

Book Reviews

Au Pair

Zuzana Búriková and Daniel Miller, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010, ISBN: 0-7456-5011-1. 240pp. Hb: £50, Pb: £15.99.

Reviewed by Mackenzie Belt

In *Au Pair*, Zuzana Búriková and Daniel Miller examine Slovakian au pairs who were working in London between 2004 and 2005. Au pairs are officially recognized as foreigners who come to stay in the U.K. with families so that they can obtain better knowledge of the country and culture. The families who employ them are required to provide them with food, housing and a small allowance in exchange for their services in domestic work and childcare. Thus, the au pair institution is a type of domestic labour that emphasizes the cultural exposure for the worker rather than promising a profitable salary. The authors attempt a very humanistic approach to explaining the institution of the au pair and do so through ethnography and a series of personal narratives.

Migration studies, such as this one, rarely focus on both the perspectives of the hosts and the workers. Here, however, because Búriková is Slovakian and Miller is English, they are in the advantageous positions to access both the workers' and the host families' more sincere perspectives, which are often kept guarded and can be difficult to obtain. Likewise, research on domestic labour migration has often looked at the migration of people from outside Europe, so this study, which looks at Eastern European migration, is significant in its rarity.

Through case studies derived from their ethnography, the authors address and analyse everything from the material culture of au

pairs to the differing perspectives of host and worker, and even the deeper meaning of time spent abroad for the au pair. The life stories and personal narratives from au pairs address various aspects of their everyday life and also more controversial issues such as sex and racism, which often remain private. The reader gains an empathetic perspective of the relationships between the hosts and the au pair.

While the reader is rewarded with significant insights into the human experience of au pairing, there are also certain areas in this book which would benefit from improvement. In the prologue, it states that the authors' goal is to humanize the people involved in the au pair institution, instead of writing a more academic piece of literature. That being said, this book is written in such a way that it resembles a homage to the parties involved in au pair relationships. Even though the personal narratives analysed are frequently intimate and rich with ethnographic detail, the conclusions reached (often through individual psychoanalysis) are mostly conjectural in nature and lack sufficient justification. Throughout much of the book, this conjectural reductionism imparts a feeling of belittling the parties involved. For example, one assumption was that 'au pairs responded to [certain] anxieties by eating more and putting on weight' (48) or 'Mrs. Christie ... was always on the lookout for what she took as the classic Slovak pose in the face of unwelcome authority, which consists of simply standing dumb' (77).

One of the most captivating concepts engaged with is the idea that many Slovaks chose to au pair in London as a sort of rite de passage, which they use to explore new ideas and encounter new people for the purpose of

self-development and maturation (189). And while this theory is inviting, it only accounts for a very small section of the book.

Overall, *Au Pair* provides an intimate and intriguing look at the perspectives of au pairs and their employers, but lacks much in the way of academic calibre or theoretical contribution. It should be useful to scholars of domestic labour migration, transnationalism, globalization and (lifestyle) migration who want an insider's perspective on the au pair institution.

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Domestic Goddesses: Maternity, Globalization and Middle-class Identity in Contemporary India

Henrike Donner, London: Ashgate, 2008, ISBN: 978-0-7546-4942-7. 230pp. Hb £55.

The Force of Domesticity: Filipina Migrants and Globalization

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, New York: New York University Press, 2008, ISBN: 0-8147-6734-6. 224pp. Pb \$22.

Reviewed by Adam Drazin

These two books are both studies of domesticity, globalization and gender in an Asian context. Both are women-centred studies which concern the re-shaping of the enacted role of motherhood in confrontation with the intransigence of ideas about motherhood.

Donner gives us a closely argued and very rich ethnography of motherhood among middle-class families in Calcutta over several generations. Her argument concerns the convergence of 'making mothers' with 'doing class' (62). Putting women at the centre of recent

social change, Donner exhaustively outlines changes in marriage, love, birth, education and diet. Historically, extremes of female segregation and isolation were common, and contemporary married life entails living with one's in-laws and undertaking a lot of the household responsibilities. Their work and their fertility are the objects of public discussion and scrutiny. Donner's informants narrate their experiences of pregnancy in terms of their relationships with in-laws, and struggle to take control of the work they do, and of their educational resources. Successive generations have negotiated similar social pressures, with older women reporting physical neglect and abuse, especially when pregnant or giving birth, for the sake of family reputation. Donner argues that contemporary improvements have not been about considering the interests of women, but about finding strategic ways of negotiating the same class-oriented aims. Frequently, medical attention to the birth of a son is used to significantly improve a woman's status in the household. Thus individual choice, where it appears, is often a part of the project of family, and this in turn forms a part of the project of class.

Donner is especially good at describing the cultural constructions of work, of intimacy with children, and the importance of caesarean sections. She brings many of her arguments together in a final chapter on the rise of vegetarianism, which she sees as directed at 'somatic truths' (159) about oneself, re-orienting traditional practices within a contemporary environment which over-determines ideas of 'consumerist' lifestyles.

The Philippines and its diaspora are a test-bed par excellence for contemporary women's studies approaches within globalization. Parreñas' book is intended to move beyond her previous work, not only exploring Philippine issues, but building on these to consider the wider relevance for gender and domesticity, evoking such work as Ehrenreich's and Hochschild's (2002) *Global Woman*.

Parreñas' argument orients around the notion of the 'force of domesticity' of the title. This means 'the continued relegation of housework to women or the persistence of the ideology of women's domesticity, in the labour market, the family, and the migrant community, as well as in migration policies and laws' (9). This phenomenon acts as a 'roadblock' (8) to the reconfiguration of gender and equality. As migrating women move smoothly into the role of breadwinner, they remain preoccupied with domestic roles and responsibilities.

Parreñas proceeds to look at the moral economy of the Philippine state, through the promotion of gender stereotypes. She then moves to the experience of transnational families and mothering – particularly the use of media to construct intimacy, and the ideas of place and placelessness. In some places here she does not do justice to her own research in the retelling: 'various studies have shown that intimacy across borders defines transnational family life' (69), we are told. The final two more satisfying chapters (one co-written with Winnie Tam) then explore the regulation of international migration – how Asian women's migration to the USA was used to assert a moralized domesticity, and a direct critique of how current ideas of trafficking also serve the project of the State through disciplining Asian women.

Donner's is in many ways the more optimistic of the two studies. Although an individual woman's role is subordinated to the project of family, the family is seen as a point of tension and struggle, the font of change rather than a roadblock. Working in a Weberian paradigm, class has a degree of mutability, and indeed all these concepts can appear as means rather than ends. The Filipina women with whom Parreñas works are much more demonstrative in their efforts to make a lasting, liberating change in their lives, moving across the globe to do so. And yet their energies and resources are drawn back into reinforcing the domestic responsibilities which arguably oppress them.

The cyclical relation of womanhood to motherhood to domesticity persists.

Parreñas is thus engaged in explaining the problem of intransigence, Donner that of change. For Donner, elements in the recipe are more interrelated which for Parreñas are disparate. For example, when the state in India promulgates new ideas about scientific childbirth, mothers in Calcutta engage with these ideas to negotiate their own situation. Filipina women meanwhile are subjected to the domestic and sexual ideologies of both Philippine and United States governments, but appear to steer their own courses regardless, sometimes deploying mobility as a strategy of distancing.

The question of what globalization refers to varies between the two authors, and especially in terms of whether it means social phenomena are locally specific or internationally comparable. Is class a question of a locally unfolding group status – more Weberian – or determined by one's role in the economy in a more Marxist sense? Where Parreñas sees gendered domestic 'labour' active internationally, Donner instead explores the cultural dimensions of 'work' in which domestic activity is infused with a sense of duty but is also a site of negotiation. The experience of globalization is also radically different. Donner describes an infusion of knowledges, ways of doing things, media and goods arriving in Calcutta, while Parreñas is concerned with the mobility of people. As relationships stretch across oceans and continents, she returns to Harvey's idea of time-space compression, but leaves us with the question of what this implies for the constitution of 'domesticity', as an ideology and/or an experience.

These differences have radical implications for the analysis of 'motherhood', a concept which is actually described in very similar terms by both authors. Both emphasize the evaluation which appends to motherhood, a construction often used morally to judge women as upholders of national or family

dignity, or as deserving migrants. Both authors also note the rise in importance of ideas of 'intimacy' with children, mediated by playing an active role in education. In their analysis, however, Donner considers motherhood as a culturally productive site for reproduction and rejuvenation of culture in India (in contrast to some past studies emphasizing its conservatism), while for Parreñas, motherhood is primarily ideological.

While these books do not transcend some age-old problems in women's studies (such as the relevance but relative inaccessibility of men's experience, the gendering of research itself), they do offer ways of thinking about articulations with globalization. Long-standing themes of gendered abuse, the burden of work, stereotypical roles and the State are re-visited. While neither work is wholly conclusive, they illustrate some possible ways forward and pit-

falls in moving beyond analytical localism in studies of care and gender.

Adam Drazin is a social anthropologist based in the Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin. He works in the fields of material culture, design anthropology and the Romanian home. Among his courses, he teaches on the themes of mass consumption in globalization, visual culture, gender and care. His design anthropology work has involved ethnographic research with HP Labs and Intel Digital Health Group, as well as consultancy with other organizations. He recently co-edited a special edition of the journal Anthropology in Action on the theme of 'Anthropology, Design and Technology in Ireland'. He is currently writing a book on the Irish-Romanian Home and the Culture of Openness, and is also working to establish postgraduate training in ethnography for design and innovation in Trinity College.