



Geraldine Pratt, *Families Apart: Migrant Mothers and the Conflicts of Labor and Love*

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 288 pages. Abbreviations, 26 b&w photos, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$67.50; paperback, \$22.50. ISBN 978-0-8166-6998-1 (cloth); 978-0-8166-6999-8 (paperback).

GEOGRAPHER Geraldine Pratt has crafted a dynamic experimental ethnography about the long-term effects of staggered migration and family separation on Filipina women who engage in Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP). The book takes an unabashed activist position, viewing the LCP as a "catastrophe" (4). Exploring the structure of the LCP and the political and economic dynamics that encompass and enable it, Pratt addresses issues of social justice and the international division of labor, striving to bring the problems with the program to public notice and debate.

The book sets out to engage the reader intimately, incite empathy, prompt ethical judgment, and inspire political action. To this end, multiple stories of families in crisis show the dreadful conditions in the Philippines that motivate migration and the ill effects of Canada's LCP on migrant families. After five chapters of unrelenting affective manipulation, a reader might feel that she has been subjected to emotional blackmail but will also recognize the power and uniqueness of this ethnography. Pratt frames her work as the result of a collaboration between herself and the Philippine Women Centre (PWC), an advocacy group located in Vancouver, British Columbia. To emphasize the depth of the collaboration, Pratt's prose shifts between the pronouns "I" and "we." This diffusion of authorship is both provocative and problematic. Adequately acknowledging collaboration is a plus; but within the trend toward reflexivity that has dominated social science for the past quarter century, authors have explored how positionality influences perception, judgment, and evaluation of events. Not until the final chapters of *Families Apart*, however, does the reader meet any of the other individuals in Pratt's collaboration—and then only briefly. The usual hallmarks of collaboration (differences of opinion, textured discussions, multiple perspectives) seem absent from the book.

A potential cost of this combination of manipulation and collaboration is the loss of scientific rigor and objectivity. The book raises several methodological questions. First, what training in ethnographic research and analysis have Pratt's collaborators received? Second, on the qualitative front, data are rarely triangulated through multiple methods, and readers are left to wonder whether any of the cases are representative. None of the stories is read "against the grain." By reading against the grain, an author does not doubt her informants; rather, she strengthens the credibility of the analysis. But in *Families Apart*, stories are taken at face value, without interrogating the identity politics at play as informants craft their self-representations through narrative.

On the quantitative front, Pratt notes that Canadian statistics do not disaggregate migrants who come through the LCP from other immigrants (26–27). With the available data, Pratt makes a convincing argument that the long-term effects of the program disadvantage both LCP migrants and their families, positioning members of these families to occupy low-paying jobs for at least two generations. These positions contrast starkly with the ambitions that fueled migration in the first place and result in the deskilling of individuals who held middle-class status and education in the Philippines.

The first three chapters deal with mothers' sacrifices, family strife, children's difficulties, and the deskilling of workers, all tied to long separations, racial hierarchies, and the structures of the LCP. Pratt considers social organizations (schools and the governments of both Canada and the Philippines), borders and sovereignty, citizenship, and global structures of power and inequality that drive migration. Against this contextual background, the book highlights stories of pain, grief, and traumatic separation. Pratt writes, "We tell stories of loss... with the hope of animating a different future" (47) and the goal of moving readers "from being spectators to ethical witnesses" (81).

In Chapter 4, Pratt writes about an ethnographically grounded experimental theatrical performance. In collaboration with local dramaturges, Pratt and members of the PWC write and stage a play that brings audience members into interaction with each other and with actors representing live-in caregivers, employers, and state officials. The play effectively "destabilized the boundary between performers and audience" (117) and spurred conversations about "the need for national child care and health care for seniors" (130). Here again, the focus is on using emotion to create empathy and spur social change.

The final chapter discusses human rights violations in the Philippines as they connect to colonial history, economic inequalities, and state violence in both Canada and the Philippines. International observers (ambiguously affiliated with PWC and Pratt's collaborating coauthors) bear witness to the military intimidation they experienced. This chapter shows that Filipino migration, while free, may not be "voluntary" in any meaningful way, given the fear, uncertainty, and danger of staying at home.

Pratt notes in the conclusion that the book's project is to "unsettle complacency" (163), and in this it certainly succeeds. It left me feeling sad and ill at ease. Although sometimes frustrated with the volume on a scholarly front, I admire its multiple experiments with collaboration, engagement, and advocacy. The book vividly describes the negative lived experiences of people who go through migration related to the LCP. It also effectively shows how migrants fall through the cracks between nations, and how borders stretch into people's lives, disadvantaging some kin groups for multiple generations. But having described the disadvantageous structures and their deleterious effects, the book does not suggest a clear alternative to the LCP. Instead, it deliberately avoids giving the reader a simple action item (such as "sign a petition" or "write to your representative"). Pratt argues in Chapter 4 that providing such closure would leave the reader with an easy out; she and her collaborators choose instead to trouble the reader's conscience and prompt a more thoughtful and long-lasting engagement with the wider issues.

In a classroom setting, instructors could use the book to engage students with advocacy anthropology and ethical issues related to human rights, labor migration, the conduct of research, and the presentation of results. The book will interest people teaching upper division classes in geography, anthropology, and Asian Studies, with focuses on emotion, care work, transnationalism, governance, and social justice.

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