

BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS

Christine Oppong, Delali M. Badasu, and Kari Waerness (eds.), *Child Care in a Globalizing World: Perspectives from Ghana*. Bergen: BRIC/University of Bergen, 2012. Paperback, 346 pp., €10. ISBN: 978-82-7453-084-3.

This book is one of the productive results from a multiyear collaboration between the University of Bergen and the University of Ghana that began in 2002. Several of the chapters are written by those whose graduate study and research were supported by this collaboration. As a result, the book contains detailed information close to the ground, generated through interviews and careful observations. Furthermore, the geographic diversity of Ghana is well represented.

The book argues that there is a crisis in the care of babies and children in Ghana. Several factors have contributed to this crisis, as Christine Oppong details in an insightful discussion in one of the introductory chapters. Time among adults has become scarcer. Women's workloads have increased. Labor migration results in male migrants' absence from children's households and female migrants' lack of kin support in child care. Cooperative practices of caring such as fosterage are not working well today. Men are avoiding their responsibilities as fathers. As a result, Oppong writes, women are in 'an increasingly solitary struggle to maintain self and children' (p. 50). Mothers are engaged in a 'balance and reshuffle', as Peter Kodzo Atakuma Agbodza says, writing about child care in Dzemeni, a Volta Lake resettlement community: 'they carried out adjustments that ensured [the] survival of all', but which were not always organized towards their young children's wellbeing (p. 237).

The chapters detail the crisis in a number of different contexts. Katherine Abu finds that economic considerations became more prominent in fosterage arrangements in Tamale in the early 1980s. Among the Dagaaba in the Upper West Region, Edward Nanbigne argues that male migration results in the burden of care for children and the sick falling to women. Cuthbert Bataar examines changes in familial relations among the Dagara in Nandom in the Upper West due to Christianity, higher bride-prices, alcoholism, and tighter male control of grain stores. Deborah Atobrah explores the fosterage of AIDS orphans in Manya Krobo in the Eastern Region, where there is a higher AIDS prevalence rate than elsewhere in Ghana. Adam Bawa Yussif examines how Dagomba female water vendors in Tamale struggled to balance their work with child care. Benjamin Kobina Kwansa discusses how male teachers in Accra participate in child care but shows that women bear the

heavier burden. The male teachers who did the most housework and child care (about a quarter of the 140 interviewed) had wives who had busy schedules as traders.

The only chapter that challenges this overwhelmingly gloomy picture is by Douglas Frimpong-Nnuroh, detailing how fostering is alive and well in Ellembelle Nzima in the Western Region, generating social cohesion, kin ties, and productive adult–adolescent relationships. Yet, even here, there is some cause for concern. The mothers of many fostered children in Ellembelle are deceased, and their fathers have absconded from their parenting responsibilities. The foster mothers are generally poor. Likewise, in some of the more depressing chapters, there is a recognition that kin do help with child care, even if such support is less secure than in the past, such as in the case of orphans in Manya Krobo.

One of the volume's virtues is its focus on how the crisis in child care affects the health of babies and young children. Recent health surveys in Ghana have found high maternal and child malnutrition, with surprising little difference across income quintiles and levels of maternal education. A chapter by Delali M. Badasu documents why the children of highly educated mothers in Accra might be stunted and wasted, and their mothers more likely to give birth to low-weight babies: the mothers worked long hours and were less likely than other Ghanaian mothers to exclusively breastfeed. While these mothers usually had household help or relied on matrikin, poorer women in Accra, discussed in another chapter by Badasu, sent their children to understaffed day care centers. Furthermore, traffic congestion in Accra led to long commutes and little time with children. Agbodza describes how mothers in Dzemeni force-fed their children and replaced more nutritious soup with pepper sauce because of their lack of time for eating and cooking. Adam argues that water sellers in Tamale weaned their children so that they could leave their children at home while they worked, replacing breast milk with not-very-nutritious porridge (*koko*). Thus, the volume suggests that mothers' lack of time, among poorer and richer mothers alike, resulted in poorer health outcomes for their children.

This volume's description of the crisis in care in Ghana has been documented in other parts of Africa, particularly East Africa. Its explicit link between child health and the social supports for mothers makes it especially useful for medical anthropologists.

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