

REVIEW ESSAY

Exploring Themes in the Scholarship on Twentieth Century Domestic Work in Canada and the United States

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Abigail B. Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis eds., *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American Domestic Workers in Washington D.C. 1910-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

Shellee Colen, “Just a Little Respect”: West Indian Domestic Workers in New York City”, Elsa M. Chaney and Mary Garcia Castro eds., *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

Varpu Lindström, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1992).

Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

Mary Romero, *Maid in the U.S.A.* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

Makeda Silvera, *Silenced: Talks with Working Class Caribbean Women about their Lives and Struggles as Domestic Workers in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1989).

Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and their Employers in the Segregated South* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988).

Donna L. Van Raaphorst, *Union Maids Not Wanted: Organizing Domestic Workers 1870-1940*. (New York: Praeger, 1988).

Domestic work—defined as domestic labour within households of families not their own in return for wages in cash or kind—has garnered attention from historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and scholars in other diverse fields. The occupation has common structural elements in North America as well as internationally. It has been a constant locale of female employment and there has historically been a constant demand for these workers. It has been deemed unskilled, unproductive, and low-status work as it is seen as an extension of women’s household labour and thus gendered as ‘natural’ women’s work. It has been associated with

migrant (of diverse racial and ethnic groups) and poor women, who work for the most part alone in isolated homes, and experience long working hours, low wages, and have little or no benefits. Relations between employer and employee are most often maternalistic/personalistic and work arrangements are casual and unregulated. Isolation and their location in the 'private' realm of the home also means domestics have had a difficult time resisting or organizing against their middle and upper-class employers, or even making sure that the minimal legislation that covers their work is enforced in these homes. As such, domestic workers have been characterized as an 'invisible' segment of the working class. Due to domestics' identities as working class, migrant, and ethnic/racialized women, the study of domestic work offers much fruitful material for scholars in various disciplines interested in the study of class, gender, and race relations in society.

This review focuses on the scholarship on domestic work in Canada and the United States produced in the last twenty years when writing on twentieth century domestic work expanded. The list of works here is by no means comprehensive. Rather, I chose these texts in an effort to include scholarship that reflects the evolution of writing on twentieth century domestic work, and in an effort to include works that have been produced in various disciplines. Historical literature on domestic work surfaced in the 1970s as part of the new social history. The categorization of domestic work as unskilled and unproductive women's work, that it occurs in the privacy of the home, and that it has not produced dramatic strikes or leaders meant that it had attracted little attention in traditional labour history in both Canada and the US. However, feminist labour historians became interested in women's work, including housework. With a few exceptions, the majority of studies on domestic work have been, and still are, written by women. By the 1980s, issues of unequal power and privilege among women made the study of domestic work particularly important to ethnic and racialized feminists. For example, in Canada, much of the scholarship on domestic work has emerged from immigration history. In fact, as noted by historian Franca Iacovetta, the historical literature on Canada's immigrant women has been dominated by two major themes, one of them being domestic service.¹ Varpu Lindström's *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* is an important example of a study on domestics that originated in immigration history. Makeda Silvera's book, *Silenced: Talks with Working Class Caribbean Women about their Lives and Struggles as Domestic Workers in Canada* and the collection of essays, *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada* edited by Abigail B. Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis are examples of works produced by non-historians that deal with domestic work in postwar Canada. These authors take a decidedly political, critical, and anti-racist stance on the contemporary domestic work program in Canada. However, unlike studies of domestic work in the US, there are as of yet few full-length monographs on domestic service in Canada, as the field has not attracted as much attention from scholars as in the US.

In the 1970s, studies of nineteenth century native and European born domestics emerged in US historiography.² By the 1980s, however, most studies of domestic work have also emerged out of specific racial/ethnic community studies in various disciplines. For example, Evelyn Nakano Glenn's examination of Japanese domestic workers in *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* is a work of historical sociology. Historian Elizabeth Clark-Lewis produced *Living In, Living Out: African American Domestic Workers in Washington D.C. 1910-1940*. Susan Tucker's *Telling Memories among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and their Employers in the Segregated South* explores the complex relationship between Black domestics and their White female employers, and is important for the rich oral history it provides. Sociologist Mary Romero's book, *Maid in the U.S.A.*, was the first monograph on Latina domestic workers in the United States. Like Romero's work, sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's book *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*, on Latina domestic workers in the present-day increases our historical understanding of domestic work, as many historical aspects of domestic service persist to the present-day. Anthropologist Shellee Colen's article, "Just a Little Respect?: West Indian Domestic Workers in New York City" is one of the few works that deal with Caribbean domestic workers in the United States. Like in Canada, sociologists and anthropologists writing about present-day domestic work take a critical position on domestic work in the US. Finally, historian Donna L. Van Raaphorst's book, *Union Maids Not Wanted: Organizing Domestic Workers 1870-1940*, merited inclusion because it is one of the few examples of scholarship that deals with the formal organization of domestic workers in American history, although it does not exclusively deal with the twentieth century.

Migration, Race, and the State

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries industrialization and urbanization were well underway in both Canada and the United States. The nineteenth century groups of domestic servants, such as Irish and German migrants, as well as native-born women were leaving domestic service for better jobs in manufacturing and white-collar work. Both nations looked to new sources of labour to fulfill the demand for domestic workers. By World War I in the US, this coincided with the large-scale migration of African-Americans from the rural South to work in the industrialized cities of the North. In Canada, the modern state became involved in the formal recruitment of British domestics, and by the inter-war period, continental Europeans. In the post World War II period, migration status became a defining element of the work. In the US, documented and a large number of undocumented Mexican, Central American, and Caribbean women filled the ranks of domestic service. In Canada, a structured and rigid state program allowed for the entry of domestic workers largely from the Caribbean and the Philippines on employment visas. For both nations in the twentieth century, 'race' became cru-

cially important to the nature and status of the work.

Migration is a central theme in the study of domestic work, as it is migrant women who largely filled the ranks of this occupation. Choosing domestic work has historically been part of a larger strategy to improve the financial well being of the individual and the family. Women have migrated to cities or to other countries where domestic jobs could be found, and supported families within the country and/or transnationally with their wages. Clark-Lewis, in her book *Living In, Living Out* examines the lives of Black women who migrated to the urban North from the rural South to work as domestic servants in the first three decades of the twentieth century.³ She explains that deteriorating agricultural and social conditions led women to a migration process that was controlled by their families. In Northern cities, these women joined relatives who had migrated earlier, obtained jobs through these relatives, and sent money to the South to support family that remained there. For Black women in the US domestic service was one of the few occupations open to them. Clark-Lewis argues that “for African American women migration was inextricably linked with the hard labor of domestic service”.⁴ In her book *Defiant Sisters*, Lindström examines the experience of Finnish immigrant women in domestic service, which was the most common occupation for this group of immigrant women by the 1920s. The Canadian federal government actively recruited immigrant women for domestic work. In fact, it was one of the rare avenues in which single immigrant women could enter Canada. Thus, in this case too, as with Southern Black women in the US, migration was tied to domestic service and served as a route to improve their economic fortunes.

Domestic work scholars have analyzed how the changing racial-ethnic composition of domestic workers from the nineteenth century to the present has shaped the nature and status of the work. While the gendered nature and servile character of domestic work had always afforded it a low-status in North American society, scholars have argued that as it increasingly became associated with women of colour over the twentieth century the occupation became even more devalued. In *Living In, Living Out*, Clark-Lewis argues that the relations between Southern Black domestics with White employers in the North were shaped by racial prejudice. Employers viewed Black domestics as “dirty, slack looking, corrupt people with clear limits beyond which they could not be educated or trained”.⁵ Furthermore, White employers demanded more from poor, southern-born Black women because they perceived these Black female bodies as more accustomed to intense, exhausting work. Clark-Lewis makes clear that racism shaped how Black women experienced the work compared to their previous White counterparts.

Over the course of the twentieth century, domestic work in Canada also became increasingly associated with women of ‘non-preferred’ races with corresponding changes in the status of the work. The article by sociologist Sedef Arat-Koç, “From ‘Mother of the Nation’ to Migrant Workers” in the collection of essays, *Not One of the Family*, traces the deterioration of domestic work as it goes from being

associated with British women to Black women. At the turn of the twentieth century, despite their subordinate class and gender status, British domestics were racially desirable and thus viewed as civilizers and nation builders through their role as caregivers. Many of these women were given assisted passage to Canada. Less desirable Central, Eastern and Southern European women were recruited over the course of the twentieth century.⁶ These women were perceived as sources of cheap labour rather than nation-builders, and were not given assisted passage to Canada. Women of colour were only recruited as a last resort. Besides a short-lived scheme in 1911 that recruited Black domestics from the Caribbean, the West Indian Domestic scheme, which started in 1955, marked the beginning of recruitment of Black women for domestic work in Canada.⁷ It also signalled the beginning of a marked deterioration in the status of domestic work, culminating in the first time use of temporary employment visas and thus loss of citizenship rights for migrant domestic workers, who were largely Black and Asian women. Arat-Koç argues that in Canada “race and ethnicity have played a very important part, over and above gender and class, in shaping the status and conditions of domestic workers”.⁸

Silvera's *Silenced*, and the collection of essays *Not One of the Family* are examples of scholarship that examine the experiences of migrant women on employment visas in postwar Canada who, like domestic workers before them entered this occupation in order to support their families nationally/transnationally, including their own children left behind in their home countries. However, domestic service for these women now meant that they were forced to live-in, had to wait at least two years before applying for landed immigrant status, and could not change to another sector of work while on a visa. As Bakan and Stasiulus argue in *Not One of the Family*, the Canadian government institutionalized unequal treatment between citizens and non-citizens/migrant workers in wages, working and living conditions, and access to rights for women of colour performing domestic work.⁹

Although the American government has been much less active than the Canadian state in formally recruiting migrant domestic workers it has had a role in shunting thousands of undocumented women into domestic service in the postwar period. Anthropologist Shellee Colen in her article, “‘Just a Little Respect’: West Indian Domestic Workers in New York City” examines the state's role in the migration of Caribbean women into domestic service since 1965. While some of these women overstayed their visitor's visas and stayed in the US as undocumented workers, many were also sponsored by employers as live-in domestics in the hopes of attaining citizenship in the future. Even sponsored women (like the Canadian temporary visa system) are ‘undocumented’ until they attain citizenship and in the meantime face an “indenture-like period of domestic work in order to obtain legal status”.¹⁰ In her impressive book *Doméstica*, Hondagneu-Sotelo examines the experiences of a large number of Mexican and Central American women working as documented and undocumented domestic workers in present-day Los Angeles. These women replaced Black women in domestic service by the 1960s. Unlike

Canada, there is no formal government system or policy in the US to legally contract foreign domestic workers. She notes that the significant demand for domestic workers is largely filled through informal recruitment from the growing number of Caribbean and Latina immigrant women who are already living—legally or illegally—in the US. Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the federal agency charged with stopping illegal migration, has historically served the interests of domestic employers by ignoring the hiring of undocumented immigrant women in private homes.¹¹

Work/Workplaces

Another theme in the literature on domestic work is the heterogeneity of domestic service jobs, their change over time, and the benefits and drawbacks of these various types of jobs to domestic workers. Generally, scholars have recognized live-in work as the worse type of domestic service job. Yet, many scholars have also noted that, for many newly arrived immigrants it is a desirable path to adaptation in a new country. In *Defiant Sisters*, Lindström argues that the most pressing concerns of newly arrived immigrants included where to live and where to work. As a live-in maid both worries were taken care of at once. The Finnish domestics also received regular meals, learned to speak some English, and were given an immersion course on Canadian home appliances, customs, and behaviour. In *Doméstica*, Hondagneu-Sotelo also notes that most Mexican and Central American domestics in Los Angeles begin as live-in workers because new migrants usually have limited options about where to work and live and do not usually have enough money to spend on room and board. They are also able to live in a safe neighbourhood, and learn English quickly. Live-in work is especially common if the migrant woman is unmarried or unattached to families.

However, all of the works being reviewed here discuss the structural difficulties of live-in service, which persist to the present day. These difficulties include how the domestic worker faces long-working days as she is expected to constantly be ‘on-call’, and is not given extra pay for the extra hours of work. She is expected to do everything around the house, even though she might have been hired for specific tasks only. She may not be given separate sleeping quarters, may not be provided with sufficient food, and generally is not able to feel ‘at home’. Her ability to have a private life apart from her job is compromised and her isolation is compounded. Live-in status for domestic workers also means that household workers are susceptible to the redefinition of work relations as familial-like obligations. Those engaged in childcare especially tend to develop emotional attachments to employers’ children, and employers often exploit maternal and familial feelings of their employees to extract more hours of work from them. However, the myth of the live-in domestic as ‘one of the family’ is contradicted in such practices as spatial and linguistic deference. Furthermore, the rights of the domestic worker to care for her own family are often ignored. Essentially, live-in service reinforces the

historically servile character of domestic work and is positioned in the literature on domestic work as the most exploitative job.

Scholars of domestic work acknowledge that live-out domestic work is preferable to live-in work, and American scholars have given live-out work much attention. Live-out domestic work means that work stops when domestics leave the homes they work in and they have more of an ability to care for their own families. Live-out domestics are also paid higher wages, especially women who clean only, rather than clean and provide childcare. In *Maid in the U.S.A.*, Romero examines the working lives of Mexican-American women who perform live-out domestic work, particularly house cleaners. She explains that for many, cleaning houses is degrading and embarrassing, but can be higher paying, more autonomous and less dehumanizing than other low-status and low-skilled occupations, such as working in factories or fast-food restaurants. Cleaning houses also offered flexible work schedules and autonomy, paid more, had less occupational dangers, and the women had more time to care for their own families. Overall, looking at the heterogeneity of domestic service has been important in domestic work scholarship in order to highlight the continuum of undesirable and desirable jobs. It has also been important to discuss this heterogeneity in terms of the ability of domestic workers to resist their employers, which will be discussed below.

The relationship between domestic workers and their middle and upper class female employers has been another important theme in the literature on the work. Domestic work is a unique work relation as it is the personal relationship and negotiation between individual employee and employer that structures the working conditions of domestic workers. Scholars have identified different forms of relationships in domestic work, the most prevalent being maternalism. This relationship has historically characterized relations between employer and employee. It is embedded in a superior/subordinate relationship between the two and has been identified by scholars as a primary source of exploitation. Within this context, employers act as caring, nurturing and empathetic employers, but expect loyalty, deference, and gratitude from their employees. For example, the employee may be expected to perform extra hours of work without remuneration. The theme of employer/employee relationships is at the centre of Tucker's *Telling Memories among Southern Women* and her study is an example of how maternalistic relations structure the working experience. In this work, she explores the complex and ambiguous relationships of affection and exploitation between Black domestic workers and their White employers in the South. She examines the tension between stories of 'good' Whites and Blacks who looked out for each other versus the harsh reality of White treatment and Black women's lives. Individual bonds between employer and employee were common as the domestic worker cared for these families and emotional attachments were developed over many years of service. Yet, the exploitative nature of the relationship was also apparent. For example, Black domestics were given 'gifts' (such as leftover food or used clothing) and understood the pur-

pose was to keep them employed at subsistence level and at the same time to let employers feel both generous and superior. Tucker argues that Black domestics led tiring lives as working wives and mothers and were poorly compensated. Cast-off items coupled with wages did not help them rise out of poverty. Thus, despite assertions of affection for Black servants, White women did little to improve the poverty in which they lived. In *Issei, Nisei, War Bride*, Nakano Glenn also finds similar employer/employee relationships in terms of maternalism, gift giving, and the expectation of deference and servitude. She argues that it is these features of domestic work that make it demeaning for the worker. That is, the 'servile' character of domestic work is reinforced.

Romero, in *Maid in the U.S.A.* examines the relationship between domestics and their employers from a feminist perspective. She argues that "domestic service accentuates the contradiction of race and class in feminism, which privileged women of one class using the labour of another woman to escape aspect of sexism".¹² She notes that female, White and middle-class employers perpetuate prevalent notions about gender, race, and class through their treatment of non-White domestic workers. They do this by keeping wages low and through such practices as giving gifts in lieu of higher wages. They also perpetuate gendered notions of women's work by expecting their domestic to be a surrogate mother and housewife and thus not recognizing their home as a workplace and the domestic labour as 'work'. Middle class women escape the stigma of 'women's work' by laying the burden on working-class women of colour. Romero ultimately argues that the domestic workers she interviewed reject personal relationships with employers and strive to negotiate a businesslike relationship with them in an effort to eliminate hierarchy along the lines of gender, race, and class.

Hondagneu-Sotelo in *Doméstica*, identifies personalism as another important relationship between employer and employee. She defines personalism as a bilateral relationship that involves two individuals recognizing each other not solely in terms of their role (e.g. as cleaner), but rather as persons embedded in a unique set of social relations. This relationship is more grounded in closeness and consideration between employer and employee, and she sees this as a more modern form of relations between employer and employee in the realm of domestic work because female employers are no longer as present in the home as they were historically. In this sense, domestic workers are able to exert more control over their labour and hours and resist 'servanthood'. Unlike the domestic workers that Romero interviewed, the women Hondagneu-Sotelo interviewed see non-paternalistic employers as potentially more exploitative because it often means they fail to see the domestic worker as a person. Rather, a show of concern for the personal well being of the domestic worker signals dignity and respect. Hondagneu-Sotelo also argues that "paid domestic work is governed by the parallel and interacting networks of women of different classes, ethnicities, and citizenship statuses who meet at multiple work sites in isolated pairs".¹³ She notes that it is social relationships—

among the employees, among the employers, and between the two groups—that organize the job, its wages, tasks and benefits. For example, she notes that conversations among employers structure ‘standard’ wages for Mexican and Central American domestic workers in L.A. Thus, scholars of domestic work have highlighted the relationship between employer and employee, and its change over time, as central to the nature and status of domestic work.

Class Identities, Agency and Voices

As part of the new social history, scholars of domestic work have been concerned with documenting the agency of domestic workers. While noting and discussing the ways that domestic workers are marginalized in multiple ways in North American society, scholars have also been sensitive to the ways that domestic workers exercise choice, influence the shape of the work, and demonstrate resistance to oppressive employers and conditions. One of the important ways in which domestics resist exploitation is to switch from live-in work to day-work. In her book *Living In, Living Out*, Clark-Lewis examines how southern Black domestic workers made the transition from live-in work to live-out work in the urban North. In the South, Black domestic workers were most often live-out workers. Thus, these women found it difficult to accept the realities of live-in service including the expected subservience, the expectation to always be on-call, the use of uniforms, and most of all the replication of a master-servant relationship which harkened back to the days of slavery. In fact, as Tucker notes, migration to the North had already been a form of resistance to the conditions of domestic work in the South. Clark-Lewis notes that by the early 1920s, due largely to the rise of apartment living and of new technology for maintaining the home (spurred by the domestic use of electricity) employers no longer required the continuous service of live-in staff. Black domestic workers actively took this opportunity to make the transition from live-in servant to daily paid worker. This granted them the ability to control their working hours and conditions, to have more privacy, and to participate more fully in African American community life, like church-going. Clark-Lewis explains that “being a dayworker meant the difference between doing a ‘job’, or ‘work’, and ‘serving’.”¹⁴ In *Issei, Nissei, War Bride*, Nakano Glenn also examines the transition from live-in work to day-work among Japanese domestic workers. While live-in work was more common before World War II, Japanese women came to reject it because of constraints on their freedom and lack of restraints on employers’ demands. It also interfered with married women’s family responsibilities. Nakano Glenn argues that the choice of day work can be seen as a way to gain greater autonomy for workers who had only limited resources for resisting employers’ attempts to control their work and the conditions of employment. Nakano Glenn and others such as Romero argue that working for several families were less dependent on any one employer and work hours could be adjusted to fit in with the workers’ familial responsibilities.

As mentioned, live-out work has been recognized as providing the domestic worker with more power.¹⁵ However, as Romero explains in *Maid in the U.S.A.* better working conditions still had to be negotiated, and she examines how Mexican-American domestic workers actively pursued improved working lives. As mentioned, Romero argues that domestic work for wages is often not seen as 'work' or the home as a 'workplace'. Thus, the struggle among domestics for improved working conditions, among live-in and live-out workers, is an effort to position themselves as members of the working class, with a 'class identity'. That is, they reject the notion that they are 'one of the family'. Romero thus further examines the relationship between employer and employee in terms of class struggle. Romero explains that like so many other employee-employer relationships under capitalism, worker and employer define their interests in opposition and struggle for control. In particular, Romero argues that private household day workers struggled to control the work process and alter the employee-employer relationship to a client-tradesperson relationship in which labour services rather than labour power are sold. They actively negotiated informal labour arrangements that include both strategies to eliminate the most oppressive aspects of the occupation and to develop instrumental employer-employee relationships aimed at professionalizing it. They did so in six main ways including increasing opportunities for job flexibility, increasing pay and benefits, establishing and maintaining an informal contract specifying tasks, minimizing contact with employers, defining themselves as professional housekeepers, and creating a small-business like environment. Overall, scholars perceive live-out domestic work as more contractual and capitalistic than live-in work, thus providing the domestic work with greater ability to negotiate improved working conditions.

Van Raaphorst's book *Union Maids Not Wanted* is one of the few examples of historical scholarship that examines attempts to formally organize domestic workers, although this is actually only a relatively brief part of her study. She notes some of the reasons that domestics have historically been difficult to organize including the fact they are located in isolated worksites, they work for numerous employers, that paternalism shapes job relations, they fear losing their jobs, that some women (especially 'White' women) view the work as temporary, that they perform unskilled work, and are often migrants with little union background. Furthermore, they face sexism and racism from the mainstream union movement. For example, Van Raaphorst notes that the American Federation of Labor largely ignored domestics because they were unskilled and female. However, two organizations that were more willing to recruit women, unskilled workers, and immigrant workers were the Knight of Labor and the International Workers of the World (IWW). In 1916, Jane Street founded IWW Local 113, a Denver Domestic Worker's Industrial Union. This local made demands for improved working conditions and established their own employment agency. Recalcitrant employers would have a difficult time securing help if they refused to meet union demands.

However, weak support from the larger IWW for Local 113 and other IWW domestic locals combined with oppression of the IWW by the U.S government during WWI meant that all locals were quickly eliminated.

The article by Judy Fudge “Little Victories and Big Defeats: The Rise and Fall of Collective Bargaining Rights for Domestic Workers in Ontario” in the collection *Not One of the Family* examines collective resistance by domestic workers in Canada. Fudge argues that due to the ideologies of domesticity and privacy, their isolation within private homes, and racial and ethnic prejudices, domestic workers were excluded from Ontario’s first collective bargaining legislation in 1943. It was not until 1993, under the New Democratic Party (a left of centre party) government that they were included in the Labour Relations Act, which gave them the same collective-bargaining rights as the majority of workers in the province. This was the result of intense lobbying by the International Coalition to End Domestic’s Exploitation (INTERCEDE), which was established in 1979. However, this victory was reversed in 1995 when the new Conservative government again excluded domestic workers from collective bargaining rights. While the story that Fudge examines is one of defeat, this scholarship points to the active role taken by foreign domestics to change the policies that exploit migrant household workers.

Scholars have examined attempts by domestics to establish their own organizations, which they have noted has been a much more common way that domestic workers have attempted to collectively improve their working conditions. Thus, this scholarship points to the uniqueness of the working-class organizations of domestic workers. Van Raaphorst briefly discusses the American Servant Girl’s Association that was established in Kansas City in 1897 and the formation of 30 other locals in various cities in the US. However, the structural reasons that made domestic workers difficult to organize meant that these organizations were short-lived. Rather, many domestic worker organizations have originated out of immigrant communities. In *Defiant Sisters*, Lindström argues that Finnish domestics were ‘proud’ maids who enjoyed a high status in the Finnish community where maids constituted the majority of single women. Socialist traditions brought to Canada from Finland shaped a community response to domestic work that included the building of ‘immigrant homes’ in several cities as well as employment agencies. Finnish employment agencies were not only a means to contact new employers, but also advised women not to accept intolerable working conditions. Finnish domestic workers were able to enjoy relatively high wages and good working conditions, and to leave unsatisfactory jobs easily due to this support from the Finnish community. In *Doméstica*, Hondagneu-Sotelo notes that community-based associations for Latina domestic workers have swelled in numbers. As Hondagneu-Sotelo explains, because domestic workers employed in private residences do not share a common employer or work site, collective bargaining is difficult. She specifically looks at the Domestic Workers’ Association (DWA) which began in 1990 as an outreach and advocacy campaign, and which the author is active in. The DWA focuses on pro-

viding live-in workers with information on workers' rights and legal resources. They did this by creating novelas, booklets with captioned photographs that tell stories about worker rights, and providing leadership classes and meetings to discuss problems with the work. Hondagneu-Sotelo explains that the DWA is not like a typical labour union. It does not strive for one collective win, such as a union vote, a particular contract or a strike (they share no common employer). Instead, it centres around social activities that solidify a group identity, provides information on improving the occupation, and creates a collective space where women can solve problems and plan strategy. But members are required to pay dues, attend monthly meetings and participate in group projects. Thus, the scholarship on collective organizing by domestic workers is important for showing how domestic workers have struggled to improve their working conditions through their own labour organizations.

Despite attempts at collective responses to working conditions and wages, scholars generally note that individual acts of resistance are the most common. Van Raaphorst notes that one of the reasons that high turnover has historically been a fundamental characteristic of domestic service is because quitting is the most common form of resistance. In *Doméstica*, Hondagneu-Sotelo also finds that in present day Los Angeles, walking away from particularly bad jobs is common among Mexican and Central American domestic workers. Sometimes this is the result of a blow-up with an employer, and other times the domestic worker lies about her reasons for leaving in order to avoid confrontation. Hondagneu-Sotelo notes that while domestic work occurs outside the purview of the state in the US, unlike the highly regulated employment visa program in Canada, this means that domestic workers can quit their jobs, and they do. Yet, Hondagneu-Sotelo explains that fear of deportation and fear of being unjustly accused of certain acts like theft impels domestic workers to lie about their reasons for leaving a job. Scholars have stressed that the inability of many domestic workers over the course of the twentieth century, whether under formal employment programs like in Canada, or as undocumented workers in the US, to acquire citizenship has meant serious setbacks in the ability of domestic workers to resist oppressive working situations. For example, in Silvera's *Silenced*, fear of deportation is a thread that runs through the oral narratives of Caribbean domestic workers and cited as a reason why many do not report exploitative working conditions to Canadian state authorities. Caribbean women relate stories of long working days, little privacy, racial slurs, and sexual abuse. With little recourse to leave these jobs, the women endured painful working lives for many years. As Silvera and others who have written about the employment visa program, one of the reasons the Canadian state instituted this program was precisely to limit the high rates of turnover in domestic work. The state effectively confined Caribbean and Asian domestic workers to their exploitative jobs.

Scholars of domestic work have also examined other subtler acts of resistance. In *Telling Memories among Southern Women*, Tucker notes two practices which

Black domestic workers used to resist being treated as inferiors in White households. The first was to refuse leftover food, and the second was to reciprocate gift-giving with their employers. Domestic workers sometimes also slow down their pace of work, or stop work altogether when their employer is not around. In *Silenced*, Silvera uncovers stories of domestic workers seeking each other out, such as in parks or playgrounds, and forming social networks in order to help cope with their working conditions. Church-going has also historically served as a source of institutional support and ethnic networking for domestic workers, as scholars such as Clark-Lewis and Silvera have explained.

In the study of domestic work, oral history has been a primary way of accessing the stories of women who were marginalized (and thus absent from the historical record) in multiple ways: by gender, race/ethnicity, immigration status, their status as workers within the privacy of the home, as well as by their level of literacy. In fact, oral history has been conducted for virtually every work that is being reviewed here in order to uncover the lived experience of various groups of domestic workers. For example, Tucker's, *Telling Memories among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and their Employers in the Segregated South* is an oral history collection made up of forty two interviews with Southern Black domestics and their White employers. Tucker attempts to tell the stories of these women, "who were the inheritors of a history involving silences as well as well-defined opinions and prejudices about race, class and gender".¹⁶ This book is an effort by Tucker to undo these silences through oral history. In *Silenced*, Silvera's use of oral history is an activist endeavour. This collection of oral histories was the first account in Canadian history of Caribbean domestic workers talking about their work experiences and living conditions in Canada. For Silvera, a Black feminist, oral history allows for the voices of powerless and silenced Black women to tell their stories. She states that her task is "not merely to observe and record, but it is to facilitate that entry into public scrutiny those who must be the makers of their own history rather than merely the subjects of the recorders of history".¹⁷

However, with the use of oral history, comes the question about the mediation of the story: how memory, present-day concerns, gender, race and class identities, and the interviewer herself shape the account being given. While Silvera presents her stories as unmediated text, Tucker recognizes the interplay between memory and history. This leads her to discover that Black former domestics tend to tell their stories to emphasize the 'good' so that their strength and dignity in the face of exploitative working and living conditions is emphasized.¹⁸ On the other hand, White former employers emphasize the 'good' as a way to diffuse their present-day guilt about their past treatment of Black domestics. While few of the works being reviewed here analyze the oral narrative of domestic workers, Tucker's analysis points to the ways that scholars can use oral history to uncover the lived-experiences of domestic workers, as well as offer insight into how their gender, race, and class identities structure their lives and memories.¹⁹

This review has shown that there has been much work done in the study of domestic work, particularly with respect to the everyday working lives of specific groups of ethnic/racialized women, their relationships to their employers, and their attempts to negotiate some power for themselves in an occupation conducive to exploitation. The reliance on oral interviews to get at the lived experience of domestic workers makes research on domestics challenging, yet immensely important for scholars to pursue in the present, while they are still able to access these stories. There are many areas of further research with respect to domestic work that have yet to be explored. The feminist interest in women's labour has been crucially important to the development of the field. Yet, the gendered nature of domestic service in North America needs further attention, particularly with respect to masculinity. The domestic work of butlers, housemen, and gardeners (who parallel the changing ethnicity and race of domestics in general) need attention. Furthermore, the differing roles and expectations of male and female domestic workers, their relationship to their families, each other and their employers, would contribute to a much stronger gendered analysis of domestic labour.

The US literature on domestic work has provided insightful information on domestic work in the twentieth century. However, more work needs to be done on the history of collective organizing among domestic workers in the US. Studies of particular ethnic/racial groups of domestic workers have been pivotal to our understanding of the role of migrant women in economically sustaining their families and communities. There is room for further research of this kind. For example, migrant women from the Caribbean deserve further attention. Comparative analyses⁷ of nineteenth century domestic workers does exist in the American literature, and the twentieth century would benefit from such attention. While Romero examines the lives of domestic workers in Denver, and the West Coast and a few eastern cities like Washington D.C. and New York have received attention, domestic work in various other regions of the country requires study, with a view to such a comparative analysis of domestic work and domestic workers in twentieth century America.

This review has made apparent some of the ways that the literature on domestic work in the United States has been more fully developed than in Canada. There is still little in the Canadian literature on the interpersonal relationships between employers and domestics, on the heterogeneity of domestic work, particularly live-out work, and historical attempts at collective action. Furthermore, the historical relationship between second wave feminists (often employers of domestics themselves) and domestic work is an area of research that can provide fruitful insight into race, class, and gender relations in Canadian society. There are still understudied groups of native-born (including Black women) and immigrant women in Canadian history that performed domestic work in different regions of Canada, and in both rural and urban contexts. This research can contribute to a comprehensive analysis of the history of domestic work in Canada.

While this review was limited to the literature on twentieth century domestic work in Canada and the US, it is important to note that there is a thriving scholarship on domestic work internationally, on various geographic locations, and from diverse disciplines and theoretical perspectives.²⁰ An increased interchange among scholars of domestic work would only enrich the field. The similarities in the nature and status of domestic work globally make this an area of research conducive to transnational research. It offers a way to connect the stories of women who perform the labour in various countries. The present movement of women from rural to urban areas, and across national borders into this work mirrors similar movements in the past, and linking past and present through interdisciplinary research can only illuminate our understanding of domestic work and history itself. The study of domestic work also offers a lens into historical inequalities that persist to the present-day despite the feminist movement, anti-racist movements, the progress of the labour movement, and state policies of multiculturalism. As such, domestic work is not an insular field of study, but an exciting area of research for current and future scholars who are interested in larger issues of class inequality, state policies around labour and migrants, racism, gender, and the resistance of 'invisible' women around the world, past and present.

Notes

1. See Franca Iacovetta, "Manly Militants, Cohesive Communities, and Defiant Domestics: Writing about Immigrants in Canadian Historical Scholarship," *Labour/Le Travail* 36 (Fall 1995): 217-252. For an overview of domestic work in Canada see Marilyn Barber, *Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991). For work on nineteenth and early twentieth century domestic service in Canada see Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920" in Janice Acton ed. *Women at Work, Ontario 1850-1930* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974); Barbara Roberts, "A Work of Empire: Canadian Reformers and British Female Immigration" Linda Kealey ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1979); Marilyn Barber, "The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domestic Servants for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930," *Ontario History* 72 (September 1980): 155-166; Marilyn Barber, "Sunny Ontario for British Girls," in Jean Burnet ed., *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: An Exploration in Women's History* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986); Marilyn Barber, "The Servant Problem in Manitoba, 1896-1930," *First Days, Fighting Days: Women in Manitoba History* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1987); Claudette Lacelle, *Urban Domestic Servants in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Ottawa: Research Publications, Environment Canada - Parks, 1987); Magda Fahrni "Ruffled' Mistresses and 'Discontented' Maids: Respectability and the Case of Domestic Service, 1880-1914," *Labour/Le Travail* 39 (Spring 1997): 69-97; Lorna R. McLean and Marilyn Barber, "In Search of Comfort and Independence: Irish Immigrant Domestic Servants Encounter the Courts, Jails, and Asylums in the Nineteenth Century", Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa eds., *Sisters or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). For British Home Children in domes-

- tic service see Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).
2. See David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Daniel Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States from 1800-1920* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); Judith Rollins, *Between Women: Domesticity and Their Employers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985). On Irish domestics in the nineteenth century see Hasia Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).
 3. For other works on African-American women in domestic service see Brenda Clegg Gray, *Black Female Domestic Workers During the Depression in New York City 1930-1940* (New York: Garland, 1993); Bonnie Thornton Dill, *Across the Boundaries of Race and Class: An Exploration of Work and Family Among Black Female Domestic Servants* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Tera W. Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
 4. Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American Domestic Workers in Washington D.C. 1910-1940*. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 80.
 5. Clark-Lewis, *Living-In, Living-Out*, 107.
 6. See Joan Sangster, "Finnish Women in Ontario, 1890-1930," *Polyphony* 3(2) (Fall 1981): 46-54. Isabel Kaprelian, "Women and Work: the Case of Finnish Domestic Workers and Armenian Boarding House Operators," *Resources for Feminist Research* 12 (1983/4): 53-60; Milda Danys, *DP: Lithuanian Immigration to Canada After the Second World War* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986); Franca Iacovetta, "Primitive Villagers and Uneducated Girls: Canada Recruits Domestic Workers from Italy," *Canadian Woman Studies* 7(4) (Winter 1986): 14-18.
 7. See Agnes Calliste, "Race, Gender and Canadian Immigration Policy: Blacks from the Caribbean, 1900-1932," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 28(4) (1993-1994): 131-148. For other works on Black women in domestic service in Canada see Frances Henry, "The West Indian Domestic Scheme in Canada," *Social and Economic Studies* 17(1) (March 1968): 83-91. Agnes Calliste "Canada's Immigration Policy and Domestic Workers from the Caribbean: the Second Domestic Scheme," Jesse Vorst ed. *Race, Class and Gender: Bonds and Barriers* (Toronto: Broadview Press 1991).
 8. Sedef Arat-Koc, "From 'Mothers of the Nation' to Migrant Workers," Abigail B. Bakan and Daiva Stasiulus eds, *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 78.
 9. For other works on migrant domestic workers in Canada see Rina Cohen "Women of Color in White Households: Coping Strategies of Live-in Domestic Workers" in *Qualitative Sociology*, 14(2) (1991), 197-214; Patricia Daenzer, *Regulating Class Privilege: Immigrant Servants in Canada, 1940s-1990s* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1993); Tanya Schecter, *Race, Class, Women and the State: The Case of Domestic Labour in Canada* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1998); Rina Cohen, "Mom is a Stranger": The Negative Impact of Immigration Policies on the Family Life of Filipina Domestic Workers," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 31(3) (2000): 76-88.
 10. Shellee Colen, "'Just a Little Respect': West Indian Domestic Workers in New York City," *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 189.
 11. For works on the global migration of women into domestic service see Wenona Giles and

Sedef Arat-Koc eds., *Maid in the Market: Women's Paid Domestic Labour* (Halifax: Fernwood Pub., 1994); Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000); Bridget Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour* (London: Zed Books, 2000); Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild eds. *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002)

12. Mary Romero, *Maid in the U.S.A.* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 15.

13. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 28.

14. Clark-Lewis, *Living-In, Living-Out*, 149.

15. For Canadian scholarship on live-out work see Susana P. Miranda, "Working Women, 'Cleaning Ladies': Portuguese Immigrant Women and Domestic Day Cleaning in 1960s and 1970s Toronto," *Portuguese Studies Review* Vol. 11 No. 2 (Winter-Spring 2003-2004): 89-108; Wanda Thomas Bernard and Judith Fingard, "Black Women at Work: Race, Family, and Community in Greater Halifax," Judith Fingard and Janet Guildford eds. *Mothers of the Municipality: Women, Work, and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

16. Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and their Employers in the Segregated South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 1.

17. Makeda Silvera, *Silenced: Talks with Working Class Caribbean Women about their Lives and Struggles as Domestic Workers in Canada* (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1989), ix.

18. For similar findings see Alexander Freund and Laura Quilici, "Exploring Myths in Women's Narratives: Italian and German Immigrant Women in Vancouver, 1947-1961" *BC Studies* nos. 105-106 (Spring/Summer 1995): 159-182.

19. On oral history methodology see Anne Oakley, "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms," Helen Roberts ed., *Doing Feminist Research* (London: Routledge, 1975); Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Marlene Epp, "The Memory of Violence: Soviet and Eastern European Mennonite Refugees and Rape in the Second World War," *Journal of Women's History* 9 (1997): 58-87; Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," Veronica Strong-Boag, Mona Gleason and Adele Perry eds. *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* 4th edition (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002).

20. Examples of this work include Leonore Davidoff, "Mastered for Life: Servants and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England," *Journal of Social History* 7(4) (Summer 1974): 406-428; Pamela Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Domestic Servant* (Dublin: Sutton, 1975); Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation* (Johannesburg: The Women's Press, 1980); Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); Elsa M. Chaney and Mary Garcia Castro, *Muchachas No More*; Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Distant Companions: Servants and Employers in Zambia 1900-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Christine B.N. Chin, *In Service and Servitude: Foreign Female Domestic Workers and the Malaysian 'Modernity' Project* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Gul Ozyegin, *Untidy Gender: Domestic Service in Turkey* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); B.W. Higman, *Domestic Service in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2002); Michele A. Johnson, "Young Woman from the Country: A Profile of Domestic Service in Jamaica, 1920-1970," Verene Shepherd ed., *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: The Caribbean and the Atlantic World since the 17th Century*.