"Mom is a Stranger": The Negative Impact of Immigration Policies on the Family Life of Filipina Domestic Workers.

Author: COHEN, RINA
Geographic Code: 1CANA
Date: Sep 22, 2000
Words: 6155
Publication: Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal
ISSN: 0008-3496

ABSTRACT/RESUME

Drawing on data from twenty-one in-depth interviews, government documents, and secondary sources, this study examines the consequences of current immigration policies on the life of Filipina domestic workers and their families. In a broader context, it explores the role of state immigration and labour policies in constructing "disfunctionality" among families of Filipino-Canadian domestic workers. The paper argues that the inability of 'live-in domestic workers to immigrate to Canada with their spouses and children results in the destruction of traditional family roles, creating servitude-like work situations in which family relations are maintained transnationally, from afar, for many years. When and if, family members of domestic workers are finally unified, they are often plagued by tension and conflict. The article analyses migrant domestic labour in the context of the global economy and proposes policy changes.

Patricia, a Filipina widow and a mother of two children, Christie (16) and Eduardo (17), has been in Canada for nine years. [1] Her husband was killed while serving in the army in the Philippines when her children were two and three years old. In 1986 she left her son and her daughter with her widowed mother to assume a position as a domestic servant in Saudi Arabia. Over the past fourteen years she has seen her children and family only twice. After four years of doing housework and caring for twin babies of an Egyptian family -- seven days a week, fifteen hours a
day -- Patricia managed to be sponsored by a Canadian family and to be admitted to the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM) program. Under the FDM program, the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) issued her a special employment authorization restricting her to live-in domestic work with a particular employer. In 1990 she arrived in Canada and started working for a family of five in North York. In January 1994, following disclosure of the fact that she is a widowed mother of two and not a single person as declared on her passport, she was granted Landed Immigrant Status under the Live-in Caregivers Program (LCP) which replaced the FDM program. A few months later she began the process of sponsoring her mother and children. Her children's applications were approved; her mother's was denied. In 1994, while Patricia's applications were already being processed, immigration policies for family reunification changed to exclude parents and siblings from the definition of immediate family. In a second attempt, using a lawyer and filing through a Canadian embassy in the United States (consequently going through a long, expensive, and bureaucratic process), her prospects seemed more positive. According to her lawyer, the longed for visas are to be issued any day. After fourteen years of separation, her family is still waiting to be reunited. [2]

INTRODUCTION: FOREIGN LIVE-IN DOMESTIC WORK IN CANADA

Several researchers (Stasiulis & Baken, 1997; England & Stiel, 1997) have documented the demand for domestic workers in Canada. Within the past four decades this demand developed substantially, undoubtedly coinciding with the proliferation of women entering the workforce, and consequently created a nationwide demand for live-in childcare and eldercare workers. In 1996, the rate of employment among women age 25-54 was 77.2 percent, up from 62.8 percent in 1981 (Statistics Canada [b], 2000). In 1999, 58 percent of all Canadian women aged 15 and over had jobs, up from 42 percent in 1976. Furthermore, the employment rate of women with preschool children (under three years of age) has reached 61 percent in 1999, more than double the figure in 1976 (Statistics Canada [a], 2000). The shortage of affordable day care space minimizes daycare possibilities leaving most parents to resort to the aid of relatives, neighbors, babysitters, or unlicensed daycare (Baken & Stasiulis, 1995; Canadian-Press Newswire, 1994; Toronto Star, 1998). One of the options available to upper middle-class families, particularly dual career ones, is the hiring of a live-in domestic worker. Similarly, facing the shortage of quality nursing home beds, many of those families are hiring live-in domestic workers to take care of the chronically ill and the elderly (Sherman, 1996).

As a result of the growing demand, thousands of foreign domestic workers are entering Canada each year. According to recent statistics, about 11,000 Canadian families employ live-in foreign domestic workers (Statistics Canada, 1995). [3] In addition, some live-in workers entered the country as visitors and overstayed their time-limited visas. Because these workers are considered to be illegal immigrants, they are, of course, omitted from official statistics.

Currently most domestic workers enter Canada under the 1992 Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP). Under this scheme, which requires applicants to have at least twelve years of schooling and six months of formal training, domestics are able to apply for "landed immigrant" status after working as a live-in caregiver for at least two, out of three, consecutive years. Once they obtain "landed" status, they can sponsor their spouses and/or children as dependent immigrants. This process may take several years resulting in a lengthy separation period in which domestic workers are living apart from their immediate families.

In this article, I will argue that denying live-in caregivers the right to immigrate to Canada together with their spouses and children is devastating to their family life. Separated from their families,
underpaid, overworked, and trapped within regressive policies, domestic workers toil for years to reunite with their loved ones. When reunification finally happens, they are struggling, often unsuccessfully, with rebuilding a relationship with children and spouses from whom they were estranged for years.

The study provides an example of how state policy shapes private lives (Ursel, 1993). It demonstrates how immigration policies for recruiting domestic workers contribute to the production of "troubled" families. The live-in caregiver program, which disallows women to immigrate with their spouses and/or children, serves the labour needs of privileged Canadian families and not the immigration interests and familial needs of domestic workers' families: it benefits the employers' families and penalizes the families of the employees, resulting in family separation, divorce, and violence. By enforcing years of separation between mothers and their children, this policy contributes to the alienation and rebellious behaviour of Filipino youth. Operating within the context of extreme inequality in the global economy, these harmful immigration policies accommodate the disruption of family life of Filipina domestic workers and may also feed racist stereotypes.

The data for this study is based mainly on sixteen in-depth interviews. Eleven interviews were conducted with Filipina caregivers who had been reunited with their immediate families. These interviews were organized with the help of INTERCEDE, an advocacy organization for the rights of domestic workers, caregivers and newcomers, between July 1998 and January 1999. [4] Additionally, I interviewed two counselors and two community workers at INTERCEDE and an immigration officer. I have also consulted a variety of government documents and secondary sources.

The following discussion will briefly explore the history of immigration policies for recruiting domestic workers to Canada, demonstrating how these policies have gradually transformed from "open door" policies at the turn of the century to a restrictive set of discriminatory regulations in the nineties. The third section will examine the family reunification program, while the fourth section will detail various experiences of reunited families. In conclusion, I will address some of the global issues of extreme poverty and underemployment that force Filipina women to engage in exploitative work in Canada at the high cost of parting from their families.

HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION POLICIES FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS

From confederation to the end of the twentieth century, domestic workers have been recruited to Canada. It was during the second half of the nineteenth century, however, when the demand for paid domestic work peaked. With the rise of the urban middle-class and the increasing prosperity of farmers in rural areas, the employment of domestic workers became both a necessity and a status symbol among the well-to-do. Arriving initially as servants, and ultimately as potential wives for lonely bachelors in western Canada, British females, in particular, were encouraged by the Canadian government to settle in Canada. Between the turn of the century and World War I, for instance, almost eighty percent of domestics came from the British Isles. The Canadian state, in an effort to cater to the ever-increasing demands for domestic service, perpetrated the ideologies of the rising middle-class which believed in the notion that the Canadian nation as well as the British Empire would benefit from "enlightened" and "well man nered" (not to mention white) British females. Lured by ads placed in newspapers by agents, women's organizations, and church groups, female domestics were offered advances for travel fare, guaranteed employment, and promised opportunities for social enhancement in Canada's "nation-building" scheme (Barber, 1985; Fahrni, 1997).
On the heels of the British domestics were Scandinavian women who immigrated to Canada as domestics during the late nineteenth century, attracted by the prospect of financial betterment that would aid them in supporting their families back home. The Scandinavians were followed by young Eastern European women recruited to positions in the rural areas of the Prairie Provinces. Unlike their predecessors, the female migrants from Eastern Europe did not receive any travel assistance. The Department of Immigration was careful to differentiate between the "preferred" countries of northern and western Europe and "non-preferred" countries of eastern and southern Europe. Similarly, most Canadian families preferred English speaking domestics, particularly in Alberta and British Columbia, and were reluctant to employ less educated domestics from Poland, Russia, or Romania, revealing the climate of cultural intolerance among Canadians at the time (Lindstrom-Best, 1986).

While the depression and the second world war temporarily stopped the flood of female (and male) migrants, the end of the war and the growing economy signaled an increase in the demand for domestic workers. Between 1947 and 1950 Canada admitted about 11,000 domestic workers from European refugee camps. But following the end of their contracts, almost all of these displaced persons left their domestic positions. Hence, by 1950, even this source of domestics had dried up. In 1950, German women, fleeing economic adversities in a Germany under reconstruction, found domestic employment in Canada, but like their predecessors, left the field as soon as they could, creating yet another chronic demand for domestic help (Macklin, 1992). The Cold War that followed created limitations for Eastern European migrants and Canada, faced with a constant demand for domestics but unable to procure domestics from northwestern and eastern Europe, finally began to open its borders to the south in the mid-1950s.

Between 1951-1952, the Department of Labour approved 500 immigrants from Italy; only 357 arrived before that particular scheme was terminated. A second attempt at recruitment was established, this time from Spain. Only 50 visas were issued but even that small number of immigrants was difficult to place; Spanish authorities demanded Catholic homes for their domestics but most Canadian employers were Protestant. More successful was the 7000-strong Greek movement between 1954-1966. Offered a two-month training program in modern appliances and basic English, these women were placed in Toronto or in Montreal. The success of this particular recruitment was made possible by the parents of the Greek daughters who saw the opportunity to not only alleviate the burden of dowry, but who themselves looked forward to eventual sponsorship that would lead to the beginning of a Greek chain migration (Macklin, 1992).

Prior to the 1950s, domestic work in Canada was rarely offered to women of colour, reflecting the country’s perpetual climate of racial intolerance. It was not until 1955 that Canada finally agreed, as part of Commonwealth policy, to admit a select group of single and healthy domestics from Jamaica and Barbados. By 1965; 1,690 women from various West Indian islands came to Canada under these conditions. The initiative, from a governmental point of view, was deemed successful as a result of the careful selection process and because the women were trained prior to their arrival. But unlike their white European predecessors, most of the women continued to work as domestics even after the expiry of their one year contracts, not because they wished to but because the obstacles for women of colour in the face of discrimination and racism left them with little or no options to do otherwise (Henry, 1968).

Under the new Immigration Act in 1967, ethnic quotas were replaced with a point system (Hawkins, 1988, p.405). This system should have guaranteed all immigrants equal entrance opportunities regardless of their race, religion, or country of origin. Household labour, however, was not considered to be a significant skill. Consequently, domestic workers continued to
encounter difficulties qualifying as independent immigrants despite the constant demand for their services. Hence, from 1973 on, the government supplied a steady steam of captive labourers with Temporary Employment Authorizations in order to meet the demands of white middle-class families. For domestic workers, these were prison-like conditions. Fearing deportation, they remained in their live-in positions even when working in oppressive and exploitative conditions (Cohen, 1987, 1991).

In response to protests from domestics' organizations and various human rights activists, the federal government introduced the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM) Program in 1981 which enabled domestics to apply for landed immigrant status. This program was eventually replaced with the Live-in Caregiver Program in 1992. While the LCP was introduced as non-discriminatory, it was nevertheless criticized for being racist and ethnocentric. For example, according to the Immigration Act, a person could enter Canada either as an immigrant or as a visitor. However, the FDM and LCP programs required domestics to qualify as both visitor and potential immigrant. The "visitor" designation reveals an underlying racist agenda signaling the government's desire to prevent these women from remaining in Canada permanently.

Researchers such as Patricia Daenzer (1993) argue that the latest restrictions on domestic workers are rooted in the fact that the origin of immigrants has changed from Europe to Asia and Africa. Indeed, if we observe the evolution of immigration policies for recruiting domestic workers from confederation to the present, we can trace a racialized pattern of preference that begins by encouraging domestics of British and northern European descent to build their lives and families in Canada, to ones that discourage, via careful legal prevention and discourse, the settlement of domestic workers from third world countries.

The recent mobilization of women (without their immediate families) from third world countries, particularly from the Philippines, to perform domestic work for wealthy Canadian families should be understood in the context of the global economy. As the income from farming and industry in the Philippines is declining, Filipino families have to rely on sending their women, and men, overseas to work in wealthier countries and support them from afar (Martin, 1993; Anderson, 1997; Constable, 1999). The debt crisis in the Philippines, as well as in other "underdeveloped countries," resulted in Filipino state policies which encouraged the recruitment and migration of Filipina maids to Canada and other countries. These maids income in hard currency and their periodic remittances help to alleviate both their families' poverty and their country's foreign debt.

Canada, at the other end of the global economy, developed special programs such as the LCP to permit the import of urgently needed domestic labour without allowing for full-fledged immigration of the workers that provide this very labour. Unlike all other categories of immigrants and foreign workers' programs (with the exclusion of farm workers), the LCP prohibits domestic workers from entering Canada with their immediate families. The slim and remote possibility for eventual family reunification does not rectify the damage caused by long and painful years of separation.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

Family reunification has always purported to be one of the priorities of Canadian immigration. It facilitates the process of social, economic, and emotional adaptation to life in Canada. For most immigrants, this usually means reuniting with relatives beyond the nuclear family. For domestic workers, however, it means reunification with spouses and/or children. Domestic workers are the only group of immigrants, with the exclusion of seasonal farm workers, who are not allowed to enter the country with their immediate family (INTERCEDE, 1993). In contrast, spouses of highly skilled foreign workers are not only allowed into Canada, but also granted, in a pilot program, a
separate work permit (Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, 1998). While accommodating the family needs of skilled, mostly white, foreign workers, the government clearly discriminates against the family needs of domestic workers, implicitly suggesting that Canada needs their work but not them or their families.

Though domestics are allowed to sponsor their children and/or spouses once they receive landed immigrant status, this does not actually happen until three years after their initial arrival to Canada. The length of the process aside, recent changes in immigration policy also limit the definition of family to biological children and legal spouses (Lara, Interview October 23, 1998). This Eurocentric definition becomes even more limiting to single domestics whose parents and relatives, while being financially supported by them via periodical remittance, will never qualify as family for the purpose of reunification.

Potential attempts at reunification are further complicated by the fact that numerous domestics enter Canada without disclosing the truth about their marital or parental status. Most are advised by employment agencies in Philippines to withhold this information if they wish to increase their chances of getting into Canada. But paradoxically, the main reason they accept a position in Canada is to support the very dependants they claim do not exist. Says Patricia, "If not for the need to feed my children, I would not have gone abroad." [5] Adds Carmelita, "And if it were not for the children, there were brothers, sisters, mother, father, cousins ... this is why we Philippine women come to this country ... we did not come to Canada for the great weather." [6]

Until 1989, misrepresenting material or parental status was grounds for deportation. The case that presents a turning point in this issue is the case of Ms Fernandez. Ms Fernandez did not disclose her marital status when she applied to be admitted into the FDM program from Singapore. Upon discovery, she admitted that she lied because she feared that her marital status would impede her chances of getting access into the program. [7] The adjudicator noted that nowhere in the Act or regulations are spouses and/or dependents considered material to the assessment of visitors (Macklin, 1992). Although family status is material to the evaluation of immigrants, Ms Fernandez has not yet made an application for landing. This particular case demonstrates the inherent contradictions in the status of domestic workers who are neither regular visitors nor regular immigrants.

From the perspective of the Canadian authorities, the former family life of a domestic worker is, at best, irrelevant. But nothing can be further from the truth. Domestics constantly think about their families and many report being homesick (Cohen, 1991). Encouraged to believe the ideological myth that she is "one of the family" in the employer's home, the reality that lies at the core of this oppressive myth requires her to break all affective ties with her own nuclear family through a deliberately lengthy and systematic process of spatial division. Along with the physical exploitation, the identity of the domestic is both denied and obscured under this guise of familial ideology. As Arat-Koc writes, "domestic work is physical as well as mental and psychological work which sustains the reproduction of labour power and labour force ... it is considered a 'labour of love'. As such it is ideologically invisible as a form of real work, a status that is hard to change even when it is paid for" (1989, p.38). This may be the reason why the work of caregivers was never fully industrialized and is still highly sexualized and racialized (Clement, 1996).

Domestic workers continue to be excluded from certain labour protection policies. This exclusion is connected to the fact that they are working in 'private' or 'familial' situations which consequently deny their status as workers. In addition, their lack of full citizenship also contributes to their disenfranchised status, and they are disenfranchised mainly for the purpose of facilitating their
exploitation and oppression (Macklin, 1992).

According to Colombia Diaz, an INTERCEDE counselor, the most painful and defeating aspect of reunification between domestic workers and their families is the substantial gap in time between the domestic's arrival to Canada and the subsequent arrival of her children and spouse. [8] For most domestics, the interval lasts between seven and ten years. Most Filipina domestics begin their exile in another country such as Singapore or Saudi Arabia where they spend anywhere from two to three years. Once in Canada it takes them approximately three to four years to acquire landed immigrant status followed by another three years to process the immigration of their dependants. With little or no financial security, this process takes even longer. Domestic workers must save money for the processing fees ($500 for adults, $100 per child), the right to landing fees ($975 for adults), medical expenses ($1200 per person), and airfare ($1400 per person). Sponsoring a husband and two children may cost her up to $10,000 (Interview, October 23, 1998).

During the lengthy separation from her family, the domestic continues to remain in touch with her relatives. Martha narrates a habitual pattern: [9]

I try to phone my family most of the time at least three times a month. Then, on occasions like Christmas, birthdays and wedding anniversaries, I send them gifts. Twice a year, I send them canned foods, household and school supplies, clothes and other daily needs through door to door couriers. Every month I send $200-$300 for my children's school expenses. ... While away from my family I felt so lonely. I attended parties and went out with friends. Everywhere I went, I thought of my family and the reason for my sacrifice. I tried to entertain myself but inside I felt like bursting out of loneliness and wanted to shout at the top of my voice how much I miss them.

Caring from afar is very stressful. While trying their best by working long hours, seven days a week, several domestic workers felt that they did not send enough money. Faced with multiple demands of relatives such as spouses, children, parents, aunts, uncles, siblings, nieces, and nephews, many domestics send their entire income back home. In addition, they take special interest in their families' health concerns and in their childrens' school performance. Patricia, for example, financed private school education for her children. She maintained regular contact with her children's teachers and followed their progress at school. When her daughter became the valedictorian of her graduating class, Patricia flew back home to participate in the graduation ceremony.

Even from a distance, domestics take a close interest in health related matters. Their narratives imply that they make sure they are kept informed, and if there appears to be a problem, they send medications, give advice, and even fly back home to take stock. For example Bonnie, finding out that her son had serious health problems, "played detective" and discovered that he was not buying his prescribed medication with the money she provided. She bought the medicine in Toronto and sent it to him with a friend who went home for a visit. [10] Some domestics expressed sorrow for not being there for their parents and children at crucial points in their lives. When describing her relationship with her mother, Rose noted that she felt guilty for not being able to nurse her ailing mother. [11] Being geographically far from loved ones -- despite phone calls, letters, parcels, and monies which are sent back home -- is painful. There is always a feeling of missing important information and significant events. These feelings are intensified when taking care of other people's families. As Patricia sensibly noted, "the hardest times are when I have to prepare for the birthdays of my employers' children. This is when I miss my children the most..." (Interview, September 12, 1998)
FAMILY LIFE AFTER REUNIFICATION

Upon arrival in Canada, the husband and children of domestic workers may feel estranged from their wives and mothers. Husbands may feel that they’ve lost their status as head of the family. Wives, on the other hand, may feel that they get little support from their husbands in the domestic sphere while they work hard all day long. In many cases, husbands cannot find jobs, or if they do, they are most often only part-time or temporary (Ms Diaz, Interview October 23, 1998).

Furthermore, domestic wives tend to earn more than their spouses which can cause tension in their relationships. Often, lengthy separations cause couples to split up. The following comment reflects some of these tensions:

My husband does not understand my need to attend computer classes. He does not have a full time job and still wants me to stay home after work. He wants me to prepare food for him when I come home from work. I am also tired from work and we often fight about which roles and responsibilities are for men or for women. He wants to follow our lifestyle in the Philippines where I used to be submissive and never argue with him. I now believe that I have my own opinion too and I have the right to voice my views. I would say that I changed a lot when I came to Canada.

Linda: Interview, Nov. 16, 1998

Another woman testifies to the detrimental effects of the lengthy separations on her conjugal relationships, almost to the point of breakup:

My husband got involved with another woman. I tried to find out what went wrong with our relationship. My husband longed for some company while I was away, too bad that he got involved with another woman. We talked for two hours on the phone, I spent $200 for us to talk about our dispute ... eventually my husband promised me he'd avoid the woman he got involved with. My husband's family assured me that they will help him get out of the relationship.

Esther: Interview, Nov. 23, 1998

Years of separation claim a heavy toll on the relationships. Spouses may have affairs or find other partners. Some women develop relationships with same-sex partners. Spouses grow apart from each other, grow hostile, jealous, depressed, or simply indifferent. According to Ms Diaz, INTERCEDE consults numerous families on how to improve their marriage or how to file for divorce.

One major source of tension among families of domestic workers is insufficient income. The prolonged recession in Canada made it difficult for domestics to procure better paying jobs. Many who could potentially move into nursing, sales, and/or other fields were forced back into "live-out" caregiving jobs. "Lately," says Ms Diaz, "it's caring for the elderly." The wages for caregiving jobs, between $1,200 and $1,800, are not enough to adequately support a family in Canada.

Because arriving husbands often lack the necessary skills and language requirements to enter the labour force, they find themselves dismayed and frustrated at the prospect of continuing to rely on their spouses as the major, if not sole, breadwinner of the family (Sherman, 1996). This inevitably creates a great deal of stress for the newly reunited family. According to Ms Lara, there is an increase in violence within these families (Interview, October 23, 1998).

In a recent case, a husband killed his wife and then committed suicide, leaving four children
orphaned. The couple, Norma and Sixto Cervas, were counseled by Ms Diaz at INTERCEDE. Norma came to Canada as a domestic worker and, as other women who entered Canada under the LCP program, was ill-advised and thus lied about her marital and parental status, declaring that she was single (Balita, 1995, p.7). INTERCEDE helped Norma to obtain her landed status and sponsor her husband and children despite the fact that she initially lied about her marital status. The family was reunited after six years of separation. Norma worked in three jobs while Sixto, who was a rice farmer in the Philippines, could not find employment in Canada. This stressful situation, according to Ms Diaz, contributed to the violence within this family.

In other cases children, left when they were toddlers to be raised by an extended kin group, became estranged from their mothers upon reunification. Says Diaz,

Now they are teenagers, they've become independent of the control of their mother... they say 'you cannot tell us what to do', and their mothers are frustrated that while they work their butts off, their grown up children are couch potatoes, watching TV all day long and waiting for mom to buy them things.

Interview, October 23, 1998

In Canada, children of domestic workers find themselves suddenly having to adjust to a busy, independent mother and her new family -- her friends. In fact, several reports reveal that teenagers who experience such conflicts with their mothers are likely to leave home (Ms Lara, October 23, 1998). Ultimately, the bittersweet combination of women's liberation and family reunification creates, in some cases, irreconcilable differences.

CONCLUSION

Not unlike other commodity trading, women's domestic labour needs to be understood in the context of a global economy. Domestic workers are the main export of third world countries. About three million domestics (and a million professionals such as nurses, doctors, teachers, and engineers) send approximately five billion dollars to the Philippines each year (Bales, 1999). Plagued with a low standard of living, extreme poverty, and a foreign debt of forty-two billion dollars, Philippino families have little choice but to export their women abroad as domestics. Often, it is the only option they have for survival.

Neocolonialism appears to be alive and well in Canada where underpaid and overworked third world immigrants continue to service the growing needs of the Canadian middle- and upper-classes. While Canadian dual career families continue to enhance their income status, the underprivileged domestic worker remains at the bottom of the Canadian proletariat; underpaid, overworked, estranged from her family, and trapped within the regressive features of a nation state that maintains a clear distinction between citizen and outsider.

The serf-like nature of live-in domestic work has a destructive effect on the family life of these workers. Spending long periods of time away from their children and away from their husbands and lovers fundamentally alters traditional family roles. While domestics may feel empowered as overseas providers, they often pay for it by sacrificing the experience of motherhood and couplehood. When they reunite with their loved ones years later they feel inadequate and strange. Children and spouses of domestic workers often feel that "Mom is a stranger."

Since the demand for domestic workers continues to be high, immigration policies for recruiting such workers should be challenged and changed. This study demonstrates that the "live-in"
requirement for recruiting foreign domestic workers, which is the main rationale for disallowing these workers to immigrate with their families, has a destructive impact on these families. Caregiving work should be accredited more points in the immigration's point system to enable caregivers to come to Canada as independent immigrants do. Domestic workers should be able to immigrate to Canada with their families in the same fashion as any other occupational category which is in high demand.

Rina Cohen is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology at York University. She is the author of numerous articles on domestic workers, on housework, and on the Israeli diaspora. Her areas of interest are the sociology of families, immigrant women, and paid domestic labour.

NOTES

(1.) All the names in this article were altered in an effort to maintain full confidentiality.

(2.) Notes from an interview with Patricia, September 9, 1998.

(3.) While this figure is much lower than the 1988 figure of 22,000 (Macklin, 1992), it is likely that it reflects only the number of official work permits granted in 1995, leaving out the actual, much higher number of workers that includes those who have already obtained "landed" status in Canada and, facing recession and economic restructuring, continue to work as live-in domestics.

(4.) INTERCEDE is an acronym for International Coalition to End Domestics' Exploitation.

(5.) Patricia, interviewed by Rina Cohen, September 12, 1999.

(6.) Carmelita, interviewed by Grace Lanceta, coordinator of INTERCEDE Caregiver's Cooperative, September 18, 1998.

(7.) This fear was not unfounded. Several domestic workers revealed in interviews that they were advised by recruitment agents in the Philippines to withhold information about their children and spouses and present themselves as single persons so their chances of being admitted to the program would improve (Cohen, 1991).

(8.) Colombia Diaz, interviewed by Rina Cohen, October 23, 1998.

(9.) Interviewed by Grace Lanceta, December 2, 1998.


(12.) Colombia Diaz, interviewed by Rina Cohen, October 2, 1998.

REFERENCES


Arat-Koc, S. (1989). In the Privacy of Our Own Homes: Foreign Domestic Workers as a Solution


England, K., & Stiel, B. (1997, Feb.). They think that you are stupid as your English is: Constructing Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada. Environment and Planning. 29, 195-215.


COPYRIGHT 2000 Canadian Ethnic Studies Association
Copyright 2000 Gale, Cengage Learning. All rights reserved.