



# Unsafe Motherhood: Mayan Maternal Mortality and Subjectivity in Post-War Guatemala (Fertility, Reproduction and Sexuality)

By Nicole S. Berry

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Since 1987, when the global community first recognized the high frequency of women in developing countries dying from pregnancy-related causes, little progress has been made to combat this problem. This study follows the global policies that have been implemented in Sololá, Guatemala in order to decrease high rates of maternal mortality among indigenous Mayan women. The author examines the diverse meanings and understandings of motherhood, pregnancy, birth and birth-related death among the biomedical personnel, village women, their families, and midwives. These incongruous perspectives, in conjunction with the implementation of such policies, threaten to disenfranchise clients from their own cultural understandings of self. The author investigates how these policies need to meld with the everyday lives of these women, and how the failure to do so will lead to a failure to decrease maternal deaths globally.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

*"Unsafe Motherhood is a finely argued monograph. It does what it sets out to do well: offering valuable insights on a topic of global importance."* • **JRAI**

*"[This] is an extremely valuable book that sheds light not only on the obstacles to making motherhood safer, but to improving the health of poor populations in general. By challenging the reader to seek to understand how other people see themselves, their bodies and their biological processes, Berry's book promises to improve how aspiring global health workers think about health and development. Written in clear, simple language, the book should be read by undergraduates in anthropology, sociology and development studies (including economics) all the way to professionals in these fields. Unpretentious but deeply thoughtful, Berry's book provides the field of medical anthropology with an exemplary piece of work."* • **Social Anthropology/Anthropologie sociale**

*"This book will be of interest to anthropologists working in the South American area, but also to those scholars with an interest in medical anthropology and reproduction more broadly. In exploring the relationship between policy, practice and everyday experience, it makes compelling reading for policy-makers and practitioners, providing a critical perspective on why initiatives around maternal and infant health succeed – or fail."* • **Anthropology in Action**

*"This book is both theoretically sophisticated and ethnographically rich. The analysis of the underlying assumptions of the various international health policies and their potentially negative consequences, biologically and culturally, should be required reading not only for Maya and Latin American scholars but especially anthropology and medical students and professionals in the areas of maternal health, global health, and international development."* • **Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology**

*"She [Berry] has an accessible narrative style, richly illustrating the theme of each chapter with examples from her in-depth research, supported by an extensive bibliography."* • **Human Reproduction and Genetic Ethics**

*"...a compelling account of maternal mortality and maternal health care among indigenous populations in Guatemala."* • **Sarah Pinto**, Tufts University

#### About the Author

**Nicole S. Berry** is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia.

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