

Mothering in the Age of Neoliberalism

Melinda Vandenbeld Giles, ed.
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REVIEWED BY YIDAN ZHU

Mothering in the Age of Neoliberalism aims to understand neoliberal globalization by centralizing the issue of mothering. It builds the ideas upon Nancy Fraser's conceptualization of "the pivotal use of discursive formations in creating legitimation for circulating previously fragmented identities" (2) and Gramsci's concept of hegemony. It argues that mothering as a "potent discursive space" for the critique of global neoliberal restructuring and for "localized economic alternatives that prioritize the needs of mothers and children" (2). The chapters in this book discuss interconnections of mothering and neoliberalism in local settings.

Drawing upon multi-disciplinary research, this book is a significant contribution to scholarship on mothering and neoliberalism. The authors define "mothering" as "the work of primary caregiving, being responsible for the economic, educational, and social care of another human being," which occurs in many forms and is highly gendered (2). Neoliberalism is understood here as a process in which "instabilities, partialities, and articulations with other cultural and political-economic formations have made the neoliberal rise to global prominence incomplete" (3). Albanese, Butryn, Hawkins, and Manion argue that neoliberalism involves local economic restructuring "driven by global capital's imperative for profit" (52) and that rural economies have been negatively affected by global economic shifts that largely affect women/mothers. The authors take three primary approaches to the study of neoliberalism: governmentality, culturalist and systemic. Within these approaches, they explore how state and governing systems identify mothers, how to locate mothering within cultural, historical, political, economic, and social trajectories, and how neoliberalism affects mothers' everyday lives.

The book is divided into four sections. Section 1 discusses how mothers face the challenges of child care, paid work, flexible labour, and identity re/construction in neoliberal local settings including the Philippines, Canada, the United States, and Trinidad and Tobago. In Chapter 1, Bryan discusses how migrant mothers' daily lives have been organized across time and space. Chapter 4 by Anderson and Moore, Chapter 5 by Takeshita, and Chapter 6 by Esnard discuss how mothers re/construct identities in the discourse of "Yummy Mummy" (95), "Mompreneur" (95), sustainable motherhood and "Eco-diapers" (118), and the gendered discourse of entrepreneurship (133).

Section 2 explores the role of the nation state in discourses of motherhood and neoliberalism. The chapters in this section reflect on the history of policy change, the role of the welfare state, the privatization of public-owned resources and state-run services, and the expansion of global free trade. Chapter 7 by Vandenberg, Chapter 8 by Baker, and Chapter 9 by Chelliah examine the social welfare system and neoliberal public policy from different perspectives in various settings, including homeless mothers' experience of losing child custody in Canada, the mothering experience in Australia, and women's and mothers' experience in the United Kingdom. Chapter 10 by Bloch and Taylor, Chapter 11 by Song and Lee, and Chapter 12 by Bayraktar explore how mothers practise, negotiate, and learn to become a "good" mother under neoliberalism.

Section 3 examines how neoliberal restructuring interacts with family configurations and the "post-second wave crisis in femininity" (Hallstein 297). In Chapter 14, Winkler provides an analysis of 1990s U.S. child support discourse and argues that it legitimized the private heterosexual family unit, required women to rely on men, and provided unequal distribution of wealth. Chapter 16 by Hallstein explores how the lives of highly educated or accomplished women have been shaped by feminism and neoliberal ideology. Section 4 explores multiple activist approaches and examines maternalism as a political power to criticize neoliberalism and seek social justice and resistance.

This book concludes that the authors "recycle" the notion of motherhood and claim mothering as a "discursive space" in understanding neo-liberalization. Although this book covers numerous local geographical settings in exploring mothering in neoliberalism, it leaves some questions unanswered. Is mothering a universal concept? What does motherhood/mothers/mothering mean in various discourses, spaces, and times? How do race, gender, and class relations interact with mothering in neoliberal restructuring? For instance, mothering across international borders has also been conceptualized within "gendered/racialized structures of global capitalism, civil war, and economic crises" (Duncan 70). Mothers' transnational experience, cross-cultural practice of mothering, fluid identities, race, gender, and class relations challenge the conceptualization of mothering and neoliberalism. This book provides an excellent point for scholars to discuss the issues of mothering and neoliberalism but still leaves some questions for further exploration.

References

- Duncan, P. "Teaching the Politics of Transnational Motherhood." *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* 4.1 (2013): 67–80. Print.