

Reflections on society as borderline mother

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Abstract

The paper describes patients who presented at the psychiatric outpatient department of a large hospital in Johannesburg after attempting suicide. The high volumes of such patients as well as the seemingly trivial reasons these patients gave for their impulsive acts led the author to formulate an understanding of this phenomenon in that particular setting. The generally accepted models of the genesis of borderline personality illness are expanded to include the broader socio-political context. The paper explores the idea of the state as a toxic parental object and reflects on how the social aspects of violence and poverty in post-apartheid South Africa impact the psychological development of these patients, resulting in borderline-like psychic structures. To illustrate the thesis, a case of a woman who committed infanticide is discussed, and the conclusion is drawn that to be a good enough mother requires a good enough holding social environment.