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**Constable, Nicole. 2014. *Born Out of Place. Migrant Mothers and the Politics of International Labor*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 259 pp. Pb.: \$29.95 / £19.9. ISBN: 9780520282025.**

Women's labour migration from global South to global capitalist centres received considerable attention in the previous decade, bringing to light the highly gendered patterns of international migration. Underscored by global inequality, women from poorer regions became increasingly attracted to work as nannies, cleaners, health workers, caregivers and entertainers in the wealthier parts of the world, prompting a myriad of micro and macro social processes in both the sending and destination countries. In her recent monograph, Nicole Constable turns to one aspect of this phenomenon: to women not only as workers but as human beings finding and losing love, giving birth, creating and sustaining families, forging friendships as well as battling loneliness and betrayal in a bustling Asian metropolis. Hong Kong, with its complex colonial and neocolonial histories, provides a setting for this nuanced and subtle account of Indonesian and Filipina "foreign domestic workers" (FDW) and their "being in the world" (p. 32).

Constable's main arguments are seemingly simple: although (similar to guest-workers programs around the world) domestic workers are welcomed to Hong Kong as workers and not as people and citizens (p. 13), they never can be only workers. They find innovative ways to form relationships and keep sexual and family lives, albeit often of fleeting nature and without long-term prospects. Furthermore, although "domestics" are crucial for the prosperity and "good life" of Hong Kong citizens, they are excluded from the same rights and citizenship. The laws and policies are put in place to regulate these women to stay in the city only as workers and only for the specific period, determined by their employment (p. 177). Too often, these regulations have the opposite effect, turning these women into over-stayers and illegal workers. Finally, their attempts of forming family life in Hong Kong often put into motion a "migratory cycle of atonement", a repeating cycle of migration and re-migration to alleviate economic pressures of the family back home and to avoid the social stigma of being a single mother in more traditional settings of their places of origin.

Through a "critical phenomenological approach" (p. 41) elaborated in the second chapter, the author examines the above arguments by highlighting everyday experiences of not only the women, but also children and men she met during two-year fieldwork research. Her deeply engaged research discovers the maze of policies in the sending as well as destination country that provide constraints and opportunities for migrant women and their countless, fast changing and often inventive strategies to navigate through these. She begins by framing FDW within the centre-periphery relations of Hong Kong and two of its less fortunate neighbours: Indonesia and the Philippines. In the countries of origin, FDW are in public discourse and imagination both crucial providers and vulnerable victims or/and immoral women. This understanding builds on accepted norms of patriarchy and femininity upheld by dominant religions in respective countries; Islam in Indonesia and Christianity in the Philippines.

In Hong Kong, on the other side, the employers ideally want women who are ‘obedient, nonassertive and whose sexuality is nonexistent or nonthreatening’ (p. 58). The government thus prohibits workers from bringing their family members with them and institutes various requirements (e.g. the requirement to live with the employer or obligatory use of agencies with often exorbitant fees) to achieve a submissive workforce. As Constable notes, this goal is harder to meet with Filipinas who are in general better educated, have stronger social networks and more experience with Hong Kong’s bureaucratic system than with often younger and less educated Indonesian women, who are relative newcomers on the scene. While the FDW predominantly come from one of the aforementioned states, the partners and fathers of their children in Hong Kong have much more diverse backgrounds: they are of African, European, American or South or East Asian origin, most often are Hong Kong permanent residents or asylum seekers and work in service, trade or construction.

The central chapter looks at practices regarding reproductive behaviour: contraception, abortion, birth, and adoption. The author’s good rapport with the FDW community enables her to go beyond commonsensical explanations for women’s taking or not taking contraceptives, deciding on abortion or giving children up for an adoption. It reveals gendered norms of behaviour regarding romance, being a good parent and a pious individual. Furthermore, as she argues in the following two chapters, not only women’s norms but also the state determine the conditions and outcomes of reproductive behaviour. Specifically, the state’s regimes of immigration and wider social control emphasise heteronormativity, i.e. the access or inclusion to local citizenship is contingent on the nature of woman’s and child’s relationship with the man and his status as permanent resident, refugee, asylum seeker or illegal immigrant. Here Constable, using De Certeau’s notion of tactics, illuminates FDWs’ strategies not only to stay in Hong Kong, but also to buy time, writing ‘the longer the mothers delay their return, the better opportunity they have to exert control over the circumstances of their return’ (p. 192). In the meantime, some women decide to be at least “Hong Kong happy” understood as a distinct experience of migrants’ impermanent and short-term attempts to find a kind of ‘normalcy’ as lovers, mothers and wives.

In the concluding chapter, the author further illuminates how going home can often mean exchanging one set of gender oppressive expectations for another. Rare are the women who find empowerment through past experience and who resist ‘the migratory cycle of atonement’ (p. 216) by which they try to prove to themselves and their families that they are worthy or/and want to redeem themselves for possible earlier migratory failures. Nicole Constable’s close account of FDWs’ lives, strategies and experience thus convincingly shows the blessings and dark sides of migration and points to the responsibility of both, sending and receiving states, to see these women not only as workers but also as human beings.

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