

# BOOK REVIEWS

## ANTHROPOLOGY & SOCIOLOGY

**Loretta E. Bass.** *Child Labor in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynn Rienner Publishers, 2004. xii + 213 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$49.95. Cloth.

*Child Labor in Sub-Saharan Africa* fills a critical void in the literature on children and work in Africa. Apart from the attention given to this subject by a few Africanist scholars, research has hitherto been dominated by non-governmental organizations such as the ILO, UNICEF, the Anti-Slavery Society, and most recently, the World Bank. Thus Bass's work should go a considerable way toward meeting the demand for such books by academics in the fields of sociology, political science, anthropology, economics, and international development. *Child Labor* attempts a broad sweep of the subject, looking at children's labor in precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial societies. Using data drawn from a variety of sources, Bass argues that child labor in contemporary Africa is associated with poverty, inequality, unaccountable leaders, war and ethnic conflict, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the globalizing impact of World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies, and ineffective local and international laws. Unless these root causes are addressed, children's labor will continue to be exploited by individual employers and corporations, and their education and future contributions to economic development will be limited. However, rather than condemn all child labor as detrimental to children's well-being, she observes that in most cases it is a survival strategy for families and sometimes for individual children. This is critical to understand as the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to deepen and produce millions of orphans who must fend for themselves and their siblings.

Bass analyzes the many circumstances under which child labor occurs, the many forms it takes, and its gendered nature: rural versus urban child labor, family farms, commercial agriculture, mining, trading, domestic work, apprenticeships, disguised forms of bonded labor, slaves, child soldiers, and prostitutes. Particularly useful are her many maps, tables, graphs, and sidebars detailing specific cases in point. She identifies and examines the numerous U.N. conventions on child labor from 1919 to 1999 and pro-

vides information on which African countries have and have not ratified these conventions. However, absent from this review is any mention of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, passed in 1990 by the now-defunct Organization of African Unity.

*Child Labor* provides an essential overview of the subject. The next step, for Bass or for other Africanist scholars, is more detailed study of child labor in specific historic and contemporary settings. There is a rich and enlightening story to be told about child labor in each African country that has the potential to shed light on many issues beyond child labor. For example, Bass uses data from the World Bank and from the South African government to argue that there is very little if any child labor in South Africa. This is doubtful, given the Anti-Slavery Society's 1983 study detailing extensive child labor in the wine lands (where it is accompanied by high rates of child alcohol addiction through the *dop* or *tot* system), on farms growing fruits, vegetables, and sugar, in domestic work, and on the streets. Though this report is admittedly dated, most would agree that the end of apartheid has brought very little change for the African majority. Constitutional provisions and new anti-child labor legislation aside, child labor in postapartheid South Africa deserves further study.

Specific and detailed studies of child labor in the past and present should also reveal children's agency as a factor in the social construction of African childhood. Bass is correct in arguing that childhood was and continues to be socially constructed, but like most who approach this topic, she treats children as passive and dependent beings who are always acted upon rather than as young people who find ways to shape their own lives, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. As Bass acknowledges, the Soweto Uprising is testimony to the salience, but also influence, of African children on politics. These points notwithstanding, *Child Labor* is a must-read for those interested in questions of age, gender, labor, politics, and development in contemporary Africa.

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**Richard Tomlinson, et al., eds. *Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Postapartheid City*.** New York, London: Routledge, 2003. xv + 298 pp. Photographs. References. Bibliography. \$28.95. Paper.

Under apartheid, the editors of this exciting compilation point out, Johannesburg had one dominant identity. As the financial hub of South Africa, it was the quintessential apartheid city, serving as a symbol of white supremacy in its persistent reminder of all that was demanded of and denied to the black majority. In the last two triumphant decades, the city has undergone staggering changes. As it, along with the country as a whole,