

DELOACHE, JUDY & ALMA GOTTLIEB (eds). *A world of babies: imagined childcare guides for seven societies*. xv, 280 pp., illus., bibliogr. Cambridge: Univ. Press, 2000. £32.50 (cloth), £10.95 (paper)

This is a wonderful volume that treads a creative line between anthropology and fiction. It is anthropology at its empirical best in providing cross-cultural examples of child-rearing practices based on ethnographic fieldwork, archival work, or library research of published studies in seven 'traditional' societies. It is creative fiction in that each chapter is written as a Western 'manual' on baby care – in the style of Dr Benjamin Spock (1945). As the editors argue, fiction is an imaginative way to reveal a simple truth about child-rearing: 'there are many models of babyhood, and ... every model is shaped intensely, albeit invisibly, by deeply held values and widely varying social contexts' (p. 26). Thus the book presents several different 'ethnographic/literary constructions' of child-rearing.

'If Dr Spock were born in Bali' (chap. 1, by DeLoache & Gottlieb) tells you outright that 'you will find answers to ... many questions about infants and how to care for them. In fact, you'll find several different answers' (p. 1). Such questions frame important issues pertaining to strategies for care and socialization. For instance, should infants be offered the breast right after birth, and whenever they cry? Should they ever be left alone? Where should they sleep? How best can toddlers be protected against illnesses? How can children be raised to become virtuous, and instructed to relate to family and society? There is also plentiful advice on parenthood. What foods and activities should mothers avoid during pregnancy? What is the role of fathers? What changes in social status will ensue for new parents? Should one resist the temptations or pitfalls of modernity, where families are experiencing urbanization and social change?

The juxtaposition of seven authoritative 'manuals' provides an effective yet gentle critique of Western beliefs and practices. We are presented with seven versions of the 'right way' for looking after a biologically vulnerable baby, and seven authoritative guides for raising children in society: the 'common sense' approach (advocated by Dr Spock) is clearly culture-dependent. Indeed, the manuals are directed to a Western audience interested in learning about the diversity of child-care practices. They form a collection that might well surprise the lay reader and delight students in class (the idea for the volume was born from actual teaching experience). In my view, the

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book will make an excellent teaching-tool, despite the constraints of its genre (a 'manual' written to appeal to a lay audience). The editors chose to exclude all references within individual chapters (although published sources to substantiate ethnographic facts or guide further reading are listed at the end of the volume) and adopted an extra-light theoretical touch (readers will have to mount their own interpretive and critical analyses).

Each of the seven chapters begins with background information about the society in question, and a brief biography situating the fictive 'author' as a member of that society. Such 'voices' might belong to a Puritan gentlewoman, a village midwife, a young urban migrant, a male diviner or a healer, namely people who might be compelled to talk about child-care practices. The case-studies include the Puritans of New England (by Debbie Reese), the Beng of West Africa (Alma Gottlieb), the Balinese of Indonesia (Marissa Diener), Muslim villagers in Turkey (Carol Delaney), the Walpiri Aborigines of Australia (Sophia L. Pierrousakos), the Fulani of West and Central Africa (Michelle C. Johnson), and the Ifaluk islanders of Micronesia (Huynh-Nhu Le). An index serves to cross-reference the main topics throughout the book.

I would add that the text can be very moving. Phrases such as 'If you are pregnant, it is great news' (p. 157) or, 'What could be more important, more precious than a new baby!' (p. 205) celebrate life and the joy of having babies. Other phrases, such as 'Keep in mind that parenting is too much work for one or two people alone – it takes an entire community to effectively raise a child' (p. 198), resonate with the difficulties of parenthood everywhere, but emphasize that expectations regarding the nature and extent of social support afforded to new parents certainly differ across societies. The message of this book is kept simple: child-care behaviours are ingrained in specific cultural beliefs. It is the creativeness of the chosen format that makes it delightful.

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