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Etienne van de Walle, ed. *African Households: Censuses and Surveys.* Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2005. xl + 240 pp. $99.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7656-1619-7.

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Measuring African Households

The analysis of African residence patterns has proved a far more complex task than the simple definition of family relationships. Any particular household or compound can include relatives, dependents, lodgers, and members who live elsewhere but visit home when circumstances allow. The epidemic of HIV/AIDS further complicates the picture owing to the illness and premature death of people of child-rearing age and the necessity for other relatives to take responsibility for dependent children. The study of households thus informs us about families, work, migration, morbidity, and mortality.

For the twenty-first century, an understanding of African households requires a comprehensive statistical analysis rather than a set of participant observations. The raw material for such analyses exists in the form of national censuses and careful sub-national surveys. Unfortunately, these raw materials are by no means uniform. Efforts by the United Nations since 1980 to standardize the collection of data relating to households in national censuses have been honored in the breach. To give just one example: although the United Nations recommends nine categories of household members, the number appearing in subsequent censuses has varied from five to seventeen (pp. xxxiv-xxxv). Beyond this asymmetry, census calculations are based in most former British colonies on *de facto* populations (counts of people physically in residence) while former French colonies tend to use *de jure* figures which include people who have rights of residence but are not necessarily physically present. Variations among surveys are just as broad. Nonetheless, if scholars are to assess African households accurately, someone must organize the retrieval and analysis of these widely divergent data.

This task has been assumed with great skill and imagination by the distinguished demographer, Etienne van de Walle, of the University of Pennsylvania. On Africa alone van de Walle's co-edited volumes include: *Mortality and Society in Sub-Saharan Africa*, *The State of African Demography*, and *The Cultural Roots of African Fertility Regimes.*[1] This is a remarkable achievement, given the paucity of publication outlets in Africa relating to demography. The volume under review skirts the publishing problem by relying on nine essays transmitted on an Internet conference held in November 2001 and subsequently supplemented by two essays on related topics.

Beyond the author's introduction, this work is comprised of six essays devoted to "comparative research on household structure" and five essays "focusing on the relationship between particular members of households." Of particular interest to readers of H-SAfrica are two essays on rural South Africa on the first topic, and one mixed rural-urban essay on Botswana in the second. Both South African essays reflect the government's efforts to survey conditions in rural areas, many of which had been shunted into low-service Bantustans. Nicholas Townsend, Sangeetha Madhavan, Mark Collinson, and Michel Garenne report on inter-household relations among Shangaan-speakers in the Agincourt sub-district of what is now Northern Province. Their research is based on annual census updates to the national census, which are part of the demographic surveillance system. Their main findings are that extensive migration of adults has caused households to consider a large number of absent adults as household members and that fertility continues to fall precipitously. In the 1970s the total fertility rate, the average number of children a woman bears between menarchy and menopause, was of the order of six. By 1996, it had fallen to 3.17 and by 2000 had reached 2.76. Victoria Hosegood and Ian Timaeus survey part of two rural districts in northern KwaZulu Natal on the basis of a demographic surveillance system implemented in 2000. They find enormous numbers of absent household members (23 percent of the total, 41 percent of men, 26 percent of women, 12 percent of boys, and 13 percent of girls).

The Botswana chapter, by Zitha Mokomane, Kristine R. Baker, and Etienne van de Walle, finds extraordinarily high numbers of children born to unmarried mothers; 47 percent of all households in the survey area of Gaborone and a small village in Kgatleng district are female headed; 86 percent of first births occur previous to marriage; and 30 percent of women never marry.

These three studies provide snapshots of the changing nature of households and families in southern Africa. Longer time series will tell us whether these observations are indicative of long-term trends or simply isolated phenomena. Nonetheless, the authors are to be congratulated on their contribution to our understanding of twenty-first-century Africa.

Note

[1]. Etienne van de Walle, Gilles Pison, and Mpembele Sala-Diakanda, *Mortality and Society in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Etienne van de Walle, Patrick O. Ohadike, and Mpembele Sala-Diakanda, *The State of African Demography* (Liege: International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, 1988); and J. Akin Ebigbola and Etienne van de Walle, *The Cultural Roots of African Fertility Regimes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Population Studies Center, 1987).

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