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Female Migrant Labor in North America: Trends and Issues for the 1990s

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Introduction

This paper examines the employment of immigrant women in North America with particular attention to the influence of economic restructuring. Evidence reviewed below suggests that immigrant women who are recent arrivals and/or from areas other than North America or Europe are most likely to be employed in low-wage, low-skill jobs in sectors of falling employment. Insofar as economic restructuring in North America means an industry separation of the labor market into "good jobs" and "bad jobs" (Economic Council of Canada, 1989), it is clear that "bad" jobs in fields such as textiles, clothing manufacturing, and personal services will be filled disproportionately by immigrant women. One may therefore conclude that extensive and effective training and other labor market adjustment policies are required to overcome the potentially negative effects of NAFTA on immigrant women. The study concludes with a discussion of the paradox created.

by industrial policy and immigration policy developments, with emphasis on their implications for future migration flows.

WOMEN AS INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS TO NORTH AMERICA

Although considerable female migration occurs within major world regions, the largest flows in recent history tend to be to traditional settlement countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States.¹ By the 1980s, the United States was the country with the largest numbers of foreign-born females – nearly 7.5 million – while Canada ranked fourth with a population of nearly 2 million foreign-born females. In both countries, foreign-born females slightly outnumbered foreign-born men. The fact that females represented at least half of the foreign-born population in these two countries is neither new nor a regional aberration (Boyd, 1992a: Table 1; Houston, Kramer and Barrett, 1984; Tyree and Donato, 1986; United Nations, 1990). Figures for the top ten source countries for females admitted as permanent residents to Canada and the United States during the 1980s show that female immigrants frequently equalled or exceeded males in number (Table 1). These top ten source countries account for over half of the total female inflow to Canada and the United States during most of the 1980s.

Apart from revealing the frequent parity of females in immigration flows to North America, the data in Table 1 also indicate the changing origin characteristics of these females. Neither Canada nor any European country is among the top ten countries sending females to the United States between 1982 and 1989. For Canada, only Great Britain, Poland, and the United States are among the top ten, largely as a result of past and current economic linkages and migratory flows.² The top

¹European countries have also been major receivers, partly as a result of the autonomous migration of women in the labor migration of the 1960s and early 1970s, but primarily as part of the resultant family reunification flows that followed male migration.

²Immigration from Poland reflects the ability of past migration streams to be self-sustaining when combined with facilitative immigration regulations. Until 1989 persons from Poland could enter Canada for humanitarian reasons. While they did not fall into the refugee class, immigration regulations permitted ministerial designation of certain groups as "designated groups" for whom humanitarian concerns would be grounds for entry. Relatives and church groups commonly played a role in sponsoring these groups. Following the rapprochement between Eastern and Western Europe, persons from Poland and other countries can no longer be admitted in the "designated group" category, and it seems likely that their numbers in annual flows will decline.

TABLE 1
TOP TEN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN FOR FEMALES ADMITTED AS PERMANENT RESIDENTS TO CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES:
1981/1982-1989

To Canada: Place of Last Residence 1981-1989		Females as Percent of Total		To the United States: Country of Birth 1982-1989		Females as Percent of Total	
Rank	Country	Females (N)	Percent	Rank	Country	Females (N)	Percent
1	India	39,710	51.6	1	Mexico	389,819	44.9
2	Great Britain	39,634	52.8	2	Philippines	224,526	58.5
3	Hong Kong	38,442	51.0	3	Korea	151,206	56.8
4	Vietnam	32,063	47.1	4	Vietnam	127,695	43.1
5	Poland	30,616	47.3	5	China	109,140	53.0
6	China	30,477	53.6	6	India	102,423	49.3
7	United States	30,190	55.1	7	Dominican Republic	98,641	51.9
8	Philippines	29,757	58.7	8	Jamaica	85,152	52.0
9	Jamaica	17,967	57.0	9	El Salvador	64,933	51.7
10	Guyana	16,795	54.3	10	Cuba	61,863	45.1
	Subtotal	310,073	52.6			1,415,398	49.5
	All other countries	259,693	49.2			2,563,790	49.7
	Top ten as percent of total female ^a		54.2				55.2

Source: Employment and Immigration Canada, *Immigration Statistics* (annual reports 1981-1989). U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (annual reports, 1982-1989).

^aCalculated as subtotal divided by sum of (subtotal plus all other countries).

ten countries in fact are part of a more general pattern in which female and male migrants no longer primarily come from Canada to the United States (and vice versa), or from Europe. In this pattern historical/political ties underlie differences between Canada and the United States in the origins of previous and more recently arrived migrants. In Canada, female and male migrants are coming increasingly from Asian countries. While this trend also exists in the United States, the Mexican border and U.S. historical and political ties to the Caribbean underlie much higher inflows from Latin America and lower flows from Europe and the United Kingdom.³

³Boyd, 1992a; see also Table 1 (herein), where five Latin American/Caribbean countries are among the top ten source countries for females immigrating to the United States.

Theories of migration that incorporate models of global restructuring argue that origin and destination characteristics of migration flows reflect patterns of investment by firms and institutions in industrial nations (Bonacich and Cheng, 1984; R. Cohen, 1987; Fernández Kelly, 1989; Petras, 1981; Portes, 1981; Sassen, 1988, 1991; Zolberg, 1981; Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo, 1989). Investment in Third World export-based industries stimulates internal (and international) migration, establishes linkages between developed and less-developed countries, and creates unemployment either through agrarian displacement, employment policies (such as not hiring women past a certain age) or the subsequent flight of investment to cheaper wage zones. As a result of contacts, the infusion of ideology from industrial nations and the creation of surplus labor, international migration occurs in the direction of those developed countries from which the original investments came.

From the "global restructuring" perspective, international migration of women occurs partly because their employment in export industries such as electronics, garments, and toys locates them in information networks, exposes them to western ideologies and makes them vulnerable to unstable, fluctuating employment as investors relocate factories to places where wage rates are lower (Sassen, 1988: 114). In addition, the forces behind the migration of women are also indirect, through the impact of investment on the employment experiences and opportunities of men. Since international migration is often a form of household survival strategy, the migration of men often leads to the migration of accompanying female family members. This is especially true in movements to settlement countries such as the United States and Canada, where family reunification is a criterion for admission and where adults who are granted permanent residence may be accompanied by close family members. Most women enter as spouses or dependents of male migrants. However, their mode of entry does not imply that immigrant women are any less a supply of labor than men. Immigration entry data in receiving countries typically underestimate the labor force participation rates of foreign-born women when these women enter as accompanying family members. Once these "dependents" arrive, however, their labor force participation rates are frequently as high as or higher than those of the locally born female population. Further, given historical and contemporary devaluations of

female labor relative to that of males, immigrant women represent source of cheap labor. By implication, *family* migration is a way of enlarging a supply of cheap labor, directly if the principal (generally male) applicant in the family is less skilled, and indirectly if women immigrants enter as part of a family unit.

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AND FEMALE LABOR

Much of the recent literature on global economy and international migration emphasizes the role of immigration in sustaining a less skilled pool of labor. This emphasis is supported by analyses that argue that the skill level of migrants is declining (Borjas, 1988). It is also strengthened by the pessimistic view of postindustrial society, in which new labor is needed to fill low-wage, low-skill "bad jobs" which emerge; the mirror image of the growth of a privatized sector of "good jobs."

Economic data document the dramatic transformation of Canadian and United States employment structures away from agriculture and into manufacturing and services during the twentieth century. By the 1950s in Canada and in the 1960s in the United States, the transform active sector, composed of manufacturing, mining and construction industries, peaked at about one-half of the total employment (Boy Mulvihill and Myles, 1991; Myles, Picot and Wannell, 1993; Singe mann, 1978). Thus the expression "the service economy" refers to the fact that employment in service industries is now the predominant form of employment in North American economies.

During the 1950s and 1960s the shift of employment to services was largely concentrated in business (producer services), in government employment (public administration) and in social services such education and health. (For a more complete description of service industries, see Singlemann, 1978; Boyd, Mulvihill and Myles, 1991. Employment in these service sectors in fact provided a large number of good jobs. More recently, however, the changing industrial structure of employment has involved two developments that create concern (Myles, Picot and Wannell, 1993). First, there has been an absolute, opposed to a relative, decline, in employment in manufacturing

⁴During the second half of the twentieth century, the proportion of jobs in manufacturing declined as a result of very substantial increases in employment in the service industries. However, because the manufacturing sector continued to grow, although at a lower rate than service industries, total numbers of those employed in manufacturing continued to increase. This changed by

Second, although growth has continued in all service industries, substantial growth has occurred in retail services and consumer services (which includes personal service, accommodation and eating, and entertainment), while social services and public administration are generally characterized by many "good jobs," retail and consumer services are widely characterized by a large number of low-wage and low-skill jobs. Thus, the shift of employment within the service industries toward more jobs in consumer and retail services implies altered, and diminished, working conditions and wages (Boyd, 1991a; Myles and Fawcett, 1990; Myles, Picot, and Wannell, 1993).

In popular usage, the term "economic restructuring" refers to deindustrialization (*i.e.*, the actual loss of jobs in manufacturing) and to the expansion of low-skill, low-wage service jobs. However, the term also includes a third component of change: notably, restructuring of employment *within* industries. In their most recent research on the disappearing middle in wage distributions, Myles, Picot and Wannell (1993) observe that Canadian and American studies alike show that job losses and gains are caused primarily by the restructuring of employment within industries, a point missed by the emphasis on the interindustrial shift of employment. Further, they argue that it is this interfirm restructuring within industries (*i.e.*, intra-industry change) rather than interindustry shifts in employment, that has produced a more polarized distribution of earnings.

Underlying the earnings redistribution is a fundamental restructuring of the labor process. This restructuring includes deskilling, routinization of certain tasks and automation of others; the growth of nonunion work as well as part-time work, subcontracting, and informal work; and in the increasing use of groups divided by gender, race and nativity as sources of cheap labor and as mechanisms of labor control. These forms of restructuring of the labor process have been extensively discussed with reference to the use of female migrant labor in North America (Fernández Kelly, 1989; Fernández Kelly and Garcia, 1985, 1988; Gannage, 1986; Sassen, 1988, 1991; Tienda, Jensen and Bach, 1984).

As these analysts note, not all firms have used off-shore labor to lower their wage bill. In some cases, the nature of the activity defies moving

production outside North America. Accommodation, entertainment, retail, hospital and cleaning services must all be provided by local workers (*see* Sassen, 1991). In other cases, notably the electronics and garment industries, some firms have moved to sites outside North America. However, others have sought new mechanisms for lessening the price of domestic labor, including expanded use of subcontracting, informal work, and homework, often involving female immigrant workers.

Migrant labor offers a ready supply of workers for these "reworked" jobs. Indeed, immigration is an important source of labor for 1) low-wage service jobs, including those consumed by a growing professional information-service class; 2) for the downgraded manufacturing sector; and 3) for the immigrant community (Sassen, 1988: 22). The demand for labor, particularly in low-wage services and manufacturing, explains why the potential supply of migrant labor, stimulated by the deployment of capital investment from developed nations to less-developed regions, becomes linked to migration flows from the latter to the former (Sassen, 1989: 825).

However, race and gender also factor into the use of migrant labor in North American economies. Students of the labor process have long noted that racial and gender divisions are used to divide workers and diffuse worker resistance. In addition, a burgeoning body of research on women points to the use of patriarchal ideology as a mechanism of control on the shop floor and to the influence of sexual stereotypes that depict women as a docile, cheap and easily disposable labor supply. The combination causes immigrant women, particularly those who are from less developed nations and/or who are women of color, to be viewed as an appropriate source of labor for low-wage, low-skill jobs and for work arrangements that because of informalization or subcontracting are marginalizing (*see* Gannage, 1986; Hossfeld, 1990). While these are "demand side" arguments, reasons also exist why these women meet such stereotypical imagery and hiring criteria: the recent entry of many immigrant women who may not have language fluency for other jobs or who face difficulty in having educational credentials recognized; the demands of their domestic roles; the dependent status assigned to many in the administrative process of legally immigrating (Boyd, 1986); and the possibility (particularly in the United States) of their undocumented (*i.e.*, illegal) status.

1980s. In Canada, the jobs lost during the recession of 1981-1982 in manufacturing did not return to their 1981 levels until 1989, and then fell below that 1981 level in the recession of 1990-1991 (Myles, Picot and Wannell, 1993).

FEMALE MIGRANT LABOR IN NORTH AMERICA

Not all immigrants are destined to fill the low-skill, low-wage jobs that accompany North American economic restructuring. Indeed, professional and high-skilled migrants are part of recent flows to North America. However, past and current studies provide considerable evidence that immigrants, and foreign-born women in particular, are disproportionately found in manufacturing, particularly clothing and electronics, and in the lower skill and lower wage consumer segment of the service industries. In an analysis of changes between 1970 and 1980 in the United States, Tienda, Jensen and Bach (1984) found that although the service sector employed the majority of both foreign-born and U.S.-born women, immigrant women were more likely to be employed in personal services, whereas U.S.-born women were more likely to be found in social services (education and health industries). For each decade, a higher percentage of foreign-born women are employed in the transformative sector (manufacturing and construction) than are U.S.-born women. The authors attribute this concentration to the heavy reliance on immigrant women in textile industries and in the fast growing and high-technology electronics industry. In her study of employment in California's Silicon Valley firms, Hossfeld (1990) notes as well the extensive reliance on immigrant women as a labor supply. Fernández Kelly and Garcia (1988, 1990) also describe the extensive employment of female immigrant workers in the garment and electronics industries.

In Canada, analyses of census data between 1971 and 1986 show that foreign-born women are overrepresented in professional, product fabricating and service occupations (Basavarajappa and Verma, 1990; Boyd, 1975, 1986). Foreign-born women of color or those who are from areas other than the United States or Europe are more likely to be employed in the manufacturing and service occupations (Boyd, 1992b). Female immigrants are also disproportionately employed in clothing manufacturing industries (Gannage, 1986; Johnson and Johnson, 1982; Seward, 1990).

Tables 2, 3, and 4 highlight the selective labor market location of female migrants in Canada and the United States. These data are taken from the microdata files for the United States 1980 Census of Population and for the 1986 Canadian Census of Population. As such they are limited in detail, particularly in the Canadian case, where industry

data are grouped into sixteen major categories (for the United States, detailed industry codes are provided). Further, the data refer to work actually reported by census respondents. Thus, if workers have reason to avoid either being enumerated (*e.g.*, undocumented workers) or reporting employment (*e.g.*, where payment is not formally recorded), the census will not capture the full range of economic activity. For this reason, activities that are central components to the economic restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s, such as homework or work in the unregulated economy, will be minimized in such data.⁵

Despite these limitations of census data, clear conclusions exist regarding the employment patterns of immigrant women, and they are remarkably similar for both Canada and the United States. First, women more than men have found employment in the service economy (*see also*, Boyd, Mulvihill and Myles, 1991; Tienda, Jensen and Bach, 1984). Second, despite the majority of employment in service industries, nearly 25 percent of foreign-born women in Canada (1986) and nearly 30 percent of foreign-born women in the United States (1980) are employed in the goods sector, represented by primary, manufacturing, and construction industries. Third, this representation in the goods sector is associated with the higher percentages of foreign-born women employed in manufacturing occupations. Thirteen percent of foreign-born women in Canada are in machining and production occupations, compared to 5 percent of Canadian-born women. Fourth, within the service sector, foreign-born women are as likely as, or even more likely than, foreign-born men to be employed in service occupations or in personal services industries (Table 2).

However, these findings vary by place of residence, area of birth and period of immigration (Tables 3 and 4). Foreign-born women in Canada are most likely to be employed in manufacturing (machining and fabrication) occupations and in the goods sector under three conditions: 1) residence in Montreal or Toronto, which are important sites of manufacturing in Canada; 2) birthplace other than the United States

⁵The data available to me also constrains the analysis. The 1986 Public Use Sample Tape (PUMS) of individuals contains information on approximately 1 in 50 Canadian-born and foreign-born, for a sample of approximately 800,000. However, for the United States, a number of different data sets are produced, including the three Public Use Microfiles (PUMS) A, B, and C. The latter three represent 1 in 100 samples, representing a potential population size of 260 million. Given the resulting challenges to computer memory, most researchers work with a subset of this potentially enormous sample. In U.S. data made available to me through another project, I was able to obtain PUMS data only on the foreign born.

TABLE 2

OCCUPATIONAL AND SECTORAL LOCATION BY NATIVITY AND SEX FOR EXPERIENCED LABOR FORCE:

	CANADA, 1986; UNITED STATES, 1980			
	Canada, 1986		United States, 1980	
	Females	Males	Females	Male
Numbers, PUST/PUMS-C	97,975	21,667	122,381	27,539
	Canada Born	Foreign Born	Canada Born	Foreign Born
Occupations, percent	100	100	100	100
Service	17	18	10	12
Machining, Production	5	13	17	22
All Others	78	69	73	66
Sectors, percent	100	100	100	100
Goods	15	24	39	41
Services	85	76	61	59
Service Sectors, percent ^a	100	100	100	100
Nonmarket	37	34	27	24
Distribution, Producer	23	25	40	38
Personal Service	11	12	7	12
Other Services ^b	10	12	8	9
Retail	18	17	19	17

Sources: Statistics Canada, 1986 Census of Population Public Use Sample Tape (PUST). U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) C.

^aNumbers may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

^bAs indicated in text, detailed industry codes exist for United States data making it possible to allocate all industries. Canadian data are in the form of a 166-category distribution for industry, in which one category is "other services." Industries in this category cannot be reassigned to other categories.

or Europe; and 3) recent immigration (Table 3). In the United States, the percentages of foreign-born women who are employed as operatives or in fabrication occupations or in the goods sector are high in urban areas of Los Angeles, Miami and New York – areas that Sassen (1991) depicts as major global cities. Percentages are also highest for persons born in the Southern Hemisphere countries (including Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America) as well as for women who immigrated during the decade prior to the 1980 census (Table 4). In both countries, the percentages of women who are employed in service occupations or in personal service sectors is highest for recent arrivals or for persons not born in North America or Europe.

TABLE 3

OCCUPATIONAL AND SECTORAL LOCATION OF FEMALE FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION^a AGE 15–64, BY AREA OF RESIDENCE, AREA OF BIRTH, AND PERIOD OF IMMIGRATION: CANADA, 1986

Immigration	Major Cities of Residence				Area of Birth ^b		Period of Immigration					
	Total	Montreal	Toronto	Vancouver	Other CMA	Other Area	USA Europe	Other	Before 1970	1971–1975	1976–1980	1981–1986
Number, PUST	16,560	1,581	5,619	1,875	3,707	3,778	10,814	5,609	9,900	3,063	2,038	1,559
Percent, Row	100	10	34	11	22	23	66	34	60	19	12	9
Occupation	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Service	18	13	14	22	23	20	17	18	16	17	22	24
Machining, fabrication	13	26	15	7	11	8	12	16	11	14	16	19
All other	69	61	71	71	66	72	71	66	73	70	62	57
Sectors	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Goods	24	34	27	14	19	21	23	25	22	23	26	31
Services	76	66	73	86	81	79	77	75	78	77	74	69
Service Sectors	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Nonmarket	34	34	28	31	38	41	34	34	37	32	29	25
Distribution, producer	25	27	34	26	20	15	25	26	25	27	24	22
Personal service	12	9	9	13	13	14	10	13	10	11	17	17
Other service	12	13	11	14	12	11	12	12	10	12	14	19
Retail	17	16	18	16	17	19	19	15	18	18	16	16

Source: Statistics Canada, 1986 Census of Population, Public Use Sample Tape (PUST).

^aExperienced labor force.

^bExcludes residual group in Atlantic Provinces.

TABLE 4

OCCUPATIONAL AND SECTORAL LOCATION OF FEMALE FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION^a AGE 16-64, BY AREA OF RESIDENCE, AREA OF BIRTH, AND PERIOD OF IMMIGRATION: UNITED STATES, 1980

	Major Cities of Residence					Area of Birth ^b			Period of Immigration			
	Total	Los Angeles	Miami	New York	Other Urban	Other	Canada Europe	Southern Hemisphere	Other	Before 1970	1970-1974	1975-1980
Number, PUMS	35,621	4,657	1,472	7,422	9,398	12,788	13,215	12,952	9,570	19,185	5,986	6,395
Percent, Row	100	13	4	21	21	26	36	37	27	61	19	20
Occupation	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Service	20	19	14	18	23	20	18	22	19	19	21	23
Operations, fabrication	17	22	20	23	15	14	14	24	14	15	22	21
Other	63	59	66	59	62	66	68	54	67	66	57	56
Sectors	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Goods	29	36	30	33	28	25	25	37	24	26	35	33
Services	73	64	70	67	72	75	75	63	76	74	65	67
Service Sectors	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Nonmarket	38	31	28	39	40	38	35	37	41	32	36	35
Distribution, producer	26	30	35	32	19	27	27	27	24	27	26	25
Consumer	11	16	12	11	11	11	9	16	9	10	13	16
Retail	25	23	25	19	30	24	28	20	26	25	25	24

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population, Public Use Microdata (PUMS)C, 1 percent sample.

^aWorked in either 1979 or 1980.^bExcludes persons born in Puerto Rico and United States and/or for whom data on year of immigration are not collected.

In sum, the aggregate figures provided by national censuses confirm that newly arrived immigrants and those from either Latin America (for the United States) or from areas other than Europe and the United States (for Canada), are employed in the goods sector, in manufacturing types of occupations and in personal service activities more frequently than "old-timers." While these census data cannot provide the type of information available from case studies of the labor process and of the deliberate reliance on certain types of labor, they are consistent with arguments that minorities, represented by women, immigrants and racial groups (and their combination) are sources of labor for the less desirable jobs accompanying the restructuring of North American economies (Fernández Kelly and Garcia, 1988).

SEWING, SERVING, AND CIRCUITRY

Although foreign-born women are employed in consumer service industries and in manufacturing generally, they are highly concentrated in specific industries. They are employed disproportionately in textile and clothing industries, in electronics manufacturing, and in personal services. In Canada, for example, unpublished tabulations show that 18 percent of the 1986 female experienced labor force is foreign-born. However, in the industries of primary textiles, textile products and clothing manufacturing, foreign-born women represent 21, 37, and 49 percent of the female population. In electrical and electronic products, accommodation and food, and in personal and other services, foreign-born women make up 30, 18, and 21 percent of the female workforce.

These industries represent low-skill/low-pay service sector jobs in consumer services and jobs in old manufacturing industries vulnerable to restructuring as a result of offshore production. Yet, they employ at least one in five – and often more – of the foreign-born female labor force in Canada and in the United States.⁶ Further, in both countries the trend for women who are recent arrivals to be employed in these particular industries is enhanced if they are born in areas other than North America or Europe. In Canada, close to half (45 percent) of employed women born outside North America and Europe who immi-

⁶For 1986 Canadian data on the select industries for females in the experienced labor force by area of birth and period of immigration, see Seward and Tremblay, 1989: Tables 12.3, 13.3. U.S. data are calculated from tabulations from U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980 Census of Population Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) C, 1 percent sample.

grated between 1981 and 1986 are employed in these industries, with 13.2 percent, or one in eight, employed in clothing manufacturing. Many of these women were born in Asia, particularly Southeast Asia (see Seward, 1990). Similarly in the United States, over one-third of the female labor force born in Latin and South American countries and arriving between 1970 and 1980 were employed in corresponding industries with 11.6 percent, or one in nine, employed in the garment industry or apparel products (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980: PUMS C).

As a result of the trends discussed above, women born in areas other than the United States or Europe tend to be overrepresented in the workforce of these industries. For example, 35 percent of all foreign-born women in Canada in 1986 were born in areas other than the United States or Europe. Yet these women represent 41 percent of foreign-born women in textile producing firms, 47 percent of those in clothing manufacturing, and 40 percent of those in electrical and electronic productions and in accommodation and food services.⁷ In the United States, although women born in Southern Hemisphere countries constitute 36 percent of the foreign-born female work force, they are 51 percent of the female foreign-born workers in the apparel products industry, 39 percent in the electrical machining equipment industries and 44 percent in the accommodation and food services. Women born in other areas, notably Asia, form the backbone of female labor in the electronic and computing industry in the United States. Representing slightly over one-fourth (27 percent) of the entire foreign-born work force, these women make up 47 percent of female foreign-born women employed in electronic and computing industries and 51 percent of foreign-born women employed in entertainment and recreation services.⁸

FREE TRADE, HIGH TECH, AND CONTROLLED BORDERS: A WAY OUT, OR MORE OF THE SAME?

Will restructuring of North American economies alter the disproportionate concentration of foreign-born women in select manufacturing industries and in personal/consumer services? How will NAFTA and other trade treaties in the Americas affect this concentration and the immigration related to it?

⁷ Calculated from Seward, 1990; see also Cohen, 1987.

⁸ Data based on analysis of the U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980, Census of Population, PUMS C

One might note the uncertainty of predictions in times of crisis. Optimistic and pessimistic scenarios for the future both assume substantial economic change, but they differ on the direction. An optimistic version would argue that new jobs will be created in the "good job" sectors of the North American economies. This could include an increase in manufacturing, although what kinds of jobs will be created remains unclear (see Thurow, 1990). In Canada, one popular assessor recently targeted service industries specializing in engineering, architecture, consulting, research, and computing services as industries best prepared for the new economy to come (Beck, 1992). Among those industries recently at the top of the growth potential list in the United States are those specializing in data base systems, biotechnologies, jet propulsion, magnetic storage information, pollution reduction and computer-based technologies (Thurow, 1992). Such growth in information-related and high technology industries could potentially draw upon an invigorated, larger pool of high-skill immigrant labor.⁹ Whether it can redeploy labor from other industries remains another question, one highly relevant to discussions of female immigrants.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the numbers employed in primary textiles, textile products and clothing industries declined 24, 16 and 12.5 percent respectively in Canada. Comparable declines in employment in textile mill products and in apparel manufacturing industries were 11 percent and 12 percent respectively in the United States.¹⁰ Furthermore, if NAFTA-related trade negotiations are any indications, the "winners," in Canada at least, will be those apparel industries that rely extensively on computer-assisted manufacturing and design (CAM and CAD). In the negotiations with Canada, for example, the United States tried to disqualify clothing imports from Canada made from cloth produced overseas. This attempt was neither idiosyncratic nor capricious, but rather reflected a history of protectionist activity.¹¹ From the Canadian perspective, manufacturers of

⁹ In making assessments of growth in selected service industries, a distinction should be made between the growth in the GNP and growth in jobs. Some high-technology services may increase the GNP but have less impact on job creation.

¹⁰ For this data, see Statistics Canada (1991: Table 1) and U.S. Department of Commerce (1992: 9-1, 33-1).

¹¹ In 1984 the U.S. Customs Service, at the behest of the domestic textile industry, announced a restrictive rule of origin for apparel, decreeing that the nation of origin would depend not on where the fabric was finally sewn or assembled, but on the nation of origin of both the fabric and

men's wool suits, and in particular the Peerless Company in Montreal, were considered the potentially big losers. The export of men's suits to the United States had increased by more than 500 percent, rising from 50,000 suits in 1986 to 380,000 in 1991 and represented a value of \$50 million and a 6 percent share of the U.S. men's suit market. However, most of the cloth was imported from Britain, Italy, Japan and South Korea, thus threatening the export capacity of manufacturers like Peerless, which accounted for 80 percent of suits exported. An agreement to increase the allowable export quota resolved this debate over men's suits. While the agreement was applauded in media reports as a success story for Canada, the fact that Peerless is highly automated went relatively unnoticed. The company relies on an array of computer-assisted cutting, sewing, and gluing machines.¹²

For both pessimists and protagonists of NAFTA (see M. Cohen, 1987), the projection of future employment in garment manufacturing is one of continued decline. One possible response is increased reliance on piecework in the home, where wages for the final product are less than on the factory floor (see Johnson and Johnson, 1982). However, another is an actual decline in employment opportunities, both formal and informal. This latter possibility raises a two-part question – where do terminated employees find new employment, and where do new entrants to the labor market, previously destined for such industries, find work?

In addressing the question of redeployment, it is important to note the characteristics of foreign-born women in the textile and clothing industries of North America. Many of these workers have low levels of education and lack fluency in the host country's language(s).¹³ There- of the sewing. In NAFTA negotiations over the summer of 1992, representatives from the United States built on this precedent to introduce a highly protectionist rule of origin for apparel. It required not only that clothing be sewn in North America from fabric made in North America but that the yarn the fabric was made from be also from North America – i.e., a triple rule of origin. Given the dominance of the United States textile industry, and the anticipated inability of the Canadian textile industry to compete effectively with U.S. textile manufacturers, the intent of this "yarn forward" stipulation was viewed by commentators as an attempt to oblige Mexican and Canadian apparel makers to buy yarn and fabrics from American textile mills before being allowed to sell clothing to U.S. consumers (*Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 1 August 1992: B1).

¹²Peerless is thus an example of the third component of economic restructuring discussed earlier in this paper, in which employment is reconfigured within industries.

¹³Analysis of the 1980 PUM data (Sample C) indicates that in the United States, 21.2% of women employed in apparel production do not speak English at home and say they speak English poorly or not at all. As might be expected from Table 4, most of these are women born in Southern

fore, their ability to find alternative sources of employment is dependent on opportunities for literacy and language training and/or job skill training (Boyd, 1991b; Seward, 1990). Compared to the United States, Canada is more proactive in language training, although the federal program, administered through Employment and Immigration and revised in June 1992, does not cover everyone and risks ignoring long-term resident migrants. In both countries, settlement services are aimed more at refugees than at other migrants. From a labor supply perspective, it would appear that massive state intervention is required to alter the future employment patterns of migrants with limited education and language skills. Yet, as liberal welfare states, neither Canada nor the United States is likely to make massive infusions. Both countries place considerable emphasis on user-pay principles and on the role of the unfettered market as mechanisms of change (Boyd, 1992a).

Pessimists also question whether changes in immigration policies will greatly diminish the numbers or origin and economic composition of immigrants to North America in general, and female migrants in particular. Although both Canada and the United States have developed mechanisms to enhance high-skill flows, two factors raise questions about their overall impact. First, in both countries, legislation permits immigration of family members unregulated by economic criteria. As observed earlier, family members can be a source of less-skilled labor, particularly when gender stratification in countries of origin ensures differences between men and women in education and employment experiences. Second, as noted in a recent conference on labor flows (Connell, 1992), where labor demand exists, attempts to restrict the immigration of the less skilled merely results in clandestine labor migration, a fact already familiar to United States analysts.

It may be argued that the immigration of less skilled female workers will continue due to the paradox created by principles of immigration legislation and the objectives of economic competitiveness in a global

Hemisphere countries. In Canada, 17% of the 1986 female population in the clothing industry cannot speak either English or French well enough to carry on a conversation. The percentage of those not able to speak English and/or French is very high (41%) for women employed in the clothing industry who were born in Asian regions other than southern Asia and Southeast Asia (i.e., China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and West Asian countries, including the Middle East) and at 16%, 18%, and 9% for women employed in the clothing industry who were born in southern Europe, Southeast Asia and Central and South America who work in the clothing industry (Seward, 1990: Table 9).

economy. Immigration policy assumes the capacity of nations to control their borders, and it includes implicit assumptions about the causes of migration flows. In her analysis of U.S. immigration policy, Sassen (1989) argues that policy makers invoke a push-pull model of forces in which immigration arises because of unfavorable conditions in the origin country, unrelated to economic needs or to larger international economic conditions. Yet, principles of economic competitiveness underlie firm investment decisions to engage in offshore production and/or to restructure domestic production, and they are the basis of international trade agreements. Models of immigration that recognize an interconnected global economy view immigration to North America as stimulated, facilitated, and sustained by economic investment decisions. Mechanisms of entry are highly variable depending on the administrative procedures (e.g., refugee claimants or undocumented immigrants versus other types of migrants), but ultimately the flows are determined not by principles of border control but by the existence of economic and political linkages. These linkages ensure that countries such as Canada and the United States will continue to receive sizable numbers of migrants, many of whom are women.

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