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# Review of: Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering

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*Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering.* By Cameron Lynne Macdonald. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010. Pp. xiv+272. \$22.95.

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In *Shadow Mothers*, Cameron Lynne Macdonald examines the dynamics of the delegation of mother work between mothers and paid in-home child care providers. Based on in-depth interviews with 30 professional-class employed mothers and 50 immigrant or American-born nannies and European au pairs, the book provides rich and nuanced details of how mothers hire and manage nannies or au pairs and how the caregivers respond to them. Macdonald provides a compelling analysis of how the mother-nanny relationship is shaped by specific cultural values and institutional barriers and suggests some possible solutions.

Macdonald reports that a majority of mothers she interviewed expect their nannies or au pairs to work as “shadow mothers”—surrogates who would care for their children exactly as they would. Some mothers employ what she calls “puppeteer management strategies” (p. 90). They set strict daily schedules for their children, such as the times at which children take naps, have meals, and play indoors or outdoors. They also set rules about language use and socializing. They attempt to monitor whether the caregivers follow the schedules and rules in various ways. Other mothers utilize what she calls “paranormal management strategies” (p. 91). They hire care providers who would “naturally” make decisions about their children’s daily lives that would be very similar to decisions they would make. In either case, mothers make efforts to limit the influences of the care providers’ personal style and attachment to their children. Using numerous policies (e.g., nannies must fade away when the mother is home), they demanded that the nannies help them enhance their place in their child’s daily life.

According to Macdonald, the mothers’ demands that their nannies be shadow mothers are derived from three factors at a broader social level—the ideology of “intensive mothering,” unsupportive workplaces, and the devaluation of care work. Professional-class mothers in her study are those who have climbed up the corporate ladders in male-dominated fields, such as lawyers, executives in finance-related fields, scientists, and physicians. Their work is demanding, and their workplace culture is not at all family friendly. Yet they are determined to live up to the ideology of intensive mothering that emphasizes the centrality of mothers in children’s development and the transmission of class values. They seek to achieve intensive mothering through carefully managing their nannies. Because they are away from home for long periods of time, they tend to be insecure about their status as mothers, which leads to their sense of needing to micromanage their nannies. In addition, they do not recognize their nan-

nies' skills because of the market logic they are familiar with—child care is considered a low-skilled job.

The book also provides the other side of the story. Most nannies and au pairs work long hours and are underpaid. Nevertheless, what they feel most resentful about is not hours or pay. They object to the lack of autonomy and the scant recognition of their skills and attachment to their employers' children. They believe that they are more experienced than their employers in caring for children. They feel that the rules and policies that their employers set are often unreasonable for them and the children. They see their attachment to the children as helping to compensate for the parents' absence. They wish to be treated as a "third parent," not as a shadow mother. The third parent ideal of nannies has problems as well, however. Their wish to be considered part of the family makes it difficult for them to negotiate wages and benefits. This often results in doing more work for the employers' family without compensation.

As Macdonald argues, the mother-nanny relationship reflects a contradiction between the ideal and reality of motherhood in contemporary U.S. society. Prior work has shown mothers' struggles with making sense of this contradiction. Sharon Hays (*The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* [Yale University Press, 1996]), who introduced the idea, argued that professional-class mothers try to achieve the logic of intensive mothering despite its fundamental contradictions with the logic of their work lives. Anita Iltis Garey (*Weaving Work and Motherhood* [Temple University Press, 1999]) reported that employed mothers feel pressured to express their identities as mothers, not as workers, and to have that identity recognized by others. Some professional-class mothers opt out of or scale back their demanding career to realize the ideal of intensive mothering (Mary Blair-Loy, *Competing Devotions: Career and Family among Women Executives* [Harvard University Press, 2003]). *Shadow Mothers* sheds a light on another strategy in which professional-class employed mothers attempt to achieve intensive mothering—through hiring nannies who work as shadow mothers.

Macdonald argues that, in order to create satisfactory mother-nanny relationships, it is important for mothers to see the nanny-child relationship as different from the mother-child relationship and to treat nannies as a trusted partner. What would make partnerships between mothers and nannies possible? Based on findings from supplemental data, Macdonald makes two conclusions. First, mothers need to come to terms with the ideology of intensive mothering. Ethnic minority mothers who live in the tradition of "othermothers" suggest that it is possible to break the ideology of intensive mothering. Second, mothers need to feel that they are spending adequate time with their children so that they are secure enough to delegate a portion of mother work to someone else. Part- or flex-time schedules may help mothers feel they are sufficiently involved in their children's lives. However, as Macdonald notes, these solutions are not easy to realize. With the increasingly competitive economic cli-

mate, upper- and middle-class mothers will not be free from the sense of responsibility for passing on their education, skills, and social connections to their children any time soon. Professional-class mothers will not take part- or flex-time schedules unless they are ensured that these policies will not mommy-track them.

In all, *Shadow Mothers* provides a rich and detailed analysis of the mother-nanny relationship that reflects a range of issues surrounding working mothers, such as cultural expectations of high standards of maternal involvement, inadequate workplace policies, parenting anxiety, and devaluation of child care workers. It makes an important contribution to the studies of motherhood, work-family balance, and care work.

*Getting Ahead: Social Mobility, Public Housing, and Immigrant Networks.* By Silvia Dominguez. New York: New York University Press, 2011. Pp. viii+269. \$45.00.

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*Getting Ahead* is a fascinating and richly informative account of immigrant life in two Boston neighborhoods, South Boston and East Boston. It highlights several key social and structural factors that shape the social mobility of low-income Latin American immigrant women and makes valuable contributions to the study of immigration, public housing, gender dynamics, and social networks in urban settings. Through longitudinal in-depth interviews, participant observation, and extensive ethnographic observations, Silvia Dominguez observes that immigrants are “getting ahead” despite living in poverty, which is consistent with the literature on assimilation and on the Latino paradox. In contrast to previous work, however, she argues that social mobility does not occur through assimilation, nor are immigrants’ outcomes explained by the self-selection of exceptional individuals into migratory pathways. Instead, their success is shaped through the combination of individual agency, dual frames of reference, supporting social networks, “bridging” ties, and a certain level of agency and social modeling within the groups with which immigrants are associated. This book reminds me of Mario L. Small’s *Villa Victoria* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), a study of a Puerto Rican housing development, with a key difference being Dominguez’s primary focus on individual social mobility over time rather than on neighborhood social capital.

*Getting Ahead* develops its argument in eight chapters. Chapter 1 presents the conceptual framework that supports the argument, discussing in detail the five main factors of immigrant social mobility, the combination of which make up what the author calls “social flow” (p. 10). Individual “self-propelling agency” refers to a combination of self-efficacy and am-