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Death Without Weeping: The Violence Of Everyday Life In Brazil



Synopsis

When lives are dominated by hunger, what becomes of love? When assaulted by daily acts of violence and untimely death, what happens to trust? Set in the lands of Northeast Brazil, this is an account of the everyday experience of scarcity, sickness and death that centres on the lives of the women and children of a hillside "favela". Bringing her readers to the impoverished slopes above the modern plantation town of Bom Jesus de Mata, where she has worked on and off for 25 years, Nancy Scheper-Hughes follows three generations of shantytown women as they struggle to survive through hard work, cunning and triage. It is a story of class relations told at the most basic level of bodies, emotions, desires and needs. Most disturbing - and controversial - is her finding that mother love, as conventionally understood, is something of a bourgeois myth, a luxury for those who can reasonably expect, as these women cannot, that their infants will live.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Scheper-Hughes's book is certainly the most impacting book I have read in months. I cannot call it entertaining but it is riveting in presenting a mind-boggling situation of abject poverty in Northeastern Brazil with its consequent infant and child mortality and impacts on the family structure. Death Without Weeping is a very original, very relevant, and carefully written book although not perfect. The book is the result of extensive field research by Dr. Scheper-Hughes, Professor of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley but nevertheless very readable. I could understand and enjoy most of it without having had extensive training in Anthropology. The author does a wonderful job in translating Alto do Cruzeiro reality into something the average American can understand. This

"translation" certainly adds a bias but is still indispensable in my opinion. I consider that the author's religious beliefs strongly affected the outcome of the book and that I think could have been avoided. I understand that the author has it's ethics and wouldn't reveal in the text the actual location name for Bom Jesus da Mata. I'm not tied by the same ethics so I can tell it: Bom Jesus da Mata is actually Timbauba, a 60,000 inhabitants town on the outskirts of Recife. The book subtitle, "The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil" couldn't be worse. Timbauba is not Brazil. It has its own very specific problems and to read the book without understanding the great diversity among Brazil's regions would be very unfair to the country. Even in a local scale, Alto do Cruzeiro is not Timabuba and Timbauba is not Pernambuco. If you read the book don't rule out the possibility of going down to Brazil and having a wonderful time there.

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