

Fear of Food A Diary of Mothering

Carol Bacchi
North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2003

Reviewed by May Friedman

In *Fear of Food*, feminist academic Carol Bacchi records her extremely personal journey through the first year of her son's life. In doing so, Bacchi exposes some of the pervasive challenges facing mothers. The details of Bacchi's situation—her status as an older, single mother and the specific physical and medical challenges of her son—provide the context for this moving story.

Within the first months after his birth, Bacchi's son, Stephen, faced a number of medical challenges that resulted in his total rejection of food. In addition to the usual rigours of new motherhood (sleep deprivation, physical discomfort, overwhelming emotional reactions) Bacchi was faced with the very real possibility of her son wasting away. When she sought help, she was patronized by medical doctors who concluded that Stephen's major problem was that he had a "tense mother."

The great strength of this book is Bacchi's voice. Large portions of the book are direct transcriptions of Bacchi's diary and the feeding and sleeping records she rigorously kept in the year following her son's birth. These accounts are interspersed with her current perceptions, ten years later. Bacchi allows the reader to eavesdrop on the inchoate panic of her voice throughout this harrowing crisis, and balances its visceral narrative with her more polished, present-day analysis of the past. Throughout the book, Bacchi achieves a skilful mediation between her obvious adoration of her infant son with her terror and resentment at the ways motherhood has overtaken her life. She offers these contradictions to the reader in order to "prick the balloon of idealized mothering which makes it so difficult to admit, to oneself and to others, that mothering can be frightening, exhausting and even, at times, totally demoralizing" (xii). Bacchi's testimony is even more moving since it comes through her experience as an academic: as an "expert," her bewilderment in coping with her young son is intensified.

If the strength of Bacchi's text is in its intensely personal form, it is perhaps this same trait that leaves the book open to criticism. Bacchi is a relatively well-known feminist academic. Her past books include *The Politics of Affirmative Action* (1996) and *Women, Policy and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems* (1999). Given her background as a critical feminist author, it is somewhat frustrating that *Fear of Food* remains so intensely personal a memoir. Tantalizing glimpses are given of an analysis of the larger context within which mothering occurs. Overall, however, Bacchi skirts the issues that underpin her

story, including the absence of both formal and informal supports for new mothers, and the systemic hostility faced by mothers whose children present challenges that cannot easily be solved. Ideally, Bacchi will use this memoir as a starting point for further analysis into the issues hinted at within the text. Despite this criticism, *Fear of Food* is a moving and well-paced text that will resonate strongly for many readers.

Adopting Maternity: White Women Who Adopt Transracially or Transnationally

Nora Rose Moosnick
Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004

Reviewed by Dorsía Smith Silva

In *Adopting Maternity: White Women Who Adopt Transracially or Transnationally*, independent scholar Nora Rose Moosnick examines how the social constructions of race, gender, and class are connected to White women who engage in transracial or transnational adoptions. Focusing on interviews of a focus group of 22 White adoptive mothers, she interrogates their different adoptive processes based on the race of their adoptive child: White, Asian, Black, and Biracial. The text, divided in five chapters, aims to give readers a look into the multifaceted process of the adoptive experience and brings the narratives of White adoptive mothers into the public sphere.

In the first two chapters, Moosnick gives a brief overview of the historical perception of transracial and transnational adoption. She calls attention to the protest of the National Association of Black Social Workers during the 1970s when they challenged Black adoptions as “cultural genocide” (2) and how social workers “redefined” the ethnicity of Black and Biracial to make them more appealing to White adoptive families (3). According to Moosnick, racial attitudes have since changed; yet, there is still a greater preference among White adoptive mothers for “lighter skinned” children (13).

Moosnick also sets the stage for raising the critical issue of whether White adoptive mothers who participate in transracial or transnational adoptions are victims and/or victimizers. She finds that these mothers are socially perceived as saving the adoptive “child from the biological mother who is understood to be neither morally nor financially capable” (13). However, she also becomes a part of the power hierarchy, which gives greater privilege to White adoptive families because they are socially perceived as more fit and “legitimate” (24).

The third and fourth chapters explicate the role race plays in adoption. In