

...dialogue but by its

Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care, edited by Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010. 340 pages.

What have scholars learned about the interplay between emotions, identity, and labor since Hoschschild's (1983) groundbreaking conceptualization of on the job emotion work? A lot, it seems, and *Intimate Labors*, a new book edited by Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, leads us through an impressive array of new theoretical avenues.

Intimate Labors stems from a 2007 interdisciplinary conference of the same title organized by Boris and Parreñas at University of California, Santa Barbara. This edited volume – containing an introduction and seventeen substantive chapters – includes many leading thinkers in the field who attended that conference. Each chapter provides a uniquely situated view into the practice of “intimate labor,” defined by Boris and Parreñas as a category that “places in a continuum the discretely examined categories of care, sex, and domestic work” (p. 3). (Note: “Sex” here refers to sexuality, not sex category (male/female/intersex).

Guiding the volume is Boris' and Parreñas' aspiration to avoid dualistic debates such as “the binary trap of exploitation versus intimacy” that is often found in discussions of sex work, and arguments over whether ‘domestic work

is a viable form of contemporary labor or a relic of servitude (p. 8). Moving beyond such dichotomies, the project has two overarching goals: 1) to emphasize "the significance of the social, cultural, political, and economic structures that shape the characteristics and dynamics of intimate labor" (p. 9), and 2) to "advance the debate among feminist theorists over the relationship between 'care' and 'economy'" (p. 10). This focus on care and economy (or love and money) is crucial for transcending classic gendered assumptions about work, particularly the notion that that caring, non-remunerated "women's" labor and rational, remunerated "men's" labor exist in mutually exclusive "hostile worlds." By examining a variety of intimate practices, this volume helps to expand notions of what counts as "real" labor. For example, based on interviews and content analysis of documentary films, websites, and lesbian magazines, Jane Ward analyzes how "femme labor" witnesses and validates the masculinity of transgendered men; Rhacel Parreñas draws from her ethnographic research as a hostess in Tokyo to detail a variety of jobs embedded in hostess work by Filipina Migrants including: "care work, sexual work (but without the provision of sex), entertainment work, and boundary work" (p. 133).

In addition to broadening our theoretical lens regarding what constitutes labor, several chapters in the volume illuminate the ways that many contemporary business practices are infused with intimacy. For example, Kalindi Vora reflects on the labor of Indian call centers, where "the Indian agent becomes a projection of herself, with a new name, new training in accent neutralization, and unwieldy cultural knowledge of the country being called" (p. 36). Vora deepens her analysis through a close reading of the play *A Terrible Beauty is Born*, which features a series of phone conversations between Ashok (AKA John Small), a New Delhi call agent and Elizabeth, a mother and wife from upstate New York (p. 37). Although the methods and topic of Rene Almeling's chapter on the commodification of women's eggs is dissimilar from Vora's, this chapter too tells the story of how the success of seemingly rational business transactions are contingent upon a series of strategic intimate interactions that produce classed, gendered, raced, and national identities. Based on interviews and observations at two egg agencies, Almeling argues that "it is not just reproductive material but visions of middle-class American femininity and masculinity, and more to the point, motherhood and fatherhood, that are marketed and purchased" (p. 77).

Standing on the shoulders of nearly three decades of scholarship focused on emotion work, reproductive labor, and multiracial feminism in the United States, *Intimate Labors* pushes these predominately US based discussions into contemporary global locations and transnational economies. The result improves particularistic understandings of intimate labor, demonstrating that the meanings and experiences of intimate labor are always contextualized. At the same time, the volume as a whole gestures toward broader, universal theoretical challenges to assumptions about gender, class, race, and labor. The

question here isn't IF labor should be intimate, but rather when and where it is, and the implications of this process within particular locations.

The seventeen chapters within *Intimate Labors* are divided into four conceptual groupings: (I) "Remaking the Intimate: Technology and Globalization" (II) "Creating Intimate Boundaries: Culture and Social Relations", (III) "Organizing Intimate Labor: Politics and Mobilization", and (IV) "Conclusion: Thinking Ahead." The volume is impressive in quality, magnitude, and variety - qualities that can make navigation both exciting and difficult. I focus my commentary below on my own steering strategy.

My recommendation is to start with Borış and Parreñas' Introduction, and then skip to chapter 17 for Viviana Zelizer's "Caring Everywhere." Although meant to serve as a theoretical bookend, Zelizer's chapter is helpful for laying a conceptual matrix for the work that follows throughout the book. Zelizer distinguishes between four types of intimate labor: "unpaid care in intimate settings, unpaid care in economic organizations, paid care in intimate settings, and paid care in economic organizations such as hospitals, day care centers, and doctors' offices" (269).

In working my way through this volume, it was useful to place each chapter (or site of intimate labor) in or around Zelizer's matrix. If using this tactic, I recommend moving next to Part II of the book ("Creating Intimate Boundaries"), which in many ways is the heart of *Intimate Labors* due to its focus on interpersonal practices; the section contains ethnographic descriptions of several separate sites of (paid) intimate labor, including Parreñas' chapter on hostess work (discussed above) and chapters on domestic labor, hospice care, and sex work. While all of the chapters in this section are strong, Elizabeth Bernstein's chapter "Bounded Authenticity and the Commerce of Sex," provides an exceptional analysis of how sexual labor and consumption have been "mutually transformed" by contemporary global economic contexts, "making the late-capitalist consumer marketplace one potential arena for securing authentic yet bounded forms of interpersonal connection" (p. 162). Bernstein's chapter also serves as an important bridge to the larger economic and political frames discussed in other sections of the book.

Once readers review the range of interpersonal strategies, issues, and contexts in Part II it may be easier to appreciate the logic of Parts I and III, which (like Bernstein's chapter) foreground the importance of global socio-economic context for the production of contemporary intimate labor. Part I ("Remaking the Intimate") holds several chapters discussing new arenas of intimate labor mediated by technology and globalization, including Almeling's discussion of egg donor agencies, Vora's analysis of transnational call centers, and a chapter by Laura Briggs on transnational adoption agencies. Part III ("Organizing Intimate Labor") of the volume moves the reader to the issue of labor organizing and rights, with a particular focus on home care, domestic workers, manicurists, child care, and sex workers.

Intimate Labors contains a diverse interdisciplinary collection of research on paid and unpaid intimate labor; simply bundling them together – including, especially, sexual labor – is a tremendous political feat for feminist scholarship. However, what makes this volume exceptional – its rich diversity – is also what makes its overarching agenda at times tough to grasp. While reading the volume, I yearned for more guidance in mapping the proliferation and contours of intimate labor (hence my technique of placing each site within or around Zelizer's matrix). But even more so, I craved more discussion of the political implications of intimate labors.

Intimate Labors is clearly a political endeavor as well as one that analyzes the practice and meanings surrounding intimate work. It enables the classic feminist project of making women's labor visible and places this discussion firmly within an intersectionality framework, highlighting raced, classed, gendered, and global divisions of labor. The book also exposes the paradoxical opportunities of providing/offering and purchasing/receiving intimate services in globalized, service-driven markets. While readers will draw their own conclusions around the meanings and implications of globalized intimate labor, this reader was left yearning for more clarity on the editors' overall political assessment. (Dorothy Sue Cobble's chapter on "Intimate Unions" points toward one important political strategy, but are there not other strategies as well?) Despite my desire for more coherence, I am stimulated by this collection of readings and will return to it frequently. Readers will find it useful for upper division and graduate courses in a variety of disciplines, including but not limited to cultural studies, sexuality studies, sociology, medical sociology, global and transnational studies, and women's studies.

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