

## BOOK REVIEWS

## Families Apart: Migrant Mothers and the Conflicts of Labour and Love

Geraldine Pratt.

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

### Reviewed by Shu-Ju Ada Cheng

Transnational motherhood is a major contemporary global phenomenon with the large-scale labour migration of women from developing countries in Southeast and South Asia, largely from the Philippines. Women often “choose” to work overseas due to unemployment, underemployment, poverty, political instability, better earnings in labour-receiving countries, and the state’s aggressive labour export policy. More importantly, migrant mothers often seek work abroad in the hope of creating a better future for their children. While many governments lament the negative impact on children left behind, they continue to utilize labour migration as a development strategy. Labour-receiving countries’ stringent regulations on family reunification constitute one major reason contributing to long-term family separation. Geraldine Pratt’s study of the Filipino community in Vancouver, *Families Apart*, adds to the existing literature on transnational motherhood.

Based on years of fieldwork and working with Filipino organizations, Pratt’s rich ethnographic work provides invaluable insights and makes several contributions to the field. One such contribution is her discussion of migrant mothers and their children. Migrant women, through years of domestic work, experience deskilling, which limits their occupational upward mobility and forces them to continue in low-paying jobs. While migrant women hope their children will have a better life in Canada, often their children do not experience upward mobility. Due to limited language proficiency, the lack of official recognition of their Philippine education, and the need to fulfill financial responsibility to their mothers, they often drop out of school. Without adequate education and necessary skills, they only qualify for low-skilled, low-waged jobs. In essence, the shared experiences of mothers and their children—the generational transmission of downward mobility—show that family reunification creates a large pool of cheap labour for Canada.

Some women point out that they migrate for political as well as economic reasons. Political instability and the militarization of life in the Philippines are key reasons for their migration. Pratt points out that state violence in silencing dissidents should be connected to the migration of women. Most importantly, she argues that the Canadian government is complicit in sup-

porting the military regime in the Philippines through the allocation of aid and the military commence, such as the extraction of natural resources by Canadian mining companies. The state violence of the Philippine government and the complicity of the Canadian state perpetuate the dominance of Canada over developing countries such as the Philippines.

This book is written primarily for an academic audience. During her fieldwork, one interviewee asked whether Pratt's research would improve the lives of Filipino domestic workers. I also had the same question after reading this book. How this book might bring about policy changes and better migrant women's lives is unclear. There seems to be an unfortunate gap between Pratt's belief in the need for policy changes and the limited reach of a theoretical book. Nonetheless, Pratt makes a significant research contribution to the study of migrant mothers in Canada.

## Rupture

Clementine Morrigan.

Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2012.

### Reviewed by Andrea Nikki

*Rupture* is a bold, honest, and thought-provoking collection of poems and short narrative pieces on female embodiment, violence against women, sexuality, and feminism. Morrigan's accessible language and intimate tone invite the reader to enter into her experiences, which range from harrowing to exhilarating, and appreciate the challenging journey of the woman in patriarchal culture who seeks to honour her feelings, desires, and powers and carve out an independent existence.

The volume includes a section entitled "Rupture" which features photographs of Morrigan sitting nude in a bathtub behind a drawn curtain in which she expresses agony over her female embodiment. Clutching and shaking her large breasts, she offers the insight that only in the seclusion of her private bathtub—a tiny, hidden space—can a woman safely express her full horror over sexual violation. Another section entitled "strange girls have feelings too" includes images of pencilled self-portraits on coloured paper. These self-portraits couple youthful innocence with female sexuality and feminist resistance to effectively underscore that sexual violence against a woman is absolutely never her fault.

A number of the pieces and images seek to educate readers on the social constructions of female beauty and female sexuality. For instance, in "the