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Maria Kontos and Glenda Tibe Bonifacio, eds. *Migrant Domestic Workers and Family Life: International Perspectives*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. XI + 341 pp. ISBN 978-1-137-32354-5.

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Throughout Western Europe live-in domestic workers such as cooks, housekeepers, and nannies were quite common until the second half of the twentieth century. The postwar period of socioeconomic rebuilding brought social welfare and publicly funded care facilities that effectively reduced the demand for live-in domestic workers, and until quite recently only the wealthy upper social strata could (and would) still employ full-time carers. Yet, recent trends show that the need for private care work is again increasing across Europe, caused especially by the growing demand for elder care. Research has already confirmed the return of the live-in domestic care work model in some European countries, coupled with the dismantling of the welfare state, as well as closure of state-funded childcare facilities and other forms of public care infrastructure. Moreover, as pointed out by Dorothee Frings in her contribution to *Migrant Domestic Workers and Family Life: International Perspectives*, emphasizing the private provision of care has actually become the official strategy of the European Commission. And because European women have, in the postwar period, increasingly left the confines of the private sphere and entered the labor market, the question of “who will do the caring” has now resurfaced with renewed vigor. Meanwhile, the policies on work-family balance have enacted an exclusionary vision of gender equality that marginalizes all but “white” heterosexual middle-class mothers who live in dual-career families. Ample research has therefore highlighted the effects of the rising demand for migrant domestic and care workers, whose lack of opportunities drives them to migrate from the so-called global South to global North (e.g., Parreñas 2001; Lutz 2008; Slany, Kontos, and Liapi 2010).

Maria Kontos and Glenda Tibe Bonifacio have edited an ambitious book that addresses the timely issue of migrant domestic workers’ right to family life, a topic that has long remained undertheorized. It is important to emphasize the novelty of the volume, which represents its strong side. Whereas current debates on domestic workers have thus far focused mainly on research about domestic workers through the employer-employee relationship, thus neglecting the aspects irrelevant to work, in this volume the migrants’ right to family life gets some long-overdue attention. Moreover, domestic workers’ family life has predominantly been studied through the concept of transnationalism, focusing on migrant family (members) as those who have been abandoned, left behind, and suffering—without giving their experiences any visibility for researchers and readership. With this volume, however, families

have finally become the core of the research, and domestic workers and their families are treated as agents trying to do their best to continue living together.

Adopting both a rights-based and an agency-based perspectives, the 16 chapters tackle the question of how migrant care workers cope with long-term separation from their families, looking at the complexity of relationships that they experience, especially the employer-worker relationship that often gets complicated by intimate situations of physical proximity and the blurry lines of the “fictive kin” mechanism (being “like a family member” to the employer). Bringing new qualitative empirical evidence from countries as diverse as Argentina, Canada, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Norway, the Philippines, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, and Ukraine, the book will no doubt attract a wide readership. While the quality and originality of the individual chapters vary slightly, the volume on the whole demonstrates interesting and wide-ranging routes for examining the topic through narrative or semistructured interviews, oral history, participant observation and ethnographic research, as well as policy analysis of parliamentary debates, governmental bills, official policy plans, and reports. Read together, the contributions are particularly powerful as a compendium that can reflect on the consequences of global economic restructuring and its multifaceted class-related, gendered, and racialized effects. Women from developing countries are in demand in the global North not only because their willingness to work for low wages represents an affordable alternative to a “successful” reconciliation of work and family for middle-class families, but also due to stereotypes about their allegedly docile nature and traditional values. Filipina workers, for example, are expected to perform care work with particular “natural” affinity and skill.

Divided into four thematic parts, the book starts by framing legalities, employment, and family rights. The first section delves into how international and European laws treat transnational domestic work(ers) and the(ir) right to family life. Dorothee Frings analyzes how migrant domestic workers lose touch with their own families due to standby time and long working hours related to care work, highlighting that the particular working conditions of persons who work abroad are not covered by any specific regulation under European labor law. What this means is that there will always be a risk of exploitation and that it is therefore imperative to raise awareness on the validity of the standards of employment for domestic work. Continuing the analysis of particular national policies in Norway and the Philippines, Mariya Bikova describes Norway’s *au pair* arrangement as a transnational organization of care actively involving Philippines’ immigration authorities. She analyzes the consequences of the Norwegian immigration authorities’ definition of *au pairs* as neither students nor workers but as “guests” of the “host family” on this particular group of migrant domestic workers. This managed and regulated migration of mostly Filipina women prevents them from having a family life, awards them only the very minimum of rights, and effectively serves the host country’s needs while limiting the agency of migrant women. They are reduced to noncitizen, nonmigrant, and even nonworker status, whereas the global care chain and transnational “redistribution of care happens at the expense of the children in the South” (p. 70). In the first of four case

studies of Spain that appear in this volume, Elin Peterson shows that domestic workers' labor rights have recently become a part of the country's political agenda. After the Franco regime, Spain has gone through interesting changes in the area of women's labor market participation. Putting forward the working mother as the subject of conservative governmental policies, it became emphasized that mothers should be able to have both children and careers, making work-family balance an important national goal. Yet due to an imbalance of shared unpaid work and care burden between men and women, domestic work remained associated with women, reproducing the gendered division of labor—which, however, is rendered unproblematic when externalized to working-class and migrant women. And while cheap migrant domestic labor has filled a need, it has also “become a valid solution to the care deficit” (pp. 84–85). Continuing the focus on Spain, Gabriela Poblet Denti's contribution is one of the best chapters in the book. Analyzing different strategies that migrant Latina domestic workers employ in order to exercise their right to family life in Barcelona, she argues that the live-in care work regime represents an absolute exploitation of these women. Moreover, “domestic and care services operate according to the logic of a precarious, sexist, and segmented global labor market sustained by immigration policies” (p. 93). The state is complicit in this ongoing marginalization and exploitation of migrant domestic workers, whose right to family life is entirely absent since they are not even imagined as having a family of their own.

The second section deals with public discourses, family separation, and reunification. Olena Fedyuk writes about the shifting roles and responsibilities of transnational families of Ukrainian care workers in Italy. Namely, in Ukraine migration to Italy gained much publicity in terms of moral panic, which framed the feminized migration as producing “social/Euro orphans.” In this way, by strongly reproducing traditionalist family standards of mothers as carers and fathers as economic providers, such nationalist discourses have put much blame and guilt onto migrant women. Fedyuk unpacks such preconceived notions by laying out the multifaceted nature of migrant experiences and showing how the migration of Ukrainian women to Italy is in fact a “familial migration project that spans across generations” (p. 127). Magdalena Díaz Gorfinkiel's chapter is the third dealing with Spain as the host country, highlighting the one-dimensional construction of female migrant domestic workers as solely workers, without any social policies to help them cope with the requirements of a long-distance family life. She importantly notes that policies and legislation are never neutral but generate life conditions unfavorable to migrant domestic workers. Glenda Tibe Bonifacio further brings this point home when discussing the situation of live-in caregivers and the so-called Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP) in Canada. The LCP is a unique pathway to permanent residence, and the chapter dissects its many problematic aspects, revealing it as discriminatory and susceptible to abuse and exploitation. Entry into Canada is deemed a privilege, and the employer of a caregiver becomes the state's extension (i.e., “the guardian” of the migrant worker), through which state control over the foreign worker can be constantly exerted. This situation breeds a neoliberal strategy for regulating migrant workers and a process of selection of desirable residents. All the while, the migrants subject them-

selves willingly to a relationship of servitude in the hope of “promissory citizenship” (p. 146). Needless to say, live-in caregivers were not allowed to bring in their families at the time of the writing (2014), though attempts at LCP reform were underway.

The third part of the book revolves around remote mothering, survival strategies, and mobilization. Julia Lausch writes about the coping strategies used by Filipina live-in domestic workers in Dubai. Like Tibe Bonifacio, she is also interested in the context of neoliberal economies, noting how global cities like Dubai can prosper precisely due to their exclusion of migrant (domestic) workers from any labor rights. Their consequent low social status makes them perfect subjects of abuse and exploitation, especially since they are not allowed to form unions in order to protect their rights. Again, their right to family life in Dubai is nonexistent. Aranzazu Recalde’s analysis of Paraguayan and Peruvian women in Argentina is another chapter that stands out. Critically reflecting on the predominant Euro-Atlantic focus of the existing literature about migrant care and domestic workers, it shows how the transnationalization of social reproduction increasingly also means South–South migration in Latin America. It also importantly argues that nonrecognition of the right to family life is not exclusive to live-in labor regimes, while migrant domestic and care workers may suffer also from mistreatment by their own compatriots—a fact that is usually neglected due to the emphasis on migrant solidarity and support as a coping strategy. Majda Hrženjak and Mojca Pajnik write about local and migrant domestic workers in Slovenia. Their chapter represents another theoretically excellent and empirically fresh perspective, since in Slovenia most domestic workers are live-out and the decision to work in the informal domestic work market is often tied to individualized strategies of enabling work-family balance. The prevalence of national over migrant domestic workers and live-out forms of care work, as well as the emphasized agency of Slovenian domestic workers who perform this work in neighboring Italy, make Slovenia distinct in comparison with other European countries presented in this volume (although resembling other postsocialist states, such as Slovakia for example). The overall conclusions still point to a “disposable domestic workforce in the grey economy” (p. 227) and confirm the fact that certain groups of women are marginalized in debates about work-family reconciliation. Valerie Francisco concludes this section by focusing on the transnational family as a resource for political mobilization. In yet another excellent contribution, she analyzes the conditions under which Filipino domestic workers form bonds of solidarity and political mobilization. Importantly recognizing migrant motherhood as a socially constructed and historically specific concept, she also considers single women as atypical mothers who see it as their maternal duty to support their extended families back home, in this way recognizing—and giving credit to—social mothering.

The metaphor of the “family member” takes up the fourth and final section of the book, where the defamilialized work of domestic workers is analyzed in three chapters that interrogate the varied applications of this metaphor. Seong-gee Um’s analysis is about Chinese institutional care workers in South Korea. The discourse of migrant care workers as “one of the family” is prevalent in the Korean institutional care sector, thus their employment in long-term care facilities is directly related to

the refusal of their basic labor rights as well as, expectedly, family rights. In Korea, care workers were not recognized as workers on account of traditionalist perceptions of care work as “too private” to be regulated. Yet the current immigration system for low-skilled ethnic Koreans with Chinese citizenship only allows them to work in “personal care” provision that is based on a contract between a care worker and a care service user—perceived by the state as the guardian. The continued rejection of the legal status of care workers as employees allows employers to avoid any legal responsibilities, creating a new arrangement of institutional care work: “24/7 continuous labor as live-in hospital care workers” (p. 272). Serving another person’s family, these care workers’ right to their own family life remains heavily restricted. The chapter by Simone Tappert and Marianne Dobner returns the focus back to Spain to discuss what it means to be considered a member of the family and how this blurs boundaries. The employer’s home being the workplace and the high level of intimacy involved in this type of work introduce a complexity of relationships between the private and the public. Social relationships and boundaries are constantly in flux and renegotiated through banal practices such as eating (together or apart). “Being a family member” thus has a different meaning for employers than for employees. It does not represent a break in existing hierarchies but reproduces social inequalities and asymmetrical power relations along lines of gender, class, and ethnicity. Amrita Pande’s chapter then provides an insightful glimpse of domestic workers’ lives in Lebanon, focusing on what she terms “weekend families.” These are formed by women and are usually based on shared occupation, sense of isolation, work comradeship, and possibly—although not always—ties of ethnicity, nationality, or place of residence. More than Filipina domestic workers, whose position she describes as being better and more protected (they tend to meet up in cafes and malls on Sundays), the chapter analyzes the weekend families of Black African and South Asian migrants, who face harsher restrictions and therefore resort to more clandestine support networks. Since some are literally locked inside their employers’ apartments, they build families across balconies and in war-damaged apartments. These familial ties “challenge institutional efforts to classify these women as temporary residents, actively discouraged from forming or extending their families” (p. 313). Maria Kontos concludes the final section with an analysis of the prospects for care of aging migrant carers. Since there is very little research on migrant women once they return to their country of origin, their needs, as well as their (lack of) access to informal family care and social security rights and pensions, are rarely considered. Kontos rightly highlights the need for addressing this gap and succinctly illustrates these questions with the method of a biographical narrative interview. The chapter brings together the themes of all the previous chapters and shows how the idea of a migrant domestic worker as a “family member” in fact does not fulfill the promises implicitly entailed in such arrangements, since no actual reciprocity exists that would be comparable to intergenerational informal family care. Actual family members, on the other hand, may hold resentment due to seeing a woman’s migration as her own individual, egoistic choice. Applying the concept of the socio-emotional commons, the chapter shows how the erosion of such commons dimin-

ishes the prospects for care in old age, hindering migrant women's plans for the future and leading to insecurity in old age.

The diversity—and yet imperative comparability—of migrant domestic workers' experiences presented in this book allows us to understand that boundaries such as private/public and migrant/native are often blurred. The right to family life should take account of gendered power relations and be accepted as an important part of the right to self-determination and autonomy. Enabling migrant care and domestic workers with this right would no doubt imply large economic contributions by society, as well as the transformation of current economic structures based on neoliberal globalization. Kontos and Tibe Bonifacio are well aware of the caveats that such demands may represent for the immediate options for migrant women, who may lose their employability and be denied access to the only jobs open to them. And yet their call for a shift in the understanding of care as a public task to be supported by the state stems from a deep conviction that the right to family life of migrant domestic and care workers is in fact "grounded on the basic humanity of individuals as persons, and hinges not on their work" (p. 335).

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