

Maternalism in Mistress-Maid Relations: The Philippine Experience

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Abstract

The mistress-maid relationship, grounded in maternalism, provides a glaring example of the class inequality among women. Contextualized in the Third World, this paper examines maternalism both as a complex, hierarchical system that governs the employment arrangement and as a field of negotiation where women exercise agency. Recorded in-depth interviews and focus groups with thirty-one domestic workers and ten female employers were conducted in a medium-sized city in the Philippines between May and August 2000. QSR NUD*IST facilitated the data processing and analysis. This paper describes several forms of maternalism, including “part of the family” ideology, emotional labor, material support, *utang na loob* system of obligation, and mistress’ control over the maid’s body, time, space, and relationships. Likewise, it analyzes three types of maternalistic styles, where each type is grounded on a different repertoire of maternalist practices and ideologies. In addition, it classifies several patterns of mistress-maid interaction, and explores the interrelationship between maternalistic styles and interaction patterns.

Key Words: *maternalism, mistress-maid, class inequality, the Philippines*

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