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families apart: migrant mothers and the conflicts of labor and love

Geraldine Pratt, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2012, 288pp., ISBN: 978-0816669998 288, \$22.50 (Pbk)

This book is a politically important and emotionally challenging contribution to feminist migration and labour studies with a focus on domestic work and global migration. US-based professor of geography Geraldine Pratt's project combines theoretical debates on gender, mothering and labour migration and feminist methodological discussions about different forms of storytelling with long-term fieldwork gathering the stories of Filipino families who have reunited in Canada after many years apart. The mothers in the families had been working as live-in domestic workers within the Canadian Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP)—a temporary labour migration scheme that allows the workers to apply for permanent residency and sponsor their children's immigration after two years (although Pratt's research shows that the process up until reunification in Canada rarely takes less than five years). Central to the fieldwork is Pratt's cooperation with the grassroots organisation Philippine Women Centre (PWC) of British Columbia, which is working for the abolition of the LCP and the introduction of a labour immigration programme that allows the workers to bring their families from the outset. Pratt and PWC have conducted the fieldwork together over the course of twelve years, and the material has been used in the campaign work of PWC as well as in Pratt's academic writing.

Pratt's project contributes to feminist debates on migration and labour in several ways. In Chapters 1 and 2, she offers an analysis that locates the LCP—and the way in which it shapes and conditions the subject positions of Filipino workers and Canadian employers—within the neo-liberal projects of both the Canadian and Filipino states. In contrast to the representation of the programme as a 'win-win-win' for the workers as well as for the Canadian and Filipino states, she maps its disruptive and sometimes traumatising impact on the lived experiences of participants in the programme. These traumas circulate around parents' and children's loss, separation and the difficulties of reuniting, but also the challenges involved for the children when they enter the Canadian school system and Canadian society, with its class and racial regimes. In some cases the trauma of separation follows the family through generations.

Pratt inscribes herself in feminist research on women's migration and global chains of care work that want to move away from one-dimensional victim stories and instead tell stories about transnational forms of mothering—embedded in national and transnational neo-liberal projects, but also

characterised by care from a distance. Pratt also wants to challenge the silences in relation to the costs involved in these migrations, caused by the design of the migration schemes, and the construction of the Filipina nanny, in this case in the Canadian middle-class imagination. Hence, in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, the focus moves towards different modes of storytelling and the potential of the testimony as a means to mobilise public engagement and identification.

Pratt and PWC are trying to find a mode of storytelling that manages to mediate the experiences of trauma and loss that many of the families carry with them, but without reinforcing stigmatising and victimising representations of Filipino families and mothers. One of Pratt's central claims is that our subjective ontologies are 'framed by our positionality within long histories of colonial ventures, uneven economic development, national formation, relations of gender, class, and race, and so on' (p. xxiii). Building on Judith Butler's writing about mourning and grievable lives, Pratt argues that the positionality in the global North of the Canadians who hire domestic workers tied to the conditions offered by the LCP creates an 'inability to see noncitizens as fully deserving of the intimacies they take for granted as integral to family life' (p. xxiv). This is the starting point for some of the experimental forms of storytelling that the book engages with. Through testimony, trauma narratives and a narrative from a theatre project that formed part of Pratt and PWC's cooperation, Pratt hopes to engage the reader to become an 'ethical witness'—a witness whose affective response goes beyond sentimentality as a 'replacement rather than a step towards a sustained social engagement' (p. 100) and instead invokes identification with the specific ways in which Filipino families are engaged and positioned by the LCP at its intersections with postcolonial relations and racism in Canada. In Chapter 5, Pratt adds further nuances to her discussion about the ethical witness by adding narratives from witnesses of the violations of human rights in the Philippines and the transnational involvement of the Canadian state in these violations.

It is rewarding to read Pratt's arguments about testimonies, affect and 'ethical witnesses' in the context of these intensely sad testimonies. While as a reader I struggled to keep the tears away, I was simultaneously confronted with the political potentiality as well as the potential problems of those tears. *Families Apart* could work as an introduction to studies on the intersections of migration, globalisation, care and mothering, as well as an inspiring contribution to feminist thought on methodology, storytelling and mediation of narratives on pain and trauma in politically relevant ways.

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