

“I am a LCP: reconfigured identities & foreign domestic workers in Canada

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(1) D. L. Spitzer. “Transnational Families in Transition: Filipino Families, Canadian Issues.”

(2) D. L. Spitzer, K. Hughes, J. Oxman-Martinez, & J. Hanley. “The Land of Milk and Honey? After the LCP.”

(3) D. L. Spitzer. “Live-in caregivers in Rural and Small City Alberta.”

(4) D. L. Spitzer, S. Bitar and M. Kalbach. “In the Shadows: Live-in Caregivers in Alberta.”

Introduction

- “I am a LCP”
- Live-In Caregiver Program
- Why take on the name of a government program as an identity marker?

Live-in Caregivers in Canada

- Over 100 years of government involvement
 - Britain, Northern European, Caribbean
- Live-In Caregiver Program (1992)
 - Care for children, elderly persons with disabilities
 - Live with employer
 - After 24 months' service in 39 months (previously 36), apply for permanent residency status
 - Contract, education, language
 - Employers provide: lockable room, acceptable duties & wages
- 1993-2006: 36,600 LCP workers
 - 98% women, vast majority from Philippines

Philippines

- IMF & neo-liberal restructuring
- Remittances needed to sustain households & economy
 - Filipina foreign domestic workers found in 130 countries
 - Care work = Philippines largest export product
- Migrant Mothers
 - Both heroes of the economy and bad mothers

Considerations of Identity

- Discursively constructed “place to stand”
- Multiple identities
- Both process and resource, delimited by social location, including socioeconomic status and cultural context
- Gender – role in shaping community boundaries
- Immigration, identity and migratory trajectory

Roles & Identity

- Estroff (1993) persons with chronic conditions
 - Contraction of social roles and identities
 - Shift from having illness to *being* the illness
 - More often with stigmatized conditions that are socially disruptive and victim-blaming
 - New subjectivities created around “I am...”

Productive Roles

- Recover careers, education
- Lack of recognition of foreign credentials
- Post-LCP work
 - Low-waged, part-time jobs
- Systemic discrimination & demands from family for financial support make re-training difficult
- Erosion of professional identity

Productive Roles: *Marina*

There's no recognition in my profession and as I work from under the LCP and then when I apply as a sales clerk, they're asking my Canadian experience . . . to show that I have Canadian experience under the caregiver program is not worth it to them . . . I'm landed already, so I decided to work 2 times a week during that time and then I work in the store as a sales clerk but my life . . . it's not really improved at all. Just like I have to transfer another place and I have to pay the transportation, it's so expensive, so in terms of budgeting my income, it's still difficult . . . It's so hard to compare because under LCP you're live-in but your income is very below minimum wage and you are being exploited a lot . . . I'm planning on going back to school but the tuition is too expensive . . . There is no, there is no place that we could really enjoy our profession and really get what we want as you know we hope before this. There's always a discrimination in terms of our nationality and our – you know, not being recognized our profession.

Gender Roles: Mother/Wife/Daughter

- Remittances
 - Important for household/role, but constrains own plans
- Family separation
- Challenges of family reunification
 - Precipitous decline in socioeconomic status

Gender Roles: *Melodie*

They didn't really know me and I don't know them, too. So it is kind of tough like getting connected. Even habits, you know. They are here, I have to take care of them, I have to dress them, give them food, cook them food. And it was hard. I come home and I am so tired and can't even sit with them and say, "How was your day?" And this and that. And even over the weekend, you know I hardly see them. I work too. So at some point my kids told me, "You are too far away. You're here, but you are too far." Yeah. It was difficult.

Migrant Roles: Sojourner/Settler/Citizen

- Precarious immigration status
 - Liminal period = uncertainty, vulnerability
 - Denied certain benefits
 - Fear of unemployment
 - Isolation and lack of control → stress
- Limited social networks and social support

Migrant Roles:

Indy

- While we are taking care of those little people, we miss big people while they're busy at their work. That is very stressful for me. Whenever I work for them, I feel attached. I get attached to the children, and in the evening when their Mom and Dad come and I realize, 'Oh my God, they've gone back to their parents.' And the emptiness you feel. Because the whole day you give them all your love and affection and in the evening all of a sudden, you're nobody.

Erosion of Health Status

- Exposure to abuse and violence
- Stress related complaints = embodiment of inequality
- Lack of control in workplace
- Limited access to supplementary health benefits
- Work constrains access to health services
- Social, cultural, emotional isolation, precarious status, devaluation of skills, all contribute to decline in health status over long term

Health Status:

Cora

- Oh gosh, my cholesterol's high. [laughs]. I'm having [pause] – I get depressed when I think of my parents in the Philippines and I'm facing a big amount of student loans in the future, so I think mentally that is affecting me, psychologically that's affecting me. Um, what else? Like, having a part-time job only, I only get like \$300 a month so how will you be able to survive with that kind of money?

Forging Identity

- Marginalization, isolation and contraction of social networks and social roles impact identity formation and well-being
- **BUT**, LCP workers create new strategies to mitigate effects
- Connection with: Live-in caregiver organizations, immigrant-serving agencies, ethnic or religious organizations
 - Stories situated within prevailing orientation of the organization (political or religious)

Forging Identity: *Netty*

- ... being here in the community . . . I was able to gain more friends and like become stronger and making some friends is very easy wherever you go, in the busses, in the church, in the like parties, you share different stories, you're relieved upon telling them stories that you just had experienced and hopefully I'm going to be relieved even though you're still far from your family. But in the future I know that it's the different from where I am now and then hard to forget.

Reconfiguring Identity: Narratives & Roles

- Isolation of LCP delimits opportunities for deployment of multiple roles
- Role of LCP increasingly meaningful →
 - *I am* an LCP
 - Heroines of their families and Philippine economy
 - Narratives of struggle
 - Memories become trauma stories
 - Self-sacrificing mother, daughter, sister, wife find meaning by fulfilling duties to family and community or becoming an activist through critique of globalization, capitalism and liberal feminism.

Conclusion

- LCP offers possibility of permanent resettlement
- Erosion of status (personal, socioeconomic, health) + low status work + exposure to personal & systemic violence + contraction of networks and changes in social roles = rupture of previous identities
- LCP workers reconfigure identities that create social solidarity on Canadian soil.
- Witnessing of their stories of suffering and resilience helps to forge LCP identity