

Reviews

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Deirdre McKay, *An Archipelago of Care: Filipino Migrants and Global Networks*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2016, 196 pp., pbk US \$30, ISBN 13: 978-0-253-02467-1.

With dual-income households and rapidly ageing populations, care labour – whether formal or informal nursing, child care, care for dependent seniors or domestic work – is in ever-greater demand. Yet such jobs are among the least desirable to take up, given that they are often physically and emotionally demanding, poorly remunerated and prone to exploitation. As a result, an increasing proportion of care labour is performed by migrants, most often migrant women.

In her book, *An Archipelago of Care*, Deirdre McKay engages with what scholars have called a ‘migrant ethic of care’ (p. 25), the notion that migrant care-givers are somehow equipped with a better disposition for caring for strangers than their non-migrant counterparts. She argues that this ‘migrant ethic of care’ exists among the Kankanaey-speaking Filipino migrants working in care jobs in London who are at the heart of her study. In her view, a specific ethic of care is generated and sustained through these migrant care labourers’ personal transnational care networks, networks through which affirmative affect flows and replenishes their own care needs in order to be able to provide high-quality care for their employers. This relational perspective – one she defines as ‘archipelagic’, a creative nod to the (physical and, ultimately, political) geography of the Philippines – builds on and complicates dominant conceptualisations of transnational care flow configurations as chains and diamonds by acknowledging the dynamic spatial and temporal constellations of nodes through which affect nourishes migrant care labourers and enables them to plough ahead. Especially unique about McKay’s contribution amidst existing studies of transnational care labour is her acknowledgement of migrant care labourers’ own individual emotional (inter)dependencies and the ways in which their coping strategies are transnationally articulated through an ever-changing range of nodes that complicate conventional thinking about proximity, distance and directionality in caring/being cared about and caring/being cared for.

McKay draws on the concept of affect to describe the energy that pulsates through care relations. She argues that ‘care originates through the affective flows and underlying ethics and norms channelling affect’ (161) via nodes in our social networks. Resonating with Lauren Berlant’s (2011) articulation of the constitutive force of affect, McKay contrasts the Kankanaey-speaking Filipino migrants in her study with the Filipino migrants’ non-migrant care-givers and care recipients in London. While

many of her migrant respondents seem to possess a clear sense of purpose and desire to seize the opportunities that temporary migration and care work are held to afford them and their families back home, their optimism stands out amidst – and, simultaneously, is fuelled by – a growing sense of socio-economic disenfranchisement among those from the Global North countries where migrant care labour is now in great demand as a result of the retrenchment of the welfare state and increasing precarity. She uses Henrietta Moores' notion of 'still life' and Saskia Sassen's 'political economy of expulsion' to capture the 'affective paralysis in which, with no pleasurable future or security on the horizon, [these] people withdraw, defer and disconnect, expressing only self-interest and apathy' (p. 9).

In McKay's view, Kankanaey-speaking Filipino migrants' sense of 'temporary hereness' in the United Kingdom's (UK) care labour sector and the prospect of ultimately returning home with sufficient funds to realise their plans in the Philippines, coupled with their limited to non-existent expectations of being able to tap into state-based welfare either in the UK or back home in the Philippines, makes it such that they do not feel similarly disenfranchised and disaffected. She uses the concept of a 'shatter zone' to identify spaces both within and beyond national borders in which the state and state-making projects are poorly grafted to existing community relations. In so doing, she identifies how the underlying structure of care ethics and norms of the 'fourth-world, indigenous and non-state periphery' (p. 10) in the Philippine shatter zone from which her respondents hail offers a useful ethical toolbox from which they can and do draw once abroad. Immersed in a 'global shatter zone' abroad, they find that community-based care relations repeatedly prove more significant for their success and wellbeing than formal bonds to any government. In each of the book's chapters, McKay illustrates how care relations are forged, sustained and adjusted within this space of a 'global shatter zone' via specific transnational archipelagic nodes through which her respondents give and receive care, like churches, community centres, homes and Facebook, all while eliding relations with governments.

In a world in which the marketisation and informalisation of care relations has become ever-more normalised and those increasingly charged with fulfilling care needs come from ever-more distant places, this book's exploration of transnational care and flows of affect offers a powerful critique of the limits of state-based articulations of belonging, responsibility and entitlement. It poses novel questions to scholars engaging with migration and care ethics in particular.

Reference

Berlant, L. G. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina.

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