach to morals or ethics as such” (Laidlaw 2014, 14).

Yet a moral anthropology, or a study of local moral worlds, appears to be gaining momentum (Csordas 2013). Recent statements claim a moral turn in anthropology can be founded on the “construction of values, and those values’ existential implications.” A key premise of a “value-related practice in anthropology” is that it involves foundational concerns “with moral forces, but not necessarily in any moralistic sense” (Kapferer and Gold 2018, 8). The turn toward morals and a



humanistic anthropology also moves away from previous concerns of power and of modes of resistance in any political and mystical realm. Shifts in anthropology that engage moral discourse are largely driven in part by wider concerns of humanitarianism. Awareness has arisen in the literature regarding the brutality of violence and poverty, “the abjection and suffering of war, the inhumanities of state oppression,” and the indifference to outbreaks of terror. Anthropological voices speak against the brutality of oppression and in favor of humanitarian agendas. “Humanitarian discourses and ethics ameliorate the forces of inhumanity,” including global forces of techno-capitalism, war, and oppression (Kapferer and Gold 2018, 12–13).

By researching evil, we contribute theoretical and ethnographic support for such a moral analytical framework that is neither necessarily moralistic nor necessarily subject to a vigilante attitude that makes finger wagging attributions of evil. If “most people immediately understand what morality means and what a moral act is without needing definitions” (Fassin 2012, 5), then evil constitutes a portion of human moral thought and conduct, occupying the “negative aspect of any moral system” (Parkin 1985, 3). We recognize that morality infuses human interaction with codes and rules and symbols that sustain even extreme reaches of what it is like to be part of mankind, or the “delimitations of the human” (Pocock 1986, 18). We wish to draw special attention to situations in which evil is inherent in an act of human will and intentionality, particularly when the impact of evil is felt by persons, families, or communities—or where “evil appears as a direct manifestation of the human spirit” (Csordas 2013, 529). Whereas authors writing on moral systems in anthropology have largely passed over the subject of evil, a basic premise to this volume is that “evil is fundamentally implicated in morality and ethics, and all are bound up with meaning” (Csordas 2013, 526). We concur with Kleinman (2011) that personal experiences, including individual freedom and choice, may be active forces for altering moralities in society and even for creating moral crises. Indeed, moral crises and evil are properly viewed as part of the moral system, especially when considering the realm of life that is injurious, harmful, calamitous, disadvantageous, criminal, and which includes human suffering. Evil is often best comprehended when understanding the “boundaries of the good” (Parkin 1985, 3). In response to the query of whether evil is a dimension “undermining morality from below and outside or as intrinsic to morality in a foundational sense,” we favor the latter, since “if it wasn’t for evil morality would be moot” (Csordas 2013, 525).

From indigenous perspectives, evil may be a category of local thought and action, a moral “descent into the ordinary” (Das 2007, 15). Along with human suffering, evil is also a vital issue that “brings moral debate to the human costs exacted by our social arrangements, economic organization, cultural values, and modes of governance” (Wilkinson and Kleinman 2016, 3). By looking closely at the intersubjective fabric of quotidian living where evil often resides, we “become more fascinated by our mundane struggles to decide between competing imperatives or deal with impasses, unbearable situations, moral dilemmas and double binds” (Jackson 2013, 11). Put differently, it may be said that “anything that can be described in ethical terms involves people’s interactions with one another” (Keane 2016, 80). Yet it is often difficult to determine the exact moral framework of the actions of any particular individual. Morals are seldom neutral and, especially in complex circumstances, may be challenged or ignored. Thus, negotiation of the meaning of values and ethics is part of who people are and what they do or do not become. Engaging evil may be useful here since a moral anthropology considers realities of existential lives in conditions and settings of extreme variation. We wish to bring a wider narrative to the “richness of ethical experience that seems to speak to what cannot be said, what might or might not have happened, what might or might not happen, in ways that simply exceed and elude structures of meaning” (Dyring, Mattingly, and Louw 2018, 16).

Beidelman (1986, 201) argues this point from his perspective of living with the Kaguru in Tanzania:

Each Kaguru struggles to shape a meaningful and expressive world. . . . Social and psychic experiences are manifest in a series of dualistic tensions between public and private expression, conformity and individuality, compliance and subversion, and harmony and discord. The notions of imagination and morality . . . lie at the heart of these complex correspondences and discrepancies between society and individuals.

Evil enters here as a matter of homodicy rather than theodicy, where living is manifested more in experiential modes than in theocratic frameworks. Zande witchcraft is “not the sole agent of misfortune;” however, since witchcraft is so morally wrong and depraved, “it is the prototype of all evil” (Evans-Pritchard 1937, 56–57). One reason for this perspective is that witchcraft is a deliberately “causative factor in the production of harmful phenomena” in specific physical circumstances and within particular social networks (1937, 72). A

witch “cannot send out his witchcraft and leave it to find his victim for itself, but he must define its objective and determine its route” (1937, 36). Parkin claims, “our attempt to understand other peoples’ ideas of evil draws us into their theories of human nature: its internal constitution and external boundaries” (1985, 6). Beyond indigenous theories of human nature, for comparative purposes, evil can be seen as a constitutive confrontation with morality in an “immediate existential sense” (Csordas 2013, 525). In this sense, anthropology is positioned to provide a greater perspective on evil and moral systems. “Anthropological approaches that highlight the ‘experiential excesses’ of ethical life are especially suitable for exposing the ontological indeterminacy of the ethical domain. Many anthropologists would claim that investigations into the ‘actual’ or empirical are also investigations into the possible” (Dyring, Mattingly, and Louw 2018, 15).

Such reference points signal a move away from political economy and toward the idiosyncratic. Collective reckonings of evil, as in Zande, illustrate this trend. A broadened view of morality, “whether as a way of going about politics by finding evil to be eliminated, including evil people, is, then, part of a larger shift of focus from strategies of power and control to logics of value, all of which follows from the shift to the culturalist framework” (Friedman 2018, 184). Within that framework, the use of evil as an analytical concept may become a working tool within anthropology. In settings such as Azande, evil may provide a flexible moral code in a field of moral actions. This field is often composed of ambiguity and contradictions that involve “struggles and dilemmas that are born of human sociality itself, where partial and temporary agreements are all that is possible, where incompatible viewpoints are the norm, and where scarcity is a permanent condition” (Jackson 2015, 64).

Finally, community morals and religious systems provide explanations of evil. Evil itself implies “a workable set of ethical criteria, normative guides to govern our action” (Geertz 1973, 106). Questions of evil arise when people give meaning to the vicious and contradictory moments of living with pain and suffering, as opposed to the way life ought to have been. We encounter the “strange opacity of certain empirical events, the dumb senselessness of intense or inexorable pain, and the enigmatic unaccountability of gross iniquity” for which there is “no empirical regularity, no emotional form, and no moral coherence” (Geertz 1973, 107–8). Explaining such matters is not equally important in all cultures and societies. People wish to comprehend the meanings of specific evil occurrences and events rather

than any expanded explanation of evil on a wider moral platform. Yet morals are enmeshed within living agendas and social systems and within history. As such, morals present a challenge for anthropology to analyze and interpret; but analysis should come from within that experiential context and from history. For Geertz, the “problem of evil” is formed within a worldview involving “the actual nature of the destructive forces within the self and outside of it, of interpreting murder, crop failure, sickness, earthquakes, poverty, and oppression” in a manner that evokes modes of comprehending evil and suffering (1973, 130).

In this volume, chapters by Csordas and by Good address the issue of the place of evil as a viable analytical tool and legitimate concept within anthropology. Csordas claims that evil, minimally defined as malevolent destructiveness, is an inherent dimension of morality. Studies that reject the use of evil as a working construct may have a serious blind spot in examining moral and ethical values and their consequences in action within a culture, including our own. Proposing an anthropological homodicy as an alternative to theodicy, Csordas juxtaposes religious and psychoanalytic analyses of Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* to show how supernatural and human cultural phenomenologies of evil can be superimposed on the same scenario and how they can overlap. He also discusses cursing maledictions within Roman Catholic discourse. At least implicitly invoking demonic power, maledictions become vehicles of Satanic influence. They are more than just sinful and may require exorcism. Maledictions as human acts are thus situated at the intersection of culture and the cosmological. Byron Good’s chapter reviews the diverse perspectives and assumptions in Western thought that contribute to an understanding of evil. Providing a counterpoint to Csordas, Good critically and skeptically examines the viability of evil as an anthropological tool in a moral sense. He also looks at the decades’ long record of state violence and abuses in human rights in Aceh, Indonesia, as a test case to determine the value of the word *evil* as an analytical tool in coming to terms with such events. Good explores anthropological investigations and engagement and interrogates the possibility of moral judgment on what is observed. He asks, “To what end are we as anthropologists to use a language that implies moral judgment as an analytic frame?” His perspective opens consideration of the assumptions that allow anthropologists to assert a status among those qualified to make such judgments in situations such as the violence and trauma in Aceh.

## Chaos and Malevolence

Evil is often associated with persons or locales that are incomplete, unholy, unsanctified, or impure. Evil may be seen or unseen, apathetic, full of meaning or appearing entirely gratuitous. Evil may be without form or it may be strategic and cunning. It is mostly associated with unwholesomeness, filth, degradation, fragmentation, decay, defect, and imperfection (Csordas 2013, 527). In many cultures, evil beings or events are sinister, desecrated, and spoiled. Important events, objects, and places require protection and limited exposure to evil influences. Evil may be experienced as uncontrolled power and as full of ambivalent purpose (Geschiere 2013). It may also be transitory, as in Buddhist rituals of exorcism where demons exchange hierarchical order and powers with deities and for a brief time, evil is closely associated with what is pure (Kapferer 1983).

Evil persons are not only misguided or lacking benevolence; they are filled with aberration, moral failing, inexplicable malevolence, and deviance. They may be considered irredeemable in contrast to common criminals whose misdeeds are regarded as capable of rehabilitation. Evil is linked to persons whose existence and identity stand contrary to much of reality and truth. These are cruel beings, dedicating their existence to annihilation and destruction. They bring about dirty wars and death squads, massacres and terror, and their works are graphic, painful, and meaningful to all. Evil brings abandon to the life of the soul; it induces suffering and a degradation and humiliation that disrupt any desire to exist. Through evil, one may wish to never have been born. When criminal, their misdeeds are considered unspeakable, inciting notions of horror, such as child molestation, necrophilia, and genocide. The gravity of such actions compels heads of state, the ICC, or the United Nations to declare certain actions as crimes against humanity rather than as acts of war and modes of terror. Evil persons are often portrayed as having lives that “should not be.” These are persons who represent the “very worst of all badness.” This description of evil resonates with the idea that evil is “inversion of the ideal of order itself” (Pocock 1985, 47).

Some authors contend that paradoxes and ambiguities of evil become reality because of personal will or the intentionality of the person. Human intentions can create circumstances of privation and moral indigence that descend to the level of evil because of their severity. A lyrical rendition of this theme is given by John Milton as Paradise becomes lost to humans due to their first disobedience by

way of a forbidden tree, which brought “death into the world, and all our woe.” In such a scenario, the universe is often predisposed to both good and evil, and one of these powers becomes a distinct and experiential reality based upon the actions of humans in relation to one another. The example of the Dinka from East Africa illustrates how senselessness and avaricious intent thwarts the will of divinity and brings about the more selfish results of men and women. For the Dinka, an archetypical people experienced no death and had sufficient food to eat based on a daily allotment from Divinity. One day, while pounding millet, the woman decided out of greed to plant more millet than was permitted. Her inattention resulted in striking Divinity with a hoe. Now offended, Divinity retreated into the sky, severed the rope between heaven and earth, and left humans to contend with suffering, sickness, death, and laboring for food (Lienhardt 1961, 29). This scenario is repeated in Navajo where “chaos is the general state of affairs” in an existence known as Lower World, which happened before any contemporary time and space. The suffering and evil of primordial chaos persist in the current Navajo world and are captured within the realm of community living in which a range of moral options provides a basis for living and experience. “In such a context, it should come as no surprise that the ideal state of *hozho* is part of a continuum, the other end of which is *hochxo*, evil, ugly, worthless.” Life in the present is “orderly and operates according to rules of reciprocity” when the moral system is not disturbed through infractions of personal greed, lust, or volatility. This life stipulates “beauty, harmony, good, happiness, and everything that is positive”; and such values are known by all and are expected to be experienced as part of daily life (Frisbie 1987, 3–4). Violations of the cosmic order are inherently *hochxo*, or evil.

In Africa, evil is commonly associated with “wildness, deviance, terror, destruction, chaos, unbridled passions and sexual lust, and predatory forces. Evil effects or substances may be found in the barrel of a gun as well as in pureed vegetables and pulp cereal given to a young child” (Van Beek and Olsen 2015, 2). Malevolent beings, such as demons, witches, spirits, and so on, become the personification of evil and assert evil and nefarious intentions of ill will. Grace Harris captures the question of morality, sorcery, and geography as she describes Taita responses to witchcraft. “A sorcerer violating fundamental morality transgressed against human decency. A neighborhood full of undetected sorcerers was on the verge of ceasing to be a viable moral community” (Harris 1978, 29). When such horrendous and powerful forces become personified, intentional suffering of

others is also identified, defined, and understood. In turn, identifying and personifying evil allows the moral community to “engage them in dialogue and reflect on the boundaries of humanity” by calculating the very dimensions of evil (Parkin 1985, 23).

Evil rhetoric in Kaguru resembles what is found throughout the continent. “Belief in witchcraft is a mode of imagining evil, judged harmful, bad, and beyond any moral justification” (Beidelman 1986, 138). Kuranko witches are predatory and cannibalistic. They consume vital organs of their victims; and they channel away the life blood of victims through the back or neck. Witches are considered evil because they are seen to epitomize the worst in women and to bring about anxiety and weakness in men (Jackson 1989, 94). Each African scenario epitomizes how evil is personified; and then the evil entity is attributed with the capacity for evil or “wanton destructiveness,” which may also be “punishable by other humans and/or by divinities” (Parkin 1985, 21). The moral imagination constructs the witch as an inversion or negation of the moral concept of the person. This descriptive mode is active throughout Africa. It is a contextualizing mode of comprehending that which is reprehensible and bad enough to be called evil.

Intentional suffering is also a quality of modern genocide and political torture. Hinton’s definition of political terror and torture differs from genocide in that the latter presents a sustained attempt to annihilate a collectivity (Hinton 2002, 6). We may see all these aspects of cruelty, however, within a continuum of evil since they all involve repetitive intention to inflict pain and suffering in a way that is wantonly destructive. Wanton forms of destructiveness serve to remind us of the limitations of anthropology’s central precept, notably cultural relativism. In this volume, we seek an alternative position, one that allows anthropology to condemn the horrendous acts of brutality, political cruelty, and the evil of induced suffering. In her chapter on Turkish torture of Kurdish rebels, Nerina Weiss identifies the 1980s as a “period of barbarism.” Torture was linked to identity, nationhood, and heroism. It was also purposeful and intensely intersubjective. An example is given of a guard who deliberately attempts to break a victim (Yusuf) by falsely stating that, while in prison, the man’s wife has taken her own life by setting fire to their house. The fire also kills their four-month-old son. The guard then burns the only photo kept by the prisoner of his family. Yusuf’s breakdown involves the onset of symptoms of neuroses and severe illness. His therapist later describes the process as “*onskabsfuld* (evil), horrible, and horrendous” (Medical file of a Turkish male political activist, October 1985).

Medical anthropology provides illustrations of evil in this regard. When disease is given meaning like this, symptoms may be regarded as disruptive in a social sense as well as a personal sense. Relations may include spirits, ancestors, witches, and deities, as well as the network of ties to family and neighbors. Presumptions of “sent sickness” may prevail. Investigations into such events often identify a perpetrator, but they also seek out the meaning of the act itself. Why him as a victim? Or, why you as a culprit? Especially when the disease brings death, realities of sickness are very often identified as acts of evil. Such a “personification of evil” recognizes the intent of the perpetrator as a deliberate provocation of suffering and pain. Victims’ lives become broken and shattered. Human entities who are extended kin or community invoke the powers of witchcraft or sorcery. The result may be death and disease, but the mystically acquired power of known peers does the work of demons and malevolent spirits. Spirits may have the greater powers, whereas humans are often the vessels of wrath, misery, and destruction.

Olsen’s chapter notes that evil is a foundational principle for understanding Asante perceptions of some forms of disease, notably those that are identified in Western culture as modes of mental illness. Even more indicative of evil is the childhood disease known locally as *asram*. Symptoms of *asram* are nearly always delivered via witchcraft. But it is the intentionality of the witch that makes the deed particularly nefarious. Asante say of such illnesses that the child is the being who is most valuable to the future of the family and lineage; and thus the child’s death is most likely to bring the greatest measure of grief and suffering. Infant death also obliterates the anticipation that a life’s work will be fulfilled by that child, including the care of elderly parents. *Asram* is also particularly evil since it extinguishes all apprehension of *nkrabea*, which is the destiny of the being made by deity before the infant was born. As such, *asram* is an attempt to counter the work of Nyame (God) and also of the future. Due to the likelihood of infant illness and child mortality, evil remains an intermittent and recurring suspicious force within the lives of young couples and their families and neighbors. Those suffering may also be exposed to the “vulnerability of intimacy” (Geschiere 2013) and its associations with evil and witchcraft, as certain herbalists are perpetrators of *asram* in attempts to counter the disease by the sale of their herbs. Geschiere’s premise of the close associations between intimacy and witchcraft in Africa are seen in the Ghana example. Evil is ambiguous when it becomes manifest in relations of family. African witchcraft is found among kin or close neighbors. Yet relations of trust are constantly



shifting, making evil highly situational. Kin may represent amity; but they may also be the bearers of deep sorrow. Asante episodes of *asram* show how kinsmen are rarely completely outside the realm of evil.

The “motiveless evil” of South Asian mythology may also be captured in descriptions of sorcery in Sri Lanka. “The horror of torture, like that of sorcery, is the turning against the victim, as the instruments of pain, of all that is familiar, pleasurable, safe, and secure. . . . In both torture and sorcery, rationality and reason are engaged to the service of painful destruction.” When such misery threatens a person, “experiences of sorcery indicate the transmutation of a life world into a space of dangerous and threatening realities and ultimately into a space of death” (Kapferer 1997, 192). Evil is a declaration “on the other,” claims Obeyesekere. The word invariably implies reprehensible conduct; and once applied, we presume those persons may revisit that behavior “on us.” Obeyesekere’s chapter invokes Kant’s notion of “radical evil” to portray characters whose acts are so heinous that their course of action lacks all “guilt, remorse, repentance, and conscience.” They thus acquire the character of “resentment,” a term taken from Nietzsche to pertain to “motiveless evil,” such as seen in the character Iago in Shakespeare’s *Othello* or Angulimala in Buddhist Sri Lankan myths the *Suttas*. With the idea of a motiveless evil at large in the world, we are close to coming full circle back to chaos. “Resentment” is experienced within those who have committed atrocious and extensive modes of evil: killings, rape, and the like. Buddhism frames dilemmas such as: What sorts of Karma await such evil persons? Why do sinners prosper and the good suffer? Why must the good face such disappointment and strife? In the long term, Karma may ultimately claim the Evil soul. But the process is long, and may entail multiple rebirths. Such mythical tales may also have their parallels in the contemporary world when the tyrant thrives while the just man remains a perpetual victim. Yet evil is no less present when “good” forces descend into the use of torture and brutality to punish those associated with an evil head of state, such as Saddam Hussein, Efrain Rios Montt, Juvenal Habyarimana, Charles Taylor, and Muammar Gaddafi.

## Divinities and Demons

How does evil exist in a world created and overseen by a benevolent deity? Reconciling a merciful or loving God with a world of suffering, evil, and death has caused confusion, disbelief, and indifference

toward that Deity. The problem of theodicy implies that there is a “source to the victim’s indisposition” or predicament of evil, implying there is an “agent responsible” for suffering and pain (Kiernan 1982, 288). Where such a Being is omnipotent, or is known to embody sympathy, the perceived contradictions are especially puzzling. Robin Wright describes the lives of Baniwa in Northwest Amazon, including a description of the world of humans. This world is “irredeemably evil” in that it is comprised of “wicked people” (*maatchikwe*) and because it is a place of pain (*kaiwikwe*) and a place of rot (*ekukwe*). Much of the world’s abasement is due to the abundance of witches and sorcerers. They contaminate the world and make it intrinsically a flawed place of existence. The world and all of human existence are “flawed by evil, misfortune, and death” (Wright 2004, 85).

One intriguing answer to this line of philosophical inquiry comes from the Nupe of northern Nigeria. Like nearly all other African cosmologies, the Nupe are monotheistic. God is all-powerful and all-knowing. God is literally the creator of all things, including evil. “Good and evil are both laid into the same creation, as are the various sources of evil—malevolent spirits, disease, witchcraft” (Nadel 1954, 12). In this setting, “the deficiencies of the world are taken for granted” rather than as a source of puzzlement and dread. “The only problem in Nupe theology is the actual power of evil, not its origin” (Nadel 1954, 12). And the presence and potency of evil are assumed because of the distance of Deity from the world created by Deity. For the Nupe, the question is not why does evil exist or why did God not create a more perfect world. Instead, moral dilemmas surround the fact that the distance between humans and God too often leads to suffering, disease, and death. Why is God so unresponsive to the human condition? For the Nupe, the answer is because God has only limited interest in the world and its problems. The Nupe world was created with an implied potential for evil; and evil things “slip into it by chance.” Thus, Deity created a world that included a possibility for evil, and “the actual evils are a consequence of the ‘world left to itself,’ that is, of accident and unpredictable circumstances” (Nadel 1954, 36).

A similar perspective comes from Malaysian Sufism. Orthodox Muslims proclaim that everything that exists comes from God. Without God, nothing exists, and God is in everything equally and wholly. The entirety of this divine scenario includes belief and devotion. But it includes also treason, sin, infidelity, and evil (*jabat*). The creation and explanation of evil are circular in Muslim Malaysia. “Evil as a cosmic force invades and causes suffering and so explains it” (Bousfield 1985, 206). They do evil because they are created with an

inherited ability to be evil. Evil exists because it was meant to exist. “The destructive intentions both initiate Evil and are initiated by it” (Bousfield 1985, 206).

The relation between evil and divine will is played out within several of our chapters. Littlewood’s chapter describes Mother Earth, a psychotic cult-leader in Trinidad who identifies herself with multiple personalities—including deity—and who has gathered a community of followers that likewise identify with her pathological personality and set of laws and rules. “Mother Earth is Nature. She is the Devil, the Black, the Mad, the Left-Handed, the Witch, the Naked, the victim of Interference” (Littlewood 1993, 134). Mother Earth’s declarations and persona display what “should not be” as they proscribe a self-imposed mantle to “combat mistaken doctrines of our existing religions.” She is the Devil and “represents Life and Nature, in opposition to the so-called Christian God” and in defiance of the principles of Science and Death. She opposes churches, prisons, education, money, politics, urban life, contemporary morals, and well-informed opinions. Her personal revelations disclose the End of the world, where her own powers will make the blind see, the crippled walk, and will implement cures for all diseases. Mother Earth is an “inversion” to order in all her exactitude. She and her followers revere the “left” while God inhabits the “right.” “Bad” is exchanged for good; and conventional obscenities have become the common lexicon. This vocabulary centers upon the whims of a woman who, in flesh and blood, is regarded by her community as “the source of all life.” Evil is empowering in the sense where it inhabits space and structures that are contrary to a life lived otherwise.

We see the theme of the ubiquity and possible omniscience of evil realized within the lives and moral framework of Yoruba migrants in two Pentecostal congregations in London. Coleman’s chapter brings awareness to the flexibility of evil, including its “ability to inhabit every nook and cranny of people’s lives, and indeed to emerge in contexts where variations of excess, imperfection, and incompleteness are uncovered.” Ambiguous evil is found in Christian populations of Yoruba in London, where it expands to fill a globalizing moral world of Nigerians, Pentecostals, and those living in new settings of immigration. Evil reflects attitudes derived from history, culture, and the new realities of British life as experienced by those who are both outsiders by origin, and insiders by legal and political appropriation. It becomes a versatile trope of discourse about the demonic, with a character that transforms the moment as it responds to a plurality of possible applications and meanings. Open accusations of witchcraft evil in

Nigeria become more circumspect in London as immigrants adapt to a Christian community that frames evil and the Devil in ways that may be more restricted. Evil enters Pentecostal practices not only as a topic of frequent and expressed concern but also as part of a more general morality that is an inherent “modality of action” (Csordas 2013, 535). Church congregations in London promote an altered sense of community. “Intimacy brings not only protection but also danger” (Geschiere 2013, xxii); and new intimacies stimulate a new, Christian discourse about who is evil. Coleman’s chapter shows us a shifting geography of evil that allows its terms to be applied to changing times, places, and populations.

Evil spirits and conceptions of evil have become everyday features of Islam in southern Niger. The moral code resonates with a “demonization of local spirits” who advocate theft, immorality, and other loathsome actions. Masquelier’s chapter reveals a transitioning Muslim cosmology, including a proliferation of spirits whose character has evolved from the mysterious and wild in the 1980s. Spirits are known to inflict infertility, paralysis, and skin rashes upon victims. Spirits today are more deliberate in attacking children. Spirits especially attack young girls who ignore religious injunctions and leave their bodies uncovered. These girls thereby experience a threatened sexuality. Demonization of spirits by Muslim clerics does not marginalize these evil entities. Rather, they assume a more active, if ambiguous, place in community life. Evil spirits now take up a more robust identity within a continuing religious crusade between God who is good and Satan who is evil.

Ambiguous and duplicitous characters who personify evil are demonstrated in Beatty’s chapter on Indonesian history, culture, and contemporary shadow plays. The goddess Durga gives birth to Kala, an evil figure who embodies misfortune and bad luck. Kala and evil are eventually expelled from the cosmos. But in the process, modes of disorder, chaos, and calamity befall human communities swept up in her wake. In more recent times, the powers of the state emerged within the scenario of this morality play. Witch-type figures have assumed evil personas of history and mythology. Mob violence, mutilation, and body dismemberment are the results of a contemporary politics of state terror. The characters assume the destructiveness of Kala’s armies as the political ideology of the Right asserts a violent agenda in attempts to vanquish evil foes of the Left. Suharto himself becomes incorporated into the mythological charter, and new characters of evil appear on the fringes of the everyday: headhunters, tricksters, monsters that hunt the shadowless noonday. In this scenario, ambiguous

evil characters of contemporary politics correspond to evil characters of history and drama.

The personalization of evil has broad application. Nietzsche's despair captured this breadth when he said, "Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?" In this vein, Julie Peteet draws attention to a "misery committee," which limits food intake for Palestinians, imposing "excessively calibrated punishment and deprivation." When asked about his condition, one Gaza resident responded, "I am breathing but not alive." A living, personified being representing all forms of evil may be superfluous in this form of living death. In the post-Enlightenment West, where rationality, skepticism, evidence, and proof form much of the worldview and consciousness of the self, the notion of personified evil carries less impact for an individual's moral career. Explicit evil appears to be limited mostly to analogy or symbol, while implicit evil is instantiated in mute existential despair.

## **Structural and Political Violence**

Is evil part of the quotidian world surrounding us? Is evil ordinary? Violence and suffering are found in the home as well as the warzone. Sometimes they exist in both settings at once, as for the Salvadoran women discussed by Jenkins (2015) who were often refugees from the brutality of the civil war and the brutality of their husbands, as political and domestic violence amplified one another in a cycle of extreme distress. Suffering and deprivation are part of a daily routine for large global populations experiencing lower ends of economic and income strata. Paul Farmer has articulated how violence is embedded in the structure of social relations insofar as "social inequalities based on race or ethnicity, gender, religious creed, and—above all—social class are the motor force behind most human rights violations. In other words, violence against individuals is usually embedded in entrenched structural violence" (2003, 219). Of the 31,000 children under age five who die each day globally, over half die because of hunger-related causes. Other similar numbers show that poverty kills by limiting health care access. Realities of structural violence negatively impact the daily lives of millions. This includes examples of AIDS cases in Nigeria, where the morality of the disease illustrates the deepening gulf of income inequalities, modernity, and new wealth (Smith 2014).

Can some violence be identified as evil? Modes of structural violence and poverty include the world's greatest extremes of disease and

mortality, lack of education, homelessness, powerlessness in resources and mobility, “a shared fate of misery, and the day-to-day violence of hunger, thirst, and bodily pain” (Kleinman 2000, 227). Parkin notes, “Suffering may be culturally defined, but is never lacking. The predicaments are therefore many” (Parkin 1985, 23). Anthropologists claim that some populations make a personification of evil, showing evil to be the result of a named perpetrator with an identifiable victim—an individual or a community. Varying modes of excess, depravation, and even disease may be the results. A scenario of evil intent and personal suffering makes for familiar struggles among humans and also between humans and spirits or God. Intentions aside, what is to be made of those predicaments in anthropology where known persons and communal living constantly embrace suffering and pain, death and decay, abandonment and loss? This “space of death” has itself become a kind of moral struggle with perpetual uncertainty about life or death, health or sickness, with increasing degrees of uncertainty. Anthropology now lives with that space; we seek to understand its place in history and within a global political economy.

While most forms of evil involve violations of individuals and collective bodies, not all violence is evil. Evil does not exist solely in terms of graphic and physical abuse, assault, or infliction of pain. It includes assaults on the meaning of life and death, on agency, on personhood and dignity. Evil attacks the ontological security of the victim’s attachment to the world. Cannibalism, kidnapping, disappearances, dissections, sadism, sexual abuse, domestic violence, torture, containment, immobility, extinction, and annihilation may be regarded as examples. There are many social and political realities that render ordinary people vulnerable, wounded, and afraid. In times of political chaos or natural disasters, people disappear, and fears and allegations of kidnapping and murder for organs proliferate. They surface from the “political social imaginary”—where state bio-power and necro-politics occupy a zone between the real and the imagined.

Recent accounts of violence call for “anthropological witnessing.” Scholarly distance in the name of cultural analysis and relativism may be criticized. In those episodes where the ethnographer is a witness to torture, rape, ethnic killings, hate crimes, child abuse, ethnic violence, victim eradication, and the like, the witness is called upon to render of voice of condemnation within their writing. Academic and scientific accounts should yield to broader descriptions of violence as modes of terror. State sanctioned violence and terror are included in this equation. State killings and violence by Rios Montt in Guatemala, the on-going slaughters in El Salvador, and the Killing Fields of Cambodia

are examples of where anthropology has played its hand in exposing the terror of the state. A state killing apparatus often works in times when the larger population is “immunized by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil in order to protect it against the risk” of wider encroachments from a minority group. Such myth-building, says Nagengast (2002), serves to identify the offending population, what they have done to offend, and what the state must do to eradicate the problem. Authors in the present volume claim that such occasions of state violence may be reasonably identified as circumstances of evil due to the purposeful plan to cause suffering and to bring about the annihilation of one community by the state.

Ordinary evil as structural violence is abundant in the lives of squatters and sharecroppers who inhabit sugar plantations around Alto do Cruzeiro in northeast Brazil. Political terror, oppressive social conditions, and poverty have a deep impact on the body and its functions. The aftermath of colonial farming and the more recent military dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s rendered the northeast as a “zone of abandonment” (Biehl 2005). For those at the miserable end of Brazilian political economy (Scheper-Hughes 1992, 229–30), the impact of violence—including tactics of dirty wars—is both devastating and routine. Ordinary evil in Brazil’s Northeast is seen through structural violence: military tactics include the disappearance and targeting of subversives and agitators of the state. Such events have become routine and expected. “Among the people of the Alto, disappearances form part of the backdrop of everyday life and confirm their worst fears and anxieties—that of losing themselves and their loved ones to the random forces and institutionalized violence of the state.” These circumstances created a moral environment of emotional indifference at the sudden death of young children, such that mothers do not mourn the death of a child unless the child reaches an older age, an age that is not so strongly associated with the politics of poverty, death, and disease. Meanwhile, people generally “keep their peace despite the everyday violence of drought, hunger, sickness, and unnecessary death” (Scheper-Hughes 1992, 507–8).

In a review of decades of Apartheid, Adam Ashforth identifies the mechanics of the South African state as enacting modes of power, one of which was evil in its intentions to inflict pain and suffering. The state murdered, segregated by race, and forced legal separation and inaccessibility to power of millions of native South Africans. In fact, the “system was evil. . . . For to name evil is to identify power, the power to cause harm, and the attribution of evil to a political system is not independent of the modes of attributing evil to the other powers

that shape the fortunes of everyday existence. When these powers are also invisible, epistemological problems proliferate” (Ashforth 2015, 373). Apartheid evil was an everyday matter, the quotidian source of essentially all forms of misfortune which had negative impact upon black people. “No one doubted that the System was evil, it was spoken of as a generalized source of suffering and misfortune” (Ashforth 2005, 268).

Julie Peteet’s chapter in this volume claims that evil is found also within the routine and within structural configurations without always being “excessively violent.” It may be revealed in “mundane quotidian acts of subjugation, degradation, and petty violence” that are found in Palestinian relations with Israel. Israeli modes of power create perceptions of the Palestinian that include irrational, pathological, and unlawful. The state reinforces modes of subordination and hierarchy that “infantilize and humiliate to the point of despair.” Knesset decisions, she claims, create a schema that epitomizes Palestinian agendas and political action as “irrational, pathological, and beyond the pale of lawful response” and involves an abandonment of human rights. These tactics thereby legitimize a severity in administrative dominion, one that presumes “responses to the evil nearby.”

There is a point at which structural and political violence shade into one another, where everyday violence becomes overt armed conflict, and at worst becomes routine as in contemporary Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Colonial and post-colonial political forces become active vectors of violence and evil during years of civil war between FRELIMO and RENAMO in Mozambique (Englund 2002, 2006). Social and economic elite display animosity, indifference, duplicity, and self-aggrandizement within the political sphere. Leaders who began the Civil War on one side of the conflict became aligned with the opposite side because of cleavages in ethnicity and within forces of a rising national economy. Self-serving and duplicitous public officials became the foundation of rumors of massive levels of cholera within the water supply, the killing of school children, wide extractions of human blood from patients in public hospitals, and the trade in body parts and blood for money on the international market. An economy of death soon reappeared. Corpses of the dead were then used to repay foreign donors all interest on the national debt. The outcome was the result of war and its aftermath, economic forces imposed by outside foreign agents, a rising democratic landscape, and perceptions of the state as an actor based on its own self-interests.

Evil in everyday actions is vividly portrayed in the chapter by Perez, who claims evil “as an obscuring mechanism to acts of



violence” since it “challenges our hope that the world makes sense.” Violence in Mexican border towns was historically less episodic and spectacular and more systematic and every day. The “landscape of evil” encompassed a public space of well-established modes of suffering: rape, torture, murder, and human-trafficking. Also common to the region were malnutrition and poverty. Members of renegade political groups and labor organizations disappeared. Perez argues that Ciudad Juárez may be identified as a contemporary “death zone,” where “the politics of civility and democratic conflict have been erased.” Ciudad Juárez is also synonymous today with Narco violence and death.

If “evil refers to various ideas of imperfection and excess seen as destructive” (Parkin 1985, 23), and if excess and its trepidations are “represented via the complex and often horrific imagery of evil” (Mitchell 2001, 3), what illustrates the excess and imperfection of evil more than genocide and the Holocaust? Or human trafficking and slavery? Or dirty wars? Or state terror? In these cases, evil becomes invisible to the perpetrator or community of killers because of the perceived moral necessity for killing. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004, 2) have argued that violence “defies easy categorization.” It may be sudden, or well planned. Violence may be state-sanctioned, or it may be contrary to the laws of the state. Violence may be headline news, or it may be invisible to the entire population. Thus, the everyday violence of infant mortality, slow starvation, disease, despair, and humiliation that “destroys social marginalized humans with even greater frequency are usually invisible or misrecognized.” Moreover, most “violence is not deviant behavior, not disapproved of, but to the contrary is defined as virtuous action in the service of generally applauded conventional social, economic, and political norms” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, 5).

Political and economic developments often give rise, historically, to questions of exclusion and even possibly eradication. Eliminating the problem population through torture and killing has sometimes been the presumed resolution. Peacetime violence, including small wars and invisible genocides, is no less excessive and evil. The range of excess and evil related to killing and forms of violence constitute what Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois have termed a genocidal or violence continuum. This continuum “refers to the ease with which humans are capable of reducing the socially vulnerable into expendable non-persons and assuming the license—even the duty—to kill, maim, or soul-murder” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, 19). Recent publications on the ethnography of violence show that violence, while

shocking and alarming, may certainly have a normative place within society and society's moral system. Violence is as cultural as other common acts in society, such as political elections or weekend sport. The reality of a cultural bedrock provides the act of violence with its power to create havoc. It is what makes it so disturbing.

## Conclusion

Authors in this volume address a subject much too long excluded from wider anthropological discourse. Evil has been avoided because its presumed associations with Western history and Christian society are loaded with social baggage. Disengaging from those contexts appeared too difficult. Other anthropologists claim evil belongs in the realm of metaphysics and should remain unobserved. They argue that research focus should remain on acts of brutality, such as violence, rape, and murder. These concepts are sufficient to portray the realities of cruelty. Evil has been denied and rejected by anthropologists as an indefensible subject of study rather than embraced and highlighted as a human reality within the purview of anthropology. The range of topics in this volume supports a broader application of the concept in anthropology. Insofar as evil and moral behavior very often imply one another, we affirm that the topic has value as anthropologists write of moral systems. Evil certainly defines the boundaries of humanity; and it distinguishes ex-human and post-human from the bestiary of other creatures. Realities of unresolved warfare, brutality, senseless death, dull violence, sorcery, and mystical harm and suffering demand anthropological attention because they exist within our own orbit of experience. We can then ask: Do we find in the attribution of evil "the other" who is also ourselves?

We do not anticipate this volume will put an end to the challenges in anthropology of glossing behavioral meanings and translating linguistic elements from different cultures with the word "evil." We certainly have no vested interest in making this process an easy one. Translation of cultures endures as the work of anthropology no matter what theory may remake its horizons. We do remain convinced that a moral anthropology will increasingly refine its work at the nexus of judgement and human experience on the one hand and political economy and power relations on the other. As a sustaining framework in individual and community involvement and knowledge, moral anthropology calls for a fuller comprehension of moral systems as they are played out in life stories of gender, violence,

terror, witchcraft, myth, religion, and so forth. Operative within such systems, and included as integral to moral codes, is evil.

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