
“They think you’re as stupid as your English is”†: constructing foreign domestic workers in Toronto

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Abstract. In Canada, paid domestic work is often associated with (im)migrant women from a variety of countries of origin. We critically analyse Canada’s foreign domestic worker programmes, noting the shifting definitions of which nationalities should participate. We note how gendered, racialised, and classed constructions of national identities infuse these programmes. We then turn to an empirical analysis of how foreign domestic workers are constructed in Toronto, where demand is the highest in Canada. In particular, we investigate how the practices of domestic worker placement agencies reinforce images about which national identities supposedly have qualities that make them best suited to certain types of domestic work. Finally, we explore how domestic workers’ constructions of their occupation are interwoven with their own national identities, the (partial) internalisation of others’ images of them, and how they define themselves in relation to other domestic workers.

Introduction

In Canada, paid domestic work is often associated with (im)migrant women from a variety of countries of origin. Canada has been importing ‘foreign’ women as domestic workers since the 19th century. Generally, the countries of origin of these women reflect the broader changes in the pattern of immigration to Canada—from predominantly European countries up until the 1950s to ‘Third world’ countries at the present time. Currently, the majority of foreign domestic workers⁽¹⁾ in Canada are from the Philippines or the Caribbean. However, recent changes in Canada’s immigration policies regarding domestic workers have resulted in fewer entrants from the Third World and an increase in the number from Europe, especially England (as opposed to Britain). Thus women foreign domestic workers in Canada are from a range of national groups. Our paper is hinged on two concepts. First, we are concerned with domesticity as a supposedly universal and ‘natural’ attribute of women. Second, domestic work is racialised, and, we argue, in a context where (im)migrant women are an important source of domestic workers, national identities are employed to signify a group’s proclivity for domestic work as well as the quality of the care that they provide.

We begin by exploring two sets of literature in the context of the (im)migration and employment of paid foreign domestic workers in Canada. In the first literature the construction of national identities is considered, and in the second literature issues related to the (im)migration of foreign domestic workers are examined. Then we present a critical appraisal of Canada’s foreign domestic worker programmes, paying particular attention to the racialised, classed, and gendered construction of these policies.

† Comment by Anna, a Hungarian paid domestic worker in Toronto.

⁽¹⁾ We use ‘domestic workers’ as an umbrella term. As Gregson and Lowe (1994) discuss, the terms used to describe people engaged in paid domestic work (for example: ‘domestic worker’, ‘nanny’, ‘mother’s help’, ‘au pair’, and ‘caregiver’) are confused and confusing.

In this context, we examine the state's explicit and implicit definition of which national groups should perform paid domestic work. Initially, recruitment and selection were mediated by government officials. However, as the demand for live-in foreign domestic workers has grown, so have the number of domestic worker placement agencies, and they have taken up some of these recruitment and selection functions. The staff at placement agencies have become another set of 'gatekeepers' in terms of matching jobs to potential employees. We employ a targeted empirical case study of the construction of foreign domestic work in Toronto, where demand has traditionally been highest. For our analysis we draw on interviews with the staff at placement agencies and foreign domestic workers. We examine how these agencies engage racialised, gendered, and classed representations of different national identities of foreign domestic workers, especially in terms of which are best suited to particular types of domestic work and which provide the best quality of care. Identities are formed through relations of intersubjectivity and involve self-representations (how groups of or individual foreign domestic workers constitute themselves) and representations (how a particular group or individual is constructed by others—the government, placement agencies, and other domestic workers). Last, we investigate the (partial) internalisation of these constructions by the domestic workers who reinscribe national identities through their everyday lived experiences.

The construction of national identities

There is a growing interest in the formation of national identities, and it has been suggested that social and cultural geography would benefit from "an exploration of contemporary national identities and experiences as lived and understood by people in their everyday lives" (Rogers, 1992, page 522). National identities are constructs and mean much more than merely 'country of origin'. They also encapsulate the wider geographic contexts and subtle differences associated with social relations of immigration and citizenship, language and culture, and can also be expanded to include religious affiliation, education, and training. National identities highlight the various cultural, economic, political, and social constructs which divide people into different collectivities, based on exclusionary-inclusionary boundaries which focus on biological, cultural, or historical claims in common (Anderson, 1991; Chambers, 1993; Jackson and Penrose, 1993; Sarup, 1996).

National identities are deeply gendered, 'raced', and classed (also see Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Gilroy, 1987; Radcliffe, 1990; 1996; Walter, 1995). The critical point here is that national identities involve 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. Thus there are a multiplicity of individual and group identities within these systems that are positioned and gain meaning in relation to other identities. Identities have two intertwined meanings: the self-defined sense of who we are; and, second, how we are constructed by 'outsiders'. In this paper we explore these ideas through an investigation of the construction of foreign domestic workers in Toronto. We take on board Rogers's (1992, page 522) argument that in much of cultural and social geography "nation appears as an implicit or silent container of social relations of difference. 'Race'/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality are all identities which are constituted in specific national contexts" and consider how various (gendered, racialised, and classed) national identities are recast in the context of foreign domestic work in Toronto.

Dealing with the representations of non-Canadian national identities highlights the fuzzy boundary between national identity and national stereotype. Clearly, stereotypes

about different national identities abound. Filipinos as submissive, British as reserved, Americans as loud, and so on. As Bush (1990, page 13) remarks, stereotypes provide "a composite picture of an individual which, while reflecting an element of reality, distorts it. It is inflexible and can exhibit a massive durability, even in the face of historical change." And Young (1990) discussing (and quoting) Bhabha, argues that:

"contrary to what the very word 'stereotype' might imply, what is at issue is not a straightforward matter of crudity of the stereotype as opposed to the complexity of the actual people being characterised. [Bhabha] argues rather that 'the colonial stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself'" (page 143).

By stereotyping a particular national identity, certain characteristics are universalised and even naturalised, whereas individual differences are neutralised. Taken with that tendency to construct nurturing and domesticity as natural, rather than acquired, attributes of women, a (good or bad) experience with one member of a particular national group gets expanded to the whole group. Thus, Filipino domestic workers are seen as naturally good housekeepers, and English domestic workers are seen as well-educated nannies properly trained to look after children. The images of and language used to describe different national identities of foreign domestic workers and the connotations they imbue not only pervade popular consciousness but also, as we shall explore, are reinforced by federal immigration policies and local placement agencies, as well as by an individual's national identity of themselves and of others.

Paid domestic work, (im)migration, and difference

The relationship between (im)migration and domestic work has been a prominent and continuing theme in the interdisciplinary literature about domestic workers (for example, see Colen, 1989; Enloe, 1989; Robinson, 1991). For example, Colen (1989), in her study of West Indian domestic workers in New York City, remarks that "migration and domestic work are part of an international solution to women's problems within a world economic system" (page 172). The recruitment of Third World women as domestic workers is structurally linked to the global economy, uneven patterns of international development, and international migration patterns and regulations. The legacy of colonialism, coupled with increasing indebtedness of Third World countries has created large supplies of female migrant labour to satisfy the demand of Canadian middle-class families (Bakan and Stasiulis, 1994; Satzewich, 1989).

Geographers have highlighted the importance of women's migration flows and patterns at the rural-urban, regional, and international scale (for example, see Chant, 1992; Momsen and Townsend, 1987), but, relative to other disciplines, have paid little attention to domestic worker migration specifically. Important exceptions include Radcliffe's (1990) work on rural-to-urban domestic worker migration in Peru, and Mattingley's (1996) on Mexican domestic worker migration to the USA. More generally, citizenship and immigration have become important themes for geographers (Kobayashi, 1993; Kofman, 1995; Smith, 1989; 1990; 1993; Staeheli and Cope, 1994). Smith contends that in establishing the rules governing immigration in terms of entry, exit, and settlement, the state defines citizenship and immigration status. In so doing, the state also defines a particular group's economic, political, and social worth. This, in turn, dictates access to a range of rights and privileges in terms of labour protection, residency, and social and political rights.⁽²⁾ For instance,

⁽²⁾ In the United Kingdom, some foreign domestic workers enter on their employers' passports and actually have no individual rights.

since 1981 domestic workers in Canada on temporary employment visas have been *legally* required to live in the home of their employer and are not permitted to change employer without prior approval from Immigration Canada. These aspects of Canada's foreign domestic worker policies seem exceptional in the Canadian context, given the country's postwar trend towards liberalising immigration policies and expanding citizenship rights.

Paid domestic work is 'women's work'—98% of foreign domestic workers in Canada are women—and involves performing highly gendered domestic and nurturing roles. Generally, domestic workers are engaged in child care and housework, although, as our research reveals, the amount and type of work can vary considerably. We contend that one of the factors that can influence the experience of paid domestic work for particular women is their specific combination of 'race'/ethnicity, class, and national identity. Given that domestic work is racialised and has been "the most prototypical job for racial-ethnic women" (Glenn, 1986, page ix) it is not surprising that the difference that 'race'/racism makes to the experience of domestic work has been a predominate theme in a number of studies of domestic workers in Canada (Arat-Koç, 1992a; 1992b; Barber, 1991; Silvera, 1989) and the USA (Colen, 1989; Rollins, 1985; Romero, 1992; Thornton-Dill, 1988). However, most previous literature on domestic workers tends to concentrate on the 'race'—ethnicity, class, and gender issues experienced by *one* ethnocultural group of domestic workers, such as Afro-Caribbean Canadians (Calliste, 1989; Silvera, 1989), African-Americans (Rollins, 1985; Thornton-Dill, 1988), Black South Africans (Cock, 1980), Chicanas (Romero, 1992), and Japanese-Americans (Glenn, 1986). Few have looked at differences *among* domestic workers.

We want to capture some of the diversity among Canada's foreign domestic workers in the context of the gendered, classed, and racialised construction of their national identities. This diversity means that, although the experience of domestic work contains some commonalities (for example, isolation and low pay), domestic workers are not a monolithic category and there is no one universal domestic worker experience. Indeed, as Arat-Koç (1992b) notes,

"It is widely known that a hierarchy exists among domestic workers [in Canada]. Those from Western Europe are generally employed as 'nannies', expected to be involved only in child-care. They are likely to get higher pay, better treatment, and recognition for their work. However, foreign domestics from the Third World are expected to do both child-care and housework and receive less pay and recognition for their contribution" (page 239).

In short, in Canada at least, it seems that foreign domestic workers' relative worth is judged according to the poverty (or wealth) of their country of origin (Arat-Koç, 1992b; Bakan and Stasiulis, 1994; 1995; Barber, 1991). In addition, as we will show, paid domestic work is infused with stereotypes regarding different national identities, which are perpetuated at the state level and percolate through subsequent layers of decisionmaking by placement agencies and the everyday lived experience of foreign domestic workers.

Canada's foreign domestic worker immigration policies

By the early 1970s the paid employment of women in Canada was the norm, and many of these women were also mothers, but Canada's child-care provision remained inadequate. As women began to hold more of the well-paid, high-status managerial and professional jobs, middle-class families increasingly sought an alternative solution to the child-care crisis: there was a marked rise in the demand for paid.

live-in domestic workers.⁽³⁾ In the British context, Gregson and Lowe (1994) have traced the connections between the rise of the service classes and the revival of paid domestic work. In marked contrast to the Canadian situation we are studying, the British situation led them to examine paid domestic workers who were predominantly *living-out* and came from *within* Britain. However, in the 1970s Canada's continuing chronic shortage of people willing to take paid domestic work (even at times of high unemployment) because of low pay, poor status, and the denial of employment-related benefits, led the Canadian government to develop new schemes to bring women to Canada to work exclusively as *live-in* domestic workers. That the government viewed importing domestic workers as a partial solution to the child-care crisis is evident in the following statement:

“as the labour force participation of mothers continues to increase, the need for quality child-care services to meet the growing demand will pose ever increasing problems for Canadian families. Because of this, we must accept that the demand for foreign domestics is not likely to decrease in the near future” (EIC, 1988).

Canada's long tradition of importing women as domestic workers goes back to the 19th century when the influx of middle-class, European immigrants increased the demand for household servants. Initially, this demand was met by working-class women already settled in Canada, but by the end of the century industrial expansion attracted such women to factory work. The constant scarcity of domestic servants prompted associations of upper-middle-class women to organise the recruitment of women from abroad. In the 1870s these groups pressured the government into cooperative projects with the ‘home country’ (Britain), where similar women's groups were actively encouraging the departure of unemployed, unmarried, working-class women. The Canadian Immigration Department was involved with advertising as well as setting up a comprehensive network for the selection and ‘assisted passage’ of domestic workers across the Atlantic. This was closely linked to Canada's nation-building efforts at the time—British women were considered to be of the right national and ‘racial’/ethnic stock. They were seen as ‘belonging’ to Canada, a message conspicuous by its absence in subsequent immigration policies (Arat-Koç, 1992b; Barber, 1991; Macklin, 1992).

Owing to intolerable working conditions, many of these women left domestic work as soon as they could. Demand continued to outstrip supply, but rather than improve the rates of pay, living arrangements, and overall status to increase the supply from within Canada, a number of programmes were implemented to recruit women from abroad. For example, after World War I the supply from Britain dwindled and the government assumed a more aggressive stance in recruiting from alternative sources. Preference was given to northern and western European women, with more rigid restrictions placed on ‘nonpreferred’ parts of eastern Europe (Daenzer, 1993). During the 1950s and 1960s the Caribbean Domestic Scheme was set up to circumvent the racially restrictive immigration regulations of the time, and allowed mainly single, well-educated Jamaican and Barbadian women to emigrate to Canada and become landed immigrants, providing they spend one year in domestic service before choosing other work (Calliste, 1988). This scheme also marked the beginning of the shift from domestic work being largely white women's work to it being associated with women of colour from the Third World.

⁽³⁾ Among the reasons for increased demand are flexibility in scheduling work (most other child-care arrangements have fixed hours) and, if there is more than one child, child-care (arrangements for children of different ages are often at different locations); and it is often cheaper to hire one *live-in* domestic worker than to pay for a number of child-care arrangements. In addition, some mothers may feel that care in the home is better for their child(ren) than other forms of nonparental care.

In 1973, the relatively open immigration of domestic workers ended. The federal government introduced the Temporary Employment Authorisations Program which ensured that the continuing domestic labour shortage was filled by migrant women with short-term contracts for a specific period and with a specific employer (EIC, 1980). This marked an important turning point in the government's recruitment of foreign domestic workers. Previously, most (but certainly not all) domestic workers entered with landed immigrant status. Landed immigrants have practically the same rights as full citizens, except that they cannot vote or hold political office or jobs involving national security (landed immigrants are eligible to apply for citizenship once they have been in Canada for three years). From 1973, foreign domestic workers tended to enter Canada on temporary work authorisations without the rights associated with landed immigrant status, yet being effectively indentured to their employers.

During the 1970s and 1980s foreign domestic workers rights groups began to emerge. Part of their concern was the abuse and exploitation of domestic workers, but they also lobbied the government to change rules associated with the (im)migration of foreign domestic workers. Indeed, intense criticism and lobbying by groups, such as INTERCEDE (International Coalition to End Domestic Exploitation: a Toronto-based domestic workers' advocacy group that began in 1979),⁽⁴⁾ about the temporary work authorisations encouraged the government to introduce the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM) programme in 1981. Under this programme, domestic workers could apply and be considered for landed immigrant status from within Canada, following a two-year period on a temporary work authorisation. However, during this two-year period the domestic worker was confined to *live-in* work with the employer named on the authorisation (previously, living in was preferred but not mandatory). In addition to completing the two years of live-in domestic work, eligibility for landed immigrant status was contingent on domestic workers having a good employment record and good language skills. Beyond this there was a litany of requirements to be fulfilled, including upgrading educational qualifications, performing voluntary work in the community, demonstrating financial management, and having 'personal suitability' and proven potential for 'self-sufficiency' (CEI, 1991).

The FDM remained intact until 1992, when it was reviewed by the government. In this instance, lobbying by a different advocacy group was pivotal. The Canadian Coalition for In-Home Care represents the concerns of employers, agencies, and their (predominantly European) 'nannies-caregivers' (given the different objectives of INTERCEDE versus the Coalition, it is interesting to note the difference in the terminology between INTERCEDE's 'domestic workers' and the Coalition's 'nannies-caregivers'). Their stated objectives include government liaison "to develop procedures that will efficiently deliver an employment programme to meet the needs of Canadian in-home employers, primarily working parents" and "advocating for easier access to in-home child-care givers through an overseas programme" (CCIH, no date).

Spurred by the recession of the early 1990s and supposedly high numbers of unemployed domestic workers in Canada, especially in the Toronto area, the government placed a moratorium on arrivals under the FDM early in 1992, and later that year introduced the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP). Employees (now officially

⁽⁴⁾ A 1991 INTERCEDE study (Serwonka, 1991) found that about 95% of INTERCEDE's members were originally from the Third World, compared with about 75% of the entrants under the FDM programme. The majority were Filipino (65%–70%) and Caribbean (20%–25%); 5%–10% were Spanish-speaking (mainly from Latin America); 5%–10% were Chinese-speaking; and less than 5% were from Europe. This compared with the 65% Filipino, 5% Caribbean, 15% European, and 15% of other nationalities entering Canada under the FDM programme in 1991.

called 'caregivers' rather than 'domestic workers') hired under this new program are to provide unsupervised child-care, senior home-support care, or care of the disabled, in private households. Although housekeeping is not a stipulated criterion, this function is still often expected of caregivers by the government and many employers. The LCP removes the FDM's education upgrading courses and voluntary work eligibility requirements for landed status. Moreover, in an effort to curb the incidence of abuse and exploitation, the government pledged to provide foreign domestic workers with information regarding their employment rights under Canadian law and to support the counseling function of domestic workers' advocacy groups (EIC, 1993).

The LCP maintains two features of the FDM—the mandatory live-in requirement and the initial two-year temporary status—which domestic workers' advocacy groups had fought against. In addition, the LCP introduced strict requirements for entry that essentially act as screening mechanisms. The LCP dictates that recruits must be fluent in either English or French, have successfully completed the equivalent of a Canadian Grade 12 education, and have undertaken six months of full-time, classroom-based training related to the caregiving of children, the elderly or disabled [this includes the British National Nursery Examination (NNEB) qualification—a two-year postsecondary programme]. These changes can be regarded as an effort to 'professionalise' the occupation; alternatively, they can be seen as raising the standards for entry to 'compensate' for the reduction in the number of requirements for landed immigrant status (Macklin, 1992). On the other hand, the shift from the FDM to the LCP can be interpreted as an effort to curb Third World immigration by women arriving as domestic workers. Macklin (1992) notes that under the FDM 85% of those from the Philippines and 70% from the Caribbean received landed immigrant status, compared with 50% from Britain and 30% from Europe (also, see CEI, 1991). And consider the comments of one immigration official:

"My premise is that the foreign domestic programme [the FDM] 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*" (EIC, Policy Files 8600-10 memorandum; cited in Daenzer, 1993, pages 247–248, emphasis added).

These comments clearly reveal the powerful ways in which stereotypes about different national identities are created and perpetuated through government programmes that recruit domestic workers from particular countries.

Not surprisingly, the LCP has come under attack for discriminating against 'Third World' women, as few have access to secondary or postsecondary education or to officially recognised training courses⁽⁵⁾ (even Eire does not offer a recognised course for nannies) (Léger and Rebick, 1993; *Toronto Star* 1993). The programme also neglects cross-cultural differences; for example, in the Philippines, twelve years of education would include a university education. The six-month-training-course requirement received the most criticism. It was seen by some as highly biased, reflecting the assumptions and needs of employers, employment agencies, and other

⁽⁵⁾ Disturbingly, some travel companies and recruitment agencies in the Philippines have even tried to capitalise on this new requirement by advertising 'six-month caregiver training', with expensive enrolment fees, potentially exposing vulnerable Third World women to further exploitation (INTERCEDE, 1993).

business concerns. As these courses are more generally available in Britain, the new policy obviously disadvantages those applicants from other regions of Europe and the Third World.

In mid-1993, after extensive lobbying by domestic workers' advocacy groups and some more broadly based women's groups, Immigration Canada agreed to allow applicants to substitute a year's practical experience for the six-month training requirement [it is generally Third World women who enter with practical experience, and European (or, more specifically, English) women who enter with training]. However, the education requirement remains. Of those domestic workers who gained landed immigrant status in 1989, about one-half of those from the Caribbean and the Philippines and about a fifth of the Europeans had less than Grade 12 education (Macklin, 1992; Murdock, 1992). Under the new rules these women would have been refused entry into Canada. Immigration Canada's justification for the Grade 12 education requirement is that by the turn of the century 65% of all jobs in Canada will require at least a Grade 12 education. They argue that those domestic workers who apply for landed immigrant status will be unable to succeed outside the paid domestic labour force without this level of education (CEI, 1992).

Academics have offered a number of critiques of Canada's foreign domestic worker policies, particularly regarding their racist and sexist overtones (see Arat-Koç, 1992a; 1992b; Bakan and Stasiulis, 1994; 1995; Macklin, 1992; Murdock, 1992; Ng, 1986; 1992). As Bakan and Stasiulis (1994) point out:

"The anomalous features of the foreign domestic program do not, however, mean that it is a racist and sexist policy in contrast to other Canadian policy areas which are impartial, fair and universal. Rather, it is anomalous only in the degree of its transparency, revealing and highlighting ideological and institutionalised processes that are more commonly hidden" (page 19).

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 75% of the 83 730 foreign domestic workers entering Canada were women of colour and from the Third World, but especially the Philippines¹⁶ (Macklin, 1992; Murdock, 1992). The more stringent entry requirements of the LCP have had a dramatic effect. The number of arrivals is substantially reduced in comparison with the FDM programme (this was partly because of a freeze on recruitment, imposed because of supposedly high unemployment among paid domestic workers); and there has been a significant shift in the source countries. In 1991 (prior to the introduction of the LCP) 68% of the FDM arrivals were from the Philippines, and 4.5% were from England (as opposed to Britain); in 1992 (after the introduction of the LCP) only 7.5% of arrivals were from the Philippines, whereas 30% were from England (*Globe and Mail* 1993). Despite this, the then Immigration Minister, Bernard Valcourt, insisted that "there will not be a fundamental shift in the source countries from which the [LCP] recipients come" (quoted in Murdock, 1992, page 61).

¹⁶ In 1983 15% of the entrants were from the Philippines, by 1990 this figure was 58%. It is difficult to assess the reasons for the switch to, and predominance of, Filipinos arriving under the FDM programme. It might be the result of Canadian government targeting or of increased supply from the Philippines (Eviota, 1992; Eviota and Smith, 1984). At the same time, Canadian employers seemed to favour Filipinos because they are well-educated (one of INTERCEDE's studies of its members revealed that 68% had postsecondary education) and speak relatively good English.

Paid domestic work in Toronto

By far the highest proportion of legally documented, foreign domestic workers in Canada reside in the Toronto area. Toronto has traditionally had the highest demand for foreign domestic workers, in part this is because it is Canada's largest city, and more recently because it has seen a rapid increase in the paid employment of women in professional occupations. Over half (54%) of the arrivals under the FDM programme resided in Ontario, of whom 60% lived in the Toronto area (Serwonka, 1991). Under the LCP policy, Ontario continues to be the most popular destination for new arrivals. However, increasing numbers of caregivers are going to other provinces, especially British Columbia. Not surprisingly, then, most Canadian research on foreign domestic workers has focused on Toronto (Bakan and Stasiulis, 1994; 1995; Cohen, 1991; Serwonka, 1991; Silvera, 1989), and our study is no exception.

For the empirical portions of the paper we draw on an analysis of data gathered in two phases. The first phase covered a six-month period of what can be loosely described as participant observation. The second phase consisted of taped in-depth interviews with foreign domestic workers and with Toronto placement agents specialising in foreign domestic workers.⁽⁷⁾ The first phase of the research involved a number of research strategies that provided the background for the study as well as the necessary preparation for the in-depth interviews. These strategies included: (1) attending the monthly meetings of INTERCEDE; (2) conducting supplementary interviews with INTERCEDE's staff and the President of the Canadian Coalition for In-Home Care; (3) contacting all twenty two of the placement agencies that advertised under 'nannies' in the *Toronto Yellow Pages* to ascertain when they began business and whether they dealt with foreign domestic workers; (4) speaking with the senior staff at or owners of those agencies that placed foreign domestic workers (twelve of the twenty-two agencies); and (5) informal 'chats' with over fifty foreign domestic workers (some of whom were contacted through INTERCEDE, some via personal contacts and snowballing, and others met in parks where foreign domestic workers were known to take their 'charges'). All the participants in this phase of the research were informed, ahead of time, about the project. The information gathered during this phase of the research informed our analyses, but the lengthy quotes that appear in the remainder of the paper are only from the in-depth interviews described below (except for the interview with the President of the Canadian Coalition for In-Home Care, who agreed to being quoted).

During the second phase of the research two sets of taped in-depth interviews were conducted. The first set were with the owners or senior staff at half of the placement agencies that specialised in foreign domestic workers (the agencies are identified by number). The second set were interviews conducted with seventeen women who were, or had been, paid domestic workers in Toronto (table 1; the women are identified by pseudonyms). Clearly, the sample of foreign domestic workers is not intended to be representative in any statistical issue. Instead, our intention is to reflect and illustrate some of the experiences of women from the different nationalities who make up the entrants to Canada's foreign domestic worker programmes.

⁽⁷⁾ The decision was made to concentrate on the domestic workers and placement agencies. The role, attitudes, and opinions of the employers would form another, highly informative, study, but these were outside the scope of this study. Moreover, a number of the domestic workers said they would have refused to participate in the study had their employers also been involved. Furthermore, it was likely that the women would have been far less candid and open in expressing their opinions and experiences if they thought that they would be the subject of discussion with their employers. Ideally, a separate group of employers should be interviewed, as their choices and actions play a part in this issue.

Table 1. Characteristics of the domestic workers interviewed.

Name	Country of origin	'Race'	First language	Age (years)	Marital status	Number of children
Naomi	Philippines	Nonwhite	Tagalog	28	Single	None
Wilma	Philippines	Nonwhite	Tagalog	30	Single	None
Jocie	Philippines	Nonwhite	Tagalog	34	Single	None
Joan	Philippines	Nonwhite	Tagalog	32	Married	One
Edith	Philippines	Nonwhite	Tagalog	50s	Single	None
Felicity	Jamaica	Nonwhite	English	35	Married	Two
Cynthia	Jamaica	Nonwhite	English	30	Single	None
Amy	Thailand	Nonwhite	Thai	30	Single	None
Karen	England	White	English	23	Single	None
Sue	England	White	English	23	Single	None
Kath	England	White	English	22	Single	None
Ingrid	Germany	White	German	29	Single	None
Silke	Germany	White	German	30	Single	None
Anna	Hungary	White	Hungarian	27	Divorced	None
Alena	Hungary	White	Hungarian	26	Single	None
Maryse	France	White	French	27	Single	None
Maggie	Republic of Ireland	White	English	29	Single	None

The value of these voices is in their individual richness, which remain meaningful in their own right, despite their inappropriateness for extrapolation to generalisations or quantifiable trends.

The women interviewed were from eight countries of origin—England, France, Germany, Hungary, Republic of Ireland, Jamaica, Philippines, and Thailand. Reflecting the relative youthfulness of domestic workers in general, the majority of the women interviewed were in their twenties and early thirties; all but two were single (the two who were married were also the only ones with children). Apart from two, all had arrived in Canada between 1986 and 1992 under the FDM regulations. The other two arrived in 1993 under the LCP, and, not insignificantly, are both English.⁽⁸⁾ Seven of the women became landed immigrants through the FDM programme; of the others, three were on open permits (an immigration status between a temporary work authorisation and landed immigrant status), and seven were on temporary work permits. Most of the women lived in, but three lived out (they had fulfilled the two-year live-in requirement), and another three (who were no longer on temporary work permits) had recently found other employment.

Constructing 'domestics' and 'nannies'

In this section we explore some of the ways that national identities are engaged by placement agencies when matching jobs with workers and by domestic workers themselves in the construction of their identities. Part of our purpose is to illustrate that these identities are constructed and obtain meaning in relation to one another. Interviews with agency personnel revealed clear differences in the way various national

⁽⁸⁾ Although all three of the English women interviewed were NNEBs, it must be remembered that only a small proportion of those who gain the qualification in Britain actually go overseas. In this paper we focus on the construction of foreign domestic workers *within* Canada. However, another interesting project might be to explore the process of selectivity through which particular people migrate to Canada to become foreign domestic workers.

Table 1 continued

Programme entered into Canada by, and year of arrival	Immigration status	Current job (live-in, live-out)
FDM, 1991	Temporary	Live-in
FDM, 1990	Open	Cashier ^a
FDM, 1989	Open	Live-in
FDM, 1987	Landed	Cashier ^a
FDM, 1986	Landed	Housekeeper, Live-out
FDM, 1992	Temporary	Live-in
FDM, 1991	Temporary	Live-in
FDM, 1989	Landed	Cashier ^a
LCP, 1993	Temporary	Live-in
LCP, 1993	Temporary	Live-in
FDM, 1989	Open	Live-in
FDM, 1991	Temporary	Live-in
FDM, 1986	Landed	Live-out
FDM, 1990	Open	Live-out
FDM, 1991	Open	Live-in
FDM, 1991	Temporary	Live-in
FDM, 1986	Landed	Live-in

Note: FDM, Foreign Domestic Movement; LCP, Live-in Caregiver Program.

^aFDM entrant with open or landed immigrant status who no longer works as a domestic.

identities are represented both in terms of their suitability for different types of domestic work and in terms of their ability to provide quality care. At the same time, the interpretation and meanings that the domestic workers attach to their occupation and experience are inextricably interwoven with their own national identity, others' images of their national identity with regard to domestic work, and how they define themselves relative to other foreign domestic workers.

'Selling a quality product'

Most of the agencies remarked that their business was about selling a product and that they were acutely aware of the importance of word-of-mouth recommendations from clients (one agency's advertisement includes the slogan "You'll tell your friends about us"). Their economic success depends on convincing employers that using their placement service is the best way of ensuring that the employers hire the most appropriate domestic worker (as opposed to, for example, the employer opting for the cheaper route of placing a newspaper advertisement). The service usually involves a trial period with a 3–6-month 'quality assurance' guarantee in return for an agency fee equivalent to one month of the domestic worker's salary. Thus, a number of the advertisements in the *Toronto Yellow Pages* emphasise 'professional screening', and one agency even offers 'videos and files'. Many of the names of the agencies seem to have been carefully chosen in order to convey professionalism and selectivity: Choice Nannies, Diamond Domestics, Execu-Nannies, Perfect Help and Care, and Selective Personnel. The owner of Agency 1 nicely summarises these points:

"I would hate selling something to people that I'm convinced they do not need, so I'll never be very good at sending a nanny to people when I don't think that they'll cut the mustard, because I want to make my fee".

In other words, the agencies have packaged themselves according to employer's needs, responding to (and helping to create and perpetuate) employer demand. Bakan and Stasiulis (1995) suggest that, to be competitive, agencies must also project particular

racialised and gendered stereotypes regarding domestic work. Stereotypes about the suitability of different national identities for different types of work are also significant and is evident in the number of *Yellow Pages* advertisements that list the countries of origin of the domestic workers on their books. Of the thirteen large advertisements (those providing more information than just the address and telephone number), seven stated specialisation in 'overseas' domestic workers, with a number specifying particular countries or regions, notably the Caribbean, the Philippines, and Europe. When asked whether their clients ask for domestic workers from specific countries of origin, one agent replied: "Yes, and it's a good thing too. Why send someone to a home where they're not wanted?!" (Agency 4). Another said:

"Employers ask for all sorts of things. For example, *if they want a driver, you won't usually look at Filipinos 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 Filipino'. 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, *emphasis added*).

These remarks highlight Arat-Koç's (1992b) contention that European women get employed as 'nannies', engaged only in child-care, whereas Third World women get jobs as 'domestics' and are expected to do both child-care and housework and often work longer hours. So agency personnel play an important allocative role in preselecting 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 comments of the agency personnel reveal a number of assumptions which relate to supposedly 'natural' aptitudes of particular national identities for specific skills, as they match 'appropriate' women to 'appropriate' jobs.

Afro-Caribbean women, especially those from Jamaica, have been associated with paid domestic work in Canada since the 1950s. Bakan and Stasiulis (1994) 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. In part this may relate to the more general (and relatively recent) representation of Toronto's Afro-Caribbeans as dangerous and prone to crime (Jackson, 1993; Mitchell and Abbate, 1994). However, Bakan and Stasiulis suggest that the shift in the representation of Afro-Caribbean domestic workers relates to their increased collective action in domestic workers' rights groups, such as INTERCEDE, behaviour that contradicts their earlier, more submissive image. And Daenzer (1993) suggests that the shift from Afro-Caribbean women to Filipino women was also facilitated by the practices of placement agencies. Certainly, the staff at a number of the agencies expressed reticence 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 leary of West Indians. The other thing, which I really hated myself for doing it, 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—it's 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 been a total shift away from Afro-Caribbean women. 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 first described her 'fondness' for retired 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 exploitation long after they complete their immigration requirements, being called on to perform 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 'know their place', both with their employers and with their placement agency personnel. Seemingly, 'West Indian' women might be able to do this, whereas 'Jamaican' women cannot.

In contrast to the 'assertive Jamaican women', Filipino women are represented as 'knowing their place'. They are portrayed as 'naturally' docile, hardworking, 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 Filipinos because they are excellent housekeepers ... I don't think they pick Filipinos 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 about national identities seem to be all-pervasive and are (partly) internalised by foreign domestic workers. A Filipino INTERCEDE staff member remarked that she saw Filipinos as very adaptable and able to assimilate quickly into new cultures yet remaining very cohesive as a group. Exemplifying previous studies that indicate that domestic workers create various coping strategies (Cock, 1980; Cohen, 1991), our research indicates that Filipino domestic workers in Toronto form close networks that allow them to support each other and survive through arduous circumstances (for example, one group pooled their resources and rented an apartment to use on their days off). Of course, the extent of their support networks could also be related to the fact that the Filipino community is by far the largest group of domestic workers, so that sheer numbers and concentration in Toronto allow them to remain cohesive.

The introduction of the LCP has curbed the flow of women entering Canada to be paid domestic workers and has resulted in a distinct shift away from Third World women towards 'trained', European, women, particularly English women with NNEB qualifications. In defining the 'quality' of the employees available to Canadian households, the President of the Canadian Coalition for In-Home Care stated that her organisation was instrumental in the government's introduction of the LCP so strongly opposed by INTERCEDE. She argued that the policy is not intended to be

a “charity to the Third World”, but rather, “an employment programme” that has been used as an immigration loophole by many Third World women who have indirectly undermined the “quality of caregivers available to employers”. In so doing, the President of the Coalition claims, Third World domestic workers have provided cheap labour, fueling the market for illegal domestic workers, which in turn undermines the status of the profession for other nannies.

It seems that the shift prompted by the LCP has been accompanied by a reclamation of the term ‘nanny’ to refer *only* to formally trained nannies, such as English NNEBs. Some agency owners remarked that during the 1980s the term ‘nanny’ was used more generally to include ‘unqualified’ Third World women (of course, it is possible that the liberal use of ‘nanny’ also relates to employers’ guilt as well as employees’ recognition of the stigmatised meanings and images associated with ‘domestic workers’). Currently, those agencies recruiting trained or NNEB nannies (such as the owner of Agency 1) seem to be attempting to reassert the prestige of ‘nanny’ and promoting it as a profession that should be accorded a high degree of respect. One way they do this is to differentiate between ‘trained nannies’ and ‘other nannies’, thus 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 quote illustrates the priority accorded to domesticity as a natural and universal experience for women, as well as the intersection of gender (women “cook, clean and look after children”), class (“‘trained’ nanny”), and national identity (“Brit”) in defining one group as different (and even superior) from the others.

The argument about ‘trained nannies’ also reflects much of the rhetoric associated with the NNEB qualification in Britain, which promotes respect for nannying as a profession and encourages students 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 providing a vehicle with which to legitimate the exclusion of ‘undesirable others’ from paid domestic work. At the same time, although ‘the trained professional’ may be seen as just NNEB college rhetoric among nannies in Britain, in the Canadian context its significance appears to be 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). Furthermore, the recent LCP program now places a premium on such qualifications as a benchmark for defining exactly who can (most ably?) provide quality domestic help and child-care. These views were evident in the interviews with the President of the Coalition for In-Home Care, the advertisements in the *Yellow Pages*, as well as in the opinions expressed by some of the placement agency staff who were interviewed. Hence, the state and other ‘gatekeeping’ organisations, such as the agencies, are highly influential in privileging certain qualities among domestic workers as highly regarded and others as less desirable and, as we show in the next section, these images regarding domestic work are often (partly) internalised and reflected in the identity formation of some of the foreign domestic workers who participated in our study.

'Third World domestics' and 'European nannies'

Distinctions between 'nanny' and 'domestic' and between 'trained nannies' and 'other nannies' saturated the language that the foreign domestic workers themselves used to describe their occupation. The constructions and connotations of 'domestics' and 'nannies', along with their ideological baggage, seem to have been reinforced by the foreign domestic workers' respective training and employment experiences. The women interviewed show that the same occupational category is steeped in *differential* degrees of respect and stigma. All the women interviewed carried out child-care as their primary responsibility, with varying amounts of housework also expected. However, it was only the Third World women who referred to themselves as 'domestics' or 'foreign domestic workers'. They appear to have internalised the stigmatised social construction of 'domestic work' as 'inferior' work, commonly attributed to 'immigrant women' of colour. This is in sharp contrast to the positive occupational image of the white, European, 'nannies', who rarely use the more stigmatised labels to describe themselves or, interestingly, others. Instead, they opt for the more valued and respected title of 'nanny'.

Cynthia (Jamaican) used a range of terms, in addition to 'domestic', to describe her job, including 'substitute mum', 'maid', 'companion', and even 'slave'. If she uses the state-imposed term 'domestic workers' she feels she becomes a "nobody". Although Cynthia despises the title and job she has to do in order to become a landed immigrant, she also refuses to accept the Canadian use of the term 'nanny', which she views as a euphemism:

"I don't think Canada has any place for nannies; people want domestic help, they don't want nannies. Nannies are supposed to train kids, do art work, take them to the library, read them books—that is the job of a nanny. A nanny here is underrated, most people here aren't willing to pay for a proper trained nanny, they are just looking for a domestic worker and baby-sitter on the cheap".

By contrast, the NNEB-trained, white, English women saw their identity as nannies as professional and prestigious. For example, Karen, an NNEB English nanny, entered Canada in 1993 under the LCP. She felt that NNEB nannies were: "the 'crème-de-la-crème' of the profession ... able to command high wages around the world and receive better treatment partly because [we] have a higher estimation of [our]selves". Kath, another white, NNEB, nanny (who arrived in 1989 under the FDM policy) reiterates this point: "England turns out all the trained nannies, because of the education system; the NNEB is pretty well regarded".

The prestige of the English identity, accent, and traditional status of the white 'English nanny' continues to be held in high regard by Canadians, and this was clearly understood by the English women interviewed. For instance, Sue (who arrived under the LCP) 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".

Maggie's (Irish) remarks reflect the image of the trained, English nanny. Her Irish identity and lack of formal training means that she constructed herself as distinctly 'other' in relation to English NNEB nannies, especially as she arrived in 1986 prior to the tighter training requirements introduced under the LCP.

"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 soie care of the children, educating the children, no house cleaning”.

Notice how Maggie has absorbed the rhetoric of the NNEB qualifications: she comments 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 belong to racialised minorities (Baken and Stasiulis, 1995; Gregson and Lowe, 1994). Although the three English nannies who were interviewed are white, it is worth considering Ingrid’s (German) remarks regarding the way in which national identity and ‘race’ interweave in the case of one of her friends:

“Debbie, a Black girl from London, she’s being treated the same as *us white girls*. Her employers are pretty good. She went to school in England, she’s got her qualifications—NNEB—but she’s going to school here; she wants to be a nurse in the end. She’s living-in, she’s just had a child and I just found out that the baby will have stay with her aunt during the day. I said to her, ‘What’s the difference? If your employers had another child, you would have to cope with another child’. I didn’t understand it. But in a way, Debbie shuts up too, I guess *because she’s Black she has it a bit tougher too*; she just said ‘fine!’” (emphasis added).

Ingrid implies that, although Debbie’s ‘Englishness’ and her training set her apart from other paid domestic workers, these advantages were complicated by her ‘race’. At the same time, Ingrid considers Debbie to be like one of “us white girls”. Hence, an unequivocal ‘hierarchy of oppression’ cannot always be categorically stated. Identity, experience, and power relations are highly context-specific. In this case, the friendship between two women of different countries, ‘races’, language, and culture groups appears to engender solidarity. Yet in the context of her working relationship with her employer, Debbie is thought to have “it a bit tougher” and “shuts up” “because she’s Black”.

Our interviews clearly support previous studies that highlight the importance of ‘race’/racism in the construction of paid domestic work. The interviews with the placement agencies indicated that they regarded Jamaican women to be difficult and aggressive. The two Jamaican women interviewed were both aware of this and claimed to be proud of this ‘aggressive’ and ‘assertive’ aspect of their shared national identity. Cynthia stated:

“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. It’s [also an issue] of colour.”

In some respects, then, what is seen as ‘aggression’ by placement agencies is regarded by the domestic workers as self-respect and a strategy of resistance in order to block attempts to exploit them. Cynthia points out that, unlike other domestic workers (she later specified Filipinos), English is her first language, which makes her feel less exploitable. At the same time she recognises the role that racism plays. However, Cynthia seems to have partly internalised 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 Filipinos don’t discipline the kids, or they’re scared of them.”

In drawing a contrast to Filipinos, Cynthia not only illustrates the relational nature of identity formation but also shows that the domestic workers also engage national identities to draw out distinctions among foreign domestic workers. Moreover, her comments highlight the culturally specific construction of 'being a woman' or 'carer of children' and of 'feminine characteristics' such as caring and discipline.

Establishing identities in relation to Filipino domestic workers was not just restricted to Third World women. Even the white, 'European nannies' constructed themselves relative to 'Filipino domestic workers', illustrating that 'race'/ethnicity is integral to the construction of whiteness. Silke (German) remarked that:

"I don't know why employers pick nannies of different nationalities, but I know mine picked me and not a Filipino 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 [Filipinos] can't. They wanted someone with a strong will, and I'm stubborn ... Filipino 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's remarks indicate some employers' preference for particular *European*-language-speaking nannies because of the potential linguistic education of their children (there is my no means the same demand for Canadian children to speak Tagalog!). Maryse (French), for example, commented that her employers saw that their 2-year-old daughter might become bilingual as an 'added perk' of employing a 'French au pair'. Maryse and Silke reflect the prestige accorded to European (as opposed to Third World) languages and culture. Silke's comments also 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.

The Filipino women interviewed also constructed their identities relative to other nationalities of foreign domestic workers, and, at least initially, it seemed to us that they had completely internalised the stereotypes about 'Filipino domestic workers'. They viewed their hardworking, uncomplaining nature as a positive characteristic, setting them apart from other groups of domestic workers. Joan said:

"[Employers] like Filipinos—us—instead of other nationalities, because we never complain and we are very hard workers".

Jocie agreed that Filipinos "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 general trend that we noted—rather than being a purely 'cultural' reaction of 'natural' attribute of their national identity, their hardworking and compliant 'nature' is at least a partial result of a strong desire by

some of the Filipino women to stay in Canada, to gain landed immigrant status, often with the eventual aim of sponsoring their families from abroad.⁽⁹⁾

At the same time, the interviews with the white, 'European nannies' suggest that culture, language, and training were used to separate and distinguish among them:

"German nannies I've met ... almost start ruling the household—like Heidi from across the road. They're very cold; the employers are nearly afraid of them. They start telling them how to run their households, they're very particular—perfectionists—but they're very strong" (Maggie, Irish).

"One thing you do notice when all the cultures get together, we are all different. It doesn't matter if you're European, it's where you come from that matters. French girls are maybe not as clean, or whatever ... All these prejudices that you have, I don't know, I guess people make up their minds" (Silke, German).

In many ways it can be said that the identities of foreign domestic workers are formed in relation to Filipino (who form the largest group of foreign domestic workers in Canada) and English women (in terms of their cultural and political dominance). The comments by this selection of foreign domestic workers not only illustrate the relational nature of identity formation but also indicate that the women themselves engage stereotypes of national identities in order to draw out distinctions among themselves. National identities are employed to distinguish between the construction of 'domestic workers' as opposed to 'nannies'. This underscores the social constituted categories of 'domestic worker' and 'nanny', and the gendered, classed, and racialised construction of national identities.

Conclusions

In this paper we have explored how gendered, racialised, and classed images of national identities infuse the construction of paid domestic work in Toronto. We presented a critical discussion of Canada's immigration policies pertaining to foreign domestic workers, paying particular attention to the state's explicit and implicit understanding of which nationalities should perform paid domestic work. For many women, the foreign domestic worker programmes have provided a means with which to emigrate to Canada. In part of our analysis we considered Canada's shifting definition of who can be eligible for landed immigrant status. What emerged are the constant attempts by the state to reduce citizenship rights and/or to exclude particular groups or nationalities of women, yet simultaneously to encourage others.

As the demand for live-in domestic workers has increased, so have the number of domestic worker placement agencies. They have taken up some of the recruiting and selection functions that were previously the domain of the government. In the process of matching foreign domestic workers with jobs, staff at these agencies help create and perpetuate images of which national identities are best suited to what types of jobs. We also investigated the internalisation of these constructions by the domestic workers themselves whose everyday lived experiences are partly predicated on the various definitions of their employment suitability based on constructions of their national identities.

⁽⁹⁾ This is far from being an easy option to implement as the immigration process is now lengthy, expensive, and far from guaranteed. However, the long-term goal of gaining landed immigrant status often leaves some women much more vulnerable to unscrupulous and exploitative employers. Cynthia (Jamaican) summarised the lack of freedom to change jobs, employers, and home: "Each time you have to change jobs, you pay immigration \$100 ... It doesn't look good on your record. That's why a lot of people take the abuse, you can't be bothered with changing this and that."

Central to our argument was an emphasis on the relational, constructed, and interlocking qualities of axes of difference, and on how identities are expressed through representations, language, and practices of various 'gatekeepers' and the lived experience of foreign domestic workers. So it is not simply a matter of any one axis of social stratification operating in isolation: the NNEB nannies, for example, cannot extricate their 'Englishness' from their training once in the work situation; neither can the Filipinos, 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; and we have attempted to go beyond simple description and categorisation, to provide insights into the dynamic, intersubjective, constitution of national identities.

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