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## **Transnational Adoption and International Intimacies**

In this paper, I explore neoliberal globalization and its paradoxical effects on the “private” space of the family, through a narrative about two figures—a Guatemalan infant, displaced from her birth family through adoption to the United States, and a Guatemalan woman displaced from her natal family and her other children through migration to the United States, where she works as an undocumented nanny. I am interested in how these two figures are valued, thinking of wages in relation to the carework the latter does and the care the former requires, and how borders produce that value. Specifically, the infant’s cost to its U.S. adoptive parents is in the neighborhood of \$30,000; the child’s mother, in contrast, is valued at very little in terms of what wages her labor power can command, and what her life was worth, crossing first Mexico and then the Arizona desert. In Guatemala, in contrast, their relative “value” would be reversed. The infant, indigenous and racially minoritized, would be lucky to go to school; she might well be working for wages by the time she was six or seven. The virtual absence of a child welfare system in Guatemala would mean she might, at best, be raised in a church-based orphanage for several years, perhaps later to join the massive population of street children. Her mother, although equally racially minoritized, we could say would have a higher social value, marked by her ability to earn higher wages, say, or measured by the fact that she would be less likely to die of treatable disease or malnutrition than an infant separated from family.

In puzzling out how the fact of borders reverses the relative value of these two human lives, it is clearly important to set them in relationship to different but interlocked problems of domestic labor and value in middle-class, largely white, U.S. American families. As Arlie Hochschild noted in her 1989 book, *The Second Shift*, as increasing numbers of heterosexual mothers entered the labor force to offset a decline in real wages for their husbands, it created a gendered labor crisis at home. At the time, it seemed that men were going to have to do more childcare and housework in order to resolve this crisis. It turned out that there were two other ways of negotiating this problem for middle-class families: delaying childbearing (with an attendant risk of infertility) and then hiring a nanny from outside the United States. Rising ages at reproduction for women have led to an infertility “epidemic,” met in part through transnational adoption.

In this paper, I explore a genealogy of how these bodies, families, and their intimate labor came to be differently valued, looking at some of the many factors that might account for it. First, I examine how transnational adoption from Latin America emerged in the 1970s and 80s, in conjunction with those nations civil wars and dirty wars. Second, I explore how “moral panics” around race and parenting rendered some children less desirable than others. Finally, I suggest, related and sometimes the same hysterics around parenting turned middle-class parents into guardians of their children, and rendered “security” a keyword of the family as much as of the national security state. Taken together, I suggest, these three developments begin to account for the peculiar and contradictory story of the relative values of the Guatemalan woman and child I tell above.