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3

JAMAICAN DOMESTICS, FILIPINA HOUSEKEEPERS AND ENGLISH NANNIES

Representations of Toronto's foreign domestic workers[1]

Bernadette Stiell and Kim England

Canada has a long history of 'importing' (im)migrant women to fill the demand of middle class families for live-in domestic workers. Since the nineteenth century, the Canadian government has designed a number of programs to recruit women of different nationalities as domestic workers. Generally, the women who have entered Canada as domestic workers reflect broader patterns of immigration to the country – from Europe up until the 1950s, then from the Caribbean to Asia at the present time. Currently, the majority of foreign domestic workers in Canada are from the Philippines, although Europe (especially Britain) and the Caribbean continue as important source regions.

The majority of Canada's legally documented foreign domestic workers are concentrated in Ontario, of which, by far the highest proportion reside in the Toronto region (Serwonka 1991; Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Grandea 1996). Toronto has traditionally had the highest demand for foreign domestic workers, in part because it is Canada's largest city and, more recently, because of the rapid increase in women's paid employment in professional occupations. In the late 1990s, Ontario continues to be the most popular destination for new arrivals, but increasing numbers are going to other provinces, especially British Columbia (see Pratt 1997: Chapter 2 of this book).

Domesticity is a supposedly universal and 'natural' attribute of women. At the same time, paid domestic work is racialised (see also Chapter 7), and, we argue, in a context where (im)migrant women are an important source of paid domestic workers, national identities are seen as signifying a group's proclivity for domestic work, as well as the quality of the care they are able to provide. In this chapter, we explore the construction and representation of national identities, through a targeted, empirical case study of foreign domestic workers

in Toronto. Our analysis is based on interviews with domestic workers and the staff of domestic worker placement agencies. We argue that the way in which placement agents match 'suitable' employees to jobs, reinforces stereotypes pertaining to the 'natural' qualities of women of different nationalities. We also show that domestic workers' identities are influenced by the representations and constructions of others (governments, placement agencies, employers and other domestic workers), and that their everyday experiences are implicit and explicit testaments to the potency of national identity constructions.

Immigration, national identities and foreign domestic workers

> My premise is that the foreign domestic program is really two programs. One is the true temporary worker program involving British nannies and the like. This one should be left alone. The second program, involving the Caribbean and the Philippines, is, however, a sham ... very few people from this latter group come with the intention of remaining in domestic work .... And the upgrading courses that we make them take, are more for show than substance. ... So where does this leave us? ... it leaves us with a program that pumps people, who have gone through a half-assed selection assessment, into the Canadian labour market (Employment and Immigration Canada, Policy Files 8600–8610 Memorandum; cited in Daenzer 1993: 125).

More than 90,000 women have arrived in Canada, since 1981, under two federal government programs (the Foreign Domestic Movement programme 1981–92, and the Live-in Caregiver Program 1992 to the present). These programs require that domestic workers/caregivers be 'live-ins' at their employer's home for their first two years in Canada (after which, they can apply for landed immigrant status). The above quote, from an immigration officer (referring to the Foreign Domestic Movement programme), clearly reveals the powerful ways in which stereotypes about different nationalities are created and perpetuated through government programs that recruit domestic workers from particular countries. Between the mid-1950s and the early 1980s, most foreign domestic workers entering Canada were from the Caribbean. Under the FDM programme (1981–92) about 43 percent of the foreign domestic workers entering Canada were from the Philippines; 19 percent from Europe (excluding the UK), 12 percent were from the UK, and 10 percent from the Caribbean, (Macklin 1992; Murdock 1992; Grandea 1996). There are numerous critiques of immigration programmes in Canada relating to foreign domestic workers, particularly regarding their racist and sexist overtones (see Ng 1992; Arat-Koç 1992, 1997; Macklin 1992; Murdock 1992; Bakan and Stasiulis 1997, 1995). The over-representation of immigrant women of colour among foreign

domestic workers is rationalised in terms of their being predisposed to domestic work (Rollins 1985; Glenn 1992; Macklin 1992; Ng 1993; Bakan and Stasiulis 1995; see MacDonald 1998, for a discussion of naturalizing mothering, and delineating and policing the line between mother and caregiver). Macklin (1992) demonstrates this point with the example of Mary, the white Canadian employer of Delia, a Filipina domestic worker:

> Mary (can) objectify Delia in various ways that are influenced, but not precluded by, gender. For example, Mary can hardly claim that Delia is ideally suited to domestic work because she is a woman, without impugning herself, but she can fall back on *Filipina* women being 'naturally' hard-working, subservient, loyal, tidy house-keepers, and 'good with children'. In this context, race, ethnicity and culture conjoin with sex, to create a sub-category of women whose subordination other women can rationalise by projecting onto them the stereotypical 'feminine' qualities that patriarchy has used against women generally
>
> (Macklin 1992: 754, emphasis in the original).

Macklin's argument that race/ethnicity, culture and gender, are employed to create a subordinated ('foreign') group of women, would suggest that national identities are being imbued with far more subtle connotations than merely the 'country of origin'. At their most general level, the wider geographical contexts and differences associated with race/ethnicity, immigration and citizenship status, language and culture, are all encompassed by national identity. Further expansion of the term could be taken to include religious affiliation, and even education and training, thus highlighting the complex range of political, economic, cultural and social constructs that divides people. These divisions center on exclusionary/inclusionary boundaries that ascribe differential degrees of power, value and prestige, by focusing on biological, cultural or historical commonalities (Anderson 1991; Jackson and Penrose 1993; Sarup 1996). Clearly, national identities are deeply gendered, raced and classed (Radcliffe 1990, 1996; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Walter 1995). In this context, we view national identities as involving the simultaneous and inseparable operation of various social relations of difference. Together, national, gender, class, and racial/ethnic identities form interlocking, relational, socially constructed systems of oppression and privilege. Within this complex system, there is a multiplicity of individual and group identities that are positioned, and gain meaning, in relation to other identities.

In dealing with views of the national identities of 'others', it is often difficult to determine the boundary between the stereotype and reality. In stereotyping a national group, certain characteristics are conflated, generalised, and often distorted. By thus doing, individual differences are ignored (Bush 1990). For instance, as a group, Filipinas are seen as submissive, hard-working house-

keepers, whereas English 'nannies' are seen as well-trained carers of children. As we explore these preconceptions, we see that such notions of group identities not only permeate the popular consciousness, but are also reinforced by 'external' constructions of national identities by placement agency staff, as well as by the 'internalised' notions of identity of domestic workers themselves.

Foreign domestic workers in Toronto

Our purpose in this chapter is to illustrate ways in which domestic workers' national identities are constructed, and obtain meaning, in relation to one another. We draw on two sets of in-depth interviews conducted by Bernadette.[2] The first set were carried out with the owners or senior staff at twelve placement agencies specializing in foreign domestic workers (the agencies are identified by number). Interviews with agency personnel revealed clear differences in the way various national identities are represented, both in terms of their suitability for different types of domestic work and their ability to provide quality care. This reflects Bakan and Stasiulis' (1995) suggestion, that in order to be competitive, agencies project particular racialised and gendered stereotypes regarding domestic work. We examine some of the ways that national identities are engaged by placement agencies when matching jobs with workers. When asked whether their clients ask for domestic workers from specific countries of origin, numerous agents made similar comments to those quoted below:

> Employers ask for all sorts of things. For example, if they want a driver, you won't usually look at Filipinas because they usually don't drive. Or if they want housekeeping, you won't look for a trained European nanny, because they won't want to do housekeeping. So it has more to do with what the job requires rather than them saying 'I want a Filipina'. They do ask for a certain nationality, because if they've had a good experience with one nationality, they'll want that again. If they've had a bad experience with one nationality, then they'll want a different one.
>
> (Agency 5)

These remarks highlight Arat-Koç's (1992) contention that European women get employed as 'nannies', who are engaged only in child-care, while 'Third World' women get jobs as 'domestics', and are expected to do both child-care and housework, and often to work longer hours. Agency personnel therefore play an important allocative role in pre-selecting and matching domestic workers of different national identities to the expressed, or, as the staff member of Agency 5 indicates, the perceived needs of their clients.

The second set of interviews were conducted with eighteen women who were, or had been, paid domestic workers in Toronto.[3] The women interviewed

came from nine countries of origin – Canada, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Eire, Jamaica, the Philippines and Thailand. We do not pretend that this small sample is representative of all domestic workers in Toronto, rather, we believe that these women reflect some of the diverse identities and experiences of the varied group of workers in Toronto. The majority of the women were in their twenties or thirties; all but two were single (the two who were married were also the only ones with children).

The interviews with paid domestic workers demonstrate the ways in which 'external' representations of their national identities are internalised by the women themselves. The interpretations and meanings that the domestic workers attach to their occupation and experience, are inextricably interwoven with their own national identity, other people's image of their national identity with regard to domestic work, and how they define themselves relative to other foreign domestic workers. In many ways, it could be said that the identities of foreign domestic workers are formed in relation to Filipina women (who currently form the largest group of foreign domestic workers in Canada) and their English counterparts (in terms of the latter's cultural and political dominance). Throughout the rest of the chapter, we examine comments made by the interviewees, regarding domestic workers from Jamaica, the Philippines and England – the three major source countries for domestic workers in Toronto. Our aim is not only to illustrate the relational nature of identity formation, but also to show how domestic workers themselves engage stereotypes of national identities in order to draw out distinctions among themselves.

'Jamaicans, especially, are very aggressive and I'm proud of that'

In the 1870s, recruitment focused on the 'home country' (i.e. Britain), as the concern was to get women of the right national and racial stock. After the First World War, however, the government assumed a more aggressive role in recruiting alternative sources, as demand continued to outstrip the dwindling supply from Britain. Initially, north western Europeans were 'preferred', but because recruitment proved unsuccessful, programs were implemented to recruit the first non-whites from Guadeloupe, in 1911. Unlike their white counterparts, these women were bonded for two years and earned less than half of the pay of white domestic workers. The 1950s and 1960s saw the introduction of further experimental programs, such as the Caribbean Domestic Scheme, which was set up as a result of pressure from Caribbean governments to circumvent Canada's discriminatory immigration policies. This marked the shift towards domestic work being seen as the work of women of colour from Third World countries; Afro-Caribbean women, especially those from Jamaica, have been associated with paid domestic work in Canada since the 1950s (Calliste 1989; Daenzer 1993).

The interviews clearly support previous studies that highlight the importance of 'race'/racism in the construction of paid domestic work. Bakan and Stasiulis (1997) suggest that the images of paid domestic workers from the Caribbean have shifted over time. Initially, they were represented as docile, jolly and good with children ('Aunt Jemima' or the 'Black mammy'), but more recently they have been viewed as difficult, aggressive and selfish. They suggest that the shift relates to Afro-Caribbeans' increased collective action in domestic workers' rights groups (such as INTERCEDE – International Coalition to End Domestics' Exploitation – in Toronto), behaviour that contradicts their earlier, more submissive image. Certainly, the staff at a number of the agencies expressed reservations about placing Afro-Caribbean domestic workers:

> I gave up hiring West Indian women, unless they had really good references, where they'd been with a family for three years, or five years. I gave up. I would like them, but two or three months later, they'd have a couple of hundred dollars in the bank, and their boyfriend would say 'Hey man, let's party!' So I gave up. So I'm very leery of West Indians. The other thing, which I really hated myself for doing, but I'd ask them on the phone very precisely about their experience, and they'd lie through their teeth! And I'd ask for references, and the reference would have a West Indian accent, and – its their culture – it is far more important to support your friends and family than it is to tell the truth. So I gave up.
>
> (Agency 1)

There has not, however, been a total shift away from hiring Afro-Caribbean women as domestic workers. Interestingly, the owner of Agency 4 distinguishes between different types of Afro-Caribbean women. She uses age and, at least by implication, period of immigration, to differentiate between 'retired West Indians' and younger, more assertive 'Jamaicans'. She started by describing her affinity for West Indian women:

> I think West Indian people are lovely. If I'm in a jam for someone, I'll always go to one of my retired West Indians. Especially with my elderlies, the really difficult jobs, if it's an Alzheimer's patient, it's hell. So, I really use them.
>
> (Agency 4)

On the other hand, the same woman speaks much less fondly of 'Jamaicans':

> Jamaicans are the most assertive group I've ever met in my life. I can be just as tough as them though, maybe not tougher, but just as tough, if I have to be [if it doesn't work out with their employers] .... You

> have to be in a job a long time, and be very good at what you do before you tell a person who employs you where to go and what to do.
>
> (Agency 4)

Although the statement regarding 'retired West Indians' refers to elder care, it shows how certain groups of domestic workers are still potentially vulnerable to exploitative agents and employers. Long after they complete their immigration requirements, some women may have no choice but to remain in domestic work, often performing the most difficult jobs ('my elderlies') that the agencies might not otherwise fill. In her comments regarding 'Jamaicans', the owner of Agency 4 suggests that domestic workers are expected to be compliant, unassertive and to 'know their place', both in relation to employers and placement agency personnel. Seemingly, 'West Indian' women might be able to do this, whereas 'Jamaican' women cannot.

Cynthia and Felicity, the two Jamaican women interviewed, were aware of the representation of Jamaican women as difficult and aggressive. They said that they were proud of being characterised as 'aggressive'. Cynthia said:

> Jamaicans, especially, are very aggressive and I'm proud of that. We don't take bull, right. We tell you if we don't like something. [Employers] can't take that. We talk English, and we understand, we don't just answer in monosyllables. They don't feel comfortable.
>
> (Cynthia)

Cynthia and Felicity regard what is seen as 'aggression' by placement agencies, as self-respect and a strategy of resistance against their employers' attempts to exploit them. Cynthia points out that, unlike other domestic workers (she later specified Filipinas), English is her first language, which makes her feel less exploitable in English-speaking Canada. Yet, Cynthia also embraces the image of the 'caring West Indian' versus the 'aggressive Jamaican': 'You won't find a more loving nanny than a West Indian, we have more discipline. The Filipinas don't discipline the kids, or they're scared of them.' In drawing a contrast with Filipinas, Cynthia not only illustrates the relational nature of identity formation, but also shows that workers themselves engage national identities to draw out distinctions among foreign domestic workers. Moreover, her comments highlight the culture-specific construction of 'being a woman' or 'carer for children', and of 'feminine characteristics' such as caring and discipline.

Felicity and Cynthia's experience of racism, greatly shaped their feelings of respect and dignity regarding their employers. Their comments show that they see race and racism as fundamental in explaining their exploitation and the lack of respect shown by employers. Cynthia and Felicity also maintained that it is impossible to untangle 'race' from other systems of difference that shape their experience.

> It's a matter of colour too. Let's face it ... it's a combination of the fact that you're Third World, and it's racial too because they figure you're Black and you're stupid, or you're coloured and stupid, or you're Third World and stupid.... Even if you're not stupid, it doesn't make a difference!
>
> (Cynthia)

> Sometimes when they treat you badly, its because you're Black, and they really just don't have any respect for you as a human being, no matter how educated, well-spoken and no matter how good you are with the kids. But its also because they pay you to be in their house that makes it even worse, you become nothing in their eyes. I can't tell you why, there are so many reasons, but they happen together, we come as one package.... What I can't deal with is the idea that because I mop their floors, I'm stupid. They can do anything they want to me. They don't have to respect you, but they come with this disguise, 'Oh, you're part of the family.' They hug you. I don't want to be hugged! For God's sake, I'm your employee, treat me like an employee! I don't want to be hugged. But that's their way of trying to outsmart you. It's emotional blackmail. You're meant to think, 'This nice white lady, she's hugging me.' Then I'm supposed to take everything they dish out. I don't want that. I just want to be respected as a worker, with an employer–employee relationship.
>
> (Felicity)

Felicity's comments also underline what Gregson and Lowe (1994) describe as false kinship ties, what Rollins (1985) terms 'maternalism' (i.e. the highly gendered and personal nature of the paid domestic work relation). Being 'like one of the family' was interpreted by Cynthia and Felicity as a means of extracting further unpaid physical and affective labour, without the genuine caring and respect associated with familial relationships. As Cynthia said: 'You're supposed to feel so privileged to be part of their family that you overlook everything else.' Intimacy, affective labour and a high degree of maternalism, often veil the asymmetrical class relation associated with paid domestic employment. The interviews also reveal that the class relation is constructed in relation to interlocking systems of race/ethnicity and gender. The extent and way in which maternalism and false kinship relations are experienced, obviously depend on the personalities of the individual domestic worker and her employer. However, the interviews suggest that more equitable, mutually supportive and respectful relationships were most often experienced where there was greater similarity in the identities of the domestic worker and her employer.

'Many people want Filipinas because they are excellent housekeepers'

The source countries for Canada's foreign domestic workers changed considerably in the 1980s (following the introduction of the FDM). Particularly marked, was the increase in the numbers of Filipinas among entrants, from 15 percent in 1983 to 65.7 percent in 1992 (Grandea 1996). It is difficult to assess the exact reasons for the increase in Filipinas – whether through Canadian government targeting or, merely, increased supply. A number of factors have been suggested, including 'the cult of domesticity' that continues to define Filipina femininity; the Philippine tradition of high female participation rates in education and employment; and the Philippine government's vigorous pursuit of overseas employment as a means of alleviating chronic unemployment and balance of payment problems (Eviota 1992; Grandea 1996). It also seems that the shift from Afro-Caribbean, to Filipina women, was facilitated by placement agencies' practices. In contrast to the 'assertive Jamaican women', the agency staff tended to represent Filipinas as 'knowing their place' (Daenzer 1993; Bakan and Stasiulis 1995). Filipinas are portrayed as 'naturally' docile, subservient, hard-working, good-natured, domesticated, and willing to endure long hours of housework and child-care with little complaint. Placement agencies recognise and use these differences in the recruitment process:

> Some employers ask for a specific nationality .... Many people want Filipinas because they are excellent housekeepers .... I don't think they pick Filipinas because they want their children to learn the Philippine language. They are very good workers. They are also very quiet. They keep themselves to themselves. They're not looking for friends, and that, for many employers, is an asset.
>
> (Agency 3)

Such stereotypes concerning national identities seem to be all-pervasive, and are (partly) internalised by foreign domestic workers. A Filipina INTERCEDE staff member remarked that she saw Filipinas as very adaptable and able to assimilate quickly into new cultures, while remaining very cohesive as a group.

Establishing identities in relation to Filipina domestic workers was not just restricted to Jamaican women. Many of the white Canadian and European women constructed themselves relative to 'Filipina domestic workers', illustrating that race/ethnicity is integral to the construction of whiteness:

> I'm Canadian, I speak near-perfect English, and I'm educated ... our relationship [with her employer] is pretty good. Having me was a bit of an adjustment, because she was used to having a Filipina nanny, and to have someone who understands everything she says to me, and someone who's not going to fight her exactly, but not meekly let her

walk all over me, was a big change for her. Sometimes we have our altercations over it. Other than that she really likes me, and I really like her.

(Barb, Canadian)

I don't know why employers pick nannies of different nationalities, but I know mine picked me and not a Filipina because they didn't want [the children] picking up on the foreign accent. Although I have an accent too, it is not as huge or whatever, as strong. They also said that they don't mind if I speak German to the kids, but I don't though. I'm too much into English. They also wanted someone who will put their foot down with the kids, because they [Filipinas] can't. They wanted someone with a strong will, and I'm stubborn .... Filipina girls are all being treated more like a little sister, a family member. They fear the day she leaves, they depend on her so much. My experience is, and what I've heard from different people is, that they will do anything. They just say 'yes and amen', and that's it. They never say 'no', they work for low wages, which is bad for us European nannies because they will undermine everything. Demands for better wages, which will be better for them in the long run too, will be undermined by them saying yes to everything and not standing up for themselves.

(Silke, German)

Barb and Silke make reference to language (an issue also raised by Cynthia and Felicity). Silke's remarks indicate that some employers prefer European nannies because of the potential linguistic education of their children. She also reflects the prestige that is accorded to European languages and culture. Moreover, Barb and Silke's comments indicate that national identities undercut notions of a universal experience of paid domestic work, in this case because of differences in their relative understandings of acceptable levels of pay and working conditions. Silke also refers to Filipinas being treated 'more like a little sister, a family member'. Unlike Cynthia and Felicity, Joan, Naomi and Wilma, three of the five Filipinas interviewed, said that they preferred to feel 'like one of the family', and that if their employers treated them well, they were happy to work hard. Joan provides an example of conditions she has tolerated, that we suspect many other domestic workers would reject:

In my second job they got only one bedroom apartment, so they give me an extra bed in the living room. But I don't mind because they are very nice to me. They really treat me as a member of the family. We eat together, we watch TV together. They are a very nice family.

(Joan)

Edith, Joan, Jocie, Naomi and Wilma constructed their identities relative to other national groups of foreign domestic workers. They viewed their representation as hard-working and uncomplaining as a positive characteristic, setting them apart from other groups of domestic workers. Joan said: 'They [employers] like Filipinas – us – instead of other nationalities, because we never complain and we are very hard workers'. Jocie agreed, 'There's less problem [with Filipinas], because they don't complain. Even though they get into trouble, they just want to stay quiet.' However, Jocie's explanation of why this is the case, is very revealing: 'You know why? Because they don't want to get bad record from government. They want their immigrant status.' Jocie's comments are indicative of a more general trend that we noted. Rather than being a purely 'cultural' reaction or 'natural' attribute of their national identity, their hardworking and compliant 'nature' is at least a partial result of a strong desire, on the part of some of the Filipinas, to stay in Canada and gain landed immigrant status, often with the eventual aim of sponsoring the migration of their families. The goal of immigration also helps explain why a number of the Filipinas (and Jamaicans) put up with intolerable conditions and treatment from their employers. In a number of instances, domestic work provided much needed remittances to support children and relatives in their homeland – for example, Joan sent money to her husband and child still living in the Philippines. Changing jobs entailed bureaucratic delays, considerable expense, and could reduce their chances of being viewed as reliable and hard-working when they came to submit their application for landed immigrant status.

Respect and dignity are fundamental to a person's feeling of self-worth and self-esteem, and are important in defining the dynamics of the social relations of paid domestic work. Some employers did not seem to respect their Filipina employees' efforts to learn English. In fact, having their intellect demeaned was a particularly familiar experience for the Filipinas, as Joan illustrates:

Sometimes when I want to tell her something, like I keep forgetting the proper words to use to say it and I get frustrated. I have to think first and then go back to her. My first employer thinks I am stupid. They don't want me to talk to other Filipinos. They say they don't want me to use the telephones.

(Joan)

This is more evidence of domestic workers feeling that their employers consider them to be stupid. Joan's comments also indicate that her first employer actively increased her sense of isolation, by trying to prohibit contact with other Filipinas/os! The interviews with Edith, Joan, Jocie, Naomi and Wilma are full of statements that illustrate the potency of the stereotype of the uneducated, poor, 'Third World' domestic worker of colour, who cannot speak English. This stereotype can be so persuasive that it may lead to their educational achievements or middle-class background being discounted (see also Chapter 2). Joan continued to tell Bernadette about her first job:

> At my last employer, her daughter – she were talking to me, asking me about life in the Philippines ... And I was telling her, I never worked as a domestic back home. All of my family are educated, all the children and everything. And she felt that because she was not educated, she was just a high school graduate, working in Bell Canada, she felt like I am over her. She said to me, even though you are educated, they don't acknowledge your education here and you still belong to poor country. That's what she told me! I don't say anything, because I think I hurt her feelings in some way. She had to find some way to put me down. I just don't say anything. I feel bad, but I just don't say anything. I just keep quiet.
>
> (Joan)

It is evident that Joan disrupted and challenged the 'Third World domestic' stereotype. The family member re-asserted an asymmetric power relation by re-constructing Joan as a 'Third World domestic', and discounting her worth, achievements and background as 'inferior' to her own.

'She won't get a qualified English nanny to do what she wanted'

Britain continues to be an important source country for Canada's domestic workers. When the LCP (Live-in Caregiver Programme) was initially introduced, there were strict requirements regarding formal training and education,[4] and this led to a relative increase in the number of women coming to Canada from England (as opposed to Britain), especially those with NNEB[5] qualifications. There is a sense among the agencies that English women do not generally come to Canada with the aim of immigrating, unlike other groups of domestic workers:

> Now, most of the trained nannies that come in, they don't come here to emigrate, you know. A nanny is a professional who uses her profession to travel, just like other people do. You know if you had the opportunity to travel, you go.... I am talking about trained nannies from Britain. And I don't think its more than 25 percent of them stay, and it's usually because they've met Mr. Wonderful anyway, or they like the life.... The women coming in from the Third World, I mean they haven't come here to work with children, they've only come for their landed immigrant status.
>
> (Agency 3)

In addition, the LCP (at least initially) seemed to have resulted in agencies that recruited trained or NNEB nannies (such as the owner of Agency 1) attempting to re-assert the prestige of 'nanny' and promote it as a profession that should be accorded a high degree of respect. It seems that the term 'nanny,'

came only to be used to refer to formally trained nannies, such as English NNEBs. Some agency owners remarked that, during the 1980s, the term 'nanny' started to be used more generally to include 'unqualified' 'Third World' women. They seemed keen on differentiating between 'trained nannies' and 'other nannies', again positioning one group in relation to others:

> [In] England, you think of a nanny as somebody who's trained, [but] I'm using the word [nanny] in the Canadian sense. I have now come to realise that what the government think of as a nanny is just any female – you know, if you are a woman, you must be able to cook, clean and look after children. So I'm going to use the word 'nanny' in the Canadian sense, and if I'm talking about what, as a Brit, you call a nanny, I would add the adjective 'trained' nanny.
>
> (Agency 1)

This agency staff member was obviously critical of assumptions that domesticity is a natural and universal experience for women. She also illustrates the intersection of gender (women 'cook, clean and look after children'), class ('trained nanny') and national identity ('Brit') in defining one group as different from (and even superior to) the others. However, not all the agencies had completely positive views of 'English nannies'. The owner of Agency 2 had herself previously employed an English nanny: 'Some of the English nannies can be absolutely horrendous. I had one like that. I asked her to wipe down the kitchen counters for me. Then I heard her telling her friend on the phone, 'she thinks I am her skivvy'.

The argument about 'trained nannies' and their reluctance to do housework, reflects much of the rhetoric surrounding the NNEB qualification in England. Nannying is promoted as a profession, and students are encouraged to protect their professional status by resisting employers' attempts to add housework to their duties. Of course, the notion of the 'trained professional' can be regarded as a vehicle with which to legitimate the exclusion of 'undesirable others' from paid domestic work. Such views were evident in interviews with agencies and some of the domestic workers, and influence the assessment of certain qualities among domestic workers as 'highly regarded', while other qualities are seen as less desirable. For example, Maggie, the Irish woman we interviewed, reflected on the image of the trained, English nanny. Her Irish identity and lack of formal training meant that she constructed herself as distinctly 'other' in relation to English NNEB nannies.

> A lot of the English nannies are very professional, they've taken the NNEB, it's more like nannying is a career to them and they idolise Lady Di, people like that. They see the nanny as being prestigious, and it really is to them. And they take a two-year course to do it, so they take it really seriously .... The employers love that. As opposed

> to the other nannies, they have sole care of the children, educating the children, no house cleaning.
>
> (Maggie, Irish)

Maggie seemed to have absorbed the rhetoric of the NNEB qualification, commenting that NNEBs are 'very professional' and do 'no house cleaning'. Interestingly, other studies indicate that the white, upper-class image of a 'Mary Poppins' or 'Lady Di' is often not borne out in the class background of the NNEB nannies, the majority of whom are from working-class or lower middle-class backgrounds. Moreover, a significant proportion also belongs to racialised minorities (Gregson and Lowe 1994; Bakan and Stasiulis 1995).

Karen, Kath and Sue, the three NNEB trained, white, English women we interviewed, clearly saw their identity as 'nannies', as professional and prestigious (they had all arrived under the LCP). For example, Karen felt that NNEB nannies were: 'the "crème de la crème" of the profession... we are able to command high wages around the world and receive better treatment, partly because we have a higher estimation of ourselves'. Kath reiterated this point:

> England turns out all the trained nannies, because of the education system, the NNEB is pretty well regarded. I'm pretty well respected ... what you say goes, and they're willing to come around to what you want. Well this one [her current employer], more than the first one. They know what you're capable of. She's always had NNEBs. She knows what to expect.
>
> (Kath)

The prestige of the English identity and accent, and the traditional status of the white 'English nanny' continue to be held in high regard in Canada. Their significance seems greatly heightened in a culture and marketplace where 'things British' are still valued highly among some groups (including the popular consciousness of many potential employers). This was clearly understood by Karen, Kath and Sue. For instance, Sue remarked that:

> Being British, the things we get away with! Our English accents – people just bend over backwards to help us, 'Oh what a lovely accent!' 'What can I do for you?' 'Oh, since you're British, you can have it free, or you can have it cheaper!' .... [Employers] like the English accent; they like the way we speak, they like our education, the way we speak to the children. Manners, they're really keen on manners, because we think they're very important, especially table manners.
>
> (Sue)

One important issue for the English NNEB trained nannies was the perceived need to remain in an unsuitable job. When they reported enduring poor working

or living conditions, it was usually in their first job, which was often arranged before their arrival in Canada. These jobs often fell short of their expectations, but they remained with these employers in the pursuit of a good reference for their next job. As Kath described:

> My first job changed, that's why I was only there for a year. It was awful. They changed a lot of things once I got here ... they wanted a housekeeper and they took the car away from me, extended my hours, but that just wasn't on. When I tried to talk to them about it, they said they'd deal with it later, but later never came. When you're at college they drum it into you that you have to do your first year, you have to get that experience, and then a good reference. They don't tell you how easy it is to get another job over here. So I stuck it out, I was unhappy, but I did it.
>
> (Kath)

Despite Kath's confidence and assertive nature, she felt powerless to effect change with her exploitative employers. As a 'career nanny', her perceived need for a good first reference effectively removed her bargaining power and left her with no choice but to 'stick it out', even though she was unhappy. Of course, while asymmetrical relations can still exist for English NNEB nannies, many soon realised that their 'Englishness', experience and training could secure them a better-paid job with better conditions and more respect. As Sue noted:

> [My first employer] wanted the best of both worlds, but at a very cheap price. She was silly, because she won't get a qualified English nanny to do what she wanted. Other [nationalities of] nannies will work extra hours with no pay, but not me! For a lot of my English nanny friends, their first job doesn't go well. Once they've got into Canada, they'll get themselves a job that they want.
>
> (Sue)

We would like to end our discussion of 'Jamaican domestics', 'Filipina housekeepers' and 'English nannies' by emphasising that many of the women interviewed shared a number of common concerns. Almost all the domestic workers had, at some stage, experienced difficulties related to living-in, especially in dealing with employers who frequently demanded additional duties not stated on their contracts. But those who were less marginalised tended to be better able to negotiate these situations. Their locations in the systems of difference often related to their sense of self-worth in terms of their occupation and their experience of respect.

Conclusion

This chapter explored how gendered, racialised and classed representations of national identities, infuse the construction of paid domestic work in Toronto. Canada's foreign domestic worker immigration policies contain explicit and implicit understandings of which national groups should perform particular kinds of paid domestic work. As the demand for live-in domestic workers has increased, so have the number of domestic worker placement agencies. These agencies have taken up some of the recruiting and selection functions that were previously the domain of the government. By the very act of matching foreign domestic workers with jobs, agency staff help create and perpetuate images of which national identities are best suited to what types of jobs. We also investigated the internalisation of these representations by the domestic workers themselves – those whose everyday experiences are partially predicated on the various definitions of their employment suitability, which in turn are based on constructions of their national identities.

Central to our argument is an emphasis on interlocking, relational systems of difference, and how identities are expressed through representations, language, the practices of various 'gatekeepers', and the lived experience of foreign domestic workers. Thus, it is not simply a matter of any one axis of difference operating in isolation: the NNEB nannies, for example, cannot extricate their 'Englishness' from their training; neither can the Filipinas, who are stereotyped as 'naturally enjoying' housekeeping. National identities are constructed through mutual imbrication with other social relations of difference, especially gender, race/ethnicity and class. We have attempted, in this chapter, to provide insights into the dynamic, intersubjective constitution of such national identities.

Notes

1 This chapter is a rewritten version of two previously published papers (England and Stiell 1997; Stiell and England 1997). We thank the staff and volunteers of INTERCEDE for their time, and for access to their resources. Thanks also go to the 'foreign domestic workers' and agency staff who participated in our research. We are grateful to Janet Momsen for giving us the opportunity to further disseminate our work.

2 I (Bernadette) conducted the interviews, and quickly realised that my own identity was significant in the subtle and not-so-subtle interactions between the participants and myself (this issue has recently received a great deal of attention from geographers: see, for example, England 1994; Katz 1994; Moss 1995). My country of origin (England), language, accent (that of South East England), race and culture (British–West Indian), education (graduate student at the University of Toronto), and gender, all, to some extent, affected the negotiation of the 'researcher–researched' relationship. I was able to relate with great ease to the English and Irish women, and we talked freely about our experience of being 'Anglos' in Canada.

There were also certain points of connection between myself and the Jamaican women, in terms of a shared 'West Indian' identity – they disclosed a number of experiences and opinions that I do not believe they would have so readily revealed to a Canadian or white English interviewer (like Kim!). Communication was also facilitated by the fact that they saw me as a West Indian (albeit British-born), who was struggling, as they were, to settle, study and move forward in a foreign country. It must be said, however, that there were occasions when they assumed rather too much common ground between us, and I was unable to appreciate fully the subtle nuances of everything they.

Perhaps the greatest social distance was that between the Filipinas and myself; this was, in part, due to a lack of shared language fluency, and my unfamiliarity with their culture (all the interviews were conducted in English). I attended a number of INTERCEDE meetings and was able to talk more informally with domestic workers generally, especially Filipinas, who constitute the majority of the membership. Kim and I decided that I should conduct more interviews with Filipinas – not only because they are the largest group of foreign domestic workers in Toronto, but also because I wanted to obtain a clearer picture of the range of their individual experiences and the complexities of their social worlds.

3 A decision was made to concentrate on the domestic workers and placement agencies, rather than the employers. The role, attitudes and opinions of employers would form another, highly informative study, but were outside the scope of this research. Moreover, several of the domestic workers said they would have refused to participate in the study had their employers also been involved. It is also likely that the women would have been far more inhibited when giving their opinions and talking about their experiences, if their employers were also interviewed.

4 Following intense lobbying from advocacy groups such as INTERCEDE, the requirements were amended, so that applicants could substitute one year of domestic work experience for the formal training requirement (Velasco 1997). This led to a relative decline in those coming from Britain, and a relative increase in those coming from the Philippines.

5 The NNEB (National Nursery Examination Board) diploma is offered only in Britain. It is a two-year, post-secondary training programme and is one of the most widely recognised qualifications in childcare.

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