



BETWEEN INTIMACY AND INTOLERANCE

Greek Cypriot children's encounters with Asian domestic workers

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This article explores how Greek Cypriot elementary school children construct their identities in relation to Sri Lankan and Filipino women who come to Cyprus as domestic workers. The article focuses primarily on the views of children whose families employ these women; however, the views of children whose families do not employ domestic workers are also explored to illustrate how these women are popularly constructed in children's imaginations and in the absence of direct daily interaction with them. The study reveals that children access different cultural discourses and construct identities that are often ambivalent and contradictory and are revealing of new forms of nationalism and racism. For the children whose families employ domestic workers, the home becomes an arena for renegotiating their status as children in their interactions with these women. Thus, the encounter between Self and Other becomes critical to understanding reconstituted definitions of childhood and adulthood.

Introduction

The study of children's emerging understandings of concepts like nation or race have been of concern to psychologists since at least the 1950s, when Piaget and Weil (1951) attempted to theorize it from a developmental perspective; more recently others (e.g. Barret, 2005; Hirschfeld, 2005) have tried to advance debates through more comparative, large-scale studies. Similarly, immigration and its impact on the populations of host societies, most often expressed in the form of intolerance and racism, have been well documented, while the ways by which racism and nationalism converge and feed on each other have also been examined to a great extent (e.g. Miles, 1993). However, the relationship between these phenomena and childhood largely remains unexplored from a sociological and anthropological perspective (see the collection of essays in the edited volume *Race, Identity and Representation*

in Education [McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993] for a notable exception). The critical work that has come out of childhood studies in recent years, with its emphasis on children's situated lives and their role as social actors while at the same time considering the larger structural contexts in which their lives are embedded, provides a productive framework for exploring this relationship (e.g. Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998; James, 1993; James and Prout, 1990; Mayall, 1996, 2002; Morton, 1996; Solberg, 1990; Stephens, 1995).

In societies like Cyprus, which are ethnically divided and have become immigrant destinations only recently, understanding how children make sense of who they are in the face of a variety of others can help us understand how the young are implicated in the social and cultural production and reproduction of problematic human phenomena like racism and nationalism. At the same time, it can inform our understanding of more positive human conditions like intercultural intimacy and relation-building, which are, as I show, often part of the same process. Through the use of ethnographic methods, the dynamics of the processes involved can be highlighted and children's identities as they are variously expressed in their daily worlds can be adequately understood and theorized (e.g. Hatcher and Troyna, 1993).

In this article, I attempt to analyse Greek Cypriot children's emerging understandings of immigration by situating these understandings in both the larger social contexts that frame them as well as the day-to-day discursive practices of children that contribute to the production and reproduction of these understandings. Cole (1997: 133) has rightly argued that an 'improved understanding of European reactions to immigrants – whether hostile, ambivalent, or supportive – must take into account the role of everyday experience and the interaction of ideologies within changing contexts of power'. This article responds to this call by exploring the range of responses that children have in relation to the recent phenomenon of Asian migration into Cyprus and in light of other major changes that have shaped the island's recent history, including its Turkish invasion and occupation in 1974 and its entry into the European Union in 2004.

The data on which the article is based come from a larger research effort that aimed to investigate Greek Cypriot elementary school children's perceptions of, and attitudes towards, foreigners who come to work in Cyprus. The article focuses primarily on the results of the qualitative part of the study, which deals specifically with 10- to 12-year-old children's perceptions of, and attitudes towards, Sri Lankan and Filipino women who are employed as domestic workers in Cyprus, though some of the data from the quantitative part of the study are also utilized for complementary and illustrative purposes. My focus in this article are the views of children whose families employ Sri Lankan and Filipino domestic workers. However, I also draw on the views of children whose families do not employ domestic workers in order to highlight

how these women are imagined by children in the absence of direct daily interactions with them.

The qualitative part of the study focused on 13 children with whom semi-structured, in-depth interviews were carried out. Five of these children belonged to families who did not employ a domestic worker, while eight belonged to families who employed such women. In addition and in order to get data from an interactive context with children, two focus groups (one with six children who did not have a domestic worker and another one with seven children who had a domestic worker) were also included. The children in the sample were selected through the use of non-probability sampling. Children were identified with the help of teachers and principals in various schools. Thus, a combination of quota and convenience sampling was used to select the children. All in-depth interviews took place in children's homes and in all cases but one, children were interviewed on their own without the presence of a parent or another adult. The quantitative part of the study consisted of a self-administered questionnaire completed by 288 Greek Cypriot elementary school children ages 10–12 who came from 10 different schools in Nicosia. Twenty-nine percent of children in the sample belonged to families who hired domestic workers. The survey questionnaire investigated children's experiences, knowledge, perceptions and attitudes towards foreigners who live in Cyprus and included several open-ended questions that children could respond to especially in relation to their perceptions and attitudes towards domestic workers. The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions explored the same issues in relation to specific groups of foreigners but much more extensively.

With only one exception, the children who participated in the qualitative study and whose families employed domestic workers could be characterized as middle class, that is as coming from families who led a comfortable life, where both parents worked and the need for house assistance and childcare were the principal reasons for hiring a domestic worker. Similarly, with two exceptions of families that could be characterized as working class, the remaining of the children who participated in the qualitative study but whose families did not employ domestic workers could also be characterized as middle class. For the children who participated in the quantitative study, social class data were not collected but it is safe to assume that most of them came from working-class families with smaller numbers coming from middle-class families.

The questionnaire survey was carried out in schools with the permission of the relevant ministry and the informed consent of the children. For all interviews and focus group discussions, parents provided their consent in writing and all children were informed about the purpose of the study and that their participation was entirely voluntary and they could withdraw at any moment irrespective of their parents' consent. To protect children's anonymity, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Asian domestic workers in Cyprus

The patterns of transnational migration for work around the world are clearly shaping both the global landscape and the specific cultural contexts in which they take place. Cyprus has traditionally being a country of out-migration but the 1974 Turkish invasion of the island and the relatively quick economic recovery that gradually resulted in an economic boom have turned Cyprus into a host country for immigration.

Thus, the economic growth in Cyprus coupled with a highly educated population have meant that the local supply of labour has been insufficient to meet all the needs of the economy. At the same time, changes in gender roles have meant that many more women have entered the labour market in recent years, leaving a gap in the provision of childcare and care for the elderly, which have traditionally been provided by women (Anthias, 2000: 26, 29; Anthias and Lazarides, 2000: 7). The lack of local labour to fill this need at a cheap or affordable price led the government of Cyprus to invite foreign workers to come on temporary visas to work in Cyprus. The arrival of large numbers of Asian domestic workers since the early 1990s largely met the need for cheap labour that could be used by families for housework, childcare or for care provided to elderly or disabled family members. Filipino and Sri Lankan female domestic workers are two of the largest categories of immigrants on the island. Official estimates for 2005 report 1182 Sri Lankan women and 901 Filipino women legally residing in Cyprus (*Demographic Report*, 2005) but unofficial estimates suggested by NGOs estimate the number of both legal and illegal Asian women to be significantly higher.

These changes in the social landscape of Cyprus have given rise to various new challenges. The need to make sense of the emerging relationships of the local population to these newcomers on the island remains a key challenge (Sainsbury, 2003). How Greek Cypriots perceive, feel and relate to these individuals is the outcome of many complex processes that have been taking place on the island. Filipino and Sri Lankan domestic workers, given their sizeable presence in people's homes, have been at the forefront of debates about the social and cultural issues that their influx has resulted in. Not surprisingly, children and their views and opinions on this issue have largely remained outside these debates. In this article, I seek to illustrate the utility of including their perspectives in such discussions, especially given that children fare prominently in adult discourse about domestic workers as a principally affected group (i.e. by being cared for by domestic workers).

When racism meets nationalism

During the last 15 years and with its recent entry into the EU in 2004, Cyprus has been undergoing a process of Europeanization. This westward look has led to a clearer identification with what is European, or that which is Christian and white (see Anthias, 2000: 23),¹ and by comparison to that which is not.

This is highly significant in the context of the EU, where immigrants as a category are signified as those who come from outside Europe and more specifically from the so-called 'Third World'; individuals who move within the Union for work as well as those who hold professional and managerial positions are excluded from the definition (Miles, 1993: 207).

Asian domestic workers in Cyprus provide a suitable target for the nationalist imagination, which always seeks some kind of 'other' to direct its gaze and to construct its sense of identity (Spyrou, 2002; see also Spyrou, 2000, 2001). The ambiguity that Greek Cypriots feel about their European identity – being geographically and culturally on the margins of Europe (see Philippou, 2005; see also Herzfeld, 1987a; Spyrou, 1999) – is partly resolved through their assertion of superiority over non-European 'others', as is the case with Asian domestic workers.² Such a discursive position is of course full of contradictions, one of the most obvious being that between the ideological need for national purity, on the one hand, and the economic interests met by hiring cheap imported labour, on the other (Anthias, 2000: 35). Another cultural contradiction, at least on the surface, is that between the local sense of hospitality (*filoxenia*) offered to strangers/foreigners, in which Greek Cypriots pride themselves, and the xenophobic, intolerant and racist attitudes and behaviours expressed towards foreign workers. One needs to consider the complexity of the categories involved to fully understand when, in relation to whom and why such negative attitudes and behaviours become expressed. Hospitality is a cultural value but it is offered to those *xenoi* (strangers/foreigners) who the locals need to impress at some level (e.g. since these foreigners are otherwise dominant as they come from politically or economically dominant countries like the UK, France or the US) with the superior cultural/moral qualities of their character. These *xenoi* must be acknowledged as equals, if not morally, at least in the sense of being worthy of engagement (Herzfeld, 1987b). Being able to offer hospitality to them is in some ways a way of exercising moral power over them since they cannot reciprocate directly (by being visitors) despite the economic and political dominance that they otherwise represent. On the other hand, those who are considered inferior (Sri Lankans, Filipinos, etc.) are not worthy of engagement; in short, they are not worthy of hospitality and all it entails. That which is offered to them is more akin to charity and a sense of pity.

The presence of these Asian domestic workers is seen, at best, as a necessity, at worst as a threat to the well-being of the nation since it challenges the extent to which the latter may continue to be imagined as homogeneous. As Miles (1993: 79) has argued, 'the ideologies of racism and nationalism can be interdependent and overlapping, the idea of "race" serving as a criterion of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion so that the boundary of the imagined "nation" is equally a boundary of "race"'. Children's sense of identity and their expressed attitudes towards Filipino and Sri Lankan domestic workers cannot be viewed outside the ideological framework of nationalism, which

can only imagine the nation as homogeneous. That which is not of the nation is by definition a problem.

In recent history, the primary Other for Greek Cypriots has been the Turks, for they are represented as having invaded and occupied more than one-third of the island. Nationalism has provided for Greek Cypriots an ideologically convenient framework for understanding and interpreting the island's recent history and for constructing their collective sense of Self. This framework has helped to establish the boundaries of the Self through a process of inclusion and exclusion. Those outside the nation are classified as foreigners, as outsiders, and relegated to the category of the Other, those who are substantially different from the Self. In the nationalist imagination, this Other can, as a result of its substantive difference, adulterate the nation and forsake its purity (see Spyrou, 1999). The Turks, being an Eastern Other, in the Greek Cypriot nationalist imagination often lend their cultural negativity to other kinds of Easterners, such as Sri Lankans and Filipinos. As shown by the quantitative study, Easterners are in general considered to be uncivilized. For instance, 53 percent of the children considered the Turks to be 'uncivilized' (the highest percentage of any group considered) with Pakistanis in second place with 52 percent, Sri Lankans in fourth place with 38 percent and Indians and Filipinos in fifth place with 35 percent.

Asian domestic workers, unlike Cypriot women, cannot by definition contribute to the reproduction of the nation; they are outside the collectivity (Anthias, 2000: 33). But though they are not involved with the biological reproduction of the nation, they often play a key role in the upbringing of young Greek Cypriots. Mistrust towards domestic workers for their role in the upbringing of children was one of the worries expressed by some of the children whose families employed domestic workers. Elpida (12),³ for example, asked whether you can trust the raising of your children to a Filipino domestic worker. In her own words: 'Most people trust them. I think we should not, because she might, let's say, if she takes care of a child, teach him their [i.e. Filipino] religion, the manners and customs of their country, so that your child will grow up differently.'

The coming together of the ideologies of nationalism and racism provides a socially convincing way of camouflaging racist attitudes in the name of the nation, which is publicly, at least, much more likely to be accepted especially when framed in terms of 'the national interest'. Thus, domestic workers become a threat to the coherence, unity and essence of the national collectivity by their mere presence among 'us'; but they certainly become a much more serious threat when they enter the intimate space of the Greek Cypriot home.

Racializing Sri Lankan and Filipino domestic workers

This section focuses on children's perceptions of Sri Lankan and Filipino domestic workers and the ways by which they racialize them through their

descriptions. The children's discourse contains both positive and negative perceived characteristics as well as contradictory attributions; however, their constructions still largely create an image of these women as Other, as fundamentally different.

When I asked the children to tell me what comes to mind when they hear the words 'Sri Lankan' and 'Filipino' in the feminine (*Sri Lankeza* and *Filipineza* in Greek), the pattern that emerged was very much the same. The overwhelming majority of children from both categories (i.e. both those whose families employ domestic workers and those who don't) pointed out 'domestic worker', suggesting a clear identification between the national category and the particular occupation. Other related terms that the children used were terms like 'cleaning lady' and 'baby-sitter' (the latter term used in English). A second set of characteristics that most children pointed out focused on appearance. Both Sri Lankan and Filipino domestic workers were described as 'black' or as having a different skin colour from 'us'. The quantitative survey produced the following pattern when children were asked to say what comes to mind when they hear the word 'Sri Lankan' and the word 'Filipino' respectively: 45 percent said 'black', 37 percent said 'domestic worker' and 18 percent said 'cleaner' for the former while for the latter 36 percent said 'domestic worker', 29 percent said 'black' and 20 percent said 'cleaner'. Interestingly, there were no significant differences in children's responses depending on whether their family employed or did not employ a domestic worker.

Differences in religion, language and mentality were also mentioned by children and some children described these women as simple, poor and uneducated. Their countries were similarly imagined as poor and underdeveloped with harsh life conditions that force them to go overseas for work. Some of the children, in their attempt to understand who Sri Lankans and Filipinos are, imagined them as radically different from 'us'. For instance, one boy imagined Sri Lankan food habits as exotic and weird: 'They eat snakes, they are poor people, they do not eat the kinds of food we eat.' Similarly, a girl described Filipinos as people whose only activity revolves around having many children: 'because they have nothing much to do, they have children'. Though such statements tended to be more common among children whose families did not employ domestic workers, the children's social class positions (even among working-class children) allowed them to socially distance themselves from these women whom they perceived as extremely poor, uneducated and backward. The children's descriptions show the process of 'othering' these women that takes place at the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender and class; an idealized image of the white, European, educated and affluent woman is (indirectly) juxtaposed to the image of these domestic workers whose identities are perceived as radically different and 'other' (Anthias, 2000: 16; Sainsbury, 2003).

But the children did not only see differences between 'us' and 'them'; they also identified similarities. The most common similarity pointed out was 'character', which children saw as being similar between Sri Lankans and

Filipinos, on the one hand, and Greek Cypriots, on the other. Chrysostomos (11), whose family employs a domestic worker from Sri Lanka, for example, explained that the character of Sri Lankan domestic workers is like 'ours' and that they behave the same way 'we' do: 'They are like us . . . like our mother takes care of us, she takes care of us the same way . . . like we clean our houses, she cleans the same way too.' One may of course identify here an attempt by children to explain similarity in terms of 'our shared humanity', a value they are taught in school. But, one may also go further and see in children's reasoning an attempt at rationalizing the presence of these women in their homes. For many children, these domestic workers become second mothers. On the one hand, the intimacy developed between themselves and their domestic workers over time and, on the other hand, the important role that these women play in their homes – as home and childcarers – allows the children to see them as playing a role not unlike that of their own mothers.

Though some children also identified a number of similarities between the two groups and 'us' (e.g. 'they' have a similar character to 'us'; 'they' have a similar way of understanding and reacting to things to 'us'; 'they' are hard-working like 'us'; 'they' have a love for learning and trying new things like 'us'), it was the differences – racial, ethnic, cultural and class – that were readily pointed out as constitutive of these women's identities. In that sense, though some of the children felt a sense of empathy towards these women as human beings, most of them also clearly differentiated themselves from them.

That these statements may contradict some of their other evaluations of these women should come as no surprise. For one, not all children view these women the same way; for another, identifying similarity between 'us' and 'them' in terms of the social role these women perform in the home does not necessarily imply that their cultural difference (interpreted as inferiority) is eclipsed. During their descriptions of these women, children are often caught between different discourses that draw on different levels of relationship. Thus, a family discourse brings these women, who are often socially playing the role of the mother, closer to the children, and establishes a sense of intimacy, while a discourse of difference with its emphasis on inferiority renders them distant and Other. What appears as a contradiction is part of the process of identity construction and expression that is typified by the shifting nature of Self presentation in different social contexts. As others have also shown, there is no essential core of the Self that remains consistent across all terrains and that may lead us to think of contradiction as a pathology of the Self (see also Askouni, 1997: 322; Stiell and England, 1997) while in fact it is the Self revealing itself through various modes of expression.

The idealization of otherness

When it came to comparing Sri Lankan with Filipino domestic workers many children expressed their clear preference for Filipinos because, as Michalis (12),

whose family has employed three domestic workers in the past, explained, 'they do not steal like Sri Lankans'. In general, there was a sense in which Filipino domestic workers are better than Sri Lankans in many different ways: 'They do their work better, they understand Greek better, they dress better', one girl explained. Anthias (2000: 31) reports a similar finding, with Filipino women being 'regarded as top-class maids for status, being generally seen as cleaner, more deferential and more sensitive to privacy' and concludes that this might stem from the fact that they, unlike the Sri Lankans, are Christian (see also Lazaridis, 2000: 64).

Despite their preferences, most of the children whose families employ Asian domestic workers described both Sri Lankan and Filipino women as 'good' or 'very good', as having a 'good character' and as being 'polite'. Other characteristics they mentioned were: friendly, sensitive, loving, hardworking and helpful. Much of the same pattern emerged in the quantitative study when children whose families employ domestic workers were asked to state what they liked about their domestic worker the most. The most frequently cited characteristics had to do with the domestic worker's behavioural characteristics and qualities (e.g. clean, gentle/polite) as well as her work performance (e.g. hardworker, cleans well).

Yet, for some of the children whose families employ domestic workers, their positive evaluation was based on their understanding of these women as passive, obedient and good-natured. Minos (12), for example, made it a point to tell me that the character of Sri Lankan domestic workers is good because 'Let's say they can't even get upset with you if you do something wrong to them.' For Minos, the quality of their character is measured by their ability or rather inability to react to those who do wrong to them. In other words, being subservient, non-reactive and compliant is a sign of good character. Consider one more example from another boy, Michalis (12), which reinforces this particular understanding: 'I had myself a Filipino in my house, she was relatively good, she obeyed me, she was good.' Michalis here speaks from his position of authority – as an employer himself from a higher social class – and his evaluation of the domestic worker mainly depends on his understanding of how their respective social roles were fulfilled: '*She obeyed me.*' For some children the willingness of Filipino domestic workers to carry out their employers' wishes signified their good character. Minos (12), for instance, explained that Filipino domestic workers 'are good people because they do whatever you ask them to do'.

Other children expressed mixed feelings towards Filipino domestic workers. Chrysostomos (11), for example, said he likes Filipino domestic workers 'a little'. When I asked why, he explained that it is 'because they are not from our country, but we like them' because they are 'good-hearted'. Yet, as he added, what he does not like is that they too get upset: 'They might get angry one day.' For Chrysostomos, the possibility of a domestic worker getting angry is a negative quality of her character. Such a view is suggestive of how

an idealized image of the domestic worker is constructed, that is, one where the person exhibits only certain kinds of behaviours and emotions rather than the full range of human behaviours and emotions. In other words, *a domestic worker should never get upset*. Being upset, presumably with her employer, constitutes a challenge to the established social order where a subordinate is expected to be submissive rather than reactive to her boss.

What is interesting also here is that it is mostly boys who express this understanding. The process of contrasting a masculine Self, a Self with power over others (in this case, not just any others, but specifically females, and not just any females but older females from a different ethnic and 'racial' background) directs us towards an investigation of the intersection between power and identity, on the one hand, and age, gender, race and ethnicity, on the other. The process of racialization that these women undergo is linked to their legal status as immigrants on temporary visas, ethnically Other (and of Asian origin in particular), and from an economically underprivileged class and results in their subordination and oppression (see Anthias and Lazarides, 2000). How each and every individual child racializes these women is both an outcome of the cultural discourses that are circulated and their own individual experiences and particular circumstances, giving rise to 'personal racism', a process much like that described by Cohen (1996) as 'personal nationalism'.

The discomfort of colour

Needless to say, not all children were excited about the presence of foreign domestic workers in Cyprus. Minos (12), for example, whose family employs a domestic worker and who had told me earlier that Sri Lankans have a good character, later declared that he dislikes Sri Lankan women and foreigners in general:

They are not the group of foreigners that I like. Let's say I do not like blacks. . . . let's say we dress in the winter and wear shoes, they walk around with sandals, I do not like this. We should not be a country like the United States which hosts people. Let's say Canada hosts a lot of foreign people, they have their own customs but I do not think we are that country. . . . I mean we are a different country. In Canada they might see things differently but most of us, Cypriots, do not like them [foreigners] coming.

Such openly expressed intolerant attitudes towards Others tend to be few and rarely told with such frankness, though they clearly suggest the inability to comprehend the complexities of migration as a global phenomenon.⁴ More often, the attitudes expressed are more ambivalent, suggesting a sense of discomfort, doubt or uncertainty. When, for example in a focus group discussion, I asked children whose families do not employ domestic workers to tell me what they like or do not like about Filipino domestic workers, one of the first issues that came up in our discussion was colour. The children clearly distinguished 'us' from 'them' by juxtaposing 'their' black colour to 'our' white

colour. As one girl explained: 'we are not like them. When we see them we feel a bit uncomfortable. We are all Cypriots, our colour is white, they are black.'

Here, it is physical difference – skin colour – which is used as an assumption of discomfort in an encounter between Cypriots and Filipinos. Having a different skin colour becomes for these children a potential obstacle to intercultural communication. Skin colour as not simply a marker of difference but also an evaluative criterion suggests its significance in constructions of otherness. In other words, *people who have a different skin colour must necessarily be substantially different from 'us'*, hence, the assumed or expected discomfort that could result from an encounter. As Minos's statement earlier shows, through a process of othering the visibly different, the children proceed to construct these women as racially different and because they are seen as black as also culturally inferior. In this way, colour racism, camouflaged as discomfort, becomes the means and justification for marginalizing 'racial Others'.

Despite its significance, what is important in the context of Cyprus is that it is not colour by itself that gives rise to the particular form of racism we see. Rather, it is, as in the Greek context studied by Lazaridis and Koumandraki (2001: 283), a combination of perceived physical difference together with cultural difference as well as other key axes of difference such as class, gender and ethnicity (see also Lazaridis, 2000; Stiell and England, 1997). Racism and ethnocentrism in interaction with sexism and classism⁵ give rise to the particular form of emerging racism that we witness in Cyprus.

It is important to recognize that there is not so much a prevailing racist discourse that clearly marks black (or Asian) people as inferior but rather a set of emerging relationships that inform racist attitudes. These relationships are primarily work relationships between the local population and these Asian women who work in their homes. Racist and intolerant attitudes are produced to justify relationships of authority and exploitation, with colour being simply a convenient symbolic marker that is used to mark out those who belong from those outsiders who are economically dependent on Greek Cypriot employers. The contradiction and ambivalence that characterizes children's understandings stem from their contradictory relationship with these women: as children of these women's bosses and as children cared for by these women who, they often see them as their substitute mothers.

Ambivalent relations: between the distant and the intimate

Interestingly enough, many of the children whose families employed domestic workers described their relationships with them as 'good' or 'very good'. Some of these children, in fact, described the relationship as extremely important. Niki (12), for example, was very clear about her feelings towards her family's Sri Lankan domestic worker: 'I love her and she loves me.'

However, the way the children perceive the character and behaviour of the domestic worker is key to how they understand the relationship. Chrysostomos (11), for instance, likes his family's Sri Lankan domestic worker because she is good-hearted and does what he asks her to do, while Kyriakos (12) appreciates the fact that his family's domestic worker is always polite and never moody, always smiling. As I have shown earlier, being obedient and appearing to be happy are preconditions for some children to like their domestic worker. In a similar vein, for some of the children, their relationship with the domestic worker depends to a large extent on how they evaluate her character in relation to her work performance. Efi (11), for example, likes her Sri Lankan domestic worker because 'She always cleans. When she does not have anything else to do, she calls my mom on the phone to ask her "what else do I have to do?"' A domestic worker, in the minds of some of the children, cannot be anything else but a domestic worker. She is fully identified with her occupation in a way that it makes it unimaginable for her to engage in anything but domestic work. The social role of the domestic worker is defined in terms of her ability to satisfy her employers by consistently presenting an ideal character. Her 'proper' behaviour and character, her happy personality, are necessary to build a 'proper' relationship between herself and her employers, who will then feel content about their decision to hire her. These children come to see their domestic workers from their own points of view as children of the employers (or as little employers themselves) and a number of them develop a sense of entitlement in relation to these women.

There were a number of children, of course, who disliked their domestic workers and openly disclosed their feelings. For instance, one of the boys disliked the fact that their domestic worker nags all the time, while two other children complained that their domestic worker interferes with their studying. More specifically, one of the girls in a focus group discussion explained that she dislikes the fact that her family's domestic worker goes and sits next to her and reads books while she is studying. By implication, the domestic worker's life must begin and end with domestic work. Having leisure time, relaxing and reading, or enjoying oneself in any form, is a challenge to the established order of things. What is assumed to be a right for a family member becomes a transgression for the domestic worker that challenges the social expectations of her employers.

James et al. (1998: 53–5) outline the need to look at the domestic space of the home as regulated space that 'is constituted for the child through relations of power and control'. The space of the home is indeed highly regulated and controlled by adult (parental) authority. Both the children and the domestic workers are dependent, though in different ways, on the parents/bosses, the former as family members, the latter as a result of the work relationship and its inherent power differential (see Lazaridis, 2000: 70). However, for many of the Greek Cypriot children whose families employ domestic workers and whose parents are absent from the home in the afternoons, the home is also

a space for acting out their newly found power over their domestic workers. Unlike the school, the home is a much more autonomous sphere of activity for these children. As Mayall (2002: 28) argues, children and adults are in an ongoing negotiation of space, time and status that gives shape to their relationships and ultimately constitutes and reconstitutes the boundaries between them. Put another way, as relations between children and adults change, so do their respective powers and what it means to be an adult or a child (Alanen, 2003: 41). This is not to say that the distinction between childhood and adulthood is becoming so blurred that childhood is no longer a conceptually valid distinction from adulthood (see Postman, 1983); rather the instability characteristic of modern adulthood and the erosion of adult authority over children (see Lee, 2001: 19) coupled with the reconstitution of the Greek Cypriot family has allowed children to experiment with a newly found form of power – traditionally in the adult domain – and to increase their social age as a result of their increased responsibilities and encounters with domestic workers in their homes (see James et al., 1998: 175).⁶ By increasing their social age, children are also challenging their presumed lack of competence and maturity, which is a key defining characteristic of their status as children.

Through their emerging relationships with their domestic workers, children renegotiate the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. Their superior status in relation to these women in the home, as defined by their familial association with the employer/parents, renders them more powerful and challenges the assumed powerlessness inherent in the condition of childhood. In this way, a particular kind of childhood is constituted that blurs the boundaries of separateness from adulthood by borrowing from the power of social privilege (as expressed through the children's membership in the family) to redefine itself in a social field where race, class and gender (rather than simply age) intersect to define power differences between the children and their domestic workers. As a result, children partake in the reproduction of privilege and dominance in Greek Cypriot society as well as the production of new generational relationships.

Consider, for instance, how one boy responded when asked to elaborate about his positive evaluation of Sri Lankan domestic workers: he said he likes them because they say 'Yes, Madam' when their female employers ask them to do something. Or consider how another boy explained his frustration when he once found out (because he was sick and had to stay at home) that the domestic worker was not as hardworking as she should be and that she often was on her mobile phone or lied down to rest.

By challenging the assumed fixity of age through their emerging relationships with their domestic workers, these children construct identities for themselves that are shifting and malleable across social space with more, or less, power depending on their social encounters with various others. The changing configurations of the family, with women entering the workforce and children finding themselves having more control over the domestic sphere, result in the

reconstitution of the home as a social space (see Solberg, 1990). The fact that it is mostly boys who exercise their power over these women is also significant in the sense that it highlights the role of gender in the process of racialization (i.e. of male power over females) and reverses the power inequality often inherent in age (i.e. children can exercise more power over adult domestic workers than the other way around). This role reversal focuses our attention on how children come to negotiate their relations and identities as they move through social space characterized by different constraints and possibilities.

In fact, as the children point out, their relationships with their domestic workers are often characterized by negotiation, which reflects to a great extent a recognition from both parties that no one has absolute power over the other (see Gill, 1994: 71, 143). Thus, for instance, the relationship between a child and a domestic worker might occasionally take the form of an alliance. Both the child and the domestic worker are in different ways subordinate in relation to the parents/employers. The dynamics of such alliances are interesting for they suggest the existence of common interests that cross-cut ethnic/cultural lines and age and centre on the shared powerlessness. Consider the following exchange between the interviewer and one of the boys in a focus group discussion:

Spyros (interviewer): Tell us about your domestic worker.

Dinos: When my mother brings a woman I cooperate with her [i.e. the domestic worker] so she will cover [for] me. Let's say, if I do not eat my lunch, I am not allowed to eat potato chips. I eat chips, however, and she covers for me. And I cover for her too.

Spyros: How do you cover for her?

Dinos: When she eats something too.

Spyros: So, you share secrets with each other.

Dinos: Yes, so that my mom does not beat me up.

Spyros: So, the domestic worker hides the chips so your mom can't find them?

Dinos: No sir, listen! We have a cupboard with chips for the guests in the kitchen. She [his mom] tells me that if I do not eat my food, I cannot eat chips. I eat chips and if it happens that the Filipino sees me, she does not tell her [his mom]. Occasionally, when she feels like it she tells my mom, and my mom takes the chips and hides them.

In a sense, power is constantly played out, negotiated and renegotiated, with the children, the parents and the domestic workers playing their respective roles but also occasionally transgressing, by choice or by being forced to, into another field of power, more or less enabling. Chan (2005: 521) has suggested that children whose families employ domestic workers are less likely to view their domestics in racial and class terms and that similarly the latter tend to see the children simply as children and not as employers. On the contrary, the research findings suggest that in the context of Cyprus both children and domestic workers seem to be well aware of where each comes from and what that implies for the power one holds and for its limitations.

Discussion

Alanen (2003: 35) has argued for the need of ‘generationing’ the sociology of childhood. Generationing constitutes, reproduces and transforms childhood and adulthood through a relational process between children and adults that is characterized by negotiation as each group positions and repositions itself in relation to the other in the practice of everyday life (Christensen and Prout, 1997: 135–6; Mayall, 2002: 40). Again, as Alanen (2003: 27–8) has observed, there has been a transformation of the generational orders of nation-states as a result of modernization. As two distinct generations, Greek Cypriot children and their parents negotiate their particular social positions in light of the new phenomenon of migrant domestic help in their homes. The children, unlike their parents, are growing up as the first generation of children with domestic workers in their homes. The home, which was traditionally a private domain of activity, is partly redefined as a workplace with the presence of a domestic worker in the midst of the family (Stiell and England, 1997: 341). These changes shape children’s particular understanding of Self and Other as they come to develop a generational consciousness that characterizes their outlook towards the world, and especially towards their parents and their domestic workers. The home, as I have shown, is a place invested with specific meanings and power dynamics that can help us understand the children’s emerging generational consciousness (see Christensen and Prout, 1997: 152). Similarly, for the rest of the children whose families do not employ domestic workers, the larger Greek Cypriot society is likewise invested with meanings that help us understand how notions of Self and Other are constructed not necessarily as a result of direct contact but rather in the battleground of discursive wars. Thus, for instance, it is interesting to see that the quantitative survey revealed that 46 percent and 39 percent of children respectively thought that Sri Lankan and Filipino domestic workers were dirty though only about 9 percent of the entire sample had any direct experience with either group of women in their homes.

As Ausdale and Feagin (2001) have shown, children are involved in the process of racialization, that is, the means by which Others are rendered racial subjects, in their everyday lives. In their encounters with Sri Lankan and Filipino women, Greek Cypriot children learn how to position themselves in relation to them and in ways that allow them to assert their identities as Greek Cypriot children. Racist ideologies can, and often do, find fertile ground in children’s everyday worlds and provide them with appropriate frameworks for interpreting their experiences. The children whose families employ domestic workers also negotiate their own status as children in the home, crossing the boundaries of childhood and entering into adulthood; their power and status is reconstituted in relation to their domestic workers as age, ethnicity, race and gender come together to give shape to their social relationships with these women.

The children develop their sense of Self by juxtaposing themselves to foreign women whom they construct as radically different from themselves. These women are clearly set apart through a process of separation and exclusion, and have projected on to them the negative qualities that allow the Self to emerge as superior. At the same time, domestic workers are an integral part of the process of constructing a meaningful identity for the Self, precisely because of their (paradoxical) proximity to the Self by being present in the home (see Castro, 2004: 476, 486). The children's status becomes reconstituted as their identities are acted out in relation to these women. In the process, particular understandings of Self and Other emerge that suggest both cultural distancing and closeness. Thus, while all the children (with the exception of one boy) who participated in the qualitative study said that they would be sad if their domestic worker had to leave to go back to her country, many of them at the same time (as shown in this article) expressed opinions and attitudes that suggest a sense of superiority and power over these women.

In their daily lives, children access diverse voices, which are socially inscribed with meaning and which they have to orchestrate in order to author their own identities as they move through their everyday lives (Bakhtin, 1981). This process is, of course, full of tensions and contradictions, and the understandings they construct reflect that. At a fundamental level, there is a contradiction between notions of human rights, justice, equality and even love, on the one hand, and racism, prejudice, inequality, hate and exploitation, on the other. The children say that they like their domestic workers and that they have a good character. At the same time, however, children objectify them by constructing domestics as compliant, submissive and passive. In this ambiguous space, where the familiar and the strange, the Self and the Other encounter one another, children orchestrate the various voices they encounter and craft their own responses to the world, even if such responses are far from clear and consistent.

Notes

1. See also Philippou (2005) for a discussion of Greek Cypriot children's constructions of national and European identities, where she shows that children clearly express positive attitudes towards Europe (even if for purely instrumental rather than affective reasons).
2. As is the case of the working-class Palermitans studied by Cole (1997: 72), Greek Cypriots adopt the West vs non-West distinction to classify themselves as higher up in relation to these immigrants on the scale of racial classification and to distance themselves from what they see as the inferior Third World (see also Askouni, 1997: 307; Mandel, 1994).
3. The number following the name signifies the age of the child.
4. The results of the quantitative survey, however, showed that in fact a large number of children saw foreigners as unwelcome in Cyprus. For instance, the overwhelming majority of children stated that either 'some' (46 percent) or 'all' (39 percent) of foreigners should go back to their countries. Only 10 percent of the children stated that no foreigners should go back to their countries. In line with another finding of the survey, where 77 percent of children thought that there were too many foreigners living in Cyprus, the high percentage of children who think

that at least some or all foreigners should go back to their countries suggests a clear sense of intolerance towards foreigners or, at least, to large numbers of them.

5. As Dragona (1997: 99) reminds us, it is not the characteristics of the group itself but its low social position that give rise to its stigmatization and stereotyping.

6. Solberg (1990) has shown that children in Norway exercise a great deal of agency when they find themselves at home alone as a result of their parents' working. The increased responsibility that goes with being left at home alone ends up reconstituting their social status, making them socially older than their biological age.

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