Raising Generation Rx is a very useful resource for those studying or researching gender, intersectionality, or the neoliberal transformations of the welfare state and is worth serious consideration. It will also appeal to those who have an interest in the political economy of care, parenting practices, the postindustrial context of the United States, social inequality, and disability. The text covers many themes, the intersecting context of neuroscience, neoliberalism, highly gendered parenting, disability, and the new economy as well as risk society. The feminist methodology employed and its explicit discussion of the social context of health contributes to a pool of knowledge that is challenging dominant discourses of power, health, and well-being. It is personal, written accessibly, and provides a substantive grounding in the political and health context it critiques. Placing the experiences of mothers and their children at the center of the issue around medicalization and disability shifts the debate, and places lay experience at the core.

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Au Pairs’ Lives introduces itself as “some of the first research on particular national contexts of au pairing” (p. 248). Although a region-specific au pair placement was already analyzed in Scandinavia (Calleman 2010), Cox’s interdisciplinary and international team went further, covering au pair placements worldwide. While au pair placement has gained systematic academic attention, it has been examined mostly through a series of case studies that are not sensitive to international comparisons. Only through multi-sited research, is it possible to shed light on the complex constitution of this institution both as a set of regulations and as daily experiences.

The collection is organized around four contexts—the United Kingdom, the Nordic countries, the rest of Europe, and the Americas. Methodological diversity is represented by the core anthropological approach, historical analysis (Eleni Liarou), as well as observations and recommendations from practitioners (Jenny Moss, Lene Løvdal, and Aoife Smith).

The regulatory construction of the au pair system runs on a global spectrum of government approaches from the “less regulated” end in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia, moderate regulation in the...
Nordic countries and France, and strictly regulated cultural exchange of the United States. Au pair applicants use a wide variety of permits to enter receiving countries, including student and tourist visas, Working Holiday visa, au pair visa, or even no visa at all for EU citizens. These options certainly influence their motivations, migrant status and rights, positioning in a host family, and overall experience in the host country. The complexity of global regulation of the system also involves the governments of sending countries, bilateral agreements, child care and migration regimes in receiving countries, intermediaries (au pair agencies), as well as host families, au pairs themselves, and even the relatives left behind. These findings contribute to an understanding of the governance of au pair migration. But a question remains: Does more explicit regulation of au pair placement improve the lives of participants?

Another strength of the collection is the multi-faceted analysis of the agency of female au pairs. For instance, Mariya Bikova applies a transnational care circulation framework to show that au pairs perform as agents even before departure, when they decide to move either to provide for their sending families or to fulfill their own ambitions. However, the examples across states demonstrate that it is not easy for migrants who are expected to provide housework and child care to broaden their life horizons. The authors show how au pairs resolve the cosmopolitan dilemma (Mirza Aguilar Pérez) and apply different strategies of self-positioning, such as negotiations with host families (Zuzana Sekeráková Búriková), separation from them through affective boundary work (Elisabeth Stubberud), outside networking (Séverin Durin), or even leaving them (Christine Geserick). Still, I would expect a more consistent gendered analysis of relationships between two women—female host and au pair—not just in domestic work situations.

_Au Pairs’ Lives_ has some other weaknesses as well. Its wide geographical and thematic coverage does not always contribute to a multi-faceted vision of au pairing. The volume focuses on “porous lines that exist between domestic service and the au pair scheme” (p. 157) and sticks to frequently emphasized ambiguities such as cultural exchange versus work or au pairs as sisters versus servants. References to the Protocol of the Council of Europe that formalized au pair placement in 1969 are in many cases ritualistic rather than analytical. This historical document—as the authors excellently show—broke away from realities of contemporary contexts where au pair performs a metaphor rather than social status. Duality of the au pair system might work out for practitioners who struggle for transparent rights for au pairs, but the research agenda here is much wider than this. Depending on a variety of aspects that constitute this
institute in a particular context, I would speak of different au pair systems rather than just one.

Similarly, an analytic framework of paid domestic labor retains its dominance in the authors’ approach to au paring. The book avoids elaborating on certain themes that are between the lines in many chapters, such as youth mobility and tourism, newcomers’ perceptions of new localities, female migrants’ solidarities and friendship, au pairs’ non-working activism, and domesticity and privacy in au pairs’ experience. Such analytical optics might enrich the excellent ethnographies documented in the chapters.

These points aside, Au Pairs’ Lives has much to offer and should interest not only au pair researchers but also scholars of migration governance, female mobility, transnationalism, agency, and intersectionality.

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REFERENCE


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Claire Snell-Rood’s No One Will Let Her Live presents an in-depth and thoughtful ethnography of women’s lives in a New Delhi slum. Over the course of 14 months, during which time the slum is demolished and residents are scattered across the city, Snell-Rood examines women’s relationships with their families, neighbors, and environment to document how they manage their health and well-being amid tenuous living situations and dubious relationships. Snell-Rood’s argument, and main contribution, is that women employ moral strategies to address and justify the relational and systemic inequality that threatens their physical and mental health. Entering the field, her hope was to document resistance and social action against oppressive social institutions; what she found instead were women’s