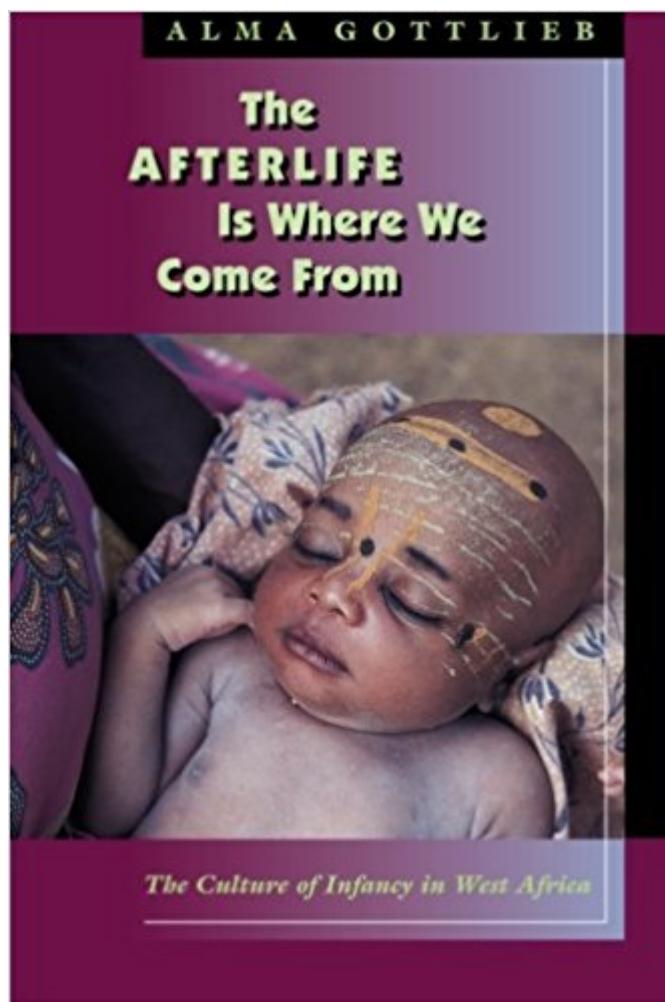


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# The Afterlife Is Where We Come From: The Culture Of Infancy In West Africa



## Synopsis

When a new baby arrives among the Beng people of West Africa, they see it not as being born, but as being reincarnated after a rich life in a previous world. Far from being a *tabula rasa*, a Beng infant is thought to begin its life filled with spiritual knowledge. How do these beliefs affect the way the Beng rear their children? In this unique and engaging ethnography of babies, Alma Gottlieb explores how religious ideology affects every aspect of Beng childrearing practices—“from bathing infants to protecting them from disease to teaching them how to crawl and walk”—and how widespread poverty limits these practices. A mother of two, Gottlieb includes moving discussions of how her experiences among the Beng changed the way she saw her own parenting. Throughout the book she also draws telling comparisons between Beng and Euro-American parenting, bringing home just how deeply culture matters to the way we all rear our children. All parents and anyone interested in the place of culture in the lives of infants, and vice versa, will enjoy *The Afterlife Is Where We Come From*. “This wonderfully reflective text should provide the impetus for formulating research possibilities about infancy and toddlerhood for this century.” —Caren J. Frost, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* “Alma Gottlieb’s careful and thought-provoking account of infancy sheds spectacular light upon a much neglected topic. . . . [It] makes a strong case for the central place of babies in anthropological accounts of religion. Gottlieb’s remarkably rich account, delivered after a long and reflective period of gestation, deserves a wide audience across a range of disciplines.” —Anthony Simpson, *Critique of Anthropology*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The Afterlife Is Where We Come From is filled with richly layered (and often moving) material on the daily lives of Beng people, especially on what they say about babies and how what they say informs their day-to-day practice in caring for infants. . . . The breadth of [Gottlieb's] knowledge is admirable and the book is engagingly written and bound to be widely read by the public at large as well as by anthropologists." (Christina Toren Anthropological Quarterly)"The Afterlife Is Where We Come From is a sophisticated, insightful and compelling analysis of infants, infant care, and Beng Religious ideology. . . . Gottlieb's approach to the study of infants is systematic, comprehensive, and satisfying. The resulting analysis is beautifully organized and provides a model for all of us seeking to explicate complexity without reductionism. . . . This book will be a welcome addition to the growing number of courses on the anthropology of children and youth, as well, as to anthropologists teaching or researching the life cycle, family, African ethnology, and religion. It has the added attraction of being highly readable by both scholar and undergraduate." (Lisa Mitchell The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 2005-03-25)"This text would be extremely informative for undergraduate and graduate students. . . . This wonderfully reflective text should provide the impetus for formulating research possibilities about infancy and toddlerhood for this century." -- Caren J. Frost, Medical Anthropology Quarterly (Caren J. Frost Medical Anthropology 2005-04-18)â œAlma Gottliebâ ™s careful and thought-provoking account of infancy sheds spectacular light upon a much neglected topic. . . . [It] makes a strong case for the central place of babies in anthropological accounts of religion. Â Gottliebâ ™s remarkably rich account, delivered after a long and reflective period of gestation, deserves a wide audience across a range of disciplines.â • (Anthony Stimpson Critique of Anthropology 2006-05-11)"[Afterlife] contributes to the field of anthropological research on children at many levels, revealing above all that children can be imagined by adults in ways that differ markedly from Western popular, religious, and scientific models alike." (Nicolas Argenti Current Anthropology)â œA tour de force of deep ethnography, nuanced reflexivity, and characteristic elegance.Â Alma Gottlieb has produced a sparkling text on an utterly neglected topicâ "the anthropology of infancyâ "Â- that will challenge and change the way we think about culture and do ethnography.â •

When a new baby arrives among the Beng people of West Africa, they see it not as being born, but as being reincarnated after a rich life in a previous world. Far from being a *tabula rasa*, a Beng infant is thought to begin its life filled with spiritual knowledge. How do these beliefs affect the way the Beng rear their children? In this unique and engaging ethnography of babies, Alma Gottlieb explores how religious ideology affects every aspect of Beng childrearing practicesâ "from bathing

infants to protecting them from disease to teaching them how to crawl and walkâ "and how widespread poverty limits these practices. A mother of two, Gottlieb includes moving discussions of how her experiences among the Beng changed the way she saw her own parenting. Throughout the book she also draws telling comparisons between Beng and Euro-American parenting, bringing home just how deeply culture matters to the way we all rear our children. All parents and anyone interested in the place of culture in the lives of infants, and vice versa, will enjoy *The Afterlife Is Where We Come From*.

Had to read this book for class and it did not disappoint. A little long for my liking but I am not complaining.

That rare anthropology book that's both academically sound and eminently readable. Highly recommended!

I had to purchase this book for a college course & it is excellent! Easy to read and understand. A little detailed with a lot of references and facts, but that is why it is used for school. Even if it was not for a class I would have purchased it.

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