

Domestic Service Work in Canada:
The Living and Working Conditions 1940s to Present

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In Canada, there has been a very high demand for migrant domestic workers throughout the 20th century. Domestic work has long been ingrained as traditional women's work and thus it is without surprise that the vast majority of domestic workers have been young females. Domestic workers have come to Canada largely to escape the repression and economic devastation they face in their home country due primarily to non-industrialization. The majority of domestic workers in Canada send large portions of their earned wages back to their family members in their home country. The hope of a new and better life is the aspiration of many migrant domestic workers. White, middle-to-upper class privileged women have been using their class status to employ migrant domestic workers to perform the traditional reproductive duties of maintaining the home and providing care for children and elderly parents in order to better compete with their male counterparts in the labour market.¹ Although it appears that domestic service work is a great opportunity for foreign women to earn wages to support their families, research and interviews² suggest that some domestic workers can be subjected to high levels of exploitation both by their individual employers and by the state of Canada. This paper will feature the interviews of two live-in domestic workers in Toronto to support the above argument (Please see footnote "2").

¹ Sedef Arat-Koc. "In the Privacy of our own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada." *Studies in Political Economy* 28 (1989): 33.

² Two interviews were conducted with domestic workers in the Toronto area. Their real names have been altered to protect their identities as they are both currently attempting to have their non-citizen status changed to permanent landed-immigrant status. In an attempt to uncover generation change, which resulted in largely generational "unchanged," the interviews were over a decade in age apart. Maria is the older domestic servant who has been employed by several families for contracts ranging between 2-3 years. She is a 53 years native of the Philippines who has left behind in her home country her husband, 4 children, and 2 grandchildren. She has had her application for landed immigrant status rejected 3 times. Carmela is the younger domestic service worker and is also from the Philippines. She is married with 3 children and 1 grandchild. She has also worked for several families in the Toronto area. She has had her application for landed immigrant status rejected once and is extremely discouraged to apply again.

***Please note that this paper has taken a focus in analysing how the working and living conditions for domestic servants have remained largely unchanged over the past half century.

History of Domestic Service in Canada in the 20th Century

The first quarter of the 20th century saw a very high demand for domestic workers in Canada, particularly in the western provinces. The years between 1910 and 1930 witnessed 240,000 women from Britain, Ireland, and other European nations migrate to Canada to work as domestic servants.³ Approximately 98%⁴ of domestic workers have been, and continue to be women because of longstanding traditional ideologies which associate women with reproductive domestic labour and men with productive labour performed in the public sphere.⁵ Canadian immigration policy predominantly favoured white domestic workers up until the 1950s when the Cold War hampered relations between Eastern Europe and North America.⁶ Bakan and Stasiulis (1994) assert that these white domestics would immediately be given landed immigrant status in Canada upon arriving⁷. This pattern of allowing only the preferred white, female European to serve as a domestic in Canada continued up until 1955 when the Government of Canada extended its immigration policy to include women from third-world countries because of mass shortages of white women willing to come overseas to work as domestic servants.⁸

Consequentially, the Government of Canada also amended its immigration policy regarding how landed citizenship would be awarded. In 1973, the Canadian Federal Government began issuing

³ Marilyn Barber. "Hearing Women's Voices: Female Migration to Canada in the Early Twentieth Century." *Oral History* 33, no. 1 (2005): 69.

⁴ Arat-Koc, "In the Privacy of our own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada," 34.

⁵ Rhacel S. Parrenas. "Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor." *Gender and Society* 14, no. 4 (2000): 561.

⁶ Jarrah Hodge. "Unskilled Labour": Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program." *Undercurrent* 3, no. 2 (2006): 62.

⁷ Abigail B. Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis. "Foreign Domestic Worker Policy in Canada and the Social Boundaries of Modern Citizenship." *Science and Society* 58, no. 1 (1994): 12.

⁸ Bakan and Stasiulis, "Foreign Domestic Worker Policy in Canada and the Social Boundaries of Modern Citizenship," 13.

conditional temporary work permits rather than landed immigrant status to all incoming domestic workers who were not white while many white Europeans continued to be granted landed immigrant status.⁹ Conditions for non-white domestic workers included immediate deportation upon termination of their contract by either themselves or their employer and that they must live with their employer¹⁰. After enduring intense criticism regarding the fairness of the immigration policy, the *Foreign Domestic Movement Program* was established in 1981 and lasted until 1992.¹¹ Hodge (2006) states that the *Foreign Domestic Movement Program* allowed for domestic workers with temporary worker permits to apply for landed immigrant status after two years working in the country.¹² Shortly after the demise of the *Foreign Domestic Movement Program*, the *Live-In Caregiver Program* was instituted and continues to be in place at the time of writing.¹³ The current program is very similar to the former but requires domestic workers poses the equivalent of a Canadian grade 12 education.¹⁴ Canada's history of discriminatory immigration policy has set the stage for migrant domestic workers to be heavily exploited by both their individual employers and the Government of Canada.

Canadian Market for Domestic Workers

Women in Western nations have been entering the labour market in record numbers over the past half century. Arat-Koc (1999) states that in the latter half of the 1990s, roughly 43% percent of the paid labour market consisted of female workers and approximately 70% of

⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hodge. "Unskilled Labour": Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program," 62.

¹² Ibid., 62.

¹³ Bakan and Stasiulis, "Foreign Domestic Worker Policy in Canada and the Social Boundaries of Modern Citizenship," 14

¹⁴ Hodge. "Unskilled Labour": Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program," 62.

married women were participating in paid labour.¹⁵ While these numbers are fascinating for the women's movement and reduction/elimination of traditional, socially constructed gender roles, some men have not responded to the changes in women's participation in the labour market by assisting women in domestic duties such as maintaining the home and caring for children and elderly parents.¹⁶ As such, some women are still largely responsible for the majority of domestic work as well as their commitments in the public sphere in paid labour. Arat-Kok (1999) argues that more families are resorting to migrant domestic workers to "free both spouses for the labour market."¹⁷ Namely, white, middleclass families use their privileged status to remove themselves from their socially constructed gender roles by exploiting the services of migrant domestic workers.¹⁸ It is evident that there is an increasing demand for domestic workers in Canada as women are entering the paid labour force in record numbers.

Over the last quarter century, more than 5000 female domestic workers have been entering Canada yearly.¹⁹ Hodge (2006) states that the vast majority of domestic workers in Canada are from non-industrialized nations; primarily the Philippines and the Caribbean.²⁰ The reason that there is a mass shortage of Canadians willing to perform the occupation is best summed up by an employee of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. In 1999, the employee was quoted as saying, "The reason that we have to bring in from abroad is that the occupation is so poorly paid that no one wants to do it."²¹ Therefore, it is clear that there is neither competition amongst Canadians for positions as domestic servants nor extensive competition amongst

¹⁵ Arat-Koc, "In the Privacy of our own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada," 34

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁸ Parrenas. "Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor," 562.

¹⁹ Hodge. "Unskilled Labour": Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program," 61.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 62

²¹ Geraldine Pratt. "From Registered Nurses to Registered Nanny." *Economic Geography* 75, no. 3 (1999): p. 220

migrant domestic workers as the demand for their services continuous to increase as women continue to enter the labour force in large numbers.

Profile of Domestic Workers – Wages, Skills, Education, and Working Conditions

Wages and Skills

Most labour can be classified as either productive or reproductive. Domestic work has long been considered to be natural women's work and to fall under the category of reproductive labour. Grandea and Kerr (1998) argue that because domestic work is considered to be natural women's work and non-productive labour, it is deemed to be unskilled and of low-status and thus deserving of low wages.²² The wages of domestic workers have not increased along with the cost of living throughout the past half century as the only increases have been from changes to provincial minimum wage legislation.²³ Furthermore, the fact that domestic labour has traditionally been performed in the private sphere for no wages reinforce the perception that it requires no real skills to be performed and may be used to justify the extremely low wages paid to migrant domestic workers. In reality, domestic work is not inherently women's work but requires much skill regardless of the setting in which it is performed. One is not born with the ability to cook, clean, wash clothing, care for children and elderly people, and execute the various other tasks that domestic workers are assigned.

Education

²² Mona Grandea and Joanna Kerr. "Frustrated and Displaced: Filipina Domestic Workers in Canada." *Gender and Development* 6, no. 1 (1998): 7.

²³ Pei Chia-Lan,. "Maid or Madam? Filipina Migrant Workers and the Continuity of Domestic Labor." *Gender and Society* 17, no. 2 (2003): 194.

The assumption that domestic workers are uneducated may be used by employers to justify paying low wages. Hodge (2006) proves that this assumption absolutely holds no water as many domestic workers are highly educated²⁴ and held professional level jobs in their homeland.²⁵ They were forced to migrate to industrialized countries such as Canada because the wages offered at professional designated positions such as teaching, nursing, and engineering were insufficient to support their families.²⁶ The painful irony of having attended university in one country and having to scrub toilets in another was clear visible in my interview with two migrant domestic workers. When I asked Carmela about how she felt being forced to migrate to Canada to work as a domestic because she was unable to make ends meet in the Philippines after graduating from university she expressed, "I loved going to school back home. Me and my friends would have study sessions all the time. I always got high marks. Now I'm away from them, and my family, because there is no money back home, the jobs are few there."²⁷ The pain and hurt was plainly noticeable as Carmela spoke with a strong, yet clear accent. Maria, who has been in Canada for much longer than Carmela, did not attend university but completed her high school diploma and worked as an accountant in the Philippines. When asked how she felt going from accountant to domestic worker she said, "Obviously I'm not happy, but I had to do it. We would never have been able to make it on the wage I was earning back home. My wage now isn't very much but it's a lot better than working in my country."²⁸ In Canada, the educational credentials of immigrants are unrecognized as employers demand Canadian education and

²⁴ Hodge. "Unskilled Labour": Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program," 63.

²⁵ Mona Grandea and Joanna Kerr. "Frustrated and Displaced: Filipina Domestic Workers in Canada," 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁷ Carmela. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

²⁸ Maria. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

experience.²⁹ For that reason, it is extremely difficult for even highly educated and experienced immigrants to assimilate into the Canadian labour market in non-precarious occupations.

Domestic service workers may be exposed to potentially dangerous health and safety conditions in their precarious occupation.

Workplace Conditions

On the surface, domestic service workers appear to have a great workplace setting. They are indoors, usually in relatively spacious environments compared to workplace settings such as small offices or crowded stores, and completing their domestic duties at their own pace. However, Arat-Koc (1999) argues that domestic workers are frequently exposed to dangerous cleaning agents, hazardous conditions, and stress via work intensification.³⁰ Domestic workers are rarely taught about the dangers of cleaning agents and may lack sufficient English reading skills to read about the possible risks associated with using a specific cleaning agent incorrectly.³¹ In my personal interview with Carmela, I asked her if she had ever worked in a home in which she was exposed to hazardous conditions. Carmela responded, "I have been told to do jobs that I thought were very dangerous many times. Oh of course, my boss would always say that I was too worried and that it was not dangerous at all. One time I had to clean a very big chandelier. It was hanging from the second floor maybe one or two feet away from the railing. I had to really stretch out far to clean it as good as I could and I almost fell right over many times."³² Domestic workers may be frequently exposed to circumstances like the one described by Carmela and may be very difficult to prove because of domestic work occurs in the private

²⁹ Hodge. "Unskilled Labour": Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program," 63.

³⁰ Arat-Koc. "In the Privacy of our own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada," 38.

³¹ Ibid., 38

³² Carmela. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

sphere. Finally, domestic workers are often subject to stressful working conditions. Aronson and Neysmith (1998) argue that domestic workers have been continuously given more responsibilities without an increase in wage.³³ For instance, domestic workers hired to care for children or elderly people may also be responsible for maintaining the house, cooking, cleaning, and several other tasks.³⁴ This signals work intensification as the women are being hired for one purpose and then assigned several unrelated tasks are also assigned. My interview with Maria revealed that work intensification has been ongoing for several decades as she explained to me how the early 1980s were some of her hardest worked years. Maria said, "I always have to do work outside of what me and my boss agreed before I signed the contract. I will never forget my stay with one family in the 1980s. I was given new things to do almost from the very first day I started. After a few weeks my workload was so heavy that I was working 3-4 hours a day of overtime. Not only did I not get paid for my overtime but I was constantly harassed for not finishing my duties by the time my boss came home from work."³⁵ Arat Koc (1999) adds that the occupation requires workers to constantly conform to the ever changing schedules, attitudes and behaviour of their employer and their family.³⁶

Live-In Requirement

In Canada, Migrant domestic workers are managed by both their individual employers and government regulations. The government of Canada has two main pieces of legislation that leave domestic workers vulnerable to exploitation. The first is the requirement that domestic

³³ Jane Aronson and Sheila M. Neysmith. "You're Not Just in There to Do the Work": Depersonalizing Policies and the Exploitation of Home Care Workers' Labor." *Gender and Society* 10, no. 1 (1998): 68.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁵ Arat-Koc. "In the Privacy of our own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada," 38

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

workers live with their employers for a minimum period of two years.³⁷ Grandea and Kerr (1998) argue that the aforementioned legislation often leads to domestics working long hours of unpaid overtime and non-contractual duties, residing in substandard living conditions, and being vulnerable to sexual, verbal, and physical abuse.³⁸ Domestic workers are heavily exploited in the amount of hours their employer requires them to work.³⁹ The reason for this is because it is extremely difficult to distinguish between working hours and non-working hours because the worker is legally required to live in the home of her employer.⁴⁰ Essentially, the worker is always on call as she is in the home of her employer and cannot escape the employee-employer relationship. Furthermore, domestics are exploited in the hours that they work because of feelings of obligation. In my interview with Maria, she expressed how her employer would make her feel obligated to help even though she was no longer getting paid for the day. Maria said, "Sometimes I would be asked to have dinner with them in the kitchen after my day was over. Once we had finished eating the family began to look at me, waiting for me to clean up. I knew this is what they wanted. I got up and cleaned the table then washed the plates and clean the kitchen."⁴¹ Maria was not paid overtime pay as stipulated in the *Employment Standards Act* of Ontario although she was working beyond the specified hours in her contractual agreement. This form of exploitation is one of the most commonly used against migrant workers.

Many live-in domestic workers are provided with substandard living conditions by their employer. Stasiulis and Bakan (1997) state that employers often provide domestic workers with

³⁷ Daiva Stasiulis and Abigail B. Bakan, "Negotiating Citizenship - The Case of Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada." *Feminist Review* 0, no. 57 (1997): 121.

³⁸ Mona Grandea and Joanna Kerr. "Frustrated and Displaced: Filipina Domestic Workers in Canada," 9-10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰ Arat-Koc. "In the Privacy of our own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada," 38.

⁴¹ Maria. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

rooms in dark, cold basements or in hot, noisy furnace rooms.⁴² Furthermore, some employers do not provide their employees with televisions, radios, or telephones or may provide them for a fee to be taken directly out of their wages.⁴³ My interviews with both Maria and Carmela reveal that they were both exploited by the living conditions they were given by their employer. Maria said, "I have been given the worst room in the house on many occasions. I have lived in cold basements with no bathrooms and beds without mattresses." My interview with Carmela showed how some employers would try to exploit as much out of their domestic service worker as possible. Carmela said, "When there wasn't a phone in my room, I would ask to use the phone in the kitchen. I would only ask once I had finished for the day. Sometimes they would say yes, but they would stand close to me and listen. One time my employer said I could use the phone once I began paying for it."⁴⁴ The live-in requirement also exploits workers because it leaves them vulnerable to having their privacy violated. Grandea and Kerr (1998) argue that the rooms in which domestic servants stay during their employment with a particular employer may not have locks on the doors⁴⁵, may not be completely closed off, or may be used as a family room, television room, or sewing room.⁴⁶ There is clearly a power imbalance between the domestic workers and their employers that allows for the exploitation to occur.

Domestic workers are expected to refer to all family members and their guests as mister or miss yet the employer(s)⁴⁷ simply refer to them by their first names.⁴⁸ My interview with

⁴² Daiva Stasiulis and Abigail B. Bakan, "Negotiating Citizenship - The Case of Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada," 127.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁴ Carmela. Interview by Author. Personal Interview. Toronto. March 1, 2011.

⁴⁵ Mona Grandea and Joanna Kerr. "Frustrated and Displaced: Filipina Domestic Workers in Canada," 10.

⁴⁶ Arat-Koc. "In the Privacy of our own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada," 42.

⁴⁷ According to the Government of Ontario Employment Standards Act Fact Sheet regarding Domestic Workers, domestic workers only have one employer, however some are coerced into obeying all orders given to them by family member so if the official employer.

Maria revealed that Arat-Koc (1999) was correct as she exclaimed, "I always refer to my employers as mister or miss, it is the respectful thing to do. They are my bosses. They call me Maria but sometimes the children call me "the nanny," or "the maid." The little girl of my one of my former employers told her friends I was her slave."⁴⁹ Aronson and Neysmith (1998) argue that many migrant domestic workers are subjected to power imbalances between themselves and their employer because of the low status associated with their occupation, few skills with they can use in the labour market, and because of the intersecting factors of being female, low-class, of an ethnic minority, and non-citizen status.⁵⁰

Non-Citizenship Status

The second piece of state legislation that leaves domestic workers vulnerable to exploitation is their status as temporary workers.⁵¹ Temporary workers can be deported back to their home country as soon as their contract of employment either expires or is terminated by themselves or their employer. In many cases, the female of the home is the official employer of the domestic worker as per the employment contract.⁵² However, many domestics may be coerced into obeying orders given by any member of the family, often including extended family members and friends of the family because of the constant fear of being sent back home if the employer cancels the contractual agreement. I found this fear to be especially prominent in my interview with Carmela. Carmela said, "I have been humiliated many times. Sometimes I am treated like I am an entertainment show. One time a relative of my employer ordered me to

⁴⁸ Arat-Koc. "In the Privacy of our own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada," 43.

⁴⁹ Maria. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

⁵⁰ Jane Aronson and Sheila M. Neysmith. "You're Not Just in There to Do the Work," 61.

⁵¹ Daiva Stasiulis and Abigail B. Bakan, "Negotiating Citizenship - The Case of Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada," 121.

⁵² Arat-Koc. "In the Privacy of our own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada," 38.

remove four very heavy bags of concrete from his trunk by myself. It was very heavy and I knew it was not in my contract. But how could I say no? Could I refuse? I could not. My employer could fire me and then how would I be able to support my family without a job.”⁵³

The risk of disobeying an employer could be every costly for domestic workers as they could be sent back home and thus unable to receive Canadian landed immigrant status.

Many domestic workers will put up with the exploitation they are faced with because they are eligible to apply for permanent landed immigrant status.⁵⁴ It is important to keep in mind that the vast majority of domestic servants today are from non-industrialized countries such as the Philippines and the Caribbean.⁵⁵ They have never been granted immediate landed immigrant status in the same fashion as white European immigrants for as long as they have been allowed to immigrate to Canada. As previously mentioned, domestic workers of visible minority were given temporary work permits with the ability to apply for permanent landed immigrant status after a minimum of two years of work for an employer under the former Federal Domestic Movement (FDM) policy which existed from 1981-1992.⁵⁶ The current Live-in Caregiver Program follows the same agenda but adds specific requirements to be met in order to be granted landed immigrant status.⁵⁷ There have been absolutely no positive changes to how domestic workers obtain Canadian landed immigrant citizenship since they were allowed to immigrate in 1955.⁵⁸ Carmela, the younger of the interviewees chosen for this paper stated that amendments made in 1992 to the Canadian immigration policy regarding domestic workers requiring them to

⁵³ Carmela. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

⁵⁴ Bakan and Stasiulis, “Foreign Domestic Worker Policy in Canada and the Social Boundaries of Modern Citizenship,” 15.

⁵⁵ Hodge. “Unskilled Labour”: Canada’s Live-in Caregiver Program,” 62.

⁵⁶ Bakan and Stasiulis, “Foreign Domestic Worker Policy in Canada and the Social Boundaries of Modern Citizenship,” 14.

⁵⁷ Hodge. “Unskilled Labour”: Canada’s Live-in Caregiver Program,” 62.

⁵⁸ Bakan and Stasiulis, “Foreign Domestic Worker Policy in Canada and the Social Boundaries of Modern Citizenship,” 12.

meet specific requirements to prove they are self-sufficient⁵⁹ has made it much harder for her to ever be granted landed immigrant status. Carmela said, "I have been told that they [the government] want me to show them proof of volunteer work that I have done during my time here. I do not have the time to volunteer. I often begin my duties very early and do not finish until it is very late and I am very tired. They also want to know how much money I have saved. I send almost all my money back home. I do not have much to show them. I do not want to clean houses and care for the children of other people my whole life. I have my own children that need me to care for them." Carmela adequately expresses how the government of Canada's recent policy amendments regarding proving self-sufficiency serves to exploit domestic workers as it is extremely difficult to meet those requirements with the painfully low wages and unpaid long hours of overtime work.

Family, Leisure Time, and Aspirations

Family

Migrant domestic workers are forced to leave their families behind when they travel to industrialized nations in search of employment. Chia-Lan (2003) argues that migrant women have become transnational breadwinners; however they are still plagued with having traditional female responsibilities in their home country.⁶⁰ Domestic workers are forced to neglect their own children and husbands in order to earn money to support them.⁶¹ This means that the women must arrange for their homes to be maintained by older sisters or other female relatives because their husband or father will not perform traditional female domestic labour.⁶² Also, Parrenas (2000) states that some migrant domestics hire domestic workers of their own to

⁵⁹ Hodge. "Unskilled Labour": Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program," 62.

⁶⁰ Chia-Lan., "Maid or Madam? Filipina Migrant Workers and the Continuity of Domestic Labor," 204.

⁶¹ Ibid., 190.

⁶² Parrenas. "Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor," 563.

maintain their homes while they are working overseas.⁶³ Migrant domestics can afford to do this as the average wage for a domestic worker in the Philippines in 2002 was only US \$30.⁶⁴ I asked Maria what arrangements she has made to have her domestic responsibilities in the Philippines taken care of while she is working in Canada. Maria said, “My aunt comes over to the house everyday to cook for my husband. She does not ask to be paid, but we always give her what we can. While she is over, she cleans up around the house. My husband usually helps her because he understands that I am not able to be there⁶⁵.” Maria is fortunate that she has relatives that can assist her family back home as domestic workers are frequently separated from their loved ones for years at a time. I asked Carmela the same question and she responded with a similar answer. Carmela said, “My mother takes care of the home while I am gone. My mother is also a domestic work in the Philippines. She has to take care of both our home and two other homes. She is constantly working to help support the family.⁶⁶” It is important to relate the issue of exploitation with domestic workers being unable to see their families for years at a time. The mandatory two years of work with an employer forces domestic workers to be away from their families as they cannot stop working for their employer because it would disqualify them from applying for permanent landed citizen status. The government is systemically exploiting domestic workers from the right to be with their husbands, children, and families. It is obvious that domestic workers are unable to fully participate in family life and family activities as they must labour in other countries in order to support the family.

Leisure Time

⁶³ Chia-Lan,. "Maid or Madam? Filipina Migrant Workers and the Continuity of Domestic Labor," 194.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Maria. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

⁶⁶ Carmela. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

Domestic workers are often unable to enjoy very much leisure time because of the precarious nature of their occupation coupled with the frequency of being subjected to exploitation. Arat Koc (1999) argues that it is very difficult to distinguish between working hours and leisure time because domestic workers are forced to live in the homes of their employer.⁶⁷ As a result, domestic workers are constantly on call and may often be asked to perform duties well after they have worked the specified amount of hours in their contract. This subjects some domestic workers to exploitation because they may not be getting paid for the work they are doing when they could be enjoying time to themselves. Also, domestic workers cannot engage in personal activities in her home because her home is also the workplace and thus she cannot be free of her employer's presence.⁶⁸ For instance, it would be difficult for her to have a gathering of friends over because it is not her home. These complications are evident in my interview with Carmela. Carmela said, "I would not even think of inviting anyone over to visit me in the house of my employer. I would be very embarrassed. I hardly get a few minutes to myself before someone asks me to make them a sandwich or wash them a sweater. I would not invite anyone over. Even if I would have some time to myself, what could we possibly do in my small room⁶⁹? Furthermore, I believe that domestic workers may not invite guests over because they do not want their employer to think of them as partiers, drinkers, or socializing with "the wrong crowd."

Some domestic workers lack the finances and mobility to enjoy leisure activities outside of the home such as watching a movie or taking a walk in the city. Chia-Lan (2003) states that many domestic workers are paid the provincial minimum wage and thus do not earn very much

⁶⁷ Arat-Koc. "In the Privacy of our own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada," 38.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁹ Carmela. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

money.⁷⁰ The majority of the little money that they do earn is usually send back home to their families thus leaving the domestic worker with very little disposable finances to use for leisure activities. Maria summarizes this point very effectively as she said, “I do not have the money or ability to go out very often. I do not know where anything is. Sure, I have been sent to the grocery store down the street many times but I would not consider that to be leisure time. When I have some alone time I usually read a book in my room. I do not go very far from the house often⁷¹.” It would appear from my interview with Maria that many domestic workers enjoy their time away from working by themselves in the home. Also, the issue of mobility appears to be important in understand how domestic workers spend their leisure time. Both interviewees have stated that they do not own a vehicle and are not familiar with the transit system. I asked Carmela if she had ever taken the bus by herself to go out and explore Toronto. Carmela responded, “I have never taken the bus by myself. Sometimes the family I am working for will take me with them when they go to the beach or the park for a picnic. I do not know why they take me sometimes and other times leave me at home. Do they think I will invite people over to the house while they are gone? Do they bring me because they want me to clean up their mess after they have eaten? I am at their mercy and cannot do anything because I have not been granted Canadian citizenship yet.⁷² It is evident that domestic workers in Canada do not enjoy very much leisure time because the live-in requirement subjects them to being on call at any hour and constantly under the supervision of their employer as well as financial and mobility reasons.

Aspirations

⁷⁰ Chia-Lan. "Maid or Madam? Filipina Migrant Workers and the Continuity of Domestic Labor," 194.

⁷¹ Maria. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

⁷² Carmela. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

For many domestic workers in Canada, the promise of a better life has been heavily complicated by the difficult living and working conditions they face coupled with often severe financial struggles.⁷³ Since the *Foreign Domestic Movement Program* began in 1981 to allow migrant domestic workers from non-preferred nations to apply for permanent landed citizenship after a minimum period of two years, many women braved the exploitative conditions with the aspiration of bringing their family to Canada to have a better life. Unfortunately, it is still very difficult to be granted landed immigrant status. This forces some women to work as domestics for much longer than original planned. Furthermore, the changes to Canada's immigration policy in 1992 requiring domestic workers to prove self-sufficiency⁷⁴ has dampened their aspirations to be granted landed immigrant status because it is awfully difficult to prove given the level of exploitation they are subjected to in both their working and living situations. Domestic workers have worked extremely hard in their efforts to achieve their aspirations. Many have worked long, hard hours for meagre pay, overtime without compensation, performed dangerous duties outside of their contractual agreement, and have left their friends and families behind for several years at a time. Carmela was very hopefully when I asked her what she wanted out of life. Carmela responded, "I want to give my family a life they cannot have in the Philippines. I want them to be happy. I want to be happy. I want us all to have a new life here in Canada. All my hard work will pay off. I pray that it does."⁷⁵ Domestic workers have clearly endured much hardship in Canada. Although unions could help elevate some degree of the exploitation domestic workers face, domestic workers are not permitted to unionize.

Rights of Domestic Workers

⁷³Mona Grandea and Joanna Kerr. "Frustrated and Displaced: Filipina Domestic Workers in Canada," 10.

⁷⁴Hodge. "Unskilled Labour": Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program," 62.

⁷⁵Carmela. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

In Ontario, domestic workers have the same rights as other workers under the *Employment Standards Act*.⁷⁶ According to the Government of Ontario *Employment Standards Act*, domestic workers are entitled to such key rights as overtime pay, public holidays, and hours of work protection which includes maximum hours of work and daily rest periods.⁷⁷ However, I have demonstrated that employers have continuously violated the aforementioned rights in ways that non-migrant workers are significantly less likely to face. Domestic workers are largely either unwilling or unable to redress rights violations. The former has been comprehensively discussed, referring to domestic workers' fear of deportation. The latter must be looked at in more detail. Stasiulis and Bakan (1997) argue that the reason domestic workers are unable to defend themselves from obvious violations of the Ontario *Employment Standards Act* is because of barriers such as inadequate language skills, inaccessibility to transportation⁷⁸, and insufficient monetary resources. Hodge (2006) states that domestic workers whom wish to file a claim against their employer must pay a \$100 fee, as well as bear the lengthy waiting period for the claim to be heard.⁷⁹ This clearly exploits domestic workers whom have had their rights violated in three ways. Firstly, the \$100 fee is very expensive for many domestic workers as they are forced to work for low wages and are known to send the vast majority of their earnings to family members and relatives back home. Secondly, Hodge (2006) argues that the waiting period to hear a case could easily be two or more years.⁸⁰ It is crucial to recall that because of the live-in requirement for domestics, they must continue to live with their employers while their claim is

⁷⁶ The Government of Ontario. "Employment Standards Fact Sheet - Domestic Workers." Ontario Ministry of Labour. <https://ospace.scholarsportal.info/bitstream/1873/5404/1/10312936.pdf> (accessed March 1, 2011).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Daiva Stasiulis and Abigail B. Bakan, "Negotiating Citizenship - The Case of Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada," 122

⁷⁹ Hodge. "Unskilled Labour": Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program," 63.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 63.

pending before Immigration Canada. This could lead to a tremendous increase in exploitation by an employer as a method of retaliation for having a claim filed. Lastly, some domestic workers are often unable to do anything because domestic work is done in the private sphere and therefore it is very difficult to enforce labour legislation or prove that a violation has indeed occurred.⁸¹ Although domestic workers in Ontario are protected by the *Employment Standards Act*, it is evident that it is exceptionally difficult to have violations redressed.

Resistance

Domestic workers have been largely unable to resist their employer's exploitative demands throughout the last half century and beyond. Arat-Koc (1999) maintains that in Ontario, domestic workers are denied the right to organize or to be represented by a labour union according to the *Ontario Labour Relations Act*.⁸² The lack of union representation may be a central reason why the work of some domestics can be extremely exploited and subjected to work intensification. Furthermore, domestic workers have been unable to resist their employers for another prominent reason. Arat-Koc (1999) argues that the live-in requirement forcing domestic workers to live in the same house as their employer makes it extremely difficult for employees to discuss common problems that they may be facing and organize themselves into a union similar to how non-domestic workers may do so after a shift at a factory or plant.⁸³ I asked Maria if she had ever considered protesting against the province's legislation banning unionization of domestic workers. Maria responded, "No. I would not even know how to start. I do not want to cause any problems because that could affect my citizenship status. Even if I protested something over here around the house I could upset my employer and she could have

⁸¹ Mona Grandea and Joanna Kerr. "Frustrated and Displaced: Filipina Domestic Workers in Canada," 10.

⁸² Arat-Koc. "In the Privacy of our own Home: Foreign Domestic Workers as Solution to the Crisis in the Domestic Sphere in Canada," 41.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 40.

me deported.”⁸⁴ Clearly Maria, as many other domestic workers, is afraid to disrupt the status quo for fear of having her citizenship request denied. Therefore, many domestic workers are forced to put up with the exploitation that they face because of legislation prohibiting unionization and inability to communicate with other domestic workers and mobilize to rally the government for the right to organize collectively into unions.

Final Thoughts

Migrants have been travelling to Canada throughout the 20th century to work as domestic servants. The hope of starting a new life in Canada is very attractive to those living in non-industrialized, third-world countries. The escape from tremendously meagre wages and poor living conditions has seen primarily young women leave their families behind to work as domestics in western nations such as Canada. However, as attractive and opportunity domestic work appears for foreign women to earn wages to support their families, research and interviews suggest that some domestic workers can be subjected to high levels of exploitation both by their individual employers and by the state of Canada. There has truly been a sense of generational “unchange” or consistency throughout the last half-century as domestic workers continue to be exploited by their employers because of relatively unaltered government legislation pertaining to migrant domestic service work. Two major immigration policies are responsible for subjecting some domestic workers to exploitation. The live-in requirement forces domestic workers to live in the home of their employer throughout the life of her employment contract. As a result, some domestic workers must go several years at a time without being able to see their families, may be subject to privacy violations, inadequate living conditions, unable to escape their employer because they live in the same home, work intensification without compensation, and inability to

⁸⁴ Maria. Interview by author. Personal interview. Toronto, March 4, 2011.

participate in leisure activities. The second policy which serves to exploit domestic workers is their status as a non-citizen in Canada. This means that they can be deported back to their home country as soon as their employment agreement ends or is terminated by the employer.

Domestic workers are also unable to collectively organize into unions because of their status as non-citizens of the country. Employers may frequently exploit a worker by not paying overtime, failing to provide vacations or break periods, or coercing them into performing dangerous tasks not agreed upon in the contract knowing very well that domestics have little recourse to redress exploitation. It is imperative that the Government of Canada reconsider its immigration policy, namely the two above policies which inevitably allow employers to exploit their employees in ways that workers with citizenship rights would unlikely face. Domestic workers have been an invaluable assistance to numerous Canadian families throughout the 20th century and have recently allowed women to better compete against their male counterparts in the labour market. The first major step should be to allow domestic workers to unionize. Through collective organization, domestic workers can resist exploitation and improve their working and living conditions in Canada.

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