

Antipode

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Book Review Symposium

Geraldine Pratt, *Families Apart: Migrant Mothers and the Conflicts of Labor and Love*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0-8166-6999-8 (paper); ISBN 978-0-8166-6998-1 (cloth)

Intimacy and Violence

The intimacy of various violences is a core theme in *Families Apart*. As such, the book presents a very valuable detailed conceptual and empirical working of the wider feminist project, in which Gerry's earlier work has been central, to collapse the divides that are commonly drawn around, frame, and order what gets called violence.

Violence, in the book, is always intimate: embedded in intimacy, produced through intimacy, and having effects that are experienced intimately. Intimate violences sit across the conventional bounds of places and scales, and while aggressors may be family members, employers, or the state, all are situated in the political relations that violence arises from and reinstates. Violence against those who are marginalised works so well, and so silently, precisely *because* of this embedding in multiple places and scales. Gerry's continuum of state violence calls to mind Liz Kelly's (1987) continuum of sexual violence, which rejected discrete analytical categories for different incidents and degrees of violence and highlighted the underpinning roles of power, force, and coercion.

I found Gerry's analysis of violence and intimacy as intertwined to be especially compelling because it is always underwritten by emotion. This analysis of emotion/affect reflects the scaling upwards and outwards of emotion that has characterised feminist politics and scholarship. Intimacy, whether we think about it as tyrannical or liberating, works through emotion in two important ways.

First, it emphasises that violence has its key consequences through emotions. This is clear for each of the forms of violence that the book deals with. Intimate abuse in the domestic sphere of Filipino migrant women workers - whether from family members or employers - works through women's fear of harm, but also fear of economic hardship for their families. In parallel, state terror in the Philippines (the extrajudicial killings of human rights workers and members of the political left) maintains its powerful grip because of the wider fear it invokes. In Canada, the Live-in Caregiver Program works as state violence because of its long-term material implications for families, but also the emotional trauma that comes across so powerfully. Just as these materialities radiate out from the migration event, so emotions are dispersed and relational. The emotional trauma for Filipino caregivers and their families is intimately bound to the emotional security it allows for Canadian mothers and their families; the provision of valuable-but-devalued care makes it economically and socially comfortable for white middle class Canadian women to leave their children for paid work themselves. Finally, the book both highlights and reacts against the epistemic violence of western scholarship on Third World women's experiences, too often "taken as objects to know rather than subjects capable of knowing and theorizing the conditions of their world" (p. xxxiii). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) reminds us, such epistemologies have left longstanding and deep-seated collective emotional wounds (see also Pratt *et al.* 2007).

Secondly, working with intimacy through emotions becomes a way of addressing all forms of violence: this is central to the political and ethical project outlined in *Families Apart*. We know that as well as being oppressive and constraining, fear can be a galvanising force for resistance against both 'intimate' and 'global' violences; a possibility that can't be romanticised, as in many situations opportunities for countering violence are few and far between. Nonetheless, intimacy and its power to circulate emotions for productive good surfaces in a number of chapters. It is present most powerfully in the representations (through theatre, photography, testimonials) through which Canadians make intimate connections with domestic workers' experiences, facing the unrecognised (racist oppression) as well as the familiar (maternal love). It is also present, in discomfort and empathy, for the Canadians who witness state violence in the Philippines. Developing this 'cosmopolitan interestedness' involves making relations and realities in different places concurrently visible, and engaging personal registers of feeling and listening. Intimacy also frames responses to the danger of the epistemic violence of

western research. Feminist participatory action research is not simply about establishing good relations and letting emotion/affect do its work; Gerry has done much, here and elsewhere, to highlight the personal/political labour in working with and across difference. This major theme, the recognition of others as a precondition for change to take place, gathers pace throughout the book, alongside recognition that violence is already here inside, at home, with us and others.

I kept feeling, as I was reading, that when we think about intimacy in this way it becomes something else. In *Families Apart*, intimacy reaches out for and wraps around its others. Intimacy to begin with concerned the internal - the personal, private emotions of the self, shared only with people who are close. More recently, especially in geographers' work, we have seen how intimacy stretches out of the private realm across space, to make connections with still-intimate others. *Families Apart* is full of these stretched intimacies, but its political project develops a further dimension, where intimacy turns inside out. Emotions, materialities and relations become no longer only intimate, but inseparable from what were previously taken to be others.

Lacan's concept of extimacy is useful in connecting gendered global violences (see Bahun-Radunovic and Rajan 2008). Extimacy is not an opposite to intimacy, but acknowledges the presence of what is other at the place thought to be most intimate, defying inside/outside and self/other boundaries, and rejecting the common psychic division between the internal and external. For geographers, extimacy offers a way of viewing intimate issues as simultaneously present and rooted in other spaces, and "how our feelings can be radically externalized" to others/objects elsewhere (Kingsbury 2007). For example, in our work with Scottish Women's Aid on domestic violence and global terrorism, the description of one form of these violences as 'intimate' serves an ideological purpose that limits the scope of its causation and our responses to it. Instead, calling domestic violence 'terrorism' exactly performs this bringing the outside in and the inside out; allowing us to talk about the ways that *all* terrorisms are already private, public, mundane and spectacular, and ultimately fostering more inclusive securities (see Pain and Scottish Women's Aid 2012). Might 'extimacy' help to describe the political project of getting experiences or feelings that are normally private into wider circulation amongst others, galvanizing change through emotional connection?

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