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Book reviews: *Migration in Performance: Crossing the Colonial Present*, by Geraldine Pratt and Caleb Johnston

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***Migration in Performance: Crossing the Colonial Present*, by Geraldine Pratt and Caleb Johnston. Routledge, 2019; ISBN: 9780367138301 (£38.99 pb.)**

***Interculturalism and Performance Now: New Directions?*, edited by Charlotte McIvor and Jason King. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019; ISBN: 9783030027049 (£109.99)**

Reading has, for me, turned out to be one of the nurturing practices that has kept me grounded and lifted my spirits during the lockdown. The global health crisis in 2020 has, perhaps, prompted many of us to notice and understand viscerally how much our lives and health are interconnected with those living far away in unimaginable distances. The books presented in this review deal with two of the most pressing and exacerbating issues of our times: care and racial inequality.

We are witnessing ongoing crises of care in the Global North, powered by racialised capitalist exploitation of labour migrants, their abuse and repression through

tightly woven legal, political and cultural systems. Geraldine Pratt and Caleb Johnston address this overwhelming mine field, by attending to the politics of storytelling in their book in *Performance: Crossing the Colonial Present*. In a genuinely kind and caring way, both authors situate themselves carefully with their academic, white, Canadian privilege, including funding access and travel possibilities. Yet, in their reflection and documentation of their sociological and theatre practice-based research about the labour migration scheme for Filipino/a domestic workers in Canada, the lived experience shared by the migrants in testimonies and in personal encounters takes centre stage.

The book tells of the making and disseminating of a testimonial play *Nanay*, both on and off stage. With the book, the authors document their collaborations between the academy, arts and the people having experienced and lived through what the play tells of. Pratt and Johnston ask what is at stake—not least life and death—when presenting narratives of racialised domestic care labour on theatre stages across the globe, sometimes in places where family members whose struggles are told and shown have been left behind. In particular, they deconstruct the ‘familiar scholarly story, typically told as the dehumanisation and exploitation of women from the global south [...] within a worldwide system of racial capitalism’ (p.3). These are stories that usually have limited reach beyond the pitying ivory tower, and their play *Nanay* tells of the entanglement between both academic sociological research *about*, and the testimonies *of* Filipino/a domestic workers.

Therefore, poignantly, the book’s introduction starts with questions, rather than neat answers and the culminating question is: how can we understand a mother leaving her children with her sister in the Philippines to care for another family's children in Canada?

To disseminate their stories more widely than with sociological publications alone, Pratt and Johnston staged

a testimonial play from the testimonies of Filipino/a domestic workers in Canada, thus affecting and engaging audiences. Drawing on Julie Salverson's seminal research on the erotics of injury as well as indigenous and black feminist resources, they deal with the whiteness of the theatre production and the overarching research narrative:

there is nothing inherently radical about conceiving theatre as an intensified site of circulating affect, intersubjective encounter and ethical communication. Quite the opposite, theatre as a heightened space of emotionality potentially maintains the hegemonic (and gendered) distinction between emotionally laden leisure time and artistic practice, and the rationalities of economic and political life. The problem is compounded when it is women from the global south who are the object of empathy in the global north' (p.7).

Throughout the book Pratt and Johnston continuously wrestle with the nuances of their own authorities and position, destabilising the idea of the white ally as a stable category.

In *Crossing the Colonial Present* the authors self-critically analyse the journeys the theatre productions of *Nanay* takes. In four chapters, they show how the theatre play developed its own dynamic, gaining international interest, input from various audiences and developing a life on its own. After the first production in Toronto, *Nanay* was invited to a theatre festival at HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin, bringing the researchers, so to speak, 'along on its travels' (p.8). In turn, the agency of the thing itself opened up their research and knowledge production in an iterative, organic way through forming collaborations with every new community encountered.

In chapter 1, Pratt and Johnston rigorously document the first productions of *Nanay* in Toronto and Berlin, and offer a tenacious engagement with audience reactions to it. They pay particular attention to a difficult testimonial encounter with a Colombian migrant in Canada, who left the performance crying and called the play out as self-serving whiteness. Drawing on Jacques Rancière and Jill Dolan, they discuss the fraught and compromised modes of witnessing stories of suffering by racialised women, which always risk falling back into reinforcing race constructs and geopolitical privilege.

Chapter 2 documents the rewriting of the initial script, reacting to previous audience reactions and talkback between employers, care workers, activists and ambassadors from the Philippines after the first production. Their aim is to present a more nuanced narrative of Filipina agency and show the play in the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) Theater Centre in Quezon City in Metro Manila and engage through the theatre production with families left behind. They carefully deal with audience feedback from Phillipinian dramaturgy students, who here too, raise the issue that this play was a 'white man's' made for his problems only.

The next chapter sheds light on the potentials and pitfalls of their subsequent collaboration with the activist organisation Migrante International. Translated into Tagalog, the play was shown outside the urban centre for Manila to the poorer, migrant-sending community of Bagong Barrio. Gayatri Spivak's criticism is taken into account here, whereby feminists who 'begin their analysis of migrant stories at the moment of landing in the destination country' consequently leave readers of such analyses aloof because they 'remain within their predicament of a multicultural society' (p.95). The authors also tell of the communication and decision-making process between themselves, the non-professional youth actors of Teatro Ekyumenikal and the Manila-based director Rommel Linatoc, who finally decided to cut half of the testimonies in the play, thus leaving out the

immediate link to Canada's labour migration scheme. He also changed the dramaturgy drastically towards the Filipino/a 'puro arte'. The authors discuss their initial hesitations about the director's suggestions, but through this process came to learn about the history of union organising and protests during the repressive years of martial law in the Philippines. This new production initiated new field work and encounters with long-term residents, who shared their stories of migration, often 'histories and experiences of intense precarity, permanent transience and economic desperation', family separation, personal sacrifice and strategic planning (p.100).

The final chapter takes us back to the Canadian north and another reworking of the play, which explores potential connections and differences between colonial experiences, showing the play in a Filipino/a community in Whitehorse, Yukon. Here, Pratt and Johnston collaborate with a Filipina actress who moved there and a Tlingit elder and drag performer to move the play 'away from a model of minority immigrant success within narratives of state multiculturalism, towards new ontologies of belonging and social relatedness, including familial relations imagined and lived beyond the private family' (p.127). Through the interactive community performance, First Nations' experiences of state-enforced family separation and settler colonialism, as well as Filipina/o experiences of family separation and racialised labour migration are shared.

In their conclusion, what resonates most with me (and is deeply felt when reading the whole book) is the authors' insight that '[l]earning from *Nanay* was not simply analytical. It has been embodied. It has been felt within a process of creating relationships and exchanging stories. The play has been a thing that has generated and extended worlds within and around it' (p.159).

Something in the book that is not directly unpacked, despite always thinking about the power dynamics of gender and social reproduction, is motherhood and the more intimate agency of thinking of oneself as a mother or performing some kind of mothering in the role of a nanny and caretaker. However, here again, my white longing for a hopeful, loving encounter, and colonial images of family and care risks perpetuating what the authors rigorously sought to counter-practice. While highly vigorous and critically astute, reading *Crossing the Colonial Present* felt very personal and close to home, notwithstanding the great geographical and political distances the research covers. I highly recommend reading Pratt and Johnston's work to all those in the arts and humanities (and beyond), who are interested in complex global questions of care, intercultural theatre and *showing doing* research differently.

I am reading and engaging with the books this review is concerned with in an age of severe militarisation of borders and racialisation, anti-immigration nationalism, xenophobia and right-wing conservatism, which further unsettle questions of what to do with such colonial residues, prevailing challenges of racial inequality and intercultural theatre and research. Charlotte McIvor and Jason King have edited the volume *Interculturalism and Performance Now: New Directions?* with manifold cutting-edge approaches to the question of interculturalism, including theoretical and practical contributions, case studies full of integrity and case studies full of (in)visible violence. The editors champion the assembling of a rich plethora of contemporary and historic contexts in between Mexico, Southeast and East Asia, Australasia, Ireland and Canada, France and Afghanistan, South Africa and Britain, United States, Greece, Germany and the EU. They identify and take seriously the discursive shift in understanding and applying the paradigm of interculturalism: the shift from a Western oriented, hegemonic framework of assimilation and integration, towards more grassroots, rhizomatic, diasporic theatre practices and diverse voices within, a shift that is disrupting binaries between cultures and of West / rest, white / non-white, urban / rural. I would

recommend reading both works, *Crossing the Colonial Present* and *Interculturalism and Performance Now* in tandem as the former details this paradigmatic shift in intercultural theatre and research, offering a long-term study of the processes of un/learning biases and rewriting against Northern hegemonies.

In the introduction, McIvor understands this new shift of interculturalism as one which speaks to ‘something that actually begins at home rather than being primarily mediated through elite international exchanges’ (p.2). This ‘newness’ of interculturalism emerges in the 2000s / 10s when scholars such as Tan, Ric Knowles, Royona Mitra, Leo Cabranes-Grant, Hae-kyung Um and Diana Looser critique many of its revisionist and hegemonic theoretical and practical foundations in the 1980s / 90s. As this rich volume exemplifies, the New Interculturalism moves beyond binary exchanges between East / West, North / South and toward multi-partner-driven models of analysis, and includes also non-theatrical case studies. Scholars in this volume (and beyond) centre thinking about the institutional frameworks at work, including production conditions, funding structures, state policies and the involvement of supra-national bodies, historical genealogies, and the predominance of English-language works and analyses. The volume is compelling as McIvor's own work sheds light on how interculturalism has been conscripted as social policy and used as political instrument by, for example, the EU for engaging with recent migrants and refugees (pp.14-15). She carefully dissects the potential violence of this political instrumentalisation both in her own contribution to the volume, and in her latest monograph on intercultural theatre in Ireland (McIvor, 2016). For this and New Interculturalism, Daphne P. Lei's concept ‘HIT’, or ‘hegemonic intercultural theatre’ is of utmost importance (Lei, 2011). With that, she describes and critiques the classic model of intercultural theatre which ‘has been embodying ethnicity or nation without naming it, and the subject of the experimentation (or resultant contention) seems to be about cultures or artistic traditions, which are often kept distant in time and space; that *culture is*

not race seems to be of a general consensus for intercultural theatre practitioners.' (p.237).

Interculturalism and Performance Now? is divided into four different parts. In the first part of the volume 'New Interculturalism as Methodology', Leo Cabranes-Grant, Alvin Eng Hui Lim, Julie Holledge et al. shed light on different histories of intercultural theatre work and historiography, dealing with the violence and potential of archival research and material networks. Their focuses range from sixteenth century Mexico, Shakespearean adaptations in South and Southeast Asia from the nineteenth Century to the present, and intercultural theatre in post-2003 Australia.

The second part 'Redirecting Intercultural Traffic' represents some of the seminal companies and paradigmatic cases of the 'old' intercultural theatre through this new lens of interculturalism: Jason King investigates the Maliseet First Nation peoples' Akwiten Grandfather Canoe in Ireland; Emine Fişek deals with Théâtre du Soleil's workshops in Afghanistan through discussing the notion of humanitarian intervention; Yvette Hutchison discusses the prominent examples of Handspring Puppet Company and Brett Bailey and what got lost when they toured the international festival circuit in Europe; and finally Ric Knowles writes about Soheil Parsa's work with Modern Times Stage Company in Toronto and the director's appreciation for modernist theatre makers and theatre making.

'Intersectional Interculturalisms' is the third part of the volume, which centres on critical race studies, intersectionality and feminist thinkers to unpack a plethora of constructed, intersecting and dynamic socio-ethnic categories. McIvor and King here assemble contributions, which raise pertinent issues concerning the representation, expression and cultural performing of, by and with minority ethnic and religious identities and diasporic communities, on stage and in the public sphere. Brian Singleton discusses intercultural

misunderstandings by investigating the protests against the stagings of Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's 2004 play *Behzti* and Brett Bailey's 2014 performative installation *Exhibit B* in the UK. In her chapter contribution, Daphne P. Lei investigates the performing of 'yellowness' and Asian-ness during the proclaimed 'century of China', and discusses new Orientalist stage practices in three different examples of 'yellow face, yellow drag, and yellow play' (p.235). Justine Nakase, studying the mixed-race Irish musician Phil Lynott, offers the metaphor of a Russian nesting doll for analysing the multiple analytic scales of an intercultural performance, ranging from the individual, community and emergent to the national, historic and global.

Part four, 'Migrant Interculturalisms' includes three contributions, which look at the shifts in performing arts and social policy regarding interculturalism from a European and EU perspective. Natasha Remoundou maps emerging intercultural performances by refugee community groups in Greece, which deal with their performing of statelessness, forced migration and displacement. Lizzie Stewart meticulously analyses the success and aesthetics of three different productions of Feridun Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel's 2005 play *Schwarze Jungfrauen (Black Virgins)*, shedding light onto intricate dynamics of intercultural funding policies and discourses of inclusion in postmigrant Germany. McIvor's final chapter examines the case study Terra Nova, a Northern Irish theatre company, and their performance series *The Arrival's Project* (2013-2018), working with racially and ethnically diverse writers, actors and community members, to theorise how the EU's vision for intercultural dialogue as vessel for identity transformation and structural social change, might be practised on the ground.

Both publications will, I believe, be useful and compelling resources for readers from across the arts and humanities and beyond, to rethink their own 'trodden paths' and roles as researchers within hegemonic cultural relations,

and to shape our understanding of how theatre and performance reinforce as well as undo some of the violent, persisting, representational matrices of race, class and gender.

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