**Book Review Symposium**


**Introduction**

This symposium brings together a group of scholars to discuss Prof. Geraldine Pratt’s monograph *Families Apart: Migrant Mothers and the Conflicts of Labor and Love*. *Families Apart* is grounded in a collaboration between Prof. Pratt and the Philippine Women’s Centre of British Columbia (PWC) that began in 1995 as a means of investigating care work in Canada, and more specifically the Live in Caregiver Program (LCP). This temporary migration program has brought tens of thousands of largely Filipino women to Canada, under conditions akin to indentured servitude, to look after Canadian children and elderly people. Pratt’s (2004) previous monograph, *Working Feminism*, documents the many violences experienced by the caregivers and puts this research into conversation with academic debates in feminist theory and geography.

*Families Apart* picks up where *Working Feminism* finishes by examining the horrific economic, social and political effects and affects of the LCP on families attached to and invested in this migration. However, following the analysis in the book itself, *Families Apart* might be best thought about not as a sequel, but rather as a breaking apart of the frame of analysis established in *Working Feminism*, and its reconstitution at a great spatial extent, to incorporate what after Butler (2012) we might term the geographies of ‘wretched’ transnationalism. As Pratt notes (2012: 44), “[i]t seems possible to say that mothers entering the Canadian nation to care for Canadian children while their own children remain in the Philippines are sacrificed for the benefit of Canadian families, and that a sense of Canadian benevolence and liberal universalism depends on concealing with fact”. However, it is not only mothers, but also their children that
suffer: “It is not only that women coming through the LCP are deskillled through the process; in eerie and rapid repetition, their children relive many of their mother’s experiences” (Pratt 2012: 7).

* Families Apart documents the experiences of second-generation migrants, and the multiple connections between Canada and the Philippines forged through their lives, in ways that resist the seductions of feeling good about feeling bad (Pratt 2012: 80). Instead, the book experiments with multiple forms of telling stories about wretched transnationalism, and thinks critically about processes of storytelling, as a means of creating ethical and political geographies that entangle and impact Canadian, Filipino and other concerned publics, often in literal, which is to say material, embodied ways.

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The responses to Pratt’s book that constitute this symposium were given in preliminary form at a seminar at Durham University on 5th March 2013. As the organiser of this seminar, I asked five members of Department of Geography at Durham to address specific themes in the book that both intersect their own research and give some sense of the scope of the monograph. These responses were recorded, and are available here. Lynn Staeheli talks about citizenship and publics, Rachel Pain examines intimacy and violence, Paul Harrison reflects on witnessing and testimony, Lizzie Richardson discusses performance, and Lucy Smout Szablewska thinks through transnational labour migration. We have included some of the subsequent discussion that followed the presentations. My thanks to Michele Allan for her help in recording the seminar and preparing the files for Antipode.

Rachel, Paul, Lizzie and Lucy have subsequently written up their contributions, which Gerry has kindly responded to. As Gerry notes in her response, her interlocutors enact “a kind of conceptual-ethical-aesthetic politics” that connects worlds and starts conversations. However, despite the breadth of these contributions there are still many aspects of Families Apart that
aren’t covered, and can perhaps only be appreciated when it is read cover to cover. We hope you will take the opportunity to do so.

References


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