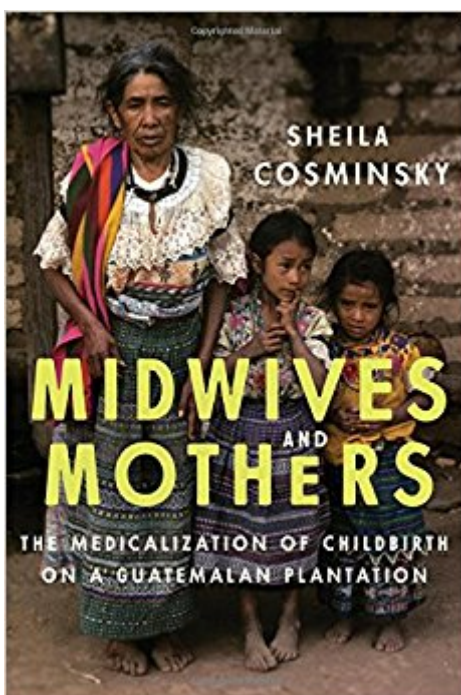


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# Midwives And Mothers: The Medicalization Of Childbirth On A Guatemalan Plantation (Louann Atkins Temple Women & Culture)



## Synopsis

The World Health Organization is currently promoting a policy of replacing traditional or lay midwives in countries around the world. As part of an effort to record the knowledge of local midwives before it is lost, *Midwives and Mothers* explores birth, illness, death, and survival on a Guatemalan sugar and coffee plantation, or finca, through the lives of two local midwives, Doña Maria and her daughter Doña Siriaca, and the women they have served over a forty-year period. By comparing the practices and beliefs of the mother and daughter, Sheila Cosminsky shows the dynamics of the medicalization process and the contestation between the midwives and biomedical personnel, as the latter try to impose their system as the authoritative one. She discusses how the midwives syncretize, integrate, or reject elements from Mayan, Spanish, and biomedical systems. The midwives' story becomes a lens for understanding the impact of medicalization on people's lives and the ways in which women's bodies have become contested terrain between traditional and contemporary medical practices. Cosminsky also makes recommendations for how ethno-obstetric and biomedical systems may be accommodated, articulated, or integrated. Finally, she places the changes in the birthing system in the larger context of changes in the plantation system, including the elimination of coffee growing, which has made women, traditionally the primary harvesters of coffee beans, more economically dependent on men.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A gem of a book! Sheila Cosminsky is world-renowned in anthropology as one of the

mothers/founders of the anthropology of midwifery and birth. She has been conducting fieldwork on midwifery in Guatemala from the 1970s until almost the present day, and this book is her magnum opusâ "the culmination of all those decades of research in one volume." (Robbie Davis-Floyd, University of Texas at Austin, author of *Birth as an American Rite of Passage* and *Birth in Four Cultures*)

Sheila Cosminsky is professor emerita of anthropology in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice at Rutgers Universityâ •Camden. She is the coauthor, with Ira Harrison, of a two-volume bibliography, *Traditional Medicine*, and has published numerous articles on ethnomedicine, midwifery, and maternal and child health and nutrition.

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