# THEMATIC ARTICLES – NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES: MIGRANTS AND HOST SOCIETIES

## Asian Immigrants' Vision of an Alternative Society in Australia and Canada: Impossibly Utopian or Simply Social Justice?[1]

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**Abstract.** Both Australia and Canada have adopted extensive immigration policies as well as a policy of multiculturalism to maintain "harmony" between immigrants and the wider society. Currently, the majority of immigrants to Australia and Canada are from Asia. In fact, six of the ten top-ranking migrant-sending countries for Australia and Canada are located in Asia. Building on exploratory research undertaken in Australia and Canada, this paper finds that class predominates over race in the recruiting of immigrants in both Australia and Canada. However, Asian immigrants as well as advocacy groups including left, progressive, and social activists are challenging the neo-liberal agenda. These groups have a vision for creating an alternative society based on social justice.

**Keywords:** *Asian immigrants, multiculturalism, social justice, Australia, Canada*

**Introduction**

Australia and Canada are two major immigrant-receiving countries with goals of attracting workers with certain skills from the international labour market and meeting specific target numbers for these workers in any given year. In fact, both Australia and Canada actively seek to attract immigrants[3] with what one may identify as "population policies"[4]. Currently, the majority of immigrants in Australia and Canada are from Asia, and at least six of the ten top-ranking migrant-sending countries are located in Asia. Unlike the United States, the "skilled" category constitutes a major proportion of current immigrant population in Australia and Canada (Antecol, 2003). To maintain "harmony"[5] between immigrants and the wider society, both Australia and Canada have adopted a policy of multiculturalism.

In my exploration of the issues of immigration and multiculturalism in Australia and Canada, I use class as a central category of analysis because it interacts with other axes of power such as gender and race. I argue, in this paper, that under neo-liberal policies, class overshadows race and bypasses gender in the recruiting of immigrants in both Australia and Canada. Further, the restructuring of multiculturalism as part of neo-liberal strategies risks creating a monoculture and challenging the central aspect of the welfare state - - social justice.

**Key Questions and Framework**

This paper primarily addresses the following key questions: (i) To what extent is immigration a market-driven agenda that ignores the role of social

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[3] Generally, immigrants are legal permanent residents. In this paper, "immigrants/ citizens," whose country of origin is in Asia, and "migrants," who have the potential to get permanent residency, have been used synonymously. The term "immigrant" has been used to describe the Asian migrant population, who is visibly different in terms of skin colour, language, accent, dress, culture and so on

[4] In 1997, in rejecting the Jones report titled *Australia's Carrying Capacity: One Nation – Two Ecologies*, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Philip Ruddock, pointed out that given the projected fertility rate in Australia and its immigration policy, population growth would still decline over the next 30 to 50 years.

[5] During my research in Sydney, Australia, an Australian academic used this term and illustrated that the Australian government now focuses on harmony rather than on multiculturalism.

justice and the equity agenda in a number of areas such as basic entitlements, social rights, and so on? (ii) How is neo-liberal ideology couched as multiculturalism leading to a monoculture framework? (iii) What visions do Asian immigrants in Australia and Canada have of an alternative society?

Based on an exploratory research undertaken in Australia and Canada during the period of 2000-2005, this paper examines the skills-oriented recruitment strategy that focuses on Asian immigrants and the outcome of this market-driven force on these immigrants, especially female immigrants. After looking briefly at multiculturalism under neo-liberalism, the paper demonstrates the shifting discourse on such terms as "difference", "assimilation", "integration", "harmony", and "social justice" within the multicultural framework. In Australia, this shifting discourse is reflected by the revival of monoculture under the banner of "one nation", and in Canada, by the increasing withdrawal of financial support to multiculturalism. I use narrations of settlement workers and immigrant advocates[6] at the Migrant Resource Centres in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, as well as interviews with front-line immigrant activists in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, to shed light on Asian immigrants' experiences in two societies apparently committed to social justice.

My examination of immigration policies in Australia and Canada will be followed by an exploration of immigrants' entitlements and access to the labour market. Analysis will illustrate variations in multiculturalism over time and reveal the shifting of policies in both countries during economic recession and changes in the party in power. The results of these changes are reflected in the vulnerability of Asian immigrants, as illustrated by the narrations of settlement workers and front-line activists. In concluding, I will discuss Asian immigrants' vision for an alternate society and ask the question: Is their vision impossibly utopian or simply a case of social justice?

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[6] Interviews and interactions with the settlement workers convinced me that these workers are compassionate towards immigrants' issues and try to maintain a fine balance between their own government-funded jobs and their work as advocates for the immigrants. Indeed, one worker categorically pointed out that when people visit the Centre for food, settlement workers do not ask about status, i.e., whether they are visa workers, undocumented or refugees. In other words, the settlement workers do not deter anyone from getting food, a basic need for survival. Settlement workers' unequivocal commitment to social justice is astounding given their precarious job situation. However, they stated clearly that they provide services, i.e., referrals, etc., only to immigrants.

**Immigration Policies in Australia and Canada: Non-discriminatory and Market-driven**

### *Australia*

Until the end of the 1960s, Australia's immigration policies were overtly racist, deliberately promoting "White Australia" and not receptive to migrants from Asia, Africa and Latin America. The residency requirement for non-Europeans was five years as opposed to one year for Europeans. Further, under the guise of maintaining "social cohesiveness", a policy of assimilation was introduced for a small number of immigrants of colour (Castles et al., 1994). This assimilation policy failed for two reasons: (1) the labour market became segmented along gender, race and class lines, which restricted racialized immigrants in their upgrading of language and educational skills; (2) non-British citizens continued to be segregated in where they lived and in their social interactions. The White Australia policy ended when the Labour Party won in the 1972 election and in the mid-'70s, introduced several non-discriminatory immigration policies.[7] For example, the Australian Citizenship Act of 1948 was amended in 1973; as a result, all immigrants irrespective of nationality became eligible to apply for Australian citizenship. In addition to moral grounds and an international political climate where overt racism was becoming unacceptable[8], Australia's abolition of the racist policy was linked with two major international factors. First, the British government entered into the European Common Market and loosened its relationship to its former colonies in Asia. Second, to place Australia in the geopolitical world, Australia aspired to link its foreign and trade policies with those of Asian countries (Dutton, 2002:84-85). Consequently, in 1975, the Australian government passed the *Racial Discrimination Act* prohibiting discrimination based on colour, descent, race, and national or ethnic origin. This act shifted immigration policy from Eurocentric to non-discriminatory and allowed increased numbers of immigrants from Asia. For example, during the period from 1973 to 1999, out of 2.4 million immigrants, approximately 796,000 immigrants (about 33 percent) came from Asia (Dutton, 2002:88).

Under its non-discriminatory immigration policies Australia was gradually transformed from a monocultural society to one characterized by diverse countries

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[7] Both the Labour Party and its advocate for anti-racist policy worked tirelessly to eliminate discriminatory immigration policy based on race (Dutton, 2002).

[8] Dutton (2002) illustrated several moral grounds and described the international political climate of those times in a chapter entitled "The End of White Australia".

of origin. As the table below shows, from July 2001 to July 2002, New Zealand constituted 17.6 percent of settler arrivals by country of birth, while other countries ranged from the UK at 9.8 percent to Malaysia at 2.2 percent.

**Table 1. July 2001 to June 2002 settler arrivals, by country of birth**

| Country | Percentage |
|---|---|
| New Zealand | 17.6% |
| United Kingdom | 9.8% |
| China | 7.5% |
| South Africa | 6.4% |
| India | 5.7% |
| Indonesia | 4.7% |
| Philippines | 3.2% |
| Fed. Rep. Of Yugoslavia | 2.3% |
| Sri Lanka | 2.3% |
| Malaysia | 2.2% |

Source: Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2003

However, the table clearly shows that immigrants from Asia comprise a significant number -- about 26 percent. The increasing number of Asians has resulted in increasing debate among some Australian-born citizens about the "Asianization" of Australia. Dutton eloquently describes the debate as having two major points: first, to some this trend has disrupted social cohesion and facilitated ethnic or racial concentration in certain areas; second, non-discriminatory immigration policies and later on, multiculturalism, have "privileged" ethnic groups while diminishing Australian national identity (2002:89).

Based on overall labour market outcomes and under pressures from business groups, the Australian government has begun favouring skilled migration over family reunion migration (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2000). For example, in 1999, nearly 69 percent of immigrants belonged to the family stream and only 29 percent were in the skilled stream (Jupp, 2002:160). By 2000-2001, more than 50 percent of new migrants were selected from the skilled stream and 44 percent from the family stream (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2000). This pattern continued in 2001-2002, with 57 percent in the skilled stream and 41 percent in the

family stream – apparently contradicting the family values commitment of the Coalition government (Jupp, 2002:160). In 2001-2002, of all skilled migrants, 38 percent were from Asia[9]. The concept of "skill" is ambiguous and relies heavily on Immigration officers' interpretations[10], which mostly favour men. As Fincher states, "It is clear that males dominate migrant entry: 'active' immigrant entrants are more frequently men, not because men are more active but because of the administrative interpretation of activity as something which males best comply!" (1997:223). Despite their credentials, Asian migrants in Australia are sharply divided into two broad and distinct categories: (i) one group is highly educated and is concentrated in professional and white-collar jobs; (ii) the other group consists of labourers in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations (for details, Jayasuriya and Pookong, 1999; Jupp, 2002). The majority of Asian women immigrants are concentrated in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations, i.e., in low-paid, temporary jobs. One reason is that they generally enter as spouses and family members. Asian women, mostly migrating as spouses or family members, are at disadvantage for primarily two reasons: (i) Asian countries systematically and structurally discriminate against women, and this discrimination perpetuates women's secondary position in the labour market in the country of origin; (ii) most Asian men have more credentials than most Asian women – in other words, "skills" that command higher salaries and better working conditions.

With a Liberal government[11] in power in Australia, major cuts have been introduced along with a program of deregulation and privatization heralding the embracing of neo-liberal policies. For example, fees for English courses were drastically increased and many occupational English courses were discontinued. The waiting period for eligibility for social security benefits and entitlements was extended from six months, first introduced by the Keating government, to two years after the election of the Coalition in 1996 (Jupp, 2002)[12]. Jupp attributes this

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[9] Out of this 38 percent, 22 percent were from South-East Asia and 16 percent were from North-East Asian and Southern Asia (Australian Bureau of Statistics: www.abs.gov.au/usstats/abs@.nsf/ retrieved on December 13, 2004).
[10] The National Film Board of Canada's film titled *Who Gets In* (1989) illustrates poignantly how immigration officers' interpretations influence the decision-making process.
[11] The Liberal government in Australia leans towards conservative policies – comparable to Canada's Conservative party.
[12] A new immigrant is not entitled to seek unemployment benefits for the first two years and is barred from a number of basic entitlements. Interviewees identified this situation as "the two-year waiting period".

change to "American notions of 'cost-free immigration' and 'user pays'", ideas intended to recover full cost on some services (2002:152). Cost-free migration as well as the two-year waiting period for basic entitlements reinforces neo-liberal ideology, which perceives immigrants as responsible for their own settlement, training and employment. In the case of new immigrants and their settlements, the neo-liberal ideology of the Australian government is becoming similar to the system in the US. To reduce settlement costs, the government is providing immigration status to overseas students in Australia who already have Australian training, degree, language ability, and work experience. This procedure allows government to reduce its cost for overseas embassies and save its settlement services while receiving new immigrants' skills immediately as the economy desperately searches for skilled immigrants. The introduction of the point system in 1999 emphasizes skills and familiarity with the English language, and thus eliminates prospective unskilled migrants from Asia, especially women. Indeed, as Jupp points out: "A high proportion of recent refugees have been from the middle classes, many of them familiar with English" (2002:215). This applies also to current skilled immigrants from countries in Asia. In Australia, it is clear that under neo-liberal policies, class overshadows race and bypasses gender in the recruiting of immigrants.

### Canada

Canada carried out overtly discriminatory racist immigration policies until 1962, when the Immigration Act removed the racist content of the former immigration policy. In 1967, a "non-discriminatory" points system was introduced. Because of the new selection criteria, i.e., points system, significant changes have occurred in the composition of Canada's immigrants. From 1991-1996, the top five countries of origin of immigrants were the People's Republic of China, India, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, with more than one-third of all immigrants from these countries arriving annually (Boyd and Vickers, 2000). Census 2001 identified Canada as one of the most diverse nations in the world. Anderson (2003) describes this diversity as a "kaleidoscope" of cultures, languages, and nationalities reflecting more than 200 diverse ethnic groups – a mix second only to Australia's. As this table shows, currently the top seven out of ten migrant-sending countries are located in Asia.

**Table 2. Top Ten Source Countries for Immigrants (Principal Applicants and dependents): Year 2002**

| Country | Percentage | Rank |
|---|---|---|
| China | 14.51 | 1 |
| India | 12.58 | 2 |
| Pakistan | 6.18 | 3 |
| Philippines | 4.80 | 4 |
| Iran | 3.38 | 5 |
| Korea | 3.20 | 6 |
| Romania | 2.48 | 7 |
| United States | 2.31 | 8 |
| Sri Lanka | 2.17 | 9 |
| United Kingdom | 2.06 | 10 |

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada–Facts and Figures: Immigration Overview (2002:8)

Like Australia, Canada focuses on the skilled-stream category of immigrants, and thus 50 percent of skilled workers come from Asia and the Pacific (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002). In terms of gender breakdown, of all the skilled workers, 75 percent are males and 25 percent are females, a ratio clearly reflecting men's domination in the skilled stream (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002). Interestingly, skilled immigrants were the most likely to emigrate, especially immigrants with high-demand skills, such as IT workers, health care managers, and physicians. Dryburgh and Hamel have also found that economic migrants are most likely to emigrate (2004:16).

Recently, despite their language abilities and high qualifications, immigrants in Canada are less likely to be employed, and their situation has become increasingly precarious. Many are more likely to be employed in sectors with variable, short-term employment, like construction, industries, and manufacturing. Thus, it is not surprising that Canada's recent immigrants show a higher incidence of unemployment rates and poverty. For example, in 1996, immigrant men had a 13.6 percent unemployment rate compared with a 9.3 percent rate for Canadian-born men (Thompson, 2002). Immigrant women suffer the most. For example, in 2002, 8.6 percent of Canadian-born women were unemployed, while 20.2 percent of recent immigrant women were

unemployed (Thompson, 2002:10). In general, immigrants' incomes are lower than those of Canadian-born people. One could conclude that many immigrant groups live in poverty and their low incomes will accelerate class division within Canadian society. Picot has summarized the situation: "This deterioration in low-income rates over the past 20 years was not restricted to recent immigrants. It was observed among all immigrant groups, no matter how long they have resided in Canada, with the exception of immigrants living in Canada for more than 20 years" (2004:11).

According to Picot (2004), competition from domestic labourers, as well as hurdles faced in transferring education and job experience from countries of origin, may constitute two major factors contributing to higher unemployment rates among immigrants. Although the skill-stream category attracts more highly educated immigrants, lack of recognition for immigrants' credentials – education and job as well as training experience – keep many immigrants in a low-income category. Under neo-liberal policies, funding for language programs and vocational programs has been restructured and reduced continuously, resulting in the restricting of immigrants' access to services. So that immigrant settlement services are cost-free -- another neo-liberal strategy -- the federal government charges $975 dollars as a landing fee. As in Australia, then, immigrants bear the costs of their own settlement and services.

For example, in 2003, 54 percent of 221,352 new immigrants settled in Ontario, and the province received $800 per immigrant.[13] Transfer of payment per immigrant in Ontario, which receives more than 50 percent of Canada's new immigrants annually, indicates clearly that the federal government has adopted a market-driven, neo-liberal strategy. Moreover, the federal government does not transfer the full amount charged to immigrants to the province, keeping $195 per immigrant for federal immigration services. Overall, unemployment and underemployment due to lack of accreditation for education and training contribute to the de-skilling of immigrants in the long run and concentrate them in low-skilled, low-paid and part-time jobs.

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[13] Source: *The Windsor Star*, March 18, 2005. The title of the article is "Immigration: Ontario's Valid Argument." The report argues that Windsor's population has jumped by 16,970 to 208,405 from 1991 to 2001 and immigrants accounted for 63 percent.

**Multiculturalism in Australia and Canada**

To create tolerance for minorities, to appreciate racial diversities, and to foster sustainability among different cultural groups, Australia and Canada have adopted multiculturalism as a policy. Both countries have taken this step despite arguments for and against from an array of groups. Multicultural policy is intended to create an environment where minority groups, including immigrants, irrespective of their countries of origin, enjoy rights and are treated equally to those born in Canada.

In their book *Changing Multiculturalism* (1997), Kincheloe and Steinberg laid out five categories of multiculturalism: conservative (monoculturalism), liberal, pluralist, left-essentialist and critical. My following analysis of multiculturalism has been influenced by Kencheloe and Steinberg's framework of "critical multiculturalism," although the paper has used the common notion of multiculturalism that the governments in Australia and Canada use in discourse and power politics. Through the vantage point of critical theory that originated from the Frankfurt School of Social Research in Germany, critical multiculturalism focuses on power and domination within a national framework, which Kincheloe and Steinherg (1997) have articulated in their analytical framework.

*Australia*

According to Jayasuriya and Pookong, "The term 'multiculturalism' [in Australia] borrowed from Canada is a shorthand way of characterizing the doctrine of cultural pluralism that has evolved over the past two decades" (1999:20). The 1989 *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* argues: "Multicultural policies seek to eliminate discriminations. They aim to protect the rights of all members of society to enjoy their culture, language, and to practice their religion – within the institutional framework of Australian law, parliamentary democracy, and acceptable methods of conflict resolution" (Ruddock, 1997:6). In recognizing diversity, Australia's multicultural policies stress common bonds associated with democratic traditions.

Two views are noticed when one visits Australian multiculturalism: (i) multicultural policy is intelligible within a monocultural framework; (ii) multiculturalism has evolved in Australia in a controlled manner without gaining

public legitimacy (Jayasuriya and Pookong, 1999). In the advent of the New World Order and free trade agreements such as GATT, multiculturalism as an official strategy mobilizes, albeit manages, ethnic and racialized groups to pursue progress and development. In Australia, to achieve economic redirections and a liberal economy directed towards the Asian marketplace, multiculturalism has become a central strategy for the Keating government.

Pauline Hanson's (a member in the Parliament) advocacy of a one-nation party is a clear indication that the fears and prejudices of many Australians have not diminished and both immigration and multiculturalism are under direct attack. Prime Minister Howard has condemned racism, but never endorsed multiculturalism in an effective way. As far back as in 1988, Howard delivered a message to the Ethnic Communities in Canberra and stated that multiculturalism could not unite a nation (Jakubowicz, 1997). Further, Howard's aggressive policies towards asylum seekers (e.g., the *Tampa* Crisis[14] of August 2001) played a vital role in his wining the next election. Australia's focus on the skilled-stream category, bringing IT workers from Asia while rejecting asylum seekers, clearly indicates that class more than race is an important issue within the context of immigration and multiculturalism.

With the two-year eligibility period for basic entitlements of the welfare state, such as unemployment and sickness benefits, newly arrived immigrants, especially less wealthy and family-class immigrants, suffer the most. As Collins points out, "Funds are cut from adult migrant education, immigration and multicultural research, health and human rights areas. Welfare and unemployment services are privatised and dismantled at the very time [Asian immigrants] are needed" (1998:27). These policies hurt immigrants, especially Asian immigrants and women, who are less privileged compared with people from developed countries. If the current trend of slashing budgets for multiculturalism continues, multiculturalism will lose its very essence: its commitment to diversity and self-identity. Indeed, increasing support for the Liberal party for its handling of the *Tampa* affair and the rise of "One Nation" ideology jeopardize multiculturalism and indicate that Australia may be shifting again towards a monocultural society.

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[14] The Australian government denied permission for the ship *Tampa* – filled with asylum seekers – to dock at nearby Christmas Island. This denial, in effect, excluded asylum seekers from the legal system, i.e., the courts in Australia. For details, see Brennan's (2003) *Tampering with Asylum: A Universal Humanitarian Problem*.

### *Canada*

The liberalization of immigration policy in the 1960s opened the door for immigrants from Asia as well as for multiculturalism. In 1971, Prime Minister Trudeau announced the multiculturalism policy as a legislative response to ethnic plurality. In 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights through Section 27 affirmed that multiculturalism "should assist and encourage the integration (but not assimilation) of all immigrants" (Harles, 1997). In Canada, multiculturalism was a response to the dissatisfaction of immigrant and social activist groups. Through the Charter of Rights, Canada has established multiculturalism as a symbol of a Canadian identity that represents diverse cultural communities. However, many immigrants, especially racialized immigrants, experience systematic discrimination in the workplace as well as in the recognition of their credentials and training in their country of origin.

In Canada, multiculturalism is a state-initiated policy with a governing apparatus and administrative bureaus sanctioned by the legalistic framework. Consequently, a change has taken place over the years. The Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship was disbanded in the 1990s and multiculturalism was moved to the Department of Canadian Heritage. In October 1996, the Liberal government restructured the multiculturalism policy while focusing on themes of "identity," "civic participation", and "social justice" (Abu-Laban, 2000). The Canadian Ethnocultural Council argues that the very basis of social justice has been compromised by restructuring and decreases in federal funding. To establish social justice by decreasing social inequality is impossible without having appropriate funds for the concerned department. On the other hand, Jones (2000) argues that this revised policy demonstrates the commitment of the federal government to multiculturalism. Despite the rhetoric of multiculturalism, words spoken by a front-line activist in Vancouver illustrate its effectiveness among disadvantaged groups:

> This week we are celebrating International Women's Day with other women of colour and grassroots women. This year's theme is: "Health for All." And presently we are doing a research on the Filipino nurses, called "From Registered Nanny to Registered Nurse." It's funded by Multiculturalism. (Vancouver, March 2004)

**The Vulnerability of Immigrants and Their Vision for an Alternative Society**

During my research in Australia, I visited four places: three migrant resource centres and an Immigrant Women's Speak Out association – all located in New South Wales. Although I contacted several migrant resource centres in advance and received enthusiastic positive responses, some were not related to my research interest -- for example, trauma victims' centres, which deal with violence and so on. In addition to collecting published materials, I spoke with several people in these centres and audiotaped four women's interviews. My analysis has been based on these interviews and the published materials.

Immigrating to a new country from an Asian country involves culture shock and financial stress. For new immigrants in Australia, the two-year waiting period can place them in a precarious situation and eventually de-skill them, as this narration illustrates:

> [T]here is a two-year waiting period … for those newly arrived migrants before they can access full support in terms of getting employment and this is very difficult … although some services are available for them like medicare and others…. [W]hile you are looking for a job, you can't access to have any financial support … what happens with these families if a family has three children. [T]he parents will do any job, like cleaning job or be a hotel housekeeper as they call it and then the other one goes to an educational institution in order to upgrade his skills and usually it's the man. [T]he woman has to stay home and at the same time do a part-time job. … [S]he gets a part-time job during the weekend in order to support the rest of the family so it is really tough on women and well … she is in the path to deskilling, becoming deskilled and losing her self-confidence. (New South Wales, Australia, February 2005)

As most immigrants migrate to Australia in the skill-stream category, men as "heads of families" as well as in the "skilled" category get priority when entering Australia. Further, as the above narration shows, the two-year waiting period escalates gender differences in terms of education and upgrading skills -- most men go to school to re-skill, while women get de-skilled due to the nature of the jobs they do to support families and maintain childcare responsibilities.

When national or international crises happen, immigrants bear the major burden, as they become the target groups for restructuring and coping with economic changes. After 9/11, hotels where many immigrants worked were restructured and hundreds of jobs eliminated. This affected men and women in

different ways. The following narration illustrates the situation:

> He has a job… that sort… you know, engineering like repairing air conditioners. In addition, he is happy with that. Then later on, she opted for redundancy when there was restructuring in the hotel industry here because of the September 11. … She thought she might just, so she has a redundancy package and she put that in the bank… did some sort of casual jobs here and there after that. … (Y)ou have opted for redundancy because the logic is that redundancy will get you through the period when you are looking for a job. (New South Wales, Australia, February 2005)

This narration shows how immigrants, especially immigrant women, can get hit hardest when there is restructuring of service industries. Despite long years' of service, they can be compelled to accept a package that seems lucrative initially, but in fact destroys their job prospects.

One of the advocates who work at the Migrant Resource Centre in Australia put forward her vision of an alternative society:

> [T]hese stories give us… courage to put forward our argument to the New South Wales government as well as the federal government to really scrap out, you know, to cancel the two-year waiting period… those are the issues that… confront us… no recognition of overseas skills and also the migration policy…. Two-year waiting period before you can get a full support from the government and that affects a lot on getting jobs…. (New South Wales, Australia, February 2005)

To some extent, Australia's two-year waiting period is comparable with the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) in Canada, under which domestic workers are eligible to apply for permanent resident status only after completing a two-year job as a live-in caregiver.[15] Both groups get de-skilled and de-certified in the end. In both cases, the two-year waiting period acts as an effective neo-liberal strategy for both Australian and Canadian governments to make migration and settlement market-driven and cost-free.

One of the front-line activists in Vancouver commented on what immigrants and their supporters can do to counter neo-liberal strategies:

> As a new [immigrant] community in Canada, we must deepen our understanding of the root causes of our migration, marginalization and poverty, including the

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[15] I have conducted collaborative research with the Philippine Women Centre in Vancouver and about 80 immigrants were interviewed. Of these, several were domestic workers who migrated to Canada under the Live-in Caregiver Program. My research indicates that almost all domestic workers get permanent status once they apply.

problem of de-skilling and the accreditation gap. [We] never stop campaigning most strongly for the migrants' concerns. There are meetings, sharing for focus groups, which is a very important tool for us because that way we learn new issues affecting the lives of many, so it is time to unite… (Vancouver, Canada,March 2004)

This front-line worker perceives that immigrants must act together, in transnational solidarity, to counter issues around de-skilling and lack of accreditation. On the other hand, a worker at the Migrant Resource Centre in New South Wales argues:

[The] accommodation issue is big because of the demand and because of the lack of… refugee houses for women here in Australia. Especially, in the middle of the night… I find it very, very stressful when I have to organize an accommodation for a woman who is fleeing domestic violence because there are only a few places. You would be lucky to find a place for a woman or a refugee straight away… But it's very very hard. There is lack of accommodation… some places accept families, the whole family you know, including the husband … whether they're evicted or… (February 2005)

Food, clothing and shelter are considered by most as basic human rights and the absence of these rights does not indicate scarcity of these resources in welfare states like Australia and Canada. To be cost-free and market-driven, Australia bars new immigrants from access to basic entitlements for a limited period, i.e., two years. On the other hand, while Canada generally does not make distinctions between its citizens and new immigrants, it imposes landing fees that make immigrants responsible for their own settlements. It is evident that accommodation, a basic need for survival, is a key issue for both immigrants and refugees. Domestic violence heightens the impact of lack of accommodation on those who need the most. The following narration illustrates:

… [for] women fleeing domestic violence… there is a crisis in accommodation, there are short term accommodation, there are long-term accommodation because crisis accommodation is the time when they flee domestic violence so there are different categories … within 6 weeks they have to be moved to a short term accommodation, which is from 6 weeks to 3 months. The median is … sometimes 6 months and then after 6 months they need to be moved again to a longer-term accommodation. (New South Wales, Australia, February 2005)

The above narration further shows lack of accommodation for immigrants as well as lack of resources for immigrant women who flee from domestic violence. In turn, Immigrant women who have left their homes due to domestic violence

have a very difficult time in finding accommodation. While all immigrant women are more vulnerable in the absence of family and friends, women who live with domestic violence are in a desperate situation. Another narration elaborates on how complex some immigrant women's lives can be:

> …financial assistance is a big thing especially for those women who don't qualify for centrelink payment because of the two-year waiting period. … for those who have recently arrived they cannot accept financial assistance or centrelink payments or benefits …they have to pay the rent weekly. They have to eat, you know, or buy things for the household. If they don't have financial assistance in the first few months of arrival, they are in a very difficult situation. Sometimes because of a desire to earn a living for the family, they accept jobs below the level of their qualifications. (New South Wales, Australia, February 2005)

The above narration clearly illustrates the effect on immigrant women of the cost-effective neo-liberal strategy, i.e., the two-year waiting period for basic social entitlements. This two-year waiting period forces immigrants to do menial jobs despite high educational qualifications, credentials, and job experience in countries of origin. Immigrant women are in a double bind both as women and as a spouse or family member. Once the two-year waiting period is over, it is men who have upgraded skills and women who are still concentrated in menial, low-paid, flexible-work-hour jobs. This vicious cycle traps immigrant women in the lower echelons of society. One participant made these thoughtful comments about this situation:

> …early intervention is important rather than addressing the issues later on. This is what we in the community sector are speaking about, representing to the government about. It is very important to address the issues when they first arrive, preventing them from falling into that pit, you know. (New South Wales, Australia, February 2005)

Although all the people I interviewed worked either at the Migrant Resource Centres or at Immigrant Women Speak Out Association, they also acted as advocates for immigrants, especially for immigrant women. Despite the nature of their jobs and the source of their funding, which was mostly from government, these participants had not lost their vision for social justice. They unequivocally advocated scrapping the two-year waiting period, which ultimately hinders the emotional, social and economic growth of new immigrants, especially immigrant women. A similar tone is evident in a front-line activist's voice in Vancouver:

One of the clear examples that we're saying is in relation to housing. Housing is supposed to be a basic human right. It's supposed to be one of the most basic rights for all humans – access to food, clothing and shelter (Vancouver, Canada, March 2004).

**Conclusion**

The above analysis suggests strongly that class predominates over race in the recruiting of immigrants in both Australia and Canada. Those who are upper- and middle-class, English-speaking, educated, and have jobs as well as education experience in the developed countries are preferred immigrants. Males who are perceived as skilled thus comprise a major portion of immigrants recruited. On the other hand, disadvantaged groups such as women, working class, and non-English-speaking people are barred from migrating to either Australia or Canada. The only option most disadvantaged groups have is to migrate either as a spouse, or as a family member, a domestic worker, or, at worst, an asylum seeker or refugee. These categories eventually transfer disadvantaged groups into low-skilled, low-waged and temporary jobs. The rise of Pauline Hanson's "One Nation" and the Liberal Government's handling of the *Tampa Crisis* have created an environment in Australia where the public is leaning towards some sort of monocultural framework supported by the Liberal Government's neo-liberal agenda. In Canada, the increasing slashing of funds for multiculturalism may be compromising social justice. However, in Australia and Canada, Asian immigrants as well as advocacy groups including feminist, left, progressive, and social activists, are challenging the neo-liberal agenda. These groups have a vision for creating an alternative society based on social justice, i.e., where everyone has access to basic entitlements such as food, clothing and housing irrespective of class, gender, and immigration status.

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