

*Protection de l'enfance et régulation sociale en Colombie.
Ethnologie des foyers communautaires à Ciudad Bolívar (Bogotá)*

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Child Protection and Social Regulation in Colombia.
Ethnology of the Community Homes in Ciudad Bolívar (Bogotá)

Summary. The *community homes* are social child day-care centres, co-managed by the Colombian State and the community, which operate since the 1980s in the vulnerable neighbourhoods of the big Colombian cities. The woman of the house cares for about fifteen children and thus becomes a *community mother*. The resources provided by the State are managed by associations which gather about twenty *community homes*. This research studies both the evolution of the community homes on the public scene, and the daily life of the members of an association of beneficiaries of the programme. The author combines the study of a legal corpus which regulates the operation of the community homes and an ethnography conducted in an underprivileged neighbourhood in the southern periphery of Bogotá.

With the support of the social regulation theory, the analysis sheds light on the central role played by the *community homes* in the process of construction of the Colombian nation : within a society burdened by an internal war, child protection is presented as the cornerstone of national integration, a supreme moral value and a lever of social development. The translation into domestic law of the principle of the child's best interest, taken from international legislation, facilitates the institutionalisation of such values. Yet, in the name of these values, the fundamental rights of the *community mothers* -who have a status of volunteers, and not of employees- are neglected by the State : the community mothers mobilise in order to claim their rights and obtain conclusive results. The mechanisms by which these women are empowered, around their daily child care activities, are exposed. The values associated to child protection thus appear as the bedrock and the driving force of the empowerment of two antagonist social actors : the Colombian State and the *community mothers*.

The light shed on this mechanism, as well as its global anchorage, is intended as a methodological contribution to contemporary anthropology and sociology of childhood. This research also nourishes the juridical debates on the principle of the best interest of the child.