Revista de Estudios Sociales

45 | Enero 2013
Servicio doméstico y desigualdad social

Nanny Diaries and Other Stories: Immigrant Women's Labor in the Social Reproduction of American Families

Mary Romero

Edición electrónica
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/revestudsoc/7694
ISSN: 1900-5180

Editor
Universidad de los Andes

Edición impresa
Fecha de publicación: 1 enero 2013
Paginación: 186-197
ISSN: 0123-885X

Referencia electrónica
Mary Romero, «Nanny Diaries and Other Stories: Immigrant Women's Labor in the Social Reproduction of American Families», *Revista de Estudios Sociales* [En línea], 45 | Enero 2013, Publicado el 01 enero 2013, consultado el 04 mayo 2021. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/revestudsoc/7694

Revista de Estudios Sociales No. 45
rev.estud.soc. • ISSN 0123-885X • Pp. 276.
Bogotá, enero - abril de 2013 • Pp. 186-197.

Nanny Diaries and Other Stories: Immigrant Women's Labor in the Social Reproduction of American Families*

Mary Romero**

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7440/res45.2013.15

* * A longer version of this paper was originally published in *DePaul Law Review* 52, no. 3 (2003).

** ** Ph.D. en Sociología de University of Colorado, Estados Unidos. Profesora de Justice Studies en Arizona State University, Estados Unidos. Correo electrónico: mary.romero@asu.edu

Wanted: One young woman to take care of four-year-old boy. Must be cheerful, enthusiastic, and selfless—bordering on masochistic. Must relish sixteen-hour shifts with a deliberately nap-deprived preschooler. Must love getting thrown up on, literally and figuratively, by everyone in his family. Must enjoy the delicious anticipation of ridiculously erratic pay. Mostly, must love being treated like fungus found growing out of employer's Hermès bag. Those who take it personally need not apply (McLaughlin and Kraus 2002, back cover)

Two former nannies employed on the Upper East Side of Manhattan offer this want ad as an illustration of employers' expectations and working conditions awaiting potential employees. Although it is a fictionalized account of their total six-year experience as nannies while attending college, Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus' *The Nanny Diaries, A Novel* has spurred significant attention from the media. Editorials, letters to the editor, book reviews, and talk shows featuring the authors and the book are the most recent additions to the national dialogue on the "servant problem" (Romero 1999). Perspectives on cleaning and childcare services in private households emerging from *The Nanny Diaries* are similar to the recent public exposures of the working conditions and paid arrangements for childcare and housework in upper-middle- and upper-class families (a.k.a. Nannygate). However, unlike attorney general nominees, McLaughlin and Kraus' fictionalized employers, Mr. and Mrs. X, did not hire an immigrant, but rather Nan, "a 21 year-old part-time nanny and full-time NYU senior majoring in education" (Stoller 2002, J4).

Nan is drafted into a plot that immigrant nannies may not recognize: "Nan is trying to graduate from college, start a romance and find a better job. But like Cinderella, she's sidetracked by the constant harping of her employers to hurry, hurry, hurry and help plan a party, buy *foie gras* and locate the mistress' missing underwear" (Falcone 2002, 43). Media responses to the book generally bypassed references to exploitative employment practices documented by researchers and Human Rights Reports. The authors of the book reduce labor issues in domestic work and childcare to comical scenes between Mary Poppins and Jackie Collins. Nan shares the same social status as her employers. Thus, instead of focusing on problems such as unregulated practices that allow abusive employers to avoid prosecution, the lack of venues for employees to address grievances, and other violations of employee rights of household workers and nannies, the book discusses "personality conflicts" between women. The site of employee struggle is therefore successfully moved away from the labor process and the globalization of household labor and caregiving. Placing immigrant nannies in the shadows of the novel, McLaughlin and Kraus are assured that their readers will identify with Nan. Readers can ignore the uncomfortable realities surrounding families and communities who rely on immigrants' low-wage labor in reproducing the American family. Policies and practices creating and reinforcing the vulnerability and exploitability of immigrant labor used to reproduce upper-middle- and upper-class American (as well as worldwide) family lifestyles are invisible to the American national imagination.

This article investigates this erasure of immigrant women from our vision of who we are as US citizens. It analyzes the process and function of placing immigrant domestics and nannies in the shadows and avoiding issues surrounding employee rights, safety and health problems, and childcare needs. Analyzing the social processes and structures that reproduce family, community and nation is central to understanding the maintenance of social inequality. I refocus the immigration lens to frame the reproduction of the American lifestyle requiring an abundance of exploitable immigrant women labor in the twenty-first century. I argue that the nexus of immigration, nationality, and markets is central to the social reproduction of the "American" family, communities, and nation. Immigrant women assist affluent families in the United States and internationally; this assistance is vital to "conceiving the new world order" (Ginsburg and Rayna 1995, xi). Although hidden from the public's view as they work in their employers' homes, visible signs do exist: immigrant riders of color on public transportation in affluent neighborhoods, and women of color, frequently in uniforms, in parks caring for white children or pushing the wheelchairs of their invalid charges. I contend that contemporary social, economic, and legal conditions shape the constraints and opportunities for immigrant household workers and nannies, as well as their families. Consequently, these conditions (1) reproduce gender, race, ethnic, and class privileges; (2) blur the ideological contradictions of equality and justice embedded in the American Dream; and (3) reinforce the existing social stratification.

Two points about immigrant domestic workers are central to the paper's discussion of immigration and the perpetuation of the subordinate status of women. The first is

Revista de Estudios Sociales No. 45
rev.estud.soc. • ISSN 0123-885X • Pp. 276.
Bogotá, enero - abril de 2013 • Pp. 186-197.

the contradiction between anti-immigration sentiment exhibited both prior to and after 9/11 and the employment of immigrant women who are entrusted with their employers' homes and children. It is ironic that underpaid immigrant women are hired domestic workers, while immigrants vilifying immigrants as a threat to the "American way of life." The second is the failure of the caregiving movement in the United States to place immigration at the center of its discussion. Considering caregiving within the larger framework of the global economy places immigrant women (both as potential providers and recipients) at the center of the caregiving crisis.

I draw from popular culture to analyze the normalization of the processes used to employ immigrant domestic workers. I begin by comparing and contrasting the depiction of domestic workers and nannies in *The Nanny Diaries* and in social science research. I then turn to the peculiarities of paid childcare created by competitive and intensive mothering that uses the labor of immigrant women from the southern hemisphere. This type of social reproduction consists of socialization processes that maintain and reflect class, race, gender, ethnicity, and citizenship systems of privilege. State immigration and labor regulations, alongside employers' hiring preferences and practices, result in the commodification of immigrant women in the globalized market of carework and perptuates their subordinate status.

The Nanny Diaries: Reality or Fantasy?

Given the media attention and public discourse generated by the novel, it is worth asking the question: How representative is *The Nanny Diaries* of the situation of nannies and domestic workers in the United States? Is it an accurate servant's or childcare worker's worldview of employers and domestic service at the beginning of the new century? Is the plight of domestic service workers dependent upon the selection of the "right" employer, as suggested by the authors? Is the uniqueness of the female employee-employer relationship a result of "having someone work in your home challenging for everyone. Because there is no script, these are incredibly complicated relationships". "Is the uniqueness of the female employee-employer relationship a result of the challenge of having someone work in your own home, and the lack of a normative script for this kind of relationship, as McLaughlin claimed in a recent interview?" (Ganahl 2002, E2). How well does the white 21-year-old female fictional character, Nan, serve as a spokesperson for nannies in the public discourse on paid caregiving?

Due to the large number of undocumented immigrants, US workers employed "off the books," and workers with temporary or permanent visas, as well as the broad category of domestic service defined by the Department of Labor and the Census, precise numbers of domestics and nannies are difficult to obtain. Assessing the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Human Rights Watch estimates that eight hundred thousand private household workers were officially recorded in 1998, of which thirty percent were immigrant women. Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe export the largest number of women as domestic servants (Lutz 2000). Latina and Caribbean immigrants are more vulnerable in the labor market than European immigrants (Lara 2002, E2). Research on domestics in the United States includes immigrants from Latin America (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Mattingly 1999), the Caribbean (Brown 2011; Colen 1995), and the Philippines (Parreñas 2001).

Race and ethnic differences between the employer and the employee are distinctive characteristics of domestic service in the United States. The intersection of class, race, and ethnicity has been a prominent component of the study of African-American (Dill 1994; Rollins 1985), Chicana (Romero 1992), and Japanese-American (Glenn 1996) domestics. Race remains a striking distinction between caretakers and their charges and employers. Reflecting on the playground scene in Central Park in *The Nanny Diaries*, one onlooker contrasted the faces of the children and the caretakers:

> There are also adults there, but curiously, the faces of the two groups (adults and children) don't match. For every white child in a stroller, there is a black woman leaning down, to guide a juice box into their mouth. If she isn't black, she is Hispanic or Asian. The women are the children's nannies. In many cases, they are stepping in for white parents, who are working full-time (Overington 2002, Insight 2).

Education and previous work experience are apparent differences between native-born and immigrant women of color employed as maids and nannies. African-American, Chicana, and Japanese-American women rarely have more than a high school education. A growing number of Latina and Caribbean immigrants are high school and college graduates, and some have held white-collar positions in their homeland. Helma Lutz (2000) noted the international trend toward older and better-educated Third World immigrant women in her survey of research on the globalization of domestic service. Unlike younger and single European immigrant women at the

turn of the twentieth century, these women work to cope with financial crisis, to support families, and to educate their children. Thus, Nan's race, marital status, and citizenship are not characteristic of many women employed as nannies in the United States. With the exception of European women immigrating to the United States with J-1 visas to work as *au pairs* while pursuing their education, most immigrant women are not part-time college students. Nan's career trajectory is destined for a professional or managerial position, whereas older immigrant working mothers find little, if any, social mobility. When domestic service is constructed as offering immigrant women the experience to move into higher paying jobs, the work is characterized as a bridging occupation. When women experience barriers to entering other job sectors in the economy, domestic service is described as a ghetto occupation to characterize the lack of social mobility and isolation in the underground economy.

Nan informs the reader of the existing continuum of childcare arrangements, which she classifies into three types of nanny gigs: (1) "a few nights a week for people who work all day and parent most nights"; (2) "'sanity time' a few afternoons a week to a woman who mothers most days and nights"; and (3) "provide twenty-four/seven 'me time' to a woman who neither works nor mothers." (McLaughlin and Kraus 2002, 26). Embedded in the last category are live-in positions and day workers that might work full-time solely for one employer or for a number of employers. Employers make arrangements with agencies, franchises, collectives, or directly with the employee (Romero 1992; Mendez 1998; Salzinger 1991). Employees working on their own include some that are bonded and considered self-employed, and others working in the underground economy. However, the actual distinctions are reflected in the working conditions: long hours of employment, low wages, lack of benefits, and the inclusion of all household work alongside childcare (Romero 1992; Macklin 1993).

Researchers and labor advocates reporting on wages for immigrant women over the last decade point to the variability in the market. Grace A. Rosales (2001) found wages ranging from $100 to $400 a week in Los Angeles. In her study of immigrant women employed as domestics and nannies in Los Angeles, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) stated that many Latina live-in workers do not receive minimum wage, while day workers had a higher average wage at $5.90 an hour. Doreen Mattingly (1999) interviewed current and former Latina domestics in San Diego and found the average hourly rate was $8.02 for day workers and $2.72 for live-in workers. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2001) reported that Filipino women who migrated to Los Angeles earned an average of $425 a week for providing elderly care, and $350 a week for live-in housekeeping and childcare. In a survey conducted in 2000, the Center for the Childcare Workforce in Washington, D.C. found that half of childcare providers earned less than $4.82 an hour and worked 55 hours a week. Human Rights Watch (2001) reviewed 43 egregious cases among domestic workers with special visas in the United States, and found a median hourly rate of $2.14.

The variation in wages and working conditions among employees points to the hierarchical structure of domestic service reinforced by employers' preferences. This hierarchy was not completely lost on McLaughlin and Kraus. In a reading at a Barnes and Noble bookshop, Kraus acknowledged the privileged position she and her colleague experienced: "We were the Hermès bags of nannies." Epaminondas (2002) explains that "as white, middle-class and university-educated nannies they [Kraus and McLaughlin] were able to avoid the seamier elements of the industry" (p. 8).

McLaughlin and Kraus portray a typical day of nanny tasks caring for the employer's son as "spent schlepping Grayer to French class, music lessons, karate, swimming, school and play dates" (Falcone 2002, 43). Consistent with the image of Marie Rainer, the governess that Captain Von Trapp hired to care for his children in the film *The Sound of Music*, most employers with a live-in nanny assign employees a wide range of household tasks. While nannies are distinguished from housekeepers in that nannies are employed primarily to care for children, housekeepers may occasionally be asked to assist in childcare, and nannies may be expected to cook, wash dishes, "pick-up," and do other household work directly related to the care of children. A consistent complaint among nannies is the expectation that they do housework and cook alongside caring for children (Wrigley 1995). Distinctions between domestic workers or private household workers and nannies are blurred in the everyday reality of employees as they engage in a broad range of household and caregiving activities, including cleaning, cooking, laundry, nursing the sick, supervising, playing with children, and grocery shopping (Rosales 2001).

The most lucrative and sought-after positions are those that make a clear distinction between tasks and recognize employees' skills, expertise and experience. Immigrant women, particularly those who are undocumented, are more likely to be hired for live-in work and

day work—positions that do not have clearly defined job descriptions (Richardson 1999). These nannies are unlikely to have much authority over the children or in planning activities. Instead, they find themselves at the beck and call of children as they serve and wait on them. Given the number of immigrant women nannies that McLaughlin and Kraus saw in the park, it is not surprising that they wrote, "Every playground has at least one nanny getting the shit kicked out of her by an angry child" (McLaughlin and Kraus 2002, 172). In contrast, *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Adair Lara (2002) described the job of a non-immigrant nanny as quite different: "At the other end of the spectrum, a professional nanny often works weekends, engages the child in imaginative play, knows CPR . . . She will want her hours guaranteed, will expect a bonus, and might be persnickety about doing more than the dishes and the baby's laundry" (Lara 2002, E2).

Nan's life implies that a nanny's work is filled with new learning opportunities and adventures, from learning to cook exotic foods to vacationing among the rich and famous. This depiction does not capture the overwhelming sense of isolation reported by immigrant women, particularly live-in workers. Since Lucy Salmon's (1972) sociological study at the turn of the century, extreme isolation continues to be cited by live-in workers as one of the worst aspects of the job. Isolation from relatives, friends, and other domestic workers prevents them from gaining resources to find employment elsewhere. Separation from their own children is frequently identified as a major factor in developing a strong emotional attachment to their charges (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Domestics' loneliness is not countered by stimulating tasks. In the transformation of domestic labor from the unpaid work of mothers to low-wage work, physical demands are increased and more creative aspects are eliminated (Rollins 1985; Romero 1992). The transformation from unpaid to paid childcare involves assigning the least pleasant tasks to immigrant nannies. Childcare advocates Suzanne W. Helburn and Barbara R. Bergmann describe the division as follows: "The parents try to reserve the more interesting child-rearing tasks for themselves. They do the storytelling and reading, supervise homework, and organize outings and parties in order to spend 'quality time' with their children" (Helburn and Bergmann 2002, 109).

Similar to the public discourse generated by the Nannygate scandals over the last decade, *The Nanny Diaries* examined the impact of hiring domestics and nannies on employers and their children rather than on the employees and their children. Editorials and book reviews focused on the employer's rights to privacy, poor parenting, and the suffering and deprivation of "the poor little rich boy, Grayer." Since the novel's fictionalized employers were portrayed as a cheating husband and an unemployed trophy wife, the stage was set against a public debate over the needs of working parents. Labor issues were contextualized as interpersonal gender relationships between women (and their competing expectations and emotions in doing "women's work") and the difficulty of employees in identifying as servants. References to immigrant nannies were curtailed to discussions on the impact of their limited English skills and cultural differences on children under their care.

However, when immigrant women speak for themselves, the list of labor issues is similar to the concerns expressed by workers in the United States: low wages, unpaid hours, the lack of decent standards, the absence of health insurance and other employee benefits, and constant supervision. In the case of live-in domestics, employer abuses include violation of their human rights. Anderson and Philzacklea's (1997) international study reports the following grievances, which are also found in the United States:

> [...] denial of wages in cases of dismissal following trial or probation periods, refusal by employers to arrange legal resident status (for tax reasons, etc.); control and sexual harassment; pressure to do additional work (for friends and colleagues); excessive workloads, especially where in addition to caring for children and elderly people they are responsible for all other household chores; and finally the very intimate relationship between the domestic helpers and their employers (Anderson and Philzacklea 1997, 92).

Human Rights Watch cites additional employer abuses in the United States: "Employers deny them basic telephone privileges, prohibit them from leaving employers' homes unaccompanied, and forbid them to associate or communicate with friends and neighbors" (Human Right Watch 2001, 12). More extreme reported abuses include sexual assault, rape, and physical violence. In attempts to keep domestic workers in abusive working environments, some employers hold employees' passports and threaten to call immigration authorities to deport them (Human Rights Watch 2001). Human rights and labor advocates also report health hazards posed by cleaning chemicals "causing everything from skin irritation and rashes to serious respiratory problems from inhaling toxic fumes" (Rosales 2001, 179).

The Nanny Diaries allows readers a voyeuristic view into the daily lives of the rich and famous; it is not an exposé on folkways, norms, values, and etiquette governing unregulated labor practices in American homes. Research on the plight of domestics and nannies in the US presents an entirely different narrative. The next section of this article draws from social science and legal research discusses the role of immigrant women domestics and nannies in the social production of privilege in the childhood of future masters and mistresses.

Immigrant Nanny Care and the Reproduction of Privilege

Globalization of childcare is based on income inequality of women from poor countries providing low-wage carework for families in wealthier nations. Even with low wages and wage variation, hiring a nanny is recognized as the most expensive childcare option. Macklin (1993) states, "The grim truth is that some women's access to the high-paying, high-status professions is being facilitated through the revival of semi-indentured servitude. Put another way, one woman is exercising class and citizenship privilege to buy her easy way out of sex oppression" (Macklin 1993, 34) The largest number of domestic workers is located in areas of the country with the highest income inequality among women. In regions with minimal income inequality, the occupation is insignificant (Milkman, Reese and Roth 1998). Particular forms of domestic labor affirm and enhance the employer's status, shift the burden of sexism to low-wage women workers, and relegate most physically difficult and dirty aspects of domestic labor to the employee (Rollins 1985; Romero 1992).

Little attention has been given to the ways that privilege is reproduced through childcare arrangements and the significance that Third World immigrant women's labor plays in the reproduction of privilege. A notable exception is Bridget Anderson, who states:

> The employment as a paid domestic worker [...] facilitates status reproduction, not only by maintaining status objects, enabling the silver to be polished and the clothes to be ironed, but also by serving as a foil to the lady of the house. The hired productive worker is reproducing social beings and sets of relationships that are not merely her own but also deeply antagonistic to her own interests. Her presence emphasizes and reinforces her employer's identity—as a competent household manager, as middle-class, as white—and her own as its opposite (Anderson 2000, 19-20).

Intensive and competitive mothering revolves around individuality, competition, and the future success of their children (Hays 1996). Competition and individualism are values embedded in children's activities. Annette Lareau (2000) refers to this version of child rearing as "concerted cultivation" geared toward a "deliberate and sustained effort to stimulate children's development and to cultivate cognitive and social skills" (Lareau 2000, 5). Concerted cultivation aims to develop children's ability to reason by negotiating with parents and valuing children's opinions, judgments, and observations. Family leisure time is dominated by organized children's activities such as sports, clubs, and paid lessons (i.e., dance, music, tennis). Most of the children's time is adult-structured rather than child-initiated play. "Play is not just play anymore. It involves the honing of 'motor skills,' 'communication skills,' 'hand-eye coordination,' and the establishment of 'developmentally appropriate behavior'" (Lareau 2011, 163).

Qualities of intensive and competitive mothering are at odds with demanding careers (Romero 2001). Everyday practices of intensive mothering require immense emotional involvement, constant self-sacrifice, exclusivity, and a completely child-centered environment. These mothering activities are financially draining and time-consuming. Mothers with disposable income use commodities to fulfill areas of intensive and competitive mothering where they find themselves falling short. In *The Mother Puzzle*, Judith D. Schwartz (1993) argues that advertising companies use guilt as leverage:

> Companies who are marketing to our guilt inevitably start marketing the guilt itself in order to keep us shopping. This toy will help your child develop motor skills (implicit message: his motor skills will suffer without it). This line of clothing is made of the softest cotton (implicit message: other, less expensive fabrics may be abrasive) (Schwartz 1993, 250).

By the 1990s, "babies and children were firmly entrenched as possessions that necessitated the acquisition of other commodities (and that became more valuable with further investment in goods and services)" (Schwartz 1993, 257). Advertisers targeted the new "Skippies" market (School Kids with Income and Purchasing Power). Quoting *People* magazine, Judith Schwartz characterizes parents of these "gourmet children" as "rapaciously grabbing kudos for their kids with the same enterprise applied to creating fortunes on Wall Street" (Schwartz 1993, 250). She suggests

Revista de Estudios Sociales No. 45
rev.estud.soc. • ISSN 0123-885X • Pp. 276.
Bogotá, enero - abril de 2013 • Pp. 186-197.

that, "Teaching values to our children has been replaced by building value into them . . . by preparing them to compete and giving them what we think they need to do so" (Schwartz 1993, 264).

Hiring a live-in immigrant worker is the most convenient childcare option for a mother juggling the demands of a career and intensive mothering. Purchasing the caretaking and domestic labor of an immigrant woman commodifies reproductive labor and reflects, reinforces, and intensifies social inequalities. The most burdensome mothering activities, such as cleaning, laundry, feeding babies and children, and chauffeuring children to their various scheduled activities, are shifted to the worker. Qualities of intensive mothering, such as sentimental value, nurturing, and intense emotional involvement, are not lost when caretaking work is shifted to an employee (Silbaugh 1996). Employers select immigrant caretakers based on perceived "warmth, love for children, and naturalness in mothering" (Colen 1995, 93).

Employers stereotype different racial and ethnic groups as ideal employees for housework, childcare, and live-in positions. Stereotyping is based on a number of individual characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, class, caste, education, religion, and linguistic ability. This results in a degree of "otherness" for all domestic servants. However, this stereotyping does not always put workers in the subordinate position, and the employers' preferences can vary from place to place. Janet Henshall Momsen (1999) notes that "professionally-trained British nannies occupy an elite niche in Britain and North America" (Momsen 1999, 13). Interviewing employers in Los Angeles and New York City, Julia Wrigley (1995) observed that they identified Spanish-speaking nannies for their ability to broaden the cultural experience of their children, particularly by exposing them to a second language in the home. Employers referred to the growing Latino population in their community and the long-term benefits of their children learning Spanish. However, the socialization to race and culture politics may be most significant consequence of the current commodification of reproductive labor.

The primary mission of reproductive labor in contemporary mothering is to assure their children's place in society. This is partially accomplished through socialization into class, gender, sexual, ethnic, and race hierarchies. The employment of immigrant women as caretakers contributes to this socialization. Reinforced by their parents' conceptualization of caretaking as a "labor of love," children learn a sense of entitlement to affection from people of color that is detached from their own actions (Silbaugh 1996). Children learn to be consumers of care rather than providers of care. Caretaking without parental authority does not teach children reciprocal respect; rather, it teaches them the treatment of women of color as "merely means, and not as ends in themselves" (Tronto 2002, 40). The division of labor between mother and live-in domestic caretaker stratifies components of reproductive labor and equates burdensome, manual, and basic maintenance labor with immigrant women of color. This gendered division of labor serves to teach traditional patriarchal privilege. Privilege is learned as children acquire a sense of entitlement to having a domestic worker always on call to meet their needs (Helburn and Bergmann 2002).

Stratified reproductive labor of a live-in immigrant domestic ensures "learned helplessness and class prejudice in the child," and teaches "dependence, aggressiveness, and selfishness" (Helburn and Bergmann 2002, 108). Systems of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and citizenship domination are taught to children as they witness "the arbitrary and capricious interaction of parents and servants or if they are permitted to treat domestic servants in a similar manner" (Tronto 2002, 40). As children move from their home located in class-segregated (and frequently race-segregated) neighborhoods to school (also likely to be segregated), power relationships and the larger community's class and racial etiquette are further reinforced. "As care is made into a commodity, women with greater resources in the global economy can afford the best-quality care for their family" (Parreñas 2001, 73). If a mother aims to assure her child's social and economic status in society—a society that is racist, capitalist, and patriarchal—then employing a low-wage, full-time or live-in immigrant woman helps a mother achieve her goals. Conditions under which immigrant women of color are employed in private homes are structured by systems of privilege; consequently, employers' children are socialized into these norms and values.

Perpetuation of Immigrant Women Subordination

Paid reproductive labor in the United States is structured along local, national, and international inequalities, positioning Third World immigrant women as the most vulnerable workers. Care workers are sorted by their degree of vulnerability and privilege. Paid domestic labor is not only structured around gender, but is also stratified by race and citizenship status, relegating the most vulnerable worker to the least favorable working conditions

and placing the most privileged in the best positions. The solution of hiring a live-in domestic, used by a relatively privileged group, is a component of reproductive labor in the United States. It serves to intensify inequalities between women in two ways. First, it reinforces childcare as a private rather than a public responsibility. Parents with disposable income maintain private services in their homes rather than support public childcare or join the struggle to gain family-friendly work policies. Second, hiring a live-in domestic reaps the benefits gained by the impact of globalization and restructuring on Third World women. The globalization of domestic service contributes to the reproduction of inequality between nations in transnational capitalism, and reported cases of domestic servitude are increasingly characterized as global gender apartheid (Richmond 2000).

The devaluation of immigrant women in the international division of labor begins in the home as unpaid labor; it is further devalued in the segregated labor forces within Third World countries used by wealthier nations for cheap labor. Women are relegated to low-wage factory work in textiles and electronics industries, with no opportunities available for better-paid positions (Gatmaytan 1997). Migrating and working as domestics becomes the primary strategy for sustaining households for both poor and middle-class women. The demand for low-wage migrant workers expands the pool of cheap labor that unemployment and welfare regulations are unable to maintain. Theorists have traditionally argued that women's unpaid domestic labor in the home serves as a reserve labor force. Applying this qualification to immigrant domestic workers, Third World immigrant women constitute a significant labor reserve, similar to the function of the unemployed and underemployed. Saskia Sassen (1998) puts it this way: "Does domestic service—at least in certain locations—become one of the few alternatives and does it then function as a privatized mechanism for social reproduction and maintenance of a labor reserve?" (Sassen 1998, 115). The transnational export of women from the Global South to the rich industrialized countries of the North has resulted in the promotion of domestics as a major "export product" (Lutz 2000). Transnational division of labor is determined "simultaneously by global capitalism and systems of gender inequality in both sending and receiving countries of migration" (Parreñas 2001, 72).

A prominent feature of globalized reproductive labor is commodification. Parreñas (2001, 73) argues that "commodified reproductive labor is not only low-paid work but declines in market value as it gets passed down the international transfer of caretaking." Anderson (2000) claims that the commodification process in globalization is not limited to the labor but is extended to the worker. In her work on the global politics of domestic labor, she points out that employers "openly stipulate that they want a particular type of person justifying this demand on the grounds that they will be working in the home" (Anderson 2000, 114). Having hired the preferred racialized domestic caretaker based on personal characteristics rather than former experience or skills, the employer does not recognize the emotional labor required. The worker's caretaking "brings with it no mutual obligations, no entry into a community, no 'real' human relations, only money" (Anderson 2000, 123-124).

Employers' hiring preferences for employees who are of a particular race, ethnicity, or nationality contribute to the hierarchical chain of domestic caretakers (Romero 1992). Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) notes that African Americans are no longer the preferred employees in Los Angeles homes because they are portrayed as "bossy," and young black men are associated with "terrifying images" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 56). Caribbean women in New York, meanwhile, are cautioned against coming "across in interviews as being in any way aggressive" (Wrigley 1995, 10). Latina immigrants in Los Angeles are perceived as "responsible, trustworthy, and reliable" workers as well as "exceptionally warm, patient, and loving mothers" (Wrigley 1995, 57). In the case of Filipino workers, Dan Gatmaytan (1997) argues that they are distinguished in the international division of labor as docile and submissive; thus, they are ideally packaged to be imported "by other countries for jobs their own citizens will not perform and for wages domestic citizens would not accept" (Gatmaytan 1997, 247). Parreñas' (2001) findings suggest that employers view Filipinos as providing a "higher quality" service because they speak English and generally have a higher education than Latina immigrants.

However, without state regulations of labor and immigration policies, employers' preferences are irrelevant in the racialization of reproductive labor in the United States. Joy Mutanu Zarembka (2001), the director of the Campaign for Migrant Domestic Rights, argues that the estimated four thousand special visas issued annually for Third World immigrant women contributes to the commodification of these workers into "maids to order" in the United States. Human Rights Watch (2001) lists three visas perpetuating the subordination of immigrant women of color as live-in domestic workers:

> A-3 visas to work for ambassadors, diplomats, consular officers, public ministers, and their families; G-5 visas to work for officers and employees of international organizations or of foreign missions to international organizations and their families; and B-1 visas to accompany U.S. citizens who reside abroad but are visiting the United States or assigned to the United States temporarily for no more than four years, or foreign nations with nonimmigrant status in the United States (Human Right Watch 2001, 4).

In contrast to special visas given primarily to Third World immigrant women, the J-1 visa is increasingly used to bring young and middle-class European immigrant women as nannies or *au pairs* with "educational and cultural exchange" as their primary purpose (Zarembka 2001, 27-28). Under this visa, each nanny receives an orientation session and is placed in geographical locations near other nannies. After her placement, she attends an orientation session and "receives information on community resources, educational opportunities and contacts for a local support network" (Zarembka 2001, 27-28). Counselors have monthly sessions with each employer and nanny to "report any problems and resolve disputes". "In contrast, with the G-5, A-1, and B-1 domestic worker programs, there are no official orientations, no information, no contract numbers, no counselors, and no educational programs. In practice, as well, there is often no freedom—many are systematically (though illegally) forbidden from contacting the outside world" (Zarembka 20001, 27-28).

Human Rights Watch (2001) further asserts that special visas intensify workers' vulnerability to abuse and facilitate the violation of other human rights. Procedures, guidelines, laws, and regulations governing special domestic worker visas create circumstances that tolerate and conceal employer abuses and restrict workers' rights. Among the problems cited by Human Rights Watch is the lack of INS follow-up monitoring or investigations to verify employer compliance with the employment contract, and the Department of Labor's lack of involvement in administering these visas. No governmental agency is responsible for enforcing contracts.

Zarembka (2001) asserts that the secrecy of the whereabouts of G-5, A-3, and B-1 workers makes them "some of the most vulnerable and easily exploited sectors of the American workforce" (Zarembka 2001, 27). The violation of their human rights is silenced by their invisibility. In addition to low wages, long hours, and lack of privacy and benefits, which are common among live-in conditions, immigrant women experience other abuses. These include passport confiscation, limited freedom of movement and ability to communicate with others, employers' threats of deportation, assault and battery, rape, servitude, torture, and trafficking. Changing employers under live-in conditions has always been difficult for workers, but women with employment-based visas have to choose between their legal immigration status and respect for their human rights. For similar reasons, women are reluctant to report abuse because they fear losing their jobs, deportation, social and cultural isolation, and "retaliation by politically powerful employers against their families in their countries of origin" (Human Rights Watch 20001, 2). They are also unfamiliar with the US legal system.

Exclusion from a number of labor policies contributes to the hardships that immigrant women experience as live-in domestics. They are excluded from overtime provisions provided in the Fair Labor Standard Act, from the right to organize, strike, and bargain collectively in the National Labor Relations Act, and from regulations in the Occupational Safety and Health Act (Smith 2001). "In practice, too, live-in domestic workers are rarely covered by Title VII protections against sexual harassment in the workplace, as Title VII only applies to employers with fifteen or more workers" (Human Rights Watch 2001, 2).

Third World immigrant domestics experience firsthand the inequalities of caregiving as they provide labor for parents in rich industrialized countries while leaving their own children (Frank 2001). Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (2000) equates mothers leaving their children with relatives in their homelands to European infants left in foundling homes or sent to wet nurses during the eighteenth century: "Solutions differ, but the tradeoffs mothers make, and the underlying emotions and mental calculations, remain the same" (Hrdy 2000, 317). Bridget Anderson (2000, 118) notes that immigrant women's care for their children is "demonstrated in the fruits of hard labour, in remittances, rather than in the cuddles and 'quality time' that provide so much of the satisfaction of care". In transnational mothering, the "physical closeness, seen as healthy and 'normal' in the Western upbringing of a child, are not given, because most of the women are not allowed to take their children with them" (Lutz 2000, 99). These conditions reduce mothering to the basic function of economic support. In her research on Filipino women in Rome and Los Angeles, Parreñas (2001) observed the impact of economic ties rather than affective ties between mother and child separated from each other for a long time.

The provision of material goods, financial assistance, and school tuition results in the commodification of family relationships and motherhood. Children of live-in workers bear the cost of inequalities in the distribution and quality of domestic labor and caregiving. The absence of retirement benefits and pension ensures that workers will not be able to contribute financially to their children's future; rather, they will need their children's assistance (Romero 2001).

Conclusion

Within the privacy of many American homes, immigrant women (primarily Latina and Caribbean) provide reproductive labor that fulfills the basic tasks of maintaining families of dual-career couples and contributes to middle-upper- and upper-class lifestyles. The characterization of nannies and private household workers in *The Nanny Diaries* reduces the significance of immigrant women in fulfilling childcare needs in the United States, and erases issues of employee rights from the American imagination. Popular culture normalizes the hiring of immigrant women by depicting domestic service as a bridging occupation that offers social mobility, opportunities to learn English, and other cultural skills that assist in the assimilation process. Employers are classified as good or bad: good employers are benevolent and provide immigrant women with a modernizing experience, while bad employers are rich couples that ignore their children. Popular culture does not contextualize paid reproductive labor. Economic, political, and legal structures surrounding the migration of Latina, Caribbean, and Filipino women are ignored along with the circumstances that relegate their labor to low-wage, dead-end jobs.

Labor and immigration regulations constructed along the work-family, public-private, and dependence-independence axes render immigrant domestic caretakers invisible and prolong their subordination. This is then passed on to their children. Solutions that improve working conditions for domestic caretakers call for the reconceptualization of these axes. First, the employer's home—the employee's work site—must come under the domain of labor regulation. Second, worker protection laws and regulations must be extended to cover all resident workers in the country regardless of immigration or citizenship status. Current collective organizing efforts have already demonstrated the significance of broadening the Fair Labor Standard Act to include the working conditions of all domestic caretakers.

Immigration and labor regulations reproduce race, class, gender, and citizenship inequalities and privileges. In the case of immigrant women employed as private household workers or caretakers, the social reproduction of inequalities begins in the employer's home. Managing the contradictions of intimacy and vilification of immigrants through cultural images that falsify employee-employer relationships allows Americans to retain a vulnerable labor force unprotected from exploitation while arguing for humanitarian positions. Films such as *The Nanny Diaries* assist in normalizing privilege and erasing issues of economic injustice. Our complacency in the subordination of immigrant women is once again maintained by our fascination with chatty gossip on sex, drugs, money, and family values of the wealthy on Park Avenue. Our illusion that there is no greater state of being than being American is further enhanced by denying the privileges gained by social reproduction from Third World labor.

References

1. Anderson, Bridget. 2000. *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*. London: Zed.

2. Anderson, Bridget and Annie Phizacklea. 1997. Migrant Domestic Workers: A European Perspective. Report to DG V of the European Commission.

3. Baquendano-López, Patricia. 2002. *A Stop at the End of the Bus Line: Nannies, Children, and the Language of Care*. Working Paper No. 51. Center for Working Families. http://workingfamilies.berkeley.edu/papers.html (Downloaded October 10, 2002).

4. Brown, Tamara Mose. 2011. *Raising Brooklyn: Nannies, Childcare, and Caribbeans Creating Community*. New York: New York University Press.

5. Colen, Shellee. 1995. 'Like a Mother to Them': Stratified Reproduction and West Indian Childcare Workers and Employers in New York. In *Conceiving the New World Order, The Global Politics of Reproduction*, eds. Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp, 78-102. Berkeley: University of California Press.

6. Dill, Bonnie Thornton. 1994. *Across the Boundaries of Race and Class*. PhD Dissertation, New York University.

7. Falcone, Lauren Beckham. 2002. Mommy Dearest: Former Nannies Spill the Dirt on Jobs with Wealthy Families. *Boston Herald*: 43.

8. Frank, Robert. 2001. Child Cares: To be a U.S. Nanny, Ms. Baustista Must Hire a Nanny of Her Own. *Wall Street Journal* 18: A1.

9. Gatmaytan, Dan.1997. Dead and the Maid: Work, Violence, and the Filipina in the International Labor Market. *Harvard Women's Law Journal* 20: 229-61.

10. Ginsburg, Faye D. and Rayna Rapp. 1995. *Conceiving the New World Order, The Global Politics of Reproduction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

11. Hays, Sharon. 1996. *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

12. Helburn, Suzanne and Barbara R. Bergmann. 2002. *American's Child Care Problem. The Way Out*. London: Palgrave Macmillian.

13. Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. 2001. *Doméstica: Immigration Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

14. Human Rights Watch. 2001. *Hidden in the Home: Abuse of Domestic Workers with Special Visas in the United States*. http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/uslabor/ (Downloaded September 29, 2002).

15. Lara, Adair. 2002. Nanny Facts and Fiction; Inspired by Tell-All Novel, Bay Area Moms and their Sitters Talk About Arrangements' Pros, Cons. *San Francisco Chronicle* 28: E2.

16. Lareau, Annette. 2000. *Contours of Childhood: Social Class Differences in Children's Daily Lives*. Center for Working Families, 18 Working Paper, University of California, Berkeley, http://workingfamilies.berkeley.edu/papers.html (Downloaded October 9, 2002).

17. Lareau, Annette. 2011. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

18. Lutz, Helma. 2000. At Your service Madam! The Globalization of Domestic Service. *Feminist Review* 70: 89-104.

19. Macklin, Audrey. 1992. Foreign Domestic Worker: Surrogate Housewife of Mail Order Servant? *McGill Law Journal* 37: 681-760.

20. Mattingly, Doreen. 1999. Job Search, Social Networks and Local Labor Market Dynamics: The Case of Paid Household Work in San Diego, California. *Urban Geography* 20, no. 1: 46-74.

21. Mendez, Jennifer Bickham, 1998. Of Mops and Maids: Contradictions and Continuities in Bureaucratized Domestic Work. *Social Problems* 45, no. 1: 114-135.

22. McLauglin, Emma and Nicola Kaus. 2002. *The Nanny Diaries. A Novel*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

23. Milkman, Ruth, Ellen Reese and Benita Roth. 1998. Macrosociology of Paid Domestic Labor. *Work and Occupations* 25, no. 4: 483-510.

24. Momsen, Jane Henshall. 1999. *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service*. New York: Routledge.

25. Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. 2001. *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

26. Richardson, Chad. 1999. *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados: Class and Culture on the South Texas Border*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

27. Richmond, Anthony H. 2000. *Global Apartheid: Refugees, Racism and the New Order*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

28. Rollins, Judith. 1985. *Between Women: Domestics and their Employers*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

29. Romero, Mary. 2003. Nanny Diaries and Other Stories: Imagining Women's Labor in the Social Reproduction of American Families. *DePaul Law Review Volume* 52, 3: 901-939.

30. Romero, Mary. 2001. Unraveling Privilege: Workers' Children and the Hidden Costs of Paid Child Care. *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 76, no. 3: 101-121.

31. Romero, Mary. 1999. Immigration, The Servant Problem, and the Legacy of the Domestic Labor Debate: 'Where Can You Get Good Help These Days?' *University of Miami Law Review* 53, no. 4: 1045-1064.

32. Romero, Mary. 1992. *Maid in the USA*. New York: Routledge – Chapman and Hall, Inc.

33. Rosales, Grace A. 2001. Labor Behind the Front Door, Domestic Workers in Urban and Suburban Households. In *Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy, The Metamorphosis of Southern California*, eds. Marta López-Garza and David R. Diaz, 169-87. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

34. Salmon, Lucy. 1972 [1901]. *Domestic Service*. New York: Arno Press.

35. Salzinger, Leslie. 1991. A Maid by Any Other Name: The Transformation of 'Dirty Work' by Central American Immigrants. In *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis,* eds. Michael Buraway, Alice Burton, Ann Arnett Ferguson, Kathryn J. Fox, Joshua Gamson, Nadine Gartrell, Leslie Hurst, Charles Kurzman, Leslie Salzinger, Josepha Schiffman and Shiori Ui, 139-60. Berkeley: University of California Press.

36. Schwartz, Judith D. 1993. *The Mother Puzzle: A New Generation Reckons with Motherhood*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

37. Silbaugh, Katherine. 1996. Commodification and Women's Household Labor. *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 9: 81-121.

38. Smith, Peggie R. 2001. Work like any Other, Work Like No Other: Establishing Decent Work for Domestic Service Workers. *Employee Rights & Employment Policy Journal* 15: 157-198.

39. Tronto, Joan C. 2002. The "Nanny" Question in Feminism. *Hypatia* 17, no. 2: 34-51.

40. Wrigley, Julia. 1995. *Other People's Children*. New York: Basic Books.

41. Zarembka, Joy Mutanu. 2001. *Maid to Order*. *Colorlines* 4, no. 3: 26-28.

Press Articles

42. Ganahl, Jan. 2002. Satirical "Diaries" Causing Tantrums. *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 28.

43. Stoller, Bettina. 2002. "Diaries" Show Nanny knows Best. *Times Union*, April 21.