

Masuzawa, Tomoko

2005 *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226922621.001.0001>.

Tomori, Cecilia, *Nighttime Breastfeeding: American Cultural Dilemma*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2014, 312 pages.

Reviewer: Aimee K.H. Whitefoot
York University

In the book *Nighttime Breastfeeding: An American Cultural Dilemma*, Cecilia Tomori investigates one of the most intimate areas of social life that is by nature unseen and is “rarely shared with others” (1). Tomori uses ethnographic research methods to follow nighttime breastfeeding and sleep experiences among middle-class American families experiencing the birth of their first child from late pregnancy until the baby’s first birthday, skilfully bringing together two fields of research that have rarely been studied at the same time. To gain access to this unseen element of social life, Tomori conducted participant observation in two childbirth education centres, where strategies for infant feeding and infant sleep are an essential part of the curriculum. Several families from each centre filled out a sleeping and feeding log for Tomori. A smaller number of families participated in a series of in-depth interviews with Tomori where nighttime breastfeeding was discussed. Because discussions about sleep take place during the day, these meetings were also a form of participant observation wherein Tomori was able to collect mothers’ narratives about sleep.

Tomori’s research reveals that these two fields—breastfeeding and sleep—are intricately intertwined not only in practice but also theoretically through analysis that exposes the contradictions inherent in the cultural norms governing these intimate embodied experiences. As such, Tomori characterizes the parents in her study as “moral pioneers” (38) navigating the “moral minefields” (120) of parenting culture in contemporary America. Like many other parents in the United States and Canada, Tomori’s participants struggled with doing what “works” or following official biomedical recommendations about proper protocols for breastfeeding and infant sleep.

Within the contemporary field of breastfeeding research, there is an ongoing project started by anthropologist Penny Van Esterik (1989), and expanded by women’s studies scholar Bernice Hausman (2003), to use research on reproduction and reproductive technologies—breastfeeding in particular—to develop a concept of relationality that “not only encompasses the inter-corporeal relationship between mother and child, but also espouses a broader, ecological approach that includes other social relationships and human-environmental interactions” (80–81). Tomori’s work is explicitly part of this project since she conceptualizes the embodied practices of breastfeeding and sleep as never simply biological but also equally relational, taking on a biosocial approach.

Drawing on Marcel Mauss’ (1973) concept of habitus and Talal Asad’s (1997) work on embodiment, Tomori’s exploration of the various strategies used by parents for breastfeeding and sleeping draws attention to “the relational way in which people acquire habitus” (27). These “techniques of the body,” Tomori argues, are shaped by dominant cultural norms, which have developed over time to accommodate the ideological and temporal needs of industrial capitalism and to privilege the self-sufficient and autonomous individual. But as Asad suggests in his work, when these bodily techniques are carried out, they too have an effect on the culture that instructed them. The nighttime breastfeeding strategies actually carried out by parents in Tomori’s study are not a perfect reflection of dominant norms because the temporal-spatial demands of a capitalist ideology that idealizes self-sufficiency and solitary sleep do not resonate with the embodied needs of nighttime breastfeeding. As a result, all parents end up negotiating between the demands of culture and biology by crafting a variety of “in-between” practices, depending on each family’s own characteristics and needs.

Tomori offers to further this project by situating breastfeeding studies within the well-established field of kinship studies. This is a logical move, since bonds of relatedness are formed between parents and between parents and their child through the affective embodied engagements of breastfeeding and sleeping. In the process, new forms of personhood are crafted. Her book has seven chapters and covers four themes: the first theme, which Tomori describes as her exploration of “embodied moral dilemmas,” outlines the theoretical tools she will use to interpret her data. The second theme provides an overview of the relationship between biomedicine and capitalism. The third theme explores the role of childbirth education classes as a framework for developing parenting strategies. The fourth and final theme considers the moral contradictions of breastfeeding. All of these together draw on theory and ethnographic data to show how forms of personhood and kinship are established through breastfeeding and sleep arrangements.

The unique contribution that Tomori’s research offers is that it de-romanticizes the role of the breastfeeding mother by acknowledging the “moral praxis of women who are committed to breastfeeding” (141). Her work reveals that pro-breastfeeding moral frameworks are stigmatizing even among mothers who do breastfeed and that additional moral quandaries are encountered throughout the process of actually breastfeeding a baby, and especially with regard to nighttime breastfeeding practices. Tomori’s participants were subject to the scrutiny of friends and family who objected to their breastfeeding practices based on cultural expectations about measurability, the self-sufficiency of infants, proper sexuality, decency and incest taboos. In dealing with medical professionals, Tomori’s participants often lied to medical experts about their sleeping arrangements to avoid further moral anguish over defying medical and cultural norms for solitary sleep (137). In their conversations with Tomori, many mothers downplayed the suffering they endured while attempting to establish successful breastfeeding in the first few weeks and months. These breastfeeding difficulties, ranging from fears of insufficient milk to poor latch, often resulted in “mother (self)-blame” (129) resulting from the cultural imagination of idealized breastfeeding,

wherein experiencing difficulties meant that mothers felt a deep sense of embodied failure to mother adequately.

Throughout the book, Tomori remains committed to uncovering the socio-economic inequality that exists among mothers in America based on class and racial stratification. In the present, breastfeeding is publicly valorized, as evidenced by the litany of public health campaigns and mainstream media coverage of breastfeeding controversies, but few supports exist that make it possible for *all* women to carry it out, especially within the most “private” of settings—nighttime. When viewed from this lens, the moral imperative to breastfeed not only is damaging to mothers who choose not to breastfeed their infants but also essentially dooms breastfeeding mothers who do not have the privileges of white, middle-class families to fail when they do attempt to breastfeed.

Tomori concludes by suggesting that breastfeeding advocacy that includes recommendations for safe co-sleeping is key in providing effective breastfeeding support in the United States. Safe options for co-sleeping acknowledge that nighttime breastfeeding is an integral part of the practice of breastfeeding and that until prevailing authorities like the American Academy of Pediatrics abandon their prohibition of bed-sharing, countless American families will continue to face moral anxiety as they struggle to find ways to feed their babies during the night while conforming to dominant cultural norms shaped by capitalist ideologies and temporal regimes. While Tomori’s research clearly shows that parents do not wholly conform to the dominant norms, it also reveals that these norms remain pertinent in shaping parents’ long-term decisions on where their baby sleeps. These parents are engaged in a continuous and careful negotiation between linear clock time and learned cultural norms and the relational, embodied rhythms of breastfeeding and infant sleep (209). To remove the need for this negotiation would ease the moral burden of breastfeeding parents.

Tomori cautions that the rhetoric of “choice,” feminist or otherwise, is not useful. In addition to erasing the structural barriers to breastfeeding from view, this rhetoric mistakenly oversimplifies the “choice” to breastfeed, placing it in stark opposition to the “choice” to not breastfeed. The reality, as exemplified by the struggles endured by Tomori’s participants, is that the practice of breastfeeding a baby is not a choice freely made by parents. Complex cultural factors influence each family in a myriad of ways, and the outcomes are always the result of careful negotiation. What could yield more fruitful results would be changes to the biomedical approach that embrace the social dimension of breastfeeding and infant sleep as well as changes to social policy that acknowledge how economic inequalities create significant barriers to successful breastfeeding. Tomori points to sexuality as an area pertaining to breastfeeding and nighttime sleep that remains unexplored in the literature but that is likely to play a key role in furthering our understanding of how and why parents choose the breastfeeding and sleep strategies they do.

References

Asad, Talal

- 1997 Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body. *In* Religion and the Body: Comparative Perspectives on Devotional Practices. S. Coakley, ed. Pp 42–54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hausman, Bernice

- 2003 *Mother’s Milk: Breastfeeding Controversies in American Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Mauss, Marcel

- 1973 [1935] Techniques of the Body. *Economy and Society* 2(1):70–88.

Van Esterik, Penny

- 1989 *Beyond the Breast-Bottle Controversy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Kazubowski-Houston, Magdalena, *Staging Strife: Lessons from Performing Ethnography with Polish Roma Women*, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010, 264 pages.

Reviewer: Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier
University of Victoria

Since the 1980s “collaborative,” “participatory” and “community-based” approaches have proposed new ways of envisioning ethnographic fieldwork. Today anthropologists and students alike are encouraged to adopt these trendy approaches, often perceived as more inclusive than conventional ways of conducting fieldwork and as challenging—and even eliminating—power relations between researchers and participants. Their ultimate goal is to empower and give agency to the people anthropologists work *with*. This vision of collaborative research is attractive and indeed full of promise. Yet, in developing a specific case of collaboration, anthropologist Magdalena Kazubowski-Houston in her book *Staging Strife* successfully suggests that this vision of collaboration is utopian and that it is time to look at these approaches from a critical perspective.

Kazubowski-Houston was born in Poland, and she studied theatre before becoming an anthropologist interested in the potential of performance as a methodological approach in anthropology. Committed to the aesthetic of Poland’s avant-garde theatre, she developed, with her husband, an acting methodology they called “illustrative performing technique,” a theatrical approach that relies on the grotesque, improvisation and bodily expression and that aims at “politicizing the audience” (9). In 2001 Kazubowski-Houston left Canada with her family for her hometown, Elbląg, to develop an approach combining her skills in theatre and her interest in anthropology to work with Roma women and help them improve their lives. The idea behind Kazubowski-Houston’s project was to co-create a theatre play to provide a space where Roma women could tell their stories, so that issues of racism could become public and could subsequently be addressed by the general population. In other words, Kazubowski-Houston believed that her project, using a combined performance ethnographic approach, would constitute a form of consciousness-raising about violence for the researcher, the participants and the audience. Her goals were significantly altered when she began fieldwork. *Staging Strife* is a reflexive account of the multiple power dynamics that emerged during Kazubowski-Houston’s ethnographic research among Roma women in Poland. The book encourages us to think about how fieldwork encounters