

Seeing Beyond the State

Toward Transnational Feminist Organizing

GERALDINE PRATT IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PHILIPPINE WOMEN CENTRE OF BC AND UGNAYAN NG KABATAANG PILIPINO SA CANADA/THE FILIPINO-CANADIAN YOUTH ALLIANCE

“Collaboration” and “transnationalism” are terms that circulate widely, and probably too easily, within feminist scholarship. Both terms connote betweenness, a sense of exchange, instability, and movement, and rather than being easily circulated, perhaps their value lies in part in making us hesitate, reexamine, and reconsider. Collaborations between activists and academics often arise from some desire for exchange, but this exchange can take many different forms, some of which exaggerate as much as disrupt existing power relations, for instance, when academics imagine that they hold exclusive expertise in research methodology or a superior capacity for theorizing. We take this chapter as an opportunity to examine and hesitate over our research process, which has involved a series of collaborations over the last fifteen years between two Filipino-Canadian activist organizations in Vancouver and a white Canadian university researcher.

Typical of our collaborative academic writing, and reflecting the distribution of a key resource—time—this chapter was written in the first instance by Geraldine Pratt and then passed back and forth between us. Transitions between “I” and “we” reflect this process and the uneven and negotiated process of authorship. Like many collaborations, this chapter involves the busy traffic of collaborators entering and leaving, coming and going. The text also attempts to communicate the chatter of oral communication and more reflective writing. We begin by considering our collaboration, through conversations about the research process and a parallel written text. We resist idealizing one model or cartography of collaboration (that of similarity and close proximity), and suggest that some distances between researcher and activists can be strategically valuable. We describe how our collaborations

have differed from project to project and how the terms of collaboration need to be rethought as circumstances change.

My activist collaborators then leave the space of the text and I turn to reflect on some of what I have learned from them. In a now-canonical feminist essay, Donna Haraway (1988) wrote about the need to more fully understand how our social locations and methodologies shape what we can and cannot see. The point of this was to understand the limits of any one way of knowing, so as to create the appetite for and means to forge connections across inevitably partial ways of seeing. Connection can also be a means of understanding the partiality of one's vision. I want to describe some of what I have learned about transnational feminist praxis from my research collaborators, who have long lived and theorized transnationalism in the contexts of their own lives. I have learned from my collaborators not only about the Filipino community's struggle in Canada, but a new perspective on the world, which can be called transnational. This has involved a process of unlearning certain ways of framing the Philippines in relation to Canada, framings that uncomfortably repeat and reproduce some of what we have criticized about Canadian state policy. I have also learned from my collaborators another sense of what academic research can aspire to achieve, which is not just to describe the world, but to seek to change it. One means of doing this is to work within transnational activist networks. There is no single privileged or ideal site within these networks for research and activism, although the risks of epistemological nationalism are considered herein; transnational activism is compatible with doing research in a national space such as Canada.

Collaborating on Research

Taken from a conversation that we staged on May 18, 2006:¹

GERRY: *What skills have been learned through our research?*

CHARLENE SAYO (*Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada/Filipino Canadian Youth Alliance*): *Well, picking up interviewing skills, understanding even how to read reports, how to write them, how to try and understand them, how to critically analyze. Because that's something that, you know, our community . . . well, I know for myself, for the youth, that's not something that they always have access to. They're so marginalized. You know, they've dropped out of school. Their education is really being affected. Their sense of confidence and development is really robbed of them. The fact that they can have this opportunity to develop themselves, that's huge. Like for me, personally, that's a big, huge benefit.*

CECILIA DIOCSON (*Chair, National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada*): *But they're also seeing that they're part of this history, part of the reality, the lived experiences. They find that they're part of it. They own it. They have the ownership and so they want to do something to also change their situation. I think that's really very important. So even the interviews. Before [the youth] did not want to do these. But now they're very assertive in going out, and interviewing [other Filipino youth who have experienced separation through the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP)] and using these interviews in the programs at the center.*

CHARLENE: *Because they also know that the reports, the stories, they're going to be this historical product. Fifty years from now, people will at least know what has happened to them. And that's important because at least they're then part of this society. I mean they've been so marginalized that they've never felt like they belong here. But knowing that they can have that sense of place . . .*

CECILIA: *But I think they're really experiencing it also. Like, it's not because we interviewed them, collected their stories, and analyzed them. They're really experiencing it. So, you know, it really helps their own analysis, helps in their realization that "Oh yeah, it's really true, it's really happening." Like systemic racism is really happening. It's not just that the stories were gathered and this is it. But, you know, every day, that critical analysis is really being developed, and through their own experience.*

Perhaps the truest thing to say about our collaborations is that each has been different from the others, and that we have kept our distance and come together in different ways at different moments. We first met when Cecilia Diocson of the Philippine Women Centre (PWC) was a community scholar in residence at the Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Relations at the University of British Columbia. This program offered a rare opportunity for community activists to spend time at the university, access resources, and make connections with university researchers (and vice versa). This was a moment of intense scrutiny of the many ways that white supremacy and colonial relations persist within feminist scholarship (e.g., hooks 1990; Mohanty 1991); in the research project that I had already begun on domestic workers in Canada, I was stalled by concerns about appropriating others' narratives for my own professional gain, exploiting research subjects, and reproducing the distinction between expert academic theorist and naïve native informant through my own research practice. I had interviewed nanny agents, government officials, and Canadian employers but found myself immobilized when it came to researching the lives of domestic workers. Collaborating with an activist group working with domestic workers on this issue in a participatory research project seemed one solution to this problem.

One feature that has been constant across all of our projects is the commitment to plan the research collectively and to research issues that organizations at the Kalayaan Centre have judged to be pressing ones for their community at the time. Our first project (described in Pratt 2004) about the significance to conventional academic scholarship of the innovative methodologies was by some measures the most collaborative. After deciding to collaborate in a participatory research project, we met five times for day-long workshops with some fifteen or so domestic workers, many of whom already met regularly at the Philippine Women Centre. We spent our first day together planning the research focus and methodologies. I have written elsewhere (Pratt 2000) about the significance of the innovative methodologies, such as role-playing, suggested by women at the PWC. The next two sessions were spent breaking into three small groups in which women shared stories of their experiences in Tagalog (except for the group in which I participated, which was conducted in a mixture of Tagalog and English). When the tapes were translated and transcribed by the PWC, we met together to read the transcripts line by line, to share and verify what was said and to develop a joint analysis. We met one more day to further develop the analysis. It has always been my job to write a first draft of academic papers and present them to my collaborators for criticism and comments. But we have equal access to the data and they can (and have) used the information gathered through our research to write nonacademic briefs and reports, and we have a history of collaborating on media and press releases. We did our best to clear away a kind of leverage that researchers often hold over community partners insofar as the agreed upon research monies were exchanged before the research began. Domestic workers participated as community researchers: they were not paid for their time.

Subsequent projects have not quite followed this model, for different reasons. In a second project with youth, we planned the research together and I was invited along to a couple of the focus groups, but much of the data was made accessible to me only through transcripts. As Charlene and Cecilia describe in the accompanying conversational text, the youth needed space (and time) to take ownership of the research process and develop trust in our collaboration. The second project with the PWC was less fully collaborative in another sense, and this reflected less a choice or the need to keep a certain distance from a university researcher (as seemed the case for youth) than the changed circumstances of those whose lives we were documenting. For this project, the PWC and I jointly developed the research proposal and budget, and brought the same women from the

first study together eight years later to document how they were getting on after fulfilling the requirements of the Canadian federal government's Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) and settling permanently in Canada (see Pratt in collaboration with the Philippine Women Centre 2005). Although the aim for collective storytelling remained, the effects of deskilling were evident; because so many women were working at multiple jobs on variable work schedules it was difficult to bring everyone together at one time, and individual interviews were arranged in some cases. The idea of engaging participants fully as community researchers over five daylong sessions, to both collect and analyze their own stories, was inconceivable. The women's experiences also had begun to diverge so that the individual interview format was useful because it allowed a more thorough examination of the particularities of individual lives. True, a range of experiences always existed among these women—some had gone first to Singapore, others to Hong Kong; some had left children in the Philippines, others had not; some were registered nurses, some high school teachers. There is the possibility that the complexity detected eight years on reflects the shifting terms of reference and an unwitting (colonial) tendency to view lives in Canadian society as infinitely more complex than those in the Philippines.² But in the first study, all participants were registered in the LCP and they shared the common experience of working as live-in domestic workers. They told their stories within a context of organizing to change the conditions of the LCP, and individuals came to recognize the similarities in their circumstances through the telling. A common project—to uphold their rights within the LCP, and to reform or scrap the program—was clear. Eight years on, the tone of many of the women's stories had changed: most women were approaching middle age and, for many, their circumstances had not improved and, in some respects, worsened. A number had resigned themselves to permanent separation from their mothers and extended families, others to never finding a romantic partner (for some because a life of working at multiple, low-paying jobs left little time to socialize). Their immediate problems—though rooted in a common experience of the LCP—seemed more diverse: for instance, some had retrained, but through different courses and to different extents; and the specifics of their employment situations were less immediately comparable.

CHARLENE: I wanted to share, because of what I said about the white guy [another "expert" researcher she had earlier criticized]. Because I think it's also very much like what Cecilia said: it [our collaboration] has been a long process. And it's been nurtured, and we can see the long-term impacts. When we first did the project

about Filipino youth, in particular, it wasn't like you just left and that was it. There was a lot more there that you wanted to explore, which was really important. And so, moving on from that project, we've looked at the issue of family separation and impacts on the youth. So there was that follow-up, or at least continuity. And I think for the youth that were involved in that, they could see that. . . . You know you have to understand that when you're bringing in these youth who don't even want to be here in Canada anymore because there are no opportunities for them. They're criminalized already. There's no trust. You know, they have a hard time trusting people. So when they see that their stories and their experiences are being taken seriously, and that they themselves can also develop from it, then, of course, there's really that sense of ownership and also that sense . . . I guess it's a better relationship knowing that their stories aren't being used to further your career or whatever. But they're really taken seriously. I think the fact that they know that. . . . Well I know for the youth, for some of the younger ones, that when they see that their names, their stories are being published, of course, for them it's like, wow, they're being validated. But they know they can also do it themselves. I think that's a big, huge step. So knowing that there's always that benefit there of education and that process of development.

In our most recent project, we are interviewing mothers and children, and some fathers, who have been separated for a long time—the median number of years is eight. These are often sad stories, stories of not being recognized by one's own children, or bewilderment about one's mother's sudden departure or feelings of distrust and betrayal. We have collected these stories through interviews with individuals or with mother and children together, using contacts developed by the Kalayaan Centre and the help of a settlement worker. Our goal is to use the stories to draw out a collective, community story. We have brought a number of the interviewed families together on one occasion to build this common understanding, and the center has been using the stories to organize the community around this issue. But because of the change in emotional tone, the more individualistic mode of collecting stories, and the focus on problems settling into Vancouver, the risks of victimization, voyeuristic witnessing of suffering and community stigmatization seem even more pressing for this project relative to earlier ones, and the need for community ownership extremely important.

At issue here is not only the type of stories that are constructed about peoples' lives but the conditions under, and the social relations within and through which they are told. Collecting the stories has to be a community endeavor, and part of community development rather than community

exposure. Though this has always been our goal, what we take from our varied experiences across research projects is the understanding that there is not one ideal set of conditions and no single model of collaboration; methods and modes of collaboration depend on the circumstances and the particular needs of the community at that time. In our view it would be unfortunate if feminists idealized one model of collaboration based only on ideals of closeness, proximity, and intimacy.

EMANUAL SAYO (B.C. Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines): Gerry, a classic example is when we say that Filipino youth have the highest dropout, one of the highest, dropout rates among young people in the Lower Mainland. It's just a statement if it's not backed up by an academic researcher. The credibility is not really that strong within the community. Unless we show them, "Look, Dan Hiebert, Gerry Pratt, these are their findings" and all that stuff. Then even the community is surprised. If we say that [the dropout rate is high] based on our own research alone, it would not have that much of an impact. But now it's being backed up by this community research from the academic. Then that becomes a very powerful tool, and suddenly people start using it, and it just spreads out. It's not just with the youth or with domestic workers. The members of the [broader] community can see that here's the Kalayaan Centre. The credibility of the Kalayaan Centre is also bolstered by the fact that whatever we say at the center is backed up by very strong academic research. And we have succeeded in convincing academics that these are our own terms for doing research if you want to do it with us. And academics are also cooperating; they understand that this is based not only on our personal but collective life experiences as a community.

We are allies—sometimes coconspirators. But we have never collapsed our roles as academic and activists, and certainly not our identities. In the first instance, this reflects fundamental differences in our life experiences: I am not Filipino, I do not speak Tagalog, and I have not experienced the forced migration and radical deskilling, that is, of being dislodged from my profession as university professor to clean Canadian homes. Our collaboration developed, not from a common identity, but from the common understanding that Canada requires a national childcare policy that does not rest on the exploitation of women from the global South through the LCP. There are also good strategic reasons for maintaining our distance and difference. As Emanuel explains in the accompanying oral text, association with an academic can authorize ongoing community research—even within the Filipino community. And because of the perceived neutrality and professionalism, academics sometimes have access to government data or

interviewees that are unavailable to community activists. For instance, we have been able to calculate the dropout rates of Filipino youth relative to other youth in Vancouver high schools from a Ministry of Education data set that tracks every youth year by year within the British Columbia school system. Researchers must approach this data through a consulting firm established within the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Education; literally by being buzzed through a locked door and signed in, after making an appointment with one of the two data analysts employed there. Each proposed statistical analysis is closely vetted by the B.C. Ministry of Education and researchers must sign an agreement to obtain ministry approval before publishing or presenting material that draws upon this data.³ And though it is merely speculation that the proposals of UBC academics and community activists might be evaluated differently, I was told that passage through the evaluation process is eased if the project has been reviewed by the university's ethics review board. Certainly any investigator requires the financial resources to pay for the data analysis, which can only be done by the facility's data analysts.

This raises the thorny issue of inequity of access to material resources, which can reinstate the very hierarchies that collaborators are at pains to disrupt. It should not be surprising that the state assumes and produces a range of "boundary projects" through the allocation of research monies. One boundary that is assumed and reproduced is the distinction between university researcher and community activist. So, for example, though the PWC and I jointly planned and wrote our second research proposal, the funding body would only award the grant to a university researcher, and deposit it to a university account managed both for and by that researcher. So, too, the state maintains a strict division between national and international space, which belies community experiences of transnationalism. When Ugnayan applied for funds from a provincial government agency, Heritage B.C., for their antiracism work in winter 2005, for instance, they were told that they could not be funded if they focused some of their work on understanding the situation in the Philippines. For this, they were told, they must apply for funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). This is an instance of boundary maintenance—between national and international space, and domestic and external affairs. Equally, academic researchers bring with their research funds a set of constraints, timelines, and requirements (for instance, in terms of formalized ethical review and the need to produce certain kinds of scholarly research output), which can fit awkwardly with the priorities and schedules of community activists.

But without wishing to sidestep this important issue, there is a danger of reifying power relations and casting community researchers as powerless and dependent, in ways that play out stereotypes of expected distributions of expertise, wealth, and access. It may be that our collaborations over the years have built the center's capacity to generate their own funding from government agencies and that Canada is a distinctive context in this regard, but it certainly is the case that the PWC has had—for many years—considerable success generating its own research monies, through their own research proposals, to do their own community research. To cast the PWC as dependent on my material wealth as a funded university researcher would misrepresent their skills, success, and autonomy. For instance, their latest and largest project, begun in spring 2006, funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage and carried out by the National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada (NAPWC) over a three-year period, is a comprehensive examination of factors leading to the economic and social marginalization of Filipino communities in Canada, and created a series of forums to strategize toward their communities' fuller participation in Canadian society. It was a long struggle to secure this funding, in part because the government considered this a very large research project for a community group to manage on its own—but the struggle was successful.

CHARLENE: Because we also know that is also a challenge and struggle [to be both a scholar and activist] especially with youth activism. Because, you know, it's very common for youth to reject school and formal education. Especially since we know that what we're being taught, even at the universities, will not always be the most liberating. Like that's why a lot of youth don't continue.

CECILIA: It's about commercializing education.

CHARLENE: Exactly. It's not fulfilling. You're not actually learning how to think. You know, there are very few professors who are really able to give that to their students. But then overall, it's that overall sense: "Well, why go to school, if I get a huge loan and can't even get a decent job or whatever? What am I going to get out of this?" But we are also trying to challenge our own members as well. It's not, for one, wrong to pursue school. And second, we also have to be open to collaborating and working with professors who are also very progressive, and are also very open to working with us. One, because we're also not living in a society that takes our community and our research seriously. Second, we want to change our society but we also have to know how to live in it, survive in it. So we also have to be able to, you know, become a little bit more sophisticated, especially if we have to talk about our community, really know how to articulate our experiences. We have to be able to deliver that. I mean, it doesn't mean that we're completely changing our

principles but we have to wear a lot of hats when we're doing our political work and activism. So we have to be very comprehensive in our skills. So we do encourage youth to go to school and to work with professors and academics. In the long term it's also a capital investment. I mean, we may not make a lot of money out of all of this but to have, say, a Filipino academic who's also going to address the issues of the Filipino community, I mean that's big. That could be a big influence one day.

The community organizations' capacity to generate their own research monies also suggests that the terms of our collaboration will continue to change, with the possibility that its usefulness—from the perspective of organizations at the Kalayaan Centre—may disappear. We know, for instance, of four or so Filipino-Canadians currently doing master's and PhD degrees on their communities in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. Is it still useful to collaborate with a white, Canadian researcher? Are the terms and forms of useful collaboration changing? At the weekend consultation in Vancouver in February 2007, for instance, the first day was spent reporting on the research that had been done by NAPWC over the previous year as part of their large national research project. I attended, not as a researcher, but as an interested member of the public. Sunday was restricted to Filipino-Canadians only—it was a day of capacity training workshops in which participants gained experience in policy analysis, formulation of policy recommendations, and written and oral presentation of policy briefs. I participated in the afternoon as one of several allies invited to take part in a mock parliamentary hearing. Each of us was assigned a character (as a municipal, provincial, and federal government politician or bureaucrat with a specific history and particular set of priorities), to whom the submissions were made. We were asked to dress appropriately for our roles, and to perform the task of receiving the briefs (looking variably stern, bored, official, or sympathetic, depending on our roles) and then challenging the presenters on the material and positions that they put forth. This was a serious (and immensely pleasurable, joyful) exercise in popular education, which exemplified a moment of collaboration through and not despite our differences. It provided a snapshot of the range of significant collaborations that the Kalayaan have developed over the years: with university researchers, Grassroots Women, Vancouver's Bus Riders Union, among others. And it configured my relationship to the group as ally/activist rather than university researcher. We are also currently collaborating with theater artists to use our previous research transcripts to construct a testimonial theater production. This collaboration opens the possibility of developing different kinds of skills, such as play writing, acting, and grant writing for theatrical productions. In each of these two cases, the

rationale and the form of collaboration have varied. The only certainty for the future is that our collaborations will continue to change along with the needs and opportunities for community development.

Seeing Like a State

As a way of honoring and underlining the significance of our collaboration, I would like to step away from my collaborators to reflect on what I have learned from them. Certainly I have learned about the struggles of the Filipino community in Canada, but I also learned to theorize these struggles in new terms, and to envision how research can move beyond describing and conceptualizing the world as it is put into circulation within transnational grassroots networks.

My collaboration with the Philippine Women Centre of B.C. has focused on documenting and critiquing the LCP, a temporary work visa program that brings from 3,000–6,000 (mostly) Filipino women to Canada annually to work as live-in servants. Much of our attention has focused on the inadequate state regulation of the program, and the Canadian state discourses and practices that legitimate it. Drawing very loosely on James Scott's (1998) phrase "seeing like a state," we might say that the Canadian state sees the LCP in distinctive ways—for instance, as a solution to carefully defined problems, such as affordable childcare for middle-class Canadians—that make it difficult to leverage an effective critique. After identifying two such ways of seeing, I want to consider how these same frameworks slip into the thinking of allies of Filipino-Canadian activists, including—possibly—our first research collaboration, and then describe a trajectory toward a transnational perspective.

One way of "seeing like a state" in relation to the LCP is to conceive it as a humanitarian response to the horrors of life in the Philippines. The possibility of attaining Canadian citizenship after twenty-four months in the LCP is often seen as an adequate compensation for two years of live-in servitude, and a comparison to economic circumstances in the Philippines self-evidently justifies employment conditions under the LCP that Canadians would not accept for themselves. Sherene Razack has criticized the rhetorical and practical importance of Canada's self-representation as world "peacekeeper" and reflected on its implications for immigration: "It is through such images that . . . when people of the Third World come knocking at our doors, we are able to view them as supplicants asking to be relieved of the disorder of their world and to be admitted to the rational calm of ours" (1998: 91; see also Razack 2004, 2007). Under almost any conditions.

Further, the Canadian government sidelines the welfare of domestic workers and their families within what one might call its own “grid of intelligibility”: its overwhelming concern about the availability of affordable childcare for Canadian families, and a jurisdictional fragmentation that makes it difficult to pinpoint responsibility. The jurisdictional fragmentation of the LCP across provincial and federal governmental bodies, for instance, seems to blur and confuse lines of responsibility and accountability.⁴ Likewise, though our analysis of the difficulties encountered by families who reunite in Canada after the LCP experience has been met with sympathetic responses, policy makers responsible for the LCP tend to see such problems as the concern of those in charge of settlement issues, in other words, as outside of their jurisdiction. Official statistics are fragmented, and in particular, those collected for the LCP are not integrated with immigration statistics. In Tania Li’s words, “experts devising improvement schemes generate only the type and density of data required to constitute a field of intervention and to meet specific objectives” (2005: 388). Separating statistics for temporary work visa programs from those collected on immigration makes it very difficult to document the effects of the LCP on family settlement. When Filipino settlement in Vancouver is abstracted from the LCP experience, there is a risk, at best, of developing very partial analyses, at worst, of pathologizing the Filipino community in Canada for the inadequacy of their integration and economic success.

Even given this critique of state discourse and practice, it is worth reflecting on Tania Li’s critique of James Scott’s analysis of state modes of seeing. She argues that the binaries that structure Scott’s analysis (such as state/society, state space/non-state space, power/resistance) provide “insufficient traction to expose the logic of [state development] schemes or to examine their effects” (2005: 385). She argues that the state is neither as monolithic as Scott presumes nor do politicians and bureaucrats operate in isolation: non-governmental organizations, expert consultants, and scientists are among those who participate in a more general “problematic of improvement” (384). I want to reflect on two ways that I (and other allies of Filipino-Canadian critics of the LCP) may unreflectively participate in “the problematic of improvement” associated with the LCP by unwittingly drawing upon framings of the Philippines and Canada that repeat and reproduce statist ways of knowing. One involves casting the Philippines as a brutal and primitive place from which to flee; the other erases the Philippines altogether.

The tenacity of the first was evident at a conference held in Vancouver in June 2006, focused on the current crises in the Philippines, and designed

to invite and gather support from progressive Canadians.⁵ After a panel in which the extremity of the current state of political violence in the Philippines was described, a representative from a Canadian organization, Grassroots Women, asked whether this ought to cause Canadian activists to rethink their commitment to scrap Canada’s LCP. The question was instructive because it demonstrated how easily Canadians—including progressive Canadians—fall into a framework of liberal humanitarianism, in which the Philippines is cast as monstrous and Canada as a refuge that is preferable under any conditions, including servitude outside of the legal protections of citizenship. This tendency to conceive of the LCP as a type of humanitarian response to the crisis in the Philippines makes it almost impervious to critique, and supports the program on its own transnational itinerary: governments in other countries are currently examining the LCP as a model for their own temporary work visa programs, while within Canada it is now cited as a legitimating prototype for expanding Canada’s temporary foreign worker programs (Jimenez 2005).

If humanitarianism is one common posture that feminists from the North take in relation to women from the global South, erasure through a rubric of multiculturalism is another. Gayatri Spivak, for instance, has criticized the tendency to equate globalization with migrancy and diaspora, to ignore rural populations, and to assume “that the entire globe is in a common cultural fix, and its signature is urbanism” (Sharpe and Spivak 2002: 611). Moreover, scholars often cast such urban diasporic communities within the gender-race-class relations of the “receiving” country. Elsewhere Spivak develops this argument through her reading of Jamaica Kincaid’s novel *Lucy*, a story of a young woman who leaves Antigua to come to the United States to take up employment as a domestic worker. Spivak criticizes standard U.S. feminist interpretations of the novel for operating within the familiar rubric of race-gender-class. Playing within this “structured ideological field” of well-worn binaries (black/white; poor/rich; periphery/core), Spivak argues, encourages analyses that “remain narcissistic, question-begging” (2000: 335). This is because these analyses return readers to themselves and their own “predicament” of a multicultural society. They treat the migrant as “an effectively historyless object of intellectual and political activism” (2000: 354), thereby reasserting the centrality of the metropolis in the global North and the irrelevance of all places and social relations that lie outside it. But Spivak’s point goes beyond this: many overseas migrant workers are themselves middle-class professionals. (For the case of Filipino migrant workers, see Parreñas [2005] and Pratt [2004], although it must be emphasized that many Filipina professionals such as teachers and registered nurses

also migrate because of poverty and economic hardship.) If we focus only on their experiences, we miss, in Spivak's view, "the real front of globalization," which she locates in rural areas of the global South (2002: 611).

Locating the "real front" of globalization in one site is hyperbole; the point about erasure of the global South within much feminist scholarship is not. I want to consider how I was operating within this ideological field of erasure-through-multiculturalism when I began the research collaboration with the Philippine Women Centre in 1995, and to describe some of my trajectory toward a transnational analysis.⁶ For our first project, as noted earlier, we invited domestic workers, already coming to the center, to join us in recording and analyzing their stories of their experiences under the LCP. Though domestic workers typically began their stories in the Philippines—long before coming to Canada—my memory is that I only started to listen carefully as they described their experiences in Canada. In our early collaborative writing, we described the many ways that Canadian employers violate—and Canadian provincial governments fail to regulate—existing labor laws. We described domestic workers' immense frustration about their deskilling through their time spent completing the LCP requirements. We described the marginalization of Filipino women in Canada in terms of their life in Canada.

Why this lack of curiosity about the Philippines, and blindness to the interconnections between life in Canada and in the Philippines? Similar to the Canadian state, my intellectual jurisdiction seemed to end at the borders of my nation. I offer four explanations for this, one specific to the project, and three of more general relevance for feminist scholarship. First, I understood my focus to be Canadian state policy. Second, and relatedly, penetrating critiques of development discourse (e.g., Cowen and Shenton 1996); of ethnography (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986); of a dubious history of complicity between area studies, the discipline of geography, and Cold War politics (Barnes and Farish 2006); and of liberal humanitarianism made a focus on Canada seem more appropriate (and less problematic). And third, this was especially the case because I had not been trained in an area studies tradition. The distinction between particularistic area studies and research in North American and European contexts (often erroneously taken to be less situated and more universal or generalizable) is, of course, precisely one that transnational perspectives attempt to disrupt (Chow 2006), but it remains a powerful organizing schema that I have found difficult to recognize and resist. Fourth, it is now clear to me that I had absorbed what Doreen Massey (2004) has identified as a territorial, locally centered, Russian-doll model of care and responsibility, which she thinks has shaped much ethical thinking

in Western contexts: "[f]irst there is 'home,' then perhaps place or locality, then nation, and so on. There is a kind of accepted understanding that we care first about, and have our first responsibilities towards, those nearest in" (8). There is a clear and important geopolitical rationale for a Canadian scholar to concentrate her critique on the LCP rather than, for instance, the Philippine government's Labour Export Policy: it reflects a commitment to investigate exploitation and oppression in a society that prides itself on multiculturalism and social equality rather than displacing attention to other parts of the world. As Rachel Silvey notes there is an important distinction to be made between reflexivity and narcissism.⁷ (And it is also for this reason that Spivak's location of the "real front" of globalization in rural areas of the global South seems overdrawn.) But at the same time, an exclusive focus on circumstances in Canada reinscribes the tendency to "constitute our maps of loyalty and affection"—of care and responsibility—within the rhetoric of nation and territory (Massey 2004), and misses the opportunity to develop a more fully transnational agenda

Learning to See (and Act) Transnationally

If I only partially registered the stories told by domestic workers about their lives before coming to Canada, as well as the Philippine Women Centre's strong and well-developed critiques of the IMF, the World Bank, Structural Adjustment Programs, and the Philippine government's Labour Export Policy, I began to listen more closely when working with Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada (the Filipino-Canadian Youth Alliance) on the second research project discussed above. This project involved collecting life narratives from Filipino-Canadian youth, most of whom were born and raised in Canada. It is possible that I paid more attention precisely because these youth were born in Canada, and their transnationalism caught me by surprise.

I was struck, for instance, that the play that they wrote, produced, and performed around the time of our research collaboration in 2000 began in the Philippines, with a young woman graduating summa cum laude with a nursing degree. Experiencing difficulties obtaining work in the Philippines, she migrates to Canada under the LCP. Though most of the play took place in her Vancouver apartment after her younger siblings had migrated to join her, it interested me that second-generation youth would choose to narrate their story of racism in Vancouver in the first instance from the vantage point of the LCP. I was struck as well that Ugnayan at that time was dividing its activist energies and resources between antiracism campaigns in Canada and participation in a campaign to oust President Joseph Estrada

in the Philippines. When I presented to Ugnayan a first draft of a paper written from our research collaboration, members of the group asked me to “deepen” the analysis by more fully theorizing their lives in Canada within their community’s history of forced migration from the Philippines.

It became apparent that, for Ugnayan, transnationalism is a political achievement, and a destination as much as an origin. There are two facets to the transnationalism that Filipino-Canadian youth are striving toward: they are theorizing their situations within a transnational conceptual framework, and they are creating and operating within transnational political networks. As an example of how members of the Filipino-Canadian Youth Alliance explicitly relate their history in Canada to a longer history in the Philippines, the alliance organized its activities to celebrate its tenth anniversary in 2005 under the theme of “Ipagpatuloy: Living the Storm.” This referenced the thirty-fifth anniversary of the First Quarter Storm, a three-month period in 1970 of mass mobilization in the Philippines to protest the Marcos regime, and drew a line of continuity between this struggle and their own in Canada. As Charlene Sayo, of the Filipino-Canadian Youth Alliance, explained it:

In terms of Philippine history, it’s the 35th anniversary of the First Quarter Storm. . . . This was at the height of the Marcos era, just around the time that Marcos was about to implement martial law . . . and it’s a pivotal point in Philippine history and a lot of Filipino youth really look at that time. That’s when youth and students really went out to the streets and it wasn’t just rallies. . . . they were protesting and having sits ins . . . in the universities, the students weren’t going to school, and a lot of people were being arrested. And so we’d like to integrate that history knowing that this is what we are as a people. Not only is the symbolism strong as youth and students but also this is when a lot of Filipinos were leaving the Philippines to come to Canada. So . . . we also integrate this history and get inspired by it, and integrate it with our own organizing. (Interview, 10 May 2004)

Ugnayan is enfolding and sedimenting its history in Canada within a long and rich genealogy of student struggle in the Philippines. It is constructing Vancouver and the Philippines as a continuous political space insofar as its ten-year anniversary celebration was translated into a key moment in the Philippines’ history. Integrating their lives in Canada into a history in the Philippines is important for their sense of identification and belonging, of “knowing that this is what we are as a people.” Ugnayan also actively solidifies actual transnational networks by attending international conferences, and sending each year at least one Canadian-born member (and in some

years up to three) to the Philippines for an extended period of “integration” into political organizations there.

If second generation youth have the geographical imagination and political commitment to make the connections, how much simpler to envision the transnational lives of domestic workers, who live their lives simultaneously in Canada and the Philippines. As one index of the simultaneity of their transnationalism, in 2003 the PWC staged a political fashion show. They constructed one of the dresses entirely from used overseas telephone cards, gathered from members of SIKLAB, a Filipino migrant workers organization also located at the Kalayaan Centre. It took less than a week to gather the hundreds of cards necessary to construct the dress and matching handbag. This is unremarkable if one considers that roughly 37 percent of those who come through the LCP have left dependents— that is, husbands and/or children—in the Philippines, with whom they are in constant contact (Live-in Caregiver Program Fact Sheet 2005). Recognizing their transnationalism alters the interpretation of their lives in Canada, and unsettles the notion that Canada and the Philippines are discrete national spaces, which can be analyzed separately.

How does a transnational perspective “deepen” our analysis of the LCP and unsettle territorial, Russian-doll models of care and responsibility? Consider the problem of deskilling. Despite the fact that the majority of those registered in the LCP have postsecondary educations, even years after leaving the LCP and securing Canadian citizenship few escape the fate of working as housekeepers and cleaners, or in low-end jobs in the Canadian health care sector. In other words, few regain the occupations for which they were trained in the Philippines. The experience of being in the LCP for a number of years and the impact of state regulations that restrict educational upgrading while registered in the LCP—factors that we emphasized in our early analyses—are clearly important. But it is also true that many Filipinas do not invest heavily in their own “human capital” after leaving the LCP and settling in Canada. If this lack of investment in their own human capital is understood only in terms of their lives in Canada, one might view this as an individual choice for which they must bear responsibility. Situated within their transnational lives, the perspective shifts. The deskilling of women in the LCP is bound up with their ongoing commitments to send remittances to their families in the Philippines and to save to sponsor their families’ immigration to Canada. Both sending remittances and saving for their families’ immigration leave the women with few financial resources to retrain or upgrade their professional credentials in Canada. Domestic workers recognize the interpretation that Canadians place upon this. In the words of a woman who participated in two of our research projects: “That’s really

our difference from the whites. They ask, 'How come you're still supporting your family? You have your own life [here in Canada].'" But how should we interpret commitments to send remittances to the Philippines? One interpretation might be to see remittances as yet another sad indication of the destitution of life in the Philippines, or to understand transnational families as the norm for Filipino families (as in, "It's normal for Filipino children to be left with their grandmother or aunt"). But it is important to recognize that the terms of the LCP set by the Canadian federal government—which allow entry of a single worker only (and not her family)—legislate family separation. In other words, it is not just that the situation in the Philippines leads women to come to Canada as domestic workers and to leave their families behind or that this is the norm for Filipino families: the fact that they leave their families in the Philippines is determined by the rules of the LCP. Understanding this deepens an analysis of the extent to which the Canadian state has manufactured Filipino deskilling and marginality in Canada. One could take the analysis of the intertwined histories and futures of Canada and the Philippines even further by considering, for instance, the large presence of Canadian mining interests in the Philippines and their effects of displacing rural communities, which (and this is purely speculative) may fuel the need to immigrate under programs such as the LCP. The point is: the Canadian political economy is intertwined with the Philippines in many different, concrete ways such that our histories and geographies need to be investigated and understood together.⁸

Further, working closely with the PWC has allowed me to see that we are not only researching transnational lives and connections, but our research collaboration is itself a transnational practice that is taken up and reverberates throughout activist networks (even when the research is carried out only in Vancouver). To return to the conference on human rights in the Philippines mentioned earlier, in response to the question about strategy posed by the representative of Grassroots Women, one of the panelists, Maita Santiago, who was at that time secretary-general of Migrante International (international alliance of overseas Filipino workers) based in the Philippines, asserted Migrante's support for the campaign to scrap the LCP, explaining that this is a good example of the importance of research: "it allows us to say that the call to scrap the LCP is the right one." The National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada (of which the PWC of BC is a member) has also worked closely with six members of the Philippine Congress to introduce Resolution 643 on March 2, 2005, within the Philippine Congress, a resolution "to conduct an investigation, in aid of legislation, into the Live-in Caregiver Program being implemented by the Canadian government." The

congressman who introduced the resolution, Crispin Beltran, was arrested illegally and held by the Philippines' national police from February 2006 until June 2007. At the aforementioned conference, Maita Santiago of Migrante International speculated on the links between Resolution 643 and Beltran's arrest, given the importance of remittances from overseas contract workers to the Philippines economy. At the same conference, the chairperson of the Canadian Committee for the Immediate Release of Congressman Beltran traced Congressman Beltran's history in Vancouver, including his keynote address at the opening of SIKLAB in Vancouver in 1995, and his presence at protests surrounding the APEC meetings in Vancouver in 1997. The point, then, is not only that specific actions against the LCP have taken place within a transnational network; actions reverberate throughout the network, can solidify and extend the network in new ways, and become solidified through time. Maita Santiago emphasizes both the importance of research and the role of specific, local campaigns within a transnational field of politics. Situating an analysis of the LCP within a transnational framework opens a network of sites for action and creates opportunities for building solidarities across national borders. Imaginative geographies of belonging and obligation are reconfigured in the process.

Conclusion

Our collaboration—the first participatory research project for each of us—has launched us in new and different directions: for the Kalayaan Centre toward many other research projects, both independently and with other university researchers; for me to retheorize the LCP, and toward a fuller understanding of transnationalism and the possibilities for feminist praxis. We offer no model for collaboration beyond a firm commitment to collectively generate the research focus and methodologies. We have attempted to unsettle expectations about where the problems of collaboration might exist, by questioning the assumption that university researchers always retain control over material resources, or that overcoming differences is the ideal for a close and productive collaborative relationship. Researchers from the global North certainly do have fuller access to research funding, but not exclusively so, at least in the case of a transnational group living and working in Canada, and a distanced academic can have strategic value. Factors that create distance (or friendships and alliances) may not come in expected categories such as race or class or nation.

I have used my own experience as an opportunity to reflect upon the difficulties that feminist scholars from the global North might have envisioning

and participating in transnational feminist praxis because of hegemonic ways of seeing the world and academic knowledge production. I brought to our collaboration a body of feminist theory about racial difference in a multicultural society that blinded me to the ways that transnationalism extends and reshapes this theorization. Feminist academics have the responsibility to scrutinize how their geographical imaginations have been shaped by their institutional and national contexts, and the ways that they may (despite their best intentions) see “like the state,” whether this be by absorbing and reproducing Russian-doll models of care and responsibility, overgeneralizing the reach of knowledge developed in the global North, erasing the global South, or conceiving places outside the global North through tropes of poverty and underdevelopment. It is difficult to see the assumptions that structure our knowledge (Rose 1997); collaborators situated differently can be helpful guides. Ugnayan’s determination to build transnational perspectives and activist lives provided one means for me to see the limits of a multicultural perspective. Organizations at the Kalayaan Centre have challenged me to conceive Canada and the Philippines as interdependent rather than discrete spaces. Grasping these concrete connections resituates the research—away from the helping hand of liberal humanitarianism to an investigation of the ways that this international labor diaspora and the long-term separation of Filipino families are equally structured in Canada and the Philippines.

Witnessing organizations at the Kalayaan Centre circulating our research in transnational feminist networks makes clear two important points: our research is not only about transnationalism—it is a transnational practice; and it is a very small part of a much larger political project. This realization is a fundamental challenge to the individualism of the academy, a system that rewards and celebrates “solo feminism.”⁹ Working with a community organization is a lesson in working collectively; working with a transnational organization teaches about an even wider world of collaborations. Collaborations with community activists remind feminist academics, not only that there are important things to be done, but that there are important things that they can (and should) be doing through their research practice—which reside far outside their daily struggles in (and the relative comfort of) the academy.

Notes

We would like to thank Kale Bantigue Fajardo, Chris Harker, Rachel Silvey, and Amanda Swarr for comments on an earlier draft of this essay. Thanks so much to Richa and Amanda for inviting us into this rich discussion of feminist transnational collaborations.

1. The conversation took place with Cecilia Diocson (Chair, National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada), Charlene Sayo (Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada/Filipino Canadian Youth Alliance), and Emanuel Sayo (B.C. Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines). All of these organizations are housed at the Kalayaan Centre in Vancouver.
2. I thank Rachel Silvey for this point.
3. I received a letter from the ministry two weeks after making an oral presentation without obtaining this approval: “It has come to our attention . . .” I was asked to submit the presentation and to make slight amendments after the presentation had been reviewed.
4. The federal government is responsible for administering the temporary work visa, while the provincial government is responsible for regulating work conditions.
5. The conference, which took place on 21 June 21 2006, was organized under the title: Prospects for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy in the Philippines. For further information, contact bcchrp@kalayaancentre.net.
6. Debts are owed to academic feminists as well, of course, a number of whom have contributed to this volume. For the purposes of this chapter, I am focusing on what I have learned from my research collaborators.
7. Rachel offered this distinction in comments on a draft of this essay, but she explores elsewhere the importance of First World activists investigating exploitation close to home alongside commitments to global justice, specifically in relation to anti-sweatshop activism on her campus (Silvey 2002).
8. This restates the point made in a rich body of scholarship that analyses how colonial relations were coproduced in both the colony and metropole (e.g., Cooper and Stoler 1989; Driver and Gilbert 1998).
9. This is a term that Jennifer Hyndman has used to critique a tendency within the academy to claim ideas as one’s own rather than to acknowledge a wider community of feminist scholars.

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Conflicts and Collaborations

Building Trust in Transnational South Africa

SAM BULLINGTON AND AMANDA LOCK SWARR

In contemporary South Africa, progressive coalitional politics are extremely fraught and contentious due to deep divisions and distrust resulting from centuries of colonization and decades of apartheid repression. This chapter explores our navigation of this complicated terrain in our fourteen-year relationship to two social movements (one promoting rights for lesbian and gay South Africans and the other advocating equitable access to AIDS medications for poor people) and their participants. The past two decades have brought dramatic changes in South African history, including the end of apartheid, the passage of the unprecedented sexual orientation clause in South Africa's constitution and a variety of rights to sexual equality won, such as legalized gay marriage, as well as an exponentially worsening AIDS crisis, the denial by former President Mbeki that HIV causes AIDS, and the South African government's resistance to providing antiretroviral medications to stem the devastation. Within our own lives and in the South African communities to which we are allied, organizations folded, relationships broke up, and individuals shifted geographical and class locations, while the dominant frames of poverty and violence have remained consistent threads in our interconnections.

In a dialogic exchange, this chapter considers what it has meant to cultivate these relationships of collaborations over space and time, within an ever-shifting political and material context, marked by ongoing negotiations concerning the meanings of these collaborations. We take "The Place of the Letter: An Epistolary Exchange" (Bammer, Gwin, Katz, and Meese 1998) as our starting point in modeling both the process of collaborating in producing a book chapter and inciting our thinking about how to reframe and rethink ways of writing, building, and sharing ideas collectively. We have collaborated, conducted research, and written together since 1996 and spent months and years together in South Africa in 1997, 1999–2000, 2003, and 2007. Our work together has taken place in multiple locations and communities, including Soweto, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape

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