CHAPTER 10

Ambivalence of Return Home: Revaluating Transnational Trajectories of Filipina Live-In Domestic Workers and Caregivers in Toronto from 1970 to 2010

Yukari Takai with Mary Gene De Guzman

Devina immigrated to Canada from Pangasinan, Philippines, a province located 180 kilometres north of Manila, in order to work as a live-in caregiver in private households other than her own. She left the Philippines to support her family back home. She arrived in Toronto in 1980 with a temporary work visa. She was twenty-six years old. Canada was not her first destination, however. Before coming to Canada, she had worked in Palermo, Italy, from 1977 to 1978 and then in London, UK, from 1978 to 1980. By the time of her arrival in Toronto, Devina had acquired international experience in care work and, being the oldest daughter of her household, she had become the idealized breadwinner of her family and her homeland through the remittance payments she sent back.¹

As the eldest daughter of six sisters and three brothers, Devina first and foremost identified herself as a daughter and sister who felt obliged to support her family in place of her ailing father. Her migration journey parallels, in part or in whole, the experiences of tens of thousands of Filipina women who travelled across the globe in order to work in Canada since the mid-1970s. This was a crucial time when Filipina nannies, domestic workers and caregivers came to

¹ Two groups of Filipina women provided the histories of their migration and domestic work or caregiving in Canada and elsewhere. The first group, family members and a friend of Mary Gene De Guzman, all had worked as live-in caregivers in Canada. De Guzman conducted four in-depth formal interviews of about an hour each and numerous informal interviews of variable length between 2011 and 2013. The second group, also from the Philippines, consists of personal support workers (PSWs) who care for their, usually elderly, Canadian clients in their homes and accompany them to hospitals in Toronto when they require medical attention. They are no longer under the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) and thus usually live out. Methodologically, interviews with family members may be skewed because of the selective nature of stories told and potential distortions. However, a close relationship with the narrators has permitted privileged insight. All participants and places have been assigned pseudonyms.
surpass the new arrivals from the Caribbean who had until then constituted
the largest group of domestic workers in Canada.2 The ascendance of migrant
Filipina care workers in Toronto and other Canadian metropolises such as
Vancouver and Montreal is a direct consequence of distinct yet related state
policies of out-migration (from the Philippines) and in-migration (to Canada),
the interaction of a global economy within neoliberal capitalism, and the
influence of migration culture.3 In this triad, distressed by a severe decline in
economic growth, political instability and incurring debts with the World Bank
and the International Monetary Fund (IMF),4 the Philippine government
implemented the Labor Export Program whereby the state government
couraged a temporary policy of men and women’s labor migration abroad, a
policy that continues today.5 Remittances from overseas workers likewise
amount to a major source of the national revenue and foreign currency of the
Philippines.6

Canada, on the other hand, instituted new labor recruitment policies to
attract domestic workers and caregivers in order to respond to the increasing
demand for nannies and caregivers by largely white, middle-class Canadian
households at a time when a growing proportion of women in these house-
holds were entering paid labor markets. As late as the second half of the 1960s,
Great Britain continued to play its historical role as a leading source of domes-
tic workers to Canada. However, British nannies, stereotyped in the image of
Mary Poppins,7 the white governess for children of upper-class families, no

---

2 Daiva K. Stasiulis and Abigail B. Bakan, Negotiating Citizenship: Migrant Women in Canada
and the Global System (Toronto, 2005), 77.
3 Deirdre McKay, “Filipinas in Canada – De-Skilling as a Push toward Marriage,” in Nicola Piper
and Mina Roces (eds), Wife or Worker: Asian Women and Migration (Oxford, 2003), 23–52.
4 Stasiulis and Bakan, Negotiating Citizenship, 40.
5 C. Diocson, “Filipino Women’s Identity: A Social, Cultural and Economic Segregation in
Canada,” <http://pwc.bc.tripod.com/resources/RaceGen/speech.html>. Cited in Jacqueline
Oxman-Martinez, Jill Hanley, and Lesli Cheung, “Another Look at the Live-in-Caregivers
Program. An Analysis of Action Research Survey Conducted by PINAY, the Quebec Filipino
Women’s Association with the Centre for Applied Family Studies,” Working paper (Montréal,
2004), 6. As part of a structural adjustment of its economy, the Philippine government was
also pressured to institute several other reformist policies. This included a devaluation of the
peso, the liberalization of an import–export oriented economy, wage control and no-strike
measures, cuts in social services and further concessions for encouraging investors abroad.
Stasiulis and Bakan, Negotiating Citizenship, 58.
6 Josephine Eric, “The Rites of Passage of Filipinas in Canada: Two Migration Cohorts,” in
Roland Sintos Coloma, Bonnie McElhinny, Ethel Tungohan, John Paul C. Catungal, and Lisa
M. Davidson (eds), Filipinos in Canada: Disturbing Invisibility, (Toronto, 2012), 123–141, 126.
7 Stasiulis and Bakan, Negotiating Citizenship, 76.