

mobilizes and reinforces the verticality of power in Luanda by putting forward strategic connections to access resources and bureaucratic support. Similarly, Chapter 6 explores the relations of complicity through which the population embraces the hyper-individualistic and modernist model of success showcased by the MPLA, while expressing nostalgia for a time (the socialist period from 1975 to the late 1980s) when solidarity and collective values were stronger. Protests against and resistance to the regime, on the other hand, are examined in the final chapter, which proposes an in-depth account of the wave of protest from 2011 onwards. This new resistance has brought to light a new generation of political activists who openly challenge the 'culture of fear' that has prevailed since 1977.

Worth noticing throughout *Working the System* is the quality of its language analysis. Schubert, who has a long acquaintance with Angolan Portuguese, manages to convey the historically loaded and political meaning of terms such as *Angolanidade*, *cunhas*, *crioulo* and *sistema*, offering a fascinating exploration of the Angolan collective imagination and the role of language in shaping identities. One weakness, however, is the absence of a gender perspective, especially considering the importance attributed to family networks. Similarly, most of his young informants are male, leaving unexplored potential female strategies of social ascension in a society deeply ingrained in machismo and militarized masculinities. This limitation, however, should not obscure the book's many merits. Weaving anthropology, history and language analysis, *Working the System* proposes a rare journey in the minds and lives of Luanda's population. It is an enjoyable read and an important contribution to scholarship on contemporary lusophone Africa.

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Jennifer Tappan, *The Riddle of Malnutrition: the long arc of biomedical and public health interventions in Uganda*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press (hb US\$79.95 – 978 0 8214 2245 8; pb US\$32.95 – 978 0 8214 2246 5). 2017, xx + 218 pp.

Jennifer Tappan's *The Riddle of Malnutrition* traces long-standing efforts to understand, treat and prevent severe malnutrition in Uganda and sheds light on how biomedical research shaped the way in which people engaged with biomedicine. In historicizing the epidemiology of malnutrition, Tappan dismantles any preconceptions that may see biomedicine in colonial times as one of certainty, efficacy and assurance. On the contrary, Tappan details the way in which biomedical research on the nutritional problems faced by a large number of children in colonial Uganda was based on uncertainty, improvisation and hesitation. Nutritional research was blurred by misdiagnoses, cultural bias and discourse focusing the blame on Ugandan food culture. Tappan demonstrates that, over time, the scientific debate questioning whether childhood malnutrition in African countries was due to protein or mineral deficiency came to depict malnutrition as a disease rather than a preventable condition, a framing that would further compromise nutritional health in Uganda.

Furthermore, Tappan demonstrates how the medicalization of malnutrition not only prevented alternative ways of promoting nutritional health but also

engendered a breastfeeding crisis as the new programme advocated for a dried skimmed milk (DSM) therapy. Consequently, blame, confusion, contradiction and anxiety over breastfeeding and bottle-feeding made their way into nutritional health issues. Although the shift from breastfeeding to bottle-feeding became permanent, the incidence of children dying from nutritional health issues was not halted or reduced. In fact, as Tappan shows, it increased the prevalence of under-nutrition and compromised child health and nutrition in Uganda. Although Tappan demonstrates how medical research and the misgivings over procedures performed (blood extraction), the medicalization of malnutrition and the unsatisfactory results (dying children) increased distrust of biomedical work and how local concerns compelled future research on malnutrition, *The Riddle of Malnutrition* moves away from the typical arguments on African suspicion and fear of biomedicine. Instead, Tappan argues that Ugandans were also concerned about 'the ethical performance of biomedicine' and that the local response was a mixture of 'complex and dynamic historical engagement' and 'accumulative reflection'.

Furthermore, Tappan also tackles the nutritional health problems in the early independence period in Uganda. While many scholars have emphasized the deterioration of biomedicine and medical infrastructure and services in post-colonial Africa, Tappan shows how, in postcolonial Uganda, 'not all things fell apart'; there was a shifting in medical thinking and practices concerning malnutrition. Rather than making biomedicine the solution to malnutrition issues, the new health programme known as Mwanamugimu emphasized social and cultural approaches to nutritional health and began the process of de-medicalizing malnutrition. Combining biomedicine and local feeding practices made Mwanamugimu one of the success stories of nutritional health in Uganda.

Last but not least, Tappan underscores the central role of local female role models in the postcolonial nutritional health programme. While colonial physicians and scientists blamed Ugandan women and portrayed them as responsible for the malnutrition problem, Tappan shows the indispensable role these women played at the interface of community work, medical care and advocacy. Rather than being passive recipients of nutritional healthcare, these women became active participants, teachers and critical components of the de-medicalization of malnutrition.

The Riddle of Malnutrition is a substantial book that relies on an impressive array of sources, including archival sources, oral histories and personal papers. The writing style is easy to follow and very accessible. However, the author's tour de force is the way she paints the complexity of health interventions in an African country – Uganda – that is far from the simplified image that we are often presented in the name of improving children's health. Tappan does not hesitate to attribute the success and rehabilitation of the nutritional health programme to national and local initiatives in Uganda rather than simply to international institutions and funds. In doing so, *The Riddle of Malnutrition* underscores the failures and shortcomings of international health interventions and seeks to recognize, value and bring to light the often neglected past public health expertise of African countries. Moreover, it also shows how biomedical research cannot always be considered as an ultimate solution to address the health issues that affect populations in African countries. Overall, Tappan has produced an insightful book that stands as a contribution to studies of public health, global health and the history of medicine in African countries.

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