



Campaign to end imprisonment of live-in domestic workers in the United States, reports on the case of a woman from Bolivia working as a live-in domestic worker in Washington, D.C. for a human rights lawyer:

Once her plane landed...her employer...confiscated her passport
and forced her to work days more than twelve hours long for less

reunification (Cohen, 2000) and implicitly suggests that Canada wants and needs their labour, but does not want their residency to become permanent. Moreover, when domestic workers finish their two years and are able to apply to bring family over, Immigration Canada applies a Eurocentric heterosexist definition of “family” that limits applicants to bringing over spouses and children (Cohen, 2000). When children in source countries have been cared for by grandparents or other extended family for years, this separation can often be painful and fraught with difficulties (Salazar Parrenas, 2000).

THE LIVE-IN CAREGIVER PROGRAM: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

In addition to the ways in which the Live-in Caregiver program marginalizes women of colour, it has the more insidious effect of capitalizing on and encouraging global economic inequalities while reinforcing women’s responsibility for increasingly devalued domestic work. Asian-American Studies professor Rhacel Salazar Parrenas notes that “the migration of women connects systems of gender inequality in both sending and receiving nations to global capitalism” (2000, p. 569).

Global capitalism makes the Live-in Caregiver program possible. Zarembka outlines the role of institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, dominated by economically privileged countries, in reinforcing their privilege by economically marginalizing other nations: “preconditions of loans...include cutting...services, devaluing local currencies, and imposing wage freezes...[while] the world’s poor are [left to] search for work overseas” (2002, p. 144). Advocacy organizations for Live-In Caregivers and feminist scholars such as Pratt have criticized “Canada’s opportunistic use of an economic crisis in the Philippines that leads one out of every ten Filipinos to find work overseas” (2002, p. 198). Indeed, while Immigration Canada and domestic worker employment agencies may flatter themselves that they are supporting women who should be grateful to come to Canada, in reality, many of these

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using the same stereotypes “that patriarchy has used against women generally” (Stiell & England, 1997, p. 343).

Moreover, women of colour domestic workers often leave a system in their source countries wherein they are responsible for childcare and domestic work in their own households (Salazar Parrenas, 2001). Rather than escaping this gender stratification, they are pushed into a new system of stratification in Canada with the added racial and class dimensions. Meanwhile, they often leave female relatives to care for the children they leave behind, completing a process where they enable economically privileged women to escape gender constraints while “finally relegating their gender roles” to women left in economically marginalized nations (Salazar Parrenas, 2000, p. 570).

Fathers in economically marginalized nations such as the Philippines are not always expected to take part in their household’s domestic work, even to make up for a mother gone overseas (Salazar Parrenas, 2001), creating what Hochschild (2002) terms a “care drain” whereby children of colour in economically marginalized nations are not entitled to the same level of care as children of white Canadian families. For example, Hochschild describes the situation of a Filipina domestic worker who cares for her employers’ baby in America while leaving her two children to the care of her mother, who also works long hours as a teacher, in a four-bedroom house with twelve other family members (2002, p. 16). She states that if women from economically privileged nations are “building careers that are molded according to the old male model...[with] long hours and demanding jobs...domestic workers suffer a greatly exaggerated version of the same thing” (2002, p. 20).

Finally, programs such as the Live-in Caregiver program also enable the government to avoid taking responsibility for the shortage of childcare and instead place the burden on women (Pratt, 1997). When upper classes of women are able to purchase domestic work for roughly \$900 a month plus room and board (Pratt, 1997), a system is created wherein Canadian women are divided in demanding universal, quality childcare provision from the government. The Live-in Caregiver program makes childcare a private issue to be dealt with by mothers, not a public issue to be dealt with by the government.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Live-in Caregiver program reinforces and exploits racial and gender divisions of labour, both in sending and receiving nations. By ascribing “feminine” characteristics to domestic workers and leaving women in charge of hiring domestic help, women remain essentially relegated to the devalued sphere of the home and domestic labour. As well as

domestic labour in order to increase its value and stem the “care drain.” If Canada wishes to be considered an “immigrant” country rather than one of Fleras and Elliott’s “non-immigrant” countries, it needs to stop treating women of colour as guest workers and start treating them as Canadians with equal rights.

REFERENCES

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