

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Economy* by Miriam Ching Yoon LOUIE, Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2001, 306 pp., ISBN: 0-89608-638-0.

*Disposable Domestic: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* by Grace CHANG, Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2000, 236 pp., ISBN: 0-89608-617-8.

Charlene M. Gannagé

Volume 58, numéro 1, hiver 2003

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/007376ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/007376ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Gannagé, C. M. (2003). Compte rendu de [*Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Economy* by Miriam Ching Yoon LOUIE, Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2001, 306 pp., ISBN: 0-89608-638-0. / *Disposable Domestic: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* by Grace CHANG, Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2000, 236 pp., ISBN: 0-89608-617-8.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 58(1), 149-152. <https://doi.org/10.7202/007376ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 2003

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

é  
rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

une analyse qui sont repris par les auteurs dans la partie théorique de l'ouvrage qui porte sur le travail d'organisation comme négociation. Vient ensuite une dernière section sur les régulations sociales et leur lien avec le travail d'organisation.

Le chapitre théorique (chapitre 4) est très intéressant et peut certes être utile à l'analyse de nombre d'autres contextes de travail, les concepts développés par De Terssac, dont certains s'inspirent de l'analyse de J.-D. Reynaud, étant ici bien expliqués et illustrés, favorisant

leur compréhension et leur application éventuelle à d'autres contextes. Aussi, l'ouvrage intéressera tous les chercheurs qui travaillent sur l'organisation du travail, bien sûr, mais aussi plus particulièrement sur le travail en équipe, la coopération, la collaboration, le collectif de travail. L'ouvrage est riche en enseignements théoriques, mais peut aussi être très utile pour des étudiants de doctorat, comme illustration d'une méthode d'analyse de cas.

**DIANE-GABRIELLE TREMBLAY**

Télé-université, Université du Québec

***Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Economy***

by Miriam Ching Yoon LOUIE, Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2001, 306 pp., ISBN: 0-89608-638-0.

***Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy***

by Grace CHANG, Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2000, 236 pp., ISBN: 0-89608-617-8.

Two books on immigrant women workers in the global economy analyse the repercussions of American foreign policy on domestic immigration issues. *Sweatshop Warriors* and *Disposable Domestics* complement each other in every respect. Each book mentions the tragic consequences of the 1992 riot in Los Angeles in the name of Rodney King. These unfortunate events galvanized labour organizers with a conscience to find alternatives to what C. Wright Mills, as early as 1956, coined as the "industrial-military complex" in his sociological study entitled *The Power Elite*. Authors Louie and Chang come from the communities they research. Each author shows an insider's view of the immigrant communities under study. In both books immigrant women are seen not as mere victims of globalization but rather as active agents in social change.

In their research, each writer addresses the alternative self-organization of immigrant women who seek to redress human rights abuses experienced

by marginalized ethnic workers in American society. Louie focuses on the multi-ethnic women's coalitions led by genuine working class heroines from the Chinese, Latino and Korean working class populations of the United States. Chang's study highlights the coalitions of immigrant women that are linked with organized labour. Both books focus on women's working lives at the point of production and reproduction within the nexus of transnational capital. In so doing, both authors provide highly readable accounts of complex macro-economic processes that shape the everyday political lives of women at the micro level.

*Sweatshop Warriors* is a useful companion to another recent study of the sweatshop pyramid *Behind the Label: Inequality in the Los Angeles Apparel Industry* by Appelbaum and Bonacich (2000). Unlike Appelbaum and Bonacich, Louie examines the underside of the sweatshop pyramid. She draws attention to the ethnic women found at the bottom of the subcontracting process

and especially in the clothing and restaurant industries. She reveals the ways in which immigrant women fall victim to the government's failure to enforce the minimum labour standards in companies owned by new ethnic entrepreneurs and subcontractors who also find themselves to be outsiders in America.

As Louie travels to the communities, the countries of origin, the homes and social gatherings of her respondents, *Sweatshop Warriors* becomes a polyglot of kitchen smells, ethnic recipes, a glossary of words, phrases, and even the languages of the many immigrant voices she encounters. Louie's monograph is especially significant for understanding the working conditions of immigrant workers both in their country of origin and in their host country. She gathers information about the immigration history of local leaders and presents a series of vignettes that outline their memory of past work experience and of resistance that each has brought with them to the host country.

The author's authentic portrayal reveals the heterogeneous nature of immigrant culture from New York to California shaped as it is by women's immigration status. For example, Vietnamese refugees of Chinese origin work alongside Cantonese speakers from Hong Kong and undocumented workers from Fujian province in China. All are united by a common language but divided against each other by unfair employer practices that pit documented workers against those who are undocumented. By way of contrast, the Chicano population enjoys a long history of organized trade unionism particularly in the Western United States in territories considered by recent Latino immigrants to be occupied by the American government. Finally, militant Korean women are in flight from political repression. Each successive wave of new immigrants has been affected by the contradictory nature of American foreign policy that drives them to North America in search

of a better life whether to escape war, poverty or political repression within the global economy.

Despite their hardships in the host country immigrant women have cultivated alternative forms of organization. Out of necessity, their social movements tend to be more inclusive and democratic than their mainstream counterparts in the labour movement. Louie recounts her respondents' perceptions of "the workers' centers": "Many women also spoke of how the centers reached out to them to fill other unmet needs in their lives—to learn English, to become enfranchised citizens, to break their isolation, to get out from under the thumb of domineering partners, to give themselves space outside the sweatshop grind, and to taste the freedom of remaking themselves as fuller human beings" (14). What countervailing forces have caused the sweatshop warriors to develop new responses to the racism they encounter? Chang's book provides some answers.

Chang's *Disposable Domestic* is important for outlining in detail how global financial institutions benefit from neo-liberal government policies that restructure industries and privatize the public domain. Chang's research follows a similar line of inquiry pioneered by the authors in the Nash and Fernandez-Kelly anthology *Men, Women and the International Division of Labor* (1983). Following the passage of international trade agreements how do women fare under the harmonization policies of first world governments?

Chang's post-modern methodology is partially a textual analysis of the media, government documents, proposed legislation and legal cases that have set precedents. All of the aforementioned reinforce the ideology of the "disposable" and "recyclable" service provider. Similar to Nigel Harris' (1995) "new untouchables" found in Europe (*The New Untouchables: Immigration and*

*the New World Worker*), Chang probes the reality of undocumented migrant workers who live in North America.

Chang's in-depth field work answers the question as to why immigrant workers, their children and the so-called "volunteers" on workfare have suffered the loss of human dignity in America. What racist ideology has separated the right-wing "nativist" from the immigrant worker? What racist ideology perpetuates this turn away from the human rights of the poor and the working poor? How does gender ideology reinforce racism?

California's proposition 187 is a starting point for indicating how Latino migrant workers employed as domestics and agricultural workers are treated as "inferior" "aliens" and "undeserving" of basic rights of education for their children, health care for their families and the minimum labour standards to protect them in the workplace. From the Eastern United States she writes about the discriminatory conditions of Filipino women who provide in-home and nursing home care. Moreover, black Americans in California who "volunteer" their labour in exchange for welfare are seen by the media, the government and migrant workers themselves as comprising a category of the poor who are also undeserving of "public entitlement". Chang shows how the unemployed, the underemployed and the underpaid are not only caught in an endless cycle of poverty but are unwittingly used in government policies to undermine unions in the sectors where immigrants are employed and workfare recipients "volunteer" their labour in the service industry, in agriculture, construction and the transportation sectors.

U.S. government policy constructs a racialized labour market composed of migrant and undocumented workers who are continually denied the rights of national citizenship: "immigrant women are in danger of becoming the new "braceras"—a pair of arms to rock the

cradle or scrub the floors for their employers, then go home tired and empty-handed to their own children" (116). Gender ideology reinforces the image of women as "disposable" and makes them vulnerable to unfair employers' demands: "... immigrant women's culturally inscribed values and identities may play into the hands of employers eager to capture these women's 'labors of love' for themselves, their dependents, and clients" (115).

What is more, the elite within such institutions as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund stand to gain from the quasi-legal sector of the underground service economy. Chang further suggests that family remittances earned in the host country not only circulate foreign capital back to the home country but also enrich public and private agents who use the labour market in Asia as an economic resource for their own gain.

Two strands of popular mobilization that are antithetical to each other are discussed: the rise of the right in North America and anti-globalization resistance movements armed with banners, theatre, protests and teach-ins to educate the public about the ill effects of racism. Middle class professional women come under fire for underpaying undocumented workers who help the elite in their homes. The author calls on lobby organizations to raise the standards of humane treatment by recognizing the rights of women who provide low-paid services. Chang brings into sharp relief the Gabriela Network that reaches from the Philippines to North America, the activism of HERE, an Service Employee International Union (SEIU) local in California, the No Body is Legal movement worldwide and INTERCEDE in Canada all of which have been in the forefront of anti-racist education.

*Sweatshop Warriors and Disposable Domestics* pose difficult questions about the new world of disorder. Just as Mimi

Abramovitz in her forward to *Disposable Domestic* reflects on the research of left intellectuals who call for better economic strategies that serve the needs of America's poor, the writings of Louie

and Chang have taken us many steps forward in this direction.

CHARLENE M. GANNAGÉ  
University of Windsor

***In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America***

by Alice KESSLER-HARRIS, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, 374 pp., ISBN: 0-19-503835-5.

Lawmaking in the employment arena in the U.S. and Canada has both converged and diverged, depending on the subject. On the one hand, provincial lawmakers looked to the U.S. National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) as a model for labour relations laws in Ontario and other provinces. Cross-border relationships among social movements and unions led to the development of similar human rights acts and commissions in both U.S. states and Canadian provinces. On the other hand, when the U.S. Congress passed the 1963 Equal Pay Act, Canadian provinces were already moving beyond similar equal pay models that had been passed as early as 1951 in Ontario. Currently, Canadian equal pay and pay equity law is recognized as one of the most advanced in the world, while the U.S. Equal Pay Act has not changed in 40 years.

In 2001, the synergy between U.S. and Canadian labour and employment law was brought into stark relief by the Canadian Supreme Court decision, *Dunmore v. Ontario* ([2001] S.C.J. No. 87). In *Dunmore*, the Canadian Supreme Court decided that Ontario's 1995 repeal of the Agricultural Labour Relations Act violated the Canadian Charter of Rights. Prior to 1994, Ontario's Labour Relations Act excluded farm workers from organizing and collective bargaining protection—as did the U.S. NLRA upon which it was in part modelled.

The synergy, convergence and divergence of Canadian and U.S. labour and employment law and policy make Alice Kessler-Harris' 2001 book *In Pursuit of*

*Equity* a must-read for both Canadians and Americans. Kessler-Harris' book works on at least two levels. On one level, it views the development of social protection and employment policy through the prism of gender and race. On another level, it provides a colourful history of the formation of most of the major U.S. laws affecting the employment relationship developed in the last century. Thus the book can appeal both to gender scholars and to labour scholars.

*In Pursuit of Equity* is a carefully researched book for which the author combed through oral history interviews, congressional records, administrative agency documents, advisory council minutes and other primary sources. Her careful combing uncovers provocative gendered tidbits like an exchange Senators had about a proposed job promotion bill where they disagreed on whether housewives should have the same opportunities as others or whether a law would, "take the housewives out of the home and put them into industry ..." (pp. 19-20). The author peppers the book with salient facts about the primary architects of the laws that house the U.S. employment relationship – such as where they attended school, what they studied and how this influenced their views on and contributions to the development of laws and institutions. For example, Barbara Nachtrieb Armstrong was a Berkeley law school professor who worked with the 1934 Committee on Economic Security and affected policy through her expertise in European