

**THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THERAPEUTIC CHOICE**

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# THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THERAPEUTIC CHOICE

*Obstetrical Care Decisions  
Among the Bariba of Benin*

by

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## PREFACE

This book examines the factors influencing women's choices of obstetrical care in a Bariba community in the People's Republic of Benin, West Africa. When selecting a research topic, I decided to investigate health care among the Bariba for several reasons. First, I had served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in northern Benin (then Dahomey) and had established a network of contacts in the region. In addition, I had worked for a year as assistant manager of a pharmacy in a northern town and had become interested in the pattern of utilization of health care services by urban residents. This three-year residence proved an invaluable asset in preparing and conducting research in the northern region. In particular, I was able to establish relationships with several indigenous midwives whose families I already knew both from prior research experience and mutual friendships. These relationships enabled me to obtain detailed information regarding obstetrical practice and thus form the foundation of this book.

The fieldwork upon which the book is directly based was conducted between June 1976 and December 1977 and sponsored by the Ford-Rockefeller Population Policy Program, the Social Science Research Council, the National Science Foundation, and the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Program. The Ford-Rockefeller Population Policy Program funded the project as a collaboration between myself and Professor Eusèbe Alihonou, Professor Agrégé (Gynécologie-Obstétrique) at the National University of Benin.

I am especially indebted to Dr. Alihonou for his assistance in designing the research and in editing and analyzing medical data, and for his efforts to arrange prenatal consultations at the fieldwork site of Pehunko. In addition, I am grateful to the Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of Benin and to the National University of Benin for enabling me to pursue this project. Dr. Cecile De Sweemer, then Program Advisor for Health and Family Planning for the Ford Foundation West Africa Regional Office provided support and organizational assistance throughout the fieldwork period, for which I remain appreciative, and Father Daniel Cardot generously allowed me to study his notebooks on Bariba tradition which he has collected over more than ten years in Benin.

I am also grateful to Arthur J. Rubel, John Hinnant, John M. Hunter, and Brigitte Jordan, who provided me with direction and advice during the preparation of this study, to Harry Raulet and Robert McKinley for their longstanding interest in my work, to Robert Van Kemper, for editorial assistance, and to Linda Whiteford for her unflagging reassurance. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the help of Arthur Kleinman, whose careful scrutiny of several versions of this manuscript aided in consolidating my thinking on numerous

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