



# THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON POLITICAL OPTIONS TO PROTECT WINNIPEG'S FEMALE GARMENTS WORKERS AGAINST THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

The principal objective of this paper is to identify the relationship between the results of the Canadian policies implemented to protect female workers against the impact of globalization on the garment industry and the institutional setting in which this labour market is immersed in Winnipeg.

This research paper begins with a brief summary of the institutional theory approach that sheds light on the analysis of the effects of institutions on the policy options to protect female workers of the Winnipeg garment industry. Next, this paper identifies the set of beliefs, formal procedures, routines, norms and conventions that characterize the institutional environment of the female workers of Winnipeg's garment industry. Subsequently, this paper descri-

bes the impact of free trade policies on the garment industry of Winnipeg. Afterward, this paper presents an analysis of the barriers that the institutional features of the garment sector in Winnipeg can set to the successful achievement of policy options addressed to protect the female workforce of this sector. Three policy options are considered: ethical purchasing; training/retraining programs and social engagement support for garment workers; and protection of migrated workers through promoting and facilitating bonds between Canada's trade unions and trade unions of the labour sending countries. Finally, this paper concludes that the formation of isolated cultural groups inside of factories; the belief that there is gender and race discrimination on the part of the garment industry management against workers;

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the powerless social conditions of immigrant women; the economic rationality of garment factories' managers; and the lack of political will on the part of Canada and the labour sending countries to set effective bilateral agreements to protect migrate workers, are the principal barriers that divide the actors involved in the garment industry in Winnipeg. This division among the principal actors of Winnipeg's garment industry impedes the change toward more efficient institutions and, hence, the successful achievement of policy options addressed to protect women workers.

## 1. Institutional Theoretical Approach

### Principal Approaches to Institutions

According to Hall & Taylor,<sup>2</sup> in political science what is considered the new institutionalism comprises at least three thought lines: (1) historical institutionalism, (2) rational choice institutionalism, (3) sociological institutionalism.

Historical Institutionalism defines institutions

as the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy. They can range from the rules of a constitu-

tional order or the standard operating procedures of a bureaucracy to the conventions governing trade unions behavior or bank-firm relations. In general, historical institutionalists associate institutions with organizations and the rules or conventions promulgated by formal organizations.<sup>3</sup>

This line of thought argues that actors' behavior, institutions' function, and institutions' persistence, can be explained by two approaches. (1) The calculus approach, which assumes that individuals maximize utility according to a set of objectives that are the result of actors' preferences. Actors' objectives and preferences are exogenous to the institutional analysis. Besides, the function of institutions is to affect the behavior of the actors by giving them information and, hence, certainty about the behavior of other actors, which alters their own actions. Thus, institutions persist because actors will be worst off by changing their prototype of behavior. It is a kind of Nash Equilibrium. (2) The cultural approach, which emphasizes that actor's behavior is not only strategic but also depends on individuals' worldview. Here, actors are satisficers, rather than utility maximizers, who choose their options not only using instrumental calculation but also using their worldview. The cultural approach

<sup>2</sup> Hall, P. & Taylor, R. (1996). *Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms*. MPIFG Scientific Advisory Board Board's Meeting

<sup>3</sup> Hall, P. & Taylor, R. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.





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remarks that the function of institutions is “provide moral or cognitive templates for interpretation and actions”.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, according to this approach, institutions persist because of their conventionalism and collective constructions take them out of inspection. Institutions are unlikely to be transformed by individual actions. In fact, historical institutionalists are eclectic; they use the calculus approach and the cultural approaches to analyze the relationship between institutions and actions.

Rational choice institutionalism assumes that actors have a fix bundle of preferences that satisfy the transitivity principle. Actors’ behavior is totally instrumental and strategically calculated in order to maximize utility. Actors’ behavior is strongly affected by the expectations they have about others’ behavior. The primary function of institutions is providing information and enforcement mechanisms that reduce actors’ uncertainty and allow better social outcomes. The rational choice institutionalism explains “the existence of the institution by reference to the value those functions have for the actors affected by the institution. This formulation assumes that the actors create the institution in order to realize this value”.<sup>5</sup> Thus, institutions are a result of collective agreements.

Institutions persist because they provide more benefits to the involved individuals than alternative institutions forms. In this institutionalism line of thought is considered North’s (1997) argument about the need of institutions formation to reduce transaction costs by developing certainty. Transaction costs are increasing in a global world because larger markets imply larger costs of measuring the diverse valuable dimensions of goods and services exchanged, and because of the need for systems that enforce agreements among market actors.

Sociological Institutionalism argues that institutions are not the result of rationality; rather they are the result of culturally specific practices invented by many societies. These culturally specific practices are incorporated into organizations due to processes related to cultural diffusion. Sociological institutionalists “tend to define institutions much more broadly than political scientists do, to include, not just formal rules, procedures or norms, but symbol systems, cognitive scripts, and moral templates that provides the frames of meaning guiding human action”.<sup>6</sup> Institutions not only affect the rational preferences of individuals but also their irrational choices and very identity. Thus, sociological institutionalism conceives

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<sup>4</sup> Hall, P. & Taylor, R. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Hall, P. & Taylor, R. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Hall, P. & Taylor, R. *Ibid.*, p. 14.





individuals and organizations looking for the best social ways to define and express their identity. This intuitionism stresses that new institutional practices are adopted because “it enhances the social legitimacy of the organizations or its participants. In other words, organizations embrace specific institutional forms or practices because the latter are widely valued within a broader cultural environment”.<sup>7</sup>

Cultural diversity and economic self interest are institutional characteristics of the garment industry’s workers and owners in Winnipeg, respectively. These characteristics are described below and make the historical and the rational choice institutionalisms the most appropriate approaches to analyze the influence of institutional environment of garment workers of Winnipeg on the performance of policies addressed to protect them against the impact of free trade policies. This combination of institutional approaches to explain garment industry actors’ behavior is functional and necessary given that Winnipeg’s garment industry workers and managers come from different societies which define a particular set of values, interest and views for the actors affected by these societies.

Thus, the definition of institutions given by the historical institutionalism provides the concepts through which the institutional environment of the garment industry’s actors is identified. Hence, formal and informal rules, routines, norms, conventions and beliefs set by the garments firms and Canadian government are institutional processes analyzed in this paper. Additionally, the calculus and the cultural approaches of historical institutionalism and the rational choice institutionalism provide characterization of the institutional actors’ behavior, which is fundamental to understand the reactions of people involved in the garment industry to policies implemented to protect female workers. Also, the last institutional approaches give different reasons for the persistence of institutions, which are useful to explain why the institutional environment of the garment sector in Winnipeg would persist, even though policies intend to change it.

## 1.2 Organizations, Institutions and Change

North<sup>8</sup> points out the fundamental need of distinguishing organizations and institutions in order to understand the dynamics of economic change pursued

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<sup>7</sup> Hall, P. & Taylor, R. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> North, D., “*The new institutional Economics and development*”, in Harris, Hunter and Lewis (eds.), *The new institutional economics and third world development economics*. London, Rutledge, 1997. Online version retrieved on March 28, 2007 from <http://www.econ.iastate.edu/tesfatsi/NewInstE.North.pdf>





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by development policy. North defines institutions as the “rules of the game of a society or more formally are humanly –devised constraints that structure human interaction”.<sup>9</sup> Besides, institutions are composed by formal rules, informal constraints and the enforcement characteristics of both. Thus, North’s institutional components coincide with those pointed out for the historical institutionalism definition of institutions. On the other hand, North defines organizations as “the players: groups of individuals bound by a common purpose to achieve objectives: they include political bodies (political parties, the senate, a city council, a regulatory agency); economic bodies (firms, trade unions, family farms, cooperatives); social bodies (churches, clubs, athletic associations); and educational bodies (school, colleges, vocational training centers”.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, North explains institutional change as a process in which interact organizations and institutions. Competition is fundamental factor that unleashes this interaction and encourages the need of change. Institutional change is a result of economic change, which is a consequence of the new choices that organizations and individuals do. The origin of new choices comes from perceptions that individuals

and organization acquire through possible exogenous sources to the economy such as increasing competition brought for globalization. However, the fundamental source of change is learning by entrepreneurs of organizations in order to compete and survive. The rate of learning defines the economic change rate. Change is usually increasing and reflects the perceptions of entrepreneurs of organizations in the context of an institutional matrix. This institutional matrix is particularly identified by “network externalities, complementarities and economies of scope among existing organizations”.<sup>11</sup> Besides, organizations exist because of the institutional matrix. This makes organizations resistant to actions that threaten the perpetuation of that institutional structure.

Based on North’s definition of institutions and organizations and their role in the process of institutional change, in this paper garment firms of Winnipeg; provincial and federal government bodies; and civil groups such as trade unions and ONG are identified with organizations. Likewise formal rules, beliefs, norms and informal rules immersed in the processes that affect female garment workers in Winnipeg are identified with institutions. Additionally, North’s explanation of the process of ins-

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<sup>9</sup> North, *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>10</sup> North, *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>11</sup> North, *idem.*





titutional change shed light not only on the analysis of the need and motivation of changing the institutional environment of garment sector industry but also on the possible reactions of organizations (garment firms) to policies addressed to change the institutional factors that affect female workers.

On the other hand, Oliver<sup>12</sup> provides a typology of strategic reactions of organizations when facing institutional processes demands. These reactions have different levels of organizational resistance that change from passive conformity to proactive manipulation. The feasible responses of organizations to institutional processes are: (1) acquiescence, which means that organizations would accede to institutional pressures by different forms such as habit, imitation and compliance. Habit is an unaware adherence to rules or values. Imitation “refers to either conscious or unconscious mimicry of Institutional models”<sup>13</sup> including acceptance of advice from experts. Compliance is “a conscious obedience of values norms and institutional requirements”.<sup>14</sup> (2) Compromise,

which refers to partial acquiescence of the institutional demands as a result of a possible disagreement “with conflicting institutional demands or with inconsistencies between institutional expectations and international organizational objectives related to efficiency or autonomy”.<sup>15</sup> Compromise can be exercised by tactics such as balancing, pacifying and bargaining. (3) Avoidance, which is an “organizational attempt to preclude the necessity of conformity; organizations achieve this by concealing their nonconformity, buffering themselves from institutional pressures, or escaping from institutional rules or expectations”.<sup>16</sup> (4) Defiance, which “is a more active form of resistance to institutional processes”.<sup>17</sup> Defiance can be exercised by dismissal of institutional values or rules; challenging institutional pressures by going “on the offensive in defiance of these pressures”;<sup>18</sup> and attack, which is a more aggressive and intense form of defiance than dismissal and challenge. (5) Manipulation, which is the most active type of organizational response to institutional pressures. Manipulation is a “purposeful

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<sup>12</sup> Oliver, C., “*Strategic Responses to Institutional processes*”, in *Academy of Management Review*, vol.16, 1991, pp.145-179.

<sup>13</sup> Oliver, C., *Ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>14</sup> Oliver, C., *Ibid.*, p.125.

<sup>15</sup> Oliver, C., *Ibid.*, p.153.

<sup>16</sup> Oliver, C., *Ibid.*, p.154.

<sup>17</sup> Oliver, C., *Ibid.*, p.156.

<sup>18</sup> Oliver, C., *Ibid.*, p.125.





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and opportunistic attempt to go co-opt, influence, or control institutional pressures and evaluations”.<sup>19</sup>

Oliver’s typology is very template for analyzing the responses of the actors of the Winnipeg garment industry to external demands and expectations generated by policies addressed to protect the female workers of this industry. In order to apply this typology of responses, institutional features and processes are associated with organizations and the rules or conventions promulgated by formal organizations. Thus, using the historical institutionalism’s definition of institutions, in this paper organizations are identified with the garment sector and its actors, and the government. Institutional processes are related to those formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in or promoted by the identified organizations.

## 2. Institutional Environment of Female Workers of the Garment Industry of Winnipeg

Analyzing the garment sector’s characteristics pointed out above, it is possible to identify several elements that indicate the institutional setting of female garment workers in Winnipeg.

### 2.1 Perception about Finger Dexterity and Docility as Natural Features of Asian Female Workers

It is pointed out that the garment industry in Winnipeg prefers to hire female immigrant workers, especially East or South Asian immigrants. This phenomenon is due to the belief they are more docile and willing to accept low wages. They also believe that Asian women have especial digital dexterity that give them advantages to perform operations required in constructing garments. Additionally, it is difficult to hire aboriginal or local workers because the garment duties are considered monotonous and poorly paid (Stephens, 2005). Even though the Asian female workers are seen to have these particular characteristics that benefit the industry, they do not appear to receive any incentives or bonuses from their employers. On the contrary, it has been pointed out that, in cities, such as Toronto the garment employers have hired home-workers and paid them according to their immigration status.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, in general, garment industry’s female workers (who are majority Asian) have indicated that they face over bureaucratic, rigid and racist treatment from the management staff. However, it seems that Asian women are willing to stay and to work with the garment sector.

<sup>19</sup> Oliver, C., *Ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>20</sup> Yanz, L., Jeffcott, B., Ladd, D., & Atlin J., “Policy options to improve Standards for Women Garment Workers in Canada and Internationally”, in *Ottawa: Status of Women in Canada* [online], 1999. Retrieved January 2, 2007 from [http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/pubspr/0662273834/199901\\_0662273834\\_1\\_e.html](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/pubspr/0662273834/199901_0662273834_1_e.html)



In order to understand why Asian women workers of the garment sector are eager to stay in an industry that has been pointed out as exploiter and abusive and why the industry continues willing to hire them, it is important to find out what is behind the perception of docility and finger dexterity of Asian women.

Elson & Pearson,<sup>21</sup> stresses that behind the docility of women workers of the world export manufacturing zones there is subordination of women as gender, which is a general feature of societies where male dominance is part of the culture. Males have roles socially given such as husband, parents or boss. Thus, women have to exercise self repression in order to appear docile and subservience. Self repression is proved when women behaviors change in presence and absence of male authority figures.

In the case of female workers of the garment industry in Winnipeg, the gender subordination feature inherited from societies with male dominance may be worst off as a result of their east and south Asian immigrant condition. It has been

emphasized as a general phenomenon in Canada that, even though there are several community organizations that support south Asian Women, they still live in a condition of gender subordination, oppression and disempowerment.<sup>22</sup> This situation is caused not only by the patriarchal relations of ruling the family but also by society, race, gender and class discrimination.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, employment trends show that Canadian-born women have a higher employment rate compared with recent immigrant women. In most of the cases female migrate motivated by the increasing levels of global poverty and by the women's aspiration to improve their own and their offspring lives. Often, they migrate outside of legal channels. This situation not only decreases immigrant women's possibilities for employment but also makes immigrant females susceptible to exploitation and abuse. Female Asian migrants are especially likely to be economic migrants. The labour exporting Asian countries include Bangladesh, Philippines, Indonesia, Nepal, China, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and India.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Elson, D. & Pearson R., "Nimble fingers make cheap Workers: an analysis of women's employment in third world export manufacturing", *Feminist Review*, No. 7 (Spring, 1981), pp. 87-107.

<sup>22</sup> Mossman (2006) points out that female garment workers are the primary responsible for the homework which is due to the belief on the part of both female workers and their partners that housework is a female responsibility.

<sup>23</sup> Ralston, H., "South Asian immigrant women organize for social change in the diaspora: A Comparative Study", *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, Vol. 7 (4), 1998, pp. 453-482.

<sup>24</sup> Wikramasekera, P. "Asian labor migration: challenges in an era of the Globalization", *International Migration Programme* [online], ILO, Geneva, Migration Papers, 57. 2002. Retrieved January 2, 2007 from: <http://www-ilo-mirror.cornell.edu/public/english/protection/migrant/download/imp/imp57e.pdf>







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Additionally, Elson & Pearce<sup>25</sup> indicates that the perceived the manual nimbleness of oriental women is not a natural and biological feature. This characteristic of Asian women is the result of the training in constructing garments that they acquire since their childhood from their mothers and other female family members in constructing garments. In Asian societies, constructing garment is a duty considered socially appropriated for women given their domestic responsibilities.

Hence, the digital dexterity of Asian female workers is a skill acquired by training, which is not recognized by the garment industry. This training is complemented with labour experience. In most of the Asian labour sending countries the garment industry has been promoted in order to increase manufactured exports. Women are employed massively in manufacturing export zones in these countries. Besides, because of globalization and related competitive global markets, garment producers, in these countries, face increasing competition to supply products at very low prices. Producers try to decrease prices by lowering workers wages and increasing workers labour time (Oxfam, 2004). These situation

makes garment female workers willing to immigrate to developed nations such as Canada in order to improve labour conditions. In fact, Asia has been identified as “the largest source of immigrants to Canada, providing about as many new settlers as the rest of the world combined”.<sup>26</sup> In summary, most of the female garment workers that immigrant to Winnipeg has been already trained in garment duties which is complemented with job experience. This explains their perceived digital dexterity.

Thus, many women who migrate from Asian nations have training, experience and skills to perform the garment industry duties such as sewing machine operation, which is the principal job given to females in the industry. For the garment industry it is convenient to persist in recognizing Asian female workers digital dexterity as a natural and racial feature instead of a skill given by training. Recognizing female Asian workers as a trained and, hence, skilled labour may increases their wages. Hence, female Asian workers training, job experience, social gender subordination and immigrant conditions make these women a productive and cheap labour willing to perform the above indicated monotonous garment

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<sup>25</sup> Elson, D. & Pearson R, *idem*.

<sup>26</sup> It is important to take into account that even though Asian countries are indicated as the largest provider of immigrants to Canada they are not the major providers of labour. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2007), the larger labour sending countries to Canada are Mexico and the U.S. DeVoretz, D., Skeldon, R., & Greemberg, H. “Asian Migration to Canada: best people or boat people” [online], 2002. Retrieved February 7, 2007 from [http://www.asiapacificresearch.ca/past\\_summits/aps Summit2000/III\\_ses.cfm](http://www.asiapacificresearch.ca/past_summits/aps Summit2000/III_ses.cfm).





duties. These are the real reason why Asian immigrant women workers are preferred by the garment industry. Additionally, another reason why there is massive immigrant female workforce in the garment sector is that they find that however the Canadian garment industry is considered a low-paid sector as it is in their original countries, wages regularity and work schedules are better in Canada compared with those in their nations. Also, the welfare system that Canada offers to immigrant and citizens represents a large value that developing countries such as Asian countries do not have.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.2 Garment Firms' Economic Rationality: Low Wages as Effective Way to Increase Productivity

Several factors indicate that garment entrepreneurs have institutionalized the idea that low wages is a good way to increase productivity.

Evaluation of garment industry competitiveness for different countries has

indicated that to face competition and increase productivity without lowering wages in the garment industry is possible through improving managerial and technical training, adding value to the product and by getting access to more diverse markets.<sup>28</sup> These options can be implemented in the garment industry of Winnipeg. In fact, in 2006 it was reported a significant contribution of the garment industry to the Manitoba's exports. This contribution was due to companies such as Western Glove and Pace Apparel. Even though these companies increased offshore manufacturing to countries with cheaper labour, they were able to increase productivity in their Winnipeg plants. Western Glove found a new niche market in countries such as Japan, the U.S. and Pace Apparel found a way to differentiate itself in the highly competitive sporting apparel market by striking a deal to put Hockey Canada's name on its products.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, in general Winnipeg garment industry insists in increasing productivity

<sup>27</sup> Khatun, A., "Workers views on changes in the Winnipeg garment industry: in-depth interviews with ten immigrant garment workers", in Wiest, R. (ed.), *The Winnipeg garment industry: industry development and employment* [online], 2005, pp.67-101. Retrieved October 10, 2005 from the website <http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca>

<sup>28</sup> Nathan Associates Inc and its partner organizations, *Measuring competitiveness and labour productivity in Cambodia's garment industry. USAI* [online], 2005. Retrieved March 27, 2007 from [http://www.usaid.gov/kh/democracy\\_and\\_governance/documents/703\\_Cambodia\\_Garment\\_Sector\\_Main\\_Report\\_Nathan.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/kh/democracy_and_governance/documents/703_Cambodia_Garment_Sector_Main_Report_Nathan.pdf); Siddigi, D. *Beyond the doomsday scenario*. HITMAL Report [online], 2003. Retrieved March 27, 2007 from [http://www.himalmag.com/2003/july/report\\_2.htm](http://www.himalmag.com/2003/july/report_2.htm)

<sup>29</sup> "Clothing shipments jump 24.5%" [online], in *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 15, 2006. Retrieved February 25, 2007 from <http://www.gov.mb.ca/trade/pastnews.html>





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taking advantages of cheaper labour in developing countries instead of increasing manufacturing efficiency.<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, there are reasons to believe that the industry would benefit from offering higher wages not only because it could increase the workers commitment to the companies but also because it would avoid loss of experienced workers. (1) It has been identified that for a female garment immigrant workers the opportunity cost of working in the garment sector is larger than the wage if they qualify for Employment Insurance (EI).<sup>31</sup> Thus, after working for enough time to classify for EI, applying for it would be a rational choice for women. (2) Given that the garment industry in Manitoba has been pointed out as unstable due to the impact of globalization and liberalization policies on the sector, for immigrant women it might be worthy to leave the garment sector and search for a job in another sector that is not likely threatened to disappear, does

not need especial skills, and pays the same low wage such as Food & Restaurant.<sup>32</sup>

(3) Wiest<sup>33</sup> points out the example of the very successful vertically integrated firm American Apparel, which is recognized for offering its workers basic benefits and higher wages due to the company belief that a “positive working environment is a more productive one”.<sup>34</sup>

### 2.3 Formation of Isolated Garment Workers Groups and Workers’ Perception about Racial Discrimination

The lack of recreation activities that stimulate the workers interaction with workers from other nationalities and with the management staff foment two institutional attributes in the garment sector, which affect negatively its working environment. (1) The formation and consolidation of particular groups whose members have a common language. This feature harms the workers of the same company reducing

<sup>30</sup> Hayden, L., “Technology in the Winnipeg garment industry” [online], in Wiest, R. (ed.), *The Winnipeg Garment Industry: Industry Development and Employment*, 2005, pp. 29-40. Retrieved October 10, 2005 from <http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca>

<sup>31</sup> Khatun, I., Stephens, S. & Mossman, K., “Biases and beliefs: impacts of the perspectives on the garment industry” [online], in Wiest, R. (ed.), *The Winnipeg garment industry: industry Development and employment*, 2005, pp.104-117. Retrieved October 10, 2005 from web site <http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca>

<sup>32</sup> Just Income Coalition, “Paid to be Poor” [online], (2005). Retrieved February 1, 2007 from Winnipeg Labour Council web site: <http://www.winnipeglabourcouncil.ca/article.php?story=2005100917445924>

<sup>33</sup> Wiest R., & Mossman, K. “Introduction to the Winnipeg garment industry study”, in Wiest, R. ( ed.), *The Winnipeg garment industry: industry development and employment*. [online], 2005, pp.1-16. Retrieved October 10, 2005, from the web site: <http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca>

<sup>34</sup> Wiest, R., *Ibid.*, p. 157.





likelihood of solidarity and union. (2) The female workers perception that there is racism on part the management staff against immigrant workers.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.4 Formal Rules Contained in the Canadian System to Recruit Immigrant Labour

The formal rules related to recruitment process are the legal requirements to immigrate to Canada under different immigration statuses, which are defined by diverse programs such as the Provincial Nominee Immigration Program for Skilled Workers and the Provincial Nominee Immigration and Business.<sup>36</sup> The garment industry's workers are more likely to be classified under the first program given their labour and economic background. Parts of the formal rules are the requirements specify in the Provincial Nominee Program occupation list in order to apply for garment industry positions. Currently, this list indicates that applications to immigrate to Manitoba as garment workers require a pre-approved job offer. It was the same requirement in 2005.<sup>37</sup> However, the Provincial Nominee Program for skilled workers allows the immigration to Manitoba of skilled workers who do not have

a job offer but have family or community support or who classified under Strategic Recruitment Initiatives. Furthermore, it is probable that the Refugee Canadian Program has contributed to the formation of the immigrant female labour market for the garment industry.

It is important to mention that according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Asian countries do not appear as the larger provider of foreign workers to Canada except for Philippines whose workers come to Canada under the Live-in Caregiver Program. During the last 10 years the largest source of immigrant workers to Canada are The U.S. and Mexico.

On the other hand, Pettman points out that because of the garment industry in Winnipeg indicated labour shortages during the second half of the nineties, the Provincial and Federal governments agreed to promote the immigration of overseas garment workers to Manitoba and to recruit 200 immigrant workers in 1996. Additionally, through the Provincial Nominee Program, the garment industry recruited 191 workers during 1999-2004. Taken into account Pettman's recruitment data and the Citizenship and Immigration Canada's 2007 data (see table

<sup>35</sup> Khatun, I., *idem*.

<sup>36</sup> "Immigration and Multiculturalism" [online]. Retrieved, January 23, 2007 from the web site: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/labour/immigrate/index.html>

<sup>37</sup> Pettman, A., "Government Programs and the Garment Industry", 2005, in Wiest, R. (ed.), *The Winnipeg Garment Industry: Industry Development and Employment* [online], 2005, pp. 17-28. Retrieved October 10, 2005 from <http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca>





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1 in the appendix), immigrant garment workers represented 12% in 1996 and 2% during the period 1999-2004 of the total immigrant workers to Manitoba. Likewise, according to Wiest & Mossman, in 1996 it was "reported that apparel manufacturing was the second largest industry in Manitoba, with 115 companies employing 9000 workers, 87 percent of which were visible minority labourers".<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Stephens and Mossman found that "ninety-four percent of Winnipeg's garment workers are women and the majority of these workers are immigrants who have been involved in the industry for anywhere from a few years to decades".<sup>39</sup> Thus, the fact that during the last 10 years Asia has not been the major sending of labour registered in the Federal and Provincial Programs; and the low percentage of the total immigrant workers that came to the Winnipeg garment industry during 1996-2004 compared with the large number of women workers in the garment sector in Winnipeg, indicate that most of the female workforce of the industry was

hired before this period or that they came to Canada under a status different than skilled workers.<sup>40</sup> If the later hypothesis is true, it means that most of the immigrant Asian women engaged in the garment sector during the last decade did not have a job offer before coming into Canada. Then, most of the immigrant female workers of the garment industry in Winnipeg were part of an unemployed army willing to be engaged in any activity to survive. Thus, the characteristics of this immigrant labour army made easier for the garment industry to hire productive and cheap labour. This situation shows not only that there are immigrant workers that come to Canada outside of the formal rules set by the government labour immigration programs but also that this workers become vulnerable to exploitation.

### 2.5 Formal Rules to Reduce Sweatshop Practices

Even though for several years there have been civil and non-profit organizations that

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<sup>38</sup> Jonasson updated the last data reporting that the Manitoban garment industry was employing 6000 people. Jonasson, E., "Reflections on the garment industry in Winnipeg: alternative visions, fashion, and opportunities from small business", in Wiest, R. (ed.), *The Winnipeg garment industry: industry development and employment* [online], 2005, pp. 119-131. Retrieved October 10, 2005 from <http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca.>, p. 119.

<sup>39</sup> Stephens, S. & Mossman, K. "Biases and beliefs: impacts of the perspectives on the garment industry", in Wiest, R. (ed.), *The Winnipeg garment industry: industry Development and employment*. [online], 2005, pp. 104-117. Retrieved October 10, 2005 from web site <http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca.>, p. 106.

<sup>40</sup> Some evidence to prove this phenomenon is that, of ten female garment workers interviewed in depth by Khatun (2005) during the period 2003-2005, eight came to Canada under refugee status. Additionally, Mossman (2006) interviewed in depth twenty three immigrant workers of which just eight came to Canada with a pre-approved job offer and the other fifteen came under status different than skilled workers or refugee.





have pressed, not only governments but also society, to adopt ethical policies and a code of conduct against sweatshops, it has been difficult to obtain Provincial or Federal Governments legislation or policies that enforce the wishes of these anti-sweatshop campaigns.<sup>41</sup> However, in Manitoba there have been some attempts to set formal rules in order to combat sweatshop practices: (1) by 1990 it was a system that demanded garment employers ask for a permission to hire home-workers. The system was canceled because the employers did not use this permit system given the low percentage of home-workers hired in Manitoba.<sup>42</sup> (2) In August, 2006 it was announced that Manitoba was about to adopt Canada's first no sweatshop policy after five years of lobbying on the issue by civil society and non-profit organizations such as the Manitoban Federation of Labour. The policy was expected to contain strict requirements for providers to disclose the names and locations of the factories. Thus, the trader is obligated to ensure that the factories fulfill the ethical labour codes and laws according to International Labour Organization (ILO)

in order to make business with the provincial government. In fact, the provincial government spends around \$1.6 million per year on clothing made in Manitoba which may be a significant sale for the garment industry. Thus, it is expected that in order to keep the government as its customer the garment industry fulfills the anti-sweatshop policy demands.<sup>43</sup> Hence, according to the results of the future effective implementation of the no sweatshop policy in Manitoba, it would become a formal rule in favor of this labour market.

## 2.6 Perception that Female Retraining in High Tech Operations is Ineffective

The general belief that the garments duties do not need skills acquired by training since these skills are natural female qualities is another institutional feature of the garment sector that affects women workers of this industry. This belief is directly related to the affirmation above pointed out that Asian women have natural nimble fingers. Also, it is suggested that the introduction of computerized tech-

<sup>41</sup> Maquila Solidarity Network, No Sweat Campaign [online], 2005. Retrieved on February 14, 2007 from [http://www.maquilasolidarity.org/nosweat/news/nosweat\\_update\\_mar05.htm](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org/nosweat/news/nosweat_update_mar05.htm); DeGroot, J., *Making Manitoba Sweat-Free* [online], 2006. Retrieved February 14, 2007, from Canadian Dimension: <http://canadiandimension.com/articles/2006/08/11/609/>

<sup>42</sup> Yanz, L., Jeffcott, B., Ladd, D., & Atlin J. "Policy options to improve Standards for Women Garment Workers in Canada and Internationally", in *Ottawa: Status of Women Canada* [online], 1999. Retrieved January 2, 2007 from [http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/pubsp/0662273834/199901\\_0662273834\\_1\\_e.html](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/pubsp/0662273834/199901_0662273834_1_e.html)

<sup>43</sup> National Union of Public and Federal Employees, *Manitoba Government adopts Canada's first no sweat policy* [online], 2006. Retrieved February 14, 2007 from the website [http://www.nupge.ca/news\\_2006/n30au06a.htm](http://www.nupge.ca/news_2006/n30au06a.htm)





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nology has increased the participation of male technician, operator and white-collar workers employed in the sector because they are considered more capable of understanding this technology than women. Even though it is an affirmation debated by some industry representatives and workers, still it seems to be a general affirmation.<sup>44</sup> The obvious outcome of this belief is reflected in female relative low wages, which are supposed to be proportional to the skills required for performing the garment duties. Hence, it seems that the economic rationality of companies indicates them that is more effective increasing productivity by using cheap and productive female labour than investing in high technology retraining. The empirical evidence, shown by the offshore manufacturing practices detected in Winnipeg's garment industry, indicates that as long as it can be found available trained cheap labor, garment companies will not recognize the skills a normal capacity of learning high technology that characterize their workers. Mojab<sup>45</sup> points out that it is a reality that "the new economy" has caused under-valuation of the garment workers old skills, which demands a retraining of the labour. This requires not only an educational

system appropriated for adult immigrant female but also a major restructuring of the economy. Likewise, it is recognized that racism, sexism, language barriers and high unemployment rates affect the appraisal of the skills of women workers.

### 2.7 Neo-Liberal Thought Immersed in Free Trade Policies

Additionally, the neo-liberal thought that involves free trade policies associated with globalization is another institutional process, which is exogenous to the garment industry in Winnipeg but that affects the actors involved in this industry. Especially, women workers of the garment industry in Winnipeg are/were affected by the general outcomes attributed to Globalization and its free trade policies, for instance the generation of female jobs in exporting-processing free trade zones and the feminization of poverty.<sup>46</sup>

### 2.8 Enforcement Mechanisms

Event though gender inequality is still perceived in Canada, there is several enforcement mechanisms to improve women conditions that have been developed during the last decades. Because these mechanisms

<sup>44</sup> Stephens, S. and Mossman, K., *idem*.

<sup>45</sup> Mojab S., Immigrant women in "knowledge economy": the dynamics of skilling and de-skilling, [online], 2002. Retrieved February 15, 2007 from Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, Canada: <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2000/mojabs&etal1-web.htm>

<sup>46</sup> Moghadam, V., "Gender an globalization: female labour and women Mobilization", in *Journal of World System Research*, vol. 2, summer 1999, pp. 367-388. Retrieved February 1, 2007 from <http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/special/1999/globalgender.pdf>





seek gender equality in Canada, they are, in somehow, affecting the institutional environment of garment female workers of Winnipeg. These enforcement mechanisms are at the Canadian local, national and international level and have been promoted and lobbied by community groups, non-governmental organizations and unions. Some of the principal enforcement mechanism are: Lobbying for equality labour gender rights which gave origin to organizations such as Equal Pay Coalition; litigation as an access to justice strategy which organized lawyer women to intervene in charter cases to ensure a right interpretation of issues related to gender equality; promoting the role of unions through proactive Canadian laws that recognize the role of unions in the achievement of gender equality; enforcement of international equality by pressing Canada's Government to comply the National Gender Plan.<sup>47</sup>

### 3. Free Trade Policies Impact on Garment Workers in Winnipeg

Given the phenomenon of globalization, in general the free trade policies effects on the Winnipeg women workers

of the garment sector are the same as that on garment workers in the rest of the world except for those special outcomes related with immigrant females. The garment industry exists in many developing and developed countries, but immigrant garment workers are more common in developed countries due to the special immigration programs and greater income opportunities offered by some nations such as Canada.<sup>48</sup>

As a result of globalization, corporations enjoy especial rights which protect investors against government's regulations or interventions. These rights are given through the World Trade Organization (WTO), and bilateral and multilateral agreements among the nations that seek to increase their international trade. Likewise, the flexible worker, particularly female, is an increasing phenomenon in the global markets. This situation is especially reflected in the garment sector. The principal problem is that globalization has enormously enlarged the power of retailers, who buy garments from suppliers of many countries and sell them in the principal shopping centres of the world. Due to globalization, new technologies,

<sup>47</sup> Cornish, M. (2003). Engendering citizenship and labour market regulation. International and Canadian perspectives. 5th annual World Bank gender and conference. March 18, 2003. Retrieved on March 28, 2007, from <http://www.cavalluzzo.com/publications/Reference%20documents/World%20Bank%20Gender%20Paper.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Mossman, K., *Experiences of immigrant women in the Winnipeg garment industry; gender, ethnicity and class in the global economy*, unpublished MA Thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba. Winnipeg, Canada, 2006, w.p.







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capital mobility and trade liberalization have considerably augmented the numbers of garment producers in the world, who compete for a place in their supply chains. Additionally, international mergers and acquisitions and aggressive pricing campaigns have concentrated the market in a few retailers. These retailers base their business model on maximizing returns for shareholders, “just in time” delivery, strict control of inputs and standards and lowest prices. Garment factories fulfill the retailers demand making their labour flexible and cheap. Factories hire workers through tempory contracts, set excessive targets with short shipping deadlines, and subcontract with unseen producers. In line with their desire for a cheap and flexible labour force, garment manufacturers choose workforce that will offer less resistance given their vulnerable situation such as immigrant women.<sup>49</sup>

In the specific case of Winnipeg garment industry the above situation has been worsened due to the end, in January 2005, of the quantitative restrictions on the import of some garments, which protected the industry against competition from cheaper goods from developing countries. Thus, the Winnipeg garment industry has to implement new strategies to remain competitive. One of the possible strategies

is a reengineering process. This process implies not only an implementation of new sewing methods associated with the new technology but also a deskilling of labour.<sup>50</sup> The new sewing methods imply the utilization of computerized sewing machines and software for garment design which make the workers’ old skills pointless. This situation demands labour retraining and job loss.

Also, the free trade policies have caused job losses in Manitoba since many companies prefer to move operations to countries such as China, Bangladesh, and Honduras, where the labour is cheaper. Currently, Winnipeg factories produce only garments that take less than 15 minutes to sew such as jeans. Garments requiring more time are shipped overseas where workforce cost is lower. Additionally, even though the free trade pressures increased by the elimination of the quotes agreement has augmented the productivity demand and, hence the garment workers duties, their wages has remained without rising during more than 10 years. The demand for quality has increased considerably, which is reflected on the presence of retailers who go freely into the factories to supervise workers. Furthermore the workers of Manitoba garment factories have faced a decrease in the opportunities of protection: today

<sup>49</sup> Oxfam, “Trading away our rights” [online], 2004. Retrieved December 15, 2006 from Make Trade Fair, web site: <http://www.maketradefair.com/en/assets/english/taor.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> Wiest, R., *idem*.



only around of 35% of jobs in Manitoba garment factories are unionized since the majority of the fired workers belonged to the unions. "UNITE Local 459, the largest of the three unions representing garment workers in Manitoba, reports a loss of 2500 members since the signing of the free trade agreements".<sup>51</sup> Likewise, the job loss has been directly related with the gradual abolition of the agreement of quotas that in 2004 had caused the elimination of over 2000 garment jobs.<sup>52</sup> The job losses does not seem to affect the industry since in April of 2006, Manitoba was pointed out as one of the only three Canadian provinces that increased the manufacturing and shipment due to a growth of 24.5 % in the apparel industry.<sup>53</sup>

Another outcome of globalization and its associated free trade policies is the increase of migration. Globalization makes easier communications and the dissemination of information, increasing trade and investment flows create opportunities for foreign workers. Professional, manager, skilled and semiskilled workers are cu-

rently welcome in many countries. Also, it is argued that globalization increase disparities between developing countries and developed countries, which enhance growing flows of workers from the former to the latter nations. Thus there is a general acceptance that labour immigration in the future will increase, and may not be a temporary process.<sup>54</sup>

Increasing immigration is a phenomenon particularly true for Canada, which may be related to the facilities of information given by globalization and its associated free trade policies. The dissemination and promotion of the Canadian immigration policies have stimulated the flow of foreign workers in the last years. Canada is recognized as the country that has the most compassionate immigration policies among the richest countries.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, the Provincial Nominee Program of Manitoba has been the most successful in Canada at attracting economic immigrants (see table 2).<sup>56</sup> Hence, it is likely that the expected increasing migration of workers to Manitoba enlarges the demand for jobs.

<sup>51</sup> "Women & the Economy", in *Globalization and clothes* [online], 2006. Retrieve February 19, 2007 from the web site [http://www.unpac.ca/economy/g\\_clothes.html](http://www.unpac.ca/economy/g_clothes.html), p.8

<sup>52</sup> Mossman., K., *idem*.

<sup>53</sup> Winnipeg Free Press, *idem*.

<sup>54</sup> Wikramasekera, P., *ibid.*, pp.10, 11, 33.

<sup>55</sup> Women & Economy. *idem*.

<sup>56</sup> Paykov, P., "Immigrant skill workers: should Canada Attract more foreign students?" in *Public Policy Paper*, [online], No 27, 2004. Retrieved February 19, 2007 from The Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy web site: [http://www.uregina.ca/sipp/documents/pdf/PPP27\\_Immigration.pdf](http://www.uregina.ca/sipp/documents/pdf/PPP27_Immigration.pdf)





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However, due to the effective and potential job loss caused by the effect of globalization policies in some economic sectors, the province already has a labour army that requires be retraining or relocation in other sectors. Hence, it is important that the Canadian government regulates the worker immigration flow in order to avoid that new workers increase the competence for jobs for which there are already available workers. Likewise, a larger army of available immigrant workers makes easier for the garment industry hire workers with low salaries and labour conditions in a job market without enough enforcement to protect immigrant workforce rights.

### 4. Institutional Environment and Policy Options to Reduce the Impact of Free Policies on Female Workers of the Winnipeg's Garment Industry

#### 4.1 Ethical Purchasing

According to Wells,<sup>57</sup> "ethical purchasing policies require suppliers to affirm the

presence of minimum labour rights and standards such as the right to unionize and to bargain collectively, prohibition of forced and child labour, non discrimination in employment, limits in hours of work, workplace health and safety provisions, minimum wages, and other basic rights and standards".<sup>58</sup> These policies have been implemented by the US universities that are part of the Fair labour Association or Workers Right Consortium. Likewise, several Canadian Universities have adopted ethical purchasing policies. Ethical purchasing policies seek to enforce the basic ethical labour standard stated by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

There are two important features of ethical purchasing policies. (1) The main target of anti-sweatshops codes are all plants that supply goods that are included in the range of the codes. These policies do not target particular plants in particular countries. (2) Anti-sweatshop policies have been principally promoted in Canada by non-profit organizations' members and Universities' student groups who are

**Table 2: Total Number of Provincial Nominees in Canada 1999-2002**

BC	AB	CK	MB	NB	NS	PEI	NF
252	62	169	4018	197	11	12	13

Source: Paykov, Id.

<sup>57</sup> Wells, D. "How ethical are ethical purchasing policies?", in *Journal of academic Ethics* 2, 2004, pp. 119-140.

<sup>58</sup> Wells, D., *ibid.* p. 119.



committed to fair labour issues.<sup>59</sup> Hence, currently anti-sweatshop policies in Canada derive from institutional process originated in the system of values and beliefs of the civil and academic communities, which seek to exercise pressure on an organizational system, composed of plants that supply specific garments products.

The successful achievement of the objectives of anti-sweatshop policies in Winnipeg may be hampered by some barriers. Firstly, since the buying codes do not target particular plants the free ride problem<sup>60</sup> is likely to be present. Some plants might not follow the buying codes' demand because they suppose that the majority of their competitors do; hence the garment product under the scope of the code may not be pointed out as a sweated garment benefiting all the producers, including those that are not committed to the policies.

Secondly, given the lack of enforcement of effective mechanisms to monitor the effective requirements of the anti-sweatshop policy, the organizational response to this institutional process would be avoidance. Avoidance would be rationally exercised by concealing tactics. Thus, the garment industry of Winnipeg may pretend to accept the anti-sweatshop policy but in fact, the factories would not do anything to fulfill demands on issues in which the industry has been pointed out as unfair, such as race and gender discriminations and low wages.<sup>61</sup> This outcome would be present because the anti-sweatshop policies are more a social requirement than a legal one, which does not make it mandatory for the factories. As indicated above, it seems that garment entrepreneurs in Winnipeg have institutionalized the idea that low wages is the best way to increase productivity, which makes

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<sup>59</sup> Wells, D., *ídem*.

<sup>60</sup> According to Shor free ride problem is "A situation commonly arising in public goods contexts in which players may benefit from the actions of others without contributing (they may free ride). Thus, each person has incentive to allow others to pay for the public good and not personally contribute. In short, the free rider problem occurs because one does not have incentive to account for the global benefits of a private act, such as in the tragedy of the commons game". Shor, M., "free rider" *Dictionary of Game Theory Terms*, *Game Theory.net* [online]. Retrieved February 9, 2007 from the web site <http://www.gametheory.net/dictionary/FreeRiderProblem.html>

<sup>61</sup> An example of this organizational response is the survey of Canadian business carried out in 1996 by the Canadian Lawyers Association for International rights and the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development. The survey sample was 98 companies of which 43 refused to answer if they had a code of conduct. Of the 43 firms that replied, 34 declared to have or being developing a code of conduct. Of those 34 companies just 6 said to have codes referent to all Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development core labour rights. Finally, of those six only two provided copies of their codes. Yanz, L., *ídem*.





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them reluctant to change this institutional belief. Even though, anti-sweatshop campaigns become known during the 1990s, recent studies indicate that low wages and discrimination still remain in the garment sector of Winnipeg.<sup>62</sup> Therefore why would garment factories suddenly implement anti-sweatshop policies voluntarily?

A more dramatic way by which the Winnipeg's garment companies can exercise avoidance response to buying codes would be escape. Escape may be likely if the anti-sweatshop policies become mandatory or strong enough to affect garment buyers' behavior. In fact, as above mentioned, in August, 2006 it was announced that Manitoba was about to adopt Canada's first no sweatshop policy, which was expected to contain strict requirements for providers to disclose the names and locations of the factories where their product is produced. Thus, if there is information disclosure about sweat practices in a particular company, the shoppers can identify on the label of the garment the company name and refuse to buy it. Likewise, it has been known that because of the termination of the quotas agreement garment producers in Winnipeg could consider moving their companies out of Winnipeg to countries with cheaper labour or close down them. Consequently, if the no sweat policy adop-

ted by Manitoba exercises enough pressure on the shoppers' decision the garment companies may "exit the domain within which pressure is exerted or significantly alter its own goals, activities, or domain to avoid the necessity of conformity altogether".<sup>63</sup> This means that the no sweat policy may complete the reasons of garment industry of Winnipeg to move out of Canada or close down their businesses. This conclusion may be right as long as the no sweat policy adopted by Manitoba's government includes not only imported garment but also local production. Otherwise this no sweat policy would become a strategy of protection for the local production against imported garments.

Thirdly, the no sweat policy adopted by the province of Manitoba may face barriers to be successful if the policy considers corporate disclosure and citizen access to information that allow identifying the factories that do not fulfill anti-sweat codes. How can be achieved corporate disclosure and citizen access to information? One possible information source is the Winnipeg's garment factories workers. However this source may not be the best since the workers are not in a strong position to give this kind of information, especially if it affects the company. As above identified most of the workers of Winnipeg's garment factories

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<sup>62</sup> Wiest, R., *Id.*, Khatun, A., *idem*.

<sup>63</sup> Oliver, C., *ibid.*, p. 155.



are immigrant women, who, generally, face difficulties in engaging economically and socially to the Canadian setting. These conditions, added to the fact that currently unionism is decreasing, make workers afraid of losing their jobs if it is identified that they complained about their labour conditions. Other options to identify garment workers conditions such as direct government monitoring and inspections would have different outcomes that hinder the objective of this option. (1) Monitoring and inspections may trigger avoidance response. Avoidance response in this case would be exercised by concealment tactics. An example of how these tactics can be exercised is that in anticipation of schedule inspection, the factories set settings, which are not part of the real or normal activities.<sup>64</sup> (2) Monitoring and inspections are an additional transaction cost required to enforce no sweat policies, which the government may not be willing to pay for.<sup>65</sup> This enforcement should be considered as necessary to change the institutional environment of the garment

industry in favor of labour fairness and equality. (3) Any direct government intervention in the garment industry contradicts the Canadian neo-liberal thought, which is directly expressed in the free trade policies adopted by Canada.<sup>66</sup> It may be unlikely that the Canadian government agrees to implement policies that contradict the neo-liberal model, which not only will give uncertainty to the economic agents but also will hurt an institution whose principal objective is to make industries more competitive.

The pressure exercise by women non-government organizations, anti-sweatshop student's coalitions of universities and anti-free trade networks can ameliorate the strategic respond of organizations to avoid policies that attempt to change their institutional matrix such as the anti-sweatshop policy. This pressure can be exercised by enforcement mechanism such as lobbying labour gender inequality and enforcement of international equality by pressing Canada's government to comply the National Gender Plan.

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<sup>64</sup> Oliver, C., *idem*.

<sup>65</sup> For example, in British Columbia the Victoria Labour Council set up an advocacy program to assist unorganized workers in making complaints. One problem to promote this system was that there were only two staff, and the council did not have time to do proactive outreach. Yanz, L., *idem*.

<sup>66</sup> In fact, a neo-liberal economic model has been adopted by many countries in order to meet the demands of Globalization and its associated free trade policies. Quiggin, J., "Globalisation, Neoliberalism and Inequality in Australia", in *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 2 (10), 1999, pp. 240- 259. Retrieved, February 28, 2007 from <http://www.uq.edu.au/economics/johnquiggin/JournalArticles99/GlobalisELRR99.html>





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### 4.2 Training/Retraining Programs and Social Engagement Support for Garment Workers

As pointed out above, free trade policies have mainly left three options to the Winnipeg garment industry: to move out of Canada, close down or change to a hi-tech production. Even though there have been announcements about federal financial support to the garment industry, it does not seem that there is a provincial government interest in promoting the garment sector as a priority for Manitoba's economic growth.<sup>67</sup> It means that many female workers would be unemployed as a result of shortness of job offer or/and deskilling. An option to alleviate this outcome of the free trade policies is a retraining policy addressed specifically to provide garment female workers hi-tech skills needed in the garment duties or to provide them the skills needed in an industry different than garment.

In fact since the 1990s, the Canadian government has considered the need of tra-

ining and retraining programs. The focus of the government has been on technical issues, forgetting the need of educational development of workers. By the middle of the 1990s the fundamental demand of union militants and labour educators was to develop an educational strategy with a feminist anti-racist orientation that helps to fix the remarked class-bias of retraining programs.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, by the beginning of the 1980s it was already known that Korean female workers of the garment industry of Winnipeg required training in more than technical issues: English classes; orientation programs for early adjustments such as social and educational services and basic life skills; and educational programs for future adjustment such as Canadian society, economic improvement, health and nutrition were pointed out as fundamental training issues.<sup>69</sup> Ng<sup>70</sup>, identifies that the immigrant female workers of the garment industry remain employed in a specific sector as a result of factors such as "educational and language requirements;

<sup>67</sup> Human Resources and Social Development Canada, *Government of Canada Announces Funding for the Apparel Human Resources Council*, News Release, October 19, 2004. Retrieved February 24, 2007 from <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/cs/comm/hrsd/news/2004/041019a.shtml>. Pettman. *idem*.

<sup>68</sup> Gannage, C., "Restructuring and Retraining", chap. 7, in Swasti M. and Rowbotham, S. (eds.) *Women Encounter Technology*. London, Routledge London & New York, 1995. UNU press retrieved February 24, 2007 from the website <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu37we/uu37we0g.htm#introduction1>

<sup>69</sup> Yoon, B.-N., *The adjustment problems and educational needs of Korean immigrant women in the Winnipeg garment industry*, unpublished MA Thesis, Department of Education, University of Manitoba. Winnipeg (Canada), 1983, w.p.

<sup>70</sup> Ng, R., "Training for who? For what?" [online], in NALL working paper, No. 66, 2002. Retrieved February 24, 2007 from <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall/res/6Roxana%20Ng.pdf>



women's family responsibilities and lack of affordable childcare; and devaluation of women skills".<sup>71</sup>

Hence, effective training and retraining policies addressed to protect female workers of the garment industry against the impact of free trade should include not only technical issues but also strategies to deal with the institutional environment of the workers. Workers' institutional environment contains, believes, formal and informal rules related to the factors that limit their employment options. The beliefs that should be addressed include: (1) the belief that it is more feasible for male be technician, operator and white-collar employed because they are more capable of understanding this technology than women. Failure to look for educational strategies to deal with this belief may result in continued garment industry's avoidance. This avoidance can be exercised by ignoring the new skills of female workers, which may result in a retrained female labour market whose new skills are not recognized and valued by their potential employers. Likewise, because of the traditional garment factories strategy to reduce cost by lowering wages, it is possible that the garment industry responses to the training and retraining policy with compromise. This means the factories may choose hiring the retrained women

but keeping the same remuneration rates, which will solve the problem just partially since it will reduce job losses but will keep unfair wages. (2) The tendency of workers to form isolated groups whose members have a common language and the female workers belief that there is racism on the part of the management staff against immigrant labour. These institutional processes divide the principal actors of Winnipeg's garment industry, which makes difficult the institutional change. Hence, training and retraining programs should include strategies that provide workers with the ability to develop not only language skills but also interaction with other workers.

Additionally, it is necessary that policy makers claim the manifest and effective commitment of official representatives of the economic sectors that are in need of labour. A good way for official representatives to express their commitment is giving the workers remunerated absence leaves to take the training/ retraining programs. In fact, it was found that female garment workers in Winnipeg expressed that focus on work; fatigue and lack of time because of working hours; and lack of information were the principal barriers to take training opportunities.<sup>72</sup> Failure to incorporate the viewpoints and needs of both, workers and employers may result in avoidance as a response to the policy objectives.

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<sup>71</sup> Ng., R., *ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> Mossman, K., *idem.*







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Avoidance in this case would be achieved by concealing tactic. Thus, workers and employers may seem identified with the policies but in the end the same institutional environment will remain inside of working places.<sup>73</sup> (3) Governmental training and retraining programs must encourage the elimination or transformation of non-productive and non-competitive economic sectors. Especially government should aim to transform those sectors whose competitive and productive strategies are based on taking advantages of cheap labour. Since training and retraining programs benefit both workers and companies, these programs can be used to set enforcement mechanism to change the competitive strategy based on cheap labour of the garment sector in Winnipeg. One possible enforcement mechanism to encourage garment industry to pay better wages is conditioning funding. Thus, any governmental funding to support the garment sector's need of skilled labour may be on condition that the factories pay wages according to workers skills levels, experience and labour market standards. This will give women labour mobility and freedom to choose a job since better wages will make easier to fulfill their productive

and reproductive functions. Again, failure to incorporate this kind of conditionality in training and retraining programs will lead to acquiescence response on the part of workers and industry to the training programs through imitation tactics. This means that workers and factories would take and accept the training or retraining but the working conditions in the sector will remain the same, benefiting only the garment factories' gains.

### **4.3 Protection of Migrated Workers Through Promoting and Facilitating Bonds Between Canada's Unions and Unions of Labour Sending Countries**

As pointed out above, Canada is recognized as the nation that has the most compassionate immigration policies. Likewise, Manitoba has been identified as the most successful province of Canada attracting immigrant workers through the Provincial Nominee Program. Thus, it is expected growing flows of immigrant workers coming into Canada due to globalization plus the Canadian immigration policies. This phenomenon makes urgent that Canada's immigration policies go beyond promotion and include protection of immigrant la-

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<sup>73</sup> According to Ng, government programs for training garment workers in Canada have not taken into account workers viewpoint. Working and learning are activities totally "embedded in Worker's lives as employees, parents, immigrants and so forth. Beginning for their experience will expand current thinking on training. It will enable policymakers and educators to develop a more encompassing approach that takes into account multiple worker's needs". Ng, R., *ibid.*, p. 10.



bour, which will benefit workers in general. The institutional environment in which is immersed the female workers of the garment sector indicates that in Canada immigrant workers should be protected mainly against exploitation, gender bias and race discrimination. Since migration is a phenomenon that involves sending and receiving countries it is fundamental to look for bilateral agreements. Besides, as pointed out above, theoretically individual actions unlikely change institutions. Therefore, promoting and facilitating bonds between Canada's trade unions and trade unions of those labour sending countries where unionism is allowed may be a policy option that supports the protection of immigrant workers rights. According to Wikramasekera,<sup>74</sup> unions can protect migrant workers through information provision, counseling, regulation of recruitment agencies, and integration workers assistance and welfare provision in cooperation with governments. However there are some general barriers for unions to achieve bilateral protection of migrant workers:

- "Difficulty of labour -sending countries unions to offer services to migrants while they are abroad;
- Lack of access to relevant information relating migrant workers;

- Non -representation on decision/policy making bodies and at meetings dealing with migrant workers;
- Lack of accessibility; migrants work for many different employers and for a variety of sectors; communication problems because of language and cultural barriers;
- Reluctance to become union members due to low education and lack of relevant information on the role of trade unions;
- Migrant workers in irregular situation are not keen to contact union for fear to detection and deportation by authorities;
- Lack of resources on part of the unions and limited networking;
- Restrictive policies and practices in receiving countries and widespread pressure from employment not to join trade unions;
- Insufficient organizational facilities, trained personnel, etc, on the part of unions<sup>75</sup>

Some suggestions to overcome these barriers faced by trade unions to protect immigrant labour would be:

- Bilateral agreements between the Canadian government and major labour-sending nations to support

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<sup>74</sup> Wikramasekera, P., *idem*.

<sup>75</sup> Wikramasekera, P., *ibid*. p. 31.





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politically and economically trade unions addressed to protect identified most vulnerable migrant workers such as the female workforce of the garment industry. There are some features of institutional environment of the garment workers of Winnipeg that would hinder these bilateral agreements: (1) the informal rules contained in the institutions of workers sending countries that allow workers to leave their countries without any governmental attempt to encourage the protection of workers that depend on overseas employment. (2) The informal rules contain in Canada institutions that have allowed an ineffective governmental enforcement to ensure equality, respect and fairness in the hiring process of garment immigrant workers. Failure to deal with this may lead to avoidance of the agreement by concealing tactics such as signing the agreement without exercising a real economic and political supports. It is important to mention that this option is not applicable to countries in which unionism is prohibited for example China and Vietnam, which are among the labour-sending nations to Canada.

- Strategies that enforce the provision of relevant information to unions such as monitoring of recruitment agencies and labour registration systems, bilateral, national and regional consultations involving governments, employers, employees and civil society. To obtain

transparent and accurate relevant information it is necessary to change some components of the institutional environment of the garment sector, which, also, were above pointed out as needed to enforce the effectiveness of anti-sweatshop policies and training: (1) the tendency to forming isolated cultural workers groups inside factories. The lack of socialization among these groups may lead to inconsistent information on the same issue. (2) The fear of female workers to lose their jobs because of the lack of opportunities for them in the labour market and lack of government and unions support. Failure to fix these situations before any consultation may lead to avoidance on the workers part to provide real information by concealing the truth.

- Promoting training and retraining programs to immigrant workers that include language classes financed with funding provided by government and private companies with labour shortage. The institutional belief that garment workers does not require communication skills for fulfilling their job duties may lead to defiance response to this institutional requirement on part of the garment factories management. Dismissing or ignoring the requirement to finance language classes as part of the training program for workers could be the garment industry factories way to exercise this defiance.





- Public campaigns through different communication means such as radio, television, and internet etc. that support trade unions' function of informing people the importance of trade and labour these organizations. The objective of this policy strategy would fail if the garment industry management does not become aware of the workers right to claim better working conditions, which may lead to manipulation response on the garment sector part to this institutional demand. In this case, manipulation could be exercised by controlling tactics such as limiting the worker's opportunities for meetings and socialization, faring unionized workers, etc. In fact, as pointed out above, Canada already has advanced in developing enforcement mechanisms to support trade unions objectives. Canadian laws recognize the role of unions in the achievement of gender equality.

## 5. Conclusions

The Winnipeg garment industry's institutions are composed of a set of cultural, political and economic beliefs, rules, norms and conventions that make these institutions a result of the economic rationality and culture of society. Therefore, historical and rational choice institutionalisms are the best lines of thought to approach the analysis of the garment industry in Winnipeg since it considers the rational and cultural elements of institutions.

The competitive pressure exercised by the free trade policies on the garment industry of Winnipeg affects the female workers of this industry by generating labour instability, deskilling and larger job burdens. This situation is worsened by the existence of exploitation and gender and race discrimination on the part of industry managers against immigrant workers, which is facilitated by the increasing unprotected flow of immigrant labour to Manitoba. Immigration flows is a non-temporary phenomenon stressed by globalization and its associated free trade policies.

The current institutional setting of the female workers of the Winnipeg garment industry has a sub-optimal outcome, since it allows the formation and persistence of an industry that competes on the base of cheap labour. Thus, policymakers should seek policies that support not only female workers better labour conditions but also the development of more efficient institutions that will reduce the cost of future enforcement systems. According to the historical institutionalism, the change of institutions requires collective actions. Hence, in order to be successful, any policy option undertaken to alleviate the effects of free trade policies on the female workers of the Winnipeg garment industry, must target the change of some beliefs, rules, norms conventions and enforcement mechanism developed to protect the same institutional matrix. These are embedded in the institu-





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tions, which divide the industry's workers and managers and the government. Thus, the design and implementation of policies should include strategies to eliminate the formation of isolated cultural groups inside of factories; the belief that there is gender and race discrimination on the part of garment management against workers; the powerless social conditions of immigrant women; the economic rationality of garment factories' managers that involved the exploitation of cheap labour to make profits; and the lack of political will on the part of Canada and the labour sending countries to set effective bilateral agreements to protect migrate workers. Besides, policies should encourage the creation and consolidation of enforcement mechanism to increase labour gender equality

Ethical purchasing; training/retraining programs and social engagement support for garment workers; and protection of migrated workers through promoting and facilitating bonds between Canada's trade unions and trade unions of the labour sending countries are policy options that may fail if they do not contain strategies to deal with the institutional environment that influences the processes of the garment industry of Winnipeg. The failure of these policies would be caused by strategic responses on the part of the industry actors such as acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance and manipulation. These strategic reactions may lead to a partial solution of the problems that affect the garment female workers or to a persistence of the same working system.

## Appendix

**Table 1: Intended Destination of Foreign Workers, 1996–2005**

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Newfoundland and Labrador	445	908	549	1,038	1,195	1,139	1,281	1,433	1,096	1,152
Prince Edward Island	165	95	91	111	108	103	118	115	76	134
Nova Scotia	1,081	1,074	1,725	3,095	1,483	2,044	2,277	1,439	1,447	1,156
New Brunswick	511	542	565	855	841	775	624	610	562	671
Quebec	9,219	10,457	11,546	13,037	15,572	16,249	14,366	13,524	14,888	15,370
Ontario	35,989	38,484	40,587	43,067	49,190	49,839	46,465	41,767	43,226	43,939
Manitoba	1,707	1,580	1,761	1,975	1,935	1,916	1,691	1,389	1,578	1,781
Saskatchewan	1,240	1,256	1,251	1,223	1,313	1,201	1,110	975	1,091	1,362
Alberta	6,650	7,465	7,866	7,865	8,836	9,173	8,142	7,565	8,418	9,938
British Columbia	13,549	12,681	12,737	14,227	15,972	16,903	17,697	17,389	20,430	22,917
Yukon	137	57	104	97	140	85	90	111	65	87
Northwest Territories	117	91	104	92	129	169	134	139	101	115
Nunavut	1	1	2	18	9	17	10	15	17	72
Unknown	371	793	1,059	156	138	164	131	654	486	447
Total	71,182	75,484	79,947	86,856	96,861	99,777	94,136	87,125	93,481	99,141

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada.



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