

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Otero, Marcelo. *Les fous dans la cité. Sociologie de la folie contemporaine.* Montréal, Québec: Les Éditions du Boréal, 2015. 345 pp., \$27.95, paper (9782764624036)

Building on his previous work *L'ombre portée. L'individualité à l'épreuve de la dépression* (2012), Université du Québec à Montréal professor Marcelo Otero, has made a strong contribution to the sociology of mental illness with his new book *Les fous dans la cité. Sociologie de la folie contemporaine*. Addressing the issue of when to accommodate, displace or dispose of those grappling with psychiatric ailments, Otero seeks to understand how mental illness is a unique and separate social problem (14). He questions what seems so problematic about how those with psychopathologies conduct themselves and govern their lives in the Canadian city of Montréal. In this study, discrimination, exclusion, poverty, legalities, psychiatric interventionism and characteristics of those with mental illnesses are examined.

This book has two major contributions. First, it fills a gap in the sociological literature of mental illness, rehabilitating the author's conception of "civil insanity." Otero notes that the mentally ill are rarely institutionalized nowadays, and as a result remain central to civil life in Montréal. In this context, the author examines public and institutional reactions, behaviours and policies geared toward those suffering from psychopathologies. Second, the author challenges the effectiveness of mechanisms enabling direct and prophylactic management of those determined to be mentally ill in this underexplored French-Canadian setting.

Written in French, the book contains eight chapters, which draw on empirical studies, social theory, historical sources and legal studies. Sociologists of deviance and critical theorists will appreciate the introduction and the first chapter, where medical, psychiatric and other practices, such as forced institutionalization, restraint and measures of social control are discussed. Currently, under P-38 provincial legislation, individuals with psychopathologies can be held against their will if they are deemed to pose a danger to themselves or to others (43). Otero suggests that Montréal has instituted "social requirements" that prescribe how all citizens "should" embrace normality and accept-

ability in urban life (53-54). To ensure social stability, political, sanitary and security policies have been introduced to manage those with mental illnesses. Yet sharp contrasts and singularities surrounding the conduct of the psychiatrically ill create a normative problem for the ethos of conformity: they confront and antagonize social behaviours designated as “normal” and acceptable (53-54).

The second chapter explores how the mentally ill can pose a threat to society or others. Psychiatrists exercise symbolic and formal power and a commanding association between psychiatry and some lawyers persists (55-59). Based on court orders, institutionalization is primarily initiated by local clinics, but also several community resources such as the police, lawyers, Internet alerts and hospitals (74). Research indicates that in 97.4% of cases studied in 2007, Montréal judges ruled in favour of forced psychiatric hospitalisation (69). Otero describes how forced institutionalization is accomplished, citing rhetorical strategies of those who initiate the process and present their argument to judges.

The third chapter considers socio-demographics that encompass the mentally ill. The author considers why those with psychopathologies are regarded differently from their “normal” counterparts. They are exposed to discrimination, stigmatization and exclusion, creating enduring poverty for many. When requests for psychiatric evaluations are compared by area in the city of Montréal (106-113), a relationship is established between impoverished parts of the city and demands for evaluations.

The next three chapters question why the psychiatrically ill pose a problem for some people in Montréal. Chapter four examines why mental illness is seen as a separate and unique social problem. The author suggests that negative treatment and perceptions originate from atypical, yet legitimate behaviours inherent to psychopathological individuals. Here, a link between the “social problematic” of societal conditions for the mentally ill and their embodied “disturbed psyche” is suggested, giving rise to Otero’s notion of “civil insanity” (145-147).

The fifth chapter examines what Otero calls the “troubled self”, alluding to psychiatric frames of mind and singular characteristics inhabiting the mentally ill, where social manifestations such as “bizarre”, “menacing” and “violent” behaviours or attitudes (159-163) are observed and used to justify institutionalization (159). He argues that society will protect its values, intervening through the association of law (tribunals), coercion (police) and science (psychiatry) (162). Moreover, security and psychiatry are part of the sociological aspects

of psychopathology: both have more in common with political ideology than with upholding the common good.

Later chapters connect the role of mental illness to conflicts within families. “Problematic situations” associated with impulsiveness, agitation and lack of self-control (237) are common, illustrating the association between the social (“social problematic”) and mental (“disturbed psyche”) dimensions of psychiatric illnesses in the family context (238-243).

The final chapter considers the issue of those amongst the mentally ill who refuse, neglect or cease taking prescribed medication (273-274). Although P-38 legislation permits compulsory institutionalization, it cannot impose involuntary treatment (275). Alluding to research by Emmanuelle Bernheim, the author notes that the “majority of judges affirmed being incapable of defining the notion of inaptitude” (276) of the presumed mentally ill, noting that they must be capable of consciously and wilfully exercising their free will to consent to psychiatric treatment (276). “Inaptitude” remains the fundamental legal notion at the core of such courtroom litigations between opposing lawyers and, ultimately, judge’s rulings on whether or not to forcefully institutionalize an individual. Furthermore, the absence of defendants in court (279), the rarity of counter psychiatric experts (278), the limited time to build a defence (281) and short hearings (279) influence outcomes, generally against the interests of those facing institutionalization. Advocating for alternative treatment, the author posits that the psychiatrically ill are more dangerous to themselves than to other members of society (298). In the concluding chapter, Otero reiterates that psychopathologies cannot exist without considering society’s implication (300), while also challenging the validity of psychiatric diagnoses (304).

Overall, Otero’s book is thoughtfully crafted. Nonetheless, the author’s ambitions are both his strength and occasionally his Achilles heel: his detailed accounts sometimes come at the expense of a more in-depth theoretical framework. Some chapters also seem descriptively long. Nevertheless, these substantive parts remain important and necessary for overall comprehension of the issue. Despite minor limitations, Otero’s book is essential for readers – both students and academics – interested in cutting-edge critical sociology of mental illness, contextualized in the Canadian city of Montréal. I hereby recommend it most highly.

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