

Experiences of Migration, Settlement and Work Among Filipino Domestic Workers

Catherine J. Fillmore

Introduction

There are voices in Canadian history that have long remained silenced: the voices of women, immigrants, and visible minorities. This essay gives a platform to twenty women from the Philippines to speak about their immigration, settlement, and employment experiences as domestic workers in Winnipeg. Their accounts were taped in oral history interviews which took place between January, 1989 and August, 1990. This oral history project was funded by the Department of Culture, Heritage and Recreation under the Oral History Grants Programme of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. The project authority for the study was an advocacy group for domestic workers, the MPGI (the Mary Poppins Group, Inc.)*

Until fairly recently, Canadian studies of migration have concentrated on the experiences of male immigrants (Barber, 1987) rather than the fate of migrant women (Enloe, 1989). However, there are a number of government reports (Arnopoulos, 1979; Estable, 1986; Seward and McDade, 1988) as well as several studies that have documented the experiences of women who migrated to Canada to work as domestic workers in private households. These have tended to concentrate on women from the British Isles (Barber, 1980; Lenskyj, 1981), Europe (Lindström-Best, 1986; Iocovetta, 1986), and the Caribbean (Silvera, 1983; Calliste, 1989). Less has been written about the Filipino women's experiences in Canada (Castro de Jesus, 1990), although today over fifty percent of the women entering Canada to perform domestic work are from the Philippines

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(Canada, 1991).¹ There are currently around 90,000 Filipinas employed as domestic workers in large urban cities across Canada (Vincent, 1996). There is a special need, therefore, to explore the Filipino women's experiences of migration, settlement, and work.

Oral history narratives are especially important for documenting the experiences of migrant workers and ethnic minorities (Serikaku, 1989). The perspectives of immigrant domestic workers, in particular, are difficult to document for several reasons. First, as temporary workers in Canada, the women are reluctant to have their experiences recorded for fear of reprisal from employers who may seriously jeopardize their immigration prospects. Secondly, the nature of their work — the long hours and rigid schedules — leave them little time for such a commitment. Thirdly, some women hesitate to express their viewpoints as they feel they have nothing to offer. This feeling reflects an “internalization of the male view of history and of themselves” (Lindström-Best, 1987:88).

Oral History Methodology And Theoretical Approach

At the outset, it is important to note that in the early stages of this research, there was a shift from a traditional linear research model (of data collection, interpretation and return to the community) to a more dynamic community-centered model. In the latter, the “returns,” that is, the use of the narratives to support the advocacy group's agenda was ongoing. The advocacy group had a much more immediate objective for the short-term use of the narratives to substantiate their public presentations and to inform officials at employment and immigration centres regarding the plight of Filipino women as live-in workers in Winnipeg households. The use of the narratives in building a history and leaving a legacy for new Filipino immigrants was an important objective of the project, but it was not the foremost concern of the women. Rather, it was community involvement that became the linchpin of this project. The importance of community involvement in oral history projects and the implications of such

1. In the past, most domestic workers entered Canada as permanent residents. This changed with the introduction of the Canadian employment authorization programs in 1973 (Seward and McDade, 1988). In November 1981, the federal government established the Foreign Domestic Movement Program (FDMP). While some of the women in the study entered Canada under temporary work authorizations, most arrived under the FDMP. In April 1992, the Live-In Caregiver Program replaced the FDMP (Canada, 1992).

involvement for that community have been documented (Thompson, 1978). Serikaku writes:

If oral historians agree that history does not belong to and is not created by the powerful and elite alone, then projects and products should be designed not only for the powerful and elite of the academic world, but also for the very communities from which the history comes (1989:87).

Another important feature of this oral history project is its feminist approach. The articulation of the Filipino women's experiences in Canada is a complex task, one characterized by the intersection of gender, race, class, and immigrant status. Feminist research design, methodology, and analytical approaches to the data must be sensitive, therefore, to differences in power between the narrator and researcher and must attempt to deal with the ethical issues that may arise. The principle of returning the research to the community is one attempt to deal with the inequality of the typical exchange between researcher and researched. Patai raises some important questions to this issue. "How is the research returned? To whom, in what form, and to what avail?" (1991:147). She feels that the only projects that are effective in avoiding some of these ethical problems are ones in which the community is in control of all stages of the research process. In such projects, the community assumes the role of both researched and researcher (Patai, 1991). Minister's (1991) feminist critique of the standard oral history frame also provided some useful guidelines for the interviews. She cautions, for example, against the use of topic lists as they tempt the researcher to try to control the interview. "Topic lists double-bind oral historians and deafen them to emergent meanings and to opportunities to draw out the narrators' experience" (1991:37).

The oral narratives in this project provide certain insights into the complex web of power relations which structure the lives of the Filipino women as live-in domestic workers. The analysis focuses on the links between women's individual consciousness and structures of power and domination, in particular, gender, class, and race, in the patriarchal household. A feminist oral history approach is central to exploring individual women's consciousness and the impact of these social forces of domination in shaping her consciousness. The work of Wescott (1979) and Smith (1979) have informed this theoretical approach.

Wescott (1979) provides a basic approach to studying women's consciousness. She states that "one must go behind the veil of outwardly

conforming activity” (cited in Anderson, 1987:107). For the present analysis, this entailed examining the contradictions between outward expressions of public performance and inner states of feeling. Smith contributes further to this approach with her argument that feminist sociology “must be where we are” with real concrete people and their actual lives and that it entails investigating how the dominant ideological forms structure institutions and everyday life (1987:107). It is not enough, therefore, to record the daily lives of the women but one must situate their experiences in the context of broader structural factors of gender, class, and race. Cott recognizes the vital interplay between women's consciousness and the patriarchal power structure.

The meaning that women ascribe to their own behaviour is reducible neither to the behavior itself nor to the dominant ideology. It is derived from women's consciousness which is influenced by the ideas and values of men, but is nevertheless uniquely situated, reflective of women's concrete position within the patriarchal power structure (cited in Anderson, 1987:116).

The Narrators

The narratives of the women reveal a rich range of diverse living experiences growing up in the Philippines and in their employment abroad as domestic workers before coming to Canada. First, some social and demographic information will be presented to provide a personal profile of the twenty narrators participating in the project. Secondly, some narratives will be selected that exemplify the hardships and struggles of Filipino women employed as domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore.

As the following social and demographic information reveals, the women were well educated with many skills and talents. The women narrators ranged in age from twenty-seven to forty-seven years. Almost all of the women grew up in small towns and villages in the provinces of the Philippines. Fourteen of the women were single; four were married, and two women were separated. Four of the women had dependent children that were left in the care of husbands and relatives in the Philippines. The predominant religion was Roman Catholic. For many of the women, religious beliefs were a sustaining force.

I have been through problems, and no one has helped me. I have to stand on my own. My family cannot help me. Even in the Philippines,

they can't help me. The only thing that keeps me going is my faith in God. (Interview #13)

The women had all completed high school with the majority having completed a college diploma or a university education. Eight women had completed a diploma program at a community college, such as midwifery or a secretarial course. Seven of the women had from one to three years of university, and five women had completed a degree, for example, in nursing, arts, science, and commerce. The importance of education as a key to a better life was a common theme.

Education is the only inheritance that we can get. If you have an education, nobody can grab it from you. I am looking at the demands (financial) of my children. They are very talented. (Interview #6)

With the exception of two women who were able to secure employment in their area of specialty as a nurse or midwife, the women typically worked in traditional female-types of occupations in clerical, sales, and service as well as in some factory jobs. Many of the women had one or two jobs while they were attending school.

I worked in a business at home (dry goods, restaurant, and rooming house) at the same time as studying at school. I had to stop college in my third year because my parents can't afford to send me. I sold cigarettes and candies in the street to drivers. I earned a bit, then opened a store inside the market. (Interview #13)

The women's reasons for immigrating to Canada were foremost economic.² One woman describes her family's financial hardships in the following narrative.

There are a lot of us in the family. My Mum's only way of earning a living is by selling rice cakes in the market just to feed us. She is really the breadwinner in the family. (President of MPGI, Incident Reports)

2. The most common occupations of the narrators' fathers were farming and carpentry. Other occupations included police officer, tailor, butcher, and small businesses in the retail trade. While most of the women reported that their mothers were housewives, many also worked alongside their husbands in farming and in family businesses. Other occupations of the mother included teacher, launderer, and weaver.

In addition to assisting their families with basic needs of subsistence, the women also desired to help them secure a better future by financing higher education for siblings and, ultimately, by sponsoring family members to Canada. One woman voices these goals in her narrative.

It is expensive to go to university in the Philippines. We have rooms that we rent. My father is also working, so we can manage. I am the only one who went to school. My brothers and sisters dropped their schooling. (Later), when I was in Hong Kong, my brother wanted to take aircraft mechanics, so I sent some money and he went back to school. It is hard to find a job in the Philippines. If I just stay in the Philippines, I can't save. It's just enough for survival. (Interview #18)

While very few women had actual employment as a domestic worker in the Philippines, all but one woman had left home to work abroad in this capacity before applying to the Foreign Domestic Movement Program in Canada. Most of the women had worked either in Hong Kong or Singapore before coming to Canada, although some had domestic work experience in Israel, Greece, Japan, and England.

Filipino domestic workers play a very important role in the economy of the Philippines. Sending money home (remittances) has provided the government with an essential source of income to deal with the international debt. According to Enloe, the money sent back home by Filipinas working abroad comprised 18% of what the Philippines earned from exports, and, as a result, they are considered one of the countries "most valuable resources" (1989:30). A more recent estimate of the amount of remittances sent home to support parents, husbands, siblings, and young children, ranges from \$2 billion to \$6 billion (U.S.) a year for the Philippines economy (Vincent, 1996). The personal motives for women emigrating as domestic workers must be viewed within this broader economic and political context. Enloe observes that:

When a woman from Mexico, Jamaica or the Philippines decides to emigrate in order to make money as a domestic servant she is designing her own international debt politics. She is trying to cope with the loss of earning power and the rise in the cost of living at home by cleaning the bathrooms in the country of the bankers (1989:29).

The narratives of many of the Filipino women working abroad revealed almost slave-like conditions. These experiences helped to shape, in part, the

relationship between Canadian employers and Filipino domestic workers. The following narrative describes a comparison of domestic work in Canada to Hong Kong.

It is nice here in Canada. I have not too difficult a job like in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, I work from morning to night. Well, I am also doing that here, because I am used to that. But as far as the law is concerned, they are only giving us eight hours for us to work. (Interview #17)

With few legal safeguards in some of the Asian countries, the women worked extremely long hours with only one or two days off a month. Many felt helpless to do anything about it. The following narrative reflects the feelings of one woman working in Singapore as a domestic worker.

The employment agency doesn't want to help. "Never mind," the agency said. The agency is closer to the employer than the domestic. I tried to talk to them. "Just work, don't complain. You applied to work. You're here. Don't make any complaints about your employer." (Interview #10)

One woman reported that many employers expected them to work in their businesses at night. Since this was illegal, the women were fearful that they would be deported. In terms of the household labour itself, there were few conveniences. Some of the women, for example, were not allowed to use the washing machine except for heavy items, such as curtains and blankets. The women also had little privacy and few personal freedoms. Many did not have separate accommodations and slept in the same room with the children. Curfews were common. Other employers refused to let the women use the phone or to talk to other Filipino women when they were out running household errands. One woman remarked, "The old master and old madam don't want me to talk to Filipinos. You didn't come to Singapore to use the phone." (Interview #20) The work schedule of this woman was indeed reflective of slave-like conditions as the following narrative demonstrates.

I get up at 5:00 in the morning, sometimes 4:00, if I know that there is lots of work. I went to bed past 10:30 or 11:00. First, I do laundry for both families, then mopping, shampoo the carpet once a week, vacuum, dusting, wash all the windows, then car washing. In the morning and evening, I wash two cars, the employer's car and grandpa's, before and after the use of the car. I just smile. I take care

of plants, watering, harvesting, trees, cleaning the cement, the backyard. I do this everyday. I also go to market. The market is half-an-hour away. I do the shopping with grandma. I do lots of carrying. I lose my breath sometimes. I might forget my name. The second household is more terrible. A machine can have a rest.... Sometimes, I carry the water from the ninth floor to the first (to wash the cars). Sometimes, the elevator is not functioning so I use the staircase. I carry buckets of water down. They say the bucket is not full. It spills. "Okay, okay. Yes, yes." I just take my time. "Okay, I come." I smile my problems and then voice it out with my friends. I voice out my temper also. I keep my problem and smile. I pray. I ask for the help of God to do the work. These days pass, I say. After night gets day. After day gets night. All the hardships pass. (Interview #20)

Some women who felt that they could no longer endure such working conditions did take action and faced personal risks in doing so. One woman successfully escaped her employer's household with the aid of friends. She went to the Hong Kong police and later wrote a letter to President Marcos outlining her concerns about future Filipino girls. As a result of her dauntless tenacity, this particular family was prohibited from hiring Filipino domestic workers.

Another woman who was working as a domestic in Singapore also fled from her employers. This was not without some difficulty, as they had padlocked a steel door to their house. She was also assisted by friends and later went to a shelter for overseas workers. Originally established by a priest, she described it as a "hiding place for Filipino girls who are in trouble." (Interview #2) There have been numerous reports of Filipino domestic workers being sexually assaulted by their employers in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe (Enloe, 1989). In 1988, President Corazon Aquino imposed a temporary ban on Filipino women working abroad because of the excessive abuses reported by the women (Tenorio, 1988). As this woman explains.

It started when girls were being raped and molested by their employers. This idea of molesting girls. The (domestic) work is so dirty. Therefore (they think), the girls are dirt. It's not really a reputation but they think that way. (Interview #2)

While economic and political factors are the main reasons for women leaving the Philippines, the "dream of a better life" in Canada helps to explain the women's many sacrifices to make this goal possible. One

narrator expresses the painful struggle and strong determination in making such a commitment.

That's life-a big, big sacrifice. Without my dream of going to Canada, I would go back to the Philippines. Sometimes, I say that because of the hardship. It's a big challenge. Some of the my friends, my uncle and aunties and relatives say, "You can't go to Canada. It's just struggle." I give my big best. I have a big determination to fight for it. (Interview #20)

Analysis of Narratives

The analysis will center on Filipino women's experiences of migration and work in Winnipeg. With respect to their experiences as live-in domestic workers, special attention will be paid to exploring the dynamics underlying the "mistress-servant" relationship.

The primary sources of data are based on thirty-three employment situations described by the twenty participants in their oral narratives and on a case file of employment incidents recorded by the president of the advocacy group for domestic workers in Winnipeg. These were also documented on taped interviews. Additional insights into the women's experiences of migration and work were gained from attending monthly meetings of the advocacy group, interviews and hearings at the Labour Board, accompanying the executive to various public presentations in the community, including meetings with government officials, and finally, by participating in several social events organized by the advocacy group. Secondary sources of data included a large file of newspaper clippings, government publications, and domestic workers' newsletters.

Experiences of Migration and Settlement

The concept of "stranger" is a familiar theme in the narrations of immigrants (Disman, 1985). Feelings of not belonging and of feeling distant and estranged were not uncommon in the narratives of the Filipino domestic workers. "They (the employers) have no time to talk to me. I felt like a stranger" (Interview #8). The feeling of being uprooted was expressed in the following narrative.

I think that communication is one of the basic, most important factors in maintaining a good relationship (with the employer), especially when there is a girl from out in the woods from the

Philippines living in a new country in a strange home. The feeling is just like being uprooted and transplanted. (Interview #4)

Another woman related her feelings when she first arrived at the Winnipeg airport.

There was nobody to meet me there at the plane. I have to find my own way. I arrived in July, the day before my birthday. I felt like a total stranger. (Interview #16)

The theme of the “disconnected self” (Etter-Lewis, 1991) also emerged from the narratives. This was apparent in the feeling of disconnection or break from family bonds and from ties to Filipino culture and community. For women forced to leave their husbands and children behind in the Philippines, there were feelings of loss, longing, and loneliness. This was aggravated by the difficult task of explaining to young children the reasons for the separation. This frustration is captured in the following narrative.

At first, it was fine to communicate with them through writing and the telephone, but when I came back again (during the Christmas break) and left them, they really feel homesick. When they saw me, “Where’s mummy? Where’s mummy?” The children (3 and 5 years) are always asking me this. (Interview #5)

The following narrator expresses not only the painful break in parenting her children (11, 13, and 15 years) and the strain placed on the marital relationship, but also the impact on her young daughter. A child who has to take on the parental role and care for younger siblings may develop a sense of self that is disconnected from her childhood (Etter-Lewis, 1991:51).

My husband says that it is very difficult for him. He is a man, you know. He doesn’t know how to manage the house. And so, that is my problem. My kids are suffering. They are still young. They have to cope with the housework and study for themselves. My youngest one is too young. She was eight when I left. Now, she is eleven. What I am saying is that my oldest daughter took my place being a mother to look after her sisters, to do the house cleaning, the house responsibilities, even the budgeting of money. She is the one taking over that. I show to her that we have to endure these days. Time will come, I know, when we will be together here. (Interview #17)

The disconnections from Filipino culture and community are evident in the narrators’ descriptions of the close-knit, community ties in the small

towns and villages of the Philippines. This marked a sharp contrast to their early experiences in Winnipeg. Many of the women expressed a joy for the simplicity of that life. "Our life in the Philippines is so simple a life. Although it is hard to look for a job, we are happy." (Interview #13) While most of the women's families struggled diligently to make a living, many could not have managed without the assistance of the local community. The critical role that community life plays in the lives of the women is evident in the following narrative.

Living in a small town, we know each other. We just walk out on the street, and everyone says, "Hi!", not like in Winnipeg, especially in winter.... We get so many people to support our Mum. She doesn't have a very good job to support us. We have to pull ourselves together. She is a strong woman. She has her job as a laundry woman. It is a very, very heavy job for her - she pumps water from the well. (Interview #19)

Experiences As Live-in Domestic Workers

As noted earlier, the oral narratives of the twenty Filipino women provided accounts of thirty-three employment situations which were supplemented by taped interviews with the president of the advocacy group regarding specific employment incidents encountered by the women (of a membership of over 60 Filipino domestic workers). Overall, the oral narratives document a diversity of employment experiences in Winnipeg households and offer an opportunity to explore the ways in which gender, class, race, and immigrant statuses structure the relationship between employer and domestic worker.

Turretin emphasizes the structure of social inequality which brings together a domestic worker and her (male) employer, and how this fosters a situation of dependency and discretionary power (1986:237). She identifies two types of relationships that may develop depending on whether the employer overlooks or emphasizes the inequalities between them. If employers play down the power imbalance between them, a patron-client relationship is likely to develop which is characterized by paternalism and benevolence toward servants. If, however, employers emphasize the inequalities which exist between them, conditions of servitude may emerge (Turretin, 1986).

More current descriptions emphasize the maternalistic rather than paternalistic aspects of the employer/domestic worker relationship (Cock,

1980; Rollins, 1985; Cohen, 1986). With 72% of women with children under 16 years in the labour force (Mitchell, 1997) and women's longer work week, of 90 hours as compared to 66 hours for husbands, imposed by their dual work role (Brown et al., 1994:2.2-2.3), it is more appropriate to focus on the nature of the relationship between the female employer and domestic worker. Cohen describes some of the maternalistic aspects of this relationship in terms of favours and gift exchange, expressions of appreciation and gratitude, and "mother-like" treatment (1986:194).

Based on this earlier work, Bradshaw-Camball and Cohen (1988) developed a typology of employer and domestic worker relationships. There are two major dimensions along which the relationships are defined: the employer's concern with equity and fairness and the domestic worker's sense of power and self-esteem. In studying the relationships between female employer and domestic worker, the broader bases of power in which this relationship is structured under patriarchal capitalism must be recognized. While both women in the patriarchal nuclear household are in positions of subordination on the basis of their gender, the domestic worker is further subordinated on the basis of her class, race, and immigrant status.

The typology classifies four types of employer relationships: (1) exploitive, (2) nurturing (matron-client), (3) conflictual, and (4) equitable and fair. These relationships are open to flux and change, and it is hoped, can be facilitated toward fair and equitable employment conditions (Bradshaw-Camball and Cohen, 1988). This typology was a useful analytical tool in exploring the structural constraints of social inequality. All of the thirty-three employment experiences have been categorized into one of the four classifications and will be described in some detail with supportive testimonies from the oral narratives. Most of these employment experiences were in two-parent households with young children.³ Very few women (four) worked for a male employer only, and most of the female employers worked outside of the home.⁴

3. At the time of the oral history project, twelve of the narrators were working as domestic workers (child care and housekeeping), two as housekeepers only, and six women had landed status. Of these six women, all but one were employed in jobs outside the field of domestic work. Two of the women were nurses aids, and three women were successful in establishing their own businesses.

4. With respect to the employer's occupational status at the time of the project, the following breakdown was found. Of the male employers, the most common occupations were in one of the established professions of law, medicine, engineering, dentistry, and university teaching or in business. All but two of the female employers were working for pay outside the home. Six women were pursuing professional careers

1. Exploitive Relationships

Bradshaw-Camball and Cohen (1988) describe the exploitive relationship as one in which the employer has little concern for equity and fairness and the domestic worker expresses feelings of powerlessness. There were ten employment experiences that were characterized as exploitive. The domestic worker, especially as a temporary worker, is in an extreme position of dependency — materially, emotionally, and socially. Her feelings of powerlessness can best be understood in relation to the structural bases of inequality underlying her relationship with the employer. Four traits characterize the exploitive relationship: (1) a requirement of deference, (2) depersonalization or invisibility, (3) denial of affect, (4) and treatment as property (Rex, 1973; Memmi, 1974; Cock, 1980; Rollins, 1985; Turrittin, 1986). As the following discussion demonstrates, these traits serve to reinforce the inequalities of class, race, and a tenuous legal status underlying the mistress-servant relationship.

(a) Deference Requirements

Deference can take a number of forms: linguistic, gestural, task-embedded, and spatial (Goffman, cited in Rollins, 1985:158). Some examples of linguistic forms of deference that mark class and racial boundaries include the requirement of formal, impersonal forms of address, such as "Ma'am, Madam, and My Sir." "Madam gets up around 9:30, has coffee while I play with the children, and then goes out to tennis or an aerobics class" (Interview #6). In an extreme case, an employer never directly addressed the woman, but rather nodded or snapped a finger to get her attention. In another, the employer would assume that she did not have a good grasp of English, although it is commonly taught as a second language in schools in the Philippines. One female employer would say over and over, "Do you understand me? Do you understand me?" One narrator commented on this incorrect assumption.

I am proud to say that coming from the Philippines, we have our own culture, our own education, and we are not that ignorant. If they would just treat us as intelligent human beings and that we

in medicine, law, university teaching, and in pharmacy. Other occupations reflected a broader range of occupations than their husbands, from real estate agent, comptroller, government employee to stewardess.

understand. If they can explain it to us, we will understand.
(Interview #4)

Gestural and task-embedded deference may be found in the subservient demeanour and attitude toward tasks expected of domestic workers. Uniforms can also be requested to enhance class differences. While this was required in only three situations, one woman had to wear her black and white uniform and apron while she washed two Mercedes Benz every Friday — driven or not. The “willingness to perform any task” and “to show pleasure in serving” were expected in a wide range of tasks that often served to validate the higher class status of the employer (Rollins, 1985:167). Some of the more demeaning and demanding tasks assigned included carrying luggage and groceries (by bus), shining shoes, mending underwear, washing outdoor windows (second floor), yard work (raking leaves, shovelling snow, spreading lawn soil, and cleaning the garage), turning down the bed in the “master” bedroom, and serving the family and household guests at any hour of the day or night.

Lastly, spatial deference refers to the unequal rights of domestic workers as compared to their employers regarding both personal (body) space and house space (Rollins, 1985). While the woman domestic worker is expected to maintain the “correct” physical distance from her employer, this was clearly violated in some employment situations. Two women, for example, were expected to give back rubs and massages. “If they are not feeling good, they (both husband and wife) want me to massage their backs.” (Interview #1) In another situation, the woman was fired when the wife discovered that her husband was requesting back rubs. In this example, both the racist and sexist views of some employers toward Asian women were evident in their assumptions of Filipino workers as subservient sex objects (Mitter, 1986; Mies, 1986).⁵ With respect to house space, the women tended to be confined to work areas, such as the kitchen, while some employers ignored the boundaries of privacy marking their accommodation. One woman related, “One night, I had a friend over, and we were in nighties and the guests decided to come down (to the basement). We dived into the covers. I didn't feel that I belonged.” (Interview #4)

(b) Depersonalization/Invisibility

5. In Hong Kong, Filipino women and domestic service have become so merged in the popular culture that a doll sold widely is called simply, “Filipino maid” (Enloe, 1989:30).

Rex describes one sign of the colonized's depersonalization as the "mark of the plural" (1973:85). Giving the example of a servant who does not come in one morning, Rex observes that it is viewed by the employer as irresponsibility, "You can't count on them" (1973:85). The "personal private occurrences" of a servant's life hold little interest for the employer; in fact, she does not exist as an individual (1973: 85).

There were several illustrations of this disinterest in the personal needs of the domestic worker. The refusal to appreciate health concerns, especially in the early months of migration, is evident in the following narrative.

I was two or three months here and not well acquainted with the weather. I got sick, a terrible headache. I could not move my head. I was in bed for five days already, not eating. Sometimes, she (employer) brings me something to eat, cookies. I only know my minister. I don't know anyone in Winnipeg. They should bring me to a doctor, but no. "On the fifth day, I will be having visitors," (says the employer). "I'm sorry. Just don't pay me. I can't do the work." She made me. I was vacuuming and crying, and my head is really terrible. The man said if I have I headache, I can go to work. But, this is a different headache. I can't move my head. (Interview #15)

For many of the women, establishing ties to a church was critically important in the early settlement process of adjusting to a new country. Some employers refused to acknowledge this need, while others reluctantly made some allowances.

I will endure as far as I can, but church is a priority for me.... Then they started letting me leave earlier, but it wasn't coming from the heart. I didn't feel like going. (Interview #17)

Upgrading or taking a post-secondary course was not only an important component of a successful application for landed status, but it offered the only hope of finding more remunerative work in the future. Many employers dismissed their workers' educational plans, some with hostility. The overwhelming majority of them did not pay the \$20.00 monthly educational allowance as stipulated in the employment contract. The following narrator represented the views of many domestic workers:

One disadvantage of working as a domestic is that the work is never finished. I could live with that if they could consider our needs, too, like going to school, without giving a sour face. Most employers

ignored the twenty dollars. I didn't mind as long as we were allowed to go out. A lot of the employers minded. They were very reluctant about us going to school. (Interview #4)

Depersonalization and the notion of invisibility also refer to situations in which the women's presence was not acknowledged. Conversations took place around them as if they were not there.

I serve them the meal, and then sit down with them. I feel very uncomfortable with them. Maybe they are a class family. I feel they are rich people. Usually, I just listen to them because I don't know what people they are talking about. (Interview #8)

(c) Denial of Affect

While related to impersonalization, denial of affect refers to the negation of the feeling or sentient component of the women's "selves" (Cock, 1980). The emotional deprivation experienced by the women was most apparent in relation to the separation from their families. The paradox of caring for an employer's children without any regard and recognition for her own family was a painful and problematic reality facing some Filipino domestic workers. In one extreme example, an employer refused to renew a contract with a married domestic couple, as the woman had become pregnant. The employer would only renew the contract if she sent her baby back to the Philippines. She relates the story as follows.

They started to blast, "I don't want a couple with a kid working for us." That's when I said, "That is what happened to our first child. We left our first son with our parents. This time, no matter what will happen, we will keep him with us." (Interview #3)

While this woman was able to secure another place of employment for herself and the baby, her husband could not find work and was forced to return to the Philippines.

As traditional holidays approached, it was also assumed that the woman domestic worker would willingly stay and care for the employer's family, as if she had no family of her own. One employer (a divorced male) seemed shocked to think otherwise.

I was talking away to him like he was my friend, talking about the kids. Suddenly, he became the real boss. He was asking me, "We need you for the Christmas season. We are going to Florida for a vacation with the kids for Christmas." (I reply,) "It's a holiday, my

holiday. I will see. I will think about it.” So, he snapped at me, “It’s not abnormal for me to ask you. I am disappointed in your answer.” That is when I came to the conclusion that he cannot be my friend. He’s my boss. From then on, I always put that block between us. Okay, so you want to be the boss. (Interview #2)

(d) Property Relations

There were numerous examples which expressed the employer's treatment of the domestic worker as property. This is most clearly depicted in some incidences where the women were “hired out” to relatives to work. They were superexploited in that no additional pay was given for these hours. One woman was fired for telling another Filipino domestic worker about these job conditions. This is her story.

Suddenly, the sister has a problem. My employer asks me to work for her sister and be a nanny (two children, 3 months and 2 years of age) and do some basic housekeeping in her home. At first, I just want to please my employer. I do it for two weeks. Time goes on, forcing me to work there three days a week. They say that there is no problem working for the sister because she is a member of the family. There is no extra money because it is temporary. I am so tired. The sister will phone. “I need you. I will pick you up at two this afternoon.” What can I do? I am not finished my work. I’m tired. (Interview #10)

Controlling the domestic worker's time on her days off, imposing curfews, and regulating visitors and phone calls are also reflective of ownership and conditions of servitude (Cock, 1980). The following narration reveals several restrictions and regulations imposed by the employers on her personal life.

They don’t want me to accept visitors. They are very strict. They want me to ask in person when I want to go out to visit my friends. And even when they know about school on Monday and Wednesday nights, I need to ask permission. Their reason is, “I am not hiring you to go to school. I am hiring you to work for me.” (Interview #1)

The president of the advocacy group related similar incidences from her records. When a new housekeeper suggested to her employer that she go to school for upgrading. The employer went berserk! “What’s the point? What for? Nonsense!” (President of MPGL, Incident File)

2. Matron-client Relationship

The matron-client or contractual relationship is viewed as a form of friendship based on an exchange of favours (Rollins, 1985; Cohen, 1986). In describing this relationship, Bradshaw-Camball and Cohen (1988) view the employer as having concern for fairness while the domestic worker has a fairly low sense of power. This feeling of powerlessness in the matron-client relationship is in large part a consequence of the Filipino domestic worker's structural position of dependency as a temporary worker. There were eleven employment situations that could be classified as matron-client relationships.

The domestic worker is dependent on matronage favours, both material and emotional. The employer may help her in tangible ways, for example, in providing driving lessons and access to a car, or in intangible ways in terms of expressions of appreciation, support, guidance, and good will. While the relationship is based on exchange, asymmetrical power relations still prevail. At best, it is "unbalanced friendship" (Cohen, 1986:202). Moreover, the exchange of favours for extra work expresses the utilitarian and instrumental nature of this relationship. This is evident when the woman is granted landed status and gains greater independence from her employer. She no longer feels obligated to stay with her employer if there are better opportunities elsewhere.

I cared for her almost two years. I waited until I got my immigration papers, and then left. I told her I applied for a factory job and to hire someone else before I left. (Interview #14)

One of the women received several tangible benefits, including free room and board in a guest house on the property, dental insurance (through the husband's business), and the use of the car on her days off for any personal needs. In exchange for this, the woman is expected to travel with the employers on pleasure trips, to spend the summer months at the lake, and to care for the children around the clock when the wife travels with her husband on his frequent business trips. She is paid only for a forty hour work week despite any changes in schedule. As this woman remarked, "My first priority is with my employers." Moreover, she does not view the long hours as unreasonable in exchange for the extra benefits she receives. She justifies the long hours as follows.

You know the Filipino. They love to work. They are responsible people. I would feel ashamed if an employer is there, and I am not

doing anything. Anyway, I agreed to do it, so I can't blame her.
(Interview #16)

There were also many intangible benefits characteristic of the matron-client relationship, such as expressions of concern for educational goals and career plans. The gratitude that the women feel toward employers who express such concerns is evident in the following narrative.

They are concerned for me and want me to study and to have a nice future. I am grateful because I can feel how they help me. (Interview #17)

Just as important as the actual support and encouragement in pursuing educational programs was the flexibility in the work schedule which enabled the domestic worker to take a break to study. In this situation, she took time when the little boy was sleeping.

This woman also received other important benefits from her employer. The employer's recognition of the woman's family was evident in giving her one free phone call to the Philippines every month. However, despite the stipulated forty-hour work week, the woman worked from six in the morning until late in the evening after she had bathed the children (3, 4, and 5 years) and put them to bed. She also did extra babysitting on weekends without pay. Nevertheless, the woman perceived clear advantages in this employer relationship and did not feel the additional hours as exploitive but rather as an exchange of favours.

Last week, they asked a favour (babysitting). It's only happened twice. They really appreciated it. They don't pay me but in gifts, like that, not in money. (Interview #17)

A recurrent theme in most of the women's narratives was the desire to be treated like "one of the family" (Aitken, 1987). The significance of a warm, caring relationship cannot be understated. It is the quality of the relationship that is of greatest importance to the domestic worker, not the ticking of the clock. This is expressed in the following narrative.

As long as they treat you as their own family, why should you count the number of hours? I am not like that. As long as they treat me nice, I don't care. I never complain. If not for them, I am not in Canada. I still feel a big favour for my first employer. I do not forget that. They were very good to me. They help me if I have financial

problems. They treat me like their own family. I treat them like my grandparents. (Interview #15)

3. Conflictual Relationship

Bradshaw-Camball and Cohen (1988) describe the conflictual relationship as one where an employer demonstrates little concern for maintaining a fair and equitable contract, while the woman domestic worker exhibits a sense of power. There were six employment situations that could be classified as conflictual. One important base contributing to this sense of power was the socioeconomic status of the woman's family in the Philippines. In the following narrative, an employer requested that she wear a uniform when they were entertaining guests. This was her response.

The moment I heard it, I cried and cried and cried. "I am not a maid. Back home, I grew up with maids. But now here I am working as a babysitter with you guys. I am not really a maid. I have finished my nursing." To label me as a maid with an apron, what does he think of me? I was really mad! He apologized. (Interview #12)

Another base of strength upon which the women drew was the woman's high educational attainment. In the following narrative, one woman articulates her feelings regarding the lack of recognition given by employers for their qualifications and training. It also reveals how some employers devalue domestic work and, thereby, those who do it. It remains "dirty work" carried out by members of pariah groups (Rex, 1973:215).

Not all these domestics are uneducated. That is the problem of some people. They just think of the kind of job she has. They forget about what kind of mentality she has, her abilities. It's very difficult. Sometimes, you get insulted, even humiliated. "This is our housekeeper." It sounds so nasty. Do you know what it is like being addressed by your work? You have a name. Why can't they use your name? Even those guests, they look at you as if you are very small. You are just somebody for that place who has to do all this cleaning. There is an air of arrogance. What I feel about housework is that it is a noble job. It is work. What makes it dirty work is the minds of those people. The way they think about it, they forget what kind of work is being done, what energy, what abilities. All they have in mind is this person is cleaning the house. "She is a domestic. She is nothing." (Interview #2)

This woman expresses a strong sense of self. She critically appraises her situation and has a clear direction. In the following situation, despite the fact that this was the woman's first employer, she felt empowered enough to terminate her contract. This narrator feels and is able to act on the injustice of her working conditions.

I never told them about the long hours because I know they know. They should know that my contract is only eight hours. If they treat me good or like their own family, they will not do that. They should feel that I am also human, just like them. A human being can get tired anytime. She feels bored, tired. They should not let me work from 7:30 in the morning until 10:30 at night. They should know that I am tired, too. (Interview #8)

Another important reason for leaving this employer was her attitude toward the woman's attending school. When appealing to her employer "to give me a chance so that I might improve myself someday, she got mad at me." (Interview #8) This woman was highly motivated to take a vocational program in her related field of commerce. Her resolve to leave was also made possible through the support of the advocacy group for domestic workers in Winnipeg. Most importantly, she had a place to stay (the residence of the president of the MPGI) until she found a new employer. This did not prove to be an easy task, and the woman was unsuccessful in her first three job interviews as she did not have a letter of reference from the last employer.

The next narrative expresses the frustration of working for a very exacting couple. The woman was forthright in her approach to the employers. Her ability to do so was largely a consequence of the counselling that she had received from the president of the advocacy group. Having the backing of the president as well as recognizing the value of her work to the family empowered this woman to take steps to improve her employment situation.

I really get a hard time with them. They are very, very fussy. I'd dust sometimes two times a day. They check with a finger. They say the house is too dusty. Two times already they have complained. I tried to talk to them last week because I am getting very, very upset and disappointed with that family. "If you are not happy, I think that you are not happy with me." I told them that I worked in Singapore for three years and heard no complaints, not a single complaint. "Why are you making a complaint?" They say nothing. They say, "We are

very, very sorry." That's all. I am willing to leave any time. They say, "We like you and really need you." (Interview #10)

The final narrative demonstrates the important roles of all three sources of empowerment: socioeconomic status, high educational attainment, and assistance from the advocacy group.

I experienced all the very good things because my family was well off. We could afford to hire a maid.... My employer says that I start at eight in the morning and finish at eight at night. I cannot just oppose but deep in my mind.... She is a lawyer. She must know what a contract is. She knew that I was a math teacher. I thought that maybe sooner or later she would realize that she had made a mistake because, directly or indirectly, she is really taking advantage. My word is my honour.... I have learned (from the advocacy group) that every employer knows about these conditions because of the contract. Maybe in the first year, they are taking advantage. I cannot say no as a first-timer. I am not the one who is cheating. (Interview #5)

4. Relationship of Equity

The optimal working relationship is one, of course, where the employer is concerned with a fair contract and ensures that the working conditions are satisfactory. As well, the worker has a feeling of control and autonomy in performing her job (Bradshaw-Camball and Cohen, 1988). In these situations, there is no violation of the employment contract, and the worker is able to negotiate better terms or broach subjects of concern to the employer without fear of reprisal. The communication is open and two-way. Four employment situations could be classified as based on equity and fairness.

The following narrative demonstrates how relationships can change, in this case, from a matron-client relationship to one of equity. When the woman first began working for this family, she lacked self-assurance.

In Hong Kong, it is different. You are just a housekeeper. In Winnipeg, you eat together with them. I was not used to this. I have an inferiority complex. I was ashamed to sit down with them at dinner. They were very nice. I was nervous. "Maybe, they won't like me. Maybe, they will kick me out." They say, "Treat this as your own home." (Interview #3)

After three years of working for this family, the woman grew in confidence and independence. With the aid and encouragement of the employers, she learned to drive a car and took courses at the community college. The employers were extremely flexible with the living-in situation, as she had a small baby. The woman was able to plan the household schedule around the baby's needs. She had complete control over all aspects of her work within an extremely understanding and compassionate environment.

There were other situations in which the employer provided excellent working conditions, flexibility, and thoughtfulness which facilitated the women's adjustment and independence both in the workplace and in the community. This is demonstrated in the following narrative where the woman worked for a widower with young children.

I will go to my employer if there are problems with child care or with the house. Every Saturday, my employer arranges for a babysitter to look after his kids, so I could go to school. He gives me lots of considerations. (Interview #18)

This employer also provided generous access to a car for personal use, extra days off when requested, and additional paid holidays (other than the required two-week vacation pay).

Employer Power Strategies

Many of the narratives discussed in the analysis were based on the relationship between the female employer and the woman domestic worker. The mistress-servant relationship is unique in that the women share a common gender role. The treatment of the domestic worker as a family member reinforces the view of her as an extension of the housewife (Kaplan, 1985; Cohen, 1986). As a "quasi-family worker," (Aitken, 1987), she is expected to pitch in at the evening meal or to help out if the baby is fussy in the night. As a labour of love, it certainly is not recognized as real work with appropriate payment. "That's ridiculous, counting every minute. It's not the same as other work" (female employer of live-in domestic worker). Similarly, when workers are sick, there is the expectation that she will carry on.

This ideology of family member is in part supported by the domestic worker herself. In the painful separation from family and friends in the Philippines, especially as a newcomer, she counts on familial expressions of warmth and inclusiveness. "I am not after the money. My employer treats

me like a daughter.” (Interview #15) Some employers take advantage of the vulnerability of a newcomer who is lonely and isolated. To understand the desire to be treated like a family member, it is important to bear in mind some of the arduous working conditions endured by many of the women before coming to Canada. After withstanding some of these experiences, the women were grateful for any show of appreciation or kindness.

What is more difficult to understand is the exploitation by the female employer. The domestic worker plays a critical role in freeing the female employer to pursue a career or leisure pursuits. The contradiction is that the female employer exploits the very person she is dependent upon for her own autonomy and independence. Further, the domestic worker plays an important intermediary role in containing the potential disruption of conflict over the sexual division of labour in the household (Kaplan, 1985). The narratives revealed little evidence of husbands' assuming significant domestic labour responsibilities. As observed in some of the narratives, the husbands viewed their wives and domestic workers as interchangeable. This was clearly depicted in the case where, in the absence of his wife, a husband would call upon the domestic worker after ten o'clock in the evenings to prepare a late dinner. In this household, the wife did not work for pay outside the home.

Kaplan (1985) argues that both the female employer and the domestic worker are oppressed within the patriarchal household in western capitalist societies. In most of the households studied, the husband's occupation reflected a higher wage than the wife's occupation. Although subordinate to the husband, the female employer has greater status and power than the domestic worker. In her economically privileged position, she is able to hire a Filipino domestic worker to deal with “her” dilemma of juggling the demands of a career with child care and household responsibilities. It also provides a temporary solution to some of the marital tensions and conflicts that arise over sharing domestic labour in the private household. The fact that it is women generally who seek strategies to cope with the dual work role is in part explained by the powerful cultural ideologies that dictate that the care of children and the household is a woman's responsibility. Women who employ live-in domestic workers, thereby, collude in the reproduction of a gendered division of labour in the household that subordinates both of them (Kaplan, 1985; Miller, 1991).

While keeping in mind the broader structural factors that reinforce women's subordinate position in the patriarchal nuclear household, the strategies that individual female employers use to maintain their position of superiority will be examined. Kaplan (1985) suggests that a female

employer may attempt to maintain her class and race privileges by exploiting the domestic worker. She identifies several “housewife power strategies” to control the domestic worker (1985:18). Based on selected narratives, some of these strategies will be described. This discussion will also include the responses of the women employed as domestic workers. In large part, they debunk the myth of the docile Filipino domestic worker.

Division of Household Labour

A division of labour that delegates the least desirable jobs to the domestic worker reinforces the class and race differences between them (Kaplan, 1985). For women providing both child care and housekeeping duties, employment contracts usually stipulate only light housekeeping duties. Yet, the boundaries marking light housekeeping were stretched to include all forms of housework, both indoors and outdoors. Washing cars, cleaning garages, washing outdoor storm windows, and performing household repairs are clearly outside the margins of light housekeeping. These heavy jobs and the dirty jobs of cleaning toilets, ovens and fridges, and washing walls were left for the domestic worker.

Technology did not ease many of their household tasks. Some employers requested extremely labour-intensive work, from daily baskets of handwashing, ironing bedsheets, arranging cabinets and dressers, and mending, to caring for plants. One narrator remarked, “Even the plant leaves, they want them always to shine.” (Interview #1) The boundaries of class and racial status were clearly drawn around such requests for shining shoes, drawing the bed, and carrying luggage.

Control Over the Labour Process

The clearest examples of authoritarian forms of control over the labour process entailed the drawing up of daily lists and personal checks at the end of the day. Kaplan writes that the drawing up of lists is a clear sign of “who is in charge” (1989:17). One woman who dusted twice a day commented, “And still, they check with a finger.” (Interview #10) When direct supervision was not possible, other forms of coercive control were imposed. In one household, a relative would phone during the day to see if the woman domestic worker had completed a specific job.

Attempts to Maintain Dependency

Earlier analyses of the narratives revealed how many employers directly and indirectly thwarted the women's attempts at occupational mobility, whether through taking courses at the community college, doing volunteer work at hospitals or becoming involved in community organizations. With respect to the employer's attitude toward her taking volunteer work, one woman exclaimed:

They really strongly disagree with volunteer work, even the grandmother. "Why would you want to do that for?" (President at MPCI, Incident Reports)

As some of the women became more actively involved in community organizations, their employers became increasingly threatened by their growing independence. After learning that the woman working for them sought advice from the advocacy group for domestic workers, an employer angrily retorted, "You are stupid to believe some dumb girl. The people who help you are stupid." (Interview #10) Her employment was later terminated over this incident.

Responses of the Filipino Domestic Workers

The basic contradiction underlying the mistress — servant relationship — the female employer's relying upon, yet exploiting the domestic worker — generates a power struggle over their conflicting interests. How does the woman domestic worker feel about and respond to these employer tactics and attempts at control?

As newcomers, the domestic workers feel that they are relatively powerless to negotiate better terms of employment. Aiken writes:

Unfamiliar with the country and often the language, far from family and friends, isolated in an employer's home, having little contact with other workers, dependent on an employer for home, food, work, and the legal right to remain in Canada, the visa worker is powerless in negotiations with employers (1987:397).

These factors were commonly shared among the Filipino domestic workers. One narrator expressed her vulnerability as a newcomer.

My employer was very, very perfectionist. She doesn't like to see any dirt. She will even look under the bed which I don't know if it is reasonable, but How do I feel? I cannot express myself. I just find

myself with my tears dropping. This is my first time in Canada. I can't say anything. (Interview #17)

Dependency on an employer is exacerbated by the financial obligations of domestic workers to their families in the Philippines. One of the women's greatest fears is losing their jobs and with that the opportunity of staying in Canada.

All that matters is my work. My children are five and two years old (living in the Philippines with her husband). I cannot just oppose, but deep in my mind.... (Interview #6)

The president of the advocacy group confirms the fear of employer complaints and the apprehension of being unemployed.

Most of the girls are afraid of their records being broken. They want to stabilize and get a good recommendation. We don't want to destroy our names. It is very hard to reassure them. They are scared, and I am not surprised because it is very scary. It is not an easy thing to look for new work. (President of MPGI, Incident Reports)

Does toleration of exploitive working conditions signify acceptance, a passivity? Does the outward display of conformity reflect the inner thoughts and feelings of domestic workers? Cock argues that, "the domestic worker's main mode of adaptation is the adoption of a mask of deference as a protective disguise; it is a line of resistance that enables the servant to maintain her personality and integrity intact" (1989:84). Kaplan explains that it is not that the women are deferential but rather that they are trapped by racism, sexism, and the class system (1985:18). The domestic worker may be silenced by her dependency on the employer. "The girls just swallow it to keep peace." (Interview #4) Inwardly, however, she actively resists any feelings of inferiority.

Anybody that does domestic work is less than other workers. Why? If anything, employers should be educated that domestic worker are just employees with the same needs and sensitivities as whoever works for the government or those big corporations. (Interview #4)

The resistance of the Filipino women to their exploitive working conditions was most visible in their mobilization to organize an advocacy group for domestic workers in Winnipeg. The advocacy group was established during the period of the oral history project and played a pivotal role in improving the lives of Filipino domestic workers living in Winnipeg

(Cantiveros, 1991). One of the narrators describes the women's interest in organizing and their broad base of support from the Filipino community.

We only recently started to organize because there are lots of newcomers. They are still encountering the same old issues and problems that we had from the very beginning. Most of our original members are out on their own. My friend said that we had better organize. When we did organize, we had a lot of support from the Filipino community. (Interview #4)

Some of the important outcomes that the advocacy group achieved during this period included: establishing a newsletter ("Housekeeper's Newsletter"), networking with other domestic worker organizations across Canada, such as INTERCEDE and the West Coast Domestic Workers Association, writing articles for the *Filipino Journal*, organizing a speakers series, making public presentations at community meetings, for example, to the Liberal caucus, and arranging a meeting with Premier Filmon to discuss employment and immigration issues. With respect to the latter, they were successful in reducing the \$200.00 monthly room and board deduction to \$40.00 per week, on the basis of their argument that it violated the provincial *Employment Standards Act*. The advocacy group also lobbied for protection under the *Workers Compensation Act*. Domestic workers in Manitoba are currently covered under this *Act*. The women were very effective and skilful in their advocacy role. The president of the advocacy group explains:

It starts back home. Having been in universities and colleges back home, we are very active when it comes to rallies, lobbying, and demonstrations. (Our presenter) has had education in public speaking. And, she has the courage. (President, MPGI)

Conclusion

The advocacy group for domestic workers was a vital source in the creation of a sense of community among the Filipino women. Benmayer writes that community is "created through common circumstances and common struggle," and that it "builds on common histories and on bonds of national origins, class, and gender" which are expressed through the goals of the organization (1991:166). The women's interest in an action-oriented type of oral history project also generated important returns to this community. An ongoing dynamic of reciprocity emerged which furthered

the goals of the project both in the short-term and in the long-term. In the short-term, the narratives provided information vital to advocating for changes in the employment situation of live-in domestic workers. In the long-term, the narratives contributed to developing a history of the women's experiences for future generations of Filipino immigrants. Participating in the project created opportunities for the women to make meaningful contributions to their community and, for some, was empowering in the process.

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