IMMIGRANT HOUSEWIVES IN CANADA

a report
by Roxana Ng and Judith Ramirez

A study on working class immigrant housewives from rural backgrounds published by Toronto's Immigrant Women's Centre.

The study begins from the perspective of immigrant women and locates their experiences in the social and economic context of contemporary Canadian society. By focusing on women's daily experience the study reveals that the immigration process brings about an intensification of women's work in the home and a concomitant increase in their dependence on the family. But the same process which undermines their autonomy also creates the conditions for their emancipation. The struggle to initiate and maintain service organizations by and for immigrant women is a compelling example of the contradictory nature of immigration.

ORDER FORM

IMMIGRANT HOUSEWIVES IN CANADA
a report
by Roxana Ng and Judith Ramirez

Individual Rates:	$3.50 per copy
	3.00 per copy for five or more
Institutional Rates:	5.00 per copy
	4.50 per copy for five or more

Postage and Handling: 1.00 per order

Please send ___________ copies

Total enclosed _____________

Name/Organization ____

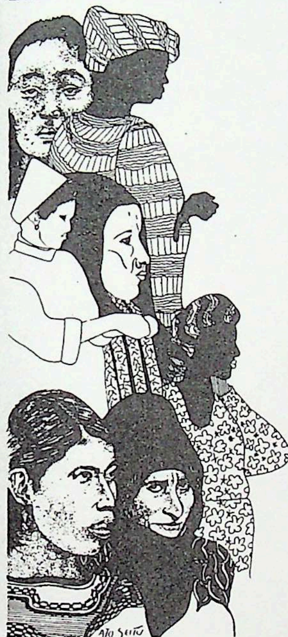
Address ____

Make cheques payable to *IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S CENTRE*, 348 College Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5T 1S4

IMMIGRANT HOUSEWIVES IN CANADA Ng & Ramirez

IMMIGRANT HOUSEWIVES IN CANADA

86



A Report

by
Roxana Ng
and
Judith Ramirez

Immigrant Housewives In Canada

A Report

by
ROXANA NG
and
JUDITH RAMIREZ

Immigrant Housewives in Canada

Report of a study sponsored by the Immigrant Women's Centre and funded by Wintario and private donations.

The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the official policies of the sponsoring or funding organizations.

Copies are available from:

The Immigrant Women's Centre
348 College Street
Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1S4
Canada

Individual Rates:	$3.50
Institutional Rates:	$5.00
Postage & Handling:	$1.00

Research Assistance:	Nora Simonetti
	Gail Buckland
	Ellen Agger
Editorial Assistance:	Carol Zavitz
Design and Layout:	Judith Ramirez
	Francie Wyland
Typesetting:	Clarion Typesetting

© 1981 Roxana Ng and Judith Ramirez

Preface

This report offers an analysis of immigrant women in contemporary Canadian society which begins from their own perspective. It is written for those who find existing theories on immigrant groups unsatisfactory in illuminating the lives of immigrant women.

The data generated for this study were gathered from interviews conducted in two stages: first in 1976 and then in 1979-80. The women interviewed were mainly from rural or semi-rural backgrounds in industrially underdeveloped countries. Their husbands migrated to Canada to fill skilled or semi-skilled blue collar jobs, and many of the women, out of financial necessity, also found themselves in the immigrant job ghettos.

While the majority of the women we interviewed were from Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish backgrounds, we deliberately did not restrict our informants to particular ethnic groups. We found that, despite their divergent cultural backgrounds, they all shared remarkably similar experiences in Canada, especially if they spoke little or no English.

Most of the 1976 interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of the informants and recorded in English. The later group of interviews was conducted in English in the presence of an interpreter, but translation was only necessary when the informant wanted to express a particularly difficult concept or a complicated situation. We are indebted to all the women who generously shared their experience with us. In the report, their names have been changed to protect their identity.

Thanks are also due to the Wintario field officer, Patty Jacobs, for her encouragement and assistance, and to the Multicultural History Society, the Women's Research and Resource Centre, and the Immigrant Women's Job Placement Centre for their help and co-operation. Finally, we wish to thank Mariarosa Dalla

Costa and Dorothy E. Smith for their important theoretical contribution to women's studies. Though not explicitly stated, their theories and methods of analysis provided the political and methodological underpinnings for this report.

Roxana Ng
Judith Ramirez

Toronto, February 1981

Table of Contents

Preface

Introduction: A Historical Note
by Judith Ramirez

Section I — The Standpoint of Women: Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Section II — The Condition of Immigrant Women

Chapter 1 — Introduction

Chapter 2 — Organizational Changes
- A. Integration of the Family into the Money Economy
- B. Women's Work Inside the Home
  - (1) Housework
  - (2) Management
- C. Women's Work Outside the Home

Chapter 3 — Institutionalized Processes
- A. Immigration Policy
- B. A Segregated Labour Force

Section III — A Way to Begin, A Way to Go . . .

References

Introduction: A Historical Note

The Immigrant Women's Centre opened its doors on April 26, 1975 without much fanfare. It was International Women's Year and Toronto finally had its first autonomous centre run by and for immigrant women. We began as an outreach project to Italian women—"Centre Donne" we called ourselves—and we consisted of two Italian community organizers, a shoestring budget from the federal Local Initiative Program, and a tiny two-room office above a dry-cleaner's on College Street.

Our objective in creating the Immigrant Women's Centre was to provide a visible point of reference for the least visible sector of the immigrant community: the housewives and mothers.

Through public service announcements, radio talk shows, and coverage in the ethnic press, we were able to reach women in their homes and to establish our presence in the community. We deliberately developed an "open door" policy, inviting women to contact us for whatever problems were most pressing to them. Soon, they were calling for help with marital problems, conflicts with their children, questions about contraception, employment, mental health, and in great numbers "just to talk to someone." We were thus in daily contact with the pain, anger, and urgency immigrant women experience as they battle—alone—the pressures of their undervalued role as the "pillars" of the immigrant family and community.

By the fall of 1975 we had expanded the Centre to include Spanish, Portuguese, and West Indian women. We were acutely aware of the fact that many of the forces which shape the lives of immigrant women cut across cultural and racial lines. And we needed the broadest possible base to drive home the need for a centre such as ours to our own communities and to Canadian society at large.

Immigrant women had not yet become a "trendy" minority, and money for projects such as ours was practically non-existent. Each woman on our staff was paid a bare subsistence wage to work with other women of her own ethnic background. The hours we logged in office time, evening meetings, and perpetual fundraising added up to a work week the length of which should be illegal!

Very early in our work we felt the need for a study about the daily life of the working class immigrant woman, since so little attention is paid to her role and contribution to Canadian society, and even less to her own perceptions of these. We decided to conduct a survey by personally interviewing a broad sample of the women who were coming to our Centre. Because our main target group was the immigrant housewife and mother, her work in the home became the starting point and pivot for the questionnaire we drew up.

We wanted the study to serve as a more permanent record of the accounts women were so eagerly giving us in individual counselling sessions. We had become keenly aware of the need to go beyond the mere provision of individualized services and to fashion tools which would give immigrant women the means with which to express themselves more collectively and publicly. We wanted to promote greater awareness of the immigrant housewife and mother as the forgotten protoganist in the often protracted drama of immigration.

In the year that followed we interviewed one hundred immigrant housewives from Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and West Indian backgrounds. The questionnaire took an average of two hours to administer and most women wanted to talk more. One 40-year-old Italian woman said, "I've wanted to say these things for so many years but nobody ever asked me before."

In 1977, the daily pressures of operating the Centre and trying to keep our heads above water financially prevented us from completing the study. In the two years that followed we decided to narrow our service focus to contraception and related health problems and we waged a successful struggle for permanent adequate funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health. In addition, we were able to expand our Centre to include services to Chinese women and younger unmarried women.

Finally, in 1979 we could again turn our attention to the interviews, and with a partial grant from Wintario, we set about completing our survey and preparing this report. We conducted an additional ten in-depth interviews and tabulated the results of the 1976 interviews. We believe our study is a first in that it strives to define the situation of immigrant housewives from their own autonomous perspective. We see it as a part of the overall struggle of immigrant women to emerge from the shadows and make visible the exact nature and extent of their contribution to Canadian society.

In many ways the history of the Immigrant Women's Centre parallels the lives of so many immigrant women; in our fight to survive and gain recognition for the value of our work, we sometimes grew weary and angry. But the loyalty of the women we serve and the assistance of our many friends gave us energy and determination; we note especially the sisters at the Birth Control and Venereal Disease Information Centre, Alderman Anne Johnston, Dan Leckie of the Toronto Board of Health, David Fischer and the Administration of Doctors Hospital, and Dr. Peter Cole of the Family Planning Services.

It is our hope that this study will not only analyse the situation and oppression of immigrant women, but will also bear testimony to our ongoing struggle to transform the conditions of our lives in Canada, our new home.

Judith Ramirez, Founder
Immigrant Women's Centre

SECTION I THE STANDPOINT OF WOMEN: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This report offers an analysis of immigrant women's experiences in contemporary Canada. Our primary focus is on non-English speaking immigrant women, from rural or semi-rural backgrounds, who immigrated to Canada as housewives with their families. This is because, although there has been an increasing number of studies on immigrant groups in recent years,[1] immigrant women have not been the central focus of these works. Commonly, what is known about immigrant women is presented through the eyes of others, and not by themselves. As Jacobson points out, immigrant women's experiences are simply subsumed under those of men.[2] Thus, in our work, we have deliberately taken up the standpoint of women, and put immigrant women's concerns in the forefront of our analysis.

For a long time, women had no language or conceptual system to express their situations and experiences. In the past, modes of expression and communication, as well as ideological structures within which forms of thought and images are developed, were largely appropriated and controlled by men.[3] Social realities were presented to us from the perspective of men. If women were dealt with at all, they were treated as objects, and not as subjects.[4]

Although women's situations and perspectives are still not fully presented and legitimated, women have made important gains in our struggle for recognition. The women's movement has created a place for women to share our common experiences, define our situations, and seek solutions to our own problems. We now have women writers, artists, and poets who make women's experiences and perceptions the focus of their work. There are feminist social scientists who seek to redress the imbalance of a previously partial and one-sided interpretation of social reality. And in spite of some serious setbacks, we have made significant progress in our demands for daycare, health and social services, and in legislative reforms (for example, in the area of family law and equal pay legislation) in the last decades.[5]

However, the struggles waged by Canadian women have not automatically touched the lives of many immigrant women. We still occupy most of the jobs unprotected by labour standard legislation. We have the least access to daycare or health care facilities. Many social and educational services which other Canadians take for granted are denied to us.[6] Our concerns and problems have not been addressed seriously or properly by researchers, policy makers, or politicians. But perhaps most important of all, immigrant women have not spoken up. We have not come out to press for our needs and demand our rights. To a large extent, immigrant women, especially non-English speaking immigrant women, have remained silent.

Frequently, our seeming inertia and silence are attributed to our cultural backgrounds and traditional values about sex roles. Not only do immigrant women fail to speak up about our rights as women; we are not very active outside the home. In the union movement, for instance, involving immigrant women is an ongoing problem which union organizers must deal with.[7] The following comment by a retired union or-

ganizer illustrates the common problem that unions have to handle:

> Right now, the union is not strong. When you belong to a union, it's up to you to get up and say what you think (at union meetings). Not go out and say it later ... Now, it's mostly the Oriental person (who is employed) in the shops like Jantzen. They are not used to standing up. So they work regardless of what they make. To them, it's money. You get the odd one (who supports the union), but not the majority.[8]

For those who work with immigrant women on a day-to-day basis, such as social workers, teachers, and educators, the problems faced by immigrant women are usually seen to be a problem of "cultural adjustment" and "value conflict."[9] These assumptions are implicit in many government policies on immigrant services. For instance, the Immigrant Settlement grant, available to community organizations from the Dept. of Immigration, is provided for services to immigrants for a period of up to 36 months after their arrival in Canada. Presumably, this period corresponds to the period necessary for new immigrants to adjust to Canadian society, and therefore funding is made available to meet their "special" needs. The presumption is that, given three years' time, immigrants will "adjust" to their new environment, and the various problems which confront them will disappear.

Unfortunately, this kind of theory has done nothing to foster understanding of what goes on in the everyday lives of immigrant women. Those of us who work with immigrant women at the grassroots level are witnessing a steady increase of what can loosely be called "family problems," regardless of how long immigrant families have been in Canada. In fact, most of the workers we talked to think that family problems don't arise until after the 36 months official "settlement" period. Non-English speaking immigrant women do not "adjust" in the sense that their situations do not

markedly improve over time. Their situations probably worsen, especially if they become separated from their husbands. In the job market, they continue to occupy the lowest-paid menial jobs. Incidents of wife beating are on the increase.[10] Immigrant children continue to have tremendous problems at school and to be streamed into vocational rather than into academic programs.[11] At least two questions can be raised here: firstly, why don't these theories illuminate immigrant women's situations in the everyday world? and how can we begin to understand these phenomena? Where do we begin?

Let us examine the first question. It seems that a parallel can be drawn here between what Rowbotham has described as "the struggle between the language of experience and the language of theory" of the working class,[12] and the experience of immigrant women. There is what Smith identified as a "disjuncture" between the experience of women and the forms in which their experience is socially expressed.[13] This is, of course, the problem against which the women's movement has struggled; and it has been partially successful in achieving a language which can address women's experiences and concerns.

The same applies to the situation of immigrant women. The concepts and theories used to express our experiences, such as "cultural adjustment", "value conflicts" and so forth, originate in the social scientific discourse. They are the language of a ruling apparatus from which immigrant women are excluded.[14] These concepts, although they have become legitimate as forms for expressing immigrant women's situations, define these situations from a position external to immigrant women's own experiences. The concepts arise from ideological institutions, which women have had no hand in making. More importantly, their credibility has depended on the silence of those whose conditions they purport to describe.

This disjuncture is a problem which people working with immigrant women have to grapple with continuously in their daily work. The concepts and categories that they have been taught to use in thinking about immigrant women's situations do not match the reality which confronts them on a daily basis. But, somehow, they have to make immigrant women's experiences "fit" and conform to these categories, before they can get funding to do their work, refer a client to proper psychiatric care, or simply make the bureaucracy recognize that there *is* a problem.

Given that the theories and concepts mentioned above are inadequate to articulate immigrant women's concerns and experiences, we cannot merely borrow them to do our work. If we are serious about addressing the problems of immigrant women, then we are committed to a rather different method of work than is commonly undertaken in the social sciences. Thus, in conducting this study, we did not start from a preconceived notion or hypothesis as to how things might be for immigrant women, and proceed to find instances in their actual situation to prove or falsify the hypothesis. Nor did we attempt to fit their experiences into an existing theory or analytic model. Rather, we began from the standpoint of women, which committed us to examining immigrant women's experiences, not from the perspective of those who studied them from institutions, but from their own perspective. We sought to discover the topics and events that immigrant women saw as relevant and central to their own lives. When we took up the standpoint of women, a different picture of their lives emerged. In the next section, we shall see how the women's perspective makes visible certain features of the family which were obscured before. It is this other picture that we are putting forward in this report.

We began with immigrant women's experiences, but we did not end there. In a highly complex industrial society like Canada, people's experiences are shaped

by many processes which are not directly known to them and which are outside their immediate control.

For example, a phenomenon which affects people's lives directly in this way is urban renewal. Residents frequently find their homes expropriated and demolished to make way for development projects and transportation systems. The urban renewal scheme in the Strathcona (Chinatown) area of Vancouver during the 60s and early 70s is an example of this. In 1960, Strathcona was declared by city hall to be a prime urban renewal area for high density development projects and a major transportation route because of its strategic proximity to the central business district, the waterfront, and False Creek. In the years following, the residents of this area, including many Chinese immigrants who had lived there for many years, found their homes destroyed with minimal compensation from the government. Many residents were forced to move out of the neighbourhood and to relocate somewhere else.[15] In this case, we see that the destiny of local residents was determined by processes beyond their direct control. These processes originated in the plans of development and real estate companies in conjunction with city government and local businesses. While such operations are most often irrelevant to the everyday lives of the local residents, these decisions came to dictate and shape their experiences and to impinge upon their everyday lives.

It is important to point out that these processes are not immediately visible or readily available to local residents, especially to those with minimal Canadian education and language skills. Non-English speaking immigrants, in particular, are cut off from many avenues of information (such as newspapers, journals, reports, etc.) and resources which would otherwise enable them to make the connection between their lives and the larger political and economic processes to which their lives are inextricably tied.

The situation of immigrant women is particularly

exacerbated because of their social location and physical isolation, with the result that they find many of their own experiences inexplicable. One of our informants still finds her husband's departure from the family perplexing; to this day, she cannot understand why her husband walked out of the marriage one day, without warning, after ten years of marriage. Within two weeks of his departure, she lost the house (taken by the mortgage company), and was out in the street with four young children and nowhere to go. Whenever she thought about it, it was like a nightmare which had haunted her all these years. At times, she still tries to figure out what actually happened.

But when she describes her life to us, it was obvious that her married life was full of financial difficulties which at times appeared insurmountable. Her husband tried to start his own business once and went bankrupt. They bought a new house and could not manage the mortgage. He was a man who enjoyed luxury and was prepared to go into debt to get what he wanted. Prior to his departure, she was forced to work outside the home, and they were at a very difficult time financially. However, she found it unbelievable that he would leave for economic reasons, because she had not done anything to provoke him. She felt all along that they had a very good marriage.

In sum, our analysis proceeds on the understanding that the subjective experiences of individual members of society are determined by and are part of an objective organization of society. What people may experience as inexplicable, as well as what researchers and social workers call the "adjustment problems" of immigrant women, are not merely psychological states of affairs: they arise out of a context, in an objective social organization which is discoverable although not immediately visible. It is our task in this report to make visible aspects of this social organization, and the ways in which they structure immigrant women's lives in Canadian society.

The data for the study were primarily gathered through interviews with immigrant women and people who work with immigrant women, including health care workers, community workers, and employment counsellors. In this report, we will not attempt to quantify the materials that we collected. Rather, the data will be used in such a way as to illuminate aspects of a larger social organization which has a temporal dimension. The intention of the report is to provide a systematic account of the processes inherent in this social organization. In places where we cannot fully explicate the workings of this organization, we will make use of other research which offers insights into the processes we have identified in our work.

Insofar as our attempt to provide an alternate analysis on immigrant women is concerned, this report is only a beginning. We have tried to capture key moments of immigrant women's everyday lives as they are located in a larger social context. Owing to the limitation of time, funding, and human resources, we could not develop many points fully in this report. Where possible, we have pointed to gaps in our knowledge and suggested directions for further research.

More importantly, the intention of this report is to open up a dialogue on immigrant women, both among immigrant women ourselves and among other Canadians. It is a dialogue which many of us have engaged in privately for many years. It is a dialogue prompted by the desire to understand our sisters and our own experiences in Canadian society, and to make sense of that mysterious transformation which took place when we came to Canada, which is unavailable in text books, government statistics, or other public sources of information. It is time to make our concerns public. It is time that our voices were heard. Thus, this report is not simply an academic study: it is an instrument through which immigrant women speak out about our lives, our situations, and the problems

which we have carried for a long time in silence. Through this report, we want other Canadians to be more aware of and to recognize the contributions that immigrant women have made to Canada, and the enormous debt owed to our country's immigrant women.

Footnotes

1. For example, Harney & Troper (1975; Montero (1977).

2. Jacobson (1979).

3. The exclusion of women in ideological structures has been thoroughly explored by de Beauvoir (1974); Millet (1970); and Smith (1975).
4. See Smith (1975: 365-367).

5. For a review of women's accomplishments in the 70s in Canada, see the Special Issue on "The Decade" of *Canadian Women's Studies* (summer, 1980).

6. The inadequacy of services to immigrant women has been documented elsewhere. See Ng & Sprout (1978); Bodnar & Reimer (1979).

7. See Winnie Ng (1979).

8. This is taken from an interview conducted by Marie Campbell with a retired union organizer (see Campbell, n.d.). We wish to extend our thanks to her for permission to make use of this unpublished material.

9. This is a commonly held assumption. A series of three pamphlets on the Italian, Portuguese and Greek communities, published by the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation, focused on the "adjustment problems" of immigrant families. The issue paper, "The Bias of Culture," released by the Toronto Board of Education and used as a basis for the work of the Multicultural Workgroup, identifies "value conflicts" as the major problem of immigrant children in the schools.

10. See Epstein, Ng & Trebble (1978); Bodnar & Reimer (1979).

11. The Toronto Board of Education (1974).

12. See Rowbotham (1973: 33).

13. Smith (1979c: 135-146).

14. The way in which this arises is succinctly explicated by Smith (1975). How sociological fieldwork can be carried out to exclude or overlook people's experience has been treated by Ng (1979).

15. The Strathcona Urban Renewal is fairly well documented by SPOTA and the Chinese Cultural Centre in Vancouver. The information quoted here is from a background paper entitled, "A Brief Summary of Strathcona and Urban Renewal," prepared by Hayne Wai and given in a course on "The Anthropology of Vancouver," U.B.C., May, 1975.

SECTION II THE CONDITION OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

From an immigrant male worker's vantage point, the home is a place to rest, eat, and relax. It is a place of leisure, where he can watch TV, read the newspaper, listen to the radio, and engage in a variety of hobbies if he wishes.[1] Here is how a woman we interviewed describes the scenario at the supper table:

Q. You eat at six?
A. I eat at six.
Q. How long does it take?
A. 15 minutes and already finished. My husband takes long because he reads the newspaper when he eats.
Q. Oh, he does, eh? How about the kids?
A. Oh, the kids. . . . Ten (minutes) it's already finished. We don't wait. He's ready (to) start his soup. . . . He's not finished the first one, we're already finished everything, you know.
Q. So by the end of the meal he's alone at the table.
A. He don't care, because he's coming back from work.
Q. He doesn't talk to the kids?
A. No, no, he reads the paper. Forget about it. He listens to the radio and forgets. He wants everyone at the table.
Q. But he doesn't talk to them?
A. When they're finished, he don't care.

photo: F. Wyland

What is obscured, from the perspective of men, is the work process which provides the material basis which enables them to engage in their leisure activities. The same scenario we described above looks very differently from the woman's point of view. Supper does not appear on the table by an act of God. It involves the purchasing of the various ingredients of the meal, planning, and preparation. After supper, there are dishes to wash, the table to clean, and the floor to sweep. In the case above, since the husband wants all the children at the supper table, it is the woman's job to ensure that the children are all there. This involves knowing the schedules and activities of the children and rounding them up from their various preoccupations to appear at supper time.

From the standpoint of the woman, then, the home is not simply a constellation of family relationships to be enjoyed. The home presupposes a work process which has to be continuously managed and organized. The work of holding a family together is essentially the work of the woman. It is her labour which produces what we can identify as "a family." When we begin from the woman's perspective, the home comes to look very different from how it may look from the perspective of a man.[2]

What we have described so far is not peculiar to immigrant women. The work process inherent, but ordinarily invisible, in the family is primarily relegated to women across class and ethnic groups.[3] This is usually referred to as "housework," and recent studies by feminist sociologists have shown that it involves much more than cooking, cleaning, and child minding.[4] It is in part the purpose of this report to make visible the diverse activities that women do which are subsumed under "housework."

What is special about the work of immigrant women, then? From our inquiry, what comes to light is that, when immigrant families first come to Canada, the woman's work in the home is *intensified*. Together

with this work intensification is a concommitant increase in, and indeed enforcement of, the woman's dependence on her husband. Thus, immigrant women's situations are actually worsened as a result of the immigration process. This means that the home, which is a refuge for immigrant male workers, becomes a trap for immigrant women, much more so than it is for other Canadian women. This contradictory dynamic of the family is crucial to our understanding of the condition of immigrant women.

In our study, we have identified two sets of processes which create the work intensification and dependency of immigrant women. For conceptual clarity, we call the first set of processes "organizational changes," to refer to those changes which bring about a drastic re-organization of immigrants' everyday lives. These changes affect how immigrant women can conduct their work in a proper and competent manner. It is worth noting that "competence" is often seen as a personal atrribute. We have come to discover that what can be seen as personal competence is in fact determined by a larger social organization which defines and limits how an individual can conduct her work. This will become clearer as we proceed.

We call the second set of processes "institutionalized practices," to draw attention to those elements in the social structure, such as government policies, which contribute to a deepening of sexual and racial inequality in our society. While we have isolated these processes for the purposes of presentation, it is important to note that they are not independent of human activities and intentions. To give a simple example, immigration policy must be implemented by immigration officers for it to take effect. Welfare and educational policies don't just happen; they must be enacted on a daily basis. The processes which we have identified are therefore not static and unchanging. They are accomplished by people, and this gives them

a dynamic and determinate character. What we are attempting to do here is to provide a "skeleton," if you will, of these processes. We have also captured some instances of how they work at a particular moment in time. But as time changes, they too will change. What these processes look like, and how they affect people, need to be "filled out" continuously. Thus, no study which truly reflects people's experiences can remain unchanged over time, and it is with this understanding that we put forward the findings of our study.

CHAPTER 2
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

Most non-English speaking immigrants come to Canada to fill those strata of the labour market which require skills — such as brick-laying, plumbing, and light manufacturing — that do not involve a high level of technology.[5] Some of them also enter various occupations in the service sector. These immigrants usually come from industrially less advanced or third world countries. Many are from rural or semi-rural areas.[6] Whereas in the past, immigrants from Scandinavia and Eastern Europe were recruited to open up the western frontiers and develop an agricultural base for Canada, many recent immigrants tend to settle in urban centres, where more jobs are available. The Department of Immigration has attempted to redirect the flow of immigrants away from urban areas. However, it has not been entirely successful, especially since a larger proportion of immigrants entering the country in the seventies came as "family class" immigrants[7] to join their families and relations already residing in cities. According to the estimates of Employment and Immigration in 1978, about half of the "family class" immigrants and half of the assisted relatives will settle in Toronto, Montreal, and

Vancouver, with the remaining half going to the next five or six largest cities.[8]

Wherever they go, these immigrants find themselves transplanted overnight from a rural environment to a highly industrialized setting with a totally different kind of social organization. This is more true for a woman than for a man, because he has usually had some experience in an industrial centre as a migrant labourer before emigration. This change in organization is not merely a cultural difference. It goes beyond changes at the level of appearance, such as in language, dress, customs, and eating habits. Nor is it simply a matter of different attitudes and values, which are determined by a definite material basis. We want to draw attention to the underlying organizational bases of different forms of societies, which the term "cultural difference" presupposes but does not make visible. It is this underlying organization which brings about the phenomena which we can observe as "cultural differences." It is the same organization which determines, to a large extent, how individuals in a given society can do their work and develop their potentials. It is our aim here to explicate some of the elements which bring about a re-organization of immigrant families and an intensification of the work of immigrant women.

A. Integration of the Family into the Money Economy

When immigrant families come to Canada, they become totally immersed in a money economy. We do not mean to suggest that immigrant families were untouched by the process of industrialization and the money economy prior to immigration; industrialization has long disrupted traditional peasant economies. It is precisely the penetration of a wage economy into the farm economy which forces many immigrants to leave their home countries in the first place. The pattern of the worker, who goes from industrial centre to

industrial centre in search of wage work, leaving his (and sometimes her) spouse and children in the village or home town, is very common in less developed parts of the world. However, in this kind of situation, women's work in the home is not fully incorporated into a money economy and appropriated by modern industries. To a large extent, the woman remains in control of the pace of work within the family unit. Her labour is directly visible in the products consumed in the home, such as the bread and noodles that she makes. In many instances, she may also produce a variety of products for home consumption, such as gardening the vegetable plot, making the children's clothes, etc. In a rural or semi-rural setting, the woman's work is indispensable in sustaining the economy of the household unit.

In an industrially advanced country like Canada, production of family goods has been taken out of the home and appropriated by business enterprises.[9] If we look around us, it is not difficult to see that practically everything that a housewife does or produces can be purchased with money outside the home, from TV dinners to laundry service. There are many services available in the city, from dry-cleaning facilities to fast food outlets, which replace the services which could hitherto be obtained only in the home. This is a process which is identified by Eichler as the "industrialization of housework."[10]

In Canada, the immigrant housewife finds herself becoming increasingly reliant on consumer goods, not only because they reduce her work load and make her work easier, but more importantly, because the material conditions in Canada do not lend themselves to the production of subsistence goods within the single family unit.[11] Virtually overnight, immigrants are forced to become consumers, even though many immigrant women still produce many of the basic food stuffs, such as canned foods, themselves. (In fact, one of our interviews was conducted in the midst of

tomato-sauce making!) However, such efforts should not be interpreted simply as an exhibition of traditionalism, but more practically as a way of cutting down costs when family income does not permit the indiscriminate purchasing of processed food-stuffs.

Together with this increasing commercialization of household products is the need for what were previously luxury goods, such as colour TVs, automobiles, and a paraphernalia of electrical appliances from dishwasher to electric razor. But in Canada these items are not luxuries; they are basic to a normal standard of living in an advanced industrial country. Thus, whereas previously only the wage earner was directly tied to a money economy, when the immigrant family comes to Canada, the entire family is placed in the centre of the money economy. Everything now requires money. In addition, immigrants also find themselves articulated to an elaborate and formal credit system, either through buying a house or a car, or simply through the use of credit cards. In order to acquire the goods and services necessary to maintain a minimum living standard in Canada, immigrants have to work doubly hard in the paid labour force.

It must be reiterated that the majority of non-English speaking immigrants come to Canada to fill the lower, and frequently non-unionized, strata of the labour market. They are in jobs which pay subsistence wages barely covering the necessary expenditures of the household. The jobs that they occupy are what can loosely be called "blue collar" occupations; these are less secure and permanent than white collar occupations.[12] These jobs are prone to lay-offs and industrial accidents.[13] Indeed, one woman told us that her husband had been unemployed for four years owing to an industrial accident. Those women who participate in the paid labour force themselves have invariably suffered from work-related health problems at one time or another.

As we shall see later, the integration of the family

into a money economy has tremendous implications for women and their work. In a money economy, people need a wage to live. Since women's work in the home does not directly bring in a wage, it does not have the same importance socially or in the family. The family's reliance on a wage puts an immigrant woman in a dependent position vis-à-vis her husband, because it is on his wage that she and the children rely for their livelihood. But the fact that the wage is paid to the husband as an individual obscures the fact that it is not just for him; it is for him to maintain his wife and children. He considers it his money because it is paid to him as an individual,[14] and in this process, the women's work in the home is seen merely as her private service to a man. At the same time, immigrant men find that they have to depend more and more on the services of their wives for maintaining the family because their own wages are inadequate to meet all the family expenses. Thus, the woman's unpaid labour is an essential component in the maintenance of the immigrant worker and the immigrant family.

B. Women's Work Inside the Home

Although many of the women we interviewed have worked or are working outside the home, they still consider themselves to be housewives and see the family as their primary responsibility. Thus, it is impossible to gain an understanding of immigrant women's lives without considering their work inside the home and how it determines the nature of their participation in the paid labour force. Our study reveals that women's work in the home undergoes a *qualitative* change when immigrant families come to Canada. This change is a result of the integration of the family into a money economy, and is brought about by changes in the material basis of household organization and the technological basis of housework.

(1) Housework

As we saw earlier, housework in Canada is more "industrialized" than in less developed countries. There are basic utilities such as running hot and cold water, as well as electrical appliances which are intended to cut down the labour spent on housework. But interestingly enough, many immigrant women find housework harder in Canada, especially in the initial period.

> Q. How about in South America? . . .Doing housework, is it different?
> A. Over there, the houses are different, the climate is different. It didn't get that dusty or dirty as over here. I don't know what it is.
> Q. It gets dirty here, eh?
> A. Ya, so dusty, you know. In South America it was different. You would do your shopping day by day, not like here where you have to go on Friday and fill up the fridge for the whole week.

Most of the women think that their work is harder than their husband's work outside the home, because the working hours for housework are longer and there are more responsibilities. They also feel that life is somehow more hectic and demanding here, and there never seems to be enough time to go around.

This is inexplicable unless we understand that these immigrant women experience a drastic change of pace in doing housework. While there is no denial that housework in a less developed, rural environment is back-breaking and involves the majority of a woman's waking hours, the pace of work is set by her and other women in the neighbourhood or the village. Women's work is an organic part of village life and is shared cooperatively among the women, whose husbands may be away most of the time. Here is how a community worker describes the neighbourhood in Italy where she grew up:

The structure of housework for the women in the peasant neighbourhood, whose husbands have already migrated away to earn a family wage, was far more communal than it could ever be here, if only because of the physical feature of the neighbourhood. When I was growing up, we all lived on a block. And inside the block it was hollow. There was a yard. So there was a yard culture. And everyday, you would do certain things, wash, or iron, whatever. Ways were devised for things to be shared. It also had a built-in daycare system The children had to play in the yard, not on the street. The women would kind of look after the children, informally, you know. You didn't appoint anyone. It just happened. It was a matter of course because that was the place where they would go to do their laundry . . .

By contrast, the pace of an immigrant woman's work in Canada is determined *industrially* by her husband's work in the paid labour force. Her major responsibility here is to maintain her husband, the wage earner, so that he can go to work again the next day. Breakfast is prepared when he needs it in the morning; supper must be on the table when he gets back from work. If there are other wage earners in the household, then she has to cater to their special needs and requirements as well. If we examine immigrant women's daily schedule carefully, it is not difficult to discover that the two peak periods of their day correspond to the times when the husband and children prepare themselves to go out, and the times when they return. The following account of Elizabeth is typical of the daily life of most immigrant women we interviewed who are full-time housewives. Although her day is not slack by any stretch of the imagination, from her account, it is still possible to identify two peak periods: from 5:30 to 9 in the morning and from 4:30 to 7 in the evening.

Elizabeth gets up every day at 5 a.m. with her husband, who goes to work early. They don't usually have breakfast. Elizabeth only makes coffee for them both. She also packs her husband's lunch, because he doesn't like sandwiches packed overnight. After her husband leaves for work, Elizabeth goes back to bed and reads.

At 7:30, she gets up again and starts waking her five children, who are all at school. This is a hectic period of time when the kids are all crowded in the kitchen fixing their breakfast. Elizabeth used to make their breakfast when they were younger. She doesn't do that anymore. She only makes coffee. She enjoys sitting down for a cup of coffee with her eldest daughter, Patricia, before she leaves for school.

During the time when the children are having breakfast in the kitchen, Elizabeth starts cleaning and tidying up the bedrooms. Patricia usually makes her own bed, but the other children don't. She also cleans the bathroom. Elizabeth considers herself a fast worker. Usually, by the time the children leave, she has already finished most of the tidying up.

Elizabeth feels that she is an organized person and spaces out her housework sensibly. She washes clothes on alternate days. She washes clothes for her family (five people), for her parents and an unmarried brother who share the same house but live in a separate suite. Elizabeth hates ironing. So she does the washing and her mother does the ironing. On wash days, Elizabeth starts the washing machine at 5:30 in the morning. she usually finishes around 9 and does some tidying up and light house cleaning. She finishes everything around 10 so that she can have some free time to herself. On days when she doesn't do laundry, Elizabeth cleans the house more thoroughly, and finishes housework around 11. Then she goes for a walk and picks up bread, milk, and the odd things they need. When she returns, she makes another cup of coffee, and sometimes makes herself a sandwich before going out again.

Elizabeth is a lunch hour supervisor at a public school nearby. She likes her "job," because she enjoys the contact with the teachers and the kids. It also gives her a little bit of "pocket money" ($5 per day). After

school, she may go for a walk. This is the freest time of her day which she considers her own. She may read. Elizabeth enjoys reading and reads a great deal.

Elizabeth starts supper around 4 or 4:30 in the afternoon, depending on what she cooks. She does not like cooking, and in her family, she exclaims that it is almost "impossible to cook," because everyone's taste is different. "I make a soup for my husband tonight. He likes the broccoli; nobody likes broccoli in my house. When I make that I make it just for him. I have to make something else for me and my kids."

Besides, everything has to be made from scratch. Her husband comes home at 5:30, and wants to eat right away. So, Elizabeth usually has everything ready well before that time, and reheats the food when he returns. Supper is at 6. When it is finished, there are dishes to wash, the stove to clean, and the floor to sweep. Elizabeth sweeps the kitchen floor after every meal, and sometimes sweeps up to four times a day. She gets very little help from her children. Patricia usually helps to dry the dishes, but now she has a part-time job and can no longer help. She doesn't like to ask the boys because it is too much of a hassle. All the work is generally finished around 7 o'clock, so Elizabeth can relax and watch TV with the kids for a while before bedtime. Her husband usually goes to bed right after supper.[15]

From this and other accounts by immigrant women, we see that, while the early evening is a time which many middle class women reserve for self-fulfillment and satisfaction, it is an intense work period for immigrant women. It is a time when everyone is home and her services are most needed. Many immigrant women simply cannot go out to evening events because of the demands placed on them by their families.

Modern household appliances such as vacuum cleaners, washers, and driers, are intended to cut down on women's work in the home. However, various time-

budget studies conducted in the United States show that this is not the case. Women who are not in the paid labour force devote as much time to housework as their forbears.[16] Our study shows that, while "labour-saving" household machines may alleviate the physical exertion necessary to carry out household tasks, the *volume* of housework does not necessarily diminish. For our in-depth interviews, we asked women to describe a typical day in detail, and among women who were full-time housewives (i.e. those who do not work outside the home, although they may do baby-sitting or do piece work at home) we counted a minimum of six hours devoted to housework, not including childcare. The woman quoted above, who claimed that she was a "fast worker" and could finish everything in ten minutes, spent an average of six hours each day cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry! This does not include time spent with her children, or on shopping, running errands, and figuring out the family budget.

The weekend, especially, is one of the most hectic periods in an immigrant woman's work week, since the entire family is home. Elizabeth, the informant we quoted above, explains that she goes "crazy" on Saturdays.

A. . . . . I hate Saturday.
Q. What about Saturday?
A. Supposed to go away, Saturday, Sunday . . . I'm going crazy.
Q. Because they're all home?
A. Because I have to cook Saturday, the lunch.
Q. All day?
A. Sometimes we have something left over, my husband likes, he can eat at night time. I try to keep it together, to cook Saturday night and Sunday night. Usually Sunday is OK because I don't care. I sit down watching TV. If somebody wants a sandwich, go. But Saturday, because it's a lot of sports on TV, there's no place to go. I don't like to sit down watch(ing) sports all day. So I'm around the

kitchen. I'm reading a book. My husband comes, goes outside, comes back, says, "Why don't you make a little bit of beans with the sauce?" When I make that I have to stay beside the stove.

. . . . .

Maybe he goes outside, comes back at 9 o'clock or ten, you know. He drinks a little bit, he's like that. I spend two hours. I have to make lunch and I have to make sometimes at night time.

Q. So Saturday is your heaviest day.

A. Yes.

Thus, in Canada, immigrant women's work inside the home is no longer under their control. Their work is organized externally, by what we call the "industrial time clock." The pace of their work is not set by them so much as by the husband's — and other wage earners' — jobs outside the home, by the school, by household appliances, by the distance to the laundramat and to shopping areas. In this sense, she is as much an alienated worker as her husband is.[17]

Moreover, the organization of the neighbourhood in Canada does not simply prevent the establishment of cooperative networks among housewives; it creates a reliance of immigrant women on their immediate family members, notably the husband, which was not there before. If we go back to the description of the neighbourhood in Italy given by the community worker earlier, it is easy to see that housework in such a setting is not restricted to the confines of four walls, but is conducted more publicly. This kind of household organization not only necessitates a cooperative division of labour; more importantly, it enables the establishment of common bonds among the women, which can be drawn on in times of need and trouble. The community worker quoted above remembered how women helped each other in dispensing medical treatment to the children during epidemics and in curtailing wife beating. Margery Wolf's brilliant portrayal of rural Taiwan, from a woman's perspective, brings to light the implicit influence and independence a woman can gain by establishing a network of friends.

> Women in rural Taiwan do not live their lives in the walled courtyards of their husband's households. If they did, they might be as powerless as their stereotype. It is in their relations in the outside world (and for women in rural Taiwan that world consists almost entirely of the village) that women develop sufficient backing to maintain some independence under their powerful mothers-in-law and even occasionally to bring the men's world to term. A successful venture into the men's world is no small feat when one recalls that the men of a village were born there and are often related to one another, whereas the women are unlikely to have either the ties of childhood or the ties of kinship to unite them. All the same, the needs, shared interests, and common problems of women are reflected in every village in a loosely knit society that can when needed be called on to exercise considerable influence.
>
> Women carry on as many of their activities as possible outside the house. They wash clothes on the riverbank, clean and pare vegetables at a communal pump, mend under a tree that is a known meeting-place, and stop to rest on a bench or group of stones with other women. There is a continual moving back and forth between kitchens, and conversations are carried on from open doorways through the long, hot afternoons of summer. The shy young girl who enters the village as a bride is examined as frankly and suspiciously by the women as an animal that is up for sale. If she is deferential to her elders, does not criticize or compare her new world unfavorably with the one she has left, the older residents will gradually accept her presence on the edge of their conversations and stop changing the topic to general subjects when she brings the family laundry to scrub on the rocks near them. As the young bride meets other girls in her position, she makes allies for the future, but she must

> also develop relationships with the older women. She learns to use considerable discretion in making and receiving confidences, for a girl who gossips freely about the affairs of her husband's household may find herself labeled a troublemaker. On the other hand, a girl who is too reticent may find herself always on the outside of the group, or worse yet, accused of snobbery. . . .[18]

By contrast, women's work in a highly industrialized country such as Canada is privatized in the sense that it is conducted within the confines of the family unit. Houses and apartments are designed for "nuclear families" and are not easily accessible to non-family members. There is no communal place which facilitates the formation of social networks and cooperative patterns among neighbours.[19] The organization of services, such as water and electricity supply, renders such cooperation irrelevant. Childcare is more difficult because of the lack of the "informal" daycare system described in the example given earlier.[20] The most important effect this has is that immigrant women have to do their work in isolation and without assistance. Since most children are at school all day, they are not able to help with some of the work. Unless she has relatives living nearby, an immigrant woman is truly alone. Most immigrants whom we interviewed spoke about the difficulties of making friends here. The younger ones would eventually establish their network of friends after a number of years, especially if they worked outside the home. Most older housewives, however, are forced into isolation. This isolation in turn forces immigrant women to be more dependent on their husbands emotionally and practically. As we shall see later, this dependence is reinforced through various institutional practices as well.

While household applicances are taken-for-granted features of middle class Canadian homes, they are not so for immigrant households. The immigrant women

we talked with have had to do most household chores by hand, especially when they first came to Canada and there was barely enough money to subsist on. Paradoxically, modern electrical appliances, once obtained, isolate a housewife from her community of women friends and confine her to the privacy of her own home. Since a washing machine is available to each family unit, there is no longer any necessity to share the washing or to hang up the laundry together. When a woman is doing housework, she has no neighbour to talk to. Cleaning is done alone. Cooking is done alone. Washing is done alone. Childcare takes place mostly within the household unit, not shared by neighbours and friends.

Even shopping in Canada presupposes the effort of an individual, and to a lesser extent the private ownership of automobiles. The concentration of shopping facilities in shopping centres, and centralization of market places in the form of supermarkets, mean that women need cars to do their shopping. While the centralization of goods and services may cut down costs for business enterprises and cut down work for middle class housewives and professional women, large scale shopping expeditions require storage facilities (in the home this means a certain size house with adequate storage space and facilities such as freezers) and certain modes of transportation. They are certainly not attractive ventures for immigrant women, who do not know the language or the geography of the city, and who have to subject their lives to the whims of the public transportation system, sometimes under intolerable climatic conditions. Most women we interviewed "prefer" to shop in the small neighbourhood stores, which, although they have higher prices, cater better to their needs and requirements.[21]

It is a small wonder that many immigrant women suffer depression and severe anxiety, especially during the initial period of immigration.[22] Some of them never fully "adjust" to life in Canada because,

as we have pointed out, unless they can attain a certain standard of living here, housework, shopping, and childcare do not actually get easier. When asked in what way she found life hard in Canada at first, one woman from South America replied readily, "Oh, but it's not the climate that is cold. It's the people!" The material organization in Canada does indeed create such an isolated environment for immigrant women that it comes to be consequential for their mental and physical well-being.

(2) Management

Although most women are responsible for the management of the household budget, it should not be equated with power or equality in the home. None of the women we interviewed considers the family income hers. They see themselves clearly as "managers" only. Usually, the husband hands his pay cheque to the wife, or deposits it into a joint bank account to which she has access. The wife is responsible for paying the rent or mortgage, the bills, grocery, and other expenses such as children's clothes. The husband usually keeps a portion of his earning for his own use. If the wife receives the entire pay cheque, then the husband is given "pocket money" to cover his own expenses. Her own earnings as a rule go into the family pot. Here is one woman's experience:

Q. Did you give (your wage) to your husband?
A. No, I manage my house.
Q. So your husband (gives) you (his) money? Everything?
A. Everything. He wants just $10, $15 for his coffee.
Q. You'd give him that $15. Do you pay the bills?
A. Everything.
Q. You pay for everything.
A. With mine and his (pay cheques). That's why I leave the kids and go to work because we can't manage with his pay cheque.

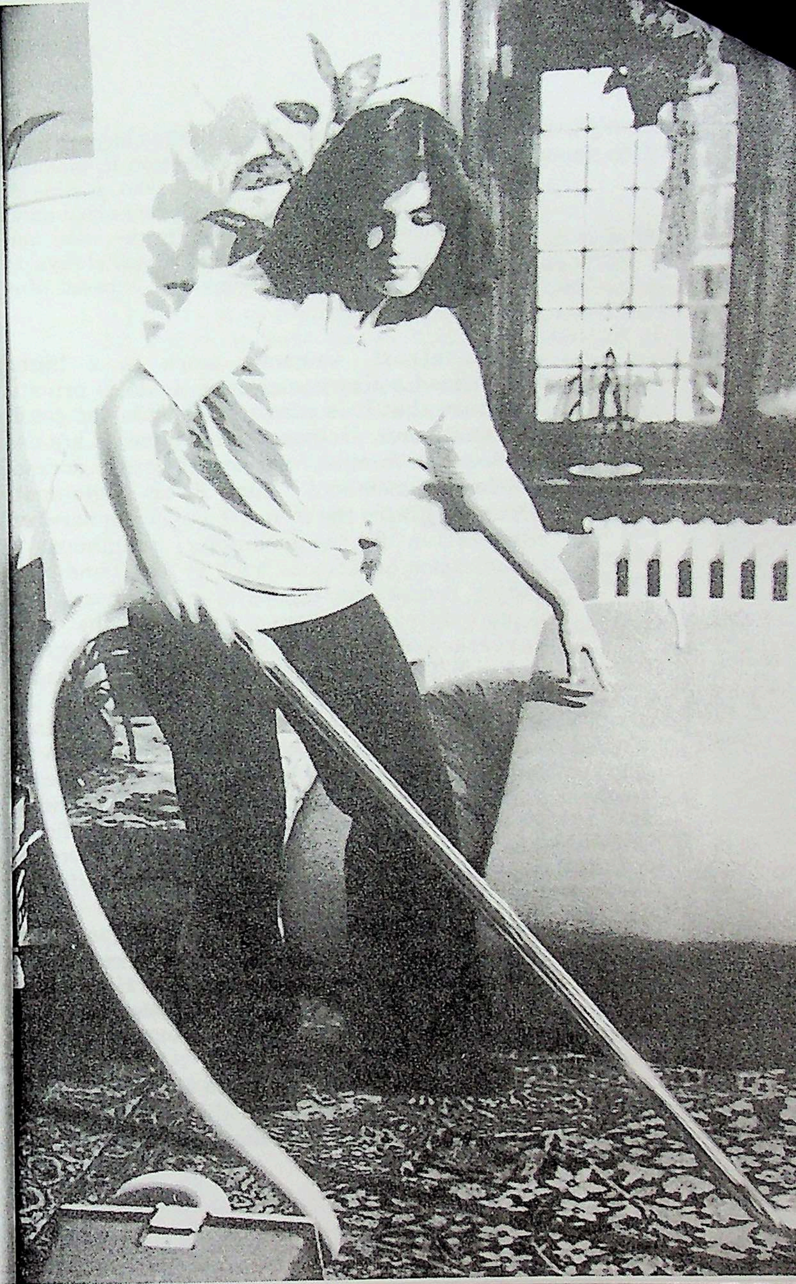


photo: A. Menozzi

The arrangement described above is rare; it is more likely that the woman will receive a portion of her husband's pay cheque for housekeeping. In cases where the children work, however, it is common for them to hand their earnings over to their parents, usually to the mother, and obtain pocket money to cover their transportation and coffee. Many immigrant children, especially teenagers, work in the paid labour force either part-time or full-time, not so much to earn pocket money for themselves, as to bring in additional cash for the household. This is especially true for recent immigrants.

> Q. How old were you when. . . ?
> A. Fifteen. We didn't like it. we wanted to go back. But then after a while... I came on a Sunday and on a Monday I start to work. They already had a job for me. In factory, you know, sewing.
> Q. At 15, what about school?
> A. I couldn't go, because I had my other sisters and brothers. They were supposed to go to school. My mother, she couldn't manage.
> Q. Are you the oldest?
> A. Ya. I had to (work). We had a permit from school that I had to go to work and my sister and my brother, the little one, they went up to Grade 10 and the other one is at university and everything. But then my other sister, the one after me, when she was 16 she went to work too. Because otherwise we couldn't make it. We had $2,000 fare that we were supposed to pay.

Frequently, the Family Allowance money is the only money that the woman considers hers, because it comes directly to her in her name. Even then, most of them have to put it into the family pot to subsidize family income. Most families we interviewed have debts to pay off, and every additional penny, such as Family Allowance and children's earnings, is needed. One woman, for example, uses the Family Allowance to cover part of her rent, because most of her husband's earning is used for housekeeping. Some better-off families may put the Family Allowance money into a separate bank account, and save it for the children or for an emergency. Since money is so tight, an emergency can throw the carefully worked-out budget off balance. In these situations, again, it is the immigrant housewife who has to figure out how to manage, as in this example:

> A. Somebody phoned before Christmas and he have to run to Italy to see his mother. She was very sick.
> Q. Your husband's mother?
> A. Ya. So it was a Sunday, what do we do? We have a Chargex. We pay the trip with that. I went to the bank; I ask how much I have to pay that trip. She told me about that, and now every week I have to take out so much money. I don't want to pay too much interest. We pay with (Chargex), and I have to put everything back, you know.

While the woman may manage the money, the husband, as the major wage earner, has a decisive voice in how money is to be spent. When there is a disagreement, the husband usually has veto power.[23] One woman stated explicitly that when disagreement regarding money arises, her husband wants the final say; "he feels superior and treats me like a dummy sometimes." Even in one family where the woman and her daughter, who was present at the interview, felt that she had complete control over the family budget, further probing revealed quite a different picture. At one point, she confided that she "tricked" her husband into buying a better home when the children were growing up. Here is Maria's story:—

> Maria and her husband came to Canada in the fifties. She worked in hotels, restaurants, and as a domestic worker for a long time. After the birth of her seventh child, Maria finally quit working and stayed home. At

this time, they had bought a house in what Maria considered a bad neighbourhood. To illustrate the neighbourhood, she told us that one night a murder took place right outside their house. She did not want her children to be raised in that area. However, her husband did not see the need to move. Besides, he wanted a new car (and proceeded to buy one). One of her sons wanted to go to college. There was no money to buy a better house. After considerable thinking, Maria decided that the only way to save money would be for her to go to work again. She had to do this behind her husband's cleaning. She did this for three years and saved up enough money. When she finally told her husband that they could put a down payment on a new house, she lied that she borrowed the money from her brother. Even up to the point when the transactions about the house were made, he disapproved, and she had to "trick" him into signing for the mortgage (although she did not say how). He did not find out how she got the money until the children were grown up.[24]

Another woman told us that her husband was the one to do the grocery shopping in the family. Again when we asked her how this arrangement came about, she replied that this was a better way because there was less argument about how she had spent the money!

A. He does the shopping.
Q. He does the shopping? Oh, that's not bad.
A. No, it's better because after we fight, after we fight.. ..Because he spends one hundred dollars, he don't care. I spend one hundred dollars, (he asks), "Where do you put it, look, one, two, three, nothing here. The money is gone. What are you doing with the money?"

Thus, we cannot take the division of household responsibilities, including management of the family

budget, at its face value. Frequently, what we observe as "equal" division of labour only goes skin deep. Just below the surface, and sometimes not even below the surface, is a very different reality!

Finally, when the immigrant family comes to Canada, the mother has to assume new kinds of responsibilities which pertain to a money economy. Since her husband's earning power is the most important consideration in the maintenance and survival of the family, her duty is to safeguard and preserve his earning power as well as possible, and to keep the family together.[25] In this regard, the woman becomes the "buffer" between the outside world and the home. During periods of unemployment, it is often the woman who applies for UIC on her husband's behalf, fills out application forms, lines up at the Employment office, etc. It is usually the woman who has to take care of housing and medical needs of the family. When the husband of one of our informants had an industrial accident, it was she who negotiated with the Workmen's Compensation Board and found out about retraining programs.[26] It is the mother who mediates between the home and the school. When the daughter of one of our informants was caught shoplifting, it was the mother who searched for a lawyer and appeared in court with her daughter. When we asked why her husband did not accompany her, her response was: "Why waste a day's wage? I can do it just as well." The following excerpt from one of our interviews reveals the kind of "buffering" work that the immigrant mother does:

Q. For instance, if you can sense when things go wrong ....Say that Theresa is having an argument with her friend Lucy or something, would your husband notice things like that?
A. No, he don't care about that. He doesn't have time

to look after, really, because when they come home, he's so tired he never...

Q. He doesn't really involve himself?

A. No. He's really happy because he knows everybody's home and he don't care if they have arguments. As long as it's not a big argument with a policeman or this kind of thing.

Whatever happens, her responsibility is to ensure that the husband does not get distrubed, so that he can go to work the next day.

C. Women's Work Outside the Home

When the husband's wage is insufficient to cover all the debts and expenses, then the immigrant woman must also seek waged work outside the home. All the women we interviewed, even those who call themselves "housewives" and spend most of their time taking care of the family, have had to work outside the home at one time or another. Usually, they work because there is not enough money to cover the basic expenses. Sometimes, a woman does part-time work to earn extra income, so that the family budget doesn't have to be so tight all the time. Many do not consider their part-time occupations real jobs, because the wages are so low. For instance, one woman babysits in her home, in addition to supervising lunch hour at a public school.

But even when immigrant women are forced to work outside the home, their primary responsibility is to ensure the stability of the family unit and to safeguard the husband's earning power. This is why the family immigrated in the first place. Thus, an immigrant woman's participation in the paid labour force is contingent upon her unpaid work inside the home. The women we interviewed who work outside the home must arrange their wage work around a schedule of housework and childcare. Many women "choose" to work part-time, or do shift work in the evening when

other wage workers can take over childcare. The life of Maria, a 59-year-old semi-retired worker, epitomizes the situation of many non-English speaking immigrant women.

> Maria came to Canada in 1955 with her husband and five children. They were tenant farmers in southern Italy and went bankrupt. They were sponsored to Canada by Maria's brother. Maria held a variety of jobs since she came to Canada. She got a job in a restaurant washing dishes two days after the family arrived in Toronto. For ten years, Maria's daily routine went something like this: She started her day cleaning people's houses at 8 in the morning, until 4 in the afternoon. At four, she went to work at the restaurant until one o'clock the next day. From her domestic service, Maria acquired cast-off clothing for her children; from the restaurant, she brought home left-over food to feed her family. On the weekend, she did housework with the help of her eldest daughter, who was responsible for looking after the younger children, plus the shopping and banking.
>
> Maria did stay home for a couple of years after the birth of her sixth child. Then she went back to work because the family needed the money. At one time, she got a job cleaning in the bank. She would go to work between 4 and 8 in the morning, before people came to work. She went home just in time for her eldest daughter to leave for school. She stayed home during the day looking after the baby, and went around cleaning houses and offices again at night.
>
> Maria is proud that she now has a nice house and that her children all had a good education. At the time of the interview, she was still working as a cleaner in a textile factory. "Now," said Maria contentedly, "I go to work because I enjoy it. When I am tired, I go home."[27]

In any case, when immigrant women have to work in the paid labour force, their work inside the home is further intensified because they effectively carry a double load. The husband is slow to offer much help

around the house, especially if he has a physically demanding job. Even when he does give some assistance, the woman is still primarily responsible for housework and managing the household budget. The situation is better if there are other female members in the household, such as the grandmother or daughters, to help out. One of our informants, who used to work a 16-hour workday outside the home, relied heavily on her eldest daughter to take care of the work inside the home, including housework and childcare. During the interview, she exclaimed several times, with a mixture of pride and remorse, "She is like a mother to me."

Family responsibilities, as well as the objective conditions of the wage labour market, are important limitations to the labour force participation of immigrant women. They form a "captive labour pool" with no possibility for advancement or for gaining better working conditions.[28] Immigrant women are usually restricted to jobs which have no benefits or permanency, such as domestic and janitorial work, the lowest strata of factory work, and unskilled restaurant work. As Maria's experience indicates, this kind of work is usually available on a part-time, temporary basis. It often pays minimum wage or less. And immigrant women have to rely on good personal relations with their employers to keep their jobs and negotiate pay increases, etc. Unless they work from 12 to 16 hours a day, there is little chance that they could make enough money to maintain themselves and their children. The prevailing working conditions, therefore, tend to enforce immigrant women's economic dependency on their husbands, and totally destroy the autonomy which they may have had in their home environment. Moreover, working outside the home puts their responsibilities in the home in jeopardy: they have to work twice as hard to keep the household together. The stress put on them is enormous.

In sum, our study reveals that changes in the material organization of immigrant women's world, as a result of immigration, bring about an intensification of their work. Housework is made more difficult without the help of friends and neighbours; and immigrant women also have to assume additional responsibilities, including wage work outside the home, which further exacerbate the immigration experience. It is in this initial phase of the immigration process that whatever autonomy they hitherto enjoyed is seriously undermined. In the next section, we shall examine the larger processes in the Canadian social structure which enforce immigrant women's dependency both economically and socially.

CHAPTER 3 INSTITUTIONALIZED PROCESSES

While our research has focused on the experiences of immigrant women, in the course of our inquiry we have come to see what we call "institutionalized processes" that reinforce the dependency of immigrant women in Canadian society. In this section, we will provide a brief overview of these processes and list those which have come to our attention. However, the discussion here should not be treated as conclusive or exhaustive. Indeed, we suggest that how these processes affect immigrants' lives is an area which has been grossly overlooked by researchers in the past and which requires further research.

A. Immigration Policy

In the previous section, we examined how women maintained a certain degree of autonomy and power in their home country by establishing an informal support system among neighbours and friends. We further suggested that both the immigration process and the material organization of Canadian society prevent

the re-establishment of this support network, with the result that immigrant women are forced to be more dependent on their husbands and, to a lesser extent, on their children. Now we focus on the immigration policy itself, and examine how it enforces that dependency.

The Immigration Act of 1976, which came into effect in April, 1978, serves to divide Canadian residents into two categories, "citizens" and "landed immigrants,"[29] by subjecting immigrants to special rules and regulations. Under the new Act, domicile protection for immigrants has been removed, so that all landed immigrants, regardless of how long they have lived in Canada, can be deported for a number of reasons, including the *suspicion* that they are being "subversive." Since "subversion" in the Act is not defined, many immigrants are afraid to engage in activities, including union organizing, which may be labelled subversive. Immigrants can also be deported if they wilfully fail to support themselves and their dependents. A recent study reveals that employers use these provisions in the Act to intimidate immigrant workers.[30]

We can thus see that landed immigrants are effectively "second class" citizens, since they do not enjoy the same civil rights as other Canadians. If this is true of independent immigrants (that is, immigrants who are expected to become self-supporting and successfully established in Canada by virtue of the skills, knowledge and other qualifications they possess), then non-English speaking immigrant women are "third class" citizens, because most fall into the "family class" category and have even fewer rights than independent immigrants.

"Family class" immigrants enter Canada via the sponsorship of their husbands or relatives and are considered to be dependents, and therefore not subject to the standard economic requirements for entry. The sponsor must undertake to support the sponsored

individual(s) for a period of 10 years. Frequently, in the application process, women are not assessed separately from their husbands. Even if a woman has been working in the country she left, she is automatically marked down on his application as a "housewife."[31] As such, she is not expected to enter the paid labour force in Canada.

Ironically, due to financial hardship in Canada, many so-called "dependent" immigrants, including "housewives," do find their way into the labour market at one time or another and contribute directly to the GNP (Gross National Product).[32] According to government statistics, about a third of the family class immigrants entered the work force in 1978.[33] This is a conservative estimate because, as we have seen, many immigrant women gravitate to jobs, such as in private domestic service, which are not included in the official employment statistics.

More important is the fact that the sponsorship system places immigrant women in a totally dependent and subordinate position vis-à-vis the sponsor, who is legally responsible for their financial welfare. First of all, an immigrant woman's entry into Canada is conditional upon the financial support of her sponsor. If, for some reason, the sponsor should be deported, it is likely that she will be deported also. Thus, prior to an immigrant woman's entry into Canada, her legal status as a dependent is already established. This process originates in the institutionalized practices of the Department of Employment and Immigration, and is quite apart from the material conditions, such as those we explored earlier, which create her psychological and physical dependence. Furthermore, once classified as a dependent immigrant, a whole series of consequences follow, which place a women in a progressively disadvantaged position. As sponsored immigrants, women are not eligible for state assistance during the ten-year sponsorship period. They cannot obtain Family Benefits, welfare,

or other benefits such as daycare subsidy and non-profit housing programs (e.g. Ontario Housing).

The following case study, prepared for a workshop which examined the services for immigrant women, is based on the experience of a sponsored immigrant. Although details which would reveal the woman's identity have been modified or omitted, it still serves to illustrate the unique problems confronting immigrant women generally.

Case Study No. 3
Woman, 28, Ugandan, speaks good English. Married with two children (ages 3-1/2 and 5-1/2).
Background information:-
She has been in Canada for 1-1/2 years. Sponsored by husband's brother. Husband working at a finance company. He has adapted to the Canadian way of life and no longer wants to be married or take any responsibility for his children.
This woman was seeking childcare subsidy so she could get a job and support herself and two children. she was looking for kitchen work or work as a domestic. She was told at Day Care Information that she would have to get approval from Manpower and Immigration (now Employment and Immigration), as she was a sponsored immigrant. Her sponsor had told her if she approached Immigration that she would be sent back to Uganda, and put his entire family in danger. She has no relatives from her side of the family in Canada. This woman withdrew her application at Day Care Information for the above reason. When approached by an advocate, she informed the person that all her calls were being monitored and please not to call again. This woman and her children are now in total servitude to her brother-in-law and his family. Her husband visits periodically for his "rights."
This woman was an accountant in Uganda.[34]

Immigrant women are effectively cut off from many social services and benefits that other Canadians take for granted. The only condition under which an immigrant woman can obtain welfare is if she can prove a break with her sponsor. This may involve proving that she and her husband are legally separated; or in the case of a relative, that the sponsor is unwilling or no longer able to support her and her children. In any event, the procedure of legally terminating this relationship is degrading and painful for both the woman and her family.[35]

At first glance, it seems that non-English speaking immigrant women can become more independent by learning English and participating in educational and skill-training programs to equip themselves with more specialized and marketable skills. In practice, however, owing to their legal (dependent) status, few immigrant women can take advantage of these programs.

Educational programs offered by Employment and Immigration can be divided into job training and skill upgrading programs, and English language training (ESL). These programs, subsidized by Employment and Immigration, are designed to meet the demands of the job market and to equip workers with the necessary skills and language facility to participate competitively in the labour force in as short a time as possible. The Department purchases seats in ESL and skills courses run by community colleges, and provides them free of charge to *independent* immigrants destined for the labour market. While taking the course, the breadwinner can obtain an allowance for himself and his family. Since most immigrant women are sponsored immigrants and are not supposed to enter the job market, they are excluded from these programs. If they wish to take ESL courses, they or their sponsor have to pay. Frequently, the high costs of these programs render them inaccessible to immigrant women. Moreover, most skill training programs require a minimum of Grade 8 English or its equivalent. Again, most non-English speaking immigrant women are automatically excluded from these programs by this admission criterion.[36] A worker in an

employment agency interviewed for this study pointed out that, in her experience, none of the clients who was a sponsored immigrant fulfilled the admission requirements for the Manpower training programs.

Even if immigrant women could be accepted into the programs, most of them wish to work because they need money immediately, and would take jobs which don't require English or specialized skills rather than complete the courses. In terms of costs, it would seem that programs offered by community and voluntary organizations and church groups, either free of charge or at nominal cost to the participants, would be most suitable to immigrant women. Unfortunately, many of these programs are not directly geared toward labour market needs. In addition, they may be held at inappropriate times and locations for immigrant women, or may lack childcare facilities which many housewives require. As we pointed out earlier, while the evenings and weekends are times that many middle class women reserve for recreational and educational activities, they are the most hectic periods of an immigrant woman's schedule. Most importantly, recent studies show that the orientation of many of these courses is toward middle class, white collar occupational requirements. They do not correspond to the needs and experiences of working class immigrant women.[37]

The policies and practices of social services and health care systems have similar effects for immigrant women. A study investigating the mental health of immigrant women points to the practices of the psychiatric profession which enforces women's dependent position.[38] In the past, these processes have been virtually ignored by researchers, health care and social workers, educators, and the like. Immigrant women's situation is generally explained in terms of their cultural backgrounds and attitudes. Recent research such as ours, which focuses on the social organization of women's everyday experience, is beginning to point out the inadequacy of these explanations and to shed light on the larger social, political, and economic processes that play a crucial role in determining people's everyday experiences.

B. A Segregated Labour Force

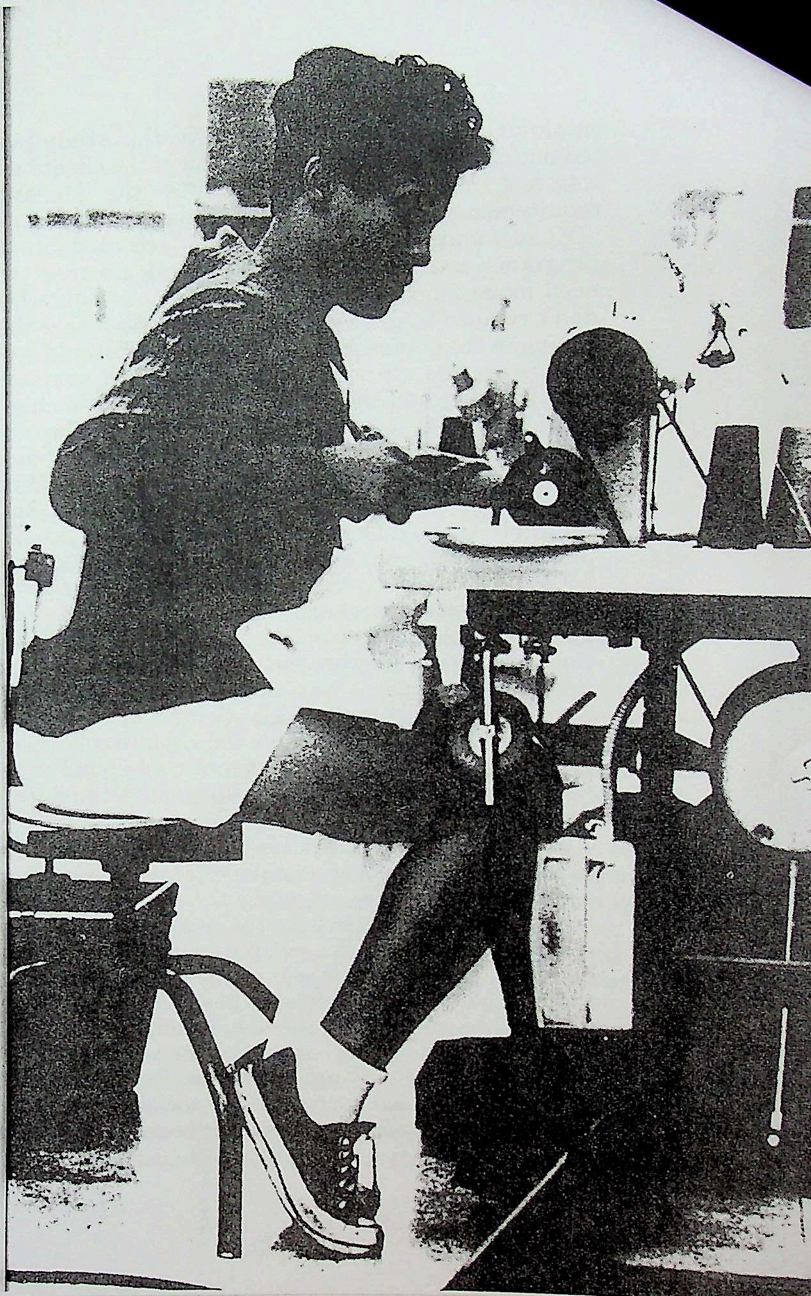
The Canadian labour market is segregated by sex and ethnicity; that is, some jobs are reserved for women and ethnic minorities, and some for "WASP" men.[39] With regard to immigrants, their disadvantaged position originates in the bureaucratic practices of the Department of Employment and Immigration, which subject them to a different set of rules and regulations than are applied to Canadians. As we discussed above, this is especially true for immigrant housewives who enter the country as dependents.

Immigrants are further disadvantaged in a competitive labour market in which Canadian work experience is one of the determinant factors for entry into different occupational classifications. A study conducted in Vanouver reveals that many immigrants, even those in professional and highly skilled technical occupations in their home countries, have to take lower positions than their formal qualifications would suit them for.[40] In her research on the Portuguese community, Boulter found that an immigrant's first job in Canada, usually a low-skilled menial job, is then treated as her Canadian experience and she is subsequently locked into certain kinds of jobs.[41] Immigrants who enter the country as independent immigrants are at least eligible for Manpower skill training and upgrading programs which may provide them with an avenue of upward mobility. For immigrant housewives, even this alternative is barred to them. This, coupled with their family responsibilities and obligations, means that their choice of jobs and opportunities are severely limited. As we have said before, they are restricted to a separate and captive pool within the labour force.

Commonly, non-English speaking immigrant women are recruited into three kinds of services and industries. Firstly, they are recruited into private domestic and janitorial services by doctors, lawyers. managers, and the like. Although this kind of employment is usually low-paid and without labour standard protection, it suits the requirements of immigrant women because it can be fitted into their schedule of housework and childcare more easily than other kinds of jobs. They also do not have to use English as part of their work. Secondly, immigrant women are found in the lower strata of the service industries, including restaurants, and janitorial and cleaning services, as well as the food industry. Thirdly, they are crowded in the lower echelons of the manufacturing industries, such as light manufacturing in textile, garment, and plastic factories, and in the retail trade. Frequently, they are hired either by small operations owned by ethnic entrepreneurs (e.g. small retail stores, supermarkets, delicatessens, etc.) in the different ethnic communities, or by large institutions (e.g. factories and hotels) employing over a hundred workers. In the latter case, the size of the industry or business seems to be important in determining whether immigrant women will be hired, because it is essential that other employees in the workplace speak the same language as the new employees. Apart from businesses run by ethnic entrepreneurs, smaller companies are less likely to hire non-English speaking immigrants because there is less likelihood that other employees can speak their language.[42]

Occasionally, in the garment industry, if a woman shows initiative, works hard, and learns a bit of English quickly, she may become an assistant to the supervisor. But most often women are confined to operating sewing machines. The more prestigious positions, such as garment cutting and supervisory positions, are usually occupied by men, and women are rarely promoted to these jobs. Thus, although we

photo: Ch. Simonpietri/Sygma



know very little about the hiring and promotion policies of businesses and industries, the effects of these policies, with regard to immigrant women, are very clear: women are confined to the bottom layers of the labour force with the worst working conditions and wages. The jobs that they occupy are those that other workers are in a position not to take.

When we consider the way in which immigrant women are locked into a job ghetto, we cannot overlook the role of unions in maintaining a segregated labour force. Most of the jobs occupied by immigrant women, with the exception of about 40% of those in the textile and garment industry, are non-unionized.[43] In her study on immigrant women in the labour force, Arnopoulos found that most of the unions covering the textile and garment trade are weak. Some of them have a long history of collusion with management.[44] Apart from the problems of organizing the sectors of business and industry where immigrant women are concentrated,[45] until recently most labour unions have not really made a concerted effort to organize women workers in general, and immigrant women workers in particular. The question is: why not?

The reasons for this neglect go beyond the scope of this report, although we can safely say that the historic animosity between labour movements and women continues today.[46] In relation to immigrant women, the goals of immigration policies and organized labour have always been antagonistic to each other. Immigration policies are designed to meet the demands of industries by allowing workers with specialized or general skills to enter Canada, thereby helping to depress wages by increasing the competition for jobs. To protect themselves from excessive exploitation, Canadian workers band together to form labour unions, thereby replacing competition with cooperation. With sufficient numerical strength, organized labour can demand higher wages and better working conditions. In the past, male workers did this by excluding or selectively organizing women, ethnic

minorities, and the children, thus contributing to the formation of a segregated labour force.

Although there is still a great gap in our knowledge in this area, recent published materials begin to shed light on the relationship between the labour movement and women workers.[47] In her study on women in trade unions in B.C. during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Campbell found that, in attempting to protect themselves against competition and employers' exploitation, white Canadian male workers used racist and sexist tactics in organizing to exclude other workers, namely immigrants, women, Native peoples, and children from their occupations. These latter groups were organized into a relatively cheap labour pool which did not pose a threat to the male labour force. When women were organized into unions, it was done to exclude Oriental workes, thus promoting racism within the union movement. Union practices were sexist in the sense that women's problems were not reflected in union demands. Women workers were consistently paid lower wages than men. The leadership was more concerned about women's morality and health than about bargaining for an adequate living wage on their behalf.[48] As a result of this tradition in our union history, many jobs in the lower echelons of the labour market remain unorganized to this day.

In sectors where organizing efforts have taken or are taking place, union organizers are frequently unaware of the critical needs of immigrant women, whose hesitation and reluctance to participate in union activities are interpreted as apathy or a manifestation of traditionalism and backwardness. Our intent here is not to deny the important work of the union movement in bringing about higher wages and better working conditions for immigrant women. However, we do want to draw attention to the fact that immigrant women have been systematicallly disadvantaged both in the labour market and in the

larger society. There are concrete barriers both inside and outside the home which shape and limit the courses of action and options available to them and it is time for the union movement seriously to confront these barriers.

Footnotes

1. Note here that what we have described is not peculiar to immigrant workers, but is essentially how men see the home. Rubin's study of working class families in the US clearly spells out the differences in the perceptions of leisure between husbands and wives (see Rubin, 1976, especially Chapter 10).
2. We are indebted to Professor D.E. Smith for this insight. Our work has also been inspired by that of Dalla Costa (1972).
3. We are not, of course, unaware of the different character of women's work in different social classes. The important class character of women's work has been brilliantly explored by Smith (1973; 1979a). However, we do want to draw attention to the fact that activities in the so-called "domestic sphere" are commonly relegated to women.
4. See, for example, Oakley (1974a) and Smith (1979b).
5. In our investigation, we found that, contrary to the common belief that immigrants are brought into Canada as unskilled workers, they are recruited mainly to fill the gaps in the Canadian labour market, and tend to concentrate on the top (e.g. professional occupations) and lower rungs of the occupation ladder with little representation in between (see also Arnopoulos, 1979). A careful reading of the Employment and Immigration Annual Reports reveals that working class immigrants usually possess skills corresponding to a lower level of technology, for which training is no longer available in Canada.
6. All the women we interviewed were from small towns or villages from Italy, Greece, the Azores, and Latin American countries. Thus, this report has focused on the experience of immigrant women from rural settings. We have not dealt with the transition from an urban setting to Canada, although this would make an interesting study in itself.
7. The Immigration Act of 1976, which came into effect in April 1978, has abolished the "nominated" and "sponsored" categories of "assisted relatives" and "family class" respectively. A "family class" immigrant does not enter the country subject to the standard economic requirements. However, the sponsoring relative must undertake to support the sponsored individual for a period of 10 years (see also Employment Handbook for Immigrant Women, 1979). It should be noted that most non-English speaking immigrant women enter Canada under this classification. The full explication of immigrants with a "family class" status will be explored in depth later.

8. Employment and Immigration, Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration Levels (1978: 22-23).
9. For a historical development of this process in Canada in relation to the family, see Smith (1979b).
10. See Eichler (1976).
11. This point will become more obvious later when we examine the physical organization of family units and technological innovations pertaining to housework.
12. This is certainly true of the women with whom we came into contact during the study. Their husbands are similarly in blue collar occupations, although some of them have managed to own small businessess after a period of struggle.
13. This pattern is quite common to most blue collar occupations. In her study, Rubin found that most of the men she interviewed had experienced periods of unemployment due either to lay-off or to industrial accidents (see Rubin, 1976). The general pattern of instability and economic hardship is consistent with an earlier study done in Vancouver (see Epstein, Ng & Trebble, 1978). The situations of immigrants are exacerbated because of their location in the occupational hierarchy.
14. For a full explication of this, see Smith (1979a & b).
15. This account is put together from two 2-hour long interviews with Elizabeth. Elizabeth is not her real name.
16. See, for example, Vanek (1980).
17. The sense of alienation experienced by working class men has been explored by Rubin (1976). Here we are arguing that, using Rubin's definition and description of alienation, the same is also true for immigrant women.
18. Wolf (1972: 37-38).
19. The arrangement of household space and its relationship to family organization has been systematically explicated by Smith (1971).
20. This pattern does not change drastically in small towns and semi-rural communities in Canada. A study released by women's groups in three B.C. communities reports conditions similar to those described here. Women in these communities experience the same kinds of problems as those confronting immigrant women, such as isolation, depression, etc. See Northern British Columbia Women's Task Force Report on Single Industry Resource Communities (1977).

21 Incidentally, with regard to shopping, the situation of immigrant women is very similar to rural women and women living in single industry towns, who have to rely on large scale shopping facilities when they do no have adequate transport or storage facilities. See Northern B.C. Women's Task Force Report (1977).

22. This information is obtained primarily from our interviews with counsellors and community workers.

23. In her study of working class families, Rubin found that when the wife manages the household budget, there is usually not much leeway as to how money is to be spent. It is simply a matter of writing out the cheques or paying the appropriate bills. It doesn't involve any major decisions. When the economic position of the family improves, there is a tendency for the husband to take over the management of the money (Rubin, 1976).

24. This account is based on a three hour interview with this woman. Maria is not her real name.

25. It should be reiterated that this is common to all working class families, but the pattern is very different for middle class households, because the man does not sell his labour power the way a working class man does. Again, it is not the purpose here to go into detail about the differences between working class and middle class families. They have been well documented elsewhere. See Rubin (1976), Smith (1973 & 1979a).

26. This observation is confirmed by our interviews with community workers, who commented that it was mostly the wives that did these chores.

27. The facts on which this excerpt is based are taken from a three hour interview with this woman. Maria is not her real name.

28. The way in which non-English speaking immigrant women constitute a "captive" labour force was originally explored in a study in connection with the Wollstonecraft Research Group at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (see Ng & Das Gupta, 1980). The Wollstonecraft Research Group is a group concerned to conduct and advance research in education in relation to women. A summary and more complete write-up of the research will be published in the *Canadian Women's Studies* (Ng & Das Gupta, 1981 - forthcoming).

29. To avoid confusion, we have adopted the legal definition for the term "immigrants" in this section. According to the Immigration Act, immigrants are people who seek to establish permanent residence in Canada. However, we still use the term "immigrant women" as a descriptive and common sense category.

The Immigration Act of 1976 does not differ drastically from the old Act in this respect. However, under the old Act, once an immigrant had resided in Canada for over 5 years he or she was granted domicile status and had essentially the same rights as a citizen.

30. The harmful effects of the Immigration Act on immigrant women in the paid labour force has been documented in depth by Sheila Arnopoulos (1979, especially Section VI).

31. For details, see Employment Handbook for Immigrant Women (1979: 16-17).

32. For a concise summary of the Canadian economic system and women's position in the Canadian economy, see Employment Handbook for Immigrant Women (1979), and Armstrong and Armstrong (1978).

33. Employment and Immigration Canada — Annual Report, 1978.

34. Source of case study: *Services for Immigrant Women —* Report and Evaluation of a series of Four Workshops conducted in the summer, 1977, written by Roxana Ng and Janet Sprout (1978).

35. According to some community workers and legal aid workers, women have been deported when they separated from their husbands and were forced to go on welfare.

36. An excellent review of different types of training programs, as well as their advantages and pitfalls, is provided in a study conducted by Janke and Yaron (1979, Section 4).

37. See Tobias (1980); Ng & Das Gupta (1980).

38. See Bodnar & Reimer (1979).

39. This is not the place to expound on the development of a segregated labour force in Canada. For a useful discussion, see Armstrong & Armstrong (1978). The ethnically segregated character of certain blue collar occupations has been explored by Cassin in her M.A. thesis (see Cassin, 1977).

40. See Epstein, Ng & Trebble (1978: 29-33).

41. See Boulter (1978: 97-108).

42. The characteristics of immigrant women in the labour force in Toronto are quite thoroughly described by Janke and Yaron (1979) in their study.

43. This estimate is quoted in Arnopoulos (1979: 9).

44. Arnopoulos (1979: 14-16).

45. See Arnopoulos (1979: 16-21) and Winnie Ng (1979).

46. See, for instance, Vickers and Finn (1980: 17-22).

47. In this regard, Julie White's study provides an excellent overview of women and unions (see White, 1980). Women's relationship to labour unions in B.C. has been explored by Campbell (1978).

48. Campbell (1979 & forthcoming).

SECTION III
A WAY TO BEGIN, A WAY TO GO . . .

The starting point of this study was the standpoint of women. The study was prompted by our awareness of the fact that the crucial role played by immigrant women in the Canadian economy is almost totally hidden from view. This blind spot has led to a dire lack of knowledge of the actual conditions of their daily lives. Our aim was to redress the distorted view of the immigrant experience as a whole by explaining immigrant women's work both inside and outside the home. Our analysis did not stop at the level of perception: we went further to investigate the structures and processes which play a determinant role in shaping immigrant women's lives.

Most of our study has focussed on the harsh realities of immigrant women's lives. Not only does the immigration process bring about an intensification of their work in the home; it also brings about a concommitant increase in immigrant women's dependency on their husbands and children. Consequently, they find themselves caught in a vicious cycle of dependency which affects them and their families negatively. Phenomena such as wife beating, family breakdown, and other kinds of psychological and physiological problems that immigrant women suffer are manifestations of the tremendous stress placed on immigrant families generally, and on immigrant women particularly. As we have repeatedly emphasized throughout this report, these problems do not pertain merely to "adjustment processes" or to "cultural differences." More fundamentally, they have to do with the social organization of Canadian society and the location of non-English speaking immigrants in this social organization.

The immigration process is by and large oppressive to immigrant women; but paradoxically, the source of their oppression and degradation also provides a means for their liberation. We shall end this report by exploring some implications of the immigrant experience for women's emancipation.

As a result of the integration of immigrant families into a money economy, immigrant women are uprooted from their traditional rural environment and are placed in the middle of a highly advanced and complex economic and social system. In this system, the management of money becomes a very important part of their lives. In a money economy, women's labour is also in demand in the workforce, and immigrant women have the possibility to realize their earning power. For women who work outside the home, although the present conditions in the paid labour market prevent many from becoming fully independent financially and although their wage goes into the family pot, for the first time in these women's lives they know that they can earn a living. They know that they could survive without a man. In fact, as family breakdown is on the increase, many immigrant women are forced to support a household on their own. Women who do not work outside the home often develop a working knowledge of bureaucracies and complex organizations due to the new kinds of responsibilities, the mediating functions performed for husbands and children, which they assume. It is true that the overall procedures of dealing with organizations such as the Workmen's Compensation Board and the Unemployment Insurance Commission are cumbersome and frustrating, but many women find that, if they persist, they eventually learn to get through the bureaucratic maze. The ability to master these complex systems and procedures, no matter how difficult and painful in the beginning, gives immigrant

women new confidence and a sense of independence.

In a rural environment, where each individual is an integral and organic part of village life, individual choice and freedom are inconceivable. One effect of the immigration process is that it breaks down traditional friendship ties, established primarily through kinship and geographic proximity, and isolates the immigrant woman from her indigenous social life. But together with this physical and social isolation is an awareness of individualism and individual freedom, a principle taken for granted in Canadian life. This awareness does not merely come about through contact with the larger Canadian society via the mass media; it arises for immigrant women out of the social organization of their own lives as immigrants.

For the first time in an immigrant woman's life, she is truly alone. She can no longer draw on the support and help which she once took for granted. While the husband may provide some support, it is neither the same as it had been nor adequate to her new needs. In fact, his demand for her support may be greater because of the demands of his wage work and the services that he requires from her to enable him to continue working. As immigrant women learn to manage on their own, they also come to value their own opinions and judgement, and the freedom that individuals may enjoy. Most of the women we interviewed, especially the younger ones, said that they could not go back to the ways of living they had left behind — not so much because rural life is hard, but because of the freedom that life in Canada offers. One women said that her afternoon walk by herself, when she could be completely herself and do what she wanted, was the time she most valued. She felt that she would never have been able to do that in Italy, where all her actions were under the scrutiny of neighbours and friends.

If a woman works outside the home, she is thrown into contact with the mainstream society and comes to see possibilities for changing her situation in the home. Cassin's study on East Indian immigrants shows that a woman's wage work provides a new basis for her relation to her husband and his family; in one case, the woman actually demanded that the husband take on some household responsibilites.[6] Thus, for the first time in immigrant women's lives, it is not only conceivable, but actually possible to alter existing family arrangements. Nearly all the women we interviewed said that they did not want their daughters to have the lives that they had. They felt that they had married too young and hadn't had enough time to experience and enjoy life. Many women complained that there had been too many responsibilities placed on them as housewives, especially in Canada. They would like to be more independent and free. When asked whether she would get married if she were to do it again, a gutsy Italian woman answered passionately:

> No way! Maybe . . . If I was to do it again, I would buy a house and have dogs. Maybe I would get married at forty, but not at 17! I didn't have time to have any fun, with five children. Now things are OK . . .

An immigrant women's striving for independence is disruptive to the family, especially during the early periods of immigration. As we have seen in the previous section, her labour is absolutely essential in maintaining the family economy. The husband, in particular, depends on her services to enable him to return daily to the labour force. Thus, her demand or attempt to alter existing family relations can be extremely threatening to the husband. A study on family violence among immigrant families suggests that wife beating is likely to occur when the shifting balance of power in the family becomes critical. Frequently, men attempt to re-assert their power as household heads by beating their wives.[2]

However, we know from our experiences that, despite wife beating and other kinds of family

problems, once women recognize the possibility of an alternate way of life and different kinds of family arrangements, they are unwilling to return to their former, submissive roles. One woman, who had worked in the paid labour force since she came to Canada at fourteen, thought that although women's place should be in the home, she herself could not stay home and be a full-time housewife. "I have worked for too long, and I like it!" was her way of explaining the apparent contradiction. In cases where family situations become too oppressive, more and more women are choosing to leave their husbands or to change radically the existing arrangements. Indeed, women's demand for independence and change in family relations is an irreversible trend as more and more women realize their earning power and other potentials.

We cannot here overlook the importance of the women's movement in opening up new alternatives for women through the struggles for social and legislative reforms which provide more support and protection for women in our society. Viewed in this light, we can also see that immigrant women's demands for social services — from health to employment to recreation — are an index of the growing realization of their specific needs. These demands, in turn are part of the larger political struggle to gain more rights for women and to win recognition for their contribution both inside and outside the home. The grassroots community organizations run by immigrant women for immigrant women remain the only places where services are provided for their otherwise ignored needs and where they can define their own situations and seek their own solutions.

In a few short years, immigrant women have come a long way in fighting for our rights and for services which meet our needs. But we also have a long way to go. Most immigrant women, relative to their Canadian sisters, are still unprotected by legislation. The service delivery system still functions, in large part, as though we were not here. We still have not gained equality in the home or at the workplace. This report has brought some of the special problems and struggles of immigrant women to light. But much work remains to be done, both in the community and in academia, in order that the situations of immigrant women in Canada be more fully understood and articulated. For those of us committed to women's rights and to justice for Canada's minority groups, this report is a modest beginning which suggests some new directions to follow. But the struggle continues . . .

Footnotes

1. Cassin (1979).
2. See Epstein, Ng, & Trebble (1978).

References

Amsden, Alice H. (ed.)
The Economics of Women and Work. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Armstrong, Pat & Hugh Armstrong
1978 *The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

Arnopoulos, Sheila McLeod
1979 Problems of Immigrant Women in the Canadian Labour Force. Ottawa: Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Becker, Gary
1980 "A theory of the allocation of time" in Alice H. Amsden (ed), *The Economics of Women and Work.* Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Bodnar, Ana and Marilee Reimer
1979 The Organization of Social Services and Its Implications for the Mental Health of Immigrant Women. Report to the Secretary of State by the Working Women Community Centre, Toronto.

Boulter, Alison Isobel
1978 Constituting Ethnic Difference: An Ethnography of the Portuguese Immigrant Experience in Vancouver. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Dept. of Anthropology & Sociology, UBC.

Campbell, Marie L.
1978 "Women and trade unions in B.C., 1900-1920: the social organization of sex discrimination." Paper prepared for the Women's Research Centre, B.C.

Campbell, Marie L.
n.d. "Inside the garment factory: a union woman talks about immigrant workers." Unpublished ms.

Campbell, Marie L.
1979 "Early twentieth century trade-unionism and women in British Columbia: discovering oppression." Paper presented at the Blue Collar Workers and Their Communities Conference, Waterloo.

Campbell, Marie L.
forthcoming "Sexism in British Columbia trade unions, 1900-1920" in C. Kess and B. Latham (eds), *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women in B.C. History.*

Cassin, Marguerite
1977 Class and Ethnicity: The Social Organization of Working Class East Indian Immigrants in Vancouver. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Dept. of Antrhopology & Sociology, UBC.

Cassin, Marguerite
1979 "Family organization and wage work," Multiculturalism, 2(4): 25-26.

Cassin, Marguerite and Jennifer L. Newton (eds)
1979 Special Issue on Immigrant Women of Multiculturalism, 2(4). Summer.

Dalla Costa, Mariarosa
1972 "Women and the subversion of the community" in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community.* Bristol: The Falling Wall Press Ltd.

De Beauvoir, Simone
1974 *The Second Sex.* New York: Vintage Books.

Eichler, Margrit
1976 "The Industrialization of Housework" Toronto: OISE, GROW Paper No. 3. (Original paper presented at the National Council of Family Relations meetings, New York, October, 1976)

Employment and Immigration Canada
n.d. Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration Level. Ottawa: Author.

Employment Services for Immigrant Women
1979 *Employment Handbook for Immigrant Women.* Toronto: Author.

Epstein, Rachel; Roxana Ng & Maggi Trebble
1979 The Social Organization of Family Violence: An Ethnography of Immigrant Experience in Canada. A report to the Non-medical Use of Drugs Directorate, Health and Welfare Canada.

Harney R.F. & H. Troper
1975 *Immigrants: A Portrait of the Urban Experience, 1890-1930.* Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Jacobson, Helga
1979 "Immigrant women and the community: A perspective for

research" Resources for Feminist Research, 8(3): 17-21. November.

Janke, Brenda & Ronny Yaron
1979 A Report on Conditions in the Labour Market and Training Opportunities for Non-English Speaking Immigrant Women in Metro Toronto. Toronto: Working Women Community Centre.

Meissner, Martin; Elizabeth W. Humphreys; Scott M. Meis & William J. Scheu
1975 "No exit for wives: sexual division of labour and the cumulation of household demands" Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, 12(4): 424-439.

Millet, Kate
1970 *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday

Montero, Gloria
1977 *The Immigrants*. Toronto: James Lorimer and Co. Publishers.

Ng, Roxana
1979 "Fieldwork as ideological practice". Paper presented at the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Annual meeting. Saskatoon.

Ng, Roxana
1980a "Moving around in everyday life", RIKKA, 7(1).

Ng, Roxana
1980b "Constituting ethnic phenomenon: accounts from the perspective of immigrant women", Canadian Ethnic Studies. (Forthcoming).

Ng, Roxana & Janet Sprout
1978 Services for Immigrant Women — Report and Evaluation of a Series of Four Workshops conducted in the Summer, 1977. Vancouver: Women's Research Centre.

Ng, Roxana & Tania Das Gupta
1980 "The organization of the non-English speaking immigrant women labour force." A preliminary report to the Wollstonecraft Research Group, OISE. March, 1980. Unpublished.

Ng, Roxana & Tania Das Gupta
1981 "Nation builders? The captive labour force of non-English speaking immigrant women", Canadian Women's Studies, 4(1). Spring, 1981. (forthcoming)

Ng, Winnie
1979 "Organizing workers in the garment industry" in *By and About Immigrant Women*. An Information Package prepared by the Women Working with Immigrant Women and the Cross-Cultural Communication Centre. October, 1979.

Northern British Columbia Women's Task Force Report on Single Industry Resource Communities. Kitimat, Fraser Lake, and Mackenzie, B.C. 1977.

Oakley, Ann
1974a *Woman's Work: The Housewife Past and Present*. New York: Vintage Books(1976).

Oakley, Ann
1974b *The Sociology of Housework*. London: Martin Robertson.

Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation n.d.
(a) Papers on the Portuguese Community
(b) Papers on the Italian Community
(c) Papers on the Greek Community

Rowbotham, Sheila
1973 *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*. Penguin Books.

Rubin, Lilian Breslow
1976 *Worlds Of Pain: Life in the Working-Class Family*. New York: Basic Books.

Smith, Dorothy E.
1971 "Household space and family organization", *Pacific Sociological Review*, 14(1): 53-78.

Smith, Dorothy E.
1973 "Women, the family and corporate capitalism" in Marylee Stephenson (ed), *Women in Canada*. Toronto: New Press.

Smith, Dorothy E.
1975 "An analysis of ideological structures and how women are excluded: considerations for academic women" *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*,, 12(4): 353-369.

Smith, Dorothy E.
1979a "Women and class — a theoretical sketch" Unpublished ms., Dept. of Sociology, OISE.

Smith, Dorothy E.
1979b "Women, inequality and the family" Unpublished ms., Sociology, OISE.

Smith, Dorothy E.
1979c "A sociology for women" in Julia Sherman & Evelyn Beck (eds), *The Prism of Sex: Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Tobias, Kathleen Jo
1980 A Case Study of a Life-Skills Course for Immigrant Women. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Dept. of Educational Theory, University of Toronto.

Toronto Board of Education
1974 *The Bias of Culture: An Issue Paper on Multiculturalism.* Toronto.

Vanek, Joann
1980 "Time spent in housework" in Alice H. Ansden (ed), *The Economics of Women and Work*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Vickers, Jill McCalla & Patricia Finn
1980 " 'And the winner is . . . Sally Field for Norma Rae' — Is unionism effective in the fight for women's economic equality?" *Perception*, 3(6): 17-22. July-August.

Wai, Hayne
1975 "A brief summary of Strathcona and urban renewal" Lecture given at the Chinatown tour in "Anthropology of Vancouver", Dept. of Continuing Education, UBC.

White, Julie
1980 *Women and Unions.* Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Wolf, Margery
1972 *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

photo: R. Nissim