

Global Labour Markets: Care Work and ‘Chains of Caring’

Jane Mears
University of Western Sydney
j.mears@uws.edu.au

Abstract

What is the impact of global markets and the mobility of capital, trade and labour on care workers? Many care workers worldwide are migrant women. They care for children and older people, in child-care centres and residential care, family day-care and home care-services for older people. There is a chain of care stretching from the less developed nations to the industrialised countries. As a number of writers have pointed out, many migrant care workers have left their own care responsibilities in the hands of other women in their countries of origin. Hochschild describes a ‘care drain’ from poor to wealthy countries. What are the implications for Australia, particularly in regard to social inclusion? The community services industry is one of the fastest growing sectors of the labour market (Meagher, 2003). Many of the workers in this industry are migrant workers. The ‘chain of care’ is a lived reality for migrant women in Australia, who have left their own families to care for children and old people here. At the very least, “we need to value care as our most precious resource, and to notice where it comes from and ends up. For these days, the personal is global” (Hochschild, 2003).

Introduction

At present I am conducting a research project, in partnership with the Benevolent Society of NSW, focussing on paid care workers. While conducting this research, I have been doing some background reading, specifically on the work others have done on paid domestic work and paid care work (Anderson, 2000; Daly, 2001; Hochschild, 2003). It became obvious from this work that paid care work is an area which is being increasingly influenced by, and caught up in, global politics and trends. Consequently, we need to understand and analyse what is happening. How do global politics and trends affect the lives and work of care workers in Australia? In this paper, I argue that an understanding of the global situation can offer another ‘lens’ to assist us in understanding what is happening in Australia. Doing a review of this nature also enables us to analyse the ways in which state institutions can intervene and lead to different outcomes and consequences. I have taken Ulrich Beck’s advice that “no self respecting sociologist can afford not to take the global context into account.”

The ‘care gap’

In this paper, I focus on the increasing demand for care workers worldwide, particularly in wealthy countries, and how this demand is being met in a number of countries, and what is happening in Australia. As Hochschild (2003) has argued, “[w]e need to value care as our most precious resource, and to notice where it comes from and ends up. For these days, the personal is global” (p. 197). The demographic and social trends taking place in Australia that effect paid care workers, and the ‘caring enterprise’ in general, are global trends. I am particularly interested in aged care, and so have been focusing on changes affecting this sector. These changes have been well documented and researched, and include the ageing of populations, the movement of women into paid work, and the increasing migration and movement of people worldwide.

One of the consequences of these demographic changes is an increasing demand for care, which has been accompanied by a decreasing supply of carers. In relation to this, Walker (cited in Anderson, 2000) argues that older people in Europe are facing a care gap.

A relatively small proportion of older people are receiving regular help with personal care and household tasks... a smaller number than those suffering some form of incapacity, an indicator of the need for care... This finding pointed to a consequent care gap.

He goes on to say that this

raises a dilemma for policy makers, since declining birth rates combined with the rise in labour force participation of women and higher incidence of divorce has led to a reduced potential outsource of care for older people in poor health. A new system of long term care is urgently required in many countries of the Union, since the predominant form of care based largely upon filial obligation, may soon be impractical. (p. 110)

Walker’s conclusion has obvious resonance here in Australia; we are also experiencing a care gap.

The globalisation of migration

As the gap between the globe’s rich and poor grows wider, the globe itself becomes more integrated. Castles (2000) writes graphically of the ‘globalisation of migration’, and that for men and women alike migration has become a private solution to a public problem. Individuals are migrating from poor to rich countries to improve their opportunities of labour market participation, and to be paid decent wages for the work they do.

In recent times there have been major changes, globally, in the gender ‘mix’ of immigrants, with women playing an increasing role in all regions and all types of migration.

In the past most labour migrations and many refugee movements were male dominated and women were often dealt with under the category of family reunion. Since the 1960s, women have played a major role in labour migration. Today women workers form the majority in movements as diverse as those of Cape Verdians to Italy, Filipinos to the Middle East and Thais to Japan. Employing immigrant servants... allows women in richer

economies to take up new employment opportunities... Today a growing care industry has stepped into the traditional wife's role, creating a very real demand for migrant women. (Hochschild, 2003, p. 188)

Chains of caring and the care drain

In many rich countries importing labour from poor countries is filling this 'care gap'. There is a clear tendency for migrants to be used to fill the role of carer in a number of rich countries. These migrants work caring for children and older people, in childcare centres and nursing homes, as live-in nannies and in family day-care for children, and as live-in carers and home-care services for older people.

As described above, many of those filling these jobs are migrant women and, as a number of writers have argued (Daly, 2001; Hochschild, 2003), there is a chain of care stretching from less developed nations to industrialised countries. This chain of care works as follows:

Many of those working as care workers in the West have left their own care responsibilities, particularly the care of their own children and ageing parents, in the hands of other women in their countries of origin. Young women from different parts of the world are drawn into a chain of care relationships. Some move from isolated villages to a distant city to care for strangers, some go abroad to care for middle class households, yet others go to labour in institutions providing care for the frail and elderly. In the Philippines, for example, care work is the country's prime export. This raises political, legal and social concerns. In all cases, those providing care have to struggle with potential oppression and exploitation that is uncomfortable to contemplate. (Daly, 2001, p. 5)

Arlie Russell Hochschild writes poignantly of this phenomenon. She peppers her work with case studies, and provides names and histories for the people she is writing about. These are real people, real lives, living in difficult times and dealing with complex problems. They are forced into making difficult decisions in order to survive. We are not able to distance ourselves from these personal accounts of people's lives and are invited to exercise our compassion, as she paints moving pictures of the dilemmas faced. She continually challenges us to make the link between personal problems and social implications, and constantly forces us to utilise our sociological imaginations.

The following is an example of how she describes one of the 'chains of caring'. This story focuses on one of the women she writes about, Rowena, from the Philippines. Her story is similar to many others. Rowena is employed as a nanny in Washington D.C. and looks after two children for her employers. As a nanny in the US, she gets paid the equivalent to the income a small town doctor would get in the Philippines. She has a partly completed engineering degree. She was a single parent in the Philippines and went abroad to work, joining the growing ranks of Third World women leaving their homes and children. Like many others, she could not find a job with a wage that would enable her to survive at home.

She left her own two children, Clinton and Priscilla, at home, in the care of her mother. They live in a four-room house, with her parents and twelve other family members, eight of them children. The children's grandmother, 'Mama', works as a teacher, from seven am to nine pm. Rowena has hired Anna, who comes at eight am to clean the house and help care for the children.

Anna, meanwhile, leaves her own children in the care of her eighty-year old mother-in-law. Of the \$750 Rowena earns each month, \$400 goes home to support her children and \$50 goes to Anna, who shares this money with her mother-in-law and children. At the time of the interview, Rowena had not seen her own children for five years. Hochschild goes on to observe that Rowena's life, and the many other case studies she has collected,

[r]eflect an important and growing global trend, the importation of care and love from poor countries to rich ones... Women who would normally care for the young, the old and the sick in their own countries, move to care for the young, the old and the sick in rich countries... It's a care drain. (Hochschild, 2003, pp. 186-187)

The notion of extracting resources from the Third World is hardly new. It harks back to imperialism in its most literal form: the nineteenth century extraction of gold, ivory and rubber from the Third World. That openly male centred imperialism, which persists today, is paralleled by a quieter imperialism in which women are far more central. Today, as love and care become the new gold, the female part of the story has grown in prominence... coercion operates differently... Women choose to migrate for domestic work. But they choose because economic pressures all but coerce them to. That yawning gap between rich and poor countries is itself a form of coercion, pushing third World women to seek work in the First for lack of options closer to home. But given the prevailing free market ideology, migration is viewed as a personal choice. Its consequences are seen as personal problems. In this sense, migration creates not a white man's burden but, through a series of invisible links, a dark child's burden... (Hochschild, 2003, p. 194)

What is happening in Europe?

A similar story can be told in Europe. Clare Ungerson predicted in 1995 that,

the foundations are apparently being laid for the effective demand for unregulated caring labour. This will not only affect women, but also, particularly in the context of an EU wide international labour market and the great migrations of labour and refugees arising out of the break up of the old Communist regimes, 'outsiders' will inevitably be brought into this pool of unregularised workers. Hence there are issues of race and nationality embedded in these developments as well as gender. (Anderson, 2000, p. 111)

This was an accurate prediction of the future, as her more recent work illustrates. Ungerson's more recent work is a qualitative study that compares five European countries (Austria, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK). She outlines the different ways in which different types of care schemes impact on the labour market, and suggests that, from what we know to date, the schemes differ markedly in their labour market impact, depending on whether or not the scheme is regulated, and on geographic, social and economic contexts within which the scheme is implemented (Ungerson, 2003).

And, indeed, many of those employed as care workers are non-EU nationals. She found that Austria and Italy, surprisingly, emerge as very similar. In Milan there is clearly a culture of, as one respondent put it, “taking a foreigner to provide care.” Ungerson describes how

[i]nformal local networks were used in the recruitment of these workers: workers were passed from neighbour to neighbour, sister to sister, and some were found by the concierge of apartment blocks. They came from Peru, Sri Lanka, Equador, Roumania, the Philippines and Mauritius. (Ungerson, 2003, p. 386)

In Austria there were similarities with Italy, but also some crucial differences. First, the Viennese labour market for care was specifically orchestrated by agencies recruiting labour in the bordering countries of Hungary and Slovakia. Hence this was unlike the Milanese sample in two senses. First, it was not a global labour market from the South, but rather labour located across a local and permeable border, allowing for transition from one economy to another over temporary and brief periods. Second, the Austrian recruitment of foreign labour was specifically directed towards finding care workers for elderly care users. In Austria... a typical payment was between 281 and 300 pounds a fortnight. For this payment, workers from Hungary and Slovakia provided twenty-four hour care while they lived in the same accommodation as their elderly employer. At the end of ‘their’ fortnight, they returned home to their home country, while another worker, usually from the same country, replaced them for their fortnight ‘off’... Typically the care workers employed were women and were very young... (Ungerson, 2003, pp. 387-88).

A significant finding was that the care workers thus engaged were highly satisfied with their work. This form of employment constituted a means of working part-time and leading a transitional life between two economies and two homes, in a way that generated a reasonable income. Most of the employers of such labour were also apparently satisfied with the round-the-clock care they managed to find at relatively cheap rates. Most of these workers were actually being recruited and placed by a cross border agency which was specifically advertising for care workers in Austria in the Hungarian and Slovakian press. In Austria, where cash subsidies are paid to care users, it appears to be the case that the employment of undocumented foreign care workers has indeed been facilitated by the payment of these cash subsidies to care users, to such an extent that the labour market is becoming organised by intermediaries (Ungerson, 2003).

Ungerson concluded that the differences in outcome also owe much to the migration regimes of the nations studied, and the migration contexts of the particular locations in which the interviews took place. Similarly the presence of NGOs involved in the provision of care services and the entrepreneurial private care agencies, appears also to have had a major impact on the differential outcomes identified (Ungerson, 2003, p. 394). Her conclusion strongly suggests that, despite similar impulses underlying these policies, they have rather different outcomes in terms of their impact on the labour market for care work, and ultimately for the care relationship (Ungerson, 2003, p. 378).

Esping Andersen supports this conclusion. Unlike many theories of post-industrial society positing that technological change is causing cross-national convergence in employment and income structures, Esping Andersen emphasises the importance of institutional forces in reshaping our employment structure: the role of the welfare state, education and industrial relations systems. The way in which these functions have powerful repercussions on the

transformation of the family, and on the relationship between self-servicing consumption and paid employment, is of considerable importance (Meagher 2003, pp. 28-29).

Globalisation, immigration and the Australian labour market

So what is happening here in Australia? Recent changes in the immigration policy have been underpinned with the aim of changing the immigration 'mix' to skew our immigration in-take towards skilled migrants, who are readily employable. A report released in 2004 by Sue Richardson and Laurence Lester, *A Comparison of Australian and Canadian Immigration Policies and Labour Market Outcomes*, tells part of this story. They show that we are selecting our migrants very carefully. There is increased weight and emphasis being given to the selection of skilled and experienced migrants. Richardson's report concludes that

Australia is an exception to the generally pessimistic picture of recent trends in labour market success for new migrants... The principal finding of this report is that while there are a number of reasons for Australian migrants having superior labour market outcomes, on balance it is policies that influence migrant characteristics that are most important. (Richardson, 2004)

As part of this study, the authors conducted an evaluation of the complex systems by which Australia and Canada assess applications to migrate. They found that potential migrants to Australia must fulfil a far more demanding set of requirements than those intending to migrate to Canada. This is particularly so for skilled migrants. All else being equal, it then follows that migrants who fulfil more stringent requirements with regard to age, qualifications, past employment, or language ability are far more likely to be successful in gaining employment (Richardson, 2004, p. 2). Richardson describes the history of the changes to immigration policy that has brought us to this point.

During the latter half of the 1990s, growth in the proportion of those in the skilled stream (that is, Independent, Business, Employer Nominated and Skilled-Australia linked categories) was considerable - reflecting changes in policy emphasis. In 1997 the replacement of the Concessional Family category with the new Skilled Australian Linked category resulted in skilled migration overtaking Family stream migration... In addition, the strengthening of the points test requirements relating to skills, age and English ability, from July 1999, makes clear the increased emphasis on skills adopted by the Australian government. (Richardson, 2004, p. 15)

And further, the impetus underlying this was that

[c]hanges were designed to reduce the welfare costs of the program and increase its economic focus, skilled immigration, and so improve labour market outcomes of more recent migrants... the migration program... more strongly favoured younger migrants, English language proficiency, post secondary educational qualifications, particular occupations or skills in high demand and work experience. In addition, migrants... were also generally denied access to most social welfare benefits for the first two years after

their arrival... As a result of these changes, the skill stream grew from 35 per cent in 1993-1995 to 50% in 1999-2000, while the family stream fell from 49 to 41%. This change in emphasis resulted in the proportion of skilled migrants increasing from 25 per cent in 1995-6 to 55 per cent in 2002-3. (Richardson, 2004, pp. 15-16)

This policy means we are selecting our migrants very carefully indeed.

An interesting outcome is that persons born overseas earn more on average than non-migrants... For instance in 2001, for the Australian workforce as a whole, employees born overseas had, on average, 12 per cent higher earnings than those born in Australia. For those workers born in the main English speaking countries the income margin over Australian born workers was 25 per cent... (Richardson, 2004, p. 31)

Richardson goes on to point out that of particular relevance is the growing global demand for skilled migrants. The phenomenon of falling fertility rates and aging populations, is not confined to Australia and Canada, and the number of countries attempting to solve this problem by seeking to attract young skilled migrants will continue to grow (Richardson, 2004, p. 40).

In summary, Australia specifically seeks out migrants who are well educated, can settle quickly and get work. 'We only want the best'. Richardson stated that this was a 'selfish' policy because it drew the most talented away from poorer countries, but was clearly in Australia's interest (Horin, 2004).

Graeme Hugo's (2004) report to the ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics), *Australia's Most Recent Immigrants*, tells the same story. He also illustrates the higher socio-economic profile of migrants by looking at levels of education, income and occupation. Migrants are four times as likely as Australian-born to have a bachelor's degree and, compared with earlier migrants, are far more likely to speak English, up from 33% to 39%, while those with poor English have dropped from 21% to 14%. Recent migrants are three times more likely to earn more than \$1,500 per week than are Australian-born workers.

Hugo has shown that, as well as being skewed towards the upper end of the occupational hierarchy, our migrant in-take is also skewed at the lower end of the skills spectrum. 12% of recent immigrants are labourers, compared with 8% of Australian workers. Hugo concludes that a "modern globalising economy does create high level, skilled jobs, but it also creates lower level service jobs and many of these jobs can't go off shore because of the nature of the work, you can't serve in a restaurant or care for elderly patients off shore." Furthermore,

Australia's immigration is increasingly hostage to globalisation. We are all demanding more of our migrants, we want them to be more mobile and we want them to live and work in places that need them.

We are active participants in the rush for the new gold.

The Chair of the National Nursing Taskforce, Belinda Moyes, says health services have been targeting foreign care workers, but expresses concerns in the profession about the qualifications of those coming in and, most importantly, the ethics of recruiting from countries which need to keep their trained workforce. The training of nurses is an industry in which, in the Philippines, the vast majority of trainees head overseas (Macken, 2004).

Since the 1980s women migrants have out-numbered men, but they come in at different ends of the immigration table. Men make up the majority of economic and skilled migrants, and women comprise the vast majority in the family categories (Macken, 2004).

Conclusion

International migration has continued to be one of the major sources of social change in Australia between 1996 and 2001 (ABS, 2004). And despite the fact that, on the surface, Australia may look very different from other countries, I have argued in this paper that we are not. Global migration trends have had, and will continue to have, a dramatic impact on the composition of our labour market.

Immigration policies impact on and affect the domestic labour market. The globalisation of migration is not an unstoppable, unalterable juggernaut. Government policy and the intervention of human agency and thoughtful policy can ensure a good outcome. We can learn from what has happened in other countries. We need to understand and recognise the implications and consequences of our immigration policies, for both the domestic and the global labour markets, and ensure that we do all we can to protect the rights of the workers we recruit, particularly those at the unskilled end of the labour market. And we should also keep in mind that

[d]omestic workers travel thousands of miles for their jobs. Capital and labour mobility define the new globalisation, demanding both national and global responses to social problems. As we face this emergent future, social justice will depend increasingly on our ability to imagine and implement global solutions. (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 238)

References

- ABS (2004) Australia's recent immigrants: where do they fit in? *Australian Bureau of Bureau of Statistics Media Release*.
- Anderson, B. (2000) *Doing the dirty work? The global politics of domestic labour*. London, Zed Books.
- Castles, S. (2000) *Ethnicity and globalisation: from migrant worker to transnational citizen*. London, Sage.
- Daly, M. (ed) (2001) *Care work: the quest for security*. Geneva, International Labour Organisation.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2003) *The commercialisation of intimate life: notes from home and work*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (2001) *Domestics: immigrant workers cleaning and working in the shadow of affluence*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Horin, A. (2004) Screening key to immigration success. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Sydney: 2.

Hugo, G. (2004) *Australia's most recent immigrants*. Canberra, ABS.

Macken, D. (2004) Australia's part in the global race for workers. *Financial Review*. Sydney.

Meagher, G. (2003) *Friend or flunky? Paid domestic workers in the new economy*. Sydney, UNSW Press.

Richardson, S. (2004) *A comparison of Australian and Canadian immigration policies and labour market outcomes: report to the Department of immigration and multicultural affairs*. Adelaide, Flinders University (the National Institute of Labour Studies).

Ungerson, C. (2003) Commodified care work in European labour markets. *European Societies*, 5 (4), 377-396.