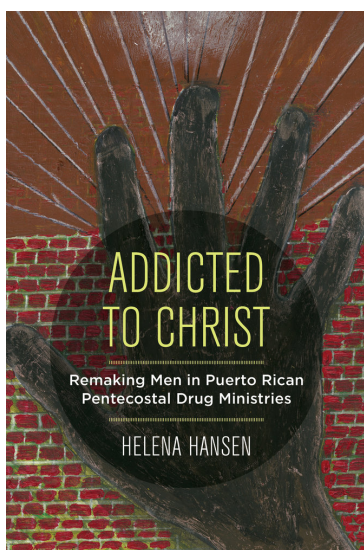


## Book Review

Hansen, Helena. 2018. *Addicted to Christ: Remaking Men in Puerto Rican Pentecostal Drug Ministries*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

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As a PhD-holding anthropologist *and* a double-board certified physician specializing in general as well as addiction psychiatry, Helena Hansen is an analytical force-to-be-reckoned-with. I first became familiar with her work while still a graduate student at the University of Washington, where she came to deliver grand rounds on the intersection of pharmaceutical marketing and Whiteness in the treatment of opioid use disorder. Since then, I have hungrily devoured anything she has had her hands on. Hansen has consistently impressed me with her keen eye for symbolic work and her ability to present holistic descriptions of the human experience that simultaneously surprise me with new insight and resonate with my own experiential knowledge, with things I have long known to be true but never singled out and bracketed as such. From one ethnographer to another, I can honestly think of no higher praise.

I have come to expect strong work from Hansen, and, in this regard, *Addicted to Christ* did not disappoint. It is an occasionally surprising, frequently touching, deeply honest ethnography about substance use and selfhood in evangelical communities of Puerto Rico. Hansen's rich ethnographic prose introduces readers to an evangelical street ministry called Victory Academy, which, like the many other street ministries in and around the city of Ponce on the southern coast of Puerto Rico, is a residential center as well as an active faith community with social and economic ties across the city. Through an intriguing series of political events, in which Puerto Rico's leaders undertook major healthcare reforms yet declined to

professionalize ‘addiction’ treatment by mandating minimum standards of care (detailed in Chapter 3), street ministries like Victory Academy developed a de facto monopoly on the management of chemically dependent bodies, accepting new residents in need of recovery from desperate families, underfund jails, and punitive court systems alike.

Early in her analysis, Hansen observes that the dominant biomedical paradigm of ‘addiction’ treatment, which largely consists of pharmaceutical intervention designed to ‘disrupt the chemical reactions at neuroreceptors that consolidate memories and facilitate learning of new cues’ (p. 38), fails to account for ‘the ways in which human subjects shape their own external and internal environments to *create new cues*’ (p. 38, emphasis mine). In other words, how are individuals on the receiving end of treatment and recovery efforts empowered to create their own narratives of transformation, and how do specific understandings of what ‘addiction’ really is open up or close off different possibilities for their future worldviews and their future selves?

The ministry staff at Victory Academy are wholeheartedly dedicated to ministering to ‘addicts’ and assisting them with their recovery and ultimate re-birth as spiritually-strong Christians. Through the course of her study, however, Hansen finds that the content of these ‘addiction’ treatment programs (like so many—if not all?—treatment programs) are driven by everything but the ‘addiction’ itself. At Victory Academy, ‘addiction’ is not a disease. To borrow a phrase from George Canguilhem, it is an anomaly—one that arises out of frayed ties in the social fabric and wreaks havoc on those afflicted as well as the surrounding community. Thus, when the leaders of the ministry act in ways that intervene on an individual’s ‘addiction,’ they also aim to intervene on the way in which society relates to itself, in which wholeness and personhood and dignity are created from within (or from God), in which ‘the remaking of relatedness, authority, and identity’ (p. 134) open the doors for a new, stronger Puerto Rico forged by its new, stronger, Christian Puerto Ricans. ‘Addiction,’ then, is taken up by Victory Academy and other street ministries as an impetus for social transformation: for gender work, for boundary work, for the construction of identities and worldviews commensurate with evangelical ideology. The goal of recovery is not simply recovery; the goal is the formation of an entirely new habitus custom made for a world re-enchanted.

The Christian conversion process and the ‘addiction’ recovery process are, as a consequence, one and the same. New arrivals to the ministry go immediately to a semi-closed ward where they are expected to endure detoxification with no medication assistance or palliative care. In the eyes of the ministry, the pain of withdrawing from chemical dependency ‘cold turkey’ is a key step in the recovery process; pain allegedly makes one stronger by increasing the capacity to be patient and delay pleasure or relief. Detoxification is, therefore, a liminal state of conversion: these residents have come to the ministry, and thus are no longer of the world; yet they are not yet ‘clean’ and are not yet part of the daily life of the ministry. Experiencing withdrawal is celebrated as a ‘voluntary’ tribulation that bonds

the converts together through shared experience and practice. In an odd twist on Weber's notion of the protestant ethic (what Hansen in Chapter 2 smartly calls a re-enchantment of the protestant ethic), withdrawal is part of the healing process in a place where 'being healed' means willingly embracing physical and material poverty to enable spiritual gain.

According to Hansen's observations at Victory Academy, this re-enchantment of the protestant ethic can be a powerful and intoxicating discourse for contemporary residents of Puerto Rico. 'Addicts' at the ministry experience extreme social marginalization in a U.S. protectorate already burdened by economic, political, and democratic isolation on a national as well as inter-national scale. The ministry deprecates of the kind of material wealth and mobility that this marginalization denies in favor of a spiritual livelihood that privileges direct and personal interaction with the sacred. It thus presents new converts with a world-wide imagined community of Pentecostals that is able to transcend the oppression and exclusion that defines Puerto Rico's neo-colonial, post-industrial, economically fragile present. The ministry creates ties, distributes resources, and generates meaningful opportunities for redemption, respect, and social mobility for members who were denied these things outside of the church.

And yet the successes of the 'ex-addict' converts at Victory Academy always seemed somehow fleeting. The first half of the book, a zealous crescendo of storytelling that invites readers to embrace with hope the full potential of these street ministries to transform social lives and redeem personhoods through a locally-generated praxis, is followed by a more sober examination of how the most seemingly successful converts at Victory Academy have fared in the afterlives of their recovery. Women struggled to gain authority in the ministry, as its philosophies were egalitarian in name but patriarchal in content. Men were challenged by the absence of close family ties outside of Victory Academy, quickly faltering in their ability to uphold Christian ideals. Poverty, stigma, and obligations to provide for those they left behind brought many 'ex-addicts' back into proximity with the narcotics-fuelled black-market economy they had tried to separate themselves from in the first place. Conversion, Helena observes, is always 'an uncertain negotiation' (p. 134).

*Addicted to Christ* closes by bringing the reader full circle back into the biomedical psychiatric service where Hansen has worked as a physician in New York. Having traded her long skirts for a white jacket, the fierce southern sun for chillier climes, Hansen nevertheless sees echoes of the self-transformation her Puerto Rican informants sought at Victory Academy in the patients whose opioid use disorder she was helping to treat in the U.S. Were their stories really so different? 'Their metaphors and methods diverged, but ultimately both drew from Occidental mysticism and attempted to stem the effects of post-industrial social disintegration and displacement' (p. 155). The moral of the story, at least as I read it, is that discourses on 'addiction' (personal, spiritual, biomedical, or otherwise) so rarely have anything to do with 'addiction.' Though the underlying biological realities of chemi-

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cal dependency are real, the ways in which we respond to 'addiction' are often little more than re-manifestations of the power structures that maintain the inequalities all around us. The 'illness' and the 'treatment' share a common cause and bracketing both as an individual pursuit closes off our ability to see the very literal forest of global neoliberal capitalism for the individual trees.

This book is well written and easy to follow. Readers will move easily from cover to cover, taking delight in the richness of Hansen's ethnographic voice and the insightfulness she brings to her grapples with anthropological theories and the complexity of human experience. The text is extremely well-balanced between exposition and rigorous analysis, making it ideal for both graduate and undergraduate classrooms. Hansen also grounds her ethnographic data in the historical context of Puerto Rico with such aplomb that this book should be used as an example of best practice in ethnographic writing courses. This is a must read for medical anthropologists working within or adjacent to the subject of substance use but may be an even more valuable contribution to those interested in religion, spirituality, and enchantment as technologies of the self as well as responses to global capitalism. I understand that Hansen is currently working on a second book-length manuscript, and I genuinely cannot wait to see it.

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