

Children and Migration

Understanding the migration experiences of child domestic workers in the Philippines

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This research paper is for my PST CRRC family.

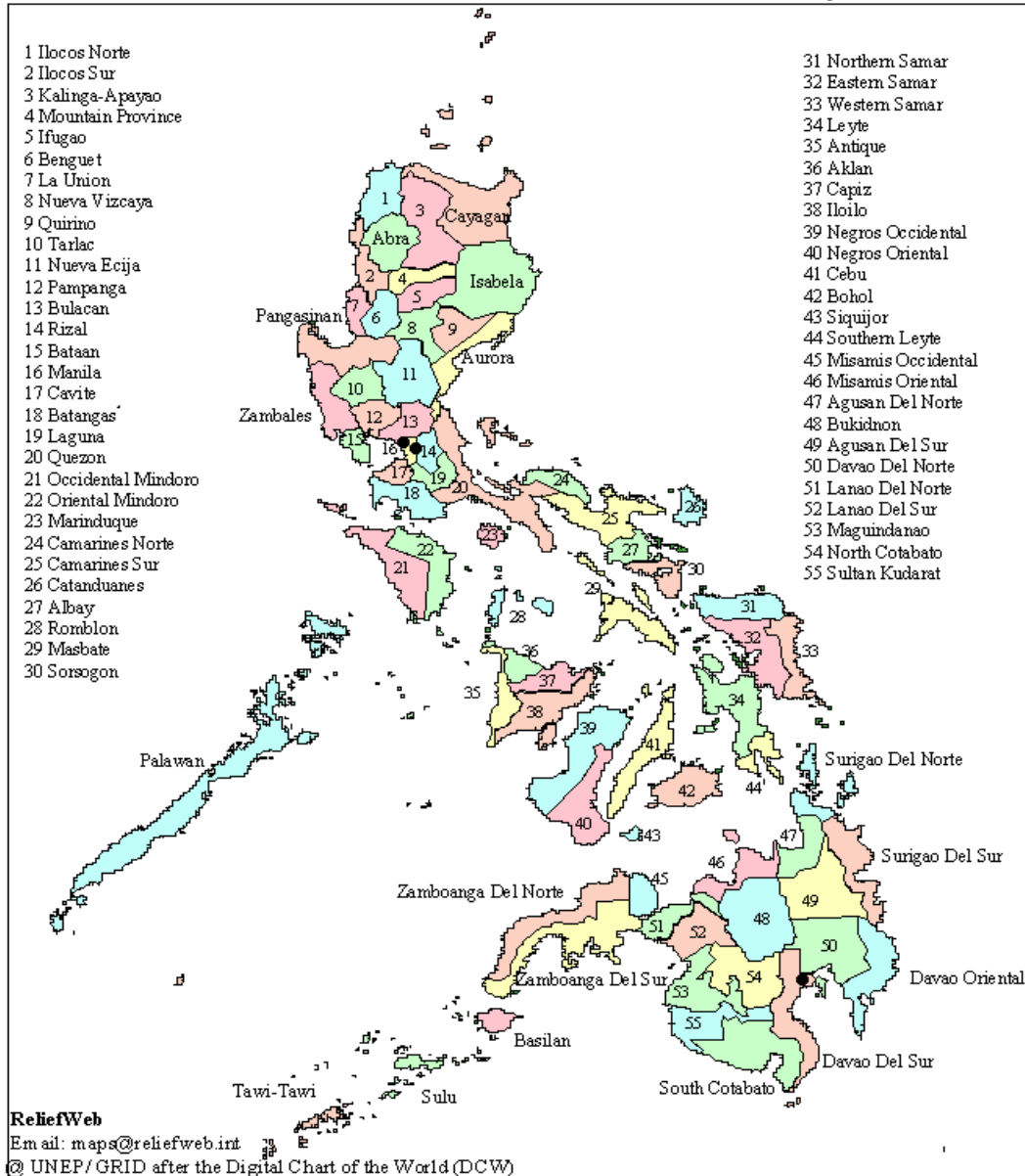
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Map of the Philippines

Philippines Provinces

Last updated: 30 Jun 1997



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Abbreviations

CDW	Child domestic workers
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
NGO	Non-government organization
SUMAPI	<i>Samahan at Ugnayan ng Manggagawang Pantahanan ng Pilipinas</i> (Association and Linkages of Domestic Workers in the Philippines)
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VF	Visayan Forum Foundation, Inc.

Filipino-English Translation

Ate	Tagalog for older sister/woman
Barangay	The smallest local government unit; equivalent to a village or ward
Bunso	Tagalog for youngest child
Fiesta	Annual feast day in honour of a town's patron saint
Kasambahay	Domestic Worker
Kuya	Tagalog for older brother/man
Manang	Visayan for <i>Ate</i>
Nanay (Nay)	Tagalog for mother
Tatay	Tagalog for father
Tita	Tagalog for aunt
Yaya	Tagalog for babysitter

Introduction

The high rates of adult migration (Asis, 2006; Bryant, 2005) mean that there are a staggering number of children affected by the migration process. In migration literature, children are often depicted as left behind by parent/s working overseas or as migrating with their parents. That children are leaving their parents behind to work has received scant attention in migration literature and childhood studies. In a Background Paper on Children and Migration written for UK Department for International Development, Whitehead and Hashim (2005) contend that there is reason to believe that there can be high rates of children migrating on their own; however, it is under-reported and under-researched. More importantly, they note that, “we are very far from understanding the meanings and social contexts of children’s moving to work” (Whitehead and Hashim, 2005:18).

This paper explores the migration experiences of children, particularly of working children. It examines how children are conceptualized in migration literature, and subsequently suggests alternative perspectives on children and migration, informed by recent developments in childhood studies. In particular, this paper explores the migration experiences of child domestic workers in the Philippines. Emphasis is placed on their motivations for migration, the decision-making processes, and on the role of the family and social networks in the migration process.

Child domestic work is a valuable entry point in examining the experiences of children’s migration for work. Defined as work undertaken by children under the age of 18² “in other people’s households, doing domestic chores, caring for children and running errands, among other tasks” (Black and Blagbrough, 1999:2), it is easier for children to be in the domestic service than in other jobs, given that housework is commonly regarded

² As per definition of children in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Given that the rights discourse is not homogenous and uncontested, and given that cultural contexts influence the migration experiences, the paper adopts critically this age-definitional conception of children in examining the migration experiences of child workers.

as work that is done naturally, without needing any training (Heyzer and Wee, 1992). In most cases, involvement in domestic work entails the movement of children away from home to work in somebody else's home.

This paper is organized as follows: Chapter One attempts to locate children in migration literature and child migration in studies of working children and argues for a child-centered approach to understanding the migration experiences of children. Chapter Two narrates the research process that is informed by a view of children as social actors capable of understanding and explaining their lives. Chapter Three explores the migration experiences of children, alternating stories of children with findings and theories in migration and childhood studies. The last chapter synthesizes salient insights generated from the stories and offers alternative perspectives on children and migration.

Locating Children and Migration

Chapter One

In this part of the paper, I briefly review innovations in migration literature that I find particularly useful for understanding the migration experiences of working children. I then examine how children have been conceptualized in migration literature, and on the other hand, how child migration has been understood in studies of working children. In the final section, I argue for a child-centered approach to understanding the complexities and subjectivities in the migration experiences of working children.

Recent Developments in Migration Literature

There exists a vast amount of empirical research and a growing body of theoretical and conceptual reflections on migration. Four interrelated lines of inquiry yield important insights about the migration processes that are particularly useful for understanding the migration experiences of working children.

First, migration theory now conceptualizes migration decision-making as happening at a contextualized moment, “where individual decisions are not atomistic but result because individuals are situated within social relations of families, household, communities, markets and nation-states.” (Curran, n.d.:15) While not discounting the argument that macro-structural conditions unleash incentives and pressures for migration, it is at the household/family level that decision-making processes happen, especially for young female migrants (Harzig, 2001; Lycklama, 1989). Decisions are usually made within the context of the family/household, guided by the needs of the family economy, informed by asymmetrical power relations along gender and generational lines, influenced by information and support from earlier migrants, and sustained by a widespread culture of migration (Harzig, 2001; Lycklama, 1989; Mahler and Pessar, 2006). Viewed in this frame, motivations and reasons for migration are seen as complex, and are best

understood not merely in economic or political terms (Harzig, 2001; Heering et al., 2004; Lycklama, 1989; Mahler and Pessar, 2006).

Second, the family/household is central to migration analysis, its various roles and responsibilities, the processes and relations happening within, and its changing configurations affecting and being affected by the migration process. The family/household was proposed as a basic unit of analysis in migration research as a way to link the individual micro level with the structural macro level approaches to migration analysis (Wood, 1982; Harbison, 1984 in Asis, 1994). While the family/household has been largely conceptualized as a site of consensus and altruism, this study concurs with the feminist conceptualization of the household as a site of conflicts, struggles, and negotiations, (Boyd and Grieco, 2003; Kabeer, 2000; Mahler and Pessar, 2006). As such, decision making processes that are happening in the context of the family/household are influenced by, among others, “hierarchies of power along gender and generational lines” (Mahler and Pessar, 2006:33). Migration has changed the configuration of the family, with family membership now “mutisited or transnational, with members dispersed in space” (Asis et al., 2004:211). This raises important challenges to maintaining and being a family, with the notion of family (re)constituted in the minds of family members.

Third, a more comprehensive approach to understanding migration is best served by analysing social networks. Curran (n.d.) regards theorizing the importance of social networks as the most important innovation in migration research. Synthesizing the ideas of migration scholars on social networks, she explains the role of social networks in shaping migration as follows: 1) it demonstrates the feasibility of migrating to a destination (e.g. by providing information on alternative destinations); 2) it reduces the expected risks and costs of migration (e.g. by sharing information on the cheapest and safest routes); and 3) by increasing the expected benefits (e.g. contacts help in finding a job or provide assistance upon arrival). The initial risks of migration decline as more and more of one’s family and friends migrate thereby becoming potential sources of information on the possible costs and dangers associated to migrating to a particular destination and on the whole migration process. Denser social networks also mean more

possible sources of support and assistance in facilitating migration. In other words, social networks have a cumulatively caused impact on migration (Massey, 1990 in Curran and Saguy, 2001).

Fourth, women migrants are “decisive agents pursuing their own agenda at the local and global levels, negotiating gendered strategies and options” (Harzig, 2001:25). Migration is no longer seen as happening in a linear and one-directional way, framed in a push-pull paradigm, where the main actor is the male pioneer who moves from one place to another mainly for economic and social reasons. Women migrants are no longer invisible in migration research but are widely recognized as participating at all levels and phases of the migration process, with numerous roles and functions, and active in building and maintaining migration networks (Curran and Saguy, 2001; Harzig, 2001; Mahler and Pessar, 2006). Beyond considering migrant women as an analytical category (Kadioglu, 1997), or “bringing women in”, emphasis is placed on making gender integral in analysing migration processes (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). Gender relations, roles and hierarchies influence the migration process and produce differential outcomes for women and men.

Locating Children in Migration Literature

While there is consensus now that women are no longer invisible in migration, with the increasing recognition of their active participation and role in the migration process, the assertion can be made that children still are. Or more appropriately, following James and Prout’s (1997) contention on the study of childhood, the study of children and migration is marked not by an absence of interest in children but by their silence and marginalization. Echoing the title of the article of Mahler and Pessar (2006), children have remained on the “periphery” of interest of migration scholars, or as Dobson and Stillwell (2000) concluded, have been largely “ignored” in migration analysis and theory.

The peripheral status of children is perpetuated by the continuing conception of children as “subsumed under the composite concept of ‘women-and-children’” (Mayall,

2001:243). For instance, Mahler and Pessar (2006) begin their essay by saying that migration studies has “eschewed female migrants owing to the widely shared assumption that women (and children) migrate to accompany or to reunite with their breadwinner migrant husbands.” Amplifying Hirschfeld’s concern (in his article “Why Don’t Anthropologists Like Children?”), they note that migration scholars have “disproportionately focused their work on the adults, with a few exceptions such as research on immigrant children in schools... a small literature on transnational childhoods... and the much larger literature on the second generation” (2006:35). Accounts of children in migration studies have largely been included as a subsection of studies on women and migration, gender and migration or family and migration. Children are often portrayed as the ones left behind by the migrating mother, or the daughter who takes on the caring activities of an older migrant sister, or accompanying mothers to reunite with the migrant father (Asis, 2002; Asis et al., 2004; Bryant, 2005). While valid issues for investigation, we need to peer beyond the role of children as “dependents”, “replacements”, or “companions” to have a fuller understanding of children and migration. A call made by Mayall (2000:243) on children’s welfare studies can also be made for children and migration: “we must extricate children, conceptually, from parents, the family, and professionals.”

Though recognized as participating in the migration flows, children are largely regarded as non-migrants who are left behind when their parents migrate. In Bangladesh, children are considered as “passive movers”, migrating only if their families decide so (Giani, 2006). In other words, they are not the main actors in the migration process, this role largely reserved for the adult migrants. This is not to say that children are not migrating. The DFID Background Paper on Children and Migration (2005) categorizes these children as follows: children migrating as family members, children left behind when parents migrate, and children who migrate separately from their parents. Huijsmans (2006) offers the following categories: children as ‘social migrants’ or children who migrate for the purpose of family reunion or family formation (in the case of adoption); children as ‘political migrants’ or children who have fled their countries and apply for asylum with their parents/family members or as an unaccompanied refugee; and children

as ‘economic migrants’ or children who migrate particularly for work. It is the latter categorization that is most problematic, ambiguous, and most laden with moral valuations. Huijsmans (2006:7) rightly notes that children as economic migrants are “unlikely to have their status recognized. In contrast, since they have left the protective wing of the family and have entered, what is considered prematurely, the adult world of work, they deviate in two major ways from the normative standard of childhood. Consequently child migrant workers are often perceived and targeted as either, ‘innocent victims or pathological threats, in any case, as ‘children out of place’ in need of rescue, rehabilitation or control’ (White, 2003:14).”

When children are portrayed to be migrating for work, the push-pull paradigm holds considerable sway (Aldaba et al., 2003; Giani, 2006; Sayres, 2004). This paradigm presumes the determinants of child labour to be predominantly economic. Households (or parents) are assumed to make rationale decisions regarding the participation of children in work (and school), which are shaped by conditions in the macro-economy. Households are faced with insufficient resources (push factor), forcing children to work and move towards areas where there are work opportunities for children (pull factor).

Situations of extreme poverty as a consequence of globalization, or because of acute distress and insecurity, have led to a dramatic rise in internal (and external) migration of working children. Attention was focused on abuse and exploitation of working children, the “dark side” of migration labelled as “trafficking” (Haque, 2005; Kaye, 2003; Pacis and Flores-Oebanda, 2005; Pacis et al., 2006; Sayres, 2004). Trafficking places “people in a ‘harm’ situation, violates fundamental human rights and is a form of modern-day slavery” (Haque, 2005:2). With global attention to stop trafficking, it can be argued that children no longer remained on the periphery; however their portrayal was largely as victims in need of rescue, protection and rehabilitation.

To sum up, why has scholarship proved so slow in understanding the complexities and subjectivities of the migration experiences of working children? A difficulty lies in the lack of conceptual autonomy of children and childhood in migration literature, one that

recognizes children as social actors, and related to this is dominant utilization of the conception of “victim” when referring to children. The lack of conceptual autonomy relegates children to the periphery of interest of migration scholars, but when attention is on children, they are reduced to the category of victims which justifies the protectionist and rescue orientation of policies and programs for them. Another handicap lies in analysing child migration and work largely in economic terms to the exclusion of other factors. This fails to see children as active participants in a network of relationships that shape their decisions and migratory paths. It is no wonder that “we are very far from understanding the meanings and social contexts of children’s moving to work” (Whitehead and Hashim, 2005:18).

A Child-Centered Approach to Children and Migration

There are recent developments in childhood studies that I find particularly useful in understanding the complexities and subjectivities of the migration experiences of working children. They provide a substantive basis for a child-centered approach to children and migration.

A child-centered approach heeds the clamour for the conceptual autonomy of children and childhood (Brannen and O’Brien, 1996; Mayall, 2001; Thorne, 1987 in Corsaro, 1997) in which children are regarded as social actors active in the construction of their own lives and of those around them (James and Prout, 1997). That children are social actors rejects the dominant view of children as mere passive agents amidst social structural determination. The nature of children’s childhoods and their experiences are simply not an outcome of the particular structural conditions they find themselves in (James and James, 2004). Relationships are central to the everyday lives of children, interacting and negotiating with peers and adults while pursuing their own agendas (Mayall, 2001; Ansell, 2005). In other words, children are social agents. They are competent individuals with ongoing lives, needs and desires. As people with agency, their actions have consequences, and their interactions make a difference – in their own lives, in the lives of people around them, and in the society which they live in (James and

James, 2004; James and Prout, 1997; Mayall, 2001). In her study on child labour and education, Kabeer (2003:372) notes that children, “exercise far greater agency in the decisions which affect their lives than is conventionally recognized.”

Mayall (2001) asserts that we have to consider the extent of children’s agency as they intersect with the structures in their lives. Children’s agency is constantly in question given the dominating (mainly adult) conceptions of childhood’s social status as inferior to adulthood, and perceptions of children as objects of socialization and control. To understand childhood, we should recognize that “(T)he social relations of agency and structure require children to work with and against structures whose character is rooted in past events, interactions and beliefs, such as ideas about childhood, education, parent-child relationships” (Mayall, 2001:252). That children are active agents of their own lives should be seen in the context of interdependence and reciprocity rather than of rational and lonely autonomy. Similarly, it can be argued that children’s migration decisions are not made on the basis of rational individual choices, but result from their being situated in social relations where negotiations and interactions take place. They are active participants of a migration social network.

However, the recognition of children as social agents is not a denial of their vulnerabilities. Children are confronted with many adversities in life, and some are necessarily harmful. In such cases, their health may deteriorate, their learning may be disrupted, they may become aggressive or withdrawn, and they may be traumatized. Children’s vulnerability or resilience to face these adversities depends on their individual circumstances as well as the circumstances at the broader societal level, termed in resilience literature as risk and protective factors. However, the dominating (mainly adult) conceptions of children as inferior, immature, and incompetent account for the almost exclusive attention to children’s vulnerability and the grim aspects of their everyday lives. Worse, children’s problems are considered as stemming from children’s innate vulnerabilities as such they are easily traumatized by negative events. Children are regarded as passive victims and adults have the duty and responsibility to protect and provide for their needs. But studies on resilience and working children emphasize that

children are not always vulnerable victims of adversities (Bautista et al., 2001; Boyden et al., 1998; Woodhead et al., 2003). Children can be so resilient that they are able to bounce back. Some thrive in adversities and come out of it as stronger persons.

A child-centered approach asserts that work can be beneficial for children's well-being and development (Boyden et al., 1998; Karunan, 2005). Nowhere is the tension between varying conceptions of children and childhood more pronounced than in the study of children's working lives (White, 1999; Woodhead, 1999). The dominant notion of childhood as a time of play and recreation, where the family and school are the only legitimate places of growing up has rendered children invisible in mainstream sociological research on work (Nieuwenhuys, 1996 in White, 1999; James et al., 1998). If they are studied, children are often portrayed as exploited at work and work as detrimental to children's well-being. As James et al. (1998:101) aptly put it, "If (children) are seen working (either in paid employment or in household domestic or caring work), the reflex is towards constituting this as an aberration or an outrage – a social problem premised on children's vulnerability and need for protection." The perception of work as anathema to children and childhood is inappropriate to the realities of children's lives, particularly in the southern contexts where "children have economic and other responsibilities to fulfil within families and communities; are not the sentimental core of nucleus families but rather part of an inter-generational system of interchange and mutual responsibilities; and (in recent history at least) have often been important political protagonists" (Ennew, 1999 in Karunan, 2005:299).

The child-centered approach owes its development to "the growing influence of the CRC (1989) on both national and international ideas about protecting children" (Myers and Boyden, 1998). It asserts that children are rights-holders as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child³ (1989). Two articles of the UN CRC have largely defined the guiding frameworks for the study of children and childhood. The first is Article 3, which requires that the "best interest of the child" be a "primary

³ The rights discourse is not without critique, mainly it being an instrument for exporting the Western conceptions of childhood to the Global South. See discussions of Boyden, 1997; and Bissel, 2003.

consideration” in all actions concerning children. The second, Article 12, guarantees children who are capable of forming their own views the right to express their opinion in matters affecting them.

But more importantly, the child-centered approach owes its development to the “perceptions and actions of working children relative to their everyday experiences of work and labor, and on their hopes and dreams for the future as well” (Karunan, 2005:294). In this respect, a child-centered approach invariably begins from a position of respect for children, both as persons and as workers with rights, for the contribution they make to their families and communities, and for their capacity to shape their own lives as well as of those around them (Bautista et al., 2001; Boyden et al., 1998; James and Prout, 1997).

Research Questions, Methodology, and Ethical Issues

Chapter Two

The purpose of this paper is to explore the migration experiences of children, with particular focus on child domestic workers in the Philippines. Specifically, I explore why children migrate and what motives they have for migrating. Through this I hope to have a clearer understanding of the child's role in the decision making process. Who are involved in making decisions about children's migration? What types of social networks do they rely on? One of the challenges of this research is to explore the changes that can be observed in relation to their families, as well as links between children's migration and education. I also intend to bring out the voices of the children in the hope of informing the victim/trafficking discourse.

Research Objective:

This research aims to explore the migration experiences of children, with focus on child domestic workers in the Philippines.

Research Questions:

1. Why do children migrate? What motives do they have for migration?
2. What is the child's role in the decision-making process? Who are involved in making decisions about children's migration? What types of social networks do they rely on in the migration process?
3. What changes can be observed in relation to their families?
4. What are the links between children's migration and education?
5. What can we learn from the children's experiences that can inform the victim/trafficking discourse?

This paper sees migrants as “pro-active, socially embedded, intentional agents who influence and are influenced by the social contexts in which they are located” (Findlay and Li, 1997:34). It approaches children as “social actors with their own distinctive abilities to understand and explain their world” (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998:338). It is from these perspectives that a life story interview was used for exploring and understanding the migration experiences of child domestic workers. A life story is “the story that a person chooses to tell about the life she lived as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another” (Atkinson, 1998). As a qualitative research

method, it is considered as the most helpful research approach available in gaining an understanding of how people see themselves, how they interpret or construct meaning of their experiences as well as their subjective perspective and understanding of whatever topic or issue is under consideration (Atkinson, 1998).

However, a life story interview is not in itself inherently child-centered. The challenge for me, then, was to use life story interview to get closer to children's realities and to make their migration experiences visible. But the task of doing research with children and getting closer to their realities is daunting. As Fine and Sandstrom (1998:7) point out, the world of children is as "inventive, rule-governed, nuanced, and guarded" as those constructed by adults. In doing research with children, the social roles have been influenced by "age, cognitive development, physical maturity, and acquisition of social responsibility (Fine and Sandstrom, 1998:14). This demonstrates just how difficult it is to get closer to children's realities. At the very least, an adult doing research with children has to acknowledge and try to transcend the age and authority boundaries, and must possess the fine ability to listen to children not from the usual adult-centric mindset (Fine and Sandstrom, 1998:14). What is also required is knowledge of and sensitivity to the conditions and constraints in the children's political, social, and cultural contexts. This is where I find research approaches discovered and developed from natural and existing patterns of behaviour of the Filipinos indispensable in order for me to strike a level of relationship with the children based on mutual trust and acceptance (Church, 1995; Enriquez, 1985). The continuum of indigenous participative approaches ranges from the more unobtrusive to the more obtrusive. Some of these are: *pakikiramdam* (sensing or feeling through), *pagtatanong-tanong* (asking around), *pagkikipagkwentuhan* (exchanging stories), *pakikilahok* (participating with) and *pakikisangkot* (deeper involvement).

Given the limited time for data-gathering, it was indispensable for me to collaborate with a child-focused non-government organization (NGO) with a program for/with child domestic workers in the Philippines to facilitate access to child domestic workers. For this research, I was fortunate to collaborate with Visayan Forum Foundation Inc. (VF), a

national NGO that “works for the welfare of marginalized migrants, especially those working in the invisible and informal sectors, like domestic workers and trafficked women and children.”⁴ It has six regional offices in the country, two of which are located in Manila and Batangas City (Batangas Province) where this research was conducted. Manila is the primary destination of domestic workers. According to the 2002 Labour Force Survey⁵, approximately 45% of domestic workers nationwide are working in the National Capital Region (which includes Manila). The Southern Tagalog Region (which includes Batangas) ranked second at 14%. The national survey estimated that there were 574,000 domestic workers in the Philippines (October 2002).⁶

A unique aspect of VF’s program on domestic work is the involvement of domestic workers (Pacis et al., 2006). In 1995, it facilitated the organization of *Samahan at Ugnayan ng Manggagawang Pantahanan ng Pilipinas* (SUMAPI) or Association and Linkages of Domestic Workers in the Philippines, first in Manila and then in the cities of Davao , Bacolod, Batangas, Iloilo, and Cebu. SUMAPI has an estimated 8,000 members nationwide (Tibubos, 2006). SUMAPI likewise served as a partner in this research. Mila Tibubos, SUMAPI National President, agreed to assist me in my research in Manila and Batangas City. Mila started working as a domestic when she was nine years old and had 11 employers. She graduated with a degree in Psychology in 2005 and now works full-time for SUMAPI and VF.

Mila helped me identify potential research participants based on a criteria agreed with VF and SUMAPI. The participant had to be at least 12 years old at the time of interview but not above 18, following the UNCRC definition of a child. The minimum age was decided because the age of child domestic workers tends to be above 12 years of age (Black, 2005). The child should have migrated to the city when she was below 15 years old, the minimum age of employment in the Philippines, and should have had a minimum stay in the city of at least six months. All five child participants are girls, given that an

⁴ <http://www.visayanforum.org/aboutus.php>

⁵ <http://www.census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/data1fs.html>

⁶ The 2002 Labor Force Survey also indicated that there were over 1.3 million “households with employed persons.” VF estimates that there are “at least 2.5 million persons employed as domestic workers, 1 million of whom are children” (Pacis et al 2006:3).

overwhelming 90% of SUMAPI members are female⁷. In case the child had experienced abuse and her case taken in by VF for counselling, the child's participation should have "clearance" from VF's social worker.

I let SUMAPI have a free rein in the identification and selection of research participants based on these criteria, but the process hinged heavily on the child's active informed consent. By working with SUMAPI in gaining access to the child, I was, in a sense, being guided by the principle of seeking "active agreement on the part of the child, and passive agreement on the part of the caretakers" (Nigel and O'Kane, 1998:339). We agreed that in seeking informed consent, the child would be informed of the general objectives of the study, and that she could withdraw her participation at any point. We left it to the child to decide whether it was necessary to inform her employer of her participation in the research and if so, the process could be facilitated by SUMAPI.

More than the technical aspect of facilitating access to the children, VF and SUMAPI, through Mila and other SUMAPI officers, functioned as "*tulay*" (bridge or medium or local contact person) between me and the children. In Filipino culture, the trust, confidence, and acceptance of a person are easier earned if introductions are facilitated by someone the child knows and trusts.

Except for Julia, I met all the children at the VF/SUMAPI office. Before beginning every session, the child was consulted on interview arrangements (e.g. place and time of interview, when to stop the interview, who would be present). In the end, four life story interviews were conducted at the VF/SUMAPI office, with only the child and I present. In Julia's case, I went to the house of her employer, accompanied by Mila, three officers of SUMAPI/Batangas and two friends to look after the two children under her care while I interviewed her. The interviews were audio-recorded with the children's consent as well.

⁷ Email correspondence with Mila Tibubos, 17 November 2006

The life story interview did not follow a specific structure and flow. It was directed largely by the quality and nuances of my interaction with the child, but guided by the objectives of this research. The life story interview was conducted in two sessions (or for an average total of 5 hours per interview), to avoid the pressure of cramming everything in one session (Slim and Thompson, 1993). An exception was Julia who had to cancel the second session, but the social worker's Social Case Study Report provided additional information. Breaking up the interview into sessions gave the children some time for reflection, and the researcher time to review the story and ask for clarifications if needed. A simple token (toiletries, as suggested by SUMAPI) was given in appreciation for their participation.

The life story interview was conducted in Tagalog, with some use of words and phrases in English. In guiding the interview I was cognizant of the performative aspect of language that helps mould and shape the experiences of a person (Cussianovich, 1997). The language that the children use represents their social reality, the social relations within, and their profound understandings of their experiences. Children sometimes use the term "*katulong*" to refer to their work and to themselves, which in general usage refers to an extra hand or an assistant but takes on a derogatory connotation when used in the context of domestic work. The VF advances the use of the term *kasambahay*, a contraction of *kasama sa bahay* (companion at home), to refer to domestic workers to construct a new understanding and experience of domestic work into one which enhances personal and group dignity (Camacho et al., 1997, Flores-Oebanda et al. 2001). When following up on a question or seeking clarification, I took care to use the terms the children used, careful not to impose my own positions on how children construct their understandings of their migration experiences. In translating the interviews to English, "*katulong*" was translated as maid, while *kasambahay* was retained. In order to protect the anonymity of the children, all names used in this paper are pseudonyms, except for the names of staff of VF and leaders of SUMAPI.

The interviews were transcribed and translated to English. Kvale (1996) emphasizes that transcribing, or the process of rendering "speech to text", is an indispensable research

process in order to make data accessible to analysis. He notes that, “Rather than being a simple clerical task, transcription is itself an interpretive process” (Kvale, 1996:160). In reviewing the transcripts, I noticed that “features of the discourse often “jump out,” stimulated by prior theoretical interests and “fore-structures” of interpretation” (Riessman, 1993:57). In analysing the life-stories, I adopted the technique of “ad-hoc meaning generation” or the use of “free interplay of techniques during analysis” (Kvale, 1996:203) in generating meaning in qualitative texts, from the descriptive to the exploratory, and from the concrete to the more conceptual and abstract (Miles and Huberman, 1994 in Kvale, 1996). In particular, I noted patterns and themes in the children’s stories under the headings of migration decision-making, family, education, and views on the victim/trafficking discourse. Contrasts and comparisons were made where appropriate to sharpen understanding. For conceptual/theoretical coherence, I alternate findings and theories in migration and childhood studies with accounts of the children themselves.

While I recognise that the stories of five children are not representative of the migration experiences of the general population of child domestic workers, there is a lot to learn from their stories. The paper also benefited from informal conversations I had with them before and after the interviews, with other domestic workers, adult and children, who were at the SUMAPI offices in Manila and Batangas City during my visits, the staff of VF, and the group discussion I had with four leaders of SUMAPI. In Batangas City, I stayed at VF’s office/residential centre, and this enabled me to participate in the everyday activities at the shelter with the domestic workers. Through my years of personal and professional involvement on domestic work issue, including participation in some of VF and SUMAPI activities, I have earned the trust necessary for me to be allowed by VF and SUMAPI to undertake this research with them.

Profile of Life Stories Participants

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Work and Migration Experience
Jennylyn	16	Third year high school	family lives in Romblon province; graduated from elementary then went to Batangas City at the age of 13; mother of her employer went back to Romblon to look for a <i>yaya</i> for her daughter's child; was allowed to study after one year but left first employer five months later; a neighbour in Batangas, also a townmate, referred her to her second employer who allowed her to continue her studies; finished first year high school but went back to Romblon where she finished her second year; went back to her second employer, enrolled in third year high school.
Julia	16	First year high school	from nine years old, did housework for her teacher to earn money for school; at 13, worked as a domestic in Zamboanga City; but not too long after was handed over by her mother to a recruiter to work in Manila as a domestic; employer abused her and she was also made to work in the hardware store; finished her one year contract and escaped; went to live with her sister who works as a domestic in Makati City (Metro Manila); but sister accepted a job offer in Saudi and so she was sent to live with another sister in Paranaque City (Metro Manila); ran away and boarded a bus to Batangas; found herself work in two households where she suffered abuse; local community officials referred her case to VF/Batangas City where she stayed for a long time; found work taking care of two children and now goes to school
Lucy	18	Fourth year high school	family lives in the municipality of Baybay, Leyte province; graduated from elementary; it was summer vacation when neighbour who works in a bakery in Ormoc City (Leyte Province) told her they needed more help; went to Ormoc City at the age of 13; after one year, got a call from her mother and told her that a cousin was looking for a domestic worker for his employer in Batangas City;
Marlene	15	First year high school	family lives in Bacolod City; been working to earn "tips" since nine years old (in a street food stall, babysitting, domestic chores etc); at 14 years old, she went on her own to Iloilo City to look for a job; found a job as a domestic worker but had to return to Bacolod City after one month; the same year, recruited by a friend's aunt to work in Laguna as a domestic; but they were brought to a bar; escaped after seven months; worked as a domestic in Cavite City for two months then was persuaded to return to Bacolod City by her mother and her lawyer to file a case against her recruiter; staying in VF shelter while awaiting return
Solita	17	Fifth year high school	family lives in Oriental Mindoro province; went to Batangas City at the age of 14; first degree cousin was home on vacation and asked her if she wanted to work in Batangas City as a domestic worker and study at the same time; continued her studies (from 3 rd year high school onwards) in Batangas City

From the Stories of Child Domestic Workers

Chapter Three

Migration Decision Making

Notwithstanding the growing acceptance of the “new sociology of childhood” in research and programming (Ansell 2005, Karunan 2005), there is seeming reluctance to apply this when it comes to the involvement of children in work and migration. When it comes to transactions in the child labour market, Kanbur asserts, “[W]e have to assume that parents or those in loco parentis are the transactors in this market on behalf of the children whose time is traded” (2003:46 in Iversen 2006:10). Children are relegated to the “proper” spheres of the family (and school) where they are “modelled as puppets, subject to family or parental utility functions and the ensuing “family” decisions. In essence, children are depicted as powerless, and certainly without agency of their own” (Levison 2000:126).

An opposite view is offered by Iversen (2002, 2006), that of “autonomy in child labor migrants” where autonomy in migration decision is defined as “being an unambiguous reflection of a migrant’s independent wish to leave home, without any parental pressure on the migrant to leave and without any parental involvement in decision-making, in employment or in shelter arrangement” (Iversen 2002:821). However the stories of the five children in this study downplay autonomy and emphasize negotiations in the decision-making process, in effect rejecting the conventional contrast between children as passive pawns and vulnerable preys or as active and autonomous agents.

The children often explained their migration decision as their response to their families’ poverty situation. Poverty is often explained and experienced in terms of not having money for their education and food on the table. By migrating and working as a domestic, they see this as helping their parents augment the family income, if not through

their remittances, at least by relieving their parents of the responsibility of feeding, clothing and educating one less child in the family (Camacho, 1999).

We are poor because I wanted to study but I can't because I have a lot of siblings. ... I took pity on my father, and I would just add to his burden if I continued studying. Ain't I right? It's because I have a lot of brothers and sisters. He needs to put them to school. Can you imagine if I insisted on continuing my studies? I had finished grade six. So I felt it was my siblings' turn to have some education. I would just work. In that way, I could also be of help to my siblings, to my father. My father need not be the only one looking for money. It's difficult to be poor.
(Lucy)

The stories concur with previous studies on child labour (and women's migration) explaining motivation to work and migrate as not only rooted on the needs of family economics (Camacho, 1999; Hashim, 2005). From the stories shared with me, I would like to highlight three reasons other than "economics": to pursue personal goals, experience of abuse and domestic violence, and cultural expectations of a "good child"

To say that the children decided to migrate and work away from home for the sake of their families is to paint an incomplete picture of their motivations and experiences. The children's stories concur with the findings in female migration literature – that the family goals and personal goals interweave in the decision to migrate (Asis et al., 2004; Bauer and Thompson, 2004; Tacoli, 1999). Education figures prominently in the personal projects and goals of children, something that they feel they would not be able to continue had they not migrated and worked. For Solita, the prospect of studying and earning at the same time was the primary motivation. "The fact that I would be able to study motivated me to go here. If I would not be able to study, I would not have gone here." (See discussion on education later in this chapter). Personal goals include aspects of self-actualization, and consumption and lifestyle, consistent with the literatures on children's accounts of why they entered the world of work (Boyden et al., 1998, Woodhead, 1999). Accounts by children of why they work include getting personal satisfaction from working, learning valuable life skills, and having a desire to establish independence for themselves. They also report that they work to have money to buy the things that they want, to conform with the latest in fashion and accessories among their

age group, or to improve their looks and the way they feel about themselves. That the need to fulfil personal goals and the duty to contribute to the family are interwoven is clearly illustrated in the following sharing of Marlene and Solita:

My mother asked me, “Do you really want to leave?” I told her, “Yes. I have made up my mind about leaving.” She then said, “I could support you.” I said, “*Nay*, I don’t want to insult your role as a parent, but I need to do something now. I don’t want us to live like this for the rest of our lives. I can’t get and buy what I want.” (Marlene)

I am different from others my age. When I was 14, I should still be under my parents’ wings, dependent on them for my needs. But then I thought of finding work so I could support myself; so that my parents would not anymore worry about spending for my needs. They only need to worry about my siblings. ... What I like about coming here is I am able to buy my own things, like lotion. I don’t have to ask from my parents. And I am able to send myself to school. Before, it was very seldom that I am able to buy things for myself; only if we have money. Now I always have a supply of lotion ... and whitening soap. My skin is not too dark anymore. And I am able to have my hair trimmed regularly. (Solita)

Reasons of dysfunction in the family, personal experience of sexual abuse and other family problems are seldom reported by children as causing their migration, precisely because of its sensitive nature (Camacho, 1999). Julia’s rape case against a policeman was settled out of court by her mother. To avoid neighbourhood talks and gossips, her mother handed her over to a local recruiter for a job as a domestic worker in Manila. In the case of Lucy and Renalyn, they may not have cited the frequent disputes of their parents as a reason for migration, but it should be considered as shaping the context and process of migration decision.

I learned how to swear at a very young age. I heard it whenever my mama and one of our neighbours had arguments. And my papa used to drink a lot. He and my mama would fight and swear at each other. They would yell at each other, and I found it annoying. (Lucy)

Cultural expectations of a “good child” are also relevant. A Filipino child is expected to help in household work and childcare, as one grows older, in household subsistence activities. Tacoli’s (1996) study of Filipino female migrant workers in Rome showed that

daughters have stronger sense of commitments and obligations to their families than sons. In Filipino families, the daughters are expected to take on the caring role for life, and that includes taking care of the financial needs of the family. There are some who take this role of “family caretaker” to the extreme, and the result is the *tagasalo* syndrome where “daughters compulsively and single-handedly take responsibility for their families’ troubles, at very difficult physical and emotional costs to themselves” (Carandang, 1987 in Liwag, 1999:38). In contrast to the passive and compulsive *tagasalo* of Carandang, Udarbe (2001) finds the *tagasalo* child in the family to be responsible, caring and dependable and who takes charge in resolving conflicts in the family. She may actually be the one who holds power in the family or who seeks to be in control. Marlene appears to exhibit the traits of both interpretations of a *tagasalo* child, with a high compulsion to take charge, given an irresponsible father and an older migrant sister who stopped sending money to them. Her eldest brother ran away and an older sister got married at 16 years old as a form of rebellion against their father. Marlene was left to care for four younger siblings.

When I was younger, I was not like other kids who were immature. They do not see the need to work because their parents provide for their needs. I am different. I was only nine years old, but I knew that I had to work. I had to be brave enough to leave, to be away from my family. It was difficult the first time I left the house. Of course it was difficult for me; I was always crying. I couldn’t eat. After all these years and then you’re leaving; that was difficult and painful. When I left, I just had to be brave not to look back. I didn’t want to think of anything else but to leave.

How was I able to deal with all my problems? Probably it was because I needed to be strong. My siblings need me. My mother needs me. Because of this, I need to be strong for them. I will offer my life for them.

The children claimed that it was their personal decision to work and it was they who initiated the idea of migration. Given the strong embeddedness of the children in their home families, the decision to work and migrate was not made without parental involvement, whether by consulting them, informing them, or asking their permission or “blessing”. In cases where the parents showed initial disapproval, the children had to convince them. Care was taken not to rupture family relationships in carrying out the

migration decision. Lucy was 12 years old when she first worked in a bakery in their town proper before going to Batangas City. Analyn, her 18 year old friend and neighbour, had been working in that bakery for two years, and they needed more help. Aside from working in the bakery, they also did domestic chores in their employer's house where they also stayed.

She talked to me first, and then she asked my mama if she would allow me. Then my mama asked me if I wanted to. I told her, it was okay for me. My mama told me, "It's your decision."

Lucy had been working in the town proper for one year when she received a call from her mother who told her that her cousin is looking for someone to work in Manila⁸. Lucy found an excuse to leave her work and fulfil her dream of going to the city. Given the distance of Manila from their province, Leyte, her father initially did not approve of her leaving.

My mama called up the bakery. She asked me if I wanted to go with my cousin. My cousin was in town for the *fiesta* and he was there in our house. It turned out that my cousin's employer was looking for a maid. ...My papa did not approve of my going here. He said that Manila is a big city, how can they find me in case something bad happens to me. I just convinced them, really hard. I said I really wanted to go. So he allowed me. But we agreed that I would go home for a visit every year."

Solita asked her parents to allow her to go with her cousin to Batangas City and was told that they will respect her decision. Jennylyn was allowed by her mother but not after making it clear to her that "a maid's work is not easy." The children's accounts demonstrate that at home, "negotiation is a legitimate and normal activity" (Mayall 1999:205) though these negotiations and interactions vary according to social contexts. Mayall ventures factors that "play into adult-child interactions and serve to determine decisions, and children's independence and choice. ... They include: adult understandings of what children can, may and should do; children's confidence in

⁸ Her real destination was Batangas City but was told that the job was in Manila. See section on "Children on the Victim/Trafficking Discourse" in this chapter.

relationships and in their rights to choose and determine their daily lives; and the social norms of their setting” (1999:204).

Allowing their children to migrate and work, and respecting their children’s decision, are indicative of parents’ understanding of what children can do. Housework is commonly regarded as work that is done naturally by girls (Heyzer and Wee, 1992; Liwag et al., 1999), and their foray to paid domestic work, considered as a job not needing additional training, may be seen as an extension of their domestic activities but this time done in somebody else’s home. Interestingly, that they were chosen for (paid) domestic work and not their brothers is indicative of the gender-bias in responsibility training of girls and boys at home.

My cousin asked for me (to work as a domestic in Batangas City) because the one that followed me was a boy. (Lucy)

I was sent to live with my sisters. At least my parents won’t have to worry about transportation expenses. Also, I was expected to help look after my nieces and nephews. . . . I don’t know why they did not choose my brothers. Well . . .but of course, they are boys! (Solita)

Parents’ understanding of what children may and should do is also affected by their understanding of what they can, may and should do as parents but could not fulfil. Hashim’s (2005, 2006) interesting work on children’s independent migration in Ghana shows how parents allow their children to leave as a way of supporting their children’s aspirations. Alternatively, parents reluctantly allow their children to migrate, acutely conscious of the ways in which the household and the community offer their children too little. Hashim (2006:29) emphasizes that the rural underdevelopment and the poverty that accompanies it “constitute the primary constraints for both parents and children in relation to the migration decisions that are made.”

Negotiations and interactions vary according to social context, as Mayall notes. Once the children made the move to the city, there is less involvement of their parents in their subsequent moves as the primary site of negotiations (and conflict) has shifted to their

employer's household. Sensing that her employer (the mother) would not easily let her go, Lucy decided to talk to her employer's daughter whom she had developed good relations with. She also felt that she had to hide the real reason for leaving and instead told her employers that she would be living with her grandmother who had agreed to send her to school. Julia struggled to get her back wages from her employer and when she did, escaped the first chance she had.

It can be said that the children lived in families and communities where migration is an accepted and desirable method for achieving family and personal aspirations. Julia was a year old when her eldest sister left to work in Manila, and another sister has just accepted a job offer in Saudi after working as a domestic worker in Makati City (Metro Manila) for several years. Jennylyn's mother once worked as a domestic worker in Lipa City (Batangas Province). Solita's move to Batangas City was facilitated by, Menchie, her 21-year old first degree female cousin, who first started working as a domestic when she was 14 (or 16) years old. Solita moved to Batangas together with another female cousin, the 16-year old sister of Menchie. Lucy observes that there are only a few girls left in her village.

There a lot of people my age who goes to Manila. ... Now there are a few girls left there. Almost everyone has left for Manila to look for work. In most cases their neighbours go back for holidays and when these neighbours go back to Manila, they go with them. Most of the girls have gone.

Asis (1984:18) suggests that "families with a long history of migration are more likely to have values and norms promoting migration." In a recent essay, Asis (2006) highlights a "culture of migration" with millions of Filipinos eager to work in the city and abroad, despite the risks and vulnerabilities the movement may entail. The history and culture of migration effectively means that a migration social network exists, and that children have access to family and community networks of migration in fulfilling their interwoven family and personal goals.

The claim that migrants, including children, find their jobs through family or village connections is not new (Camacho, 1999; Giani, 2006; Hashim, 2006). However, for children, one could argue that these connections are mediated by their parents or an adult. In other words, children may have access to migration social networks but through their parents' connections. But as migrants tend to move at a younger age (UNFPA, 2006), they are able to facilitate the movement of people within their age group. Indeed in the case of Solita, Marlene, and the first move of Lucy (to Ormoc City, Leyte Province), they were the ones approached first before their parents were informed. Lucy's second move (to Batangas City) was facilitated by an older, married male cousin. Renalyn's migration was facilitated by the mother of her employer, a townmate. In both cases, their parents were approached first before they were consulted. Through time, the children would have expanded their connections or personal relationships, whether old or young, to facilitate their subsequent moves. Conversely, the absence of connections may not facilitate migration, norms and values promoting migration notwithstanding.

I had wished to go Manila but there was no opportunity. That's why when my cousin asked me, I saw it as an opportunity to go to Manila thus I didn't pass up the chance. .. Some of the houses in our community have improved; it got bigger. How was that possible? Mainly because there is a family member, one of the children, working abroad. I don't really know the nature of their work in Japan. I guess they are waitresses or entertainers? But most are working in Japan. Not so much I know in Saudi. I would have wanted to go to Japan also but I don't know how. People say that work in Japan is not easy, but the pay is good!

Children talked of an "opportunity" that triggered their migration. Jennylyn said, "If that employer did not arrive, I would have continued my studies, I suppose, if my parents were able to find money for my schooling. And I would have continued to help around the house." Lucy spoke of grabbing the chance to go and work in Manila. The opportunity usually happens during migrants' visits to their communities for the annual *fiesta*, and since visits are for short durations, one could argue that the process of identifying and selecting potential migrants, negotiating, and decision making happens in a very short period, not allowing the child to make a rationale assessment of the opportunity, or if indeed the child has the capacity and should be allowed to make such life-changing decisions.

It was our town *fiesta*. My cousin went back for the town *fiesta*. He arrived four days or one week before the feast day. We left the day after *fiesta*, very early in the morning. (Lucy)

It was October 14, we went to the Masskara Festival⁹. I was with my girl friends. We went home the following morning, around 5 am. I went to sleep. Then not much later, I was awoken by my sister, Sophie, the one that came after Malou. She said, “*Manang*, wake up. Someone is looking for you. Hurry up!” ... Rudy (her 19 year old friend) was looking for me. He was with his aunt. They said that we would work as *kasambahay*, that there’s no problem, that the salary is 2000 pesos, that they would take care of us. That was what they told me. ... They talked to me in the morning, bought the tickets in the afternoon, and we left in the evening of the same day. (Marlene)

While the “opportunity” may have triggered migration, it is important to recall Mayall’s point that we should see this as happening within a social context influenced by adult understanding of what children can, may and should do (and as this paper added, adult understanding of what adults can, may and should do for children but could not fulfil), children’s relationships and connections and confidence to determine their daily lives, and the social norms of their families and communities. When viewed from this frame, “the decision to leave is developed through time and assumes the characteristics of a process” (Giani, 2006). On the whole, the children said that they made the right decision. There were problems encountered but seeing the benefits to themselves and their families affirms their decision to migrate. Marlene was pained by her experience of abuse at the hands of her employer but she did not regret her decision to leave as her experience made her a stronger person. In fact, she did not want to return and would have stayed in Manila, looked for work and study, if not for the prodding of her mother. However that migration is perceived by the children as a better alternative is not to condone children’s migration and work and relieve their families and the society of their duty to the children. Children’s migration decision needs to be set in the context of extreme poverty and limited opportunities. It is in this context that children decided to migrate, notwithstanding the risks involved and the uncertainties that lie ahead. As Hashim

⁹ “Bacolod’s most popular fiesta, is celebrated on the third weekend of October closest to October 19, the city’s charter day anniversary.” See http://www.lakbaypilipinas.com/maskara_festival.html

(2006:30) aptly puts it, children's positive views about migration "tell us only what people choose given their circumstances, not what they would choose given the alternatives."

Children in Complex, Changing Families

The centrality of the family in Philippine society has spurred researches on the effects of migration on the Filipino family, from how overseas migration of married Filipinos causes "broken" families (Sayres, 2005), to how migrants strive to maintain family relations in a transnational context, through periods of social and economic changes (Asis, 2002; Asis et al., 2004). The stories of the five child domestic workers in this study reveal the complexity of family experiences amid changes in family form, roles and responsibilities, prompting, and resulting from, migration, and the difficult task of sustaining the family and family relations.

Interestingly the stories of children in this study defy the stereotype of migrant families, or of parents or adult members working and the children left behind. For the five children in this study, it was they who made the move, while their parents were left behind. Julia has two sisters who had left the family to work when she was younger.

Ate Daisy still lives in Paranaque. My sister Daisy left our town to work as a kasambahay. She went to Manila so she can work, but not to help us. When she was 14, she was brought to Manila by our mother. We are not on good terms. ... But I am on good terms with my Ate Cleofe, the one who went to Saudi (Arabia). She was also brought to Manila by my mother to work as a domestic worker. She first worked in Zamboanga City and then she was brought to Manila.

Similar to Julia's story, Marlene was 14 years old when she was recruited to work in Batangas City. Her older sister was also 14 years old when she agreed to be the replacement of a returning "kasambahay". Family membership in the age of migration has become "multi-sited", with family members in different locales. As Asis et al. (2004:211) noted in their study of unskilled female migrants and the Filipino family, "Migration has rendered it impossible for the family to be physically together all the

time, a departure from the ideal which raises important challenges to “being family.” Children compensate for the physical separation through maintaining communication with their parents and siblings left behind.¹⁰ This could initially be through letters, and when the children have saved enough, communication and relations are maintained with the help of a mobile phone. Since children come from remote and poverty stricken *barangays*, not all household may own a mobile unit. Interestingly if a household owns one, the mobile unit becomes a community resource.

My family does not have a cellphone, but the sibling of my (former) employer’s parent did. I used to call that number. Then they run to our house to get my mom. Or I send letters. I send it through any of the boat crew. I used to send three letters a month. But not anymore as there is the cellphone. So I just send a text or I call. I am the one who makes the calls. They still don’t have a cellphone. But *Kuya* has committed to buy them one. Now I call them through the cellphone of a neighbour; he’s like my grandfather. He lives about three houses away. He has a daughter who owns a cellphone. I call her “*tita*”. (Jennylyn)

It was easier for the children to maintain links with their families in their communities of origin than with other family members who have moved to another place. Relations with siblings who have moved earlier or later are constrained, either by restrictions on their mobility, unfamiliarity with the place of destination, or constraints in finances. Julia wanted to run away from her abusive work situation and go to her sister but didn’t know where in Makati City her sister worked, and didn’t have enough money to find her when she escaped. Jennylyn’s older brother followed in her footsteps and moved to work in Lipa City, another municipality in Batangas province, but although they work in the same province, it was only recently that they met and communicated:

It was only recently that we met. Last June. It’s because every time I go home for my vacation, he is not there. When he’s on vacation, I am here. Our schedules don’t meet. And I don’t know how to go to where he works. He also doesn’t know how to go to where I work. We didn’t have communication. He did not own a cellphone then. But we met recently, before the schoolyear started. We met at the pier. He sent money home.

¹⁰ In her article on child migrants in Bangladesh, Giani highlights the case of Sohid who migrated to Dhaka City. He maintained contact with his family and goes back to the village from time to time. Giani notes that “migration patterns change according to the way departure takes place, if there still is a trust relationship with the adults they left at home or not.” (2006:6)

The Filipino family is said to be nuclear in structure but functionally extended (Go, 1992; Medina, 1991) and in the age of migration, extended families can likewise be dispersed in space. The children have relatives (first degree) living in their place of destination. However, their relatives (and siblings) did not function much as a support network for the children upon arrival in their respective destinations as expected. It is argued that social networks in the place of destination serve to increase the expected benefits of migration by providing information, material and emotional support. This function of the social network needs to be qualified given the nature of child domestic work as work done within the confines of a household, week-long, all day and night. With restrictions on their mobility and social interaction, the potential to rely on their relatives for support is severely constrained.

We have a lot of relatives, uncles, here in Batangas. I just don't know exactly where they live. I haven't visited them. The only uncle I feel close to lives in Lipa (City). (Jennylyn)

While the migration social network, consisting of family, friends and community members, played a prominent role in the decision to migrate, its role in providing support and assistance to the child domestic worker in the place of destination is undermined by the restrictions that characterize domestic work. Tapping family, friends and community members in the place of destination requires a certain level of mobility and opportunities for interactions, processes which can be controlled by the employer. Children in domestic work are faced with severe limitations in sharing space and time with their families, relatives, and community members who are in their place of destination, a process essential to make this social network not only existing, but functional. One should also consider that sustaining, and maintaining relations and contacts with relatives are commonly done or mediated by parents for children. Not surprisingly, children turn to friends, fellow domestic workers, and/or to their employers for material and emotional support.

Being away from home and from family, the children formed “family ties” with fellow domestic workers, initially in their neighbourhood. With an existing but non-functional family-based social network in their place of destination, their fellow domestic workers in the neighbourhood filled up this space and provided the needed support. When Jennylyn decided to leave her first employer, it was her neighbour, a fellow domestic worker, who referred her to her present employer. Later on, as the children expand their spaces for interactions (or are given the opportunity to do so by their employers), such as when they go to school or church, the groups in these spaces outside the household serve to function as their family away from home. Similar to the stories of unskilled female Filipino migrants in Singapore, “claiming and pursuing ‘family ties’ with other Filipino domestic workers in Singapore through informal networks was an important means of “being family” (Asis et al., 2004:210).

Part of reconstituting notions of family is transforming domestic space, in this case also the children’s workplace, by negotiating relationships with the employers’ family. The employer is commonly portrayed as an exploitive actor in the migration experiences of child domestic workers, and is rightfully so in the case of Julia and Marlene. On the other hand, Lucy, Jennylyn and Solita claim that their employers treat them like “family” or at least fairly, although this image of an employer is rarely given space in both migration and child work/labour literature. Both portrayals of the employer are part of the realities of child domestic workers, but are more complex than what and how it is generally thought to be.

Family-like relations are negotiated by both employer and employee, but underlying this process are tensions within which the relationship is negotiated. First, while children are able to successfully negotiate for a family-like relationship with their employers, this was not something that is given but earned through hardwork and overtime. Their being “one of the family” is subject to restrictions and limitations, something that they have to constantly negotiate with in a space that is highly skewed in favour of the employer precisely because they are, inescapably, *still* domestic workers in the household. Solita lived alternately with two married sisters who took care of her everyday expenses in

school, while she takes care of her sisters' children and the housework. When asked to compare her domestic work for her sisters and domestic work for her employer, she said,

They are good people. ... If I need something, then I can approach them anytime. ... I am lucky to have them because they are not like other employers to who treat their *kasambahay* like slaves. ... I haven't had a job before. But when I was at my *Ate's* house, I feel that it's no different from what I am doing now. I did all the chores because my sister was away. ... But there are differences. With my employers, if I need to go out, I cannot just do that. And if I do, I can not stay out as long as I want to. If my employer tells me that I need to be back by this time, then I need to follow that. But with my sister, I can go home at any time. My sister does not mind.

Jennylyn proudly shares that her employers "have come to treat me as their own." She is less subject to restrictions in her employer's household.

My employers do not mind if I eat a lot. I can eat whatever I want to eat. Sometimes I raid their refrigerator. They do not mind at all. I drink softdrinks anytime I want to. ... Sometimes, I even feel like I am the employer in the house. Sometimes, I speak to her in a somewhat raised voice. Sometimes I am too stubborn; I don't do what they ask me to do. ... But they don't get mad at me. They know me that well. They are used to my mood swings. Sometimes, if I am really "bad trip," I don't keep a straight face the whole day. That's fine with them."

But while she has successfully negotiated for a situation where she is happy and could sometimes play a "reversal of roles", one could argue that hers is a case of trading "additional physical and emotional labour for psychological benefits" (Romero, 1992:125 in Asis et al., 2004:210). "They are concerned for my well-being. They are kind people, really kind. It's because I am good to them too." Since the daughter, her employer, is at work most of the time, Jennylyn becomes the surrogate daughter of the aging member of the household. She was given her own room ("I just keep my clothes there.") but sleeps in the bedroom of her employer's mother. That, "She sleeps on the bed while I sleep on a folding bed or a small mattress on the floor," is probably an indication of how employers "tackle the issue of how to incorporate domestic workers into the family household while simultaneously excluding them" (Moors, 2003:390).

Those in an abusive work environment, such as Marlene and Julia who stayed in one of VF's shelters, were able to form "family ties" with the social workers and other "rescued" domestic workers in the shelter. That social workers and house parents are called *nanay*, *tita* or *ate* is part of providing a sense of home for abused domestic workers (Bautista et al., 2001). Children feel greater ease or trust in relating to non-strangers or people considered as family, and this helps in their recovery process.

It was only here that I was able to talk to someone about my problems. I even cried in front of Ate Chelle (the social worker in the VF shelter). I was able to confide only to her. (Marlene)

While the children have expanded "family" to include fellow domestic workers, friends, employers, and others they have considered as "family", it is still paramount for them to maintain commitment and involvement in the affairs of their family members in the communities of origin, notwithstanding their physical absence. More common ways for migrant domestic workers are through remittances and visits to their villages, usually on the annual *fiesta*. For the children, Lucy, Jennylyn and Solita, who are getting their salary on a regular basis, remittances were not made regularly, and they were not expected to do so by their families given that they are paying for their education. However, there is still expectation of them, and it is their duty as a "good child", to send money when a need arises, such as for house repair and fertilizer. Lucy and Jennylyn said that they have shared in the expenses for the repair and renovation of their houses, something that their families concretely benefit from, a tangible output of all their hard work and something that affirms their decision of migrating. At least in matters where their money is spent, their parents took care to consult them.

I helped in house repairs. I provided the hollow blocks and my father bought the cement and other stuff. They asked me how many bedrooms to construct. Later I learned that they built one room for me! ... And we didn't have electricity. So I sent money to apply for an electric line, so now we have electricity. They were so excited – suddenly we had lights! And we didn't have a TV. So I sent money to buy a TV set. They were so grateful to me. And when I see them happy, that's OK for me. They are proud of me. (Lucy)

Not only have they remained embedded in their home families despite their movements, they perceive that their status in the family has improved. No longer are they just daughters dependent on their parents for their needs. They feel that they are treated more as adults, they are consulted, that their parents listen to what they have to say, and they have more courage to express their views and opinions on family matters. It was noteworthy how Lucy confronted her parents to have her mother undergo tubal ligation, and how Jennylyn advised her parents to stop fighting over money.

This was when I went back for my vacation in 2004. When my mama had our youngest (the ninth child), I told them, “There are already so many of us! Ma, that’s enough. You should have your tubes tied.” So she and my papa discussed about it. It’s about time she had it. Her uterus is not that healthy anymore. If I hadn’t suggested the tubal ligation, they would not have even thought about it. I really don’t know why. So I strongly suggested that my mom have her tubes tied to be sure she won’t have another child. Yes, I paid for it. So before I left Batangas, I made sure her tubes are tied. They might postpone it again and again.
(Lucy)

There was a time I was there on vacation and they had one of those arguments again over money. I talked to them. I told them to talk things over, that there’s no need to yell at each other. Discuss things calmly. And they listened to me.
(Jennylyn)

It is apparent that the family remains central to the migration experiences of child domestic workers. However, a more nuanced understanding of the family as affecting and being affected by children’s migration can be had when we listen to the stories of children. Migration has changed the contours of the family, its structure, and the roles and relations within. And children are not just passive players amidst these changes happening to the Filipino family. Children strive to remain embedded in their home families, and create new “family ties”, as children work away from home to pursue family and personal goals.

In Pursuit of Education

No account of children’s migration experiences could be complete without understanding its linkages with education. A popular but simplistic argument is that children’s migration

undermines their education (Giani, 2006). This position becomes more contentious when work is factored into the picture.

With the exception of Solita, the children had just graduated from primary school when they migrated. While primary education in the Philippines is tuition free, secondary education is not. Secondary schools are usually located in the town proper and this would entail additional transportation costs. It was the summer break and the children anticipated that there would be difficulties with their school fees and decided not to continue to secondary school. The decision to drop out was not out of lack of motivation for education but more because of self-sacrifice; out of a duty to help the family, particularly to give younger siblings a chance to at least graduate from primary school.

There were three of us siblings in school, and I know how difficult it is for our parents to send the three of us to school. So I told them that I could postpone high school for the meantime. I volunteered to work. My *tatay* was against the idea. But I wanted to help support my siblings. (Jennylyn)

In other words, the children's migration decision coincides with a time when their families face increasing difficulties in sending their children to school. Coming from poor households, the children are also considered to be in an age when they are fully expected to assist their families in subsistence activities (Liwag et al., 1999).

This is not to say that they do not help out in the household at a younger age. Children are gradually given light tasks as early as four years old, with the weight of responsibility increasing as the child grows older. As Cabanero (1997, in Liwag, 1999) puts it, Filipino children, girls and boys, cease to be "welfare recipients" at an early age and help in the subsistence activities of the household. But girls are expected to contribute more unpaid labor in the household and child care. Julia and Marlene took a step further by taking on paid work at an early age while going to school and doing housework at the same time:

Grade three, I was nine years old, and I was already a working student. I worked as an "all-around" in a house. I ironed clothes. I worked in the house of my teacher. I was a working student so I can graduate from elementary. (Julia)

Our classes start at 7 am up to 11:00 am, then from 12 to 4 pm. After 4, what I do is, there is a Carinderia near our school. I worked there so that I have money for my school supplies. I washed the dishes and I served food. (Marlene)

Solita was transferred between the households of her two older sisters so she could continue her secondary education. Even with this household strategy in place, Solita chose the option of migrating to Batangas and studying at the same time.

Though we were poor, they were able to send me to school. That's why they sent me to my sisters. They can't give everything of course but I just tried to bear it. It was difficult. They could not provide for everything that I need. For example, they can't buy me uniform. Oftentimes, I go to school without an allowance. Then in the afternoons, after class, I just walked home. I didn't have money to take the tricycle. So I had to walk for one hour and a half. That's why I made the painful decision to go here.

Migration for work is a strategy employed by the children to pursue their education, *and* their siblings' education. Far from hindering the pursuit of education, migration afforded children the possibility of continuing their education, which would otherwise been difficult, if not impossible, had they stayed in their villages.

Had I stayed in our province, I'm not sure if I will graduate from school there. Life is difficult there. But here, I am almost sure that I will finish my studies. There, I'm not sure what will become of my life. But here, I feel like my life will be better. I feel like I'll finish school, even college! (Jennylyn)

If you ask me, I'm happy (with the decision I made). If I didn't move here, I would not have continued my studies. I am working, and one more year, I would graduate from high school. And at the same time, I am able to help my mama. I just think of that, and all my hardwork pays off. I just think of that whenever I feel like crying. (Lucy)

The pursuit of education can be done simultaneously with working or delayed until one is able to save enough to be able to return to school. Whether the young migrants are able to perform satisfactorily in school given their workload is another question, but it is not something that is impossible. This is where work with employers is crucial, in persuading

them to allow time for the child domestic workers to review and work on their school assignments.

One reason why the children were able to pursue secondary education is because there are night schools for adults who want to go back to school and complete their secondary education and for working students such those in domestic work. Two schools in Batangas City offer evening classes, six days a week. One can earn a high school diploma in five years. One school, the Batangas National High School is tuition free, and this is where Lucy and Solita go to school.

However uncertainty looms. While they would want to pursue their education further, and be the first in their families to have a college degree, they have lesser financial means for higher education.

I am about to graduate. I am excited about it. I want to go to college. But I don't know if I could enrol or not. My parents still don't have money to send me to college. I can be a working student. Or I can work, save money, and then go to college. (Solita)

Children on the Victim/Trafficking Discourse

Early literature on child domestic work was more nuanced in its characterization of the occupation and of the experiences of children in it. When families are poor, or when children are orphaned, it was customary for families to send their children to live in another household where they perform domestic tasks in exchange for room, meals and education (Black and Blagbrough, 1999; Young and Ansell, 2003). In many countries, children's involvement in domestic work is recognized as a suitable employment for children, particularly girls. (Anderson, 2000; Liwag, 1999)

Black and Blagbrough (1999:2) note that an important change in recent times was the growing commercialization of child domestic work, making it a "more potentially

exploitative arrangement.” The demand for children for domestic work was becoming more organized, with the child’s labour the traded commodity. Noticing that researchers and child rights advocates have primarily focused on abuse, exploitation and discrimination suffered by child domestic workers, they argue that, “Care should be taken, however, in any analysis of the situation of child domestic workers, especially in settings where domestic employment is the norm. Although engaging children at any age below the legal age of employment is an infringement of children’s rights, it is not necessarily the case that all child domestic workers suffer gross abuse, neglect or exploitation” (Black and Blagbrough, 1999:2)

But this nuanced approach has been drowned with calls for the abolition of child domestic work that it is now synonymous with terms such as “forced labour”, “slavery”, “unconditional worst form of child labour” and “trafficking”, the latter association having more prominence in the literature (Haque, 2005; Kaye, 2003; Pacis and Flores-Oebanda, 2005; Pacis et al., 2006; Sayres, 2004). With domestic work largely construed as exploitative work, the recruitment, transport and receipt of children “for the purpose of exploitation” (or domestic work) is seen as a gross violation of rights and is now criminalized. Children fall prey to traffickers, and are seen as “victims” that needed to be rescued, rehabilitated, and returned to their home families. But the problem with the “trafficked victim” subject, as Agustin (2005:106) asserts in the case of women, is that it is a “poor description of and discounts what many women say about their own life projects.” Hence, there is a need to bring back the analysis of children migrating for paid domestic work in other people’s households to its early nuanced nature by bringing into fore children’s own depictions of their experiences.

A prevailing argument in the victim/trafficking discourse is that the children were not given clear information about their destination, work, or employers, the process in effect containing an element of deceit (Agustin, 2005; Pacis et al., 2006). The stories of the children revealed that they left and joined their cousins or friends or recruiters without fully knowing the terms of their employment. As discussed in the early part of this chapter, everything happened so fast and they were just too excited about the prospect of

working and earning their own money. The prospects of working, and living in another place, and the “urgency” of the movement, just overrode the need to ask, perhaps because an element of trust is involved in the negotiations, with the process facilitated by someone they know and trust, something that would suffice in any transaction in Filipino culture. Or perhaps the fact that their parents were involved in the process made it seem safe that questions, if any, about their work could be asked at a later date. Indeed the children not only were not given (or they didn’t ask for) the full and clear information about their work, in some cases, incorrect information was given.

Along the way, my cousin explained to us what we were expected to do. He told us that we would do the laundry everyday, but only five pieces of clothes. But the five pieces turned out to be two wash-bins of clothes! ... And I was told that I was going to work in Manila. But I ended up in Batangas City. .. Even if I was told that I was going to Manila, and I ended up in Batangas, it was not meant to deceive me. Anyway, I was able to go to Manila. And Batangas City is like Manila. I just think of it that way. People in our community do not know about Batangas, so it’s easier to say Manila. I myself have not heard about Batangas then. ... And also, he’s not the type of person who would deceive others. (Lucy)

Agustin (2005:102) argues that “knowing beforehand” may be a “poor measure of potential exploitation and unhappiness, because it is difficult, if not impossible, to know what working conditions will *feel* like in future jobs.” Asking information about the terms of work, was deemed “inappropriate” at this stage and could be asked in the place of work. However, Anderson (2000:391) argues that what is peculiar about the position of domestic worker is her lack of power, so she unable to set the limits to her tasks. This makes the “requirement” of “clear information” insignificant. On the other hand, Moors (2003) highlights how domestic workers are able to “partake in negotiations of difference and power in a great variety of ways” and their responses may vary from “consensual to oppositional, and various combinations thereof.” This gives child domestic workers leeway to ask about their work, negotiate, and transform their workplace into terms beneficial to all concerned.

There are people who do take advantage, and one could argue convincingly that the experience of Marlene was one involving deceit from the beginning. That domestic work

is accepted customarily as a suitable job for young people is being used by traffickers to lure people into their clutches. This is where the danger lies; domestic work is used as cover for the trafficking of children, especially girls. The danger lies in the fact that traffickers have learned to manipulate not only the legal channels of migration (Skeldon in Derks, 2000), but also the informal channels customarily taken by children migrating to domestic work.

The children's experiences also depict an infinite array of possible relationships between the child and the members of the household she is working in. A significant relationship is formed with the employer, largely construed in the child labour literature as the "exploiter". In the trafficking discourse, the "employer" could be held liable for "receipt" of a child to perform domestic service, a work that exploits children. But the employer is not a monolithic actor for the child; for instance, the child may form "family ties" with a female employer, while feel excluded by the male employer. Lucy was in this kind of situation in her first foray into paid domestic work, in the town proper of the municipality where they live.

She (referring to the mother) yelled at us. That's why we did not like her. And we were afraid of her, especially when she was around. And we had to wake up at 4 am ... She let us clear the surroundings. If we were ordered to do something, we have to do it first before we could have our meal. Just one small piece of *tuyo* (dried fish), and whatever is left was given to us. We were not given snacks. I won't forget that employer. ... I lasted for one year because despite her wicked character, we were happy, the 10 of us (workers). We would just laugh off her ill-treatment of us. It became the butt of our jokes. We got along well. I was their *bunso*. It was a good feeling to have older sisters. ... Yeah we were happy despite our situation.

I know the recipe of their breads because I'm in good terms with the daughter who prepare the dough. Sometimes she lets me do it. She taught me how to. ... I received an SMS from one of my co-workers. She said that my employer's daughter misses me. I always attended to her. I was her favourite.

The nature of this array of possible relationships formed among the child and other members of the household (including the co-worker/s) is important for the child to assess her situation, the level of abuse and exploitation, and in making the decision to stay or to

leave, and necessary to consider in making a program intervention. In the case of Julia, on the other hand, given the abusive treatment she endured from practically all members of her employer's household, she thought of nothing else but to escape and find her sister.

Program interventions stress the importance of education in the child's life and may assess a situation where a child in domestic work is going to night school as "less exploitative", if not the best arrangement possible for the child. While it would be ideal (and it is their right!) for all child domestic workers to be in school, this does not automatically make the situation acceptable for the child. Jennylyn found the workload so heavy (caring for two children) that she had no time anymore for her studies and decided to leave even if her employer allowed her to go to school and even if there was a risk that her next employer would not give her the same benefit.

My first employers were good to me. I got along well with them. They were hesitant to let me go because no one would look after their baby. But I told them that I could not do the work anymore, that it was too heavy for me. .. At that time, it was the exam period for the first grading. And I really could not find the time to review. The eldest child was always asking for me; she always wanted to go out and have a walk. Actually I spent more time taking care of her than the second child. It's as if I was hired to be her *yaya*.

Long working hours constitute a violation of the rights of workers. However, it may be advisable to know the child's view of her situation before making any judgment and taking any action.

My employer is not abusive. I sleep at around 12 midnight because I want to finish whatever needs to be finished. That was my choice – what time I sleep. I want to finish everything and not leave it for tomorrow. It was not like I was ordered to. They also do not tell me not to work till late. Whatever I do is just okay to them. I do not consider my long working hours as abusive. It was I who set it. It was my choice. But if I want to sleep early, it's also fine with my employers. I could do that. (Lucy)

While the legal framework does not allow children below the age of 15 to be employed, children consider other factors other than age in assessing whether a child is fit for work (in this case, domestic work) or not. Lucy, who was 13 years old, when she moved to

Batangas, felt that she was not too young to migrate for work. (“Yes I was 13 when I moved to Batangas, but in my opinion, I was not too young to migrate for work because I already have experience working in our province. I believe I am mature for my age.”) Jennylyn believes that it’s “okay” for a child who had just graduated from elementary to leave home and work.

These positions were based on the following considerations: if the child has previous experience of (paid) domestic work; if the child knows how and can do housework (Lucy: “If my employer or a neighbour asks me to look for a maid for them, would I choose someone who is 12 or 13 years old? I don’t know. Maybe not, because I don’t know if they know how to do housework. I have to see them do housework to know. If I see them as being active, used to doing housework, then maybe I would bring them along.”); if the child wants to and is decided; if the child is accompanied; if the child’s safety and security is assured upon arriving at the place of destination (Jennylyn: “It’s okay for a child who has just graduated from elementary to leave home and work, as long as she is accompanied and she has a place to stay upon arriving here. Or she can travel on her own from Romblon to Batangas as long as she has a place to stay upon arriving here. Chances are something bad might happen to her if she doesn’t have a place to stay or she doesn’t have numbers to contact here.”); and if the child is not in school (Solita: “The first time I tried to bring someone here to work as a domestic worker, she decided not to. She was my friend. I chose her (over other girls) because she had dropped out several times. I thought it was just a waste of money, time, of transportation fare to enrol her in school only to drop out. I didn’t consider if she can do housework because all the girls in our community are used to doing housework.”)

Having made the move, the children can now assume the role of facilitating the movement of other children (or older people) in their community. Solita had facilitated the employment of the sister of her brother-in law.

She’s 16 years old. I encouraged her to come here. I went home last March for my vacation. She does not have work, or she just finished her contract and she is looking for a job. I told her that someone here is looking, the sibling of my

employer. I told her, “If you want, I can endorse you.” I also talked to her parents. She said she will come with me. But her parents already knew that I will take her. I told her about the kids she will be taking care of, and the pay.

Given the tendency of the victim/trafficking discourse to conflate all forms of “facilitated” migration with trafficking, Solita and other children who have facilitated the movement of another child, be it their relative or friend, into domestic work run the risk of being considered exploiters, or as traffickers by virtue of their participation in the migrant social network. Their intention of “helping out” other children in similar situations, of being a “good” friend, cousin, or townmate, can be considered criminal in the eyes of law. Jennylyn said that she has not facilitated the employment of a child into domestic work not because she considers them too young, or because it is illegal, but because she cannot vouch for them to the employers.

I am scared to ask someone to come with me and find her a job because I don’t know that person very well. There is someone who has been asking me to find her a job but I haven’t done anything about it. I am scared. What if something bad happens to the employers? I will feel guilty since I am the one who referred the maid to them.

The trafficking discourse relies on the assumption that the family and school are the best places for children; that the children should not have left home to work in the first place. Following this position, the response to a “rescued” child victim of trafficking is to “return” them to their families. But it may not necessarily be what the child wants, nor in the child’s best interest if integral to the child’s “migration project” is to escape from an abusive home situation. Julia was adamant about not returning.

I want to go back home but only once I have reached my dreams. I hate to go back home without accomplishing anything.

Their experience of abuse is not necessarily a deterrent for further involvement in work or a reason to leave and return home. In Lucy’s case, the opportunity of another job, and migrating to “Manila” at that, was a way to leave an “abusive” work situation.

The children are aware that they took a risk when they decided to migrate. That they knew of the risks involved yet still decided to migrate does not mean that nothing should be done about child domestic work and its attendant problems. Children could experience problems in their places of destination but still choose to remain. They may still perceive migration as a better alternative, and a degree of acceptance is needed in this regard if we are to move beyond the convenience of dichotomizing children's experiences of migration.

Conclusion: Towards Alternative Perspectives on Children and Migration

Chapter Four

In this paper, I have reviewed the literature on migration, and have found children to be at the periphery of interest of migration researchers. On the other hand, the migration of children has been largely construed as trafficking in child labour literature, reducing children to a “victim” position. I argued that to have clearer understanding of the complexities and subjectivities of migration experiences of children, a child-centered approach is in order, integrating recent developments from the fields of migration and childhood studies. A child-centered approach begins from a position of respect for children, both as persons and as workers with rights, for the contribution they make to their families and communities, and for their capacity to shape their own lives as well as those around them (Bautista et al., 2001; Boyden et al., 1998; James and Prout, 1997). I showed that through their life stories, one can analyze children’s social relations and subjective experiences to arrive at nuanced understandings of their migration experiences.

The migration experiences of working children are too multi-faceted to warrant neat categorizations. To start with, family and personal goals are interwoven, thereby rejecting migration motivations as solely rooted in economic reasons. Cultural expectations of a “good child” motivate children to migrate, and while benefits to the self and family have been reported, this could have serious costs also. Education figures prominently in the personal projects of children, but their access to education enables their siblings’ access to education as well. By working, they are able to send themselves to school, hence ceasing to be “welfare recipients” at an early age. This enables the family to redirect scant resources to the education of remaining siblings and to other family needs.

Children's migration decisions demonstrate that "negotiation is a legitimate and normal activity" (Mayall, 1999:205) at home, where decisions are usually made, with children as active players. Indeed, children may have initiated the idea of migration but decisions are often made with parental involvement so as not to rupture family relations. Negotiations and interactions vary according to social contexts which serve to determine children's decisions and choices. For instance, parental involvement in migration decisions is gradually reduced as the site of negotiations shifts to the workplace from the home. Children's migration is cumulatively caused by migration social networks which they access, create and expand depending on the social context. Whereas children's access to family or community-based connections is commonly thought to be mediated by adults, children can access, create and expand migration social networks on their own, thus facilitating their subsequent moves, and even that of other children.

The children felt that they were not too young to migrate, having finished basic education. Biological age is not a primary consideration in deciding when one is ready for migration and work. Beyond age, they cited previous work experience of domestic work and capacity to do housework and assurance of safety at the place of destination. Having made the move, children are able to facilitate the migration of other children. Children out of school tend to be more targeted for migration than others. The complexities of the risks and benefits involved in children's migration warrant a flexible and context-specific approach instead of a dichotomous approach to their situation.

Family and community-based social network not only makes migration feasible, they are also expected to provide support and assistance to working children at their place of destination. But the nature of domestic work places constraints on children's ability to share time and space with families, friends, relatives, and community members at their place of destination, a process essential to make this social network not only exist, but function as well. In its place, children create "family ties" with fellow domestic workers, initially in the neighbourhood. Children also transform the domestic space, also their workplace, by negotiating relationships with their employers to make it beneficial for all concerned. But underlying the process of negotiating family ties with employers are

tensions; their acceptance into the “family” is subject to restrictions and limitations in a space that is highly skewed in favour of the employer.

Children have left home to pursue family and personal goals. Even if family members are dispersed in space, with child domestic workers challenging the stereotype of migrant children left behind, children remain embedded in their home families and they try to sustain family ties across space. Notwithstanding the physical separation, children perceive their status in their families to have improved; they are being consulted, they are treated more as adults, and they have more courage to give their opinions on family matters.

Undoubtedly, there are problems and risks attendant to the process of migration. But on the whole, children felt positively about their migration experience; seeing the benefits to themselves and to their families compensates for the difficulties experienced and affirms their decision to migrate. However, that they perceive migration to be a better alternative is not to relieve the family and society of their duty to children. As Hashim aptly puts it (see above, p. 18), children’s positive views about migration “tell us only what people choose given their circumstances, not what they would choose given the alternatives.”

What this paper has sought to emphasize are the nuances of children’s migration experiences, and the various ways it affects configurations of families and linkages with education, thus acknowledging a complexity that goes beyond the simple notion of migration and work as detrimental to children. In the same way, acknowledging the complexities and subjectivities in children’s migration experiences calls for an approach that rejects the conventional contrast between children as passive pawns and vulnerable preys or as active and autonomous agents in the migration process. Hence, the invariable need to begin with a position of respect for children, seeing them as capable of understanding and explaining their worlds. This study is but a start in the exploration of the migration experiences of working children. Further research is needed, not the least, to understand the migration experiences of boys. It would also be interesting to explore different viewpoints on children’s migration, bringing in the voices of parents, siblings,

and employers of child domestic workers. Research on migration to different types of domestic work relations, e.g. “fostering” as opposed to paid domestic work, is also important. Finally, while this study has focused on the migration experiences of child domestic workers, it goes without saying that the migration experiences of other working children also need to be explored.

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