

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)

With Gratitude

I want to thank Chris Harker for arranging this symposium on *Families Apart*, first as an event at Durham University and then as a written document. One important motivation for the Philippine Women Centre's willingness to work with me all of these years is their commitment to making migrant workers' voices heard. Although the comparison is unwise in so many ways, I nonetheless want to note the deep pleasure of feeling that I have been fully heard by the participants in this symposium.

I am interested in their style of engagement, which no doubt reflects the care with which the symposium was organized. The participants create a connective tissue between the book and their own practices: Rachel to her work on extimacy and domestic violence in Scotland; Paul to his theorizing around testimony and witnessing; Elizabeth to her work on performance and attachment in Bristol; Lucy to discourses around migrant Polish mothers. This 'walking with' or reading alongside my text enacts within our scholarly community a kind of conceptual-ethical-aesthetic politics (I appreciate that Paul names my refusal to separate them) at the heart of the book, what Paul identifies as identification beyond identity. Lucy's puzzlement about how she, a reader in the north of England, might take the kind of action asked of her by the text led her to make two locally-meaningful inquiries; again, I could not wish for a more generous or intelligent response to my text. It's a response that 'gets' its performative and activist ambitions; it's a world-opening move that creates connections between and conversations across the UK, Canada, and the Philippines.

Lucy points to a limitation of my research with the Philippine Women Centre and offers a methodological suggestion: to develop a multi-sited ethnography of transnational families located in Canada and the Philippines. It is an appropriate response and suggestion. Although my research collaborators at the Philippine Women Centre have always been theorizing across the Philippines and Canada, our interviews with migrant workers and their families have been based in Vancouver. Only recently have I ventured to the Philippines to do research; I am currently working with colleagues, Caleb Johnston and Alex Ferguson, to take *Nanay*, our testimonial play discussed in *Families Apart*, to the Philippines in November 2013. We intend to work with migrant groups in Canada and Manila to ensure that family members of domestic workers in Canada attend the play and participate in public forums organized through and around the play.

But the problems of telling and hearing testimony of trauma and harm are no less complicated in this multi-sited endeavor, not the least (but also not only) for the structural reasons outlined by Paul. Taking the play to the Philippines, we are concerned that the monologues that created empathy and a kind of melancholic attachment to the issue among Canadian audiences will no longer function in this way. Relatives who benefit from remittances and for whom Canada is a fantasy destination, judged to be vastly superior to other destination countries in the region, likely will not want or be able to hear family members' testimony of trauma, suffering, and pain. The geopolitics and ethics of accountability within this transnational encounter are different than the ones discussed in *Families Apart*, which were framed within the problematic of intercultural and multicultural communication, politics, and ethics. We are rewriting parts of the play to introduce monologues that might be heard and generate useful debate within the context of the Philippines but there remains much to think about the geographical specificity and contextual nature of our interpretations and politics.

This is of course another project. *Families Apart* urges Canadians to attend to and to attach to the traumas of Filipino caregivers and become accountable to their intimate relationships to the Philippines. Taking *Nanay* to the Philippines might be one way for me to do this. But as Chris notes of *Families Apart*, I am hoping it is not just a sequel, but an opportunity not just to work with but also to trouble the frame of analysis developed in the book under consideration here.

Geraldine Pratt

*Department of Geography
University of British Columbia
gerry.pratt@geog.ubc.ca*

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