

Abstract

This paper explores some of the processes through which minority women from Third World countries are constructed as “immigrant women” in Canada. The focal point of the inquiry is a community employment agency providing job counseling and placement services for non-English-speaking and Black women. Through an in-depth examination of the agency’s work process and its relationship with the state and employers, the paper shows that employment counseling and placement is a means through which minority women are organized into particular locations in the labor market. This is accomplished through a “documentary mode of action.”

About the Author

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The Documentary Construction of “Immigrant Women” in Canada

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Introduction and Framework¹

Immigrant women and their status in Canada is a subject of much attention in recent years. Their visibility has been partly a result of agitation by women, many of whom come from immigrant backgrounds themselves, and partly of the state's response to such agitation. Interestingly, not all women who are landed immigrants are considered to be "immigrant women." In everyday life, when we think of an immigrant woman, we have an image of a woman who does not speak English properly, who is a member of a minority group, notably from the Third World, and who has a certain location in the labor market (e.g., as a sewing machine operator or a cleaning lady). (See Ng 1984b and 1985, for a fuller discussion). In other words, the term "immigrant women" is both a social and labor market category.

In this paper, I will focus on the construction of "immigrant women" as a special labor market category. I will describe part of the process through which women from the Third World, who have certain skills and abilities, are produced as "immigrant women": as a special kind of "commodity" in the labor market. I will argue that the state, through its documentary organization, plays a central role in the production of immigrant women as a visible group. Through the analytic account based on my fieldwork, I have identified a social process whereby a segment of the population is transformed in a social formation. This understanding is derived from Braverman's work on changes in the labor process in the twentieth century:

The term 'working class,' properly understood, never precisely delineated a specified body of people, but was rather an expression for an ongoing process...the mark of which is the transformation of sectors of the population. (Braverman 1974:24)

Thus, when we call a woman an "immigrant women," we are naming, knowingly or unknowingly, the process which led to the "commodification" of a group of people (in this instance women with certain racial and cultural characteristics) in Canadian society.

Before proceeding further, I will briefly outline the conception of "the state" which is used in this paper. By now, most Marxist and neo-Marxist theorists agree that the state is not a monolithic structure composed simply of different apparatuses which perform different functions for the dominant classes on behalf of capital (e.g., Miliband 1969; Poulantzas 1978, 1980; Therborn 1980; Urry 1981). In an advanced capitalist social formation, the state has relative autonomy vis-à-vis the different classes; it is constitutive of a set of capitalist social relations and struggles from below (Holloway and Picciotto 1978; Morgan 1981)—a set which maintains an "unstable equilibrium of compromise" (Poulantzas 1978:192). This understanding draws our attention to the dynamic process of class struggle, so that the state can be seen to be itself constituted through the process of class struggle. In turn, it plays an active role in the formation of classes and the structuring of class conflicts in modern capitalist societies (Cockburn 1977).

In terms of our specific concern, my inquiry reveals how the state's "social problem apparatus" (Morgan 1981) is extended to the grassroots in its efforts to provide the infrastructure necessary to ensure the continual expansion of capital. This is done through funding provisions to community groups (see Loney 1977; Ng 1978, 1984a; Morgan 1981). In this case, in attempting to rationalize labor market demands, the state, via a community employment agency, organized groups of workers in relation to employers' needs, thereby defining immigrant women as a unique labor market category: as a distinctive kind of "commodity" for employers, the buyers of this commodity. Our knowledge of "immigrant women" as a social grouping is a product of this intervention.

I do not mean to imply that this is a one-way relation initiated completely by the state. In struggling to better the conditions of sectors of the working population (in this case immigrant women), groups pressure the state to provide funding for services for the disadvantaged sectors. The employment agency, the subject of this inquiry, was a product of this struggle which illuminates the dynamic process of state formation in contemporary Canada. (For a detailed account, see Ng 1984a).

Documents are central to the process of ruling and the coordination of the complex functioning of the state. In various shapes and forms, they provide for organizational action in the state apparatus and other large organizations: in records and files, legislation, press releases, orders-in-council, interdepartmental memoranda, and various kinds of information systems (see Garfinkel 1967; Wheeler 1969; Smith 1974, 1984; Jackson 1980; Campbell 1984). What is important about the documentary mode of action is that it serves to

objectify knowledge, organization, and decision-processes, distinguishing what individuals do for themselves from what they do organizationally or discursively, thereby constituting properties of formal organization or of discourse that cannot be attributed to individuals. (Smith 1984:61-62).

In the discussion to follow, it will become clear that documents--forms and records--were a central part of the work process of the employment agency. They provided a channel of communication between the funding apparatus of the state on the one hand, and shaped the definition of "immigrant women" as a labor market category on the other. In receiving funding from the Outreach Program of the Department of Employment and Immigration², the agency in effect entered into a sub-contractual relation with the state. The funding protocol was such that the agency had to produce a "product" for the state to fulfill the terms of the funding agreement as defined by the contract drawn up between Outreach and the agency. The "product" for which state funding was supplied was intended to provide services to both clients and employers, the buyers of the labor of immigrant women. Thus, a major consideration was the placement of women in available jobs through the agency; it was monitored by means of an elaborate accounting system executed by employment counselors. In order for the agency to match women with job openings, a cooperative working relationship with employers was fundamental to ensure a continuing supply of job orders. In this way, the requirement for certain kinds of work experiences (for example, skills, abilities, the "quality" and "personability" of the workers) came to dominate

the selection and matching process of women and jobs available through the employment agency. This process, which constituted the core of the counseling and placement work of the agency, is the focal point of my discussion. This inquiry will show how "immigrant women" having the characteristics we attribute to them, come to be constituted in the counseling and placement process.

Background, Methods, and Data

The data on which this paper is based were obtained from ten months of intensive fieldwork at the employment agency in 1981. The agency began as an experimental project which was developed under the sponsorship of another community organization working with immigrant women. As the project was very successful and was able to demonstrate a need for specialized employment services for women, the group decided to seek more permanent funding to continue its work and to set itself up as an independent organization. At the time of my research, the agency had just been incorporated as a non-profit, voluntary organization, and was at the end of its first year of funding under the Employment and Immigration's Outreach Program. It had four full-time employment counselors serving women from Spanish-, Chinese-, Italian-speaking backgrounds and Black women mainly from the West Indies; one of the counselors also acted as the coordinator.

The primary mode of investigation was participant observation, with a progressive shift from observation to participation as the fieldwork proceeded. That is, I was permitted to observe the daily routine of the agency in exchange for helping the coordinator compile statistical and descriptive information about its clients and its operation, both for record-keeping and for funding purposes. From time to time, I was called upon to act as a receptionist when student-trainees were away. When the workload of the agency increased during the summer of my fieldwork and as I became more familiar with the work of the agency, I also volunteered to work with clients as a counselor. In this way, I gained a fuller picture of the different work involved, from bookkeeping and accounting, which was chiefly the responsibility of the coordinator, to counseling and placement. My participation as an active member of the agency enables me to gain an experiential sense of the contradictions involved in working as an advocate for immigrant women--in a system where the employers' and funding agency's demands exerted constant pressure on daily work.

The discussion is based on analysis of field notes, interviews with workers, selected tapes of interviews with clients (conducted in Chinese), and documents pertaining to the agency which included various forms filled out by the agency as part of its routine operation. The object in analyzing these materials is not to recover the workings of the agency in terms of whether its work is "typical" of similar community agencies; rather, it is to situate the agency in its organizational context (i.e., in relation to the state and employers) in order to show how it played a determining role in the labor market process by sorting and matching non-English-speaking women and visible minority women according to employers' specifications.

This approach, called "institutional ethnography" by Smith (1986), is grounded in the intellectual tradition of Marxist epistemology (Marx and Engles 1970, 1973) and interpretive sociology, notably ethnomethodology

(Garfinkel 1967) and the social organization of knowledge (Smith 1974). It emphasizes social relations which are embedded, though not immediately visible, in a local setting and which organize the dynamics of the local setting. In this regard, the activities of employment counselors and the documents they produced as part of their daily work are treated as essential constituents in a social course of action which organized the relations of individuals (counselors, clients, employers) to one another and to the labor market (see Smith 1984).

When we use this analytical strategy, we begin to see how a labor market stratified by gender and ethnicity is produced and maintained routinely in Canada. Furthermore, we can make the connection between localized labor markets (such as the garment industry in Toronto) which employ cheap immigrant labor in order to compete in the international market, and an international division of labor. The uneven development of capitalism on a global scale continually displaces segments of the population from agricultural work in their indigenous country and draws them to centers of new/advanced industrial development, thus giving rise to the phenomenon of immigration (Frobel et al. 1977; Sassen-Koob 1981). Although this larger picture is not dealt with directly in this paper, it is, however, the backdrop without which the work process of the employment agency cannot be fully understood.

The Constitution of "Immigrant Women" through Job Counseling and Placement

A careful analysis of the counseling and placement process reveals the double character of the agency's work with women. It is in this process that the contradictory character of the agency comes into focus. While the intention of the agency was to assist women in overcoming the structural barriers of the labor market and to promote their overall status, it was also through employment counseling that "immigrant women" came to be constituted as particular "commodities." Part of the counseling process involved the counselor's discretion and ability to turn the individual client's experiences and skills into "credentials" which could then be matched with the requirements of certain job openings. Out of all the information given by the client, the counselor selected the relevant features of the client's social history and translated them into the kinds of "skills" and requirements which employers specified in job orders. While this part of the counseling process was a positive step in helping women who were perceived as having no skills relevant to a highly advanced and differentiated labor process in securing employment, it was, at the same time, the process by which "immigrant women" were organized into certain positions in the Canadian labor market. The counseling process which led to job placement was a way whereby "immigrant women" were inserted into the different class locations³ in Canada. Because of the agency's relation to the state (through Outreach) and to the labor market, the counseling process played a determining part in labor market processes by producing "immigrant women" as a distinctive kind of labor with certain skills and qualifications; the counseling process was a way of organizing the relation between "immigrant women" and the potential employers who bought this kind of labor.

The production of "immigrant women" as "commodities" was accomplished through documents. In the counseling process, women's work histories were translated by counselors into "skills" and "abilities," which were matched in the agency's records to the types of jobs and requirements requested by

employers through job orders. The documentary process defined "immigrant women" as a particular kind of labor in the labor market, and facilitated the matching of clients to job openings. In turn, the records on clients, elicited through the Application for Employment (AFE), formed the basis of the statistical information requested by the funding organization, thereby providing an official channel of communication between the agency and the state.

1. The In-take Procedure

The in-take procedure was the first step of the screening process which took place at the agency. Whoever was acting as the receptionist at the time⁴ verified that the clients were female and were eligible to receive services according to the mandate of the agency. At the in-take, women were asked to complete an Application for Employment (AFE) form (see Figure 1) in English and were screened in terms of their ethnic backgrounds and linguistic ability. They were then matched to a counselor according to these criteria. Thus, clients who were ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese and who spoke these languages were sent to the Chinese counselors; the Spanish-speaking clients, either from Spain or Latin American countries, ended up with the Spanish counselor; the Black women, whether or not from Caribbean countries, became the West Indian counselor's clients, and so on. If a client could speak English fluently, then her ethnic origin became less important in this initial matching process because any counselor could communicate with her.

Furthermore, as the caseload of the agency increased, women from ethnic and linguistic groups outside those for which the agency was funded were refused service. Unless they could speak English and a counselor was willing to undertake their cases, they were referred to other community agencies. The in-take thus served as a means to screen out individuals who were ineligible for the agency's services by virtue of their ethnic origins. Once the AFE form was filled out, a client could see a counselor, and the interview process began.

2. The Interview Process

Very few clients could fill out the items on the AFE form unproblematically. Even when a client knew English reasonable well, inevitably she would fill in information which was irrelevant to the counselor's requirements. In the ensuing interview with the client, in addition to finding out the client's marketable skills and the kinds of jobs desired, it was also crucial for the counselor to find out information on the client relevant to the agency's organizational requirements, which included information necessary for a successful placement and for the compilation of the statistics. The AFE form was used as a way of initiating a dialogue between the counselor and the client, as well as a way of organizing the interview.

In the interview process, the counselors invariably referred to the application form to begin the counseling, and used the form as a basis for eliciting more information from the client. Filling in the form organized the interaction between a counselor and her client. For example, if a client introduced information not central to the categories on the form, the counselor would redirect the conversation or cut the client off altogether, so

that the discussion would return to what the counselor needed to know in order to fill in the form properly.

The interview process was central to the agency's work with "immigrant women" because it was here that the clients were screened and directed to jobs available in certain sectors of the labor market. It is in this process, as mentioned earlier, that the class character of the agency's work becomes visible. This includes three major features. First, in the interview, the counselor selected the relevant features of the clients' work histories and translated them into the kinds of "skills" and "experiences" specified by employers, thereby organizing them into available jobs. In the screening process, the counselor also engaged in a "classifying practice" by selecting out women with differential skills and inserting them into different locations in the occupational hierarchy. Second, during the interview, the counselor questioned the client and worked up her background as "skills" and "experiences" relevant to the job market. In this way the counselor helped employers to screen potential employees, so that the counselor herself became a "gate-keeper" (Erickson and Shultz 1982) of women's entry into the "rules" of the Canadian labor market. This included explicit instructions to clients about attributes desired by employers (e.g., punctuality, cleanliness, swiftness, and reliability) and implicit transformative work on client's experiences into the terms and categories used by employers (e.g., translating a vague statement of the kinds of tasks which a client could do into specific skills and work experiences). These features were woven into the entire counseling process, and the transformative work took place most notably during the initial interview phase when the counselor completed the AFE form with the client. Only this aspect of the counselors work will be highlighted in this paper.

The interview process, then, covered a range of topics aimed at discovering the marketable skills of the client, the types of jobs for which she was eligible, and the job preferences of the client, given her skills and current labor market conditions. During the interview, information from the client was evaluated according to a set of categories on the AFE form. Usually, the interview session began with questions which the counselor asked about the client's proficiency in English. Did she understand any English? How much? Had she ever taken an English training (ESL) program? Where and for how long? (Item 14 of AFE.) A client's proficiency in English was seen to be crucial in placement: although the jobs available through the agency were directed primarily at the non-English-speaking segment of the labor force, the ability to understand basic English was an asset in most cases. It opened up more possible areas of employment for the client, as most employers preferred workers who could understand basic instructions in English, especially when the workers did not have previous work experience in that particular industry or business and had to go through a period of training.

The educational level (Item 15 of AFE) and previous work experience (Item 16 of AFE) of a client were two other chief areas covered in the interview. Since very few of the clients had more than secondary education, and many had only elementary education, discussion about educational background was a cursory part of the interview. Added to this was the fact that, as long as the client could understand instructions and do the work, levels of education had little relevance to many employers who placed job orders with the agency (Janke and Yaron 1979:7).

Work experiences and skills, on the other hand, were a problematic and lengthy part of the the interview for both client and counselor. While work experience and its concomitant skills were important in establishing a client's employabilty, because of the nature of work commonly available to non-English-speaking and working-class Black women, either menial work requiring a host of taken-for-granted skills (e.g. domestic skills) or highly repetitive and highly differentiated work (e.g. work on the assembly-line), it was usually difficult for them to describe what they did and what the work involved. Many of the clients did not remember even the name of their last employer or the location of their work. When asked about past employment a typical answer from a client would be: "somewhere around Main Street" or "the factory that made plastic things," and the client was unable to describe the commodity which the factory produced. Regarding her work skills, the client was frequently just as vague: "I did what everyone else did," or "I put screws into these round things, you see." The following example from my fieldnotes, recorded when I was acting as a counselor at the agency, illustrates some aspects of this process and how a vague description of tasks was worked up into a specific job category by the counselor.

I tired to get her to explain to me what she did in the last place she worked. She said, "Everything. Just like all the other people." I told her it didn't tell me what she did and explained to her that she needed to explain her work to me so that I could tell what jobs would be suitable for her.

It was difficult for her to do that. She tried quite hard to explain. They manufactured plastic basins. Like, the basins/sinks were plastic and they came out of a machine. Then she (and other workers) would put screws into the basins. They would wash them first. She also did some general clean-up work, like wiping up the mess and so on.

As I was interrogating her, I realized that what I was doing was to try to categorize what she did so that (1) I could identify what kind of work she was looking for and (2) I could explain to the employers what this client's skills were when I phoned them up. But her description was so vague that after going around the subject several times, I still couldn't figure out what this factory did. (Ng fieldnotes, July 2, 1981)

In the case of this client, since I was unable to establish her precise skills based on the interview, I put down "general factory work" after "type of job sought" (Item 2 of AFE) on her form. The information entered here was crucial because the type of job sought listed on the client's record, together with her employment record (Item 16 of AFE), became the basis for matching her to the job(s) available through the employment agency. (See Item 6, i.e., position opened, and Item 10, i.e., job description/requirements, of the Job Order Record.) Here, we see that a description given by the client was translated by the counselor into a category ("general factory work" for the client in question) which could be matched to the description provided by employers. The category of "type of job sought" became important as a way for the counselor to identify the position suitable for the client later on in the interview, when she had to place the client in a job opening.

3. Employment Contacts

Another aspect of the agency's work, much less visible but equally central, is the agency's relation with employers. In order to ensure a continual supply of job openings for clients, employment counselors had to establish contacts with employers who would place orders with the agency when they needed workers. In the two years since its inception, the agency had established a viable system of "employer contacts." While initial contacts were set up through visiting potential employers in the city who were willing to hire immigrant workers and to introduce the work of the agency to them, most of the employer contacts, by the time I conducted fieldwork at the agency, were carried out by telephone and revolved around a fairly stable network of employers. In addition, counselors daily scanned classified ads sections of the major newspapers to keep on adding employers to the agency's file of employers. The process of selection was random; however, it was shaped to a certain extent by the perceived needs and demands of the clients. For example, most of the agency's clients lived within the city boundaries, especially within the downtown core. Most clients did not have their own transportation and therefore would not have been able to travel long distances to work; thus, it would have been impractical to contact employers in the suburbs.

In terms of the reality of the labor market, non-English-speaking women, particularly those from visible minority groups, tend to concentrate in the bottom rungs of most service and manufacturing sectors in the so-called "non-skilled" and dead-end positions. They are generally recruited into three kinds of services and industries. First, they are recruited into private service as office cleaners or domestic workers through a network of informal contacts. This kind of employment suits them because they do not have to use English and it offers some flexibility in working hours essential to women with family responsibilities. Second, they are employed in manufacturing and retail industries, such as light manufacturing in textile, garment, and plastic factories. Third, they are employed in service industries including restaurants, hotels, and other food industries. "Immigrant women" occupy the lowest positions in these types of work. In the garment industry, for example, they are mainly sewing machine operators with practically no opportunity for upward mobility. In the service sector, they are dishwashers, kitchen help, chambermaids, and janitors (Arnopoulos 1978; Ng and Das Gupta 1981). Further, many also do appallingly low-paid and exploitative piece work in the home (Johnson 1982).

According to a survey in Toronto on labor market conditions and training opportunities for non-English-speaking women, the companies which are likely to employ "immigrant women" are not small companies, but larger institutions, factories, and hotels employing a hundred or more people. This is because in a smaller work place, the likelihood of existing employees speaking the same language as new workers is slight, and communication between employer and new employees may thus be difficult, whereas in a larger place, it is easier to accommodate new workers who need help communicating in English. Also, job opportunities for non-English-speaking women are concentrated in the highly competitive textile and garment industries and in cleaning, laundry, and domestic jobs. Opportunities in the food and manufacturing industries are found to be minimal and generally restricted to non-unionized places, e.g. assembly-line food production and packaging firms (Janke and Yaron 1979:11).

My previous research indicates that small companies and restaurants which consistently hire non-English-speaking immigrants are retail enterprises and restaurants in the so-called "ethnic" neighborhoods which serve a primarily ethnic clientele (Ng and Das Gupta 1980). Such industries and businesses usually have poor working conditions and pay low wages, close to minimum wage. Due to the nature of their paid employment (e.g. part-time, seasonal or piece work), labor standard legislation is not rigidly enforced in many cases, a situation which further reinforces the poor circumstances under which "immigrant women" have to work (Arnopoulos 1978; Johnson 1982). It can be seen that in order for the employment agency to find work for "immigrant women," it had to enter into those sectors of the labor market which pay low wages and have poor working conditions.

When an employer contacted the agency for workers to fill job openings, the specifications of the company were recorded on a Job Order Record (JOR) (See Figure 2). In addition to the basic information required by the agency, such as the name, address and phone number of the employer, and types and number of positions opened (Items 6 and 7), there was space on the JOR for the employer to describe the nature and requirements of the position (Item 10 of JOR). The second half of the JOR form was reserved for the counselors to record the details on clients who were referred to a particular employer. Items 6 (positions opened) and 10 (job description/requirements) were crucial categories in terms of the counseling process, because this information was used by counselors to match their clients to job openings.

4. Job Placement

While there were several routine procedures which counselors used to place a client in a job opening, I will focus my discussion on the relation between the JOR and AFE of a client, because, regardless of the procedures used, the "match" was conducted using both sets of forms.

The job order records were filed in a large, three-ring binder according to common categories of work received by the agency, such as domestic work, factory work, and restaurant work. "Sewing" became a separate category during the period of my fieldwork, because it was the predominant industry where there was a constant demand for workers by employers. Once the counselor identified the category of work sought by the client (Item 2 of AFE), she consulted the JORs under the appropriate heading in the job order file. She went through the available job openings under this category with the client, so that they could decide which of the jobs would best suit the client.

When a suitable opening was identified, the counselor telephoned the employer on behalf of the client and made an appointment for the client to see the employer. Even when an employer regularly made use of the agency to place orders, rarely did the employer hire the client directly over the phone; usually the candidate either was examined in an interview or went through the firm's application procedure, such as filling out an application form in the company's personnel department. If telephone conversation with the employer was very positive, the counselor could send the client to see the employer right away, and consider this step a placement. But more often the counselor would ask the client to report the result of the job interview so that the client's file could be updated and closed.

At this stage of the interview, the counselor usually attempted to provide the client with more details about the job. In the case of sewing work, for example, she would tell the client the type(s) of machine(s) the client was expected to operate. There also might be a discussion on wages and working hours. The counselor tried to ensure that the client was told as much about the job as possible, to eliminate false expectations. Frequently, this phase of the interview process also included instructions to the client regarding bus routes, appropriate things to say in the interview with the employer, and ways in which the client should present herself. If a client was to start a job, the counselor often impressed the client with the importance of being punctual. Also, she might act as a messenger for the employer if they had any special instructions for the client. What is of interest here is that by placing a client in a job opening with certain characteristics (e.g. certain kinds of skills and personal qualities) required by the employer, and by providing instructions to the client about the special requirements of a particular employer, the counselor, in effect, produced a client as a special commodity having these special characteristics. When the client joined the labor force, she became an "immigrant woman" whom we recognize as such in the everyday world.

Thus, the counseling process which leads to job placement is one moment in the process which transforms some women into "immigrant women" in Canadian society. Not only did the work of employment counselors dovetail the stratification already existing in the labor market, but it also actively organized and reproduced this stratification. In the above discussion, we see how gender and race/ethnicity are constitutive features of the organization of "immigrant women's" class locations in Canada.

Conclusion and Theoretical Implications

Through an examination of some of the work processes of a community agency, this paper explicated how the category "immigrant women" was produced as a labor market category in the routine activity of employment counselors. This is largely a documentary process which facilitated the articulation of the agency to the state on the one hand, and produced "immigrant women" as "commodities" for employers in the labor market on the other. Central to this examination is the understanding that our knowledge of "immigrant women" is embedded in a complex set of historical and economic relations which has to do with the state's attempt to regulate and organize the labor market in Canada. This understanding differs from and goes beyond labeling theory, which is concerned with discovering actors' perceptions in the construction of deviant acts (for a summary, see Kotarba 1980). My interests are first to explore how the construction of "immigrant women" is part of the coordinated activities of the state, and second, to draw attention to documents as essential constituents in the production of knowledge and the management of the activities of ruling.

Finally, to end this paper I discuss the theoretical implications of my analysis in terms of the debate on the importance of class, ethnicity/race, and gender as determining factors of social status in society. Canadian analysts have characteristically treated ethnicity and class as discrete categories which have different theoretical status (e.g. Porter 1967; Clement 1975; Robbins 1975). Until the emergence of feminist scholarship, gender tended to fall outside the realm of analytical relevance. (For a more

extended discussion, see Ng 1984b). My account of the employment agency suggests that if we treat class as an actual work process, rather than simply as a set of socio-economic indicators, we can begin to see the interconnection of gender, race, and class in the organization of social life.

In the foregoing discussion, we gleaned how race/ethnicity and gender were used in the screening of clients, and thus in the organization and production of immigrant women's class locations in Canadian society. They are not merely variables to be counterposed against class as competing determinants of social status; they are integral to the organization of labor market relations. I owe much of this insight to a recent development in socialist feminist scholarship. In an article which explores the relationship between women, family, and class, Smith makes the following observation:

In pre-capitalist societies, gender is basic to the "economic" division of labour and how labour resources are controlled. In other than capitalist forms, we take for granted that gender relations are included. In peasant societies for example, the full cycle of production and subsistence is organized by the household and family and presupposes gender relations. Indeed, we must look to capitalism as a mode of production to find how the notion of the separation of gender relations from economic relations could arise. It is only in capitalism that we find an economic process constituted independently from the daily and generational production of the lives of particular individuals and in which therefore we can think economy apart from gender (Smith, 1983:2).

I am not arguing that gender and race/ethnicity are reducible to class. I am suggesting that analyses of gender and ethnic relations cannot be understood by abstracing them from the particular context which they arise and come to occupy their unique ontological domains. That is, they cannot be understood without a class analysis in the way in which Marx and Engles expounded it, by locating them in a particular social formation. When we adopt this strategy, we see that ethnicity and gender are constitutive features of productive relations in our kind of society. The fact that we can think of ethnicity and gender as separate social phenomena is itself a product of our kind of society which introduces an artificial separation between economic and social life (see Ng 1984a).

Obviously, the above discussion is cursory and requires further explication, which is the subject of another analysis. I do, however, wish to introduce it here because my account sheds important light on the treatment of class, race, and gender—an emerging debate in feminist scholarship internationally (e.g. Davis 1981; Ng 1984b; Barrett and McIntosh 1985).

Notes

1. The data of this paper are from my doctoral research funded by a SSHRCC doctoral fellowship and a University of Toronto Ivey Foundations grant. Earlier versions of the paper were presented at the 1985 CSAA annual meeting and 1986 Comparative & International Education society conference. I am grateful to Dorothy Smith and Philip Corrigan for comments on these drafts of the paper, and to Wendy Keitner for editorial assistance.

2. Outreach is a small program within the federal Department of Employment and Immigration. It was established as a result of a cabinet decision in 1972. The stated objective of the program, according to various Outreach documents, is:

To improve, with the help of community-based agencies, the employability and employment of individuals who experience special difficulties competing in the labour market and who are not able to benefit effectively from the services offered by their CEC (Canada Employment Centres). The essential purpose of Outreach is to complement, and effectively extend, regular services of the Commission to such groups.

Women, because of their disadvantaged position in the labor market, were targeted as one of these groups, and the employment agency was funded under the category "women" with special reference to "immigrant women." Thus, it can be seen that prior to the provision of services, the jurisdictional domain of the agency's work was already defined, in this instance through the contract drawn up between the agency and Outreach. Services were provided to people of a certain gender, who had a certain legal status (i.e. immigrant vs. citizen), who spoke certain languages or who were Black. Gender and ethnicity, however defined, became the foremost criteria for determining who would be eligible for services at the agency.

3. In this paper, I go beyond the notion of class simply as a set of socio-economic indicators related to individuals' locations in the occupational hierarchy. This is the place where many contemporary Marxist analysts begin (see the works of Carchedi, Poulantzas, Wright and Livingstone). My understanding of class is derived from the early formulation of the concept, expounded by Marx and Engels in The German Ideology (1970), and The Communist Manifesto (1967) which treats class fundamentally as a relation. It refers to the way human activities are organized in terms of the processes of a particular mode of production; for instance, what we have come to identify as labor market processes in capitalist societies. The strategy here is to use "class," not as a theoretical concept which needs to be operationalized, but to unfold it as a set of articulated processes which are carried out through organized practical activities fully available for empirical investigation. I want to preserve the notion of "class" as a dynamic process whereby people's practices and actions are implicated by virtue of their locations in a determinate organization. This is how Marx describes commodity production (Marx 1954). This way we can begin to see how people's work enters them into certain courses of action (as in the case of the employment counselors

studied) which are not necessarily intended by them, the actors, but which do implicate them in certain ways.

4. Outreach funding did not allow for the hiring of a receptionist at the agency. In the absence of an "official" receptionist, members of the staff would take turns playing this role. However, during my fieldwork there, most of the time the agency managed to secure reception help through other grants or volunteers. As mentioned before, I was frequently asked to help out as a receptionist when I conducted research there.

Figure 1
APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

1. Date: _____
2. Type of Job Sought: _____

3. Name: _____ 4. Tel: _____
family first middle

5. Address: _____

6. Date of Birth: _____ 7. Social Insurance No: _____

8. Years in Canada _____ 9. Country of Origin: _____

10. Marital Status: _____ 11. No. of Children: _____

12. First Language: _____ 14. English: Yes No Little

13. Immigrant Status: _____
(14a) Speak _____
(14b) Read _____
(14c) Write _____

15. Education Record
School grade date course certificate
completed completed studies received

15a. Grade				
15b. High				
15c. College				
15d. Technical				
15e. Others				

16. Employment Record (Most recent employer first)

16a. Company name 16b. Where 16c. Position 16d. Salary 16e. When

17. Referral Source: _____

18. Other Information: _____

19. Date interviewed 20. Counsellor 21. Type of Service--remarks

22. Case closed: 22a. when _____

22b. why _____

Note: Numbers have been added to the AFE form for easy identification in the discussion.

Figure 2
JOB ORDER RECORD

1. File no.: _____
2. Date: _____
3. Name of employer: _____ 4. Phone no.: _____
5. Address of employer: _____
6. Position opened: _____ 7. Number of position
opened: _____
8. Starting salary: _____ 9. Working hours: _____
10. Job description/requirements: _____

11. Name of client sent	12. Date	13. Counsellor	14. Remarks

15. Date position is filled: _____

Note: Numbers have been added to the JOR form for easy identification in the discussion.

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