

*Childhood, Youth and Violence in Global Contexts: research and Practice in Dialogue*, edited by Wells, K., Burman, E., Montgomery, H., Watson, A., London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 198 pp., hardcover £100.00/softcover £95.00/ e-book £79.99, ISBN 978-1-137-32259-3 hardcover/978-1-349-45845-5 softcover/978-1-137-32260-9 e-book

This edited collection is a thought-provoking and engaging book of nine chapters (including the introductory chapter). It examines different contexts of violence against children and young people in various geographical locations around the globe, including Côte D'Ivoire, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Egypt, Mexico, Haiti and also one country in the global north, the UK.

In particular this book is about what Karen Wells and Heather Montgomery (Introductory chapter) call, 'everyday' violence, a form of violence that young people and children, here living in poverty, experience on a daily, mundane basis as part of their routine life. The accounts of this kind of everyday violence in the eight consecutive chapters are further divided into four overarching themes: Living on the street (J. Christopher Kovats-Bernat and Nelly Ali), orphanage and institutional care (Sylvia Meichsner and Amandine Bollinger), early childhood (Alma Gottlieb and Trefor Llyod), and war and everyday violence (Claudia Seymour and Deborah Haines). All four themes are approached with a rich description of the daily violence children and young people experience. These chapters also include an analysis of how the young people cope with their situation that I found to be emotionally engaging. In some cases, violent acts are even defended in a discourse on cultural norms and necessary change in children's behaviour. Examples include Sylvia Meichsner on faith-based childcare that aims to produce societal change in Mexico, and Alma Gottlieb on breastfeeding and enema practices of the Beng people. Thus the book offers diverse accounts of forms of violence and situations in which children and young people have to find ways to cope with insecurity, discrimination, neglect, and physical and material hardship.

Clearly daily violence is not a situation that affects only children and young people. In their introduction, editors Karen Wells and Heather Montgomery ask 'what difference does it make to be a child in these violent contexts?' They suggest social recognition is an important concept, in that young people and children struggle to attain it differently from adults, not being

accepted as full social human beings but rather as still 'becomings' and because of the immaturity of their bodies.

Some of the authors include informative reflections on the role of the researcher or practitioner, and to what extent one is emotionally affected by the violent contexts. For example J. Christopher Kovats-Bernat offers an unusual and honest account of his own needs for psychological support after doing research with street children in Haiti. And Alma Gottlieb presents her experience in the role of the researcher and discusses how far one can judge and intervene when social practices are harming the children researched. In her experience the researcher should be cautious regarding intervention; thus the violent practices that Beng mothers inflict onto their babies, such as enemas twice a day, can be painful and a health risk, but these practices are avoiding long-term social isolation of mother and child, which would be more dangerous than the enema practice itself in the long term.

The single chapters of the book can be read in any order or alone, and are written in easy, accessible language. Having said that, this does not mean that the book is an easy read. The authors are a combination of well-established and early career academics, practitioners and some who are both. All have extensive fieldwork experience and offer strong descriptions of the violent contexts in which children live. The authenticity of these descriptions can leave the reader shocked by the brutal realities of these young people's lives. The book thus offers something that the majority of academic book rarely achieve – placing the reader in the young people's realities, letting the reader feel the sometimes desperate situations of the children and being at the same time stunned by the resilience some young people and children present when growing up with violence and limited life chances. This was especially true of the chapters of J. Christopher Kovats-Bernat (on street children in Haiti, Nelly Ali's on street-girls in Cairo and Claudia Seymour's on the everyday violence young people in Kivus in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These got under my skin; the young people's everyday situations were in fact so horrible that one wonders at their resilience.

I did sometimes query how certain violent acts are related to wider social structures and norms and thus reproduced and defended through them. For example, in her excellent chapter, Nelly Ali describes the violence young girls on the street experience, such as being raped and then

marked with a scar underneath their eyes; the description was so vivid that I was emotionally affected by reading the chapter. However, I wondered about the related structures in Egyptian society, and how the treatment of the street girls may be linked to wider gendered cultural and social norms. My interest was aroused in the wider context simply that Ali's description was so well written and therefore asking for more context may be a bit unfair. In any case, a book chapter can only provide a certain amount of information. That said, while the combination of practitioners and academics among the authors is one of the book's greatest strengths, it is also one of its weaknesses, as it sometimes lacks theoretical and methodological depth. Thus while the different chapters provide affecting accounts of children's violent contexts and how they struggle within them, they could sometimes have contributed further to academic knowledge. One notes that, in the introduction, Wells and Montgomery discuss Wacquant's (2004, p322) suggestion that one should explicitly analyse different species of violence and structures of domination, instead of merging them into one overarching category.

On the other hand, the aim of the book was to explore children's experiences of violence in different parts of the world, and this aim was achieved in an exceptional and challenging way that involves the reader emotionally. It also offers some interesting approaches with which practitioners try to prevent violent situations. I highly recommend this book to both academics and practitioners, especially those working around issues of young people, children and violence and conflict – even though it may, at times, be emotionally challenging.

#### References:

Wacquant, L. (2004). Comment on Paul Farmer: An Anthropology of Structural Violence. *Current Anthropology*, 45 (3), 322-323

#### Written by:

Sonja Marzi

School of International Development

University of East Anglia

s.marzi@uea.ac.uk