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Charlotte Faircloth, Diane M. Hoffman and Linda L. Layne (eds.), "Parenting in Global Perspective. Negotiating Ideologies of Kinship, Self and Politics". London and New York: Routledge, 2013, 255 pp.

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Book Review

Charlotte Faircloth, Diane M. Hoffman and Linda L. Layne (eds.), *Parenting in Global Perspective. Negotiating Ideologies of Kinship, Self and Politics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013, 255 pp.

Faircloth, Hoffman, and Layne's book deals with the parenting culture and everyday experiences of parenting from both sociological and anthropological perspectives.

The theoretical background of the book consists mainly of two key texts: Sharon Hays' *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* [1996,] and Furedi's *Paranoid Parenting: Why Ignoring the Experts May be Best for Your Child* [2001.] Hays' work, at the cultural level, presents the argument that the ideology of "intensive motherhood," which prompts mothers to "spend a tremendous amount of time, energy and money in raising their children" [1996, x] [cit. p. 2,] is becoming widespread internationally. According to Furedi's work, at the political level, parenting is increasingly considered simultaneously as the source of many social problems and as the solution to them (as shown in particular in Chapter 1 by Edwards and Gillies). In this ideology and parenting culture, "the way children are constructed […] is as being 'vulnerable' and more sensitive to risks impacting on physical and emotional development (especially in the early years of life) than was previously considered to be the case" [p. 3] and "doing too little to protect one's child from external risks is bad or neglectful parenting" [p. 38.]

Besides Furedi's Foreword, the editors' Introduction and Lee's Afterword, the book is divided into fourteen chapters investigating four specific themes: the moral context for parenting, the structural constraints to "good" parenting, negotiating parenting culture, and parenting and/as identity; these are investigated with regard to a large variety of geographic and cultural contexts: United Kingdom, France, Spain, Belgium, United States, Chile, Brazil, and Turkey.

Some chapters explore the aforementioned topics with respect to transnational issues; this is the case of Berry's chapter on undocumented Hispanic migrant families, of Jaysane-Dar's chapter on Sudanese refugee parents in the United States and of De Graeve and Longman's chapter on intensive mothering of Ethiopian adoptive children in Flanders. Others chapters do so in the context of family forms that are "alternative" in comparison to the family model that is socially and culturally perceived as "normal," the heterosexual couple cohabiting with their biological children; this is the case of Layne's chapter on single motherhood by choice and of the above-mentioned De Graeve and Longman's chapter on adoptive parents, and Göknar's chapter on Turkish mothers pursuing *In Vitro* Fertilization.

More precisely, in Part 1 of the book *The Moral Context for Parenting*, in Chapter 1 entitled "*Where Are the Parents?*": *Changing Parenting Responsibilities Between the 1960s and the 2010s*, working with material from the archived British classic community studies, Edwards and Gillies "critique contemporary political rhetoric about a past 'golden age' of responsible and committed parenting norms and practices, and concomitant ideas that neglectful mothering and fathering is to blame for contemporary

social ills" since, as they contend, "ideas about the investment of constant child-centered physical and emotional attention as good parenting are distinctly contemporary conceptions" [p. 10] while in the past "children often were left to their own devices in a way that would be considered positively neglectful today" [p. 27.] In Chapter 2, *Building a Stable Environment in Scotland: Planning Parenthood in a Time of Ecological Crisis*, based on qualitative data collected in rural Scotland in 2006-2007 through participant observation and interviews, Dow explores the ideas of young women (who are without children at the time of interviews) about parenting and, in particular, about what it takes to create a stable environment into which to bring a child, thus showing how notions of intensive parenting are tied to many of the overarching principles of environmentalism ["nature and the natural can provide ethical guidance", p. 39.] Jensen's Chapter 3, *Creating Distinction: Middle-Class Viewers of "Supernanny" in the UK*, investigates how parents in the UK respond to the television program "*Supernanny*" which is intended as both educational and entertaining. The empirical material making up the basis of her observations is composed of a number of interviews conducted with parents (mostly mothers), viewing sessions, and post-interview group discussions. Chapter 4, *Negotiating (Un)healthy Lifestyles in an Era of "Intensive" Parenting: Ethnographic Case Studies from North West England, UK,* by Hinton, Laverty, and Robinson, analyzes how good parenting is interpreted in relation to health risks and, controversially, with the notion of 'intensive parenting' assuming that parents have full control of risk management while children are passive actors, and comes to the conclusion that, first of all, parents do not always have full control of this process and, secondly, children are active agents in it since they may regulate the (un)healthy lifestyles of their parents in line with intensive parenting ideals.

Regarding Part 2: *Power and Inequality: the Structural Constraints to "Good' Parenting*," Chapter 5, *Problem Parents? Undocumented Migrants in America's New South and the Power Dynamics of Parenting Advice* by Berry and Chapter 6, *Nurturing Sudanese, Producing Americans: Refugee Parents and Personhood* by Jaysane-Darr explore how undocumented Hispanic migrant families and Sudanese refugee parents in the United States interpret the child-centred parenting practices and ideals of their host nation and try to maintain links with their traditional parenting culture and ethnic identity.

Part 3: *Negotiating Parenting Culture* is about the link (as we can read on the back cover) "between intimate family life and broader cultural trends, parenting culture, policy making and nationhood." In particular, in Chapter 7, *"Intensive Motherhood" in Comparative Perspective: Feminism, Full-term Breastfeeding and Attachment Parenting in London and Paris*, drawing on empirical material consisting of participant observation at a number of local "La Leche League International" (LLLI) groups, and semistructured interviews and questionnaires conducted with women in London and Paris in 2006, Faircloth shows how in France, when compared with the UK, the wider cultural differences (the different history of feminism and the place of nature in the cultural movement of the Enlightenment) prevent the adoption of "intensive," "natural" parenting ideology. Chapter 8, *Intensive Mothering of Ethiopian Adoptive Children in Flanders, Belgium* by De Graeve and Longman, is about Belgian adoptive parents' experiences and how they work across racial and ethnic boundaries in the contemporary

parenting culture. In Chapter 9, *"Staying With the Baby": Intensive Mothering and Social Mobility in Santiago de Chile*, following an ethnographic approach, Murray analyzes the transitions to motherhood of a group of women in Santiago de Chile whom she visited between 2010-2011 on a monthly basis from pregnancy until the first year of age of the babies. Her focus is on how these mothers interpret, comply with, or reject contemporary intensive parenting ideology coming from a variety of private and public actors and institutions, especially with respect to their relationship with the medical system.

Finally, with regard to Part 4: *Parenting and/as Identity*, Chapter 10, *"Spanish People Don't Know How to Rear their Children!" Dominican Women's Resistance to Intensive Mothering in Madrid* by Sedano, shows how "these mothers do not accept or take on intensive mothering in a wholehearted way" [p. 12,] stemming from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Madrid in 2002-2007 with mothers from the Dominican Republic. In Chapter 11, *Becoming a Mother Through Postpartum Depression: Narratives from Brazil*, following social policy analyst Ellie Lee [2003], O'Dougherty asserts that postpartum depression in a group of Brazilian mothers could be seen in part as a response to the contemporary child-centred ideology of intensive motherhood. A hypothesis, in my opinion, that would be worth investigating also with respect to the "involved fatherhood" ideology; more and more often psychologists, psychiatrists, and physicians are interested in studying fathers' distress following the birth of their babies since, it seems, this is (becoming) a relatively common phenomenon also among them [Giallo et al. 2013.]

In Chapter 12, *Sacrificial Mothering of IVF-pursuing Mothers in Turkey*, by focusing on the case of mothers pursuing *In Vitro* Fertilization, Göknar shows, on one hand, that the ideology of intensive mothering fits in with the traditional Turkish idea of the self-sacrificial mother and, on another, that in Turkish culture, motherhood is seen as essential in order to achieve "complete adulthood or womanhood;" "women need a son to negotiate their adult gender identities" and this is why some of them start In Vitro Fertilization treatment [p. 210.] Layne's Chapter 13, *Intensive Parenting Alone: Negotiating the Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood as a Single Mother by Choice*, based on an in-depth case study, analyzes practices and discourses of intensive mothering of an American single mother by choice. The last chapter, Chapter 14, *Power Struggles: The Paradoxes of Emotion and Control Among Child-Centred Mothers in Privileged America* by Hoffman, shows that, on one hand, white upper-middle-class mothers describe themselves as against the mainstream and try to differentiate themselves from other parents who are more child-centred, and on the other, they still accept several assumptions of intensive parenting. Finally the author affirms that besides a power struggle between mothers and children, there is a power struggle "among mothers themselves and even in the culture at large, in its unresolved tensions over the place of emotions and power in the self and in human relationships" [p. 14.]

In my opinion, this book is very interesting and insightful and fruitfully explores an area of research that has been investigated very little by contemporary family anthropology and (even less) by sociology that pertains to the role of the scientific knowledge and professional expertise, partly in response to people's "need to intervene and regulate intimate life" [p. 53] in shaping notions of "good," "adequate" parenthood and

parenting (especially motherhood and mothering) to which individuals are required to conform and perform to some extent, and to which they comply or, on the contrary, resist.

Supported by the so-called "scientific evidence," experts and professionals (obstetricians, gynecologists, pediatricians, infant developmental psychologists, and so on) construct and reconstruct dominant cultural norms and expectations about parenting roles, ideals of (good) mothering and fathering and children's well-being directly, through their everyday practices and discourses in therapeutic interactions with the mothers-patients and with the parental couples and indirectly, through the mass media industries, books, magazines, movies, the Internet, and television (for example, as shown in Jensen's chapter, the reality TV program "Supernanny" is very popular in the UK.)

The higher the level of social legitimacy, esteem, and validity the science and professional expertise have in establishing adequate behaviour patterns and lifestyles, the greater the pressure to conform to these standards, one could hypothesize.

In the frame of a growing importance of child-development experts and scientific claims, parenting (especially mothering) looks like a highly performative "activity in which adults are increasingly expected to be emotionally absorbed and become personally fulfilled" and child-rearing is interpreted as a "skill rather than as an integral feature of informal family relationships" [p. xiv,] increasingly subject to public scrutiny.

According to Hays [1996], editors and authors argue that the ideology and practices of 'intensive mothering' are becoming widespread internationally, but despite this, at the individual level, far from being considered as the sovereign domain of truth, the "dictates" of scientific knowledge and professional expertise are not replicated automatically and uncritically by the mothers (and the few fathers) whose everyday experiences of parenting are recounted in this book. In other words, the fourteen essays report several examples of resistance to the expert-led parenting model, many "points of tension between parenting as defined by professionals, and those experienced by parents themselves" (as we can read on the back cover of the book.)

In addition to this, it is important to underline that intensive mothering, described as a recent ideological movement taking place in neoliberal contexts (the UK and the US) and spreading in global terms, is something new only in part: in fact, in some national and cultural contexts the "new" intensive mothering ideology hybridizes the "old," the (not strictly science-led) "traditional" kind, in a sort of continuity with the history and the religious and gender culture of those countries. Examples in the book of how the "new" mothering ideology "reinforces and reframes an existing sense of being good mothers" [p. 12] are the Chilean, the Spanish and the Turkish cases.

Perhaps the notion of "involved fathering" is newer, but this theme is investigated only tangentially in Faircloth, Hoffman and Layne's book. In fact, where are the fathers in this book? Despite the title which focuses on "parenting," nearly the totality of the chapters is devoted to mothering; only a few of them take fatherhood and fathering into account (for example, this is the case of Hinton, Laverty and Robinson's chapter "*Negotiating (Un)healthy Lifestyles in an Era of 'Intensive' Parenting: Ethnographic Case Studies from North West England, UK*" and Berry's chapter "*Problem Parents? Undocumented Migrants in America's New South and the Power Dynamics of Parenting Advice*", and in

only one case is this lack explicitly attributable to the difficulties to "interest fathers in the research" [Jensen, p. 54.]

There is nothing wrong with the works focusing on mothering and motherhood but, in light of the title and, above all, of the editors' declared analytical objective (that is, parenthood and parenting), a deeper discussion on fatherhood and fathering would have been desirable. Not just because motherhood is socially and individually constructed in relation to fatherhood, but also because the same scientific culture and professional expertise push toward an intensive-mothering model on the one hand, while on the other, they encourage fathers to be involved to some extent in child rearing and care (and before that, in pre-natal and maternal health care,) "in the belief that involving men as early as possible lays the foundation for better, more involved fatherhood" [Draper and Ives 2013.]

Finally, in my opinion, this book suggests an important consideration about the tensions recognizable in the contemporary era between what an intensive parenting culture prescribes (that means also to some extent what science and experts say and suggest,) and what and how it is realistically possible in the capitalist neoliberal societies. This is not only because of the cultural accent of the latter on individualism and on the self-realization through the paid work, but as already noted by Hays [1996: xiii] [cit. p. 2,] also for the "uneasy relationships with the logic of the work place;" limited access to parental leaves, flexible working hours, and a lack of control over their workload may make it harder for mothers and fathers to respond to the changing needs of their families and the demands of caring for their children [Giallo et al. 2013.] These depend on how children and raising them are valued in capitalist neoliberal societies, now widely viewed as impediments to paid work [Houser et al. 2014.]

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