

**MULTINATIONAL MAIDS:  
MULTISTATE MIGRATION AMONG  
ASPIRING FILIPINO MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

To  
All the Filipino migrants who shared their life stories with me.

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\* Not her real name

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AED	United Arab Emirates dirhams
ATIS-HK	Abra Tinggian Ilocano Society - Hong Kong, a Hong Kong-based migrant association for Filipino migrants from the Abra province in the north of the Philippines
CA\$	Canadian dollars
CGNFS	Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools
DH	Domestic Helper
EU	European Union
EUR	Euros
EVP	Exchange Visitor Program
FDM	Foreign Domestic Worker Movement Program
HK\$	Hong Kong dollars
ILO	International Labor Organization
INPS	Instituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale (National Institute of Social Security), Italy
LCP	Live-in Caregiver Program
LIC	Live-In Caregiver
NCLEX	National Council Licensure Examination
NCR	National Capital Region

NCS	New Conditions of Stay
NELM	New Economics of Labor Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSF	National Science Foundation
OWWA	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration
PHP	Philippine pesos
POEA	Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
PR	Permanent Residence/Residency
SAR	Saudi Arabian riyals
SG\$	Singapore dollars
TNT	<i>Tago nang tago</i>
TWC2	Transient Workers Count Too, a Singapore-based NGO
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
UNIFEM	UN Development Fund for Women

## GLOSSARY

<i>Abayah</i>	A loose black robe worn over a Muslim woman's clothes when in public
<i>Amah</i>	A maid or nanny in East Asia
<i>Au pair</i>	A term popular in the West to describe a young foreign woman who helps look after a household's young children in exchange for room and board
<i>Haram</i>	"Forbidden" in Arabic
<i>Hijab</i>	A head covering worn by a Muslim woman in public
<i>Haj</i>	A pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims are expected to undertake at least once in their lives
<i>Utang na loob</i>	A debt of gratitude or the norm of reciprocity that is widespread in Philippine culture
<i>Walang hiya</i>	Shame
<i>Balikbayan</i>	Overseas Filipinos
<i>Balikbayan box</i>	A cardboard box filled with presents, clothes, food items, etc., that overseas Filipinos send back to their relatives in the Philippines
<i>Jeepney</i>	The most popular form of transportation in the Philippines, they were originally US Army jeeps converted into crowded mini-buses and painted in flamboyant colors
<i>Tricycle</i>	A popular form of transportation in the Philippines, it consists of a motorcycle with a cab attached to its side where passengers can sit
<i>Tondo</i>	A heavily populated district of Manila that contains many of the city's slums

*Quezon City*

One of the cities that makes up Metro Manila

*3D jobs*

Dirty, dangerous and demeaning jobs

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

Within Filipino migrant domestic worker circles, Sherry would be considered one of the lucky few. An unmarried woman in her early twenties with a bachelor's degree in computer science, she had worked as a "medical secretary" in an exclusive clinic in Makati City in the Philippines for a few years after her college graduation before deciding to leave the country. Many of her relatives were already living overseas: On her mother's side, her aunts and uncles were all professionals working in Canada; Sherry's brother had been sponsored by his wife, a US citizen, for permanent residency in the US; and Sherry's sister, a nurse, had first worked in the UK for seven years and now lived in Australia with her husband, also a nurse. With so many of her family members scattered around the world and possessing citizenship in various Western countries, Sherry aspired to emigrate to the West as well.

Sherry knew however that she lacked the professional qualifications and work experience needed to secure a white-collar job in a Western country. So Sherry decided to pursue a position in Canada as a live-in caregiver (LIC) instead. The owner of the clinic where she worked had established a training center in Manila that provided caregiver training to aspiring migrant domestic workers. As a clinic employee, Sherry was eligible for a steep discount in the tuition fee rate. She enrolled in a six-month



training course and after she received her certificate of completion, she sent her résumé to her aunt in Canada who knew someone working in a Toronto maid agency. It took three months before she was able to secure a Canadian employer and then another year and a half before her Canadian work visa was approved. An uncle of hers who was also a Canadian citizen paid more than US\$8,000 to cover the agency fees and plane ticket from Manila to Toronto. And thus, through the benevolence of her overseas relatives and her connections in the Philippines, Sherry was eventually able to secure a job in Canada and put herself on a path to becoming a Canadian citizen.

Sherry is what migration scholars would call a “direct migrant,” travelling from her home country, the Philippines, to her preferred destination, Canada, in a single journey without any lengthy stops in intermediate countries. Such point-to-point journeys are the primary focus of most migration studies. The majority of our models of international migration are based on the notion of a single origin country and a single destination, similar to Sherry’s case. It is assumed that the journey itself between these two points is completed relatively quickly, within hours or days at the very most. In migration studies, the journey is rarely the destination.

Unlike Sherry, few migrant domestic workers from the Philippines are so fortunate as to be able to secure jobs in and visas to Western countries like Canada on their first try. Out of the 105,875 newly-hired migrant domestic workers who left the Philippines in 2010, the majority (58%) traveled to countries in the Middle East. Asia was the second largest market for these workers with 37% of new hires finding work in Asian countries like Hong Kong and Singapore. Less than 2% traveled directly to Canada from the Philippines (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2011). But in this

dissertation, I show how alternative migration patterns have emerged in recent decades that have increased the odds of these migrant workers being able to gain eventual entry into countries in the West like Canada. Instead of a single destination country, these labor migrants work for lengthy periods of time in multiple destination countries, moving from one intermediate destination country to the next as they attempt to climb their personal destination hierarchy. Ramona is one such “multinational maid.”

Ramona was 20 years old when she first decided to leave the Philippines. With an associate’s degree in computer science, the only job she had been able to secure in the Philippines was as a cashier in a local fast food chain. After two years of this type of low-paid work and no success securing a different kind of job that would better utilize her qualifications, she was desperate to leave the country for greener pastures overseas. She decided to seek out a job as an LIC in Canada after friends told her that Canada provided foreign caregivers a path to permanent residency. Her friends, who were already working as migrants domestic workers overseas, also informed her that attempting to travel directly to Canada was out of the question “because when you go directly from Philippines to here, and you don’t have any relatives that will gonna help you, it takes years. And it takes a lot of money too.” Ramona’s friends suggested an alternative migration strategy: Apply for a job in Hong Kong first, and then “cross country” to Canada from Hong Kong.

Ramona found a recruitment agency in the Philippines and applied for a job in Hong Kong, paying just over US\$1,700 in agency fees. She borrowed the money from her parents who sold some of their land to raise the necessary funds. Within three months, she had found a Hong Kong employer willing to hire her and received her Hong

Kong visa. Her employers turned out to be a sweet, elderly couple with whom Ramona built a strong, trusting relationship. She ended up working with them for six years. Happy with her job and her relationship with her employers, she almost shelved her plans to move to Canada, but her friends—many of whom had already made the jump from Hong Kong to Canada and become permanent residents in Canada—convinced her to follow them. In 2009, she submitted a job application to a Canadian maid agency along with a US\$2,500 fee payment. Thanks to her Hong Kong work experience, and because she applied for her visa through the Canadian High Commission in Hong Kong, she was matched with an employer and issued a Canadian visa within two months.

All in all, it took Ramona just over US\$4,000—less than half of what Sherry had paid—and six years of employment in a “stepping stone” country before she was able to gain access to Canada. But there had never been much chance of Ramona being able to travel directly to Canada. Unlike Sherry, she lacked the family connections to citizens of Western countries who could sponsor her for a visa or cover the exorbitant fees charged by migrant recruitment agencies to Philippines-based migrants seeking jobs in Canada. Ramona also felt that she did not have the luxury of time to simply wait in the Philippines for a year or more while her Canadian work visa was processed. For all these reasons, Ramona’s multistate migration trajectory was the most efficient and effective way for her to gain access to her preferred end-destination, Canada.

A comparison of migration statistics from the Philippine and Canadian governments reveals that over 80% of Filipino migrant domestic workers arriving in Canada on temporary work permits could potentially fall into this category of “multistate migrants.” I define these migrants as individuals who have lived/worked in an

intermediate destination country for at least a year before moving on to a new destination higher up their personal destination hierarchy. Other recent studies have found similar migration patterns adopted by other groups of aspiring migrants who were unable to gain access to their preferred destination on their first try (Biao 2007; Gold 2007; Konadu-Agyemang 1999) but there have been few attempts to define this emergent pattern of international migration. This dissertation is an attempt to explain the emergence of multistate migration among capital-constrained migrants such as Filipino migrant domestic workers and also to develop a comprehensive conceptual model of multistate migration that can be applied to all resource-strapped migrant populations that engage in such migration behavior.

Through in-depth interviews with 160 Filipino migrant domestic workers in five countries (the Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore, Canada and the United States), I find that multistate migration is a direct response to various macro-structural factors:

- (1) The increasingly strict barriers to permanent entry imposed by these migrants' preferred destination countries which are often in the West;
- (2) The growing demand for paid domestic workers in high-income countries around the world which has pushed these countries' governments to set up specific labor importation programs to bring in foreign domestic workers on short-term work visas; and
- (3) The emergence of a transnational labor market for migrant domestic workers which allows them to leverage the capital they have acquired while working in one overseas market to secure a better-paying job in another overseas market.

At the meso-level, multistate migration is fostered in part by the growing community of overseas Filipinos who provide substantive migration assistance to their relatives and friends in the home country and, once they are already overseas, advise them about the merits of new destination countries to move on to, and also encourage the adoption of a stepwise migration trajectory in order to reach their preferred destination. The *withholding* of help by overseas migrant contacts can also at times encourage aspiring migrants to undertake a multistate migration trajectory, if they find themselves unable to muster up enough resources to support a direct migration to their preferred destination.

Multistate migration is also fostered by a different kind of migration network: The network of interconnected recruitment and maid placement agencies in host and sending countries. The mushrooming of this for-profit migration industry within the Philippines and elsewhere encourages aspiring migrants to secure overseas jobs but at increasingly exorbitant prices, thus directing migrants towards less-expensive destinations and away from more-expensive ones. But these overseas agencies also promote multistate migration by using migrant labor markets in selected destination countries as recruitment pools for other countries higher up the destination hierarchy.

Lastly, at the micro-level, I show how multistate migration is a byproduct of an under-recognized side-effect of migration: The acquisition of additional capital (human, social, financial and cultural) which expands an individual migrant's capacity for agentic action, including further migrations to more-preferred but harder-to-enter destinations.

In the following sections, I outline the various gaps and contradictions within the literature that are addressed by this dissertation and some of the themes that ensuing chapters will explore.

### **Multistate Migration in the Migration Literature**

The subfield of migration studies that looks at migration trajectories spanning multiple destination countries has grown considerably in the last two decades, but it remains disorganized, as evidenced by the variety of terms that abound to describe this type of migration: secondary migration, tertiary migration, onward migration, stepwise migration, serial migration, multiple migration, multistage migration, triangular migration and re-migration (see Paul 2011a; Aydemir and Robinson 2008; King and Newbold 2007; Ossman 2007; Biao 2007; Siu 2005; DeVoretz and Ma 2002; Lam 1996, 1994). All these terms refer to the process of migrants undertaking legal stops of substantive duration in multiple destination countries as part of a migration journey spanning years, rather than days or weeks.

Some scholars who study this process focus on how such a migration journey can inform an individual's sense of self and home and their views of the world (Ossman *forthcoming*, 2007; Siu 2005, 2004). Siu calls this migration pattern "serial migration" and situates it within diasporic studies, focusing on the Chinese diaspora in Panama.<sup>1</sup> Bhachu (1985) studies Indian Sikh migrants from East Africa who have resettled in Great Britain, whom she calls "twice migrants" and "multiple migrants." Likewise, Cohen

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<sup>1</sup> Some studies of serial migration look at diasporic migration that spans generations. That is *not* what I am discussing here. This study focuses on migration journeys spanning multiple countries within a single lifetime.

(2007) uses the trope of the “wandering Jew” to analyze her own serial migration through the US, the UK and Morocco.

Given that their primary emphasis is on the lived experience of multiple migrations and its effects on the serial migrant, these scholars have paid less attention to the social forces behind this phenomenon. Siu writes that a “combination of social circumstances, geopolitical contingencies, and individual choice frame the practice of serial migration” (2005:89), without systematically outlining what these factors are. She does mention, however, that among the Chinese migrants she interviewed in Panama, women and working-class individuals are less likely to be serial migrants, as compared to middle-class men. Likewise, Bhachu (1986) finds that the “twice migrants” in her study of Indian Sikhs from East Africa who have resettled in Great Britain are, on average, of high social standing, possessing relative wealth and a university education. Among these scholars, there is less discussion about how the act of migration itself can allow a migrant to acquire new capital that can facilitate further migrations. Ossman (2004) does note that the serial migrants she interacts with have acquired a veneer of cosmopolitanism, a valuable form of cultural capital in certain quarters of the global economy. But there is no discussion of other forms of capital (financial, human or social) that these migrants may have accumulated. Finally, serial migration, as these scholars understand it, is almost always organic and unplanned, and very rarely, a strategic response to a migrant’s inability to reach their preferred destination.

Taking a more agentic and neoclassical view of multistate migration, Canadian economist Don DeVoretz has popularized the term “triangular migration” to describe the immigration of individuals from around the world to what he calls “entrepôt” countries

(such as Canada) where they accumulate additional human capital, before they move on to a third country (most often the US). DeVoretz, Ma and Zhang (2003) apply this “triangular migration model” to Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong who move to Canada to take up Canadian citizenship but then, feeling economic dissatisfaction in their adopted country, move on to the US. DeVoretz and his co-authors argue that migrants are initially attracted to Canada because it offers them “subsidized human capital” (such as English language training programs or specific technical skills for themselves or their children) and various free/low-cost public goods (such as safety, security, a welfare system, a stable government, etc.). However, after a period of time, some of these migrants might feel less than satisfied with their experience in Canada, especially if their new employment circumstances are less favorable than what they had expected or what they had previously enjoyed in their home country. Some of these disappointed migrants might choose to return to their home country; others might decide to continue living in Canada because they appreciate other aspects of life there. But DeVoretz proposes that still others might instead choose to use the capital they have acquired to secure admission into a new destination country such as the US where they imagine their life chances will finally improve.

A handful of studies have found evidence that supports DeVoretz’s theory regarding triangular migration with Canada being used as an “entrepôt.” Aydemir and Robinson (2008) calculate that 35% of young, working-age, male immigrants to Canada permanently leave the country within 20 years of their arrival. However, due to the paucity of cross-national data on migration inflows and outflows, the authors were unable to determine how many of these migrants returned to their home country and how many



moved onward to a new destination. King and Newbold (2007) took a different tack and focused exclusively on the population of onward migrants who move from Canada to the US. By combining data from the 2001 Canadian Census with data from the 2000 United States Census, these authors find that onward Canadian immigrants who move to the US are more likely to be young, married, possess a bachelor's degree, and earn an income of US\$100,000 or greater. These findings highlight how the re-migration decision is also constrained by an individual's access to capital, particularly human and financial capital. These findings also buttress the arguments of those who have claimed that Canada is experiencing a "brain drain" with the highly-skilled (both native-born and immigrant) choosing to move on to countries like the US where they believe their human capital will be better rewarded. (DeVoretz and Laryea [1998] and Stewart-Patterson [1999] make this claim while Helliwell [1999] denies it.)

The picture thus presented about triangular migrants is that of rational individuals, objectively weighing the (economic and non-economic) costs and benefits of staying in their adoptive country versus moving to a new destination. DeVoretz and Ma (2002) briefly consider the possibility that these migrants had engaged in strategic behavior, consciously using their initial destination as a stepping stone to their preferred destination. But these authors largely reject this possibility, noting that each migration decision involves significant transaction costs and is usually not made lightly, effectively rejecting the likelihood of such long-term, multistage planning on the part of triangular migrants. But DeVoretz and Ma are discussing so-called permanent immigrants who move with their families to a new location, taking all their worldly possessions with them. Unattached migrants and individuals whose families remain behind in the home

country should be in an easier position to undertake such strategic planning as they are the sole bearers of most of the social and emotional costs of each migration.

Migrants possessing relatively large amounts of financial, social and migrant capital should also be better positioned to think strategically about onward migration. This hypothesis is partially supported by Aydemir and Robinson's (2006) finding that the onward migration rates of immigrants from Hong Kong who arrived in Canada between 1990-1994 were as high as 45% within the first year of their arrival. This was a period when there was a great deal of uncertainty over the likely future of Hong Kong after its planned 1997 handover to China. Many of these Hong Kong immigrants to Canada entered under business class visas—indicating their access to large amounts of financial capital. The authors posit that a significant percentage of these arrivals were motivated by the desire to secure Canadian citizenship—a valuable form of geopolitical capital—rather than any intention to settle down in Canada. The most likely scenario is that they returned to live in Hong Kong but now armed with Canadian citizenship as a backup plan in case conditions in Hong Kong worsened after the 1997 handover. If this is the case, then these migrants do not qualify as multistate migrants given that they returned to their home country. But the larger point these authors are making—that strategic migration and destination decision-making among migrants is possible—still holds true.

DeVoretz's triangular migration model focuses primarily on immigrants to a country who are able to acquire a new citizenship or residency status that eases their subsequent migrations. A broader view of triangular migration could easily include temporary migrants who also can acquire additional capital with each move they make, though perhaps not the geopolitical capital of a new citizenship status. This is an

important point because most studies of migration only focus on how the act of migration is *constrained* by the amount of capital a potential migrant can access. Little attention has been paid to the fact that migration also creates the opportunity for migrants to acquire *new* migrant capital. DeVoretz and Ma discuss how migrants in Canada can accumulate additional human capital such as “language, knowledge of labor market channels, cultural conventions, [...] programming skills, retraining for certification, and access to modern technology (2002:59). Migrants can also acquire other types of migration-relevant capital: Financial capital through higher wages and increased savings, social capital in the form of new network contacts both in their new location but also in other countries, and finally, cultural capital in terms of the cosmopolitanism (real and performative) that comes from having lived and worked overseas. All these types of capital can help ease the process of re-migrating to a new location.

There are other examples of multiple migrations that fit the mold of triangular migration. Gold writes that Israel may have been seen as a “location of temporary residence” (2007:290) to many Jews from the former Soviet Union, North Africa, Argentina and South Africa who immigrated to Israel after World War II because it offered them immediate asylum, but then sought what they considered to be greener pastures in the United States and other Western countries. Biao (2007) finds that many Indian IT workers accept overseas jobs in what he calls “global gateways”—countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and the Middle East—to use as springboards to secure temporary work visas to the United States. In effect, these highly-skilled migrants are attempting to increase their human capital even further so that they will be more attractive to US employers.

In summary, the existing literature on multistate migration teaches us that this migration pattern involves a migrant's progression through a series of countries with stays of substantive duration in each stop. These movements across multiple countries are at times intentional and mapped out from the start, or they can be more organic in nature. This journey is motivated by a migrant's desire to climb their personal destination hierarchy to find a country where they are most satisfied with their living and working conditions. This movement across countries is made possible by an oft-overlooked quality of migration: Its ability to allow migrants to accumulate *new* migrant capital (human, social, financial and cultural) while overseas which facilitates further migrations.

What this literature does *not* adequately address is the ability of capital-constrained migrants to undertake multistate migration. To date, the studies that have looked at multistate migration patterns have focused on high-capital migrants, many of them white-collar professionals who trade on their already high levels of human capital to gain access to various countries. This dissertation focuses on a very different population of migrants: Foreign domestic workers from the Philippines, who are generally seen as low-capital migrants, and the factors that encourage and enable them to engage in such a capital-intensive process.

### **Women's Independent Migration from the Patriarchal Philippines**

Among labor-exporting countries, the Philippines is regarded as an innovator and role model in its marketing and management of its migrant citizens. Over the last 40 years, it has built a vast government apparatus focused on all aspects of migration

management, including the authorization, regulation, marketing, training, recruitment and placement of Filipino migrant workers overseas (Rodriguez 2010; Agunias 2008; Tyner 2004). However, out-migration from the Philippines is very much a public-private partnership, sustained not only by the government but also by the private sector that profits tremendously from the overseas placement of migrant Filipino labor (Agunias 2008).

There are over 1,300 private recruitment agencies in the Philippines licensed by the government to match prospective labor migrants with overseas employers.<sup>2</sup> These for-profit agencies handle the vast majority of all recruitment and placement of Filipino workers overseas. In contrast, the Government Placement Branch placed just 2% of all newly-hired land-based workers in 2009 (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2010b:11). The Philippine government has consciously tried to limit its involvement in the direct recruitment, placement and even training of workers overseas, leaving these functions to the private sector. It has done so partly because it was unable to efficiently handle the large volume of Filipinos leaving the Philippines each year, and also so as not to create the impression that it is actively involved in the commoditization and export of its people (Tyner 2009).

While this migration infrastructure plays an important role in fostering out-migration from the Philippines, so too do the continuing dire economic straits that many Filipino families find themselves in. In 2009, the individual poverty rate in the Philippines was 26.5%. The female unemployment rate was 7.4%. Among employed women, 46.1% were characterized as holding “vulnerable employment” as unpaid family

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<sup>2</sup> As of January 21, 2011, there were 1,372 active, accredited recruitment agencies in “good standing” listed on the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration website. (<http://www.poea.gov.ph/cgi-bin/agList.asp?mode=all>)

workers or own-account workers.<sup>3</sup> Employed women are also heavily concentrated in low-paying sectors of the Philippine economy—24% in agriculture and another 66% in services (such as domestic work)—with limited opportunities for career development. These negative wage pressures make it hard for locally-employed Filipino women to sufficiently support their families and set the stage for their consideration of temporary labor migration as a solution to their financial woes. But the continuing economic doldrums of the Philippines means that, even at the end of their two-year contract, overseas migrant workers are likely to decide to continue overseas (though not necessarily in the same host country).

For various structural and cultural reasons, migrant domestic work is the most popular exit strategy for prospective women migrants who desire to leave the Philippines. In 2010, 28% of newly-hired, land-based migrants leaving the Philippines were domestic workers, constituting the single largest occupational bloc of labor migrants leaving the Philippines. Of these 105,875 newly-hired migrant domestic workers, 98% were women (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2011). Considered another way, of all the female labor migrants leaving the Philippines as new hires in 2010, 51% were domestic workers.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these social forces pushing Filipinas to leave the country to work overseas, there are other forces that may hinder these women's independent migration.

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<sup>3</sup> All labor and security statistics for the Philippines were sourced from the World Bank's website at <http://data.worldbank.org/country/philippines> and the Annual Labor and Employment Estimates of the Philippine Government's National Statistics Office at [http://www.census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/lf101103\\_ar.pdf](http://www.census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/lf101103_ar.pdf). Retrieved on March 28, 2012

<sup>4</sup> Women represented 55% of all newly-hired migrants leaving the Philippines in 2010. This relatively even gender distribution is typical of the outflow of migrants leaving the Philippines each year. However, these numbers mask the heavily gendered occupational distribution of this outflow. As mentioned earlier, almost all migrant domestic workers leaving the Philippines are women. Likewise, most nursing professionals leaving the Philippines are women, while most electricians, construction workers, welders and plumbers are men (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2011).

Most Philippine households have a patriarchal authority structure with men seen as the natural heads of households (Lan 2006; Chant and McIlwaine 1995). And Philippine society as a whole is still largely conservative with women viewed as the primary caregivers within the family, responsible for looking after the children and elderly, and handling most domestic chores, even if they have a job outside the home (Eder 2006; Roces 2000; Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Eviota 1992).<sup>5</sup> Prospective Filipino women migrants have been found to encounter resistance from family members when they broach the idea of their independent migration, especially when they mention that they will be working abroad as live-in domestic workers, which is typically seen as a low-status occupation (Parreñas 2001; Lan 2006).

And yet, women's independent migration out of the Philippines and other patriarchal and traditional societies continues to occur at an increasing rate (Strozza, Gallo and Grillo 2003; Parreñas 2001; Afsar 2003; White 1976; Oishi 2005; Lauby and Stark 1988; Liang and Chen 2003; Bardhan 1977; Oishi 2005). At different points in time and in different countries, patriarchal households have even seemed to support their womenfolk's departure from the ancestral home in order to seek work in the nearest urban area or in another country, with the understanding that these women would remit a large portion of their earnings back to their families (Scott and Tilly 1980; Lauby and Stark 1988; Bardhan 1977; White 1976).

I attempt to reconcile these contradictory reports by showing how familial resistance to Filipino women's independent labor migration is not necessarily a given. Within the present study, women who were unmarried, widowed or separated, did not

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<sup>5</sup> The female labor force participation rate, calculated as a percentage of the female population of the Philippines over the age of 15 years, was 50% in 2010. (Source: The World Bank website. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>)

have any children and who possessed a college degree were less likely to encounter resistance from their families. Women with female relatives already working as migrant domestic workers overseas were also less likely to face resistance. And in households where women were already out-earning their husbands, the balance of power in the household had swung sufficiently in the woman's direction that there was little to no resistance to her independent migration decision. Other macro-structural factors (such as the culture of migration within the Philippines and the high cost of tertiary education) also act as a counterweight against the resistance to women's independent migration.

For those women who did encounter familial resistance, I find that these aspiring migrants often deployed gendered negotiating tactics, manipulating their ascribed gendered roles as dutiful daughters and supportive wives to justify why they needed to work overseas. They framed the benefits their out-migration could provide in a gendered manner and constructed their independent migration decision as an exclusive act of love, filial loyalty and self-sacrifice, rather than an individualistic decision. In order to win over these women's resistant relatives, the more self-oriented objectives behind their migration decision were carefully filtered out. In other words, these women display significant agency in successfully negotiating the gendered and generational hierarchies in which they live. I argue that this same agency is what they deploy to climb their destination hierarchies through multistate migration.

### **Destination Biases and Aspirations**

One of the primary reasons behind the popularity of paid domestic work as an exit strategy from the Philippines is the wide range of destination countries that accept



migrant domestic workers (see Lan 2006; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Parreñas 2001; Anthias and Lazaridis 2000; Yeoh, Huang and Gonzalez III 1999). Since the 1970s, many countries around the world have instituted migrant domestic worker programs to import foreign guest workers who can provide cheap live-in childcare, eldercare and/or housework to their native populace.<sup>6</sup> Even as many of these countries are now tightening their immigration restrictions to prevent “undesirable” foreigners from entering their borders (Cornelius, Tsuda, Martin and Hollifield 2004; Castles and Miller 2003), they have continued to import foreign domestic workers on temporary work contracts to meet their national-level social reproduction needs. In effect, a transnational labor market for migrant domestic workers has emerged.

However, despite migrant domestic laborers performing similar types of work in various countries, these countries’ guest worker programs are not equivalent (both in terms of policy and praxis). In this dissertation, I propose a simple rating system for different countries’ migrant domestic worker regimes, using only two broad criteria: the degree of *employment rights* and the degree of *migrant rights* granted migrant domestic workers. I apply this system to seven of the more common destinations in Asia, Europe, North America and the Middle East for Filipino migrant domestic workers. Western countries like Canada and Italy rate the highest, offering both relatively decent living and working conditions and the possibility of permanent residence. East Asian countries like Hong Kong and Singapore constitute a second tier of destinations, where working

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<sup>6</sup> At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, newly arrived immigrants in countries like the US, Canada and the UK, often turned to waged domestic service as a way to earn an income. Irish women coming to work as domestic servants in 19<sup>th</sup> century America are probably one of the best-known examples in the United States (Lynch-Brennan 2009; Diner 1983). However, it was only in the 1960s and ‘70s that large-scale, government-led projects to specifically import temporary migrant domestic workers were initiated on a widespread basis.

conditions are sometimes manageable but no migrant rights are extended to foreign domestic workers. Finally, countries in the Middle East (such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) perform the worst, offering no migrant rights whatsoever and also providing few workplace protections and rights to domestic workers. It is these stark differences between host countries that propel migrant domestic workers to leave one destination and seek out work in another where they hope to find better working and living conditions.

But how much of these country differences are these migrant domestic workers cognizant of? To date, studies that try to explicate the destination decision-making process have focused on identifying objective differences between destination options in an attempt to understand how prospective migrants make their destination decision. These studies assume, first, that prospective migrants are fully aware of these factual differences across destinations and, second, that migrants rationally and objectively weigh the costs and benefits of different countries when making their destination decision. These studies rarely recognize that migrants arrive at their destination decisions using information that may not be entirely accurate.

I attempt to shed light on the more subjective side of destination decision-making. I first highlight how prospective migrant domestic workers from the Philippines are broadly familiar with the pros and cons of different destination options. These individuals also share a common destination hierarchy socially constructed out of accounts heard from friends and relatives (both in the Philippines and overseas) and mass media reports. At the same time, however, their mental maps of the world are also influenced by cognitive biases and heuristics that can cause them to overvalue certain countries and

undervalue others. These biases impact their short- and long-term destination decisions, and I find that they can also encourage migrants to undertake multistate migration despite the significant investment of time, effort and money required.

### **The Role of Capital in Multistate Migration**

One of the underlying reasons for the adoption of multistate migration is the aspiring migrant's initial lack of migrant capital. Migrant capital refers to the resources needed to facilitate an aspiring migrant's entry into a chosen destination country. Some prospective migrants may lack the necessary educational qualifications or work experience to secure an automatic space in the immigration quotas that high-income, migrant-receiving countries have set aside for highly skilled "economic" immigrants. They also may not possess sufficient funds to cover the costs of migration or to qualify as "investor" immigrants, a category of independent, entrepreneurial migrant that several high-income countries also seek to attract.<sup>7</sup> Or they lack the overseas connections that would allow them immediate legal entry through "family class" immigrant visas. They may have relatives—perhaps even siblings or aunts and uncles—who live overseas in desired destination countries; but, because they do not qualify as their relatives' *immediate* dependents or their relatives do not hold citizenship or permanent residence status overseas, they cannot utilize these connections to gain immediate, direct entry under a permanent immigrant class of visa into these destinations. For instance, US citizens over 21 years of age can sponsor their siblings for a "family preference

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<sup>7</sup> "Investor" immigrants are required to invest significant sums of money (800,000CAD in Canada and between 500,000-1,000,000USD in the US) in a business venture in order to receive a long-term visa to their desired destination. See [http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types\\_1323.html#fifth](http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types_1323.html#fifth) for the US guidelines and <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/business/index.asp> for the Canadian guidelines.

immigrant visa” but only 65,000 of such visas are issued each year<sup>8</sup> and the backlog of applications is so large that, at the end of 2010, the State Department was only just starting to review sponsorship applications for Filipino siblings filed in April 1991, almost 20 years earlier.<sup>9</sup> Finally, these individuals may lack the luxury of time to wait for an alternative (more comfortable) exit opportunity from their home country, one that would take them directly to their preferred destination. They may be under so much pressure to start earning money for their families that, rather than waiting in their homeland for a visa to their preferred destination to materialize, these potential migrants might choose to immigrate elsewhere in the near term just so they can start earning some foreign exchange immediately.

While the lack of migrant capital can act as a constraint on migrants’ initial migration and destination decisions, I find that the acquisition of new migrant capital can create opportunities for additional migration. There are four categories of migrant capital that are useful in supporting such journeys:

- (1) Migrant human capital refers to both information about the process of immigration to a desired destination—the visa categories to apply under, the paperwork required, the particular immigration laws—as well as more personal characteristics such as an aspiring migrant’s work experience, language skills, educational qualifications, gender and even age that can facilitate securing a job in the desired country.
- (2) Migrant social capital refers to the assistance received through network connections (particularly, current migrants) to reduce the costs and risks of migration. This

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<sup>8</sup> [http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types\\_1306.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types_1306.html). Accessed on February 14, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.travel.state.gov/pdf/Cut-off\\_Dates\\_Philippines\\_online.pdf](http://www.travel.state.gov/pdf/Cut-off_Dates_Philippines_online.pdf). Accessed on February 14, 2011.

- assistance can take forms such as information sharing, employer matching, the recommendation of a trustworthy recruitment agency, and loans or gifts of money.
- (3) Migrant financial capital refers to the funds needed to pay the necessary agency fees, visa application fees, travel expenses and other ancillary costs involved in gaining access to a desired destination. When discussing migrant financial capital, I am referring only to funds that the prospective migrant directly possesses. Migrant social capital, meanwhile, includes funds received through social network connections.
- (4) The above three forms of migrant capital are the ones that are most often highlighted within the migration literature. But there is a fourth category of migrant capital that can also be useful in supporting multistate migration: cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to the forms of knowledge, skills, education and other advantages embodied within an individual that provide them with a higher status in society (Bourdieu 1986). All Filipino migrant domestic workers possess some cultural capital by simple virtue of their nationality and the efforts of the Philippine government to frame Filipina domestic workers as intrinsically more loving, nurturing and better qualified than other nationality groups (Tyner 2009). But these migrants may also acquire *new* cultural capital after working overseas for a period of time, especially if they work in countries that themselves have a higher standing in the world order. In my dissertation, I report how countries like Hong Kong and Singapore were seen as excellent recruiting grounds and credentialing sites by maid agencies in Canada. These agencies appear to view migrants with prior work experience in these Asian countries as being more competent than migrants from other intermediate destinations such as the Middle East. In this manner, Filipino migrants' new cultural capital

(acquired through their decision to work in select countries like Singapore and Hong Kong) can support their multistate migrations up their destination hierarchy.

### **An Overview of the Dissertation**

In the following chapters, I describe and then theorize the emergence of multistate migration among Filipino migrant domestic workers over the last 20 years. But first, in Chapter Two, I lay out the methods I used to gather my data. Chapters Three and Four then delve into the initial migration decision of Filipino migrant domestic workers. Helping to set the stage for the rest of the dissertation, Chapter Three focuses on the factors that push so many Filipinos to leave the Philippines each year to work overseas as short-term contract workers and the institutionalized private-public migration industry that facilitates and manages the out-migration of over one million Filipino labor migrants each year. I pay special attention to answering the question of why so many Filipinas choose migrant domestic work as their exit strategy. Chapter Four shows how the migration decision—made at the individual level—is only the beginning of a negotiation with family members who are sometimes reluctant to let their female relatives work overseas and as live-in domestic workers to boot. These women’s ability to overcome this familial resistance is an indicator of the degree of agency these women migrants possess.

Having dealt with the migration decision, Chapters Five and Six address the destination decisions of aspiring migrant domestic workers. Chapter Five paints a picture of the transnational labor market for migrant domestic workers that has emerged in recent decades, focusing on the policy regimes of seven common/preferred destinations for Filipino migrant domestic workers: Canada, Italy, the United States, Hong Kong,

Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. This chapter highlights differences between living and working conditions in these seven countries and the varying barriers to entry into each of these markets. The entry barriers and differences in conditions across these destinations are a driving force behind multistate migration.

Chapter Six looks at these countries through the eyes of migrant domestic workers themselves, assessing how these migrants construct their personal destination hierarchies and destination aspirations. I argue that these aspirations play a critical role in encouraging these migrants to keep moving “onward and upward” to new countries higher up their destination hierarchies.

Chapter Seven focuses on the mechanics of multistate migration and presents a model of how multistate migration may be adopted by capital-constrained migrants. It outlines what makes for a successful multistate migrant, by highlighting the differences between multistate migrants and direct migrants who move directly to their preferred destination country, and between multistate migrants and single-stage migrants who move only once, to a less-preferred destination country and no further. It also discusses the different kinds of migrant capital that fuel the adoption of multistate migration trajectories. Finally, Chapter Eight drills down to one particular type of migrant capital—migrant social capital—and discusses how the differentiated mobilization of migrant social capital can encourage the adoption of multistate migration trajectories as well.

In the concluding chapter, I focus on the questions that remain unanswered: How does multistate migration impact the migrants who undertake such journeys? What are other likely occupations where multistate migration might emerge? And what does multistate migration mean for migration studies?

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Data and Methods**

The selection of multistate migration as the focus of my dissertation was an accident. A happy accident, but an accident nonetheless. I traveled to Asia in the summer of 2008 intent on studying the process of destination decision-making among Filipino migrant domestic workers. I had chosen this topic and this study population for a variety of reasons. Though I was born in India and am an Indian citizen, I spent more than 10 years in Singapore, first as a high school student, then an undergraduate at the National University of Singapore and, finally, on the managerial track at Singapore Airlines. During this time, I became familiar with the ubiquitous presence of foreign domestic workers in Singaporean homes, seeing them go about their daily chores: washing their employers' cars, taking out the garbage, walking their employers' children to and from school, purchasing groceries, and on Sundays, going to church and picnicking in parks. Foreign domestic workers are positioned near the bottom rung of Singapore's social hierarchy and often treated as such. There were a handful of occasions when I was out in public with some of my Chinese Singaporean friends who had young children, when strangers would assume that I was my friends' Indian domestic worker and treat me with disdain or as if I were completely invisible. Those few instances gave me some



appreciation of the marginalization experienced by migrant domestic workers in Singapore and other Asian countries on a daily basis.

After leaving Singapore and beginning my doctoral studies at the University of Michigan, my focus returned to this migrant population as I was searching for a research topic for my third-year candidacy paper. Given that the Philippines had been the primary source of migrant domestic workers for Singapore in the 1990s when I lived there, I started to delve into the literature on Filipino migrant domestic workers. I was stunned by the wide variety of countries where Filipino domestic workers can be found. In 2006, over 91,000 newly-hired Filipino domestic workers traveled to roughly 70 countries and territories around the world.<sup>1</sup> Though Hong Kong and Kuwait were the most common destinations in 2006, attracting over 19,000 newly-hired migrant domestic workers each, Filipinos also traveled in significant numbers to countries as disparate as Canada, Italy, Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Spain and Singapore. I became fascinated by the question of how these migrants chose between their myriad destination options, but I could not find any study that addressed the destination decision-making process of Filipino migrant domestic workers. More broadly, while there are plentiful theories of migration, less scholarly attention has been paid to the destination decisions of migrants. I saw an opportunity to build new theory by attempting to explain the destination decisions of these migrant workers.

In early 2008, I began to craft a study design to address this research question. At the end of April, I left for Asia with a plan to conduct interviews with Filipino migrant domestic workers first in Singapore and then the Philippines and Hong Kong. My very first interview was conducted in the waiting area of a maid agency in the Lucky Plaza

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<sup>1</sup> [http://poea.gov.ph/stats/Skills/Skill\\_Country\\_Sex/2006.pdf](http://poea.gov.ph/stats/Skills/Skill_Country_Sex/2006.pdf)

Shopping Center in Singapore's downtown shopping district, a popular hangout of Filipino migrant workers during their rest-days. Inside the agency's waiting area, there were a couple of Filipinas sitting and chatting on the sofa and, after receiving permission from the agency manager to approach them, I introduced myself and asked if either of them was a domestic worker and, if yes, would they be willing to be interviewed by me.

One of the migrants, a middle-aged woman with a calm and confident air about her, quickly agreed. With little prompting from me, Winola started to talk about the years she had spent in Saudi Arabia working as a private tutor for a well-to-do Saudi family, her return to the Philippines and her subsequent failed attempt to find a job as a live-in caregiver (LIC) in Canada. As I probed further about her migration plans, she mentioned in passing the job offer she had received for work in Cambodia and the other offer that had recently appeared out of the blue which she had just accepted: A job as a domestic worker for a Saudi family in Italy. The Singapore maid agency where we were conversing was the one that had brokered the deal and they had offered her the Italian position primarily because of her prior work experience in Saudi Arabia.

As I listened to Winola, I experienced one of those eureka moments treasured by all scientists. Until that point, it had never occurred to me that migrant domestic workers might work in multiple overseas destinations over the course of their migratory lifetimes. It seems obvious in retrospect but I had never before considered the implications of having so many overseas markets for migrant domestic workers. From that point forward, I made sure to ask all my interviewees if they had worked in multiple destinations and the process by which they had made *each* destination decision.

From the interviews I conducted in Asia, I came to the realization that Filipino migrant domestic workers carry in their heads a cognitive map of the world and that they rate and rank the countries they are aware of to construct a “hierarchy” of destination options that drives their destination decisions. I also discovered that, though they are considered “low-capital” migrants, these migrant domestic workers are still able to agentically and strategically map out a multistage, multistate migration trajectory to climb that hierarchy (Paul 2011a). It became clear from my interviews that countries in the West, and particularly Canada and the US, sat at the top of most of these migrants’ destination hierarchies. However, only four of my interviewees in Asia had managed to secure jobs in the West at the time of their interviews. I knew that if I wanted to confirm my hypotheses about what it took to complete a successful multistate migration journey to the West, I would have to conduct another round of research in the countries at the top of migrants’ destination hierarchy. Thus was born the second phase of this study: Interviews with Filipino migrant domestic workers in Canada and the US. In the following sections, I outline in greater detail the various aspects of my study design for both the Asian half of the study and the subsequent North American half. First, however, I describe the methodological principles that grounded this project from the start.

### **Methodological Principles**

The methodological approach I adopted for this study was primarily driven by the twin goals of discovery and exploration. Kleining and Witt have outlined several heuristic rules that can help to “optimize the explorative potential” (2001:8) of any study, qualitative or quantitative. The first two of these are:

“Rule One: ‘The researcher should be open to new concepts and change his/her preconceptions if the data are not in agreement with them.’

Rule Two: ‘The topic of research is preliminary and may change during the research process.’ It is only fully known after being successfully explored.”

These “rules” share commonalities with Glaser and Strauss’ (1986) grounded theory approach and the reflexive ethnographic approach in general (Burawoy 1998). All these scholars recommend an open mindset when first approaching one’s data, but at the same time, they do not argue for researchers to enter the field *tabula rasa*. In addition, they suggest that a “dialectic” needs to occur between the researcher and her data until a hypothesis has been formed that successfully incorporates the “answers” the data provides to the researcher’s questions (Kleining and Witt 2001; Burawoy 1998). This was the philosophy I embraced when initiating my study and it also explains my willingness to change my research focus upon entering the field.

A second key principle in this study’s design and execution is my comparative analysis of Filipino migrant domestic workers in different destination countries who followed different migration trajectories upon leaving the Philippines. Comparative analysis is a foundational tool for the building of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and Kleining and Witt (2001) also recommend such an approach to allow for greater opportunities for discovery. Within migration studies, Alejandro Portes (1997) has lamented the shortage of such “cross-national comparisons” of international migration. Rhacel Parreñas’ (2001) study of Filipino domestic workers in Italy and the US was one of the first studies that took an international comparative approach to this migrant population. Her objective was to understand how Filipino domestic workers in

these two countries with very different “contexts of reception” still experienced similar dislocations. Since the publication of her book and Portes’ exhortation for more comparative studies of migration, there have been other monographs and articles based on qualitative research that compare the experiences of Filipino migrants in different destination countries (see Banfi 2008; Pe-Pua 2003) or the experiences of migrant domestic workers of different nationalities working in the same destination country (Lan 2006). My study follows in the footsteps of these earlier studies with a comparative look at the migration journeys of Filipino domestic workers in four very different destination countries (the US, Canada, Singapore and Hong Kong).

This comparative international approach achieved three purposes: it (1) “establish[ed] the generality of a fact” (Glaser and Strauss 1986:24)—in my case, the prevalence of multistate migration (as both strategy and action) among Filipino migrant domestic workers across multiple destination countries—, (2) generated new theory and (3) verified existing theory. The first half of the study in Asia generated new substantive theory about migrants’ multistate migration trajectories through an inductive process grounded in interview data and a comparative analysis across different destination countries. From this research emerged various conceptual categories, including the distinct categories of “multistate” and “single-stage” migrants, and the factors (such as migrants’ degree of access to capital prior to their migration and their ability to accumulate additional capital while overseas) that distinguishes one from the other. The data collected during the first half of the study highlighted how migrants who were able to accumulate additional capital while overseas were in a better position to become multistate migrants, moving onward and upward to climb their destination hierarchy.

Another conceptual proposition that emerged from the Asian half of this study was that of the “transnational labor market” for migrant domestic workers and how certain immigration and labor policies needed to be in place in a destination country in order for overseas migrants to be able to leverage their newly-acquired capital to move to that destination. This set the stage for the second half of the study which focused on verifying these theories. By comparing the US and Canada—two popular destinations for Filipino migrants but with starkly different policies regarding migrant domestic workers—I aimed to test the hypotheses I had developed from my Asian interviews.

A third guiding principle in my study was the adoption of Bourdieu’s “structuralist constructivism” or “constructivist structuralism” (Wacquant 1992:11). This approach to sociological methodology recognizes that social structures exist both as objective phenomena (such as the unequal distribution of different types of capital, laws and regulations that discriminate against particular groups of migrants, etc.) that directly and concretely impact individuals’ ability to act, but also as subjective representations within individuals’ minds, shaping how they choose what action to take. Recognizing the bidimensional nature of social structures calls for a twin focus on both hard facts and symbolic meanings. When applied to the case of migrant domestic workers, this “double reading” requires, first, a mapping out of the various external factors/forces that can constrain and shape an individual migrant’s migration and destination decisions. But this must be followed by an assessment of how each individual perceives the world of destination options around them and how these subjective interpretations influence their decisions as well. For this reason, my study design focused on collecting data on participants’ actual access to capital (human, financial and social) and other objective,

macro-level data, but also on collecting participants' subjective impressions of different destination countries, their migration dreams and their destination aspirations.

This dual approach is apparent in the interview protocols used for this study (see Appendices A and B) but also in how the rest of this dissertation is structured. For instance, in discussing how Filipino migrant domestic workers come to make their destination decision, I outline the macro-level factors (immigration and labor policies, labor market conditions, human capital pre-requisites, financial entry barriers, etc.) that constrain prospective migrants' decisions in Chapter Five. I draw upon primary data such as different countries' published regulations and reports concerning their internal domestic worker market, as well as secondary data including academic and UN case studies of particular countries' policies, newspaper articles concerning the latest changes to the domestic worker programs of these countries, and the country-specific investigations by human rights groups interested in the welfare of foreign domestic workers. Together, this material helps paint a comprehensive picture of each country's programs and its ease of entry (both in terms of the financial cost involved and the human capital prerequisites). But, in the subsequent chapter, I describe how individual migrants view each of these countries and how their destination perceptions shape their destination preferences and eventual destination decisions. In this manner, I recognize the role played by both objective and intersubjective factors in shaping destination outcomes. Such an approach was adopted throughout the study.

## Selection of Study Sites

For the first half of my study, I elected to conduct my field research in three Asian countries: Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines. Hong Kong was selected because it had been the largest receiver of newly-hired Filipino domestic workers in six of the eight years between 2000 and 2008.<sup>2</sup> There were over 150,000 Filipino migrant domestic workers living and working in Hong Kong in 2000 (Robles 2002). Singapore, meanwhile, represented a much less popular destination, ranking only eighth in terms of migrant volume<sup>2</sup> and with approximately 80,000 Filipino migrant domestic workers residing in the country in 2000 (Sayres 2007). I wanted to explore the reasons behind this divergence in migration flows to these two countries in an inductive manner, without any predefined hypotheses about the reasons for this difference.

I also chose to interview returned and prospective migrants in Manila, in the National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines, to broaden my participant base to include migrant domestic workers who may have worked or were planning to work in other countries in other parts of the world. The NCR is the single largest sending region for newly-hired migrant domestic workers from the Philippines, consistently sending 25% or more of all newly-hired overseas domestic workers (Sayres 2007). In addition, most Philippine recruitment agencies are based in Metro Manila so prospective migrants from other parts of the Philippines often travel to Manila to visit agencies and apply for overseas jobs. My strategy paid off as I was able to interview several women who had worked or were about to work in various Middle Eastern countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, Iraq and Lebanon) and also women who were about to leave for work in various Western countries including Italy, the US and Cyprus.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://poea.gov.ph/stats/2008\\_stats.pdf](http://poea.gov.ph/stats/2008_stats.pdf). Table 28.



For the second phase of my study, two countries were chosen as study sites: the US and Canada. My interviewees in 2008 most frequently cited Canada and the US as their “dream destinations” so I sought to interview migrants who had managed to gain entry into either country in order to understand the migration strategies and trajectories they had adopted in order to do so. There were an estimated 640,000 Filipino migrants (permanent, temporary and irregular) living in Canada in December 2009, making Canada the third largest destination for Filipino migrants after the United States and Saudi Arabia. However, Saudi’s population of 1.16 million Filipino migrants was overwhelmingly comprised of temporary contract workers with only a meager 350 permanent immigrants in the entire group. In contrast, 86% of Canada’s Filipino population held permanent residency or Canadian citizenship.

But Canada’s Filipino population was still dwarfed by that of the US, which totaled 2.9 million individuals in December 2009 (though the proportion of permanent Filipino migrants in the US at 90% was similar to that of Canada) (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2010). In 2010, Filipinos constituted the second largest Asian ethnic group within the US.<sup>3</sup>

Though both the US and Canada possess a large stock of Filipino migrants and both have similar immigration policies when it comes to family reunification, on the issue of migrant domestic workers, these two countries have starkly different policies. Canada has an active migrant domestic worker program that issues four-year work visas to qualified foreigners and allows them to apply for permanent residency once they complete two years’ worth of full employment. The US, meanwhile, has no program to import foreign domestic workers though it does allow foreign diplomats and some

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-11.pdf>

foreign businesspersons to bring their personal servants with them when they are posted to the US. (More details about both countries' programs are provided in Chapter Five.) A cross-country comparison between the US and Canada allowed me to understand how these differences in policy regimes directly and indirectly impacts migrants' destination decisions and strategies. I also hypothesized that I would find a higher proportion of multistate migrants in Canada versus the US given that Canada's program created an access point for aspiring capital-constrained migrants that the US lacked.

Within these two countries, however, I had to choose specific field locations so as to narrow my recruitment efforts. In Canada, I chose to recruit participants from Toronto, and, for the US, I chose both San Francisco and New York City. Toronto was chosen because it is the largest immigrant gateway in Canada and there were almost 180,000 Filipinos living in the Toronto Metropolitan Area as of the 2006 Canadian Census (Statistics Canada 2007). Almost one out of every two Filipinos in Canada lives in or around Toronto. Many Filipino Canadian cultural, social and religious organizations are also based in Toronto, providing what I imagined would be plentiful opportunities to recruit participants.

Within the US, I chose San Francisco as a field site because the Golden State alone holds 43% of all Filipinos living in the US (US Census 2012:18). It should be noted though that, within California, the San Francisco Metropolitan Area does not boast the largest number of Filipinos; that honor goes to Los Angeles County followed by San Diego County. But I hypothesized that the robust public transportation system within the San Francisco Bay Area and San Francisco's reputation as a sanctuary city would be an important draw for Filipino migrant domestic workers who lacked a driver's license or

were undocumented. When Parreñas interviewed Filipino domestic workers in Los Angeles, she reported that only 35% of them were working legally, having entered through family reunification visas or after being directly sponsored by US-based employers (2001:265, Appendix B, Table 7). The remainder had entered on tourist visas or through clandestine border crossings. I hypothesized that for such undocumented migrants, San Francisco would hold significant appeal.

In contrast to the West Coast, the Filipino community on the East Coast is younger, less established, and much smaller. On the East Coast, New York State holds the largest stock of Filipino Americans with most of them concentrated in New York City.<sup>4</sup> (See Table 2.1 for a comparison of population statistics between the New York and San Francisco Metropolitan Areas.) Filipinos started migrating to the West Coast and Hawaii in the early 1900s as plantation workers and farmers; they started migrating directly to the East Coast only after the 1965 immigration reforms and many of them were professionals who encountered a reduced degree of racism than their West Coast counterparts had experienced earlier. Bergano and Bergano-Kinney (1997) notice differing patterns of assimilation between East and West Coast Filipino Americans and I hypothesized that this might result in differences between the Coasts when it came to migrants' willingness to help their relatives in the Philippines immigrate to the United States. Having observed in Asia how the activation of migrant social capital among overseas migrant networks was not always a given, I wanted to assess if there existed different patterns of helping between the Filipino migrant communities on both coasts, and if this in turn affected the flows of Filipino migrant domestic workers to the US.

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<sup>4</sup> New York State holds 3.7% of all Filipinos living in the United States, behind California (44%), Hawaii (10%), Illinois (4.1%), Texas (4%) and Washington (4%).

Table 2.1  
The Filipino Community in the San Francisco and New York  
Metropolitan Areas, 2010

	<b>San Francisco Metro Area<sup>#</sup></b>	<b>New York Metro Area<sup>§</sup></b>
Total Population Estimate	287,879	217,349
Foreign-born Population	55%	65%

Source: US Census Bureau

<sup>#</sup> The San Francisco Metro Area comprises the cities of San Francisco, Oakland and Fremont counties.

<sup>§</sup> The New York Metro Area comprises New York City, Northern New Jersey and Long Island.

### The Study Sample

The study population was limited to subjects who were at least 18 years old, had been born in the Philippines and who had worked in the past or were currently working as domestic workers or caregivers.<sup>5</sup> In keeping the study’s participation criteria so loose, I was aiming to attract as wide a pool of interviewees as possible. However, the “domestic workers” I advertised for during my recruitment efforts include both the “migrant domestic workers” who were the primary focus of my study and “foreign-born domestic workers” who are a slightly different category of migrant. Both types of workers are employed in private homes to carry out various domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, childcare and eldercare. Both can be foreign-born individuals. But I define “migrant domestic workers” as individuals who choose the occupation of paid domestic work as an exit strategy to leave their home country and work overseas. Foreign-born domestic workers, in contrast, are migrants who left their home country through a variety

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<sup>5</sup> In the US and Canada, I also advertised for and recruited 13 Filipino nurses who had immigrated to these two countries and were now working or had previously worked as nursing professionals in either country. My objective was to assess whether or not multistate migration patterns were emerging among this migrant population as well and to set the stage for a potential follow-up project focusing on the migration strategies of higher-skilled migrants from the Philippines. I will discuss the findings from this pilot study in Chapter Nine, the concluding chapter.

of means (including tourist visas and family reunification visas) and then, only after their arrival overseas, when they were unable to find any other source of employment, decided to take up paid domestic work. This distinction may not always be clear to the individual migrants themselves so I intentionally chose to recruit both types of migrants with the plan of distinguishing between them during the analysis phase of my study. However, this difference is important because a *migrant* domestic worker from the Philippines has typically undergone more socialization within her chosen occupational field, is more deeply embedded within an international network of other migrant domestic workers, and is more aware of the existence of a transnational labor market for foreign domestic workers. All these factors can greatly aid their adoption of multistate migration trajectories. As I will discuss later, study participants in Canada were almost all migrant domestic workers, while those in the US fell more into the category of foreign-born domestic workers.

Different naming conventions across the various study sites also resulted in terminological differences used in the flyers and promotional materials for each country/city. In Asia, I advertised for Filipino “maids and domestic helpers” because that was the more subservient language used to describe these workers in Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines. In Canada, I called for Filipino “domestic workers and caregivers.” The term “live-in caregiver” is what the Canadian government uses to describe these workers even though their expected duties often went beyond the provision of emotional/physical care to their employers’ children or aged relatives. In New York, I asked for Filipino “babysitters, nannies and housekeepers” because this was how these migrants described their particular occupation. These women seemed to prefer the

specificity of these terms compared to catch-all terms such as “domestic helper” or “domestic worker.” On the West Coast, meanwhile, “caregiver” was the most common phrase migrants used to describe themselves given that many of them were providing live-in eldercare services and, in California, these tasks have become synonymous with the term “caregiver.”

I did not restrict participation in the study on the basis of gender. However because of the heavily gendered nature of this occupation, I interviewed only two Filipino men who were employed as domestic workers in Hong Kong. All other study recruits were women. I also did not restrict participation on the basis of immigration status or visa category. In the US, where many Filipino domestic workers are undocumented, I made sure not to ask participants about their visa status and visa category. Instead, I intuited their status from remarks they made about entering the country on a tourist visa, not having visited the Philippines for years since their arrival in the US, or asking their employers to sponsor them for a work visa.

### **Recruitment**

Over the summer of 2008, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 95 Filipinos in Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines about their decision to leave the Philippines and work overseas as migrant domestic workers (see Table 2.2 for basic demographic information about all study participants, organized by study site). During the recruitment process, I introduced myself as a student researcher from the United States conducting a study on the migration and destination decisions of Filipinos who at some point had been employed as domestic workers overseas. Participants were offered a

token payment for their time—10 Singapore dollars (SG\$), 100 Philippine pesos (PHP) and 10 Hong Kong dollars (HK\$) in each respective country, amounting to less than US\$10 in each case.

Participants were recruited for the interviews using multiple methods. In all three countries, I approached local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that aim to improve the welfare of migrant workers and asked for their assistance in finding potential interviewees. I also randomly approached Filipino domestic workers in Singapore and Hong Kong during their off-days when they gathered in downtown shopping centers (Lucky Plaza in Singapore and Worldwide House in Hong Kong) and other locations (such as the Catholic Centre and Central District in Hong Kong) that had a well-known reputation as gathering spots for Filipino migrants during their rest days. In both countries, I visited NGO- or church-affiliated shelters where migrant domestic workers lived after having run away from their employers or while they were arguing a breach of contract in court.

In the Philippines and Singapore, I visited several recruitment agencies and interviewed their domestic worker clients who were either first-time migrants or migrants between contracts. In the Philippines, I accompanied NGO welfare officers on their visits with returned migrants living in the Tondo slum area of Metro Manila. After these visits had concluded, I would stay behind in the migrants' homes and interview them. These women then took me to meet neighbors had also been or were considering becoming migrant domestic workers. In this manner, I would be passed around from neighbor to neighbor, allowing me to conduct multiple interviews on a single, but exhausting, day. I used a similar method of recruiting in Singapore: Interviewing one Filipino migrant

domestic worker outside her employer's condominium in a private housing estate, and then afterwards, asking her to introduce me to other domestic workers employed in the same estate. In this manner, snowball sampling was vital for my recruitment efforts.

Over the course of 2010 and 2011, I interviewed 65 Filipino migrant domestic workers in Canada and the US (see Table 2.2). I had initially hoped to conduct 70 interviews, with 30 in Canada and 20 each from my two US locations. However, very quickly into this phase of my study, I determined that most Filipino migrants to the US entered on tourist and family reunification visas and only chose to become domestic workers after their arrival in the US. The interviews and surveys I conducted in the US confirmed my hypothesis that US immigration and labor policies made it almost impossible for aspiring multistate migrant domestic workers to gain a work permit to enter the US, let alone first-time migrant domestic workers from the US.

For all but three of my interviewees in the US, migrant domestic work was never their exit strategy from the Philippines, but rather something they fell into after their entry into the US and subsequent inability to secure a higher-status position. For these US-based domestic workers, my questions about their migration strategies and destination decisions held little relevance because they had only ever considered migrating to the US and had only left the Philippines when their US relatives were able to sponsor them. Given my primary goal of studying "migrant" domestic workers, I decided to refocus most of my efforts to recruit more study participants from Canada who had used migrant domestic work as their exit strategy from the Philippines. As a result, I eventually interviewed 44 Filipino domestic workers in Canada and only 21 in the US (11 in New York City and 10 in San Francisco).



Recruits were paid 10 Canadian dollars (CA\$) and 10 US dollars (US\$) in each respective country. Similar to the Asian half of the study, I adopted a multi-pronged approach when it came to recruiting subjects in these two Western countries. In both the US and Canada, I approached NGOs that served the local Filipino immigrant community, the local domestic worker community, or both, and asked for their help to advertise my study to their membership. In San Francisco and New York City, I also posted flyers advertising my study at various Filipino American establishments (restaurants, hair salons, remittance centers, shopping centers and offices). In San Francisco, I posted flyers at the Philippine consulate and asked consulate officials if they knew anyone who would be willing to be interviewed by me.

In the case of Canada, I asked the NGO contacts I had made in Hong Kong to introduce me to friends of theirs in Toronto who might be willing to be interviewed. These personal recommendations did wonders as I was introduced to several multistate migrants who had worked in Hong Kong before coming to Canada and they agreed to share their migration stories with me. One participant was taking an English-as-a-Second-Language weekend course that was popular among Filipino LICs and she publicized my study among her classmates allowing me to recruit a diverse set of study participants out of Toronto. In other words, snowball sampling was an essential recruitment tool.

Table 2.2  
 Characteristics of Study Population (Survey Respondents and Interviewees), by Country

Migrant Characteristics	Hong Kong (n = 28)	Singapore (n = 41)	Philippines (n = 26)	Canada (n = 44)	United States (n = 38)
	Percentage of Population				
Age (in years):					
18 – 25	-	5%	23%	5%	3%
26 – 35	43%	41%	15%	45%	8%
36 – 45	36%	34%	38%	27%	8%
46 and above	21%	20%	23%	23%	82%
Gender:					
Male	7%	-	-	-	3%
Female	93%	100%	100%	100%	97%
Marital Status:					
Never married	50%	32%	35%	35%	38%
Married	46%	54%	35%	43%	41%
Separated	4%	10%	15%	21%	16%
Widowed	-	5%	15%	-	5%
Education:					
Less than High School	11%	5%	8%	-	8%
High School	18%	29%	38%	-	5%
Some College	36%	41%	35%	22%	26%
College and above	36%	24%	19%	78%	61%
Departure from Philippines:					
1970s	7%	-	-	5%	3%
1980s	14%	17%	19%	5%	22%
1990s	36%	41%	23%	14%	32%
2000s	43%	41%	58%	77%	43%

One additional recruitment device that I used in my North American study was the deployment of online surveys to be emailed out to members of various Filipino NGOs in both the US and Canada. These surveys were meant to collect basic information about a migrant's migration trajectory to the West and then, at the end, ask survey respondents if they would be willing to answer more questions about their migration and destination decisions in an interview (see Appendix C). My goal was to collect 200 such surveys, 100 in the US and another 100 in Canada, to help me get a sense of the extent of multistate migration amongst a larger sample. This plan came to naught when none of the NGOs I contacted agreed to send an email with a link to the online survey to their members.

Two NGOs in New York City did agree to let me hand out hard copies of the surveys during some of their community events and, in this manner, I collected 17 surveys from Filipino domestic workers in New York. Three out of those 17 survey respondents indicated that they were multistate migrants, with the remaining 14 reporting that they had traveled directly to the US. Nine out of the 17 respondents also indicated their willingness to be interviewed. However, out of those nine, only two followed up with me, calling the number I had included in the survey. For those respondents who wrote down their contact details on the survey form, I called/emailed them several times to re-introduce myself and attempt to set up an interview date and time, but I never received a response, or the numbers/email addresses they had provided turned out to be incorrect. I hypothesize that many of these survey respondents were undocumented migrants and were reluctant to give me their real contact details because of their fear of exposure and deportation.

## **Recruiting Challenges**

In addition to the overall failure of the online survey approach, I encountered several other unexpected difficulties during the second half of my study that made the North American recruitment process a challenging experience.

### *NGO Resistance*

As already mentioned, many of the NGOs in the US were reluctant to assist me with my research project and it took repeated emails, visits to their offices and participation in their community events before a handful of them agreed to advertise my research project to their members. One critical reason for their hesitation may have been the fact that many of the Filipino domestic workers who are their members (especially on the East Coast) are undocumented migrants or working illegally on a tourist visa. The fear of deportation was ever present within this population and that made many of these migrants (and their migrant organizations) less willing to trust non-Filipino outsiders like myself.

But, even in Canada, where most domestic workers are documented migrants, most of the NGOs I contacted turned down my requests for assistance. In the case of Canada, my own personal issues made recruitment an uphill task. My initial plan to visit Toronto in 2010 was cancelled after I gave birth to my second child in August 2010. Subsequently, the vagaries of caring for two very young children made it difficult for me to contemplate a long-term immersion in the field.<sup>6</sup> When combined with some visa

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<sup>6</sup> I recognize the irony in my choosing not to leave my children behind for a lengthy period of time when those of my study participants who were mothers had chosen to live apart from their children for years at a

problems that unexpectedly cropped up, I was forced to conduct all my Canadian recruiting and interviewing efforts over Skype. I should note however that most of Canadian and American study participants preferred being interviewed over the phone, rather than face-to-face. Given their limited rest days, they treasured the few hours they had during the weekend to mingle with friends and relax. None of them wanted to spend two hours on a Sunday afternoon talking with me; they much rather preferred to talk with me in the evenings when they were in their rooms/apartments by themselves and had the freedom to talk as long as they liked without competing distractions. And, in general, once I finally managed to get them to agree to talk with me, the resulting interviews were lengthy, candid and wide-ranging.

While I missed having the visual cues that come from a face-to-face interview, I recognize that with my particular study population, attempting to conduct only face-to-face interviews would have resulted in a smaller number of interviews of shorter duration. However, I still regret not having been able to conduct any field research and face-to-face recruiting in Canada, and recognize it as an important flaw in my study.

### **Interviews**

I chose the semi-structured interview format as my primary research method because it was the most effective means of probing study participants' decision-making processes. While the migration trajectory of an individual migrant can be easily captured through a simple survey, open-ended, in-depth interviews are necessary to illuminate the thinking and motivations behind each destination decision made by the migrant. Given that there is often a gap between migrants' initial intentions and their actual trajectories

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time. This speaks to the very different conditions faced by myself and by my interviewees.

(especially in the case of multistate migration), it is critical to employ a research method that allows migrants to share their dreams, assumptions and mistakes alongside their actual actions, and that encourages them to reflect on the role of chance, misfortune and larger social forces in shaping their migration decisions.

Much of each interview was spent discussing the mechanics of participants' migration and destination decision-making process, to understand the factors participants considered when making these decisions (see Appendices A and B for the interview protocols used for the Asian and North American studies). In both studies, the first major issue I explored was how the interviewee had arrived at the decision to migrate. Was it a decision made independently or in consultation with others? Did they have any preconceptions about what life abroad was going to be like? What was their pre-departure understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of migration?

The interviews then focused on participants' destination decision(s). Participants were asked about the factors that influenced their decision to migrate to a particular country and not any other destination. They were asked if they would have preferred to migrate to a different country but had chosen not to. A significant portion of the interviews was also devoted to discussing the pros and cons of various destination countries, to flesh out how much participants were aware of different destination options, what they knew of these countries prior to their departure and how they gained this information. These accounts provided a sense of how much knowledge prospective migrants actually possess about their destination options and if they make their destination decisions under conditions of incomplete information and bounded rationality.

Participants were also asked about the mechanics of their migration, for example, if they went through a recruitment agency or through family/friends. I also asked about the migration histories of other members of each participant's extended family in case these relatives' migration journeys had influenced the participant's migration decision, or if the participant had relied on their network of friends and family to help secure access to a particular destination. Participants who indicated that they had lived and worked in multiple destination countries (or desired to do so), were questioned about each of their decisions to move on to another destination, and the resources they mobilized to obtain visas and jobs. They were also asked why they adopted (or wished to adopt) such a migration trajectory instead of any other.

Given the evolution in my thinking on multistate migration that occurred between the end of the Asian half of my project and the start of the North American half, there are several key differences between the interview protocols used for the two studies. For the North American study, I made a concerted effort to retain all the questions asked in the Asian interview protocol and only add new questions. In most cases, both protocols covered the same topics (though in a different order) but the North American interviews also explored each issue in significantly more depth. Table 2.3 shows the topics covered by the two protocols.

Table 2.3  
Topics Covered in the Asian and North American Interview Protocols

	<b>Asian Interview Protocol</b>	<b>North American Interview Protocol</b>
Migration Decision	X	X
Destination Decision(s)	X	X
Destination Information	X	X
Destination Dreams	X	X
Mechanics of Migration	X	X
Family Migration Patterns	X	X
Migrant Social Capital	X	X
Migration Resistance	X	X
Migrant Financial Capital	X	X
Multistate Migration	X	X
Post-Migration Experience	X	X
Migration Regrets	X	X
Providing Migration Assistance	X	X
Migration Strategies	X	X
Future Plans	X	X
US/Canada Comparisons		X
Immigration Policy		X

All the Asian interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted 45 minutes on average. As mentioned earlier, in North America, participants lived in more dispersed locations. In addition, when I first met them, they were outside their homes, often gathering with friends, and so were reluctant to engage in a lengthy interview with me on



the spot. Face-to-face interactions were usually limited to recruitment while most interviews were conducted late at night over the phone. This gave participants a window of uninterrupted time when they could talk at length about their migration experiences. This is reflected in the average length of the North American interviews, which was well over 90 minutes. All phone interviews were conducted using the Skype software program and recorded for subsequent transcription.

The interviews frequently veered off-script as participants' answers to one question took the conversation in unexpected directions. As far as possible, I allowed interviewees to set the direction of the interview, stopping every so often at natural pauses in the conversation to see if there were questions from the protocol that had yet to be answered. But, for the most part, the interviews were loosely-structured conversations about participants' migration histories and their lives overseas.

Given the delicate and personal nature of the topics being discussed and the memories stirred—about leaving behind their families in the Philippines, their long-distance relationships with their spouses and children, etc.—the interviews were frequently emotional. It was common for participants to break down and sob as they talked about their children they had not seen for years at a time, or their husbands who had cheated on them, or abuse they had suffered at the hands of their employers. At such moments, whether face-to-face or over the phone, I made it a practice to stop my questioning and allow the interviewee to recover her composure. I would then ask if she wanted to stop the interview or would prefer to continue. On every occasion, participants indicated that they wanted to continue the interview. They would often apologize profusely for this break in their composure and it is possible that their guilt and

embarrassment may have pushed them to want to continue the interview. At the same time, I got the sense that participants appreciated the opportunity to share their migration story with an attentive and sympathetic listener. There were several times when participants would tell me at the start of their interview that they could only talk for an hour, but the one-hour mark would come and go, and when I would ask them if they were able to continue talking, they inevitably said that they had more time.

### **Interviewing Challenges**

My choice of in-depth interviews as my primary research method, my own identity as a non-Filipino researcher from the United States and my inability to meet all my study participants face-to-face, created certain challenges that I was very much aware of both during the interviews and, later, during the analysis of the interview data.

#### *Retrospective Interviewing*

I understood from the start the risks associated with using interviews—and retrospective interviews at that—to uncover study participants' past migration and destination decision-making process and the original intentions behind each decision they had made. Given that their initial migration decisions had typically been made several years earlier, participants may have simply forgotten some of the deciding factors that influenced this decision. Or, during their interviews, they might forget to mention some of the factors that had shaped their migration journey. Even if they did remember, they might choose to selectively exclude any mention of negative or less than flattering events

from their past, in order to construct a narrative where all their past destination decisions were premeditated and above board.

These are all expected issues that come with using retrospective interviews as a research method. To address these issues, I built into the interview protocol opportunities for participants to correct/revise their original accounts of their migration journeys. For instance, I would ask them if they had considered alternative migration strategies and trajectories, and mention specific destination countries that were popular among other Filipino migrants. These questions would often prompt revealing answers. Participants would remember that they had tried leaving the Philippines earlier than they had originally stated but that this first attempt had gone awry for various reasons. Or, they would recall that they had previously tried to find work in a different overseas country than the one they eventually traveled to. These revisions to their original migration narrative made the neat and straightforward trajectory they had initially described considerably more messy but also more authentic for a capital-constrained, aspiring migrant.

During the interviews, I also asked participants to tell me if they had ever felt regret over any of their migration or destination decisions. I asked them to speak to the role played by fate or chance in their migration trajectory. While the evidence gathered through these methods could not confirm the account of any one interviewee, it did help elucidate the contingent and dynamic nature of their migration and destination decision-making process.

I also attempted to assess the veracity of interviewees' statements about their migration plans and strategies through triangulating interviews with officers of local

migrant rights NGOs in all five countries. These individuals were more familiar with the long-term goals and ambitions of migrant domestic workers and could speak to the popularity of multistate migration amongst this population. Social workers, religious officials and activists in Asia confirmed that many Filipino migrants sought to use Singapore and Hong Kong as stepping stones to gain entry into the West. Likewise, the activists and immigration lawyers in Canada that I spoke with confirmed that most Filipino migrant domestic workers arriving in Canada in recent years had traveled through an intermediate destination. In the US, migrant rights activists and Filipino American community leaders told me that most Filipinos entering the US came through tourist and family reunification visas sponsored by their relatives, which corroborated what my interviewees had told me about their methods of gaining entry into the US.

I also visually surveyed several recruitment agencies in Singapore and Hong Kong and took note of their advertisements offering caregiver positions in Spain, Italy and Canada for Filipino workers already employed in Singapore and Hong Kong. While the evidence gathered through these methods does not confirm the account of any one interviewee, it does give a sense that multistate migration is a growing phenomenon amongst this population and also highlights the critical role played by recruitment agencies in fostering the onward and upward re-migrations of migrant domestic workers.

### *Interviewer Identity*

A second challenge I faced during both recruitment and the interviews themselves was bridging the social and cultural distance between study participants and myself. As an Indian national pursuing a doctoral degree from an American university, I was

removed by several degrees from the lives of the women I was interviewing. I am not Filipino, had never visited the Philippines before beginning my research, did not speak Tagalog (the national language of the Philippines) and had never been employed as a domestic worker. If I had brought up my story of being mistaken for a domestic worker, they would have probably scoffed at my thin skin.

At the same time, there were aspects of my identity that did help to overcome some of the initial reluctance my study participants felt when I first approached them. The fact that I was a woman and Asian like them (but not Chinese<sup>7</sup>) and also a migrant/foreigner helped remove some of their initial hesitation. In Asia in 2008, I was almost six months' pregnant with my first child and this inadvertently won the sympathy of many interviewees who were mothers themselves. In the US in 2010 and 2011, I brought, first my oldest child and then both my children with me on my visits to San Francisco and New York City. I suspect that the sight of my children helped humanize me in front of potential study participants and allowed for a connection to be formed between the interviewees and myself.

In fact, my outsider status meant that many interviewees were patently curious as to why I was interested in studying their population in the first place and appreciative of the attention I was paying them. They would often start and end our interactions with questions about my research motivations. I would typically answer with the story of how I had lived in Singapore for 12 years before moving to the United States and how I had

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<sup>7</sup> While some participants worked for expatriate employers who were White or Japanese, most Hong Kong- and Singapore-based participants' employers were locals who were Chinese by race. By virtue of being neither White nor Chinese myself, I was able to avoid being cast by my interviewees as belonging to the employer class in either Singapore or Hong Kong. In this way, my outsider status was of assistance as participants confided in me what they saw as the pros and cons of working for different races and in different countries, and the characteristics of each race as employers (Paul 2011b).

been interested in the status of foreign domestic workers since that time. By highlighting my familiarity with the migrant domestic worker situation (especially as it pertains to workers in Asia), I was signaling my expertise and empathy to these prospective interviewees.

Outside the Philippines, I made sure to mention my time in the field there, talking about my experiences living in a women's hostel in Quezon City, visiting the Tondo slums, frequenting the Jollibee fast food chain, and getting around Manila on jeepneys and tricycles. Those stories earned me a modicum of respect from my interviewees and helped erase some of the power differential that existed between us. I also dressed casually and simply at all times, and when I introduced myself to potential study participants, I emphasized my status as a student to downplay any class distinctions between myself and study participants.

In order to establish my trustworthiness, at the start of each interview, I would also describe the field research I had conducted in Asia in some depth. If my interviewee had previously worked in Singapore, my account would often prompt them to ask when I had lived there and we would talk a little while about our memories of Singapore. If they had worked in Hong Kong, interviewees would regularly ask me if I had been to "Central" and I would regale them with my first impressions of Hong Kong's Central District on a Sunday morning when it is taken over by Filipino migrant domestic workers. Whatever hesitation or awkwardness these interviewees may have felt would begin to dissipate and, when the time came to start the interview, we were often on a more relaxed footing with each other.

## **Transcribing**

All interviews and surveys were conducted in English with the exception of two (in the Philippines) where the participants had a very limited command of English. In those instances, a companion of the participant was requested to help translate specific questions and answers. All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure a comprehensive capturing of participants' remarks and recollections. For my Asian interviews, I personally transcribed all the interview transcripts. For my North American interviews, I benefited from a National Science Foundation dissertation improvement grant that allowed me to engage the services of a transcription company to transcribe most of my interview audio files. There were still a handful of interviews, primarily those with poor audio quality or heavily accented speech, that I transcribed myself. I checked all transcripts for accuracy, returning to the original audio file repeatedly to clarify a word or phrase.

Since most participants had learned English as their second language, participants generally spoke in a casual manner with grammatical errors littered throughout their speech. During the transcription process, I transcribed the interviews verbatim, not attempting to edit or clean up any of the language used by respondents or myself. However, in the interview excerpts that I am including in this dissertation, I have edited the language to some extent to ensure that the underlying meaning of the sentences is clear. As far as possible, however, I have tried to preserve my interviewees' linguistic style and tempo so that readers can clearly "hear" these migrants' voices.

## Coding

After all the interviews were transcribed, they were imported into the HyperResearch software package for Macintosh computers and coded for recurring themes. I employed both open and closed coding in a heavily iterative process. The initial coding categories I created for the Asian half of the project were derived from my interview questions and included codes about the migration decision-making process, the destination decision-making process, multistage migration, destination perceptions versus reality, destination dreams, destination disconnects, the role of immigration policy and participants' varying access to different types of capital. Additional coding categories were added as patterns or themes emerged from the data. For instance, in re-reading participants' accounts of their cognitive maps of the world, it became apparent that migrants were consistently talking about different destinations in a relative and hierarchical manner. Because of this insight, I developed codes about participants' destination hierarchies.

When I began coding my North American transcripts, all these codes formed the initial coding schema I started with. Again, additional codes were added as new themes emerged from the data. For instance, the concept of a "negotiated migration decision" (discussed in Chapter Four) emerged from the transcripts in a purely inductive manner. Once a new theme was identified, a second round of closed and open coding of transcripts was conducted to ensure that all interviews—Asian and North American—were analyzed equally. Likewise, the writing of each research memo involved an



additional round of coding that was targeted towards the particular themes addressed by each memo. In this manner, each transcript was read and coded multiple times.

### **Analysis**

As the coding was being completed, I combined some of the more quantifiable qualitative data derived from the interviews and the quantitative data derived from the demographic surveys into Microsoft Excel files in order to run frequency tables and cross-tabulations that could help confirm and/or visualize some of the patterns I was observing within the study sample. The task of populating these tables typically required me to pore through each transcript again and sometimes add additional codes as new themes emerged. I developed several Excel tables in this manner, including a charting of each participant's migration trajectories (including the countries where they had worked, the years spent there and their occupation in that country), their patterns of giving and receiving migration help (including the source/recipient of migration assistance and the type of assistance received/given), and their perceptions of different destination countries (keeping a tally of words and phrases used to describe each country and then categorizing each distinct word/phrase as positive/negative/neutral). (Summarized versions of many of these tables have been reproduced in the following chapters.)

This data analysis was conducted at the level of the individual and city/country. For example, at the individual level, comparisons were made between participants who engaged in direct migration to their preferred destination country in the West and those who engaged in multistate migration (see Chapter Seven). Participants who were multistate migrants were also compared against participants who engaged in only one

migration journey but to a country lower down their destination hierarchy. This comparative analysis was conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively in order to identify specific differences between these groups in terms of their educational qualifications, prior work experience and overseas network connections. Likewise, both qualitative and quantitative comparisons were made between study participants who encountered familial resistance to their migration decision and those who did not.

Cross-country comparisons were conducted among participants from different study sites to assess how participants' migration profiles differed by country and the role played by each country's immigration/labor policies in influencing participants' migration and destination decisions. This analysis revealed, for instance, that the proportion of multistate migrants increased as one moved from Singapore to Hong Kong and then on to Canada, which speaks to how the barriers to entry to these countries increases in the same order. In Chapter Eight, I argue that there is a causal relationship at work here with capital-constrained migrants forced to adopt multistate migration in order to climb to the top of their destination hierarchy.

### **Limitations**

Given that study recruitment was non-random and my overall sample size was small, I cannot speak to the statistical significance of any of the patterns/trends I observed. By relying so heavily on NGOs and snowball sampling to help identify and recruit study participants, the findings of this study may also not be representative of the general Filipino domestic worker population in any of the study sites. However, this was never the primary objective of this study. Instead, my main focus was on understanding

the macro-level forces and micro-level decisions that intertwine to lead to the emergence of multistate migration amongst Filipino migrant domestic workers. Future studies that are larger in scale and longitudinal in design are necessary to assess the true extent of multistate migration amongst this population of migrants and others. It is my belief, however, that my study helps outline the factors that contribute to the adoption of multistate migration among capital-constrained labor migrants.

A second limitation is the lack of interviews with migrant domestic workers in the US. As mentioned earlier, out of the 21 Filipino domestic workers I interviewed in the US, only three had entered the country as *migrant* domestic workers. One, Cala, had previously worked in Guam and Kuwait before securing a job as a domestic worker for a Middle Eastern diplomat posted to the Philippines. She had intentionally accepted this position because she hoped that the diplomat would be transferred to a foreign country at a later point and that she would be able to travel overseas with the family. True enough, the diplomat was posted to his country's UN Mission in New York City and he applied for a dependent work permit for Cala so that she could accompany the family to the US.

Another participant, Lucia, had worked in Qatar for three years as a migrant domestic worker before returning to the Philippines to look after her daughters. Then, one of her distant relatives in New York called to say that she needed help to look after her children and asked Lucia if she would be interested in the position. After Lucia accepted the job, her relative sponsored her for a tourist visa to visit the US. As soon as she arrived in the US, Lucia went to work as a full-time nanny and housekeeper for her relative, earning US\$300 a month.

Stories like Cala's and Lucia's were exceedingly rare. The vast majority of US study participants had come to the US without any concrete plans concerning their US employment. It was only after their arrival that they began looking for jobs and were funneled into part-time jobs as babysitters, housekeepers and caregivers for the elderly through their personal connections. The low number of *migrant* domestic workers in the US—both in terms of my study population but also for the country at large based on conversations with NGO officials—is indicative of how the new capital acquired overseas by migrant domestic workers does not easily translate into access to countries that do not have immigration provisions for such workers.

But even though migrant domestic workers like Lucia and Cala form a tiny minority of the Filipino domestic worker population in the US, they are of critical importance because their multistate migration story has a very different ending from that of the multistate migrants I interviewed in Canada. Though not all live-in caregivers in Canada are able to secure permanent residency status, many of them do (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2007). This is the mirror image of those migrants in the US for whom a greencard is almost never in their long-term future. Both Cala and Lucia eventually ran away from their employers because of harsh working conditions and proceeded to work as undocumented domestic workers in the New York metropolitan area.

Some undocumented domestic workers in the US are lucky enough to find employers willing to sponsor them for a work visa. Cala, for instance, married an American citizen who sponsored her for a green card. But many others (like Lucia) who arrived on tourist visas continue to toil in the shadows, separated from their children and

husbands whom they are unable to bring to the US. I chose to refocus my recruitment efforts to emphasize Canada because the overwhelming majority of the people I was interviewing in the US did not fit the category of “migrant domestic worker.” But that does not mean that there are not migrant domestic workers in the US as well.<sup>8</sup> It is my hope that future studies can do a better job of understanding how these migrants enter the US and their lives thereafter.

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<sup>8</sup> Parreñas’ study of Filipino migrant domestic workers in the US and Italy faces a similar problem. While many of her study respondents in Italy fall into the category of migrant domestic worker, many of her US respondents did not.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The Many Variants of Gendered Migration from the Philippines**

For several decades now, migration studies has been a fractured field riven by disciplinary differences. This is particularly true when it comes to the different theories that have been proposed to explain why some people migrate and others do not. Summing up the state of the field, Massey et al write that “at present, there is no single, coherent theory of international migration, only a fragmented set of theories that have developed largely in isolation from one another, sometimes but not always segmented by disciplinary boundaries” (1993:432). At the micro-level, there are neoclassical economic theory and the new economics of labor theory. At the macro-level, there are segmented labor market theory and world systems theory. At the meso-level, focusing on the reasons behind cumulative migration, there is the network theory of migration. In this chapter, I assess how well each of these disparate theories can explain the voluminous stream of female migrant domestic workers leaving the Philippines each year.

From my analysis, both of participants’ own accounts of their migration decision-making process and an examination of the migration history of the Philippines, it becomes clear that various causal factors operating at different levels *in tandem* resulted in the decisions by the individual participants of this study to seek work outside the Philippines. This finding parallels the arguments made by other migration scholars that

for a social process as complex as international migration, multiple theories operating at multiple levels need to be considered simultaneously (Massey et al. 1998; Massey and Espinosa 1997).

But, over the last few years, migration scholars have also called for more attention to be paid to the international migration patterns of women who may face very different drivers and opportunity structures than male migrants (Pfeiffer, Richter, Fletcher and Taylor 2008; Curran, Shafer, Donato and Garip 2006; Boyd and Grieco 2003). This first chapter, therefore, also attempts to answer two gendered migration questions—Why do so many women choose to leave the Philippines to work abroad? And why do so many of them choose to become migrant domestic workers?—using an intersubjectivity approach to understand participants’ personal interpretations of the factors underpinning their migration decision and occupational choice. From my analysis, I find a great diversity within the population of Filipina migrant domestic workers leaving the Philippines each year. At the macro-level, the same set of social forces—high underemployment for women, the spiraling cost of living expenses and tertiary education, a culture of migration, and a growing global demand for female migrant domestic workers—set the stage for all these women’s migration journeys. But, at the individual and household level, different women were motivated by different factors to make the same migration decision and the same occupational choice. Some study participants were mothers looking to fund their children’s university education. Others were unmarried women burdened by the responsibility of looking after their parents and younger siblings. A few women were running away from abusive relationships. Still others—most of whom were young and still single—were lured by the promise of adventure and modernity that

overseas work seemed to represent. Thus this chapter's original contribution is in demonstrating that there is no monolithic motivation driving all women migrants from the Philippines. Rather, it shows how, given certain structural conditions, a broad swath of women may consider migration as a viable option for earning a higher income, leading to the diversity of Filipino women observed undertaking migrant domestic work as their exit strategy from the Philippines, and also the diversity of Filipinas who eventually engage in multistate migration.

The remainder of this chapter starts with a discussion of the major theories that attempt to explain why some people migrate and others do not. To give some context to readers, I then provide a brief history of migration from the Philippines and detail the Philippine migration bureaucracy that has developed over the last 40 years to foster out-migration from the Philippines. I also paint a picture of the current socio-economic conditions in the Philippines, especially as they relate to women, to highlight existing macro-economic factors that might influence the migration decision of women. I then provide a qualitative assessment of how well existing macro-level theories of migration can explain the out-migration of Filipino migrant workers from the Philippines. After that, I shift gears and switch to participants' accounts of their migration motivations. I use excerpts from the interviews to highlight the individual-, household- and neighborhood-level factors that encouraged study participants to leave their homes and families. The insights gained from the interviews allow me to identify four categories of women migrants among study participants: the parent, the breadwinner, the aspirant, and finally, the escapee.



## Theories of Migration

### *Neoclassical Economic Theory*

One of the oldest theories of migration, neoclassical economic theory proposes that the wage differential between origin and destination is the primary driver behind the decision to migrate (Lewis 1954; Hicks 1932). Tied to this macro-level explanation for migration is the micro-level assumption that potential migrants are utility-maximizing, rational and independent actors, weighing the costs and benefits of migration before making their decision. This theory was later modified by Todaro (1969) who argued that individuals decide to migrate only if the *expected* wages in their destination—the product of the actual wages in the destination and the probability of securing a job there—are higher than wages in the origin. He also argued that most potential migrants work on a relatively long time-horizon, willing to accept little or no income when they first arrive in their destination, as long as they expect to eventually find a job and earn a higher income in the long run (Todaro 1980).

Economists have continued to tinker with this theory but its basic argument remains unchanged: that wage differentials drive migration. This straightforward argument can be reduced to a single equation comprising the average wages in origin and destination(s), the probabilities of employment in both locations and the costs of migration. Borjas outlines these migration costs as including “direct costs (e.g. the transportation of persons and household goods), forgone earnings (e.g. the opportunity cost of a post-migration unemployment spell), and psychic costs (e.g. the disutility associated with leaving behind family ties and social networks)” (1999:178). According

to this probability function, if the expected benefits of migration outweigh the costs, then the potential migrant will decide to migrate. In addition, individuals should choose to migrate to the country that provides the largest wage differential after having taken into account their travel costs and all other economic risks associated with international travel (Borjas 1990).

One of the oversights of neoclassical economic theory is its ignoring of non-economic reasons for migration such as the desire for adventure, the cultural expectation to work overseas at some point in one's life, the need to assert one's independence from elders in the family, or to join relatives already overseas (Kothari 2008). While most migration scholars would agree that financial motivations drive much of the migration we see in the world, neoclassical economic theory has been widely criticized for its ahistorical and astructural nature. Critics point out that this theory also does not recognize the role played by immigration and labor policies, or other macro-level forces in initiating and restricting migration flows (de Haas 2008; Portes and Walton 1981). Instead, it is simply assumed that individuals have complete agency to decide whether or not to migrate. In the case of the Philippines, neoclassical economic theory would have predicted outflows of Filipino migrants much earlier and in higher numbers than what actually occurred.

### *New Economics of Labor Migration*

Providing a more sophisticated picture of the individual migrant as decision-maker is the new economics of labor migration (NELM) theory. According to NELM theorists, it is the household/family rather than the individual that makes the decision

whether or not the individual should migrate. In addition, NELM proponents argue that the decision to migrate is not only about maximizing income; it is also about reducing risk exposure by diversifying a household's income streams and making up for imperfect/inaccessible credit markets in the home country (Taylor 1987; Katz and Stark 1986; Stark and Bloom 1985). Low-income families in developing countries may opt to send one or more family members overseas, or at least to a different part of the country, to find work and remit their savings so that their family can gain access to much-needed capital and spread their risk (Lauby and Stark 1988; Findley 1987; Taylor 1987; Stark and Bloom 1985). In this manner, migration can be seen as a household livelihood strategy (Chant and Radcliffe 1992; Radcliffe 1986; Stark and Bloom 1985).

NELM theorists also argue that it is not simply absolute poverty levels or even risk diversification that push households to consider sending a household member overseas. A household's relative position compared to other households in their reference group can also play an important role (Stark, Micevska and Mycielski 2009; Stark and Taylor 1989). In other words, households who are not worried about survival may still decide to send a representative overseas in order to increase their relative economic standing in their village or neighborhood. Katz and Stark (1986) find that rural-urban migration can still occur even if expected urban income is *lower* than current rural income.

The most powerful support for a household approach to the migration decision is the staggering amount of remittances sent by overseas migrants to their families in the home country each year. An estimated US\$325 billion worth of remittances was sent to

developing countries in 2010, dwarfing the total value of formal aid monies sent to these countries by the developed world (World Bank 2011).

But several scholars have critiqued NELM's presumed assumption of household unity and familial decision-making, especially when it comes to women's independent migration. They point out that the unequal distribution of economic power between men and women (especially in patriarchal households), the ideological constraints on women's independence and authority, and the gendered labor market available to potential migrants, can all significantly shape the decision-making process for prospective female migrants (Boyd and Grieco 2003; Chant and Radcliffe 1992; Folbre 1986; Radcliffe 1986). As a case in point, ethnographic accounts of migration patterns out of Mexico have highlighted regular cases of reluctance on the part of men with migration experience to assist their female relatives leave for the US partly out of a belief that helping female migrants involved more work and responsibility (Kanaiaupuni 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). And among rural-urban migrants in Peru, over 70% were men because women were traditionally seen as being responsible for reproductive functions at home such as cooking, cleaning, and raising the children (Radcliffe 1986). Only when these women were widowed or when they faced dire poverty, did they typically consider migration as an option. Regular instances of gendered resistance to women's independent migration have been reported in countries throughout the Global South, from Bangladesh and the Philippines, to Mexico and Brazil (Lan 2006; Afsar 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Stichter 1990; Wong and Ko 1984; Arizpe and Aranda 1981; Aguiar 1975).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These criticisms of NELM theory will be dealt with in more depth in Chapter Four which investigates how study participants "negotiated" their independent migration decisions with their families. In this present chapter, I focus more on the NELM proposition that there are household-level motivations behind an individual's migration decision.

But despite it being a patriarchal and more conservative society, women make up the majority of all newly-hired migrants leaving the Philippines (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2011). The Philippines also ranks as the fourth largest recipient of migrant remittances, after India, China and Mexico (in that order), receiving US\$23 billion in remittances in 2011.<sup>2</sup> This large flow of Filipino migrant workers' earnings back to the Philippines lends some credence to the notion of migration as a household livelihood strategy.<sup>3</sup>

### *Segmented Labor Market Theory*

The above two economic explanations of migration give a great deal of agency to individual migrants (or their families) who are seen as autonomously deciding whether or not to leave their home country for a more lucrative position overseas. However, critics have pointed out that micro-level theories fail to explain the *non-migration* of poor peoples from low-income countries (Portes and Walton 1981). As mentioned earlier, neoclassical economic theory does a poor job of explaining why it was only during the 1970s that massive outflows of migrants began from the Philippines when the extreme wage differentials between the Philippines and other more developed economies predated those migrations. There are several structural-historical explanations for migration that do a better job at explaining the macro-level context from which those migration flows originated. One of these is segmented labor market theory proposed by Michael Piore.

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<sup>2</sup> The World Bank. Retrieved on April 25, 2012 from [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1110315015165/RemittancesData\\_Inflows\\_Apr12\(Public\).xlsx](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1110315015165/RemittancesData_Inflows_Apr12(Public).xlsx)

<sup>3</sup> It is also possible however that migrants make their migration decisions independently and then choose to send remittances to their families in the Philippines because of their strong sense of family loyalty and obligation.

Piore (1979) proposed that it was particular structural conditions in migrant-*receiving* countries that were the primary driver behind most labor migration flows. He argued that in advanced industrial economies like those of the United States and Germany, rising education and income levels resulted in the native-born populace no longer wanting certain types of “3-D” (dirty, dangerous and degrading) jobs. These undesirable occupations included paid domestic, agricultural, sanitation and construction work, in countries where there were either no trade unions at all or where these particular jobs were not protected by unions. Given the low-wages, low status and non-existent job security attached to these occupations, they were typically shunned by native-born workers. The resulting absence of a cheap, internal labor force to fill these vacancies drove governments and employers in these advanced economies to enter the global marketplace and seek out cheap foreign laborers. Piore argued that it was these employers and receiving-country governments that created the impetus for out-migration, without which we would not observe labor migration flows to these countries.

Segmented labor market theory offers a tidy explanation for much of the international labor migration flows that can be observed within Asia and the Middle East today (Massey et al. 1998). Starting in the 1970s in Asia, the rapidly industrializing economies of Hong Kong and Singapore instituted labor importation programs to bring in cheap migrant workers from surrounding countries to make up for labor shortages in their paid domestic work sectors (Parreñas 2001; Constable 1997). Taiwan introduced a similar program for migrant domestic workers in the 1990s (Lan 2006). Likewise, in the 1970s and onwards, all the oil-rich countries of the Middle East began to import migrant labor to work as maids, janitors, construction workers, doctors, nurses and engineers.

These Middle Eastern countries initially sourced their labor from oil-poor, labor-surplus countries within the region (such as Egypt and Yemen), but shortly thereafter they diversified their labor pools and began to recruit more intensively from South and East Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippines (Abella 1995). The Philippines is now a leading source of migrant domestic workers to all of these oil-rich Arab states and Asian tiger economies. But while segmented labor market theory cogently explains why we see migration flows toward high-income countries in Asia and the Middle East, it does not explain why the Philippines (rather than, say, Mauritius) ended up being a major source country for migrant workers for the world economy.

### *World Systems Theory*

Another macro-level theory of migration—world systems theory—goes some way towards addressing the above question, by focusing more on *sending* country drivers. According to world systems theorists, migration is initiated by the displacement experienced by workers in peripheral countries in the world system as these economies become increasingly integrated into the global capitalist economy (Sassen 1988; Portes and Walton 1981). This displacement can stem from various sources: The direct recruitment of labor migrants in origin countries (as outlined by segmented labor market theory), the dismantling of the traditional economy in the origin country through the introduction of foreign capital, and the establishment of labor enclaves or export-processing zones where foreign capitalist companies can have their goods produced at a fraction of the cost they would have had to pay workers from high-income countries. These export-oriented jobs are typically very demanding, poorly paid, and unprotected by

any sort of labor standards or regulation, resulting in a high turnover of workers, most of whom are women because they are socially constructed as more docile and pliant by these foreign capitalist companies and by their own governments (Kang 1997). All of these factors create what Portes and Walton (1981) call “structural imbalances” in origin countries that induce individuals who no longer have the means to support themselves and their families to “voluntarily” adopt migration in order to earn a living wage.

As will be discussed in more detail later, all of these destabilizing factors apply to the Philippines. The foreign intrusion (originally from the Spanish, then the British, and eventually the United States) into the Philippines’ traditional economy resulted first in the internal migration of rural, agricultural workers to urban areas within the Philippines, particularly Manila. But starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as further economic displacements compounded the existing poverty and landlessness experienced by many Filipinos, international migration became an increasingly common choice (Tyner 2009; Asis 2006; Parreñas 2001).

World systems theorists also argue that specific colonial, historical, military and ideological links between certain pairs of countries can predispose prospective migrants from particular origin countries to seek to immigrate to particular receiving countries (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Massey et al. 1998; Sassen 1988). The place reputations of certain destination countries within the world system, propagated through news and entertainment media channels, also shape prospective migrants’ imaginaries and their long-term destination preferences (Appadurai 2003, 1996). In the case of the United States, the American Dream of safety, security and freedom from want has drawn millions of immigrants to its shores since the country’s founding. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century,



European peasants, reeling from the displacement effects of capitalization and modernization, “learned with hope of the New World where land, so scarce in the Old, was abundantly available. Younger sons learned with hope that the portions which at home would not buy them the space for a garden, in America would make them owners of hundreds of acres” (Handlin 1973:29). This story of American bounty attracted hordes of immigrants in the past and continues to do so today. In fact, Sassen (1988) has argued that the US has such a stronghold in people’s imaginations that any foreign direct investment in a developing country will initiate a process of “westernization” that ultimately promotes emigration to the US irrespective of where the foreign capital originally came from.

In the case of the Philippines, the US holds special significance for many Filipinos because of the Philippines’ status as a former colony of the US and the many military and industrial ties between the two countries. As will be discussed later, the US government also instituted labor importation and scholarship programs in the early twentieth century that facilitated the entry of hundreds of thousands of Filipinos into the United States and their eventual naturalization (Rodriguez 2010; Tyner 2009, 2004; Choy 2003). These programs helped create a legacy of migration from the Philippines to the United States.

But it should be noted that the Philippines also has historical and religious ties with Spain stemming from the 300 years it was ruled as a Spanish colony, and with Italy given that Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion in the Philippines (with 83% of Filipinos identifying themselves as Catholic<sup>4</sup>). These factors could contribute to

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<sup>4</sup> Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook. Retrieved December 13, 2011. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rp.html>

making these two countries attractive destinations for Filipino migrants as well. More generally, Western countries and high-income countries in other parts of the world may hold the allure of modernity that could serve to attract aspiring migrants from the Philippines (Lan 2006).

### *Network Theory of Migration*

Building on social capital theory, the network theory of cumulative migration posits that the presence of family, friends, and sometimes even co-ethnic strangers overseas can reduce the costs and risks of migration, thus easing the migration decision for potential migrants and encouraging them to move to the same destination as their overseas contacts (Garip 2008; Curran et al. 2005; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Palloni et al. 2001; Singer and Massey 1998; Massey and Espinosa 1997). These network contacts can provide both tangible and intangible aid to prospective migrants: Extending financial assistance, matching the migrant with an overseas employer, assisting with the securing of a visa or work permit, recommending a reliable recruitment agency to use, giving advice about effective migration strategies or, upon the migrant's arrival overseas, offering a place to stay or a job or simply companionship. Even the mere knowledge that a community of co-ethnics exists in a particular destination can sometimes serve to ease the worries of prospective migrants, resulting in a "herd effect" among future potential migrants (Bauer, Epstein and Gang 2002).

The network theory of migration can be seen as building on the neoclassical model of migration given that the presence of overseas contacts can significantly reduce the cost of migration and make it a more viable option to connected individuals who

otherwise would have found it too expensive or too risky to leave their home country (Borjas 1999). Prospective migrants can also possibly increase their potential overseas income or increase the probability of employment if they have contacts in the destination willing to directly hire the newly-arrived migrant or connect them with prospective employers (Massey et al. 1998). Potential migrants with access to “ethnic enclaves” overseas may find ready employment within this community of co-ethnics upon their arrival in the destination, thus sparing them from having to resort to low-wage jobs in the secondary sector in the host economy (Portes and Bach 1985). In this manner, overseas migrant networks can significantly alter the cost-benefit equation for potential migrants, increasing the odds of their deciding to leave their home country. Migrant networks have been found to be particularly critical in fostering women’s independent migration from patriarchal societies where they might encounter greater resistance to their migration decision (Curran et al. 2005; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

Set against this overwhelmingly positive picture of how networks can encourage cumulative migration are several recent ethnographies that highlight repeated instances of resistance on the part of overseas migrants to assist their contacts in the home country emigrate (Bashi 2007; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Böcker 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). The critical social capital literature also points to the role played by macro-structural factors—such as the state of the economy and the existence of a supportive/restrictive regulatory environment—in influencing helping decisions (Smith 2007, 2005; Menjivar 2000). It is not enough to assume that the large stock of overseas Filipinos—roughly 10% of the total population of the country (Asis 2006)—only plays a positive role in encouraging additional migrations from the Philippines. What must also be taken into consideration is

the socio-legal environment in which those overseas migrants live in their host country in order to determine if it is conducive to the mobilization of migrant social capital.

*To summarize:* Where one set of theories largely ignore social structure and focus only on the agency of individual migrants (or their families), the other set of theories ignore agency and only highlight the role of structural forces in initiating migration flows. Network theory, meanwhile, exists almost exclusively at the meso-level and, in its current formulation, ignores both the micro- and macro-level factors that can influence the helping decisions of overseas migrants. Throughout this section, I have also alluded briefly to these theories' (in)ability to explain migration out of the Philippines. What follows now is a discussion of Philippine history to explain the historical context from which Philippine out-migration originates and the current socio-economic conditions in the Philippines that facilitate continuing large-scale out-migration from the country.

### **A History of Philippine Migration**

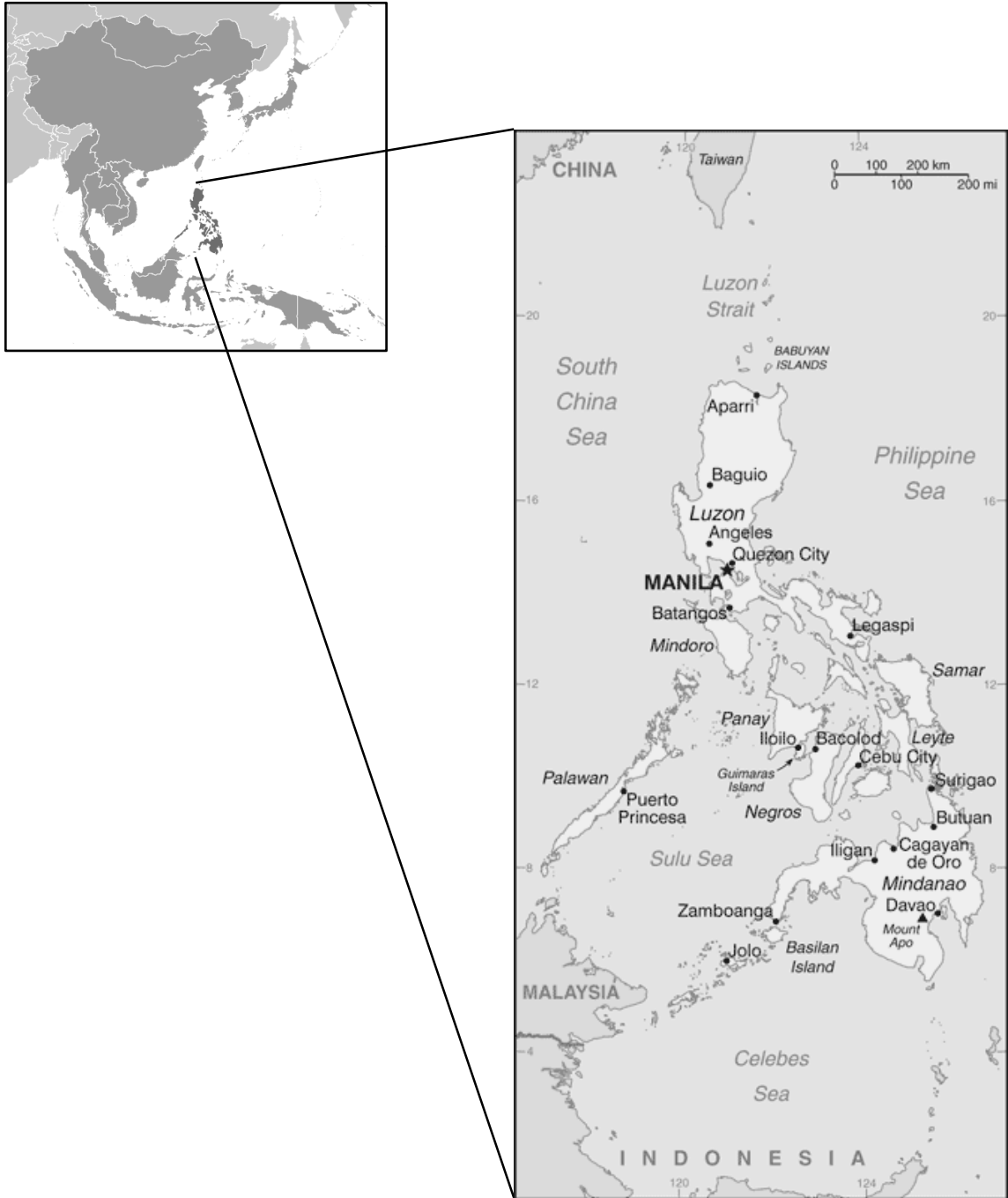
An archipelago of more than 7,000 islands in Southeast Asia (see Map 1.1), the Philippines has a long history of migration. As early as the twelfth century, traders from China, Siam, Angkor, India and the Arab world had established regular trading links with coastal settlements on the larger Philippine islands. (See Appendix F for a detailed timeline of the Philippines' migration history.) But it was the conquest of these territories by Spain in 1565 that created the entity we now know as the Philippines and began its eventual absorption into the world economy (Tyner 2009). The Spaniards used the Philippine port city of Manila as an exclusive entrepôt where Mexican silver was

exchanged for Chinese silks and other products from Asia. Known as the “galleon trade”—because of the large sailing ships that were used to transport these goods and precious metals between the Spanish Americas, the Philippines and China—it completely restructured the local Philippine economy.

Harsh tax obligations were imposed on native households to support Spain’s colonial ambitions, pushing many families into long-term debt and landlessness. Tens of thousands of Filipino men were conscripted to build and repair galleons for Spain and many of these laborers ended up also serving on these ships as crew members, later deserting and settling down in other Spanish territories in what is now the United States (Okimoto 1994:38 citing Espina 1988:1). They formed the oldest Asian American immigrant community in the United States.

The galleon trade began to dwindle towards the nineteenth century as British traders encroached further and further into Spanish trade routes. This compelled Spain to reorient the Philippines’ colonial economy towards export agriculture. The large-scale production of export-driven cash crops such as sugar, cacao, coconut, hemp, tobacco, fruits and spices was initiated (Abinales and Amoroso 2005). A plantation-based economy was introduced into the Philippines, which only served to exacerbate existing inequalities between an increasingly landless, peasant population and the small but wealthy, landowning class that had been created by the Spanish overlords. This dismantling of traditional Philippine society and its concomitant integration into the global economy are two of the most important legacies of 300 years of Spanish colonial rule.

Map 1.1  
Maps of the Pacific Rim and the Philippines



Source: Central Intelligence Agency. Retrieved December 13, 2011.

[https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/maps/maptemplate\\_rp.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/maps/maptemplate_rp.html)

In 1898, when the United States secured control over the Philippines as part of the terms of the Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-American War, this process of integration into the world economy only hastened. The nascent Philippine nationalist movement fiercely opposed this transfer of power to the United States. What ensued was the Philippine-American War which lasted from 1899 to 1902, and ended with the complete annexation of the Philippines as an American colony. It was at this point that migration out of the Philippines began in earnest, fueled by the close patron-client relationship that developed between the United States and the Philippines in the early twentieth century.

#### *Migration to the United States*

Tyner (2009) writes that three separate migration systems developed between the US and the Philippines:

1. The first was built on educational links between the two countries. The United States implemented a nation-wide, free, mandatory, English-language-based public school system that encouraged a “cultural orientation toward the West in general, and the United States more specifically” (Tyner 2004:25). It also introduced a scholarship system which brought thousands of children from elite Filipino families to the US to study in prestigious universities across the country and then return to the Philippines to join the government or enter the business world. This *pensionado* program helped cement the United States’ cultural status as the “dream destination” for aspiring, upwardly mobile Filipinos.

2. The militarization of the Philippines enabled the second migratory route to the United States. With the establishment of US military bases in the Philippines as part of the broader US effort to expand its sphere of influence within the Asia-Pacific, male Filipinos were allowed to enlist in the US Navy and eventually settle in the US after completing a certain number of years of military service.
3. The third and final route for prospective migrants to the United States was through labor recruitment. After the US annexation of Hawaii in 1898 and the decimation of much of the indigenous population of the Hawaiian islands due to various introduced diseases, American businesses needed to find an alternative cheap labor force to work the many sugar plantations that had been established on the Hawaiian islands. Originally, China and Japan had been the primary sources of labor for these plantations but the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Gentleman's Agreement with Japan in 1906 had severely restricted the entry of migrant workers from these two countries. The Philippines, which was now considered a colony of the United States, was not affected by the increasingly restrictive immigration policies of the US government, and so, large-scale labor recruiting efforts in the Philippines began. Starting in 1906, tens of thousands of male laborers left the Philippines each year to work on plantations in Hawaii (Rodriguez 2010; Asis 2006; Takaki 1989). In the 1920s, Filipinos also began migrating directly to the US mainland to work on farms in California and other West Coast states, and to work in fish canneries in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska. Several thousand Filipino men also joined the US merchant marine on an annual basis. All in all, an estimated 150,000 Filipinos arrived in the United States during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and many of these



migrants eventually settled in the United States. Tyner (2004) reports that, by 1930, there were 45,000 Filipino immigrants living on the US mainland and more than 63,000 in Hawaii.

However, with the increasing number of Filipino immigrants in the US, American anti-Asian xenophobia began to rise once again. Pressure began to build within the US to restrict the entry of Filipinos. But this could only be effected if the Philippines was no longer part of the United States, setting the stage for the 1934 passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act. This piece of legislation allowed for a ten-year period of transition after which the Philippines would be granted independence from the United States. In the immediate term, the Philippines' status was changed from US colony to commonwealth, allowing for the immediate reclassification of Filipinos as non-US citizens and therefore subject to US immigration restrictions. The annual quota for Filipino immigrants to the United States was set at 50, effectively ending most permanent migration to the United States.

A year after World War II had ended, and therefore a year later than originally scheduled, the Philippines gained its independence from the US. However, its economy remained inextricably dependent on that of the US. The independent-in-name Philippine government signed generous treaties with the United States government giving US businesses the right to export goods to the Philippines duty-free for eight years, after which tariffs would only be incrementally increased over a 25-year period. In contrast, strict quotas were imposed on all of the Philippines' major exports to the US. The Philippine peso was pegged to the dollar and could not be devalued. And US businesses were given "parity rights" to invest in Philippine natural resources and public utilities.

Meanwhile, the US military was given 99-year leases to set up military bases on Philippine soil. Other military links between the two countries continued unabated as well. Filipinos were still allowed to enlist in the US Navy, apply for US citizenship after serving for a number of years, and subsequently settle in the US (Rodriguez 2010). And in 1948, the US established the Exchange Visitor Program (EVP), a Cold War initiative that allowed Filipino nurses to receive specialized training and work in the US (Choy 2003). Rodriguez (2010) writes that, while the EVP was not created exclusively for the Philippines, by the 1960s the program was dominated by Filipino nurses. Additional exceptions were made to the Tydings-McDuffie Act for the entry of agricultural workers into Hawaii and for war brides. And so, migration to the US continued even after 1934, but in considerably smaller numbers.

This state of affairs continued until 1965 when the Immigration and Nationality Act (and its subsequent amendments) removed nationality-based quotas from the United States' immigration policy framework. This opened the door for increased permanent immigration from South and Central America, Africa and Asia, including the Philippines, for both foreign family members of existing Americans but also for foreign professionals such as doctors, engineers and nurses who did not have any close relatives in the US. Around the same time, other Western countries (primarily Canada, Australia and New Zealand) also struck down their pro-European immigration policies, opening up these destinations for permanent immigration from the Philippines as well. But the US remains the primary (and preferred) destination for permanent emigrants from the Philippines.

In 2010, the US granted permanent residence status to 58,173 immigrants who had been born in the Philippines (US Department of Homeland Security 2011). Of those,

33,746 (or 58%) were the immediate relatives of US citizens and another 17,849 (30%) were more distant relatives of US citizens or permanent residents. In other words, 88% of Filipino immigrants who received permanent resident status in the US in 2010 had done so by leveraging their migrant social capital resources, relying on their connections with existing US citizens or permanent residents.<sup>5</sup>

### *Contract Migration from the Philippines*

A second revolution in migration flows from the Philippines was kickstarted in 1974 with the “manpower export policy,” decreed by then-President Ferdinand Marcos, which both diversified and greatly expanded the volume of out-migration from the Philippines (Abinales and Amoroso 2005). There were several factors behind the adoption of this policy. Overseas temporary emigration was seen as a means to find employment for the country’s “excess” labor force and also quell any potential political unrest (Rodriguez 2010; Tyner 2004). In the early 1970s, the Philippine economy was suffering from the structural adjustments demanded of it by the International Monetary Fund to facilitate its shift from an agricultural economy to an export-oriented and industrialized one. This had resulted in a massive displacement of the rural poor from their traditional subsistence-based lifestyles. At the same time, there were insufficient jobs in the formal economy to absorb these displaced workers. The manpower export policy was initially designed to be a temporary stopgap measure until the country had

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<sup>5</sup> Another 323,216 Filipinos were granted non-immigrant temporary visas in 2010 to visit the US for business, pleasure or study. Of these, 1.5% were students or exchange visitors, 66% were either tourists or businesspersons, 22% were commercial seafarers and 6% were temporary workers. (Accessed from the US Department of Homeland Security website. Table 28: Nonimmigrant Admissions (I-94 Only) by Selected Category of Admission and Region and Country of Citizenship: Fiscal Year 2010. <http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2010/table28d.xls>)

weathered this economic crisis. A central part of this policy was the requirement that all overseas workers remit between 50-80% of their foreign earnings back to their families in the Philippines through Philippine banks. The resulting influx of foreign currency remittances from these overseas Filipinos provided a much-needed crutch for the weak Philippine economy to the point that successive national administrations have continued to rely heavily on labor migration.

At the same time (as previously mentioned), outside the Philippines, there were changes occurring at the global level that created an opportunity structure for potential Filipino labor migration. The 1973 oil embargo and subsequent hike in oil prices resulted in a massive influx of funds into the oil-rich economies of the Middle East who chose to use this money to initiate ambitious development and infrastructure programs in their countries. Most of these Middle Eastern countries (such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain) lacked a large enough internal labor supply to meet all their new labor needs and so they began a large-scale importation of foreign temporary workers. Newly-rich Arab households began hiring foreign domestic workers to help in the home and to signal their improved class position (Esim and Smith 2004; Sabban 2004; Silvey 2004; Ismail 1999). Filipino domestic workers in particular came to be highly prized because of their English language skills and relatively high educational qualifications (de Regt 2009).

By the 1980s, the newly industrializing economies of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore were also importing migrant workers on a large scale to make up for national labor shortages in construction and sanitation (Skeldon 1992). As their female labor force participation rates continued to climb, these countries also looked to foreign

workers to make up for the national care deficit that was emerging (Lan 2006; Tam 1999; Yeoh, Huang, and Gonzalez III 1999; Constable 1997). The Philippines continues to be an important source country for migrant workers for all these Asian countries, especially in the areas of domestic service (Stalker 2000). By the 1990s, a second tier of Asian countries (particularly Malaysia and Brunei) had begun to industrialize and they too became popular markets for Filipino domestic workers.

While importing low-skilled temporary migrants in large numbers, all of the above countries in the Middle East and Asia also introduced strict immigration provisions to ensure that these workers could not settle within their borders and become permanent residents at some later point in the future (Castles 2006; Skeldon 2000). As a result, *temporary* migration out of the Philippines grew exponentially from the 1970s onwards.

There continues to be a steady rise in the number of Filipinos emigrating each year on temporary contracts as the Philippine economy remains plagued by high under-employment and low wages (Rodriguez 2010; Asian Institute of Management Policy Center 2005). A government-supported culture of migration has also developed in the Philippines, facilitated by a for-profit migration industry that actively recruits temporary workers and places them overseas (for a price) (Asis 2006). Temporary labor migration out of the Philippines has now completely dwarfed permanent out-migration which still continues unabated, just on a much smaller scale. In 2009, only 79,718 Filipinos left the country on a more permanent basis (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2011). In contrast, in 2010, over 1.1 million Filipinos migrated to over 200 countries and territories to work on temporary labor contracts (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2011). Another 438,705 Filipinos were hired to work onboard merchant marine vessels as

commercial seafarers. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 display the number of Filipino labor migrants leaving the country each year between 2006 and 2010, organized by the top ten destination countries and occupational categories respectively. Table 3.2 also reveals that the single largest occupational category for outgoing Filipino labor migrants in 2010 was for “household service workers.”

As a result of this voluminous and broad-based out-migration of Filipinos each year since the 1970s, a culture of migration has become entrenched in Philippine society. A 2005 survey in the Philippines found that 33% of adult respondents agreed with the statement: “If it were only possible, I would migrate to another country and live there” (Asis 2006). This number jumps to 60% when asking the children of migrant workers. This migratory culture has also been fostered by the government through its celebration of migrants as “national heroes” for remitting their savings back to the Philippines (Rodriguez 2010).

Finally, the large stock of overseas Filipinos—a little more than 10% of the total population of the country—who send regular remittances and *balikbayan* gift boxes to their family members in the Philippines paint a picture of overseas life as financially rewarding, even if difficult at times. All these contribute to the current state of affairs where migration is a very real option that many Filipinos consider at least once at some point in their lives.

Table 3.1  
Number of Land-based Migrant Workers Leaving the Philippines, by Top Ten Destinations, 2006-2010

Country	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>All Destinations – Total</b>	<b>788,070</b>	<b>811,070</b>	<b>974,399</b>	<b>1,092,162</b>	<b>1,123,676</b>
Saudi Arabia	223,459	238,419	275,933	291,419	293,049
United Arab Emirates	99,212	120,657	193,810	196,815	201,214
Hong Kong	96,929	59,169	78,345	100,142	101,340
Qatar	45,795	56,277	84,342	89,290	87,813
Singapore	28,369	49,431	41,678	54,421	70,251
Kuwait	47,917	37,080	38,903	45,900	53,010
Taiwan	39,025	37,136	38,546	33,751	36,866
Italy	25,413	17,855	22,623	23,159	25,595
Bahrain	11,736	9,898	13,079	15,001	15,434
Canada	6,468	12,380	17,399	17,344	13,885
<b>Top 10 Destinations (% of Total)</b>	<b>624,323 (79%)</b>	<b>638,302 (79%)</b>	<b>804,658 (83%)</b>	<b>867,242 (79%)</b>	<b>898,457 (80%)</b>

Source: Philippine Overseas Employment Administration

Table 3.2  
Number of Newly-Hired Land-based Filipino Migrant Workers,  
by Top Ten Occupations & Gender, 2010

Occupation	Women	Men	Total
<b>All Occupations – Total</b>	<b>185,602</b>	<b>154,677</b>	<b>340,279</b>
Household Service Workers <sup>a</sup>	94,880	1,703	96,583
Production Workers	11,865	15,286	27,152
Laborers <sup>b</sup>	5,915	9,764	15,679
Charworkers/Cleaners	9,521	2,612	12,133
Nurses	10,254	1,828	12,082
Caregivers/Caretakers <sup>a</sup>	8,750	543	9,293
Waiters, Bartenders	4,396	4,393	8,789
Wiremen/Electrical Workers	30	8,576	8,606
Plumbers/Pipe Fitters	16	8,391	8,407
Welders/Flame-cutters	22	5,037	5,059
<b>Top 10 Occupations (% of Total)</b>	<b>145,649 (78%)</b>	<b>58,133 (38%)<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>203,783 (60%)</b>

Source: Philippine Overseas Employment Administration

Notes:

- a. The categories “household service workers” and “caregivers/caretakers” are artificial distinctions created by the Philippine government based on the titles given to these workers in different destination countries. They are called caregivers if going to Canada and Taiwan, and household service workers if going to Singapore and Hong Kong.
- b. The category “Laborers” was created by combining the categories: “Laborers/Helpers General”, “Laborers” and “Laborer Industry (NEC)” as published in the POEA’s 2011 migrant worker deployment report.
- c. The Top 10 occupational categories only account for 38% of all male migrant workers leaving the Philippines in 2010. This is because most of the male-dominated occupations fall within the construction industry which consists of smaller, very specific, occupational categories, e.g. Operators - Earthmoving Machinery, Machine Fitters, Construction Laborers, Drivers, Carpenters, etc., each of which had roughly 4,000 migrants in 2010 almost all of whom were men.



## **The Philippines Today**

Having established that there are broad structural forces at the global level encouraging out-migration from the Philippines, I now discuss the factors within the present-day Philippines that foster the continued outflow of so many Filipinas. One of the most critical of these is the “migration bureaucracy” established by the Philippine government to facilitate the export of Philippine migrant labor to markets around the world.

### *The Philippines as Labor Exporter*

Among labor-exporting countries, the Philippines is regarded as an innovator and role model in its marketing and management of its migrant citizens. Over the last 40 years, it has built a vast government apparatus focused on all aspects of migration management, including the authorization, regulation, marketing, training, recruitment and placement of Filipino migrant workers overseas (Rodriguez 2010; Agunias 2008; Tyner 2004). Within this migration bureaucracy, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration<sup>6</sup> (POEA) and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration<sup>7</sup> (OWWA) are the two most important governmental entities. The POEA is charged with the regulation and promotion of the country’s labor migration program. All outgoing labor migrants are required to seek clearance from this government agency before leaving the country. At the same time, the POEA issues licenses to private recruiting agencies and sets minimum labor standards that these agencies are expected to comply with. The POEA is also active overseas, promoting Filipinos as ideal workers for the world

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<sup>6</sup> <http://poea.gov.ph/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.owwa.gov.ph/>

economy: Docile yet hardworking, educated but undemanding (Rodriguez 2010; Tyner 2004).

The OWWA, meanwhile, is an agency within the Department of Labor and Employment and its central mandate is to protect the welfare of overseas Filipino workers and their families who remain in the Philippines. In order to do this, it administers destination- and occupation-specific “pre-departure orientation seminars” for all outgoing labor migrants to advise them about the overseas work environment and suggest ways to deal with potential problems that may arise with their employers. Philippine embassies and consulates in major destination countries frequently have a labor attaché (through OWWA) on staff to deal with any migrant labor-related issues that may arise, such as arranging for the repatriation of workers who ran away from their employers or negotiating with local law enforcement officials in situations where overseas Filipino workers are arrested or accused of a crime.

However, despite the Philippines’ sprawling migration bureaucracy, it is important to not overstate the government’s importance in fostering the out-migration of its citizens. Certainly when the national policy on labor exportation was first implemented in the 1970s, the actions of the Philippine state were integral to the policy’s success. At that time, the Philippine government directly handled all the recruitment and placement of Filipino migrant workers overseas. But now, 40 years later, out-migration from the Philippines is very much a public-private partnership, sustained not only by the government but also by the private sector that profits tremendously from the export of migrant Filipino labor (Agunias 2008).

There are now well over 1,000 private recruitment agencies licensed by the government to match prospective migrants with overseas employers.<sup>8</sup> These for-profit agencies handle the vast majority of all recruitment and placement of Filipino workers overseas. In contrast, the Government Placement Branch placed just 6,519 (or 2%) of all newly-hired land-based workers in 2010 (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2011:11).

### *The Philippine Economy*

Just as important as the Philippine government's migration infrastructure in fostering out-migration from the Philippines, are the continuing dire economic straits that many Filipino families find themselves in. In 2009, the individual poverty rate in the Philippines was 26.5%. The female unemployment rate was 7.4%, and among employed women, 46.1% were characterized as holding "vulnerable employment" as unpaid family workers or own-account workers.<sup>9</sup> Employed women are also heavily concentrated in low-paying sectors—24% in agriculture and another 66% in services (such as domestic work)—with limited opportunities for career development. These negative wage pressures make it hard for locally-employed Filipino women to sufficiently support their families.

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<sup>8</sup> As of January 21, 2011, there were 1,372 active, accredited recruitment agencies in "good standing" listed on the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration website. (<http://www.poea.gov.ph/cgi-bin/agList.asp?mode=all>)

<sup>9</sup> All labor and security statistics for the Philippines were sourced from the World Bank's website at <http://data.worldbank.org/country/philippines> and the Annual Labor and Employment Estimates of the Philippine Government's National Statistics Office at [http://www.census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/lf101103\\_ar.pdf](http://www.census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/lf101103_ar.pdf). Retrieved on March 28, 2012

Added pressure comes from the high rate of underemployment, measured at 18.8% of the employed in 2010.<sup>10</sup> For workers earning an hourly wage, the limited number of hours they work each week contributes to the smaller income they bring home and increases the pressure on them to find alternative ways of supporting their families. This is especially true for women who are usually employed in lower-paid and lower-status positions. In general, women's careers are also considered less important than men's (Medina 2001). Paradoxically, this can make it easier for women to jettison their careers in the Philippines and seek work overseas.

While the average family income has increased only marginally in recent decades, the cost of living has been rising at a fast clip, especially in urban areas. Between 2006 and 2009 alone, the Consumer Price Index in the Philippines went up from 137.9 to 160, a 16% increase (using 2000 prices). At the same time, the average family income only rose 3%. This is part of a pattern of declining real incomes that has become standard in the Philippines (Alonzo, Horton and Nayar 1996).<sup>11</sup> Lan writes that this steady decline in real wages (especially in urban areas) has made overseas employment more and more tempting even for middle class families (2006:127).

There are additional cost pressures for families with college-age children. A 2003 report from the International Institute for Educational Planning (under UNESCO) found that "scholarships and other types of student support cover at present only a small fraction of eligible students enrolled" in Philippine colleges and universities (Kitaev,

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<sup>10</sup> Sourced from Table 4.1B "Underemployed and Visibly Underemployed Persons As Percent to Total Employed, Philippines: 1987 – 2010" in the *2011 Yearbook of Labor Statistics* published by the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics. Retrieved on April 4, 2012. <http://www.bles.dole.gov.ph/PUBLICATIONS/2011%20YLS/STATISTICAL%20TABLES/PDF/CHAPT%20ER%204/Tab4-1B.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Family income statistics available online from the National Statistical Coordination Board. Retrieved on April 4, 2012. [http://www.nscb.gov.ph/secstat/d\\_income.asp](http://www.nscb.gov.ph/secstat/d_income.asp).

Nadurata, Resurrection, and Bernal 2003:16). Though the government of the Philippines does offer student loans and scholarships, these programs have been plagued with difficulties and reach “only a few thousand new borrowers a year” (Kitaev et al. 2003:20). Of the 2.4 million students enrolled in a tertiary institution in the Philippines in 2001, 75% went to private institutions and these institutions charge tuition fees that are significantly higher than what government student loan programs cover. The University of the Philippines—considered the nation’s top public university—charged the equivalent of US\$250 per year for tuition in 2003; the University de la Salle—by some accounts, the top private university in the country—charged US\$2,000 a year in contrast. The failure of credit markets in the Philippines to make tertiary education more affordable to Filipinos is another push factor propelling Filipino parents to consider working overseas so as to earn sufficient income to put their children through college.

### *Family Hierarchies and Gender Norms*

But why would the high cost burden of tertiary education in the Philippines encourage so many women to want to work overseas? One possibility has to do with how Filipino women are often seen as “keepers of the family purse” or “household treasurers” within their households (Chant and McIlwaine 1995:9). While it might appear that this should result in Filipino women holding positions of power within their households, several scholars have found that in fact what happens is that women’s responsibility over the family finances simply increases their feelings of stress and worry as they struggle to make ends meet. Women typically pour almost all their earnings into their household coffers, while men siphon off a greater portion of their income for their personal needs,

gambling or drinking (Eder 2006; Chant and McIlwaine 1995). I hypothesize that this cultural practice can compel Philippine women (more than men) to seek overseas employment to supplement the family income and provide for their dependent children.

There are other social forces that can explain women's out-migration from the Philippines. The Philippines (like most Asian societies) is still a very patriarchal society with men seen as the natural heads of households, family breadwinners and decision-makers (Eder 2006; Roces 2000; Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Eviota 1992). Even as more and more Filipino women take on employment outside the home, their status in the family is still second to that of their menfolk. This is codified in laws that make divorce illegal in the Philippines and separation only permissible in cases of incest and adultery. When married couples are allowed to legally separate, their assets are not evenly divided but, rather, they revert to the original title-holder, disadvantaging women who may have been financially dependent on their husbands. The low rates of legal separation are also connected to the widespread adherence to the Roman Catholic faith and the very strong kinship networks that exist in the Philippines that may pressure couples to remain together. For women who find themselves unable to separate from their husbands, international migration might provide a convenient escape route. In her interviews with Filipino migrant domestic workers in Italy, Parreñas found that 14 out of the 20 legally married respondents she interviewed were women who had left the Philippines to escape abusive, unfaithful or wastrel husbands (2001:66-67).

A final factor that might motivate some women to seek work abroad is the Philippine norm of never-married women taking on the financial responsibility of caring for their parents and supporting their younger siblings' education (Lan 2006; Chant and

McIlwaine 1995; Medina 2001; Lauby and Stark 1988). As they become the breadwinners for these relatives—even if they do not live within the same household—these women might feel added pressure to work overseas in order to earn a higher income to support their family members. Lauby and Stark (1988) hypothesize that rural households in the Philippines might be more inclined to dispatch their unmarried daughters rather than sons to urban centers because of this tradition and the expectation that daughters will send a greater portion of their earnings back home, compared to sons.

### **The Filipino Migrant Domestic Worker**

Migrant domestic work is clearly a popular exit strategy for female prospective migrants desirous of leaving the Philippines. Migrant domestic workers constitute the single largest occupational bloc of labor migrants leaving the Philippines (see Table 3.2) and almost all of these migrant domestic workers are women (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2011).

For unemployed and even many employed women in the Philippines, migrant domestic work represents a significant increase in their earnings, no matter how lowly or vulnerable the occupation. Even for Filipinas who had full-time jobs in the Philippines, migrant domestic work oftentimes provides a higher wage than a white-collar job. The average nominal daily wage rate for women in non-farm-related work in 2011 was PHP331 (or US\$7.92<sup>12</sup>). The average nominal daily wage rate for women in the manufacturing sector was even lower at PHP287 (or US\$6.87).<sup>13</sup> This was before any

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<sup>12</sup> Using the historical exchange rate on 07/06/2012, of US\$1 = PHP41.7899.

<sup>13</sup> Data published through LABORSTA Internet, the International Labour Organization's Department of Statistics' online database on labor statistics (<http://laborsta.ilo.org/>) and originally sourced from the Philippine government's labor force survey.

compulsory deductions for taxes, social security, or insurance, and this wage rate was expected to cover all living expenses (rent/mortgage payments, food, transportation and utilities for both the individual worker and any dependents). In comparison, a domestic servant job in Hong Kong pays roughly PHP671 (or US\$16) a day<sup>14</sup> with no deductions and with room and board provided. The above kind of simple accounting could push many women, employed and unemployed to consider life overseas as a migrant domestic worker.

Migrant domestic work is an attractive option for women migrants also because (in most cases) it does not require any particular training or educational qualifications. For female migrants especially, domestic work is a convenient exit strategy to consider because such work has traditionally been framed as “women’s work” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Parreñas 2008). As a result, prospective female migrants do not necessarily have to prove their suitability for such overseas jobs; being female is seen as qualification enough. In addition, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Five, this particular choice of overseas occupation gives these migrants entrée into a wide range of destination countries that import foreigners as temporary domestic workers. In 2010, newly-hired Filipino migrant domestic workers travelled to over 200 countries and territories to start work (POEA 2011). Given that the Philippines that does not share a border with a high-income country, these temporary labor importation programs represent the most effective strategy available to capital-constrained prospective migrants seeking to enter these countries.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Based on the current minimum wage rate required by Hong Kong law (3,740 Hong Kong dollars a month, divided by 30 and using the exchange rate on 07/06/2012 of US\$1 = HK\$7.7540 and HK\$1 = PHP5.3890).

<sup>15</sup> For low-capital migrants from low-income countries that *do* share a land/sea border with a high-income



Finally, another reason behind the adoption of migrant domestic work could be because it represents an easier job fit to many women who were already performing various domestic duties—childcare, eldercare, cooking and cleaning—in their own homes. Lan writes that one of the allures of migrant domestic work is that it allowed women to be paid for work that they currently performed in their own homes for free (2006:133).

While previously there were few regulations governing the migrant domestic worker industry, the POEA now has instituted some restrictions on the deployment of Filipinos overseas as domestic workers. There is now a minimum age of 23 years before a Filipino is allowed to work overseas as a domestic worker.<sup>16</sup> The POEA also regularly issues bans on the deployment of Filipinos as domestic workers to countries that are deemed to provide inadequate protections to ensure their safety and prevent exploitation by employers. In 2010, for instance, the POEA lifted a ban that had been in effect for over ten years, preventing Filipinos from working as *au pairs* in Switzerland, Norway and Denmark.<sup>17</sup> Similar bans have been applied at various times to other receiving countries in the Middle East and Asia.

The POEA also has a standard employment contract, specifying a minimum wage rate of US\$400 a month and a weekly day of rest, that it requires all out-going Filipino domestic workers to sign. However, this contract has no legal standing outside the Philippines and few receiving countries honor its terms (Battistella and Asis 2011). In

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country, irregular migration is always a very real option. Much of Mexican migration to the United States falls within this category.

<sup>16</sup> POEA Governing Board Resolution No. 4, Series of 2011. Accessed at [http://poea.gov.ph/gbr/2011/gb\\_4\\_2011.pdf](http://poea.gov.ph/gbr/2011/gb_4_2011.pdf) on May 6, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> POEA Governing Board Resolution Nos. 4 and 7, Series of 2010. Accessed at <http://poea.gov.ph/gbr/2010/POEA%20GBR4-20100001.PDF> and <http://poea.gov.ph/gbr/2010/GB%20Resolution%20No.07,%20S2010.PDF> on May 6, 2012.

addition, the POEA has to maintain a delicate balance between protecting its overseas citizens and marketing them to overseas employers (Rodriguez 2010). The recent see-saw decisions over the minimum age for migrant domestic workers are a reflection of the pressure the POEA faces from hiring countries, Philippine recruitment agencies and prospective Filipino migrants themselves: The minimum age used to be 25 years in 1994, then it became 21 years in 1998, 18 years in 2001, 25 years in 2006, and most recently, 23 years in 2010 (Battistella and Asis 2011).

### **Participants' Accounts of their Migration Decision**

When asked why they first decided to leave the Philippines, almost all participants mentioned financial reasons as being the primary driver behind their decisions, supporting the basic premise of neoclassical economic theory. All in all, 89% of participants spoke of wanting to earn more money. Every one of the study participants seemed perfectly aware of the fact that they could earn significantly higher wages overseas compared to in the Philippines, even from a low-status job like migrant domestic work. As one participant in Singapore, Agatha, who possessed a vocational diploma as a “computer secretarial”, put it:

I work as a cashier last time and then in a factory for almost two years. But the salary is not enough. Because the salary here in Singapore [as a domestic worker] is double. So that's why we come to Singapore and work.

Another participant, Padmé, a college graduate who had worked for an NGO in the Philippines before finding employment in Canada, explained that she first began to think of working overseas when she observed how her father and her brother were both able to afford expensive gifts for their family after starting to work abroad:

[My father] was working in Saudi Arabia before for seven years. But he's actually working for an American company. He's a chef. [...] My father—he didn't finish any degree or whatever. He's just trained by people he worked with back home. But then, when he went to that country, he was earning more than the Filipino engineers who are working for the Saudi government actually. He was being paid three times more. So, that's how I told myself that I can even help more of our relatives if I'm going to go out and explore the possibility of earning more than what I'm already earning back home.

Like Padmé, 61% of participants were already employed in the Philippines prior to their departure. In other words, most migrants were not leaving because they couldn't find jobs in the Philippines; they were not the poorest Filipinos without access to any capital. Just under a third of study participants indicated that they left the Philippines in order to find a job. Rather, most participants left because the jobs they possessed did not provide them with sufficient income to meet their immediate and/or long-term financial needs. This finding echoes what other migration scholars have uncovered about women migrants' motivations in Asia (Parreñas 2001; Thadani and Todaro 1986).

And for those participants who were unemployed, the chance at finally earning some money (even if it was from a low-status occupation like domestic work) was too attractive to pass up. This was the case with Malia, who had decided to pursue an overseas domestic worker job after having been unsuccessful at finding a job in the Philippines that utilized her engineering training:

I was a fresh graduate. I graduated in October of 1984. And then, after that, I went home, hoping that I could earn somehow an employment back in the province. But unfortunately at the time, it was also the same [jobless] scenario in the province as in Manila. So when I went home hoping for an employment, it is still the same. The status of employment is still very, very difficult. And because of the burden of no [savings] to finance me for a review class that I was supposed to take before going for the board exam, I decided to grab the opportunity [to work abroad].

Because when I was riding a jeep, I found an ad in front of a building that they were hiring domestic workers for Malaysia. That was primarily focused on KL [Kuala Lumpur] in Malaysia. So [...] because of the difficulty that I am having—because even though you are a graduate, you have to find some work experience before you can land a job. But how can I get the work experience if they are not giving me the chance for the experience to start?—So the time is passing and days are going. So I decided that, at the very least, I should grab the chance of working as a domestic worker.

In this regard, these participants seem to fit the mold described in neoclassical economic theories, rationally weighing the costs and benefits of working overseas and disregarding the low prestige associated with paid domestic work. Michael Piore makes a similar finding, writing in *Birds of Passage* that the “migrant is initially a true economic man, probably the closest thing in real life to the *Homo Economicus* of economic theory” because they are “working totally and exclusively for money” (1979:55). However, even though almost all participants were motivated in part by a desire for a higher income, many participants did not fit this ideal of the pure economic migrant.

Several participants who were employed in the Philippines also left for more intangible reasons, partly out of a sense that their current job did not fulfill them in any way, partly because they imagined that the life they would lead overseas would be so much better than their current one. One interviewee recalled how she had studied medical technology in college but had only found an entry-level position in a hotel in the Philippines upon graduation. Working in poorly paid jobs that did not utilize their training and expertise, or working in part-time jobs that lacked either security or a chance at a promotion, encouraged study participants to look favorably at migration. For these interviewees, giving up an unfulfilling job in the Philippines for a low-status occupation overseas, but one that offered significantly more money, was a worthwhile exchange.

Young, carefree women who were not yet burdened with familial responsibilities meanwhile saw migration as a bit of a lark and were attracted by the opportunity to see the world through their overseas employment. Christy, a single Filipina who had worked in a factory in the Philippines before finding employment as a domestic worker in Singapore, explained her migration decision in this manner:

I didn't have really any reasons for coming here [to Singapore]. It's just like I came here because a friend asked me to come here. I don't have the plan to come overseas. [...] [My friend,] she's here before. And I was working in the Philippines in a factory. And then after that, when she came back from Singapore, she said to me to go to an agency to come here. [But] I said I'm not interested. Then, after that, she is asking me, "Okay. Just do this for fun!" I didn't have the plan. [Christy laughs.] So, because she insisted, so I just go and I signed the papers and, after two weeks, I have employer [in Singapore]. [Christy laughs again.] So I said, "What shall I do?" And she just said, "Yes, just go on." I thought it's fun.

In Christy's estimation, working overseas would be "fun" and that was reason enough to give it a try. Her work in a factory in Manila that made thread was mundane and she was open to trying something new. "I didn't ask anything!" she recalled during her interview, laughing at how impulsive she had been.

Other young, unmarried participants remembered how they had been envious of other Filipinas who were working abroad and who had an air of not just newly acquired wealth but also cosmopolitanism about them. A telephone operator in the Philippines, Emmeline, was pulled into applying for an overseas job by a friend of hers who was more serious about leaving the Philippines. When she received the call from the recruitment agency telling her that an overseas employer had selected her, she had to decide whether or not to take up the offer. "I said, 'I will try,'" she recalled. "Because some of the Filipina going back to Philippines, they look very good, you know? So I thought, maybe I will become like that also!" Overall, 37% of participants fell into what I call the "aspirant" category of migrant, propelled by what they imagined their future life overseas could hold for them personally.

#### *Household/Family Considerations*

A different set of considerations influenced participants who had family obligations. Participants who were parents almost always spoke of leaving because they

wanted to provide a better life for their children. (Overall, 44% of all participants raised their children's livelihood as the reason why they decided to seek work overseas.) In explaining their motivation, these participants referred not only to the immediate needs of their children but also their *long-term* aspirations for their children, which usually involved their children earning a college degree and having a fruitful career. Time and again, participants shared how a good college education in the Philippines costs a great deal of money and would have been hard to afford on a Philippine salary alone. In the case of Lacey, a part-time domestic worker in the United States who now also works as a migrant rights activist, the only reason why she left a fulfilling and reasonably well-paid job in the Philippines was because she knew that her salary would not support her two children's college fees:

[I had] a job that I like. Yeah. But the thing is, with the rising cost of everything in the Philippines, we cannot send our children to good universities or colleges. So that was the challenge for me at the time. Because I have been petitioned by my family, my brother specifically, to come to the US. But for the longest time, I did not want to come here because I find my job and my life there [in the Philippines] more meaningful. But when the time came for me to send my children to college, you know, reality hits. Yeah. My sense is that I cannot do it there [in the Philippines]. I cannot do it there, so I was forced to come here.

Eberta, a former domestic worker in Singapore who now worked as a migration counselor for the Philippine embassy in Singapore, explained how her children had also been the primary reason she had given up her job in the Philippines to seek work overseas:

It was 22 years ago. Because I have four children and my salary that time was very small. It was only 1,500 [Philippine] pesos [a month]. And we are renting a room, not a house, and it's about 800 pesos [a month]. And my salary is too small. How to feed my children and give them a good education? So I decided to go overseas. At least, if I work and then I earn a little higher, then I can send my children to university.

Meanwhile, several participants who were unmarried and without children talked about the need to support their younger siblings' education (if their siblings were still

school-age) or their siblings' children's education. (A third of participants saw themselves in this light, calling themselves their families' "breadwinner.") This was how Andrea, an unmarried, former domestic worker, explained her decision to leave the Philippines:

Last December in the year 1990, I leave the Philippines for Hong Kong for the sake of my [sister]. I have one sister, a half sister, a maternal sister. She has five children and when I leave the Philippines, the eldest is about 19 years old so starting to go college. Then, after that, I send the boy to college. [...] Because I do not have family. I have only one sister so all my best I give them. Send to college their children. [...] I want them to study so that they can work.

Other unmarried participants tried to explain the cultural norms behind this practice during their interviews. Laura, a 53-year-old, unmarried Filipina who had worked in Hong Kong for over 30 years, recalled how she had used most of her earnings to support her parents and the college education of several of her nieces in the Philippines. Laura had three brothers who also worked overseas as merchant seafarers, but she explained that, because her brothers were all married, "they have their own family, so they [have to] support themselves." In other words, Laura's brothers were largely excused from any responsibility to support their parents because it was understood that they would need to provide for their own wives and children. Laura, on the other hand, as a single woman, was expected to take the lead in looking after her parents and serving as a benefactress to her various nieces and nephews.

A select few participants spoke of leaving the Philippines because they wanted to leave an abusive relationship. (Only 6% of participants fell into this category.) In such situations, their husbands were also often not financially supporting the rest of the family. These women sought work overseas partly to earn enough money for their children but also simply to get away from their husbands. Rena, who was on her second contract in

Singapore, explained that she had decided to leave the Philippines because she could not take any more physical abuse from her husband who was also unemployed:

I had business in Philippines selling veggie. Then my husband don't have work and so, me, I am the breadwinner of my family. So, for that reason, that is also one reason. Then, he is always beating me, punching me. [...] What you call it in English? "Battered wife?" You call it "battered wife."

Other scholars who have studied Filipino migrant domestic workers have written that women migrants were pursuing a "covert strategy" (Parreñas 2001:64) to "avoid unpaid household burdens at home" (Lan 2006:134). However, in my interviews with study participants, such a motivation for leaving the Philippines was not apparent, either overtly or from reading between the lines. Participants certainly enjoyed the sense of financial independence that they achieved by working overseas, and their new status as family breadwinners. But my conclusion after analyzing the interview transcripts is that this realization only came *after* they were already working overseas; it was not the primary motivation behind their initial migration decision. When participants did use the language of "running away," they were very explicit in explaining that they were running away from specific relationships and not the institution of domestic life or the gendered norms concerning household responsibilities. (But certainly, the desire to escape such household burdens may have been a reason for their continuing to work overseas rather than return home at the end of their first contract.)

#### *Neighborhood/Network-level Considerations*

Several participants, like Emmeline, also spoke of only starting to consider migration after comparing their circumstances with those of their "neighbors" or relatives who had gone overseas. It should be noted here that the term "neighbors" refers not only



to those individuals who enjoyed spatial proximity with study participants but also those who were socioeconomically proximate. Participants would look at the comfortable lifestyle these individuals' families in the Philippines were enjoying, thanks to the income boost provided by their overseas job, and ask themselves: Why not work overseas as well?

One of the reasons why Carrie, a university graduate and a secondary school teacher in the Philippines, started considering overseas work was because her neighbors in her village were clearly leading more comfortable lives after their children found work overseas:

I was challenged. Our neighbors have only finished the secondary level in the high school. They don't finish the university, their college level. But they are abroad and they were able to build a house! A nice house because of the money they earned. But our house is too small and old. So I said, "Oh, I better go." Yeah, because I want to make also the house for my family. So I decided that my first ambition is to build another house for us also. So I was challenged: How can the other people who did not finish the university make such a nice house? Or a better house? Not so beautiful but at least a better place to stay. How about me? What am I doing? My salary is only good for groceries. I can only buy groceries for my parents and myself. That's all. I cannot even save a single cent because you know the prices are so high and the salary is too low. So how can you save money? So, I better go.

This is also what happened with Cissie who saw how her aunt's life improved considerably after her aunt worked in Hong Kong as a migrant domestic worker for several years:

Because [my aunt] is working here [in Hong Kong] a long time ago. And then I can see how their life is improving. What I mean is, she can—she has her own house and lot. She has all the things that they need. They can buy it [...] because, of course, her salary.

Carrie and Cissie's stories speak to the notion proposed by NELM theorists of relative rather than absolute poverty being a migration motivator (Stark, Micevska, and Mycielski 2009; Stark and Taylor 1989). It was this sense of relative deprivation compared to neighbors and relatives who were now better off that encouraged individuals to attempt to better themselves by going overseas as well.

But what NELM theorists fail to consider is that there is a simultaneous herd effect occurring. These individuals considered migration as a means to improve their lifestyle because that was the approach taken by their neighbors as well. Several participants spoke of having been caught up almost in a wave of neighbors and acquaintances all looking for jobs overseas. Bauer, Epstein and Gang (2002) have talked about the herd effect influencing the location choice of Mexican immigrants within the United States. But, in this present study, this herd effect seems to have regularly influenced the migration decision and also the occupational choice of many interviewees. Carla chose to emigrate from the Philippines and also chose her destination (Saudi Arabia) by following in the footsteps of others from her village:

All the people in our village go to Saudi Arabia. [...] Yes! [*Carla laughs.*] Our neighbors are going to Saudi Arabia to seek a job because they said they can earn more than if they stay here in the Philippines. So that encouraged me also to go and work.  
*Only the women? Or the men as well?*  
Men! Men and women! Everybody!

An important reason why the herd effect occurs is because the people being emulated belonged to participants' "aspirations window" (Ray 2006). Ray defines this window as being "formed from an individual's cognitive world, her zone of 'similar,' 'attainable' individuals. Our individual draws her aspirations from the lives, achievements, or ideals of those who exist in her aspirations window" (2006:410). In the case of study participants, the people who populated their aspirations window were friends, relatives, colleagues at work, classmates and village/town neighbors. These role models' migration decisions directly affected study participants' musings about migration as well. There was a sense that if their role models could emigrate, then study participants could too. This had been a strong motivator for Gail who had been an elementary school teacher in the Philippines and had been struggling to make ends meet for her family. She

was inspired to travel stepwise to Canada by the actions of the principal of her school who had decided to emigrate to Canada. “Our principal is going there [to Canada] also,” Gail recalled during her interview. “So I told myself that if my principal who is planning to go, why can’t I go to Canada to go out [of the Philippines]. If somebody will help me, so why can’t I?”

### **Participants’ Accounts of their Occupational Choice**

The previous section already alluded briefly to how herd effects (a category of network effects) influenced study participants’ choice of migrant domestic work as their exit strategy from the Philippines. Just as the presence of relatives, friends or neighbors overseas encouraged participants to consider labor migration, these contacts’ decision to work as migrant domestic servants was critical in encouraging participants to do the same. For Malia, the unemployed engineering graduate mentioned earlier, any resistance she might have felt about taking on paid domestic work was negated when she received a letter from a friend of hers whom she greatly respected, who had become a domestic worker in Bahrain:

That is the push for grabbing the work as a domestic worker. I received a letter from a friend who graduated ahead of me by one semester. She is very brainy and she took a lot of government examinations to apply for [engineering] jobs. But still, unfortunately, she was not able to land a job, even though she has a lot of recommendations from the government. And I was just shocked and surprised when I received a letter from her [writing] that she is already in Bahrain working as a domestic worker. And she is a talented and intelligent woman. So, as I was saying, that was the booster that pushed me to work as a domestic worker. Because I was saying, she is more intelligent than me and she is a smart girl, she passed a lot of government examinations for our course, but she ended up as a domestic worker. So, I said, why shouldn’t I make that stepping stone too?

For study participants without a college degree, migrant domestic work was alluring because it did not require as many qualifications as other overseas jobs. In contrast, securing an overseas factory job often called for more qualifications. Abbie, a

38-year-old former housewife and college dropout, explained that she had not looked for factory jobs because there were “too many requirements. I [do not] have requirements like special skills, employment certificate. I only have employment certificate of my family!”

Abbie’s comment about her “employment certificate [from] her family” highlights many participants’ recognition that their experience with domestic work in their own homes made it easier for them to take up waged domestic service overseas. Most participants, almost all of whom were women, expressed more comfort performing household duties than other low-skilled jobs such as factory work. Working in a factory, on an assembly line, seemed dangerous to many participants. “It’s so hard, like that. Because all the plastic and then the chemical thing, you smell it and then like—I cannot do that!” one participant, 36-year-old Rani, explained to me. Domestic work in contrast seemed less daunting to such participants like 38-year-old Delia, who had chosen to become a domestic worker in Hong Kong after being unsuccessful finding a job in the Philippines after graduating from college:

I guess I think domestic work is okay. Because we are not rich, I used to work in our house at home. But, for factory, I do not have any experience. What will I do there? Domestic work is better, so that is why I decide [to do that].

There were also supply side factors that steered participants towards domestic work. Several participants recalled how, when they first started to consider working abroad, the recruitment agencies that were placing labor migrants overseas seemed to be looking only for domestic workers. “Because too many agencies, all wanted DH. No other work. All household work,” explained 65-year-old Betty, using the popular acronym for a domestic helper: “DH.” Betty ended up applying for overseas jobs at six

different recruitment agencies, all of whom were placing only domestic workers overseas.

Even those participants who had training in other vocations had eventually settled for domestic work after unsuccessful attempts to secure overseas work that more closely matched their skills. One interviewee, 39-year-old Karen had thought her training in physical therapy would help land her a job in a spa in an overseas hotel job but to no avail:

Yeah, before, because I finished physical therapy, massage, I want to work in hotels, something like that. But the domestic helper job is there only! [*Karen laughs.*] So I said I just want to try.

Several participants suggested that domestic work offered the *speediest* route out of the Philippines while more skilled occupations involved longer wait-times. There seemed to be a general sense that migrant domestic work was the most efficient exit strategy out of the Philippines, at least for prospective migrants without college degrees. Other participants saw migrant domestic work as the most expedient means to gain access to a particular desired destination country after which participants could look for a higher-skilled job that more closely matched their training and credentials. In this way, domestic work was not just an exit strategy to leave the Philippines, but also an opportunity to secure a better job at some future point in time. This was the case with 29-year-old Ariel, a former elementary school teacher who had worked as a maid in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. She explained that she had chosen to be a domestic worker “because I was thinking it’s my stepping stone to go to other countries. So I said, ‘Okay, I will try first as a DH.’ Maybe [if it’s] God’s will, I can then go to other country to work as my profession.”

On the demand side, some participants had relatives or friends overseas who were already working as domestic servants and these network contacts convinced participants to follow in their footsteps and become migrant domestic workers too. Knowing a relative or friend who had also become a domestic worker, greatly reduced the stigma attached to this particular occupation. This pattern also highlights the importance of overseas network contacts in facilitating the adoption of migrant domestic work among study participants by reducing the “psychic costs” (Borjas 1999:178) of working overseas. In some cases, these contacts even matched participants with an overseas employer willing to hire them, thus reducing the actual costs of migration and making the decision to become a migrant domestic laborer almost impossible to avoid.

### **An Assessment of Migration Theories**

The above firsthand accounts from study participants, combined with the history of Philippine migration provided earlier, can help us assess the applicability of the various theories of migration to the case of Filipino migrant domestic workers. From participants’ stories, it is clear that there is some evidence to support the broad argument laid out within neoclassical economic theory: that individuals are partly drawn to migrate because of differentials in the wages they currently receive at home and the wages they expect to receive overseas. And if this wage differential is large enough, these individuals are also willing to consider taking up low-status occupations like paid domestic work that they might have shunned in their home country.

But the stories shared by interviewees also highlight how the understanding of the migration decision eschewed by neoclassical economics is overly simplistic. The decision

to emigrate is not simply a case of wanting to earn more money. The true motivator is the reason why migrants need the extra money in the first place. In probing participants' answers to this question, their stories about being unable to afford their children's education, of not finding a job in the Philippines after months of looking, or of only finding part-time work with minimal wages and no clear career trajectory, highlight the structural factors that drive so many Filipinos to consider migration in the first place.

Filipino migrants would not have left the Philippines in such large numbers if it were not for the structural displacements they were experiencing at home. This is where world systems theory becomes relevant. It was the extreme poverty, indebtedness and landlessness that rural Filipinos experienced under colonial Spain and later neo-imperialist United States that resulted in their internal migration to urban parts of the country, especially Manila. Later, it also encouraged their international migrations to other countries. This is a theme that has continued to the present day as the Philippine economy continues to suffer from widespread underemployment, rising costs and stagnant wages.

The history of migration flows from the Philippines to select countries with specific structural labor demands, and in select types of occupations, also provides strong support for segmented labor market theory. Table 3.1 shows how, in 2010, 80% of all temporary labor migrants leaving the Philippines went to 10 high-income countries. These destinations span a wide geographical area including Asia, the Middle East, Europe and North America, and they have differing cultural and political backgrounds. But what they all have in common are very specific labor shortages that have resulted in all of them instituting labor importation programs over the last 40 years. Thus, even

though structural displacement can create the willingness and desire to leave one's home country, specific immigration and labor policies need to be in place in receiving countries to create a ready market for these migrant workers. In other words, *both* segmented labor market theory and world systems theory need to be applied *in tandem* to explain migration flows from the Philippines to specific countries in the global economy.

Participants' accounts also provide qualified support for some of the proposals of the new economics of labor migration (NELM) theory. The first is that relative poverty is almost as important as absolute poverty as a motivator for migration. The second is that migration decisions are often made because of a failure of credit and capital markets in the home country. This was made clear by the fact that parents of college-going students found it easier to work overseas to pay their children's tuition fees, rather than take out a loan.

However, there was one pattern observable in participants' accounts of their migration decision-making process that runs counter to the model of household decision-making proposed by NELM theorists. Rather than an autocratic head who made all the decisions on behalf of the household, or a family where all household members decide in a democratic and unified fashion—the vast majority of interviews presented a picture of the initial migration decision being made autonomously by the individual migrant herself. This departure from NELM will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

### **An Assessment of Women's Migration from the Philippines**

Accounts of women's migration from the Philippines in the 1980s found that primarily young, single women were undertaking migration (see Eviota and Smith 1984).



More recent accounts have found a preponderance of older, married women among Filipina migrants overseas (Parreñas 2001). I found significant numbers of both young, single women and older, married women among my study sample.<sup>18</sup> Table 3.3 reveals that among interviewees, there was a sizeable number (41%) of migrants who first left the Philippines between the ages of 16 and 25, but an equally large number (39%) who left between the ages of 26 and 35. Likewise, though most interviewees (37%) possessed a college degree, 35% had been unable to complete their degree and 27% possessed only a high school diploma or less.

Table 3.3  
Characteristics of Interviewee Population

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Percentage of Study Sample</b>
Age at First Departure (in years):	
16 – 25	41%
26 – 35	39%
36 – 45	14%
46 and above	6%
Education at First Departure:	
Less than High School	7%
High School	20%
Some College	35%
College and above	37%

In other words, demographically speaking, female migrant domestic workers leaving the Philippines are bifurcated according to both age and education. But rather than focusing on such demographic divisions, I classify study participants according to their motivations for migrating. I find that my sample population of women migrants can

<sup>18</sup> Oishi (2005) finds significant cross-national differences among women migrants from the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in her multi-country study of migration among women from the developing world. However, in this dissertation, I focus more on intra-country variations within the population of women migrants.

be broken down into four broad ideal types, each with their own distinct (though sometimes overlapping) reasons for migration. They are:

- (1) The “parent” migrant who leaves the Philippines in order to cover her children’s day-to-day living expenses and their long-term educational expenses, in particular their college education,
- (2) The “breadwinner” migrant who feels personally responsible for the upkeep of her parents, younger siblings, and sometimes, even the children of her siblings,
- (3) The “self-driven” migrant who seeks a better life for herself overseas, whether in terms of better career opportunities, a chance at permanent residence in a higher-income country, or simply more fun, and finally,
- (4) The “escapee” migrant who is running away from an abusive or difficult relationship with her spouse, or, more broadly, from a life that seems lacking in any sense of personal fulfillment.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has served several purposes. It has first provided a brief history of the Philippines, focusing on the history of migration from the Philippines. This history has helped to evaluate the relevance of macro-level theories of migration to the Philippine case and, more particularly, the case of migrant domestic workers from the Philippines. This leads to the second contribution of this chapter: An introduction to the major theories of migration and a qualitative assessment of how well these various macro- and micro-level theories of migration can explain the migration decision of the participants in this study.

What this evaluation reveals is that no single theory can adequately explain the out-migration of women from the Philippines in such large numbers. Instead, these theories—all of which have varying degrees of validity—need to be considered in concert to understand the myriad, multi-level factors that push so many Filipinas to leave their home country and seek greener pastures overseas, whether permanently or on a temporary basis. In doing so, I take heed of the point raised by Massey et al that the “causal processes relevant to international migration might operate on multiple levels simultaneously” (Massey et al. 1998:50).

More importantly, the analysis of participants’ accounts of their migration decision highlights the diversity within the female migrant domestic worker population from the Philippines. This migrant population contains young women and old, married housewives and single mothers, college graduates and high school drop-outs, women running away from abusive relationships and women who see migrant domestic work as a ticket to a personally fulfilling life in their dream destination. The scholarship on gendered migration has grown substantially in recent years with the recognition that women make up an almost equal number of migrants moving around the world today. But the continuing focus seems to be on uncovering differences between men and women, without acknowledging that even with the population of women migrants from any given country, there can exist variation between women in terms of their demographic characteristics and their motivations for migration. The taxonomy of Filipina migrant domestic workers I have constructed in this chapter demonstrates how differing motivations can drive very different Filipino women to make similar migration decisions. It also indicates how the institutionalized culture of migration has become so

entrenched within the Philippines that it has made migration a very real option for varied kinds of Filipinas. This is one of the factors that have led to such a diverse population of Filipina migrant domestic workers employed in countries around the world, and also directly feeds into the diverse population of “multinational maids” I observed in my fieldwork.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Negotiating Migration<sup>1</sup>

My mother don't let me go. She was always crying [before I left the Philippines]. She even told me, "I let you go to college and you finished your schooling in order to become a teacher. I did not ambition you to go abroad to become only a [domestic] helper." So she was crying. She didn't give me even a single cent [to pay the agency fees]. She didn't like it.

The account provided here comes from Carly, a 53-year-old former elementary school teacher, who left the Philippines in 1982 at the age of 27 to work in Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker. She worked in Saudi for several years before finding a similar job as a domestic worker in Hong Kong. When I interviewed her in Hong Kong in 2008, she had been living outside the Philippines for 27 years. During that time, she had put most of her nieces and nephews in the Philippines through college, helped several of them find overseas jobs as migrant domestic workers or nurses, bought land and built a house in the Philippines for her parents, and helped start a charitable foundation in her hometown to provide college scholarships to impoverished high school students. Simply put, her decision to work overseas had been a boon for her family and neighbors in the Philippines. But when she first voiced the possibility of leaving her job as a teacher in the Philippines to work as a migrant domestic worker in Saudi Arabia, her mother had been

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<sup>1</sup> An early draft of this chapter was a joint winner of the 2012 Dorothy McGuigan Prize for the Best Essay on Women awarded by the Women's Studies Department at the University of Michigan.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this chapter, I use household and family interchangeably, recognizing that within the collectivist Philippine society, there exist very strong ties even between immediate family members who do

appalled and had done all she could to change Carly's mind, going as far as to refuse to help her cover the monetary costs of migration.

This type of familial resistance to their migration decision (and their decision to take up waged domestic work) was a common thread connecting over half of study participants. These women recalled their parents and/or husbands expressing boisterous disapproval of their idea to work overseas as waged domestic servants. Familial resistance was often framed in a gendered manner, with relatives arguing that it was not "right" for women to live apart from their families and work overseas by themselves, or that the responsibility to be the family breadwinner belonged to their husbands.

Even in situations where participants' families did not express outright resistance, participants still spoke of seeking "permission" from their parents (and especially their fathers) and husbands, highlighting the patriarchal power dynamics that exist within almost all Filipino households and the negative pressures placed on potential women migrants. It was rarely the case that study participants decided that they wanted to leave the Philippines and then just left. The process—described in the previous chapter—of making the migration decision and deciding to become a migrant domestic worker was only the first part of the story. The second part—dealt with in this chapter—involved participants sharing their migration decision with their immediate family members and seeking their approval and, in some cases, material support. Most participants spoke of having undergone such a process: Presenting the case for labor migration to their relatives and negotiating with them in order to secure their blessings about leaving the Philippines.

In exploring this process of migration negotiation further, this chapter asks the following questions: Is familial resistance to women's independent migration decisions a given? If no, under what conditions does resistance manifest itself? And, when there is resistance, how do women migrants overcome it? In other words, how does such a decision get translated into actual action? Contrary to the original proposition by new economics of migration (NELM) scholars, I find that the migration decision for Filipino migrant domestic workers is an independent, individual decision that they then have to negotiate with powerbrokers in their family, who may or may not resist the migration decision but who almost always have a say in the final outcome. These negotiations are embedded within power hierarchies along gendered and generational lines that exist within Philippine families and Philippine society as a whole. I term my approach to household-level migration decision-making the "negotiated migration" model and I argue that it presents a more realistic picture of how prospective women migrants around the world navigate the power dynamics within their families.

In the case of the present study, these negotiations between prospective migrants and their families were aided by various macro-structural factors including the rising cost of living and the high cost of a tertiary education in the Philippines, the gendered overseas labor market that favored women migrants from the Philippines, and the lack of well-paid employment opportunities for women in the Philippines, all of which were outlined in Chapter Three. But, in order to win their families' support, many women also agentically and exclusively framed their migration decision as a personal sacrifice they were making in order to fulfill their gendered family roles as dutiful daughters, supportive spouses and caring mothers within patriarchal Philippine society. The more

individualistic and/or self-oriented objectives behind their migration decision were carefully filtered out so that prospective women migrants could win over their relatives. Instead, participants focused on how much money they could remit to the Philippines and how this money could transform the lives of their relatives.

In the remainder of this chapter, I re-introduce NELM theory but explore it in much more depth than I did in Chapter Three. I particularly focus on how NELM theorists have approached the migration decision-making process within a household. From there, I provide a concise history and geography of women's independent migration, highlighting how outright familial resistance is contingent rather than a given. I then shift focus to the present study and participants' accounts of their families' reactions to the announcement of their migration decision. I look at the individual- and household-level factors that are associated with familial resistance and the different gendered and non-gendered strategies that participants used to win over their relatives. I end by discussing how such strategies highlight the agency of these women to successfully navigate family politics and power hierarchies to secure the support of their relatives. But I also highlight some of the negative implications of these strategies for participants' future lives both overseas and if they return to the Philippines. Thus, even though this chapter highlights how women migrants have greater agency than they are sometimes given credit for, it also emphasizes how their agency has limits. Though they managed to overcome some of the structural constraints restricting their spatial and social mobility, they did not eradicate all of them. This is the case when it comes to their degree of agency within their families but also within their new host country societies.



## **The Migration Decision at the Household Level**

The neoclassical economic theory of migration assumes that potential migrants are utility-maximizing, rational and, most critically, independent actors, weighing the costs and benefits of migration before making their decision whether or not to leave their home country (Borjas 1999, 1990; Todaro 1980, 1969; Lewis 1954; Hicks 1932). There is no consideration of how other actors' opinions, beliefs, ideologies and power might impinge on an individual's migration decision (Portes and Walton 1981). In contrast, NELM theorists view the household<sup>2</sup> unit as the primary migration decision-maker, determining whether or not an individual member of the family should migrate and also which family member to send forth (Lauby and Stark 1988; Taylor 1987; Findley 1987; Katz and Stark 1986; Stark and Bloom 1985). According to NELM, households dispatch a member of the family overseas or to a nearby town/city to seek work so as to expand and diversify their household's joint income stream and reduce their relative poverty vis-à-vis other households in their reference group. NELM scholars have proposed various household decision-making models to explain the internal family dynamics that underlie the out-migration of the selected household member: The "unified household" approach, the "dictatorship" model and lastly, the "super trader family" model.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this chapter, I use household and family interchangeably, recognizing that within the collectivist Philippine society, there exist very strong ties even between immediate family members who do not live under the same roof (Medina 2001; Hofstede 2001; Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Aguilar and Evasco 1991). For instance, a woman may still be greatly influenced by her parents even after she has married and has moved out to live in a separate residence with her husband. In addition, there is a tradition for unmarried adult daughters (rather than say the eldest son) to take on the responsibility of caring for their younger siblings and elderly parents even if they live apart.

### *The “Unified Household” Approach*

The model of household decision-making that is most commonly associated with NELM is that of a “unified household” equitably sharing a joint utility function and reaching a common consensus as to which family member to send overseas. This model rests on the assumption of a “moral economy” existing within the family, where individual members selflessly subsume their personal interests for the greater good of the family both before and after migration (Lacroix 2010; Carling 2008). All members of the household are presumed to have jointly decided to send an agreed-upon member of the family to work overseas in order to benefit from their wages.

This “unified household” perspective has been routinely criticized by feminist migration scholars for ignoring the unequal distribution of power between men and women in patriarchal households and the ideological constraints on women’s independence and authority that can severely limit potential women migrants’ ability to garner support from their family members for their migration decision (Boyd and Grieco 2003; Chant and Radcliffe 1992; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Folbre 1986; Radcliffe 1986). As a case in point, ethnographic accounts of migration patterns out of Mexico have highlighted regular cases of reluctance on the part of male migrants to assist their female relatives leave Mexico partly because of their belief that helping these women involved more work and more responsibilities (Kanaiaupuni 2000). The independent Mexican women migrants that Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo interviewed in her seminal work *Gendered Transitions* were all unmarried and almost always came from broken families or ones without a patriarchal head of household, enabling them to avoid the patriarchal resistance encountered by women from more traditional and intact families

(1994:83-97). In the Philippines, meanwhile, men are seen as traditional breadwinners for their families and this results in husbands being generally resistant to a role reversal where wives work overseas and men stay behind in the Philippines to look after the children (Lan 2006; Chant and McIlwaine 1995). These criticisms of the “unified household” model tap into the next model of household decision-making: The “dictatorship” approach.

### *The “Dictatorship” Approach*

The “dictatorship” model takes as given that power hierarchies along gendered and generational lines exist within most families, and especially in more traditional conservative societies in developing countries. The “dictatorship” model assumes an all-powerful head of household who commands complete obedience from other family members and makes migration decisions on behalf of the entire family. Such a despot might decide to send a family member overseas because he—and the head of household is usually a “he”—can command that individual to send remittances back to the family. Or he sends away a family member whom he sees as a potential competitor for intra-family power, resources and status (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991).

A variant of this approach is the “altruistic dictator” model which views the head of household as a loving despot with a utility function equivalent to the joint utility function of all other household members. The altruistic dictator’s decisions are always made whilst keeping the best interests of his relatives at heart and, as such, he chooses the same family member who would have been selected under the “unified household” model.

This “dictatorship” view of household decision-making, taken together with entrenched patriarchal ideologies about a woman’s place in the home, has been used to explain the resistance many potential women migrants run into when they attempt to leave their homes for greener pastures. It has been used to explain the out-migration of younger sons from their ancestral homes (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). But how does it explain the large volumes of independent women migrants we can observe around the world today? Independent female labor migration (both internal and international) has become increasingly prevalent throughout Asia and other parts of the world since the 1980s. For instance, in Italy, Filipino women (and not men) were the pioneering migrants and it was they who sponsored their husbands and other relatives to join them in Italy (Strozza, Gallo and Grillo 2003; Parreñas 2001). In Bangladesh, the majority of factory workers in the “ready-made garment” industry are rural women who migrate independently to urban areas to work in these factories (Afsar 2003). In China, there has been a tremendous increase in independent women’s internal migration from rural parts of the country to rapidly industrializing city centers. Liang and Chen (2003) find that the vast majority of Chinese women migrants working in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone are now independent migrants (over 96%), having travelled to Shenzhen by themselves rather than with their husbands or other family members. Theorists who support the “dictatorship” model would, of course, argue that these women were all sent forth by their household heads.

This is exactly what Lauby and Stark (1988) argue after finding that, among rural Philippine households, daughters (rather than sons) are more likely to migrate internally to urban centers to seek work. These authors postulate that this was because daughters

(rather than sons) are more likely to remit a greater proportion of their earnings to their parents out of a greater sense of familialism. This likelihood of a greater remittance stream from their daughters led parents to dispatch their daughters to the city, according to these authors.<sup>3</sup> However, Lauby and Stark draw their conclusions using only survey data about rural-urban migration flows and remittance levels, without directly investigating the internal family dynamics that they hypothesize about. The intra-household causal mechanisms that support Filipino women's independent migration are thus still not clear.

#### *The "Super Trader Family" Model*

The third approach to household decision-making is what Amartya Sen (1983) cleverly calls the "super-trader family." In this model, there are at least two autonomous decision-making entities within the household—the potential migrant and other relatives—each with their own set of preferences and long-term goals. The potential migrant and their family then enter into an agreement involving "intrafamilial trade in risks, coinsurance arrangements, devices to handle principal agent problems, moral hazard problems [...] and contract enforcement problems [...] and, overall, striking a mutually beneficial, intertemporal, self-enforcing contractual arrangement" (Katz and Stark 1986:136).

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<sup>3</sup> A recent study by Semyonov and Gorodzeisky (2005) contradicts Lauby and Stark's (1988) claim. These authors find that male migrants from the Philippines (primarily by virtue of earning larger salaries overseas compared to female migrants) remit a large portion of their earnings to their families back home. Surveying over 1,000 Filipino men and women working in various overseas destinations, Semyonov and Gorodzeisky find that male migrants remit on average 60% of their overseas earnings to the Philippines while female migrants remit 45% of their earnings. But it is still possible that there might be a prevailing misperception within Filipino families that it is women migrants who remit more money, and this could encourage parents to unilaterally dispatch their daughters overseas to work.

At one level, this approach to household-level migration decision-making appears to make sense because it recognizes both an agentic individual migrant and the existence of multiple decision-makers within a household. But this approach has been criticized too for exclusively focusing on the economic interests of individual family members and ignoring the role played by culture, ideology and other structural forces in shaping individuals' views about the normative distribution of intra- and extra-household responsibilities and decision-making power within a family (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Sen 1990, 1983). Critics have pointed out that family members' perceptions about the proper role of women in the intra- and extra-household division of labor, their perceptions about what women contribute to the household (particularly in economic terms) and their perceptions about the amount of benefits (and rights) women are entitled to claim, all influence how such negotiations proceed (Sen 1990; Kandiyoti 1988).

Even if it is in a family's economic best interests to send one of their womenfolk overseas to work, family members may not support such a decision if it runs counter to their views about a woman's role in the household. This brings us back to the question that started this chapter: How do women, often bargaining from a position of weakness within patriarchal households, overcome familial resistance and gain their relatives' support for their decision to work overseas. What are the successful negotiating tactics that independent women migrants deploy?

### **Independent Female Migration**

For the purposes of this paper, I define "independent labor migration" as the setting forth of an individual from their hometown/village by themselves in order to seek

work elsewhere, but without the benefit of a family member in the destination sponsoring them or a family member from their home accompanying them on their journey. In scanning the history of women's independent labor migration, it becomes clear that claims about familial resistance to women's independent migration have not always been true. At different points in time and in different countries, patriarchal households have supported their womenfolk's departure from their ancestral home to seek work in the nearest urban area or in another country, with the understanding that these women would remit some of their earnings back to their families. At other times, households have refused to support such migrations.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, poor, rural households regularly dispatched their daughters to work in nearby towns as live-in domestic servants or factory workers (Scott and Tilly 1980). Across England, France and Italy, this practice was both widespread and unquestioned. Scott and Tilly argue that daughters (rather than sons) were sent forth because they were less needed back on the farm and they were more likely to remit more of their earnings back to their families. More recently, before the neoliberalization of the Indian economy in the 1980s, women from poor families within certain tribal communities in India would frequently move to more prosperous villages during the busy planting season to take up agricultural work (Bardhan 1977). Likewise, in the early 1970s, in parts of rural Java, there were times in the growing cycle when women's labor was most in demand (for instance, when it was time to plant rice) and, during those times, women would take up waged employment outside their village and work for long hours planting rice, while their husbands stayed at home to cook and look after the children (White 1976). These examples from different countries and different eras would seem to

indicate that households in patriarchal societies can be responsive to macro-structural forces that favor the labor migration of women over men. However, none of the above studies provide an inside view of how these households came to the decision to dispatch their women, rather than their men, whether or not this migration decision was initiated by the women themselves, and what model of decision-making was used.

More recently, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) ethnographic account of gendered migrations from Mexico to the United States is one of the better known rebuttals of the "unified household" NELM model. None of the eight unmarried women migrants interviewed by Hondagneu-Sotelo talked about traveling to the US as the result of a household-level migration decision (1994:83-97). For these unmarried women migrants, and even for the women who followed husbands already in the US, Hondagneu-Sotelo reports that almost all encountered resistance from their relatives (and especially their male relatives) when they first announced their decision to migrate.<sup>4</sup> The women who migrated independently were able to do so partly because they were all unmarried and not beholden to a reluctant husband, and partly because they were already wage earners in Mexico and therefore able to fund their own journeys, without having to rely on resistant family members for economic support. As mentioned earlier, many of these unmarried women migrants also came from broken families or ones without a patriarchal head of household and, as a result, encountered less organized resistance to their migration decision. Only two interviewees actively negotiated with their parents, making the case that it was in their parents' best interests to support their migration

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<sup>4</sup> Other scholars of Mexican migration to the US report similar findings when it comes to Mexican women's migration attempts (Arizpe and Aranda 1981). In contrast, Mexican men who migrated to the US by themselves brooked no arguments from their wives who remained in Mexico (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:58-62).



decision because they would send remittances from the US (1994:90). However, the small sample size makes it difficult to assess if such negotiations are the norm and also if all women migrants are likely to encounter familial resistance or only certain sub-categories of women.

Other relatively recent studies from around the world have uncovered regular incidences of familial resistance to women's independent labor migration from sending countries marked by high degrees of patriarchy. Women migrants from rural Brazil, rural Mexico, Malaysia, Indonesia, rural Bangladesh and the Philippines all encounter varying degrees of pushback from parents, husbands and fiancés when they first announce their decision to migrate (whether overseas or to urban areas within their own country) to seek employment (Lan 2006; Afsar 2003; Stichter 1990; Wong and Ko 1984; Arizpe and Aranda 1981; Aguiar 1975). Many young women had to delay their migrations until their parents relented and permitted them to leave home (Aguiar 1975). In other cases, parents vetoed certain destinations as being too dangerous, too licentious or simply too faraway (Arizpe and Aranda 1981).

Structural forces at the societal level may play a part in these divergent family responses to women's independent migration decision. Stark, Micevska and Mycielski (2009) find that the eventual household member to go abroad is usually the one who stands to earn the most from working overseas, and is therefore potentially able to remit the most back to the remaining members of the household. Following this line of thinking, if a gendered labor market exists overseas that provides more lucrative job opportunities for women migrants, a household might decide to send one of its women members (rather than one of its men). But without investigating the internal family

dynamics that surround the migration decision, we will remain unable to explain this variation in familial resistance to women's independent migration and what successful women migrants do when they come face-to-face with resistance to their migration decision.

### **Interviewees' Accounts of Familial Resistance**

Study participants were almost evenly split on whether or not they had encountered familial resistance when they first broached the idea of working overseas. Altogether, 55% recalled encountering resistance from one or more of their immediate relatives: Their parents, husbands, older siblings and children. Many participants also recalled encountering some degree of resistance from extended relatives and friends, and this typically went along the lines of "Don't go; we'll miss you!" from friends and "Are you sure you want to leave your family?" from an extended relative. Participants' recollections of this type of generalized negativity towards their migration decision were vague enough that I concluded it was unlikely to have been a meaningful obstacle to their planned departure from the Philippines. In contrast, participants could clearly recall what their close relatives had said and done when they first raised the notion of working overseas. I inferred that it was this category of relative that was the true source of substantive resistance.

Within the category of close relatives, most participants encountered resistance to their migration dreams from their parents, either both or just one parent. Among participants who encountered resistance, 56% experienced pushback from their parents and 29% from their husbands. But even in cases where participants did not face overt

resistance, many of these women still spoke of “asking permission” from their parents and/or husbands before going abroad and their choice of words demonstrates the unequal power structure (along generational and gendered lines) that prevails in Philippine households. In other words, even though most participants made the decision to migrate on their own, they still needed to receive the blessings of their parents (and/or their husbands if they were married) before leaving. Thus the migration decision for study participants lay somewhere between the autonomous decision-making of neoclassical economic theory and the unified household model of decision-making.

### *Husbands’ Resistance*

Several husbands who were resistant to the idea of their wives going overseas argued that their families’ existing standard of living in the Philippines was already comfortable enough and did not require raising. Christine, who had worked first in Hong Kong and then Canada, recalled how her husband had said that there was no need for her to work overseas:

But, for my husband, at first, he really don’t want me to leave. He said, “We have our daughter and I can still, I can still provide you our needs.” But I said, “Yeah, you can provide me the needs right now. But how about if we have more children? If I give birth again?” I said that I guess for the future of our family and the future of our children, in case we are going to add more, then I really need to go. I really need to go abroad.

This conversation between Christine and her husband reflects the differing opinions that occasionally existed between spouses about their ideal standard of living and their long-term financial needs. In situations where the wife believed that their family needed a significantly higher inflow of income, while her husband did not, disagreements (similar to what Christine had had with her husband) cropped up about the appropriateness of and purpose behind overseas migrant work. Amarilla, an interviewee in Singapore, spoke of

how her husband too had initially been resistant to her working overseas because he did not think he needed her to contribute to the family income:

When I first come here, I talk to my husband that I want to help him. First time, he do not want. But, maybe he realized that he needs my help. That's why he allowed me to work here in Singapore.

Without interviewing participants' husbands, it is impossible to know if these men truly felt that their income was enough to support the family or if they were rather rebelling against the possibility of their wives out-earning them while overseas. But other case studies of Filipino migrant domestic workers have reported on husbands' resistance to their wives' newly-acquired status as family breadwinners and their own new status as "househusbands" (Lan 2006; Parreñas 2001; Pignol 2001). A similar pattern of husbands rebelling against the loss of their breadwinner status has been observed amongst the families of Sri Lankan migrant domestic workers (Gamburd 2000). In addition, as will be seen later, this notion of normative gendered roles within the household was also raised by the fathers of several participants, lending further credence to the idea that there was deep-seated reluctance on the part of men to subvert traditional gendered norms about the ideal distribution of responsibilities within the household.

### *Parental Resistance*

In justifying their resistance, parents most often raised concerns about their daughters' safety, regardless of how old their daughters were at the time. The separation and isolation their daughters would experience overseas was another concern that parents frequently brought up. Desiree, who had left the Philippines when she was 25 to work in Singapore, recalled how her father had told her that "it is too far away and then you are alone" when she announced her decision to him. Another domestic worker in Singapore,

Ariel, explained how her mother had told her, “No, you just work here [in the Philippines] because, when you go to other country, you don’t know what might happen to you.”

Other participants recalled their parents overruling their migration decision and citing their youth and inexperience as reasons why they should not work overseas. Parents were also more likely to directly raise their daughters’ gender and their expected role in the household as a reason for their not leaving. Matilda’s father had spoken of these concerns when he initially vetoed her plan to work overseas:

My father doesn’t want me to go abroad. “Because,” he said, “It’s not you to go anywhere. It should be your husband. He is the man. Then he should be the one to give you everything you need.”

Likewise, Aisha’s father had had no issues with her brother working in Saudi Arabia but balked when she first raised the notion of working in Brunei as a domestic worker.

Actually, my father is against it. Because, of course, who wants your daughter to be a maid, right? [...] He’s a father. [...] Of course, I’m not the first one in the family to go out [overseas]. My another brother is in, at that time, is in Saudi. But he’s a guy, so [my father] won’t mind. But I am a girl, so it’s a big issue.

Several other participants echoed Aisha’s matter-of-fact statement about the double standards her father applied towards her and her brother’s migration decisions. These women spoke of having had male siblings already working overseas when they first raised the notion of migrating themselves. They took for granted that parents would be more worried about the safety of their daughters than their sons, and that parents would also have more say in their daughters’ migration decisions.

### **Why Familial Resistance Mattered**

Some readers might argue that familial resistance should not make any material difference to participants’ decision to migrate, and that participants would have left the

Philippines anyway. This would be a misreading of family dynamics within the Philippines. Filipino sons and daughters are very filial, demonstrating a deep-seated respect for and obedience of their parents (Medina 2001; Chant and McIlwaine 1995; King and Domingo 1986; Trager 1988). After surveying the literature on power relations within Philippine households, Medina (2001:164) also reports that husbands have more authority to override and countermand joint household decisions made with their wives. She writes that wives generally give into their husbands' wishes for the sake of family harmony.

This assessment of the power structure within Philippine families is supported by accounts from several participants about how they had tried to leave the Philippines earlier but had been unable to do so because they had encountered stiff resistance from various family members. This resistance was typically aimed at participants' initial migration decision but, in some cases, it was directed towards particular destination decisions they wanted to make.

For instance, Jeannie, a live-in caregiver in Toronto, talked about how when she wanted to re-migrate from Hong Kong to Canada, her husband had refused to give her permission, dramatically altering her onward migration plans:

In 2008, I decided to come to Canada because I don't have any future in Hong Kong. But I was planning [to come here] in 2004. Actually, before I got married, when I got married, I talked about this with my husband, that I want to come to Canada. But then he said, "No Canada."

*Why?*

He doesn't want to come to Canada. So I decided, okay. Okay, it's out of my mind already. So I will not plan for Canada. So I put it out of my head at that time. Because I want a family. I want kids. But then, in 2008, I decided I wanted to come to Canada. Because you know, I was alone. I wanted to leave my husband.

In Jeannie's case, she had initially given up on her plan to re-migrate to Canada because her husband wanted her closer to the Philippines and did not relish the idea of relocating

to Canada. But four years later, with her marriage failing, she no longer cared whether or not her husband approved of her desire to move to Canada.

### **Factors Influencing Familial Resistance**

Slightly less than half of participants (45%) indicated that they had not encountered any significant resistance from immediate family members when they first suggested working overseas as a migrant domestic worker. A joint qualitative and (very simple) quantitative comparative analysis of participants who did experience resistance against those who did not was conducted to determine variables associated with the occurrence of familial resistance. Some potential causal variables and some interaction effects between these variables were uncovered though a larger sample is required to assess the statistical significance of these variables and their interaction effects in influencing familial resistance.

Surprisingly, I did not observe any discernable pattern in how participants' age at first departure was associated with the occurrence of familial resistance (see Table 4.1). But participants' marital status did seem to play a role. Women who had never married, or were separated or widowed were less likely to have encountered resistance from their close relatives compared to married women migrants. (I should stress here that it was not that these unmarried women did not face resistance; just that *fewer* of them encountered resistance compared to married participants.) For those unmarried participants who also had children to support, their overwhelming need to earn more money cleared away most lingering resistance their families might have had. Rebecca, a 32-year-old single mother

in Hong Kong with a young daughter in the Philippines, laughed out loud when I asked her if anyone had told her not to leave the Philippines:

Nobody said that! [*Rebecca laughs.*] Nobody says that because they know the reality, that I cannot survive there [in the Philippines] because of my salary. [*Rebecca laughs again.*] *And your parents? They were okay with you leaving?* Yes, they were okay with me leaving them. Because we don't have enough income, enough monthly income for us. Because, as what I said earlier, my parents were already old, and they don't have jobs, and then we are just depending on the income of our little store.

Table 4.1  
Demographic Differences between Participants, by Familial Resistance<sup>a</sup>

	% of Participants	
	Not experiencing resistance	Experiencing resistance
<b>Migrant characteristics</b>		
<i>Age at first out-migration (in years)</i>		
18 – 25	50%	50%
26 – 35	38%	62%
36 and above	45%	55%
<i>Marital status at first out-migration</i>		
Single <sup>b</sup>	47%	53%
Married	39%	61%
<i>Children at first out-migration</i>		
Yes	38%	63%
No	49%	51%
<i>Education</i>		
High school and below	41%	59%
Some college	41%	59%
College and above	47%	53%
<i>Decade of departure from the Philippines</i>		
1980s and earlier	36%	64%
1990s	43%	57%
2000s	45%	55%

Notes:

- a. Only the responses of female study participants are analyzed. Participants who left the Philippines as permanent immigrants (to the US or Canada) are also not included as the family dynamics surrounding their migration decision were qualitatively different.
- b. Includes women who were either widowed, separated from their husbands or never married.

In contrast, married participants with children were much more likely to face resistance. Normative ideas about the role of mothers as the primary care-providers for



their children drove much of this resistance. Marnie, a domestic worker in Singapore who had left the Philippines when she was 24, had encountered resistance to her migration from her mother. Marnie's four children were between seven years and ten months in age when she left the Philippines. Her husband was a farmer in the Philippines whose earnings were minimal and she herself was a housewife. While her husband had had no issues with her working overseas—perhaps because he understood the precariousness of their financial situation—Marnie's mother had disapproved. "My mother says that 'You can't do anything' because I have my own family already," Marnie recalled.

Another participant, Lena, who had also been a housewife in the Philippines before she left for Hong Kong at the age of 25, spoke of her parents trying to change her mind. Her parents told her that "it is very hard to leave a child with another," implying that her husband or her own parents would not be an adequate substitute for Marnie's own physical presence. Linda, a domestic worker in Singapore, meanwhile recalled how her relatives had criticized her for abandoning her children who were all girls. "They say that it is hard to leave them. 'Who can teach them? Who can guide them? That is what a mother should do'," Linda remembered during her interview.

Participants who were more educated, possessing a bachelor's degree or higher, were less likely to experience resistance (see Table 4.1). It is possible that in these households, a more egalitarian power structure existed and parents/spouses were more willing to respect participants' decisions as being well-thought and for the good of the family. Janelle, a college graduate and former social worker in the Philippines, recalled how she and her husband had jointly agreed that she should work overseas after she brought up her plan.

Oh yeah! Me and my husband talk about it. You know, I said my plan. [...] So that's what I said. That's what I thought and said, 'I need to, you know, I need to go.' Well, my husband says he wants to go, but I said, "Well, that depends." Because we were looking at it. For a man, there's not really a lot of opportunity that time. It was always the woman who was faster to, you know, to leave the country.

The original idea to emigrate had been Janelle's but she then talked it over with her husband, debating which of them would find it easier to secure work overseas.

Subsequently, Janelle told her parents, not so much to get their permission and but to ask for their help looking after her young children while she was overseas. What followed was a reasoned discussion with her parents about her decision:

I told my parents about how much I earned in the, you know, in the company that I'm working with. And I said, "You know I need to go. And if I leave, you know, I need your support to look after my kids too." That's why I need to talk to them. My kids were too little that time. [At] the time I left, my eldest is four. My youngest was two years old, yeah.

In Janelle's case, her decision to emigrate came closest to a cooperative household-level decision that involved herself, her husband and her parents, all of them agreeing together on a plan of action that entailed Janelle working overseas while her remaining relatives looked after her children. This is very different from Hondagneu-Sotelo's accounts of married Mexican men who decided to immigrate by themselves to the US and simply announced their decision to their wives as a done deal, expecting their wives to take over all their household responsibilities while they were gone (1994:58-62).

Magda was another college graduate who did not face resistance from her family when she first broached the idea of working overseas and sought their endorsement. Her parents were concerned about the long separation and the possibility of workplace abuse, but they still supported her decision.

Yes, of course, I talked with my family first. Yeah, [I asked them] what they will think of my leaving. So, they said, "If you want to, we cannot stop you, if you think it is for your own good. If you believe that it's for your own good, we will support you all the way."

Like Magda's parents, most mothers and fathers harbored concerns about participants becoming domestic workers overseas because of the loss of status and the safety issues involved. However, as is clear from Magda's account, not all parents chose to prevent participants from leaving the Philippines; many only expressed their reservations but did not withhold permission.

Critically, in Magda's case, her announcement about her migration decision was eased by the fact that her older sister already worked in Singapore as a domestic worker and had been the one to suggest that Magda look for work in Singapore as well. The presence of a close female relative in the same overseas destination participants were considering (and that relative enjoying a positive experience while employed as a migrant domestic worker), significantly lessened the chances of participants encountering resistance from other family members. If, as in Magda's case, that overseas relative also offered substantive migration assistance—in effect, lessening the costs and potentially even the risks of migration—family members were even less likely to have issues with participants' migration decision. This was the case with Valentina, a high school graduate, whose sister had earlier found employment in Singapore as a domestic worker and then told her stories about the wonderful life to be had abroad:

*When you were thinking about going overseas, did you talk to anyone about it?*  
Only my mother. And then my mother say, "Okay, try your best so that you can support your children." Like that.  
*Did anyone tell you, "Do not go?"*  
No. [*Valentina laughs*] Because my sister, she came here first.

Participants who were already out-earning their husbands or whose husbands were unemployed (due to disability, infirmity, or simple choice) also tended to encounter diminished resistance as well, both from their husbands but also from their parents. Nannette, a former secondary school teacher who had first worked in Hong Kong and

was now in Canada, had opted to follow in the footsteps of her three sisters who had chosen to work in Hong Kong as domestic workers. According to Nannette, her husband, though sad to see her go, had little say in the matter because he was unemployed and completely dependent on her income. Another participant, Vanessa, a former architecture teacher, had overcome her mother's earlier resistance when her mother realized that Vanessa was not receiving enough financial support from her wastrel husband (from whom Vanessa later separated):

Because, at that time, I asked the consent of my mom because she is going to help me financially [to pay the recruitment agency fees]. Before, she always opposed my going abroad. But later on, when she see my life with my husband is not good, that my husband is not good, then she is ready to help me and allow me to come here, to Taiwan, and then from Taiwan to Canada.

*What was she afraid of? Why did your mother not give you permission before?*

Because my mom—she is a Chinese—so it seems she likes the kids, the family [to be] together. And she is very family-oriented. But actually, I have two brothers. They are seamen. Of course, they are men. Unlike women: If you go abroad, it's something like, something, that's not safe.

As Vanessa unpacked the reasons behind her mother's initial resistance to the idea of her working overseas, she exposed her mother's gendered ideas about migration being a male endeavor while women's role was to stay at home to look after the children. However, Vanessa's mother's biases were trumped by her realization that Vanessa's life in the Philippines was quite miserable and that her husband was not providing for her. At that point, Vanessa's mother's resistance evaporated. But Vanessa's story also reveals the continuing power Filipino parents wield over their daughters even after their daughters marry and become parents too. Part of this power is grounded in the fact that prospective women migrants often had to rely on their parents to step in and look after their children while they were abroad. But the strong kinship ties and sense of filial piety that exists within collectivist Philippine society also strengthened parental influence over these decisions.

Finally, there appears to be a decline in the rate at which prospective migrants in the Philippines encounter familial resistance over the years (see Table 4.1). This is most likely in response to the growing culture of migration that has become entrenched within Philippine society (Asis 2006). Working overseas as a migrant domestic worker is no longer a step into the unknown for many Filipinas. The steadily increasing number of Filipinas with overseas experience sets a precedent that future potential migrants can utilize when they raise the idea of labor migration with their families. In addition, the growing stock of overseas Filipinos means that newer prospective migrants are more likely to already have overseas contacts working as migrant domestic workers to help allay any concerns that parents or spouses may have.

### **Gendered Strategies to Overcome Resistance**

Those participants who did encounter pushback from relatives had to work to overcome this gendered resistance to the idea of their working overseas by themselves and as a domestic worker to boot. Several successful strategies were utilized but most involved participants emphasizing their *gendered* identities as dutiful daughters, caring mothers and supportive spouses, framing their migration decision as an exclusive act of intra-familial loyalty and self-sacrifice. Study participants would highlight how the benefits of migrating—particularly, the greater income that would be available—would allow them to fulfill their gendered roles as mothers, daughters and sisters. They would also talk about the negative consequences of inaction, in terms that made it clear that *not* migrating would make them less than adequate parents, siblings or wives. What they did *not* mention were the more self-directed motives behind their migration decision: The

desire to see the world, be independent, live in the West, escape a failing relationship or jumpstart their careers.

### *The Migrant as Dutiful Daughter*

In trying to convince their parents to support their migration decision, participants regularly framed their reason for migrating as a family-based need, rather than an individual pursuit for selfish purposes. This was a common approach taken by almost all study participants who faced resistance from their parents: Emphasizing the shared benefits that would stem from their individual migration decisions. Desiree pointed out to her reluctant father that working overseas would allow her to fund her siblings' university educations, something that he was unable to do on his own income:

He doesn't like me to go here. He said it is too far away and then you are alone. And so I said, "If you want to help finish all my brothers' and sisters' education, [let me go]." Because my two brothers, the two younger brothers, they are so clever. They say they want to learn, to study.

In justifying her migration decision to her father, Desiree spoke of how she would be helping him fulfill his own responsibilities as the head of the household by providing a university education for his sons, her brothers. Other participants spoke of the understanding they had reached with their parents whereby they would work overseas and send remittances to their parents in order to support their siblings' continued education, purchase land and build a house for their parents, or buy medications for parents who were sickly. Like Desiree, 44-year-old Aisha who had left the Philippines for Brunei at the age of 28, explained that her father had eventually agreed to support her migration decision after she convinced him that she could help raise her entire family's living standards:

I say [...] at least, I can help out the family. And I say, we can raise up the living condition. And I tell him, “Didn’t you want to have our own house? Buy a small land?” And he smiled bitterly. But I know. He’s a father. Then, after that, he said okay.

Another participant, Rory, who was about to commence her second contract in Saudi Arabia when I interviewed her, recalled how she had won over her parents:

My father [...] does not like I go to other country because he has heard about, through the television, about accidents. [...] But, for me, I am decided. Before, I told my father, I want to go. I want to help all my family.

*Your mother? Was she okay with you leaving?*

No, at first, it’s not okay. She is not okay. But after that, I ask my mother, “I want to go, I want to go. Not only for myself. It is just only for you.” [And] after two years [overseas], I have no money now. [...] My money, all my salary in two years, I give it to my family. I give all to my family.

In this manner, Rory cast herself (both to me, her interviewer, and her parents) as a filial daughter who continuously put her family’s needs before her own. Josie, a domestic worker in Singapore, had argued her case with her parents in a similar vein, telling them that she was not migrating to secure only her own future but theirs as well:

When I came here in 1990, my father was very worried because one of the Filipina before that had come here—Flor Contemplacion, that one—got hanged. So my father is very worried that if I go abroad something happens like that [to me]. But I explained to them bit by bit. [...] Sometimes, he is, of course, he wants us to stay very close. But I explained to him, “If we stay here together with us, we have nothing to reach our dreams. Our life is still the same.”

In speaking in such terms, participants were turning the NELM “unified household” model of NELM on its head. Rather than participating in a collective decision-making process, these women were making their migration decision independently and individually *over* their families’ objections, but doing so to boost their families’ joint income stream and collective standard of living.

### *The Migrant as Caring Mother*

When describing the initial resistance they had encountered from family members, many participants who were mothers spoke of how their relatives had

expressed disapproval over these women leaving their children behind in the Philippines. The underlying criticism being leveled at participants was that they were being irresponsible and heartless mothers, abandoning their children and leaving them in the care of another. Participants tended to counter these criticisms by arguing that working overseas (on a temporary basis) was in fact the exact opposite of abandonment, but rather, the best way for them to *fulfill* their role as mothers.

Linda, the domestic worker in Singapore who had been criticized for abandoning her three daughters, tried to convince her relatives by clarifying that she was deeply concerned about her daughters' education and day-to-day living, and that it was this (very maternal) concern that had compelled her to seek work overseas. Diane, a married mother of two, recalled how her husband had not wanted to let her leave the Philippines and she had had to convince him that her overseas domestic work was the only way for them to provide for their children:

My husband is very reluctant for me to leave. But I said, "If I stay here [in the Philippines], what will happen?" It's not that we will go hungry. We won't become like that. But we have got two kids and the kids are growing. So I said, "If we stay with this income, more likely the future of the kids will be a question mark. So maybe if I go there, maybe I can give our children a brighter future." But he is really, really reluctant.

Diane was careful not to paint a doomsday scenario for her husband because she did not want him to think that she saw him as an inadequate provider. At the same time, she emphasized how the tertiary educational system in the Philippines was too financially burdensome for a Philippine income—even two such incomes—to cover. She made it clear to her husband that if they wanted to secure their children's future, they would need to seriously consider overseas work.



A similar situation occurred with Millie, a trained midwife who had first worked in Singapore for two years, then returned to the Philippines and sought to go overseas again to Hong Kong but was initially not allowed to do so by her husband:

After I went back home, my husband doesn't allow me to work [overseas] anymore. Yeah. So I look after my children for two years. But, because of the economy, I really need to come abroad and to look for work again.

*How did you convince him to let you go again?*

I just talked to him nicely. "You know, life here is so difficult and we want that the children, after growing up, go to college or universities. But if I'm just here to look at you, look at each other's face, nothing will happen for us. And then our children won't go to—we cannot send them to school, you know." So he think it over and let me come again.

In addition to revealing how participants cited their concerns about the cost of their children's education to win over resistant husbands, Millie's choice of words—about talking to her husband "nicely"—highlights how many participants had to tread lightly when dealing with their husbands, as the next section shows.

### *The Migrant as Supportive Wife*

Participants frequently had to battle the belief that it should be their husbands, rather than themselves, holding the role of family breadwinner, whether in the Philippines or overseas. In such cases, interviewees framed their decision to migrate as a common sense response to the gendered overseas labor market that was available to Filipina migrant workers, which made it easier for low-skilled women rather than men to secure jobs overseas.

In some cases, participants had to use this line of argument with their parents rather than their husbands. Matilda was able to overcome her father's resistance to the idea of her working overseas only by pointing out how skewed the overseas labor market was:

I told my father that I think I need to work because [my husband] is not required for any job going abroad. He is not skilled. That's why I preferred to just go abroad and then he [my husband] will be the one to look after my children.

In Matilda's case, it was only her father and not her husband who expressed reservations about her working overseas. But Matilda still had to work to overcome her father's traditional views on the normative division of labor in the household. She tried to sway him by arguing that her migration decision was not an attempt to upend the gendered hierarchy in her household but rather a reaction to macro-structural forces outside her control.

Other married participants had made similar arguments with their husbands. This was why Janelle, and not her husband, was the one to leave the Philippines to support their children's education:

That time it is easier for a woman to get employed overseas. Me and my husband, we talk about it. [...] I said, "I need to, you know, I need to go." Well, my husband says that he wants to go, but I said, "Well, that depends." Because we were looking at it. For a man, there's not really a lot of opportunity that time. It was always the woman who was faster to, you know, to leave the country. [...] I was only the one [to apply]. I said we cannot do both, because of the financial, you know? The financial cost of applying [for an overseas job]. If I will go faster, then just I will try. Because, you know, if I go faster then I could start to earn [faster].

Janelle was able to convince her husband to not even bother to apply for an overseas position. Other participants spoke of having made a pact with their husbands that both would apply for an overseas job and whichever one of them received an offer first, would be the one to go. Inevitably, it was the women. In such cases, participants were able to win their husbands' support for their decision by allowing the market to dictate which one of them should go overseas. Thus both husbands and wives were freed from others' negative commentary about normative gender roles within a household. They could argue that the decision to send the wife overseas was simply a reaction to the social forces that favored a woman's departure from the Philippines over a man's. Speaking of it in these

terms made clear that husbands were not being deficient in their care for their children, and neither were wives trying to usurp the head-of-household role. Rather, the decision to let the wife work overseas was simply the most practical option available to their family.

### **Non-Gendered Strategies to Overcome Resistance**

A smaller number of participants also described adopting secondary negotiating strategies that were not gendered. These strategies were often more tactical in nature, such as waiting until very close to their departure date before notifying their family members so as to cut short the window available to relatives to express their disapproval or mobilize against participants' migration decision. These strategies also did not focus on the benefits that migration would bring to the migrant's family or the gendered roles that women migrants felt they needed to take on to gain their family's support. Instead, one tactic attempted to highlight the migrant as an independent individual, capable of making important life decisions for herself, out of the shadow of her parents and older siblings. Another attempted to give family members a sense of involvement in the decision-making process by allowing them to veto certain destinations or the timing of the migration journey.

#### *The Late-Notifying Migrant*

A particularly common tactic (especially among younger, never-married participants) was to avoid any mention of their migration plans to their family members until all the arrangements had been made for their overseas employment. This worked only for participants who had direct access to sufficient financial capital to cover the

costs of migration themselves without having to rely on their relatives for funding. Typically, these women were already employed and had their own personal source of income upon which to draw to cover their migration costs. For those participants who needed their relatives' financial support, their announcement about their migration decision typically occurred much earlier in the migration process.

But for several participants who were already employed in the Philippines, the strategy they adopted was to secure an overseas employer, fix their departure date, and only then, a week or two before leaving, announce their decision to their family. In *Women in Motion*, Nana Oishi (2010) recounts a rather extreme story of a married woman who only told her husband of her plans to work abroad on the morning of her departure. "I woke him up early in the morning and said I was going to work in Malaysia for two years on that day. He was shocked and trying to stop me, but it was too late!" the woman told Oishi (2010:105).

Desiree (mentioned earlier) had adopted a similar (though less drastic) strategy with her father. "I finished all my papers to come here in Singapore and then I told my father that I'm going here to Singapore," she recalled during her interview. Her delayed notification of her migration decision left little room for resistance on her father's part. But this tactic had a two-fold purpose in Desiree's case. Not only was it meant to curtail some of the resistance her father might have expressed, but it also allowed Desiree to demonstrate that her migration decision was not just fanciful thinking and that she had been organized and proactive enough to make good on her dream. She was able to showcase her ability to save money, impress a potential employer, handle the necessary paperwork, and overall, be fully responsible for her life—all skills that helped convince

her father that his daughter was mature and self-sufficient enough to undertake an independent migration.

### *The Mature Migrant*

In fact, young and unmarried migrants consistently tried to demonstrate to their parents that they were mature enough to work overseas. Heather, a 34-year-old woman who had been working in Hong Kong for only a few months when I interviewed her, had only told her mother a week before her departure about her plans, using the delayed notification tactic described earlier. But she also tried to mollify her worried mother by saying “that no need to worry about me because, in the first place, I am old enough to handle it.” This argument that participants were “old enough” to make an independent migration decision was a common refrain in younger participants’ accounts of their bargaining sessions with their parents.

In Aisha’s case, her parents had initially been against the idea of her working overseas as a domestic worker because of the negative stories they had heard about life as a maid. But Aisha managed to convince them to let her go to Brunei, partly by reminding them that her cousin was already working there as a domestic worker, and partly by telling her parents that she was capable and resourceful enough to protect herself from abusive employers:

That’s why my parents—[at first,] they don’t let me come here but [then] I get approved. I say, “I got her [my cousin] here. Why she stay there [in Brunei] if it’s not okay?” I say, “This is life, man! If you’re lucky, if you’re unlucky, you have to take the risk. For me, if you want to be successful, you have to take a risk. Because everyday life is a risk. Even in the Philippines also, there are bad people and good people.” I tell my father, “People in the whole world is the same. In Philippines, there’s bad, there’s good. And overseas, there’s bad and good. And, for me, if there is bad, maybe I will use my mind. I will bust my brain how to get out of that bad position, right?”

Another migrant, Sherrie, in Hong Kong, who had enjoyed a carefree, hedonistic lifestyle in the Philippines when she was younger, had had a lot more convincing to do before her parents accepted that she was levelheaded enough to work overseas. Among the many strategies she used with her parents, she also tried to explain that migrating was in her long-term best interests because it would help her stay on the straight and narrow:

Since before, I always dream to be going abroad. Yeah. But before they [my parents] don't allow me because I am still young and I am the youngest. They used to treat me like the baby, like their princess. But later on, I said, "If I just stay here, in the Philippines, I think I can't save money for my future, [or] for you, for your medication. Because before—as I have said—I am not very, very nice. I used to—I used to go out all night, drinking, smoking, drinking. I got a lot of friends. So me, myself also decided that I am too tired for this. And I am not getting any younger.

And so I told them, "I am not going to do this [anymore]." And I told them, "And who will suffer later on [if I keep behaving like this]? It's me." So that's why I said, "I think this is the right time and I hope you understand me." And my mother and my father, they cry because they don't want me to go but they respect my decision because they know that if I stay there [in the Philippines], maybe I am just like what I used to be.

### *The Flexible Migrant*

Giving their relatives some say over the parameters of their migration decision was another tactic successfully employed by several participants during their negotiations. These women spoke of changing their planned destinations because family members vetoed particular countries as being too risky. Their relatives would permit the prospective migrant to emigrate only if she went to work in countries the family deemed safe. Jinnifer, a young woman who was about to leave the Philippines for the first time when I interviewed her, explained that her family had allowed her to work overseas on the condition that she not seek out employment in Saudi Arabia which had a reputation for being a dangerous place to work. Other participants had family members who vetoed entire regions—for example, all of the Middle East—as a precondition before throwing their support behind participants' migration decision. This was the case with Millie,

whose husband had vetoed the Middle East as a destination when she first brought up the notion of working overseas:

I didn't plan to go to the Middle East because they said that the men are, you know, they are very aggressive. And they might, they will do something to the maids. [...] But anyway my husband also doesn't like that idea to go to the Middle East. Yeah, maybe if I'm a man, okay. But if you're a woman, he said, you cannot.

Interestingly, Millie's remarks reveal that she had never planned on looking for work in the Middle East. But, by letting her husband exercise his veto power over that part of the world as a destination, she allowed him to feel more in control of her migration decision. By meeting their relatives halfway on such issues, participants demonstrated that they were willing to listen to their relatives' concerns about their intended life as a migrant domestic worker.

### **Discussion**

These firsthand accounts from study participants help shed new light on NELM and assess its applicability to the case of Filipino migrant domestic workers. From participants' stories, it is clear that there is little evidence to support the traditional models of unified or autocratic household-level migration decision-making proposed by NELM. Among study participants, the migration decision was almost always made by the individual migrant herself and then negotiated over with participants' significant others, most often parents and husbands.

At the same time, not all powerholders in participants' families expressed their resistance to participants' migration decision, which speaks to the diverse pool of women who consider overseas migrant domestic work and the differentiated household/family power dynamics that can be found in the Philippines. Women who were

unmarried/widowed/ separated, did not have any children, and those who possessed a college degree, were less likely to encounter resistance from their families. Women with female relatives already working as migrant domestic workers in their intended destination were also less likely to face resistance. And in households where women were out-earning their husbands, the balance of power in the household had swung sufficiently in the woman's direction that there was little to no resistance to her independent migration decision. Thus, the picture painted by feminist critics of NELM theory is also incomplete. Not all independent women migrants in patriarchal societies encounter familial resistance prior to their migration.

When participants did encounter resistance, it was clearly gendered. This was most apparent in those cases where parents spoke out against their daughters' migration decision even though they had had no issues with their sons leaving the Philippines to work overseas. Their resistance was framed using normative beliefs that still enjoy wide circulation within the Philippines about a woman being primarily responsible for all social reproductive functions within her household and her subordinate status vis-à-vis the male head of household—either her husband or her father. Married women were told that it was their husband's responsibility to be the family breadwinner; women with children were accused of abandoning their children.

Participants adopted various strategies in order to win over their resistant relatives. They highlighted structural factors such as the lack of well-paid employment opportunities available for women in the Philippines, the exorbitant cost of higher education in the Philippines and the difficulty low-skilled men would have securing overseas jobs. They also touted the benefits that their migration would bring to their



family: Better finances to support family members' living needs and sometimes the possibility of permanent resident status for their parents, children and spouse if the migrant was planning to move to a country where family reunification was allowed. They framed these benefits in a gendered manner and constructed their independent migration decision as an exclusive act of love, filial loyalty and self-sacrifice, rather than an individualistic decision. They cast themselves as dutiful daughters, caring mothers and supportive wives, promising to remit most of their overseas earnings in order to ensure the future livelihood of the family members they left behind. They thus subverted Philippine norms about a woman's role as care-provider to her husband, children, parents and younger siblings, and agentially reframed their migration decision as a way to *fulfill* this role rather than violate it. Study participants' negotiations are thus simultaneously reflective of Filipino women's relatively weak status within patriarchal Philippine households and their agency in successfully negotiating with more powerful stakeholders within their family. It is not at all the straightforward transaction that is the third model of intra-household migration decision-making proposed by NELM scholars. The "negotiated migration" model I propose instead argues that individual migrants make their initial migration decision independently, though sometimes for collective purposes, and must then negotiate not only with individual family members but also with the system of patriarchy that exists within their households in order to have their migration decision ratified.

However, given that this study was not originally designed to test NELM theory, there are limitations in the study design that need to be acknowledged. One shortcoming is the dearth of interviews with male migrants and the absence of interviews with

involuntary female non-migrants to assess how well NELM theory holds up in those situations. In the case of the former, it is possible that even in patriarchal societies, prospective male migrants (especially younger sons who still live with their parents) may also have to negotiate with their kinfolk before being given permission to leave their ancestral home and work overseas. However, prospective male migrants are traditionally granted much greater autonomy by their families. In many cultures, the out-migration of young males from their homes and villages is seen as a rite of passage and male non-migrants are sometimes publicly shamed for not undertaking this journey (Jónsson 2008; Lan 2006). In any case, I would argue that the “negotiated migration” model can apply equally well to both men and women migrants, and can easily explain the reduced resistance male migrants experience. Using my approach, men coming from societies and households that hold certain expectations about a man’s breadwinner role and his “right” to migration can be expected to meet significantly less familial resistance and, as a result, have to engage in less bargaining with other family members.

The absence of interviews with involuntary female non-migrants presents a more critical problem. It is possible that these non-migrants presented the same arguments as study participants did when attempting to leave the country, but that for some reason they were unable to persuade their relatives to support their migration decision. Future studies should consider interviewing both involuntary non-migrants and voluntary migrants to contrast their negotiation experiences with their families.

Finally, there are the ongoing concerns with retrospective interviewing and the fact that I did not interview any members of participants’ households to verify participants’ accounts of their migration negotiations. Some participants might have

falsely recalled having had to overcome familial resistance, perhaps unconsciously making their initial struggles and subsequent victory over these struggles appear larger than they were. Or participants might have said that they did not face any resistance at all because they wanted to retain a fiction of unified familial support for their migration decision. However, I am inclined not to mistrust participants' accounts in this regard. The fact that the study sample was split almost evenly between those who experienced resistance and those who did not, leads me to conclude that there does exist significant variation in the degree of familial resistance potential women migrants encounter. Given the diversity of women who consider migrant domestic work as an exit strategy from the Philippines, it stands to reason that they would experience a diversity of reactions from their family members. My findings also help explain the seemingly contradictory results of other analyses, with some studies finding strong familial resistance to and other studies reporting household-level support for women's independent migration.

### **Conclusion**

Over the last few decades, an increasing amount of scholarly attention has been paid to the international migration patterns of women who face very different drivers and opportunity structures at the household and societal level than male migrants (Morrison, Schiff and Sjöblom 2008; Curran, Shafer, Donato, and Garip 2006; Boyd and Grieco 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Several efforts have also been made to theorize the migration of women.

Saskia Sassen has written extensively about the macro-level forces in both sending and receiving countries that encourage the out-migration of female labor

migrants from the developing world towards the West (Sassen 2006, 1988). Increased border security has been found to have a greater negative effect on women's migration from Mexico to the United States, possibly because of women's greater aversion to risk (Richter and Taylor 2008). Other scholars have highlighted how differing socio-cultural expectations for men and women can make migration a non-option for women who are expected to stay at home and take care of their families (Boyd and Grieco 2003; Radcliffe 1986). At the meso-level, several researchers have argued that migrant networks may operate in gendered ways, with male migrants encouraging the out-migration of other men and female migrants encouraging other women to migrate (Curran, Garip, Chung, and Tangchonlatip 2005; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Kaniaupuni 2000). At the micro-level, rural Mexican women's migration has been found to be positively associated with their years of schooling, possibly because of more-educated women's sense of frustration with the social constraints and lack of employment opportunities they experience in Mexico (Richter and Taylor 2008; Kaniaupuni 2000).

At the household level, feminist migration scholars have repeatedly critiqued the NELM assumption that women in traditional families are treated as equal partners when it comes to migration decision-making (Curran, Shafer, Donato, and Garip 2006; Radcliffe 1986; Wolf 1992; Folbre 1986). Meanwhile, other migration scholars have found potential women migrants regularly make their migration decisions individually, often over the objections of their relatives (Oishi 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). However, no alternative gendered theory has been offered to explain how and why women's independent migration still occurs in the face of familial resistance. To fill this gap in the literature, I have proposed a new qualitative model of household-level

migration decision-making that is based on the concept of a *negotiated migration decision* and is meant to take the place of the “super-trader family” model of household decision-making within NELM.

Rather than trading on economic interests, these family negotiations trade on different beliefs about the gendered division of responsibilities and power within a family. I argue that the migration decision is still more often than not an individual decision, but one that is often made for collective purposes to benefit not just the potential migrant but also the migrant’s family/household. This decision is then negotiated with the migrant’s household members in order to secure their support and, in some cases, permission. The bargaining that takes place between the potential migrant and his/her family is embedded within a set of social and cultural norms and perceptions about each family member’s roles and responsibilities in the household, and a gendered and generational power hierarchy. These variations in power, ideology and perceptions can mean that prospective migrants encounter varying degrees of familial resistance, from none at all (for example, in situations where they are treated as equal members of the household and/or are already expected to provide financially for their children, younger siblings or aged parents) to a great deal of resistance (as in situations where they are viewed as primarily responsible for social reproductive functions within their home).

The process of negotiating the migration decision with resistant family members is one that has not been discussed in any depth within the migration literature, even though it is of great importance to independent women migrants, many of whom labor under a set of socially constructed constraints on their freedom of choice and movement. In the case of the Philippines, the gendered social norms that cast women as providers of

emotional care within the home and men as the primary providers of financial support, make it more difficult for women to work overseas by themselves while outsourcing their caregiving responsibilities.

While the above social structures set the stage for the reluctance these women encountered when they first broached the idea of working abroad, other structural forces create the conditions that enabled study participants to overcome this resistance. These latter factors include the lack of well-paid job opportunities within the Philippines for these women, the rising cost of a university education in the Philippines for these women's children, the worldwide demand for *female* Filipino migrant domestic workers, the speed with which one of these domestic worker jobs can be secured, and the relative dearth of overseas job opportunities for unskilled male laborers. The ability of individual migrants to navigate these opposing structural forces speaks to the individual agency of these women migrants à la Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. Even as these women were often discouraged from migrating overseas on the basis of appeals to their children's welfare, they were able to cite their husbands' and parents' desires and aspirations for their family to secure eventual approval and support for their migration efforts. Others raised the Philippine tradition of unmarried daughters providing for their younger siblings and elderly parents as justification for their migration. Thus these women manipulated Filipino society's gender norms to reframe their migration decision as a logical extension of their roles as daughter, wife and mother. In this, they were also aided by the Philippine government's casting of Filipino migrants as national heroes and martyrs (Rodriguez 2010; Tyner 2009). The "migrant as martyr" trope propagated by the

Philippine government made for easy parallels with the “mother as martyr” trope that is already well-established in Philippine society.

In the future, it would be worthwhile to explore how well these findings about Filipino women migrants’ decision-making processes transfer to other countries and cultures. As it stands, the very different structural conditions that potential female migrants from Mexico face can explain why they have a significantly lower propensity to migrate (Morrison, Schiff and Sjöblom 2008). For these Mexican women, the absence of a female-biased labor market in the United States, and the greater risks associated with undocumented travel, most likely made it difficult for them to overcome the resistance their relatives had to their journeying northward by themselves. It would be useful to contrast the migration decision-making process for female migrants from countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Vietnam which have a substantial volume of documented female domestic workers leaving the country each year, to assess if they too had to negotiate with their families before being able to go abroad.

Set against this chapter’s findings of participants’ agentic negotiations with their resistant families, there is a single down note. By emphasizing how working overseas would fulfill their roles as caring mothers, dutiful daughters and supportive spouses, participants inadvertently bolstered traditional, conservative views of women’s place in a household. Thus, while they carved out a figurative space for themselves as independent wage-earners and migrants, they cemented the traditional gendered view of Filipino women as the primary care-provider in the household: Self-sacrificial and self-effacing, always putting their family first before their own personal needs. This bind is apparent in Rory’s lament (mentioned earlier) that “my money, all my salary in two years, I give it to

my family. I give all to my family.” Other participants spoke of the constant, never-ending demands for remittances from family members who took for granted that participants would send them money to meet all their needs. This practice of remitting practically all their earnings back to the Philippines and setting aside hardly anything for themselves has been observed by other scholars of Philippine migration as well (Lan 2006:148; Parreñas 2001). Within this study, participants spoke of how they were constantly inundated with demands from family members in the Philippines for more money. Lan calls these remittances “filial tributes” (2006:148) to Filipino parents. I would argue that the expectation of regular remittances is compounded by the “patriarchal bargaining” (Kandiyoti 1988) that aspiring Filipina migrants have to undertake in order to win their family’s support for their migration decision.

In this way, participants’ actions inadvertently fostered the model of “Asian feminism” (Roces and Edwards 2010; Sen 2004; Roces 2000) being promoted by the patriarchal governments of modern Asian countries. These governments encourage women’s labor force participation to boost the national GDP of their countries but, at the same time, they continue to expect women to hold a subservient position in their households vis-à-vis their husbands and fathers (Brooks 2006; Sen 2004; Roces and Edwards 2000; Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Afshar 1987). Thus, even though these pioneering women migrants break gender barriers when it comes to their labor migration, they do so by reinforcing the gendered and generational power hierarchy within their own homes.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **The Transnational Labor Market for Migrant Domestic Workers**

For Filipinas seeking to leave the Philippines for the first time as temporary migrant domestic workers, there is still the “where” of their migration journey to consider. A number of recent demographic and socioeconomic trends in both developed and high-income developing countries—most critically a rapidly aging population and declining birthrates that are shrinking the size of the productive population (UNDP 2000)—have resulted in an explosion of demand for domestic workers in these countries. The rising female labor force participation rate, alongside reductions in state investment in public welfare programs, has also created a “care crisis” in these countries, with families (especially women) feeling unable to devote sufficient time to their childcare, eldercare, and/or housework duties (Parreñas 2008; Hochschild 1989, 2000). These social reproductive responsibilities are still viewed as predominantly a private rather than a public responsibility and, more particularly, the responsibility of the woman of a household. Many working women are forced to hire household help if they want to maintain some kind of balance between work and home life (Enloe 2000; Carnoy 2000).

In other countries (especially in the Middle East) with a long history of waged domestic service, a rapidly growing middle class population has resulted in a booming demand for more domestic workers. But native-born citizens in all of these countries

increasingly shun such 3-D jobs. In order to make up for this shortfall in their internal labor supply, many of these countries have introduced new foreign guest worker programs or expanded existing policies to allow foreign domestic workers to be employed within their national borders.

In Canada, the government has instituted a “Live-In Caregiver Program” that imports foreign workers on four-year work permits to serve as live-in nannies and domestic workers (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997). Italy, Cyprus, Norway, Greece, Israel (and, until recently, Spain) have similar programs that allow foreign caregivers into the country on short-term visas (Parreñas 2001; Anthias and Lazaridis 2000). High-income developing countries in Asia (such as the “tiger” economies of Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan) and the Middle East are also important destinations for foreign domestic workers who enter into renewable two-year contracts with local and expatriate employers in these countries (Lan 2006; Parreñas 2001; Yeoh and Huang 1998; Constable 1997a). In short, Filipina migrants who decide to seek employment overseas as domestic workers can choose from the many overseas markets open to migrant workers.

Some critics might argue that for low-capital migrants like waged domestic workers, the notion of a destination decision is moot and that they are simply steered towards specific countries by factors outside their control. While this might be somewhat true for first-time migrants who are severely capital-constrained, repeat migrants must make a destination decision each time they end one overseas contract and decide to start another. Do they stay in their current country of employment? Or do they move to another country? For repeat migrants who have, in some ways, committed to a life overseas as a temporary migrant and who have managed to set aside some money from

their overseas earnings, the destination decision is an especially critical one. And so, having looked at study participants' migration decision in the previous two chapters of this dissertation, this present chapter and the next deal with participants' destination decisions(s).

This chapter outlines the key differences between the domestic worker programs of seven of the most important markets for Filipino domestic workers—Canada, Italy, Hong Kong, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and the United States—that together absorbed over half of newly-hired domestic workers leaving the Philippines between 2005 and 2009. This analysis serves three purposes. First, it highlights how labor migration—even for a low-status occupation like waged domestic service—offers prospective migrants entry into a wide range of countries around the world, including some that are otherwise highly restrictive in their immigration policies. Second, the comparison of these countries' programs reveals that even though the work being performed by migrant domestic laborers in each of these countries is very similar, these countries' programs are not. In fact, it is possible to objectively rate and rank each of these domestic worker programs on two broad criteria: the degree of employment rights and the degree of migrant rights granted these migrant domestic workers. Third and most important, this analysis reveals how different countries' policy regimes play a critical role in establishing a transnational labor market for migrant domestic workers, a necessary pre-condition for multistate migration. In fact, differences in state policy are some of the most significant structural variables directly impacting workers' immediate and future destination decisions.

## **Migrant Domestic Worker Policy Regimes**

In 2010, newly-hired Filipino migrant domestic workers began work in over 200 countries and territories around the world (POEA 2011). These migrant domestic workers labor under different labels in different host countries: In some countries (such as Canada and Taiwan) they are designated as “caregivers,” while in others, they are known as “domestic helpers” or “maids.” But across these countries, there are few significant differences in terms of the actual duties domestic workers are asked to undertake. Whatever their title, migrant domestic workers are expected to perform one or more types of carework—looking after the elderly and/or the young, cooking, cleaning and washing. However, there are significant differences across markets in terms of the regulations governing these workers’ labor protections, living conditions and wage rates.

The International Labor Organization (ILO), which adopted the Convention on Domestic Workers<sup>1</sup> recognizes domestic workers as being entitled to the same types of protections as other workers. It highlights the following areas that any national legislation on domestic workers should guarantee:

1. A formal, written contract between employer and employee outlining the expected wages, working hours, duties, rest periods and other benefits,
2. A minimum wage level,
3. A regular payment schedule for wages,
4. A limit on the amount of in-kind payments given to workers,
5. A guarantee of privacy and comfort as part of a domestic worker’s living quarters, e.g. a private room, a separate bathroom, a private bed, etc.,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/media-centre/press-releases/WCMS\\_157891/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/media-centre/press-releases/WCMS_157891/lang-en/index.htm). Accessed on January 20, 2012.

6. A limit on the number of hours a domestic worker is expected to work or be on call per day,
7. A guarantee of autonomy with respect to a domestic worker's personal life, e.g. employers do not have the right to confiscate a worker's passport or read a worker's personal correspondence,
8. Weekly rest periods of at least 24 hours,
9. Protection against unjustified termination of employment without notice or severance pay,
10. Access to health insurance, social security insurance and unemployment insurance,
11. The right to be treated equally without being discriminated against on the basis of nationality, race or health condition,
12. The right to collective bargaining and the right to freely associate with other domestic workers,
13. The opportunity to invest in personal development through classes, as long as these classes do not interfere with work responsibilities,
14. Access to courts or labor tribunals in the event of a dispute with an employer, and
15. A recognition of a worker's own family responsibilities (e.g. maternity leave).

No country currently guarantees the full set of these protections to paid domestic workers. However, some countries do significantly more for these workers than others.

Almost all European countries already include domestic workers in their general protections for workers. Most Middle Eastern and Asian countries, in contrast, specifically preclude domestic workers from their national labor laws (International Labor Organization 2010). Asian countries do provide separate but very limited

protections to domestic workers, but countries in the Middle East provide almost no employment rights at all. These latter countries fail to guarantee minimum wages, limited work hours, weekly rest days, maternity leave and other protections to domestic workers. In other words, there are sharp regional contrasts between different countries' domestic worker policy regimes.

For the remainder of this section, I focus on the domestic worker programs and policies of seven countries—Canada, Italy, Hong Kong, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the United States (US) (see Table 5.1 for a summary of differences between these country markets). These destinations were chosen to reflect the diversity of countries and world regions that Filipino domestic workers (and Filipino migrants in general) migrate to each year. Together, these countries represent 51.2% of the average annual outflow of all newly-hired migrant domestic workers from the Philippines (see Table 5.2). Hong Kong draws just over a quarter of these newly-hired Filipino migrant domestic workers while the UAE and Saudi Arabia each absorb an additional 10 percent of this migration stream. Finally, Canada, Singapore and Italy each take in just 2.5 percent of the newly-hired migrant domestic worker flow out of the Philippines, though it should be noted that these numbers are most likely heavily underestimated (see Table 5.2, footnotes c & d). And finally, the US accepts only 0.1% of all migrant domestic workers leaving the Philippines each year (see Table 5.2, footnote e) but it is included in this discussion because—as will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Six—it sits at the top of many Filipino migrants' personal destination hierarchies.

Table 5.1  
A Comparison of Migrant Domestic Worker Policy Regimes

Country	Entry Requirements	Cost of Entry	Monthly Wage Rates	Living Conditions	Working Conditions
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two years college education</li> <li>• 6-month caregiver training or relevant work experience</li> <li>• Fluency in French/English</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$16,000 (from the Philippines)</li> <li>• \$3,500-\$6,600 (from Hong Kong)</li> </ul>	>\$1200	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlimited freedom of movement</li> <li>• Permanent residence after 24 months of employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guaranteed weekly rest day</li> <li>• Limited work hours</li> <li>• Protection under Employment Act</li> </ul>
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6-month caregiver training or relevant work experience</li> </ul>	\$10,000	\$700-1200	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlimited freedom of movement</li> <li>• Permanent residence after 6 years of employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guaranteed weekly rest day</li> <li>• Limited work hours</li> <li>• Protection under Employment Act</li> </ul>
Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High school diploma</li> </ul>	\$1,500-\$2,000	~\$450	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlimited freedom of movement</li> <li>• No option for permanent residence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guaranteed weekly rest day</li> <li>• Protection under Employment Act</li> </ul>

Singapore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High school diploma</li> <li>• Females only</li> <li>• Select source countries only</li> </ul>	\$1,000-\$1,300 (part-paid through salary deductions, 6-10 months)	>\$300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlimited freedom of movement</li> <li>• No option for permanent residence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No guaranteed weekly rest day</li> <li>• Some labor protections</li> </ul>
United Arab Emirates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No entry requirements</li> </ul>	\$300-445 (part-paid through salary deductions, 3-6 months)	\$380	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some freedom of movement outside employer's home</li> <li>• Many incidents of abuse</li> <li>• No option for permanent residence</li> <li>• Freedom of religion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No guaranteed weekly rest day</li> <li>• No labor protections</li> </ul>
Saudi Arabia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No entry requirements</li> </ul>	\$200 (paid through salary deductions)	\$200	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No freedom of movement outside employer's home</li> <li>• Many incidents of abuse</li> <li>• No option for permanent residence</li> <li>• No freedom of religion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No guaranteed weekly rest day</li> <li>• No labor protections</li> </ul>

## Notes:

1. All currency amounts are in US dollars.
2. The costs of entry are the total fees charged by recruitment agencies based in the Philippines unless otherwise stated.



Table 5.2  
Average Annual Migration Flows for Newly-Hired Filipino Migrant Workers, 2005-2009

Destination Country <sup>a</sup>	All Migrant Workers	% of Worldwide Total	Domestic Workers <sup>b</sup>	% of Worldwide Total
<b>Worldwide Total</b>	<b>881,212</b>		<b>81,538</b>	
Hong Kong	86,656	9.8%	20,491	25.1%
United Arab Emirates	138,507	15.7%	8,213	10.1%
Saudi Arabia	244,716	27.8%	6,994	8.6%
Italy	21,863	2.5%	2,063 <sup>c</sup>	2.5%
Canada	11,444	1.3%	2,035 <sup>c</sup>	2.5%
Singapore	40,410	4.6%	1,962 <sup>d</sup>	2.4%
United States of America	2,888	0.3%	59 <sup>e</sup>	0.1%
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>546,484</b>	<b>62.0%</b>	<b>41,817</b>	<b>51.3%</b>

Source: Philippine Overseas Employment Agency

- a. Countries are listed in descending order of the average volume of migrant domestic workers they receive annually from the Philippines.
- b. Includes POEA statistics for both “household service workers” and “caregivers.”
- c. Data for Canada and Italy are most likely heavily underestimated due to undercounting of Filipino caregivers who traveled first to intermediate countries before finding jobs in Canada and Italy.
- d. Data for Singapore is likely underestimated as many Filipino domestic workers in Singapore arrive on tourist visas to avoid pre-departure processing (and tallying) by Philippine government agencies.
- e. Data for the United States is likely underestimated given the significantly higher number of A-3, G-5 and NATO-7 United States’ visas issued to Filipino citizens during this period. See Table 5.6.

### *Canada*

Prior to the 1940s, most migrant domestic workers entering Canada were white and British and granted full citizenship rights immediately upon their arrival (Daenzer 1997). However, starting in the 1960s, the rapid increase in Canadian women’s labor force participation rates, together with their inflexible work arrangements, precipitated a national care crisis that the dwindling immigration flow from the UK was unable to solve. By the 1970s, in order to address this problem, Canada was issuing 10,000 to 16,000 temporary work permits a year, 96% of which were being issued to live-in foreign

domestic workers (Arat-Koc 1989).<sup>2</sup> These women were drawn from Southern and Eastern Europe, the Caribbean and the Philippines (Daenzer 1997). Eventually, in 1981, the Canadian government formalized these migration flows under the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM) program (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2007). In contrast with earlier migrant domestic workers, participants in the FDM program were no longer immediately granted permanent residency upon arrival but instead had to complete two years of employment before they could apply for permanent resident status.

The FDM program was replaced by the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) in 1992. To qualify for the LCP, applicants need to have completed the equivalent of a Canadian high school diploma (which, for Filipinos, translates to at least two years or 72 credit hours of college courses), have six months of full-time training in caregiving (or one year of relevant full-time work experience) and have sufficient knowledge of English or French.<sup>3</sup> Once in Canada, workers are protected by relatively strict regulations concerning their work hours, wages and benefits that all local employers are expected to abide by. These working conditions vary slightly according to provincial or territorial law. To take Ontario as an example, migrant domestic workers in that province there are only allowed to work eight hours a day, at a minimum rate of CA\$10.25 an hour (or just under US\$10.50), with a mandatory weekly day of rest, nine public holidays each year, and two weeks of paid vacation time for each year of service.<sup>4</sup> Employers are required to provide a private room and board to caregivers at a stipulated cost and also make

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<sup>2</sup> Only the province of Quebec offers heavily subsidized, full-day kindergarten for all children under five years of age, charging parents only CA\$5 a day. The province of Ontario is considering offering full-day kindergarten to all four- and five-year-olds. For younger children, most Canadian working parents are still forced to rely on private arrangements that include daycare centers and live-in caregivers (Turgeon 2010:8).

<sup>3</sup> For the full eligibility requirements, see <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/work/caregiver/apply-who.asp>. Retrieved on January 10, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es/pubs/is\\_fn\\_esa.php](http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es/pubs/is_fn_esa.php). Retrieved on January 10, 2011.

employment insurance and pension payments on behalf of their employees. Overtime pay of at least 1½ times the basic wage is required for any hours worked over 44 hours a week. Live-in caregivers are also protected under Canada's Employment Standards Act that guarantees a host of employment rights including maternity leave, parental leave and protection from termination without notice. And, in the latest changes to the LCP that were introduced in April 2010, caregivers now have a window of four years in which to complete the 24 months or 3,900 hours of full-time employment required to qualify for permanent residence in Canada.

When compared to the generous citizenship rights granted to earlier generations of migrant domestic workers by the Canadian government, the current LCP regime seems unfairly strict (Hodge 2006). However, when compared with the programs instituted by other countries, Canada comes across as a bulwark of liberalism. Canada is one of only a handful of countries that offers even the possibility of permanent residence and eventual citizenship to migrant domestic workers. Given the allure of gaining permanent resident status and the relatively high wage rates offered, Canada remains extremely attractive to prospective migrant domestic workers. Filipinos have practically monopolized applications for the LCP since its inception. In 2008, the latest year for which full immigration statistics are available, 11,231 live-in caregiver applications were approved by the Canadian government. Of these, 10,120 applications (90%) were from individuals holding Filipino citizenship.<sup>5</sup> Table 5.3 provides more details on the number of live-in caregiver visas issued by Canada between 2000 and 2009.

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<sup>5</sup> Data purchased from Citizenship and Immigration Canada in 2010 by the author.

Table 5.3  
Number of Live-in Caregiver Applications Approved by Canada, 2000-2009

Year	Total Applications (All citizenships)	Applications from Philippine Citizens	% of Total Applications from Philippine Citizens
2000	2,236	1,910	85%
2001	3,753	3,122	83%
2002	3,458	1,860	54%
2003	4,575	3,883	85%
2004	6,134	5,273	86%
2005	6,538	5,953	91%
2006	8,185	7,483	91%
2007	11,878	11,025	93%
2008	11,231	10,120	90%
2009*	6,455	5,779	90%

Source: Immigration Canada

\* 2009 data was only available for the January-September period.

The popularity of Canada's LCP among Filipinos is also reflected in the exorbitant fees that overseas recruitment agencies in the Philippines and other countries charge prospective migrants who seek an LCP work permit to Canada. By Canadian law, migrant workers are not required to pay these agencies any placement fee at all; instead, employers are expected to bear all recruitment-related expenses.<sup>6</sup> This stipulation is largely ignored by recruitment agencies. Prospective Filipino migrants are routinely called upon to pay agencies anywhere from US\$3,000-US\$16,000 for a work permit to Canada.<sup>7</sup> The average Filipino had an average *annual* family income in 2009 of only

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/faq/work/caregiver-faq24.asp>

<sup>7</sup> Based on field interviews conducted with migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, and Canada between 2008 and 2010. Recruitment agency costs varied depending on the country where the agency was located. If a migrant was applying through an agency in the Philippines, charges sometimes went up to US\$16,000. If the migrant was applying from Hong Kong or Singapore, however, the agency charges were more likely to be within the US\$3,000-US\$6,500 range. A handful of Canada-based participants reported having used agencies that allowed them to pay a portion of their placement fees through salary deductions after having started their contracts in Canada. But the vast majority of participants had been required to pay these fees in their entirety upfront before departing for

PHP206,000<sup>8</sup> (or US\$4,640). Based on 2009 Philippine income data, the cost of entry to Canada would be between 65-340% of the average annual family income in the Philippines and, as such, an almost unsurpassable obstacle for most Filipino prospective migrants. For this reason alone, gaining *direct* entry from the Philippines to Canada through the LCP is limited to migrants (like Sherrie in Chapter One) with high levels of capital. These migrants need to have access to sufficient financial capital to pay the exorbitant agency fees, possess enough human capital in terms of the necessary educational qualifications and work experience to meet the requirements for the LCP, and/or have sufficient social capital in the form of friends or relatives in Canada who could directly match the migrant with a Canadian employer and thereby save the migrant from having to pay a placement fee to a recruitment agency. Working in an intermediate country for a few years is one way for less-endowed migrants to accumulate this much-needed capital in order to secure an LCP visa to Canada.

### *Italy*

Before the 1960s, Italy (and other southern European countries like Spain) was a net sender of migrants, but as its economy began to offer more employment opportunities for its own citizens and for foreigners, this pattern began to reverse itself. Italy is now considered a new country of immigration in Europe and various categories of migrant

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Canada.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.census.gov.ph/>. Data was collected using the Family Income and Expenditures Survey conducted by the Philippine government's National Statistics Office. However it is generally recognized that there is widespread underestimation, ranging from 30% to 70%, of income across both high- and low-income families in the Philippines. In the case of low-income families, this underestimation of household income is due to a significant portion of their income streams being non-cash-based (Rodriguez 1998) but also due to the non-reporting of income from the informal sector of the economy and from remittances (Rodriguez 1996). But even with a higher income estimate for these low-income families, they would still most likely be cash-strapped when it came time to cobble together sufficient funds to pay the necessary recruitment agency fees.

worker are in high demand, especially in the industrialized north (Calavita 2005). The need for live-in domestic workers is particularly strong and stems from the same demographic trends facing other Western European countries: A rapidly aging population and declining fertility rates (Izzo 2010). But the Italian welfare state is less developed than in northern Europe. Affordable, state-sponsored childcare and eldercare is not widespread, forcing Italian families to make their own private arrangements (Anthias and Lazaridis 2000; Calavita 2005). In addition, the notion of nursing homes for the elderly is not popular in Italy for cultural and religious reasons. As a result, many Italian families employ caregivers to look after their aged relatives and their very young. Overall, there are an estimated 500,000 to 800,000 individuals in Italy's paid domestic service sector, most of whom are foreigners (Chaloff 2008). Filipinos form the largest bloc of registered non-EU foreign domestic workers in the country (Rubio 2003). As of 2008, there were 56,445 registered Filipino domestic workers in Italy, comprising 8.5% of the total 664,785 registered domestic workers in the country (see Table 5.4), though it is widely accepted that there are many more unregistered Filipino domestic workers. Another way to gauge the size of this population is to first estimate the number of registered Filipinos in Italy: 124,000.<sup>9</sup> Roughly 66 percent of them (over 80,000 migrants) are women and most of these 80,000-plus women work as domestic servants and caregivers (Calavita 2005; Pe-Pua 2003).

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<sup>9</sup> Statistics accessed from the National Institute of Statistics online database at [http://demo.istat.it/str2009/index\\_e.html](http://demo.istat.it/str2009/index_e.html) on February 6, 2011, from the table "Foreigner Citizens. Resident Population by sex and citizenship on 31 December 2009, Italy - East Asia"

Table 5.4  
Number of Registered Domestic Workers in Italy, 1999-2008

Year	All Domestic Workers	% Filipinos <sup>a</sup>	% Eastern Europeans <sup>b</sup>	% Italians <sup>b</sup>
1999	250,291	15.3%	8.0%	50.9%
2000	262,229	15.7%	9.9%	48.6%
2001	269,906	15.4%	11.0%	48.2%
2002	552,086	8.9%	41.0%	24.1%
2003	536,861	9.1%	41.2%	24.7%
2004	499,321	9.8%	39.8%	26.5%
2005	478,280	10.3%	38.6%	27.8%
2006	478,275	10.5%	38.7%	27.9%
2007	620,299	8.7%	47.4%	22.2%
2008	664,785	8.5%	47.9%	21.6%

Source: Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale (INPS), Italy. Data accessed online on March 1, 2011 from <http://www.inps.it/webidentity/banchedatistatistiche/domestici/index01.jsp>

a. Data does not include undocumented Filipino domestic workers.

b. As the percentage of Filipinos in the domestic work sector steadily declined from 1999 to 2008, Eastern Europeans took up the slack, going from 8% market share in 1999 to 47.9% market share in 2008. Many of these Eastern Europeans are Poles and Ukrainians. Likewise, the percentage of native Italians in this particular sector of the labor market precipitously declined, going from 50.9% in 1999 to only 21.6% in 2008. However, it should be noted that even though they control a smaller share of the market, in terms of actual numbers, there were still more registered Filipino domestic workers in 2008 (56,506 workers) than in 1999 (38,294 workers).

The Italian government recognizes the strong internal demand for domestic workers. Since 1998, it has regularly set aside roughly half of its annual import quotas to foreign caregivers (Calavita 2006; Rubio 2003). Using these quotas, employers and maid placement agencies can apply for two-year renewable work permits to hire foreign domestic servants who have undergone a six-month training program in caregiving or possess relevant work experience. These “residence permits”—or *permesso di soggiorno*—are tied to a particular employer but, other than that, they provide foreign workers with many of the same labor protections as Italian workers: The freedom to unionize, mandatory rest days, annual leave, social security benefits, unemployment and

accident insurance and protection from unlawful dismissal during pregnancy (Campbell 2007; D'Alconzo, Rocca, and Marioni 2002). After one year of employment with a residence permit, foreign domestic workers are allowed to petition their spouses and dependent children to join them in Italy as long as they can show that they can support their family members financially. After six years of legal employment under one of these temporary residence permits, migrants are eligible to apply for a 10-year automatically renewable "EC Long-Term Residence Permit" (*permesso di soggiorno per soggiornanti di lungo periodo*) that can set the migrant on the path to citizenship (Chaloff 2008). And after ten years of legally living in Italy, a non-EU national can apply for Italian citizenship. However, Parreñas notes that "ethnically distinct migrant groups are unlikely to be given access to the status of citizen" (2008:59). The vaguely defined prerequisites for naturalization, such as having "sufficient financial resources" make it easier to discriminate against migrant domestic workers. In other words, Filipino migrant domestic workers may theoretically have access to the full spectrum of migrant rights but, in reality, few do.

In addition, satisfying the six-year work requirement to qualify for a residence card is difficult as many migrants often find themselves between jobs or working illegally for employers who are reluctant to register them as this would require the employer to contribute social security and insurance payments to their worker's account. As a result, undocumented status is a regular occurrence for many Filipino domestic workers in Italy.

Given the high volume of undocumented migrants in the domestic service industry, the Italian government has initiated several amnesty programs since 1986, several of which specifically targeted domestic workers. In fact, most foreign residents in



Italy acquired their legal resident status through these regularization programs (Sciortino 2009). But it is hard for these legalized immigrants to enjoy any vertical mobility out of waged domestic service because other sectors of the Italian economy enjoy much smaller immigration quotas and are not as easy to enter (Calavita 2005). Instead, most domestic workers achieve only horizontal mobility, going from a live-in to a live-out arrangement with their employer, and from full-time to part-time status which gives them additional flexibility in organizing their workday (Banfi 2008).

The relatively lax enforcement of immigration policies by Italian authorities (Calavita 2005), the chance at regularization in the future, and the high wages (between US\$800-US\$1,200 a month) that workers are able to earn even in the underground economy, keep Italy an attractive destination for Filipino migrants (Banfi 2008).<sup>10</sup> It also helps that Filipinos sit at the top of the racialized foreign domestic worker hierarchy in Italy, commanding the highest wages compared to other nationalities such as Sri Lankans who sit at the bottom (Calavita 2005:62-63). However, similar to Canada, the cost of securing a work permit for Italy is prohibitive for most prospective Filipino migrants. Agencies in the Philippines charge up to US\$10,000 in fees for a visa to Italy (Banfi 2008), or approximately 215% of the average Filipino household's annual income.

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<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to estimate the actual volume of Filipino migrants entering Italy each year. The POEA reports that only 1,831 Filipinos left for Italy in 2009 to work as newly hired domestic workers or caregivers (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2010). However, this statistic does not take into account irregular migration to Italy, which appears to be rather substantial as indicated by anecdotal accounts from study participants with friends or relatives in Italy. It also ignores multistage migrants who travelled to Italy after having worked in an intermediate country such as Israel or Cyprus.

## *Hong Kong*

During its days as a colonial outpost of the British empire, Hong Kong was a thriving market for household workers, primarily sourced from the local Chinese population or mainland China (Constable 1997a). However, in 1949, the Communist takeover of China effectively closed the border with Hong Kong and dried up the inflow of Chinese domestic workers (or *amahs* as they were called) into Hong Kong (Oishi 2005). During the 1960s and 1970s, as Hong Kong (still a British protectorate) started shifting from a trading hub to, first a manufacturing center, and then a global service center, Hong Kong women began to join the formal workforce in droves, making affordable childcare an increasingly urgent issue. Foreign expatriates who constituted a large portion of the Hong Kong workforce also demanded more English-speaking domestic workers (Oishi 2005). Finally, in 1973, the government of Hong Kong approved the importing of foreigners to serve as household workers. Filipino maids became an increasingly popular choice for Hong Kong employers (both Caucasian expatriates and local Chinese) primarily because of their English language skills (Constable 2003). In fact, Hong Kong remains the top destination in the world for newly-hired Filipino domestic workers (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2010). In 2010, 28,602 Filipinos were newly hired as domestic workers to work in Hong Kong as live-in domestic helpers. This figure does not include all the Filipinos already working in Hong Kong who renewed their contracts for an additional two years. Estimates from the Philippine consulate in Hong Kong put the total number of Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong at 185,000 (Robles 2002) and, once you include other nationalities, there are over 300,000 migrant domestic workers employed in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong offers a relatively strong set of workplace protections (by Asian standards) for migrant domestic workers. These benefits and protections include a minimum wage of HK\$3,740 (or US\$480) a month<sup>11</sup>, up to two weeks of paid vacation a year, paid maternity leave, paid sick leave, a one-time long-service payment for five years of continued employment with the same employer and employer coverage of medical expenses.<sup>12</sup> Workers who wish to complain about abuses (of any kind) at their employers' hands or about the non-payment of their wages can seek restitution through the Labor Tribunal. Foreign domestic workers enjoy the same protections as local workers under Hong Kong's Employment Ordinance and they even have the freedom to form unions.<sup>13</sup> Foreign domestic workers are also guaranteed a mandated rest day (constituting a full continuous 24 hours) every seven days.<sup>14</sup>

On the downside, Hong Kong law requires workers to reside in their employer's domicile but does not mandate that they be provided with a private room. Instead, due to the cramped living conditions of many Hong Kong residents, workers are often made to share a room with their employers' children or aged parents. Some employers do allow their workers to (illegally) rent apartments or rooms in boarding houses, and these spaces become popular gathering places for workers' friends during the weekends.<sup>15</sup> These spaces allow workers to enjoy some *complete* privacy, a rare commodity given that most workers have to spend their rest days in public parks, shopping centers, or on sidewalks and under overpasses (Constable 1997a).

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/FDHguide.pdf>. Accessed on July 8, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehhtml/faq\\_fdh.htm](http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehhtml/faq_fdh.htm)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/plan/FAQ.htm>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehhtml/ID%28E%29969.htm>

<sup>15</sup> This phenomenon has not been discussed in much depth in the literature on the Hong Kong market, but Pei-Chia Lan (2007) analyzes the advantages of the illegal live-out arrangement for migrant domestic workers in the Taiwanese market which shares some similarities with its East Asian neighbor.

Unlike Canada and Italy, Hong Kong (and all other Asian and Middle Eastern countries) does not offer the possibility of permanent residence to migrant domestic workers.<sup>16</sup> Instead, workers are hired on two-year renewable contracts. During my field research in Hong Kong (and Singapore), I encountered Filipino workers who had spent the better part of their lives—two decades and more—as migrant domestic workers on continuously renewed two-year contracts. Hong Kong also does not provide an option for family reunification so workers must remain separated from their families in the Philippines, only seeing them during their annual vacations or when they finally return to the Philippines for good.

Some workers are fortunate enough to be able to secure Hong Kong-based jobs for their spouses or adult children. I interviewed several workers (male and female) who had managed to use their contacts to find local domestic worker jobs for their spouses. I also interviewed several mother-daughter pairs: Women who had worked in Hong Kong for many years and had found jobs for their daughters when these young women reached the age of majority. Sometimes, these mothers were lucky enough to find a job for their daughters with the same employer, allowing them to build a semblance of family life overseas.<sup>17</sup> There is also a small lesbian population among Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong and these women can find living overseas away from the strictures of a socially conservative family liberating (Constable 1997b). In all three of these cases,

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<sup>16</sup> In 2011, a Hong Kong high court ruled that domestic workers and other contract laborers should be eligible for permanent residence after completing seven years of employment in Hong Kong, concluding that any law that barred only these workers from permanent residence was discriminatory. However, the Hong Kong government appealed this decision and it was overturned by an appeals court. It is scheduled to be heard again in front of Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal.

<sup>17</sup> It was more likely that female migrants were able to find overseas jobs for their adult daughters (and sisters and nieces) than for their husbands (or brothers or sons). This reflects the gendered nature of domestic work in general. Another contributing factor is the fact that overseas domestic workers accumulate industry-specific expertise and contacts, with limited exposure to information about job openings in other sectors of the host economy that may be less skewed towards women.

workers were able to spend time with their spouses, partners, or children, during their rest days which greatly helped to alleviate their sense of isolation. However, such cases were the exception rather than the rule. Most workers in Hong Kong were not so lucky and could only look at domestic workers in Canada and Italy with envy.

However, securing a job as a migrant domestic worker in Hong Kong is significantly easier compared to getting a job in Canada, Italy or any other country in the West. First, a Hong Kong job does not require any substantial human capital requirements except a high school diploma. As a result, both college dropouts and high school graduates are able to secure jobs here. In addition, both male and female prospective migrants are allowed to apply for jobs as domestic workers in Hong Kong. A prospective migrant's only real hurdle to entering Hong Kong is the still-large financial outlay required to pay the recruitment agency fees, which in 2008, ranged from PHP80,000-100,000 (or US\$1,800-2,250) and included the cost of airfare from the Philippines to Hong Kong, medical examination fees, visa fees and POEA fees. This is despite Hong Kong's standard contract stating that employers are responsible for covering the cost of all of these expenses for their domestic worker.<sup>18</sup> Prospective migrants are usually expected to pay these fees to recruitment agencies upfront which constitutes a significant financial burden, roughly 40-50% of the average annual income of a family in the Philippines based on 2009 figures. Prospective migrants often take out high-interest loans from private lending companies or acquaintances in the Philippines to help make these payments and, depending on their repayment plan, may take up to a year to pay off their loan (Varia 2007).

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<sup>18</sup> Hong Kong's standard employment contract for domestic workers is available at <http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehhtml/id407form.htm>. Retrieved on February 17, 2011.

## *Singapore*

Similar to Hong Kong, the Singapore government instituted a program in 1978 to allow foreign nationals to work within its borders as temporary live-in household workers. Statistics about the numbers of domestic worker permits issued by the Singapore government each year are not regularly published, but one estimate holds that by 2007, there were 160,000 foreign domestic workers living in this island of four million people, one for every seven households (Yeoh 2007). Most of these workers come from the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. The majority of Filipino domestic workers arrive on tourist visas and then use a Singapore-based maid placement agency to find an employer and process the necessary paperwork (Yeoh, Huang and Gonzalez III 1999). As a result, while they have legal work permits from the Singapore government, they are “invisible” to the Philippine government which makes it difficult to trust the Philippine government’s data on the volume of the Filipino migration flow to Singapore.<sup>19</sup> Philippine government statistics significantly undercount the flow of Filipino domestic workers to Singapore, putting the number at only 1,962.

Unlike in Hong Kong, only women can work as migrant domestic workers in Singapore, and they must be between 23 and 50 years of age when they first apply for a work permit. Applicants need only possess a high school diploma but they must pass a

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<sup>19</sup> The Philippine government mandates that all out-going labor migrants first secure authorization from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, attempting to ensure that the government collects accurate statistics on the volume of labor migration flows out of the country. The government argues that going through official channels ensures that migrant workers can be adequately protected by the Philippine state in the event of abuse or contractual violations while overseas (Rodriguez 2010). However, this requirement also imposes an additional financial burden (in the form of various fees charged by government agencies) on prospective migrants, encouraging some migrants to attempt to sidestep it. With certain countries such as Singapore, this is easier to do so than with others, such as Taiwan which requires a signed authorization from the Philippine government before a work permit can be issued (Rodriguez 2010).

series of tests soon after their arrival in Singapore to prove that they have the basic skills needed to work as a domestic servant.<sup>20</sup>

In terms of labor protections, Singapore is not as progressive as Hong Kong. For instance, there is no minimum wage rate mandated by the government and also no mandated weekly day of rest. It is left to employers' discretion to provide workers with a weekly rest day and a decent living wage.<sup>21</sup> As a result, the living and working conditions that domestic workers endure in Singapore can vary widely. Filipinos, by virtue of their reputation as being better educated and more "modern" than workers from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and other Asian countries, command the highest wages in the local market, amounting to SG\$400 or more a month (roughly US\$300 a month) (Human Rights Watch 2005). Filipino domestic workers also often enjoy a weekly or at least a bi-weekly rest day, compared to other nationalities. However, all domestic workers (even Filipino ones) have access to fewer workplace protections in Singapore compared to Hong Kong. Most critically, they are not covered under Singapore's Employment Act which regulates the working hours, rest periods and annual leave for most other occupations.<sup>22</sup>

Singapore is particularly wary of low-skilled temporary migrant workers settling within its borders and therefore imposes strict regulations to ensure that migrant workers leave the country once their contracts have ended. Employers are required to pay a hefty SG\$5,000 (or US\$4,000) "security deposit" to the government which will be forfeited if

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.mom.gov.sg/foreign-manpower/passes-visas/work-permit-fdw/before-you-apply/Pages/basic-requirements-of-a-foreign-domestic-worker.aspx>. Retrieved on February 7, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Starting in 2013, all new contracts will require employers to give their workers a weekly rest day or come to an arrangement with them to pay them extra for working seven days a week.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.mom.gov.sg/foreign-manpower/passes-visas/work-permit-fdw/before-you-apply/Pages/default.aspx>. Part of the reason for this security deposit is to artificially raise the cost of employing a maid, constraining the market for foreign domestic workers.

their domestic worker goes missing.<sup>23</sup> (The possibility of this occurrence is sometimes raised as the reason why employers restrict their workers' movements outside their house and do not provide them rest days.) There are also guidelines aimed at restricting marriages between locals and foreign low-skilled workers. Foreign domestic workers are required to undergo a medical examination every six months and, if they are found to be pregnant, are liable to be deported back to the Philippines if they choose to carry the pregnancy to term.<sup>24</sup> Hinting at the sexual stereotypes that circulate about promiscuous domestic workers who seek to steal their female employers' husbands, one of the conditions of migrants' work permits is that "the foreign worker shall not indulge or be involved in any illegal, immoral or undesirable activities, including breaking up families in Singapore" (Singapore Ministry of Manpower 2010:8). Doing so can result in the revocation of the migrant's work permit.

Offsetting the above restrictions is the cost of securing a job in Singapore which is significantly less than what a job in Hong Kong costs. Migrant domestic workers from the Philippines pay on average PHP50,000-60,000 (or US\$1,100-1,300, which is between 25-30% of their average annual family income) for a job in Singapore. Recruitment agencies also regularly accept part-payment of these required agency fees through a series of monthly salary deductions over the course of six to ten months after the worker has already started their tenure overseas, which can sometimes save these workers from having to take out a costly loan.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.mom.gov.sg/foreign-manpower/passes-visas/work-permit-fdw/before-you-apply/Pages/default.aspx#termination>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.mom.gov.sg/foreign-manpower/passes-visas/work-permit-fdw/inform-mom/Pages/medical-examination.aspx>

<sup>25</sup> The payment of agency fees through monthly salary deductions is a controversial topic. Scholars argue that it results in slave-like conditions for migrant domestic workers during their first few months of employment where they effectively work for no pay at all. They are completely dependent on their



Abuse does also occur on a regular basis in Singapore (and Hong Kong). The Philippine Embassy and the Sri Lankan High Commission in Singapore receive between 40-80 complaints of workplace abuse a month from their nationals (Human Rights Watch 2005:3). And between 1999 and 2005, at least 147 migrant domestic workers died from workplace accidents or suicide, most of them by jumping or falling from residential buildings (Human Rights Watch 2005:38). However, when comparing the situation facing migrant domestic workers in Singapore with that facing workers in the Middle East, it appears that abuse occurs at a much lower frequency in Singapore and is usually of a less egregious nature.

The government of Singapore is also extremely sensitive to any external criticism of its policies, particularly its human rights record, and this sensitivity has paradoxically (but constructively) helped push the government to recently introduce additional protections for domestic workers. A December 2005 report by the US-based non-profit Human Rights Watch criticizing the poor working conditions of foreign domestic workers in the country was strongly denounced by the Singapore government (Singapore Ministry of Manpower 2005a, b) with the Minister of Manpower issuing a public statement claiming that the report “grossly exaggerates the abuse and lack of rights of foreign domestic workers in Singapore” and that domestic workers “receive full protection under Singapore’s laws” (Singapore Ministry of Manpower 2006). But soon afterwards, and much more quietly, the government introduced a series of changes to its

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employer’s goodwill to be provided with a basic allowance for small purchases such as a phonecard to call home (ILO 2010). But, during my interviews with study participants, the vast majority of migrants described this payment option as an advantage that made Singapore more attractive as a destination. This payment plan lowered the cost barriers to migration, making it more accessible to low-capital migrants. When making their destination decision, migrants assumed that since they were being provided room and board by their employers, they could survive without any earnings for a few months. This issue will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

regulations governing foreign domestic workers. In July 2006, a standard contract was issued that all Singapore-based employment agencies were required to use if they wanted to stay accredited (Human Rights Watch 2006a). This contract requires that employers provide their domestic servants with three adequate meals a day over and above their salary. Also, employers who request a replacement maid must now give their former domestic servant the chance to seek alternative employment in Singapore before repatriating them. In October 2006, the Ministry of Manpower promised to conduct random interviews of first-time domestic servants to ask them about their working conditions. In December of that same year, guidebooks were also sent to all employers, outlining their rights and responsibilities towards their domestic servants. In tandem, the penalties against employers found guilty of abusing their workers were considerably tightened, most likely in an attempt to *scare* employers into treating their domestic workers properly. The rape of a worker now results in imprisonment for eight to 20 years and caning with at least 12 strokes, while wrongful confinement of a worker within her employer's home results in up to one year of imprisonment and/or a SG\$1,000 (or US\$780) fine.<sup>26</sup> It is not clear what effect these measures have had on workers' living and working conditions but they do represent a good faith effort on the part of the Singapore government to protect these workers from abuse.

### *United Arab Emirates*

The oil-fueled economic growth of countries in the Middle East from the 1970s onwards led to a surge in demand in the Persian Gulf for foreign workers of all stripes

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.mom.gov.sg/foreign-manpower/passes-visas/work-permit-fdw/before-you-apply/Pages/default.aspx#abuse>

(Castles and Miller 2003). This demand was particularly acute in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a federation of seven monarchies in possession of the world's sixth-largest oil reserves. This continues to be the case today. In 2000, the UAE's foreign worker population made up 90.4% of its total national labor force (Esim and Smith 2004). Of these foreign workers, migrant domestic workers form a significant proportion, and among female migrants to the UAE, domestic workers make up the single largest occupational bloc. Over 100,000 temporary visas were issued to domestic workers in 1999 alone (Sabban 2004) and there are an estimated 600,000 domestic workers in the UAE in total (Jureidini 2010). Rima Sabban (2004) writes that a local culture that denigrates any kind of manual work, and the high per capita income of UAE citizens, are the primary reasons why the average Emirati household employs, not one, but *two* domestic workers. In fact, current government ceilings on the employment of domestic servants allows an Emirati couple with two children to employ "two [live-in] domestic helpers, a nanny, a driver, a cook and a gardener" (Sabban 2004, p. 99).

In 2010, the UAE was the third most important destination for Filipino migrant domestic workers, with 13,184 newly-hired Filipinas flying to the UAE that year, behind only Hong Kong (with 8,602 Filipino domestic workers) and Kuwait (with 21,554) (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2011). Traditionally, Filipino domestic workers were considered "trophy maids," prized because of their English language skills and relatively high education (Sabban 2004). In recent years, however, the share of the domestic worker market controlled by Filipinos has substantially decreased as many of them have successfully moved out of domestic work and secured better paid and higher

status jobs in the local hospitality and retail industries.<sup>27</sup> (These jobs still require short-term work permits with no option for family reunification or permanent residence.) In addition, Indonesians and Sri Lankans are increasing their share of the UAE market, helped by the lower wages they are willing to accept. While Filipino workers generally receive the highest wages in the Emirati market (AED1,470 or approximately US\$400 a month),<sup>28</sup> Bangladeshi workers receive the lowest (AED750 or US\$200 a month).<sup>29</sup>

Despite their “trophy maid” status, working conditions for Filipino domestic workers are still poor in the UAE. A survey of 51 domestic workers in the UAE conducted by the International Labour Organization in 2002 found that workers clocked an average of 105 working hours per week, had no overtime pay, did not receive any rest days each month and had no social security coverage. In addition, 50% reported being abused (physically, sexually, and/or verbally) by their employers. Their freedom of movement was also somewhat restricted and all of them had their passports withheld by their employers (Esim and Smith 2004:18). By Emirati law, workers are guaranteed one month of paid leave for each year of work, but it is left to employers to decide if their employee should also receive a weekly (or even monthly) rest day and, as mentioned above, few employers grant this respite to their workers.

The UAE government has begun to recognize the vulnerable position in which foreign domestic workers are placed when they work within the confines of private homes. In recent years, it has made some effort to regulate this sector. Domestic workers

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<sup>27</sup> Thus, surprisingly, this Middle Eastern country offers migrant domestic workers more opportunities for vertical mobility than Asian labor-importers like Hong Kong and Singapore. This partly explains its out-size popularity among Filipino migrants.

<sup>28</sup> <http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/uae/employment/basic-wage-of-filipino-maids-double-1.155505>

<sup>29</sup> <http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/uae/general/minimum-wage-means-we-can-no-longer-afford-to-hire-maids-1.89976>

are still not covered under the country's national labor laws (Sabban 2004) but, in 2007, the government issued a standard employment contract<sup>30</sup> covering the minimum wages, holidays and medical coverage to which all employers of foreign domestic workers must adhere (Wall Street Journal 2007). A government agency has also been established to mediate between employers and employees in the case of any disputes. The UAE government is currently considering a bill that would more closely align domestic workers' rights with the ILO's Convention on Domestic Workers, including a weekly day off, a written contract and an end-of-service gratuity among other protections. The UAE cabinet passed a draft of the bill in January 2012 and it must now be approved by the Federal National Council before the UAE President can sign it into law.<sup>31</sup>

While living conditions in the UAE can be harsh, they are reportedly still not as restrictive as in Saudi Arabia. Female workers in the UAE are not required to cover themselves with an *abaya*—the loose black robe and head covering that are commonly worn by women in more conservative Muslim countries when they go outdoors—and they do not always need a male chaperone to accompany them. Sabban reports that “one can easily find domestic workers, males and females, going from house to house, working part time and on an hourly rate” (2004:100). Though Sabban is writing about the pervasive underground market for waged domestic work that exists in the UAE, her observation points to the relative freedom of movement available to some migrant domestic workers in that country. Non-Muslim foreigners also have the freedom to

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<sup>30</sup> A copy of the new standard contract can be viewed here: [http://www.poea.gov.ph/advisory/advisory12\\_07.pdf](http://www.poea.gov.ph/advisory/advisory12_07.pdf) (Retrieved January 25, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> <http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/uae/employment/domestic-workers-get-more-protection-from-exploitation-1.1016692>. Accessed on May 6, 2012.

practice their religion (though not the right to proselytize)<sup>32</sup> and so Christian domestic workers, for instance, are able to attend church services on Sundays if their employers permit. The ability to leave their employer's residence to attend services once a week and mingle with their fellow domestic workers, even if only for a couple of hours, helps mitigate the many restrictions these workers have to endure during the rest of their work week. And Filipino workers are often in a position to negotiate for such terms with their employers because of their higher status within the migrant domestic worker market.

The cost of securing a job as a foreign domestic worker in the UAE ranges between PHP13,500 and PHP20,000 (or US\$300-445), roughly between 6-8.5% of the average Filipino family income in 2009 (Agunias 2010:11) but most recruitment agencies allow migrants to pay at least a portion of their fees through salary deductions over the course of three to six months after they have started working. Thus, even though wage rates in Singapore and the UAE for Filipino domestic workers are roughly on par, the net cost of securing a job in the UAE is significantly lower.

### *Saudi Arabia*

There are over 1.2 million migrant domestic workers in Saudi Arabia (Human Rights Watch 2008) and, among Filipinos, Saudi Arabia is the fourth most common destination for newly hired domestic workers. In 2010, a total of 11,582 newly-hired Filipino domestic workers left for this desert kingdom (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2011).<sup>33</sup> This is despite the fact that domestic workers in Saudi Arabia are

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90223.htm> (Retrieved February 17, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Six out of the top ten destination countries for newly-hired domestic workers leaving the Philippines in 2010 were Middle Eastern countries, amounting to 62 percent of the volume of migrants going to the top ten destinations (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2011).

frequently exposed to high levels of abuse, contract violations, extreme isolation and very limited protection from local law enforcement (Human Rights Watch 2006b). In 2000 alone, there were 19,000 cases of domestic workers fleeing their Saudi employers because of mistreatment, non-payment of wages and other issues (Chammartin 2004).

Workers in Saudi Arabia are hired on temporary, renewable contracts that can last anywhere between six months to three years (Silvey 2004). Saudi Arabia (like all Middle Eastern countries) uses the *kefala* system of sponsorship, which requires foreign workers to have a local guarantor/employer or “kafeel” (Jureidini 2010). A worker’s permit to reside in Saudi Arabia is dependent on their continued employment with their sponsor. Termination of this contract, or running away from one’s employer, results in an immediate reclassification of the worker as an illegal alien, which carries with it the likelihood of arrest, imprisonment and deportation. On paper, this system of sponsorship is similar to the migrant domestic worker programs of most countries which also tie each worker to a single employer. However, the *kefala* system of the Middle East is much more restrictive for workers and open to abuse. Local employers in Saudi Arabia are able to illegally buy and sell their sponsorship permits (and effectively their domestic workers) at immense profit and without the consent of the worker (Calandruccio 2005). In 2004, the Saudi Arabian government reported that 70 percent of all work visas issued were subsequently traded on the black market (Shah 2006). It is also common practice for employers to withhold their workers’ passports to deter any attempts to escape in the face of abuse.

Saudi Arabia provides foreign workers with no option for securing permanent residence and, much worse, very little in the way of any official policy dealing with the

treatment and protection of foreign domestic workers. Female workers are confined to their employers' residences and not allowed to move freely outside even when they are off-duty. On the rare occasions when they are allowed outside, they must be accompanied by a male member of the household at all times and must wear an *abaya*. There is also no mandatory rest day for workers and many domestic workers report having to work seven days a week for their Saudi employers.

Most likely to counteract these wide-ranging restrictions, and also to meet the strong demand for foreign maids among Saudis, recruitment agencies charge the lowest placement fees for jobs in Saudi Arabia. In 2008, the average cost of securing a work permit to Saudi Arabia was US\$200 (roughly 5% of the average annual Filipino family income) and could be paid in full through monthly salary deductions over the course of three to six months after the domestic worker had started their tenure overseas.

Interviewees called this payment approach "fly first, pay later" and it was consistently the payment method offered by recruitment agencies that sent migrants to Saudi Arabia.<sup>34</sup>

The Saudi government has recently introduced some regulations to protect foreign domestic workers from abuse (Calandruccio 2005; Human Rights Watch 2009b) but these changes are still relatively weak. A "reception center" was established for runaway domestic workers and there are now also government-run shelters in the country's three largest cities where abused female workers can live while their cases are being

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<sup>34</sup> When comparing the different payment methods adopted by recruitment agencies in the Philippines, the general pattern appears to be that agencies placing migrant workers in highly sought-after countries (such as Western nations and Hong Kong) are able to set their own terms and demand payment of all fees upfront. Agencies placing workers in less-preferred countries (such as the UAE and Singapore) are willing to accept part-payment after the commencement of employment. Finally, for jobs in Saudi Arabia, agencies accepted full payment of their fees through salary deductions. There does not appear to be any government regulations that specify which payment approach to use given that most of the exorbitant fees agencies charge migrant workers are illegal. It simply appears to be a matter of agencies responding to the varying levels of demand for different destinations.



investigated (Calandruccio 2005). In 2005, the government drafted a standard employment contract for foreign domestic workers, outlining the responsibilities of not only workers but also recruitment agencies. Four years later, it was approved by the country's Shura Council, an appointed committee that is the highest legal authority in the land, second in power only to the King and his Council of Ministers. However, as of 2010, the Council of Ministers had yet to pass this bill and make it into law, leaving workers vulnerable to continued abuse and exploitation (Human Rights Watch 2010). As further indication of the government's resistance to the introduction of any meaningful improvements in domestic workers' living conditions, the bill passed by the Shura Council in 2009 excluded the right of workers to leave their employer's residence or keep their own passports, and obliges workers to "obey" their employers at all times (Human Rights Watch 2009a, b).

In 2011, the Saudi government issued a ban on new work permits for domestic workers from the Philippines and Indonesia due to the vociferous complaints of these two countries' governments about labor conditions in Saudi Arabia.<sup>35</sup> The Philippine and Saudi governments are currently in bilateral negotiations to lift this ban. In April 2012, the Saudi government also issued minimum wage requirements of SAR600-800 (US\$160-213) for all foreign domestic workers employed within the kingdom. The Philippine government insists however that its citizens receive a minimum wage of US\$400 a month.

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/224839/pinoyabroad/saudi-arabia-bans-domestic-workers-from-the-philippines>.

## *United States*

Finally, I include a discussion of the United States' provisions for the entry of foreign domestic workers into the country, despite it not having an active program to import migrant domestic workers. The United States has not needed to resort to such a policy instrument to satisfy local demand for live-in care workers partly because of its large immigrant population.<sup>36</sup> Many immigrants (documented and undocumented) who are unable to find employment in the formal, primary labor market turn to waged domestic service as a means to earn an income (Romero 1992; Salzinger 1991). For these immigrants, waged domestic service is a failsafe job option because of its unstructured, private, unregulated and flexible nature (Romero 1992).

While it does not have a dedicated program like Canada's to import foreign domestic workers, the United States does allow some foreign domestic workers to enter the country under special non-immigrant visa categories. Foreign diplomats are allowed to bring their domestic workers with them when they are posted to the United States. The State Department issues a dependent visa (under the categories A-3, G-5, or NATO-7) to these workers and their visas are tied to their employer's visa.<sup>37</sup> Once their employer's visa expires or is revoked, the domestic worker also loses their visa status and must leave the US.

As Table 5.5 shows, only a few such visas are issued each year, and even fewer go to Filipinos. It should be noted however that the percentage of such "personal

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<sup>36</sup> In the antebellum period, many American-born African slaves worked as house servants in the homes of well-to-do Americans. Even after Emancipation, Black domestic workers continued to make up a dominant share of the domestic service market especially in the South (Katzman 1981). However, in the cities of the North, native-born Blacks were slowly crowded out of this market by newly arrived, poor immigrants from Ireland and other countries in Europe (Diner 1983; Lynch-Brennan 2009). More recently, waves of immigrants from Asia, the Caribbean, and Central and South America have filled this need (Parreñas 2001; Romero 1992; Salzinger 1991).

<sup>37</sup> More details available at [http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types\\_2638.html#8](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_2638.html#8).

attendant” visas that are issued to Filipinos is disproportionately high—averaging 17% of all such visas between 2000 and 2009—despite the large number of countries that send diplomats to the United States. These statistics seem to indicate that, within diplomatic circles, Filipino domestic workers command something of a niche.

Foreigners visiting the US for business or pleasure are on rare occasions also allowed to bring their domestic workers with them under a B-1 visa. Unfortunately, the State Department does not keep separate records for this particular sub-category of B-1 visas.<sup>38</sup> But it is unlikely that the number of migrant domestic workers entering the US on such visas is very high. As the website of the Consulate General of the United States in Hong Kong and Macau warns: “The majority of domestic helper applicants are unable to qualify for a visa to enter the United States” because it is difficult for these helpers to prove that they do not intend to stay permanently in the US since “they have already demonstrated a willingness to depart their original residence to seek contract employment in another country”.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Author interview with State Department official, December 2010.

<sup>39</sup> [http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/niv\\_domestic\\_helpers.html](http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/niv_domestic_helpers.html). Accessed on February 23, 2011.

Table 5.5  
Number of US Non-Immigrant Visas issued (in Total and to Philippine Citizens) by Visa Category, 2000-2009

Visa Category		Number of Visas Issued									
YEAR		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
A-3 <sup>a</sup>	Total visas	2,486	2,228	1,971	1,259	1,258	1,227	1,017	1,000	1,000	1,186
	Visas to Filipinos (% of total)	404 (16%)	377 (17%)	335 (17%)	178 (14%)	162 (13%)	183 (15%)	163 (16%)	185 (19%)	198 (20%)	261 (22%)
G-5 <sup>b</sup>	Total visas	1,737	1,645	1,482	1,117	945	998	940	1,058	973	911
	Visas to Filipinos (% of total)	400 (23%)	364 (22%)	306 (21%)	16 (1%)	134 (14%)	154 (15%)	136 (14%)	180 (17%)	170 (17%)	155 (17%)
NATO-7 <sup>c</sup>	Total visas	3	1	8	3	1	5	2	2	3	3
	Visas to Filipinos	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Retrieved from Department of State website on January 12, 2011. [http://www.travel.state.gov/xls/FYs97-09\\_NIVDetailTable.xls](http://www.travel.state.gov/xls/FYs97-09_NIVDetailTable.xls)

- a. A-3 visas are issued to the attendant, servant, or personal employee of an ambassador to the United States, a public minister, career diplomat, consul, foreign government official, or their immediate family.
- b. G-5 visas are issued to the attendant, servant, or personal employee of G-1 through G-4, and immediate family. G-1 diplomatic visas are issued to representatives of foreign governments who are required to enter the United States to work at an international organization such as the United Nations.
- c. NATO-7 visas are issued to the attendant, servant, or personal employee of a NATO representative

Notes:

1. 2009 data should be considered preliminary but not subject to significant change.
2. It should be noted that all three visa categories are issued to personal employees, and not just domestic workers. As such, the actual number of migrant domestic workers entering the country under these visa categories is most likely less than the numbers provided here.

Whatever their numbers, there are limited labor protections for foreign domestic workers once they are inside the United States because of their lack of coverage under federal and state labor laws either formally or in practice. State Department officials attempt to educate migrant domestic workers about their employment rights before the issuance of their visas<sup>40</sup>, but there are scattered reports of foreign workers being coerced into working long hours for minimal or no pay after their arrival in the US, having their passports confiscated by their employers, and not being allowed to leave their employers' residence.<sup>41</sup> Such cases are categorized as labor trafficking by the Department of Justice, and between 2007 and 2008, there were 313 such alleged incidents reported to various government task forces (Beck, Cohen, and Kyckelhahn 2009).<sup>42</sup>

A final category under which temporary care workers can enter the country is through the US *au pair* program which allows young foreign nationals between the ages of 18 and 26 to work as live-in caregivers for host families requiring childcare services, while simultaneously attending a post-secondary educational institution in the US.<sup>43</sup> The *au pair* program was designed as a way to help young foreign nationals be exposed to US life and culture through a work-study program, and they are *not* considered domestic workers by the government. Unlike the other categories of migrant domestic labor, there

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<sup>40</sup> During the visa application interviews at US consulates, workers are seen separately by consulate staff without their employers being present. They are provided with pamphlets explaining their rights under US law and given the toll-free number of the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, a non-profit, non-governmental organization.

<sup>41</sup> My interviews with migrant domestic workers in New York City who had worked for diplomat employers reveal that few workers are willing to report workplace abuse to the authorities. Instead, they would much rather run away from these employers and work in the underground economy where jobs as domestic workers are plentiful.

<sup>42</sup> Not all of these incidents involved migrant domestic workers but it is widely accepted that the small number of reported cases represents just a tiny fraction of the actual number of incidents of labor trafficking that occur in the US but go unreported.

<sup>43</sup> Many European countries have similar *au pair* programs that allow foreign nationals to work within their borders as part-time nannies and simultaneously study. The list of European countries includes the UK, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway.

are relatively strict regulations governing this program and a great deal more oversight.<sup>44</sup> Only 13 private agencies are licensed by the State Department to match foreign au pairs with local host families, and these au pairs are issued only 12-month visas with short extensions granted only in certain cases.

Few au pair visas are issued to Filipinos. Conversations with executives at several of the 13 sponsor agencies revealed that it is difficult for Philippine candidates to secure au pair visas. Despite often being highly qualified—many Filipino applicants are nurses—and despite being preferred by many US parents because of their reputation of being very nurturing towards children, Filipino au pair candidates often have their visa applications denied. There is an apparent concern among US consular officials in the Philippines that many of these applicants will not return to the Philippines and that they will instead attempt to find ways (both legal and illegal) to remain in the US. In response to the higher visa denial rates and longer visa processing times for Filipinos, several agencies have stopped accepting applications from au pair candidates in the Philippines. Those agencies that still accept Filipino applications only process about four to five candidates a year, of which only one or two are approved annually. As such, given the various hurdles that are tied to this visa category, it is unlikely that many Filipinos utilize the *au pair* path to enter the US. Among US-based study participants, most entered on permanent immigrant visas and then took up caregiving as a way to make ends meet when they could not find jobs in other, more formal sectors of the US economy. Others came on tourist visas, then overstayed and worked illegally as both live-in and live-out nannies, housekeepers and babysitters in order to support themselves and their families in

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<sup>44</sup> More information is available at the State Department website at <http://exchanges.state.gov/jexchanges/faq.html#4>.

the Philippines. Only two study participants had entered the US on temporary work visas as domestic workers for foreign diplomats, but both had eventually run away in the face of harsh working conditions.

### **A Cross-Country Comparison of Migrant Domestic Worker Programs**

In the preceding section, I looked at the migrant domestic worker policies of a diverse set of countries: two post-industrial Western countries (namely Canada and Italy)<sup>45</sup>, the newly industrialized Asian economies of Hong Kong and Singapore, and two high-income countries from the Middle East (Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates). Not only do these countries cover three very different geographical regions in the world, but the economic, historical, political, cultural and demographic contexts of these countries also vary greatly. All these factors have combined in different ways to drive these countries to set up programs to import migrant domestic workers. At the same time, these diverse factors have helped push each of these programs in different directions.

In contrast to Cornelius et al. (2004) who put forward a “convergence hypothesis” that advanced industrial countries have begun adopting broadly similar immigration policies in recent years, my analysis did not unearth any evidence of a broad policy convergence occurring at a global level across different countries’ migrant domestic worker programs. Instead, my investigation elicited the insight that these programs run the full gamut in terms of how a receiving country can deal with guest workers. At one end of the spectrum, these workers are promised a reasonably strong set of employment

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<sup>45</sup> I am leaving the US out of this comparative analysis given that it lacks an established migrant domestic worker program.

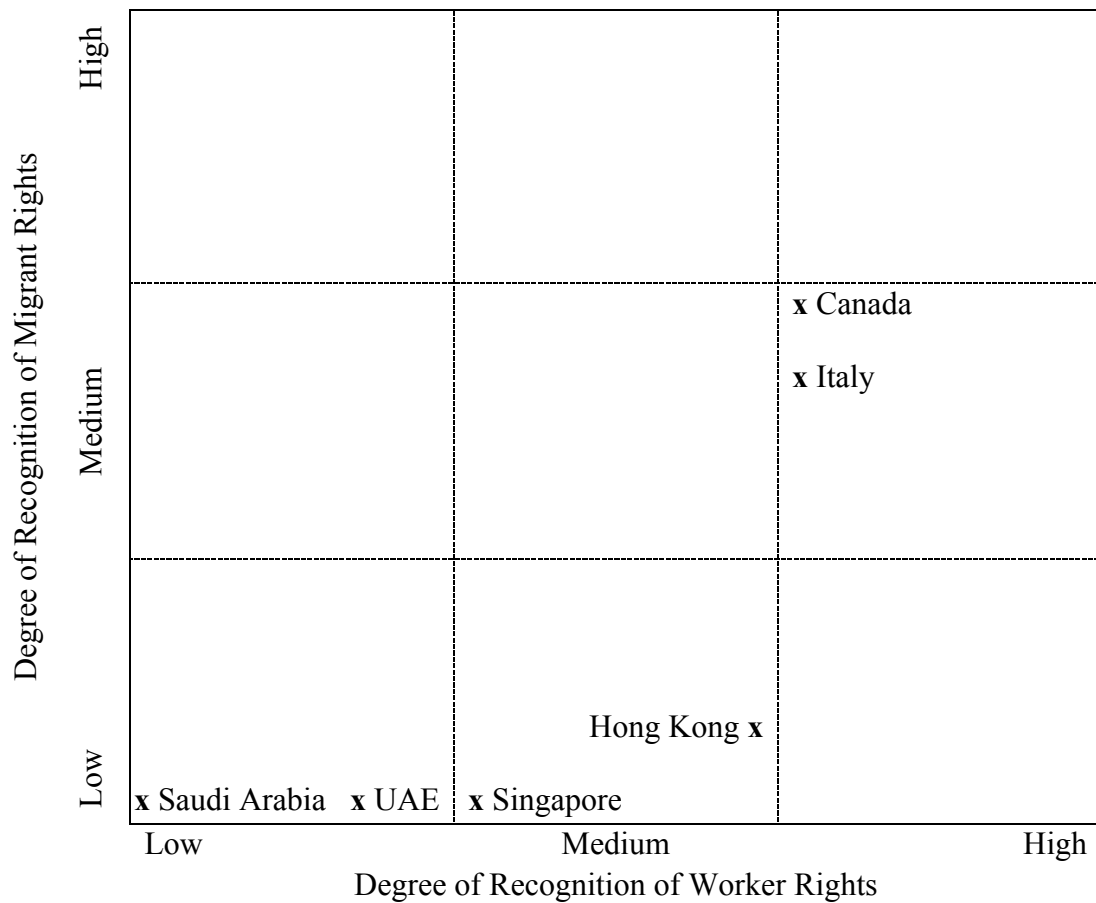
rights and some measure of migrant rights. At the other end of the spectrum, these migrant workers are viewed as little more than paid chattel to be used for a time and then returned to their home country when their usefulness has run its course.

At the same time, however, in the last ten years, all six of the countries I analyzed have inched towards providing additional workplace protections and employment rights to these guest workers. While there is no broad-based convergence emerging between programs, all six countries' programs have shifted slightly towards increased regulation of the working conditions of migrant domestic workers. In Singapore's case, this has meant the threat of harsh fines and prison sentences for employers caught mistreating their domestic workers or requiring a weekly rest day. In the case of the UAE, it has meant requiring all employers of domestic workers to follow a standard contract that spells out, among other things, the right of workers to have regular rest periods. Credit for these changes lies with the concerted efforts of local migrant worker organizations in each receiving country, but also the constant attention given to this vulnerable population by human rights organizations and the United Nations (through the work of the UNHCR, UNIFEM and the ILO). These organizations have made steady progress in this area through publicity campaigns that aim to raise local citizens' awareness of the problems facing migrant domestic workers in their respective countries and shame recalcitrant governments into doing more for these workers. The ILO's 2011 adoption of the Convention on Domestic Workers recognizing domestic workers as being entitled to the same types of protections as other workers is emblematic of continuing international efforts to demand greater workplace protections for domestic workers.



Finally, this analysis reveals that there is a clear hierarchy among these programs if we grade them according to two criteria: The degree to which a program recognizes the rights of foreign domestic workers as *migrants*, and the degree to which their rights as *workers* are recognized. The ILO only focuses on employment rights in its Convention on Domestic Workers, but the degree of migrant rights bestowed on foreign domestic workers also has a direct bearing on their long-term well-being in their host country. Using these two criteria, it is possible to rate any country's migrant domestic worker program (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1  
A Matrix of Migrant Domestic Worker Programs



## *Migrant Rights*

Cornelius et al. (1994) write that the rights-based legacy of Western nations has ensured an emphasis on the rights of migrants living in these countries even if these individuals are not permanent residents or even documented migrants. Such a statement may not ring true to migrant rights' activists in Western countries, but, in comparison to countries in Asia and the Middle East, there is a clear fault line between these latter programs and the ones in Italy and Canada: The *degree of migrant rights* (to citizenship, residency and family reunification) offered these workers (see Figure 5.1).

Despite some core differences between their migrant domestic worker programs, both Italy and Canada have adopted policies that offer (at least on paper) the possibility of migrant domestic workers securing eventual citizenship in either of these host countries. Canada recently eased the requirements for live-in foreign caregivers to qualify for permanent residence. Now caregivers have four (instead of three) years to complete their employment requirement of either 24 months or 3,900 hours to qualify for permanent residence.<sup>46</sup> And, since 1986, Italy has launched four legalization programs to assist undocumented foreign workers—particularly domestic workers—gain legal status. Italy also allows migrant domestic workers to sponsor their family members to join them overseas.

These provisions by no means imply that all foreign domestic workers in these two countries are granted their full set of migrant rights. Far from it. Partly in response to the growing anti-immigrant sentiment in Italy, the Italian government recently increased the minimum number of years of legal employment required for a long-term residence

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<sup>46</sup> [http://www.rhdcc-hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/foreign\\_workers/lcpdir/lcpone.shtml](http://www.rhdcc-hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/foreign_workers/lcpdir/lcpone.shtml). Accessed on February 10, 2011.

card from five years to six. And, as Parreñas (2008) notes, few Filipino migrant domestic workers are successful in securing Italian citizenship despite the number of years they have lived in Italy.

Meanwhile, activists in Canada point out that earlier generations of migrant domestic workers (from Europe) used to be granted citizenship rights immediately upon arrival in Canada rather than at the end of several years of employment. It is hard not to interpret this change in policy as an indication of a racial bias against more recent migrants from the Global South.

However, when compared with the situation facing domestic workers in other parts of the world, Canada and Italy are still markedly more generous. Asian countries, for instance, do not currently grant migrant domestic workers the option of family reunification or permanent residence no matter how long these workers have been employed overseas. Nor do these countries have any kind of legalization program for undocumented workers. Arrest and deportation are the only options available. These countries carefully manage their population make-up, having seen the issues encountered in the 1970s by Western countries with their nominally temporary, low-skilled guest worker programs that quickly turned permanent (Castles 2006; Martin, Abella, and Kuptsch 2005). While they are willing to grant permanent residency to high-skilled migrants, and in fact actively recruit such migrant labor to their shores, Asian countries are very wary about allowing so-called “low-skilled” migrants from settling down within their borders.

The Singaporean government has gone so far as to discourage romantic relationships between foreign domestic workers and local Singaporean men, out of a

concern about low-skilled foreign women diluting the country's stock of human capital. Middle Eastern countries meanwhile are especially fearful of how changes to their population make-up might affect the political environment within their borders. For this reason, they too do not extend the promise of citizenship or residency rights to migrant domestic workers and most other foreign workers.

### *Employment Rights*

The second fault line that divides the various migrant domestic worker programs around the world is the degree of workplace protections granted these workers. In the case of Middle Eastern countries (with the exception of Israel), the domestic service sector remains largely unregulated and unprotected (International Labor Organization 2010). In both the UAE and Saudi Arabia, there are few laws on the books governing how migrant domestic workers should be treated. Migrant domestic workers are not protected under these countries' national labor laws (Calandruccio 2005; Sabban 2004) and what few laws exist are not enforced with any regularity. Workers in both countries report an inability to rely on the local police or immigration officials to protect them from exploitative or abusive employers (Human Rights Watch 2008; 2009a; 2009b). In addition, the *kefala* system of sponsorship that makes domestic workers completely dependent on their employer, establishes a structural vulnerability that compounds the pre-existing vulnerability workers face because of their confinement within their employer's residence. Human Rights Watch has documented repeated incidences of employers in Saudi Arabia brutalizing their domestic workers with impunity (Human Rights Watch 2010). It is true that the United Arab Emirates is a more permissive society

than Saudi Arabia and, as a result, domestic workers in the UAE are able to venture out of their employers' houses on errands such as grocery shopping and taking their employer's children to the park or for a doctor's appointment (Sabban 2004), something that workers in Saudi Arabia would never be allowed to do by themselves. The ability to perform these simple tasks independently allows workers in the UAE to interact, however briefly, with other migrant domestic workers and build friendships that can help alleviate their sense of isolation. However, even in the UAE, workers complain about frequent incidences of abuse (verbal, physical and sexual) at the hands of their employers that go unpunished and, in this regard, the country is still very similar to Saudi Arabia in its treatment of low-skilled foreign workers.

In contrast, Singapore, Hong Kong, Canada and Italy all regulate their migrant domestic worker industry (to varying degrees, of course) and this government oversight extends to monitoring how employers treat their foreign workers. The legal and judicial systems in all four countries are available to protect foreign workers from exploitation or abuse. Abuse continues to occur (especially in Hong Kong and Singapore) but having a police and court system that is independent and impartial enough to protect workers' rights (however limited they may be) does help to improve the overall work environment in these countries. Of these four countries, Singapore's regulations are the weakest given that migrant domestic workers are not covered under its national labor laws. However, this island-nation has made significant strides in recent years in its efforts to protect migrant domestic workers from employer and agency abuse. In the other three countries, migrant domestic workers enjoy substantively more protections.

However, none of these six countries decouple migrant domestic workers' work permits from their sponsoring employer and, as a result, workers in these countries still often feel beholden to their employers and are wary of complaining about ill treatment in case they lose their work permit status as a result. In addition, none of these countries allow workers to "live out" in a separate residence from their employer, which would again reduce workers' exposure to the possibility of abuse or overwork. Canada and Italy do require employers to provide a private room to their domestic workers, ensuring that workers in these countries enjoy a measure of privacy even while living in their employer's residence. This is a better arrangement than in space-constrained Hong Kong and Singapore where employers are only asked to provide their employees with some amount of privacy, but are not required to give them their own room. But overall, there is still "room" for improvement on this front even in Canada and Italy.

### **Transnational Labor Markets and Multistate Migration**

The state of affairs described in this chapter constitutes a transnational labor market for migrant domestic workers. I characterize this labor market as "transnational," even though there does not exist complete free movement of migrant domestic workers across national borders as exists within the European Union (EU) for EU citizens and permanent residents. In the case of migrant domestic workers (from the Philippines and other countries in the Global South), their movement from one receiving country to the next is still constrained by both sending and receiving country immigration policies. However, migrant domestic workers in one country are still able to use the capital

(human, financial, social and cultural) that they have acquired working in one country to seek similar employment in another country.

Taking the case of Canada as an example, the Canadian government requires live-in caregiver (LIC) applicants to have undergone a six-month caregiving course *or* possess at least one year's worth of caregiving experience. This caregiving experience can easily be acquired while working overseas in another destination. Over 80% of study participants in Canada fell into this category, having worked in at least one intermediate destination country before arriving in Canada. And, as Table 5.6 shows, this pattern most likely holds true for all Filipino migrant domestic workers entering Canada, reflected in the discrepancy in the national-level statistics published by the Canadian and Philippine governments regarding the number of live-in caregiver visas issued to Filipinos each year. In 2008, a total of 10,120 caregiver applications from Filipino citizens were approved by the Canadian government. However, the Philippine government's official statistics indicate that only 1,853 Filipino caregivers were deployed to Canada from the Philippines in 2008 (POEA 2010). This mismatch between the data published by the Philippine and Canadian governments has existed since 2003. In fact, Table 5.6 shows a steady increase in this data mismatch from 2003 (when the shortfall was roughly 2,000 migrants) until 2008—the latest year for which full statistics are available—when there was a mismatch of over 8,000 individuals.

Table 5.6  
Comparison of Live-in Caregiver Statistics  
Published by Canada & the Philippines, 2003-2009

Year	Canadian Entry Statistics: Approved Applications from Filipinos	Philippine Departure Statistics: Deployed Caregivers to Canada	Data Mismatch
2003	3,883	1,811	2,072
2004	5,273	2,527	2,746
2005	5,953	753	5,200
2006	7,483	1,992	5,491
2007	11,025	4,170	6,855
2008	10,120	1,853	8,267
2009	5,779 <sup>1</sup>	1,406 <sup>1</sup>	4,373

Sources: Immigration Canada & Philippine Overseas Employment Administration

Notes:

1. 2009 statistics purchased from the Canadian government only represent data collected from January to September 2009. In contrast, 2009 statistics published by the Philippine government represent data for all of 2009. Despite this discrepancy in the reporting periods, the Canadian entry figures are significantly higher than the Philippine departure figures.

I interpret this data mismatch as representing Filipinos who applied to enter Canada as live-in caregivers while working in other destination countries such as Hong Kong. These latter destinations serve as “stepping stones” to accumulate sorely-needed migrant capital and allow migrants to bypass being counted (and taxed) by the Philippine migration bureaucracy. The steady increase in the numbers of such multistate migrant domestic workers indicates the increasing popularity of such a strategy.

A similar mismatch in immigration statistics can be observed between the United States and the Philippines. The Philippine government reports that less than 60 Filipinos entered the US as newly hired migrant domestic workers each year between 2005 and 2009 (see Table 5.2). But the US government’s statistics on entering Filipino domestic workers are significantly higher—averaging 440 domestic workers each year (see Table 5.5). Given that most of these 400-plus Filipino migrant domestic workers are not



registered with the Philippine government, it is plausible that they entered the United States after having first worked in an intermediate destination country.

Maid placement agencies in destination countries also play an important role in the creation of this transnational labor market for migrant domestic workers. These agencies usually partner with a recruitment agency in the Philippines to screen and process willing Filipinos who are eager to find work as domestic workers overseas. But increasingly, these agencies also partner with agencies in other destination countries, or directly recruit from the existing stock of overseas domestic workers. During my fieldwork in both Singapore and Hong Kong, I frequently observed flyers in the windows of local maid placement agencies that were aimed at foreign maids, rather than their Singaporean or Hong Kong employers. These posters had headings such as “Canada Need (*sic*) Caregivers” and “From Singapore to Canada”, and were advertising how these agencies could help place Filipino domestic workers in Asia in caregiver positions in Canada. Other Singapore- and Hong Kong-based agencies advertised domestic worker positions in Italy and Spain. In this manner, these maid placement agencies are what I call “agents of globalization,” actively promoting the multistate migration journeys of Filipino migrant domestic workers.

These agencies also set the stage for multistate migration through the imposition of a sliding scale fee structure that makes it more cost-effective for aspiring migrants to apply for positions in the West from intermediate destinations like Hong Kong and Singapore, rather than directly from the Philippines. As Table 5.1 reveals, a Philippines-based applicant for a LIC position in Canada would be expected to pay up to US\$16,000 in agency fees. In contrast, an applicant based in Hong Kong is typically charged only

between US\$3,500 and US\$6,600, which represents a significant cost saving for the applicant. In addition, once in Hong Kong, the applicant would be earning much more than she could make if she were still in the Philippines when she applied to Canada. For all these reasons, study participants often counseled their network contacts in the Philippines to first seek work in what they called “stepping stone” countries like Singapore and Hong Kong, before attempting to apply for positions in the West. These country reputations will be addressed in further detail in the following chapter.

### **Conclusion**

Prospective migrants who choose waged domestic service as their exit strategy from the Philippines, have a wide selection of destination options available to them. These countries range from Western nations like Canada, Italy, Greece and Cyprus, to Asian countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea, to most Middle Eastern nations such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain. This chapter focused on six of these countries (and the US), selected to represent the four major world regions where Filipino migrant domestic workers can be found. The policy realities concerning each of these countries’ migrant domestic worker programs were examined: Both the policies on the books (such as their entry requirements for migrant workers, labor laws and regulations) and the policy praxis on the ground (such as the non-enforcement of labor laws).

This analysis revealed that these six countries’ programs vary significantly. Advanced Western nations like Italy and Canada confer the highest degree of both employment and migrant rights, while countries of the Middle East provide the least.

Asian countries such as Singapore and Hong Kong provide no migrant rights to these low-status workers but they do provide more labor protections than do Middle Eastern countries, primarily as a function of their being freer societies in general. All of these differences are reflected in the cost of securing entry into each of these markets. The more comfortable the living and working conditions (and the higher the net wages) available in a country, the more expensive the fees charged by recruitment agencies to secure a work visa to that destination. A Filipino earning the average national income in 2009 would be hard-pressed to scrounge together sufficient funds to cover the fees required for a work permit to Canada. A job in the Middle East, on the other hand, costs as little as 5% of the average annual household income in the Philippines.

There are also concrete policy differences between these countries in terms of the particular personal characteristics (or migrant human capital) they expect newly arrived domestic workers to possess. These entry requirements relate to workers' gender, age, educational qualifications, language abilities, health and work experience. In order to work as a live-in caregiver in Canada, a prospective migrant must possess the equivalent of a Canadian high school diploma, which amounts to at least two years of tertiary education for a Filipino migrant. An applicant must also prove their English/French fluency and possess a caregiver training certificate or relevant work experience lasting at least one year. In contrast, there are no educational qualifications required to secure a position as a domestic worker in the Middle East.

The amount of migrant capital resources a prospective migrant domestic worker possesses thus interacts with different host countries' migrant domestic worker policies and praxis to determine which destinations the migrant can realistically expect to enter on

their first attempt to leave the Philippines. Few prospective Filipino migrant domestic workers are able to enter Canada's live-in caregiver program directly from the Philippines. In contrast, a job in the Middle East is within the reach of most prospective migrants (whether they desire it or not as a destination). Thus, varying program requirements interact with potential migrants' access to capital to directly shape their migration trajectories.

At the same time, the transnational labor market for migrant domestic workers encourages these migrants to adopt *multistate* migration trajectories in order to reach those country markets that provide better living and working conditions, but are harder to enter. A job as a domestic worker in Hong Kong allows a migrant to save some money to pay the agency fees for a Canadian LCP work permit. In Hong Kong, the migrant would also be accumulating useful work experience that would make her more attractive to prospective employers in Canada and allow her to avoid enrolling in an expensive six-month caregiver course. The migrant might even be able to make new acquaintances in Hong Kong who could directly match her with a Canadian employer. Finally, maid agencies in Canada actively recruit migrant domestic workers from intermediate destinations such as Hong Kong and Singapore that are deemed to serve as suitable training grounds and de facto credentialing centers. Workers from these countries pay significantly lower fees for a job in Canada. For all these reasons, applying to Canada from outside the Philippines can be a more efficient strategy. Along these lines, Chapter Six will provide firsthand accounts from study participants to show how Hong Kong and Singapore have developed reputations as ideal "stepping stones" for more preferred destinations in the West.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The World According to Migrant Domestic Workers

The migration literature has long recognized that prospective migrants often choose from several destination options. Destination characteristics that have been found to play a significant role in shaping a migrant's destination decisions include, but are not limited to, each potential destination's distance from the migrant's origin country/city, the concentration of co-ethnic residents in each overseas location, the relative cultural familiarity of the locations, the overall quality of life offered, and the economic opportunities available (Bauer, Epstein, and Gang 2005; Jones 1978; Le 2008; McConnell 2008; McHugh and Morgan 1984; Ratha and Shaw 2007; Roseman 1983).

However, these studies typically take a positivistic approach to understanding the destination decision-making process. They assume, first, that prospective migrants are fully aware of these factual differences across destinations, and second, that migrants rationally and objectively weigh the costs and benefits of different countries when making their destination decision. These studies fail to recognize that migrants arrive at their destination decisions using so-called "data" about different host countries that may or may not be entirely based on fact. First-time international labor migrants typically choose between countries they have never visited, making their destination decision in an environment of uncertainty, based on the *perceived* attributes of various destination

options.<sup>1</sup> To a large extent, the same situation applies to repeat migrants considering new destinations to travel to. Therefore, if we want to understand how migrant domestic workers' initial and subsequent destination decisions are made, it is not enough to analyze the very real policy differences between different countries' migrant domestic worker programs (as we did in Chapter Five). It is also important to look into how such policies are understood and interpreted by the migrant domestic workers that these programs directly target. Simply put, we need to view the world of destination options through the eyes of migrant domestic workers.

This chapter, therefore, is an attempt to insert some intersubjectivity into the scholarly discussion over the destination decision-making process. Such an effort has its ontological roots in Weber's call for *Verstehen* or "understanding" of the meanings individuals attach to the world around them. Together with Chapter Five, it is also a direct application of Bourdieu's "structural constructivism." With that aim in mind, this chapter charts participants' cognitive maps of the world, investigates the process by which these mental maps were constructed and discusses the impact these maps have on participants' destination preferences.

This analysis reveals that there is a clear *destination hierarchy* in the minds of prospective migrant domestic workers from the Philippines, one that is consistent across study participants, grouped as they are by nationality, occupation, religion and, to some extent, socioeconomic class. This shared destination hierarchy is a personally and socially constructed, tiered ranking of migrants' destination preferences, with Western

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<sup>1</sup> Um and Crompton (1990) make a similar point with respect to tourists' destination decisions.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124028/700-million-worldwide-desire-migrate-permanently.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> The average age of Canadian-based participants when they first arrived in Canada was 33 years. This is significantly higher than the average age of all study participants when they first left the Philippines to work abroad (28 years) given that the vast majority of Canadian participants had worked for several years in intermediate destinations before finding employment in Canada.

countries at the very top, followed by Asian countries, and finally, the Middle East. Up to this point, participants' destination hierarchy closely matches the more objective country and region ranking presented in Chapter Three. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that migrants' destination hierarchy is imbued with cognitive biases and affect-laden thinking. Together, these findings give us an insight into how migrants make their short- and long-term destination decisions, and also why they might pursue multicountry migration trajectories characterized by more optimism than rationality.

### **The Literature on Destination Perceptions**

Both the migration and tourism research literatures teach us that all prospective travelers—migrants and tourists—carry around in their heads an “awareness set” of potential destinations. Simply put, this awareness set is the collection of all possible destination countries that the prospective traveler is passively aware of through information about the world that they have accumulated over time (Um and Crompton 1990; Brown, Malecki and Philliber 1977). However, these cognitive maps are not always accurate (Malmberg 1997; Lee 1966:50). A century ago, Charles Trowbridge wrote that migrants carried in their heads misperceptions about the world around them that were “entirely imaginary, and erroneous” (1913:890). Trowbridge was referring primarily to individuals' assumptions about the distance and orientation of faraway destinations from their current location, but he noted that there exist other dimensions of *misinformation* in peoples' understandings of the world around them. In other words, when migrants make destination decisions that appear unintuitive to an impartial observer, it is not necessarily the case that these migrants are being irrational in their

destination choice, but rather that the information they use to make their decision may be inaccurate. Jones (1978) finds that migration flows are shaped more by migrants' *perceptions* about living and working conditions than objective measures of these factors. In addition, when prospective migrants receive information about different destinations, they process this information through a "perceptual filter" (Gould and White 1986:26) that may bias them in one way or another towards particular destination data.

Where do these perceptions of and biases toward/against different potential destinations originate? Arjun Appadurai (1996) uses the term "mediascapes" to highlight the role of mass media in creating an image of the world of destination options that may not necessarily be grounded in fact. Likewise, there is evidence that governments—through their internally-focused propaganda machines and externally-focused tourism divisions—can play a critical role in influencing prospective migrants' destination perceptions (Buchanan 2007; Jones 1978).

Migrants' social networks can also play a decisive role shaping their views of a country either positively or negatively, with individuals more likely to believe the opinions of prior migrants with whom they share strong ties. Most of the literature on the role of migrant networks on the destination decision has focused on how the existence of network contacts in a particular destination increases the odds of migration to the same location by reducing the costs of migration (Garip 2008; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Other social scientists have found a herd effect whereby prospective migrants simply follow earlier migrants to the same location, even if they cannot rely on them to ease their transition upon arrival (Bauer, Epstein, and Gang 2002). But the social mechanisms underlying these causal effects are interpersonal information



flows from destination to origin. Earlier migrants may send back glowing reports of their host country to potential migrants in the homeland. Communication may also occur unconsciously and without words, through the gifts migrants purchase for their relatives in the home country and the generous remittances they send home. Such actions signal that the country in which the migrant works is most likely a good destination for future migrants as well.

The converse of this situation occurs when prior migrants who endured negative experiences—in the form of hardship or abuse—in a particular destination dampen future migration flows to that country. When they return home prematurely, as a result of the voluntary or involuntary early termination of their contracts, prior migrants signal that life in that particular destination is difficult. And while prospective migrants might understand in the abstract that a single negative incident is insufficient to condemn an entire country, if this incident (involving someone they know personally) occurs on top of existing negative stories they have heard through their local grapevine or through the mass media, it may be sufficient to downgrade a country's worthiness as a potential destination in their minds.

A prospective migrant's social context, coupled with their particular life-stage, can also influence how they process any destination information they receive, biasing them towards (or against) particular countries (Woodside and MacDonald 1994; Moutinho 1987; van Raaij and Francken 1984; Lee 1966). Older migrants may be more risk-averse when it comes to selecting a destination. Potential migrants who are single and still living under their parents' roof may give greater deference to their parents'

destination preferences. Likewise, potential migrants who are female and married may be influenced by their husbands' worldviews.

There may also be cultural or historical reasons behind the filters prospective migrants use to process the destination information they receive (Sassen 1998, 1989). Saarinen (1973) finds that Canadian students are more likely to know of and consider other Commonwealth countries important, compared to non-Commonwealth countries. Likewise, Filipinos appear to have an inherent preference for the United States because of their status as former colonial subjects of the US (Asis 2006; Rimonte 1997). From surveys with over 250,000 adults in 135 countries between 2007 and 2009, Gallup found that the United States was the most popular destination mentioned by respondents, with nearly 24% of all respondents listing it as their desired future residence.<sup>2</sup> The United States' popularity is tied to the mythology of the American Dream of safety, security and freedom from want, which has lured millions of immigrants to its shores since the country's founding and continues to do so today, whether or not it is still accurate or achievable (Sassen 1988; Handlin 1973). In a similar manner, other destinations may hold a pre-existing allure (or repulsion) for migrants that colors all subsequent information they are given about these countries and their migrant domestic worker programs.

Having discussed, at a theoretical level, some of the factors that may influence prospective migrants' perceptions about different destination options, the next section provides excerpts from study participants' interviews to give a sense of how these migrants saw and understood the world of destinations available to them.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124028/700-million-worldwide-desire-migrate-permanently.aspx>

## Participants' Destination Perceptions

Participants' pre-arrival perceptions of the seven countries introduced in Chapter Five fell into four categories, regardless of whether they were positive or negative. Their descriptions dealt with their perceptions of:

- (1) The **working conditions** for migrant domestic workers in each country,
- (2) Each country's **immigration policy framework** including whether or not there were pathways to permanent residence and citizenship,
- (3) The **ease of entry** into the country, and finally,
- (4) More **general evaluative comments** about the country as a whole.

By and large, participants' perceptions of the world were very similar. Their "mental maps" consisted of the same destination countries that almost all study participants were aware of, the same blank parts of the world about which participants knew very little at all, and the same destination hierarchy with Western nations at the very top, Asian countries in the middle, and Middle Eastern countries at the very bottom. The only exception to this rule existed among US-based study participants who had only taken up domestic work after their arrival in the US.

For these Filipinos, domestic work had not played a part in their exit strategy from the Philippines; instead, it had simply been a by-product of their lives in America as undocumented migrants or after finding themselves shut out from white-collar professions. Their lack of socialization in their adopted occupation and its global reach meant that they were significantly less familiar with the various overseas labor markets available to migrant domestic workers. For all other study participants, their interactions with recruitment agencies in the Philippines and elsewhere, the formal pre-departure

orientation and training workshops they had been required to attend in the Philippines, their domestic work experience in other countries, and their embeddedness within migrant domestic worker networks that spanned the globe, all contributed to a strong degree of isomorphism in their worldviews and destination hierarchies. As a result, these non-US-based study participants—particularly the ones with several years of overseas work experience under their belt—were much more cosmopolitan in their ability and eagerness to talk about the relative merits of different countries’ labor markets and policy regimes. In contrast, US-based participants were remarkably ignorant of and uninterested in other countries’ working conditions. As a result, most of the country descriptions provided below come from non-US based interviewees.

### *Canada*

Canada is a free country. And if we go there, we just work for eight hours a day. And then another [thing], extra pay for the overtime. And the employers, they will allow the helpers to have two days holiday [a week], sometimes three days. Saturday, Sunday, and go back on Monday. [My friends], they said it’s nice here. And they already have—they already are [permanent] residents there. Immigrants. They already have landed immigrant [status] because they were already there for three years. And they are working in another job now.

*Did they start as domestic helpers as well?*

Yeah, caregivers. Caregivers. They said, “If you work as a caregiver here, you will just have that work. No other.” They said. And then the employer provides everything!

“Computer, everything,” they said. The employers will provide them.

The above quote comes from Renasha, a 46-year-old Filipina in Hong Kong who was considering applying for a caregiver job in Canada at the time of her interview. Like Renasha, most study participants who were not already in the West uniformly described Canada as one of their “dream destinations.” The primary reasons given for Canada’s top ranking were the presumed high wages available there and the possibility of gaining permanent resident status. These two factors were mentioned by 33% and 21% of

participants respectively. (Table 6.1 lists the ten most common descriptors applied to Canada by participants.) Participants from the Asian interviews spoke in glowing terms about what their lives would be like after their arrival in Canada. “I only dream of Canada,” Abbie, a 38-year-old woman in the Philippines told me. “To get my whole family [there] also. To become a Canadian!” she told me, laughing in glee at the very thought of acquiring Canadian citizenship. “Canada, my dream country!”

When compared with most other Western countries that provided visas to foreign domestic workers, Canada was still participants’ preferred destination because of the pathway to permanent residence that it offered. Jo-Ann, a former NGO worker who had worked in Hong Kong for seven years before moving to Canada, explained that she knew of many Filipino caregivers in Canada who had previously worked in Germany (most likely as au pairs). Jo-Ann claimed that because Germany did not offer permanent residence to foreign domestic workers, these Filipinos had chosen to re-migrate to Canada.

Another reason for Canada’s popularity as an end destination was the possibility (after gaining permanent residence) of upgrading one’s occupation from low-status domestic work to a higher status, and perhaps even white-collar, job. One out of five participants mentioned how they looked forward to returning to their original career whether in social work, accounting or education, or attempting an entirely new career, after they had secured permanent resident status in Canada. Diane, a 38-year-old Filipina in Singapore, shared her plans to transform herself from a domestic worker to a florist once she reached Canada:

Actually, my friend in Canada, Nancy, offered me a job. Also in domestic work. But, after two years, she said, if I have that certificate in flower [arrangement], I can apply to

florists after two years. She said it's a good business in Canada as well. With this kind of skill, I can earn, she said, 10 times, 20 times, 30 times, what I am earning in Singapore.

Most participants were certain that two short years after their arrival in Canada, they could start the new lives they had planned for themselves. Jeannie, a 49-year-old live-in caregiver in Toronto, recalled her pre-arrival image of Canada from when she had still been working in Hong Kong: "Canada is the best because you have to stay for [only] two years as a low working-class, as a caregiver. But then, you can look forward to something else. They allow you to travel [and have] permanent residency after two years." To study participants, this was a more-than-worthwhile bargain. They were, for the most part, blind to the intricacies of securing permanent resident status in Canada, the time it would take to process their paperwork, the additional tests and checks they and their families would need to go through, and the costs involved with sponsoring dependent family members for permanent residence.

They also did not factor in the possibility that they might not be able to complete their two years' employment requirement so quickly, that they might have to switch employers or that there might be periods of unemployment in between that could drag out the time needed to qualify for permanent residence. All they understood was that, in exchange for two years of low-status domestic work, they would acquire a future of upward mobility in a Western country. This unrelenting optimism that so many study participants displayed about life in Canada will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

Table 6.1  
Study Participants' Top Ten Descriptors for Destination Countries

No.	Canada	Italy	USA	Hong Kong	Singapore	UAE	Saudi Arabia
1	Dream country (58%)	High wages (53%)	Dream country (43%)	High wages (48%)	Nice country (42%)	Nice country (54%)	Scary country (36%)
2	High wages (33%)	High placement fees (47%)	High barriers to entry (37%)	Termination (35%)	Low wages (32%)	Open country (29%)	Not safe country (27%)
3	Nice country (28%)	Nice country (40%)	Good country (33%)	Nice country (34%)	Flor Contemplacion (31%)	Freedom of movement (14%)	Abusive employers (24%)
4	High placement fees (26%)	Family reunification (13%)	High wages (28%)	High placement fees (29%)	Scary country (31%)	Easy life (14%)	Strict employers (24%)
5	Easier to get there stepwise (25%)	Limited work hours (13%)	High placement fees (17%)	Demanding employers (21%)	Low placement fees (26%)	Not an open country (11%)	Closed country (21%)
6	Family reunification (21%)	Nice employers (13%)	Good life (17%)	Near to the Philippines (16%)	Salary deductions (26%)	High wages (11%)	No legal protections (18%)

<b>No.</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Italy</b>	<b>USA</b>	<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>Singapore</b>	<b>UAE</b>	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>
7	Permanent residence (21%)	Occupational mobility (13%)	Need more schooling (17%)	Weekly day-off (12%)	Clean country (17%)	Low wages (11%)	No freedom of movement (18%)
8	Upward mobility (19%)	Permanent residence (7%)	No openings (15%)	Not nice country (8%)	Safe country (15%)	Low placement fees (11%)	No weekly day-off (15%)
9	Need 72 college credits to qualify (18%)	Unattainable (7%)	Unattainable (13%)	Difficulty switching employers (8%)	No termination (13%)	Large Filipino community (11%)	Very strict country (12%)
10	Difficult to enter (15%)	Difficult to enter (7%)	Undesirable (11%)	Lengthy visa processing (8%)	Easy visa processing (10%)	Rape of workers (11%)	Low placement fees (12%)
					Demanding employers (10%)		Rape of workers (12%)



While participants were very aware of the better working and living conditions in Canada, they were also familiar with the high cost and the more stringent entry conditions for securing a caregiver visa to Canada. Altogether, 26% of participants raised the issue of the high placement fees charged by recruitment agencies as a significant barrier to gaining access to Canada. Accounts varied with regards to how much agencies charged, with participants in Singapore citing amounts ranging from US\$2,500-US\$4,000, Hong Kong participants claiming between US\$2,500-US\$10,000, and participants in the Philippines citing figures going from US\$6,800-US\$17,000. The lower agency fees charged in Singapore and Hong Kong were a critical factor behind several participants' adoption of a stepwise migration strategy in order to reach Canada. But this wide variation in fees even within a single country market also speaks to the lack of transparency and widespread corruption in the migration industry. These exorbitant fees had resulted in many participants deciding to defer their dreams of going to Canada until they had saved sufficient money. Mindy, a 27-year-old Filipina who was working in Singapore when I interviewed her, explained her plans for the future as follows:

Now, I stay [in Singapore] more than three years already. But I am not willing to stay here forever also. I am going to save money first for myself, and then I am going to find another job. For example, I would try to go to Canada. But right now, I do not have money to do processing in Canada like that.

*How much would it cost to go to Canada?*

I think the last time I inquire in the agency, they said, SG\$5000 [or US\$3,900]. It costs a lot of money. [...] Yeah, I need to save a lot of money.

While it was difficult but not impossible to accumulate the needed financial capital to cover these exorbitant agency fees, it was almost impossible (while overseas) for non-college graduates from the Philippines to accrue the additional human capital (in the form of the necessary college course credits) required to secure employment as a live-in caregiver in Canada. Eighteen percent of participants raised this issue. Participants

who lacked the prerequisite educational qualifications expected of live-in caregiver applicants to Canada—the equivalent of 72 college credit hours or roughly two years of a college education—had resigned themselves to never working in Canada (and had moved on to consider other destination options with less stringent entry conditions). Annie, a 26-year-old Filipina working in Singapore, explained why she had turned her attention away from Canada as a final destination:

Of course, I cannot go there [to Canada]. I know that already. Because I know I do not have 72 units. That's why. But, in Spain, even if you are [only a] secondary graduate, we can go already. But, in US and Canada, must be 72 units or college graduate to come there. So [it is] hard to go.

Several participants also raised the issue of an upper age limit for applicants to Canada, stating that they were too old to qualify for a live-in caregiver job. In reality, the Canadian government does not stipulate any age limits for applicants, but it is possible that recruitment agencies dissuade older Filipinos from applying, assuming that employers prefer younger candidates.<sup>3</sup>

While awareness of how difficult it was to gain entry into Canada was widespread and largely accurate, few participants mentioned any disadvantages to working in Canada. The most frequently cited worry was the high cost of living. But only four participants raised this issue and only for two of them was this sufficient reason to decide not to seek a job in Canada. Rebecca, a 32-year-old domestic worker in Hong Kong, was one of those migrants. Her initial plan had been to travel stepwise from Hong Kong to Canada but she explained how stories about the high cost of living in Canada were making her rethink her destination dreams:

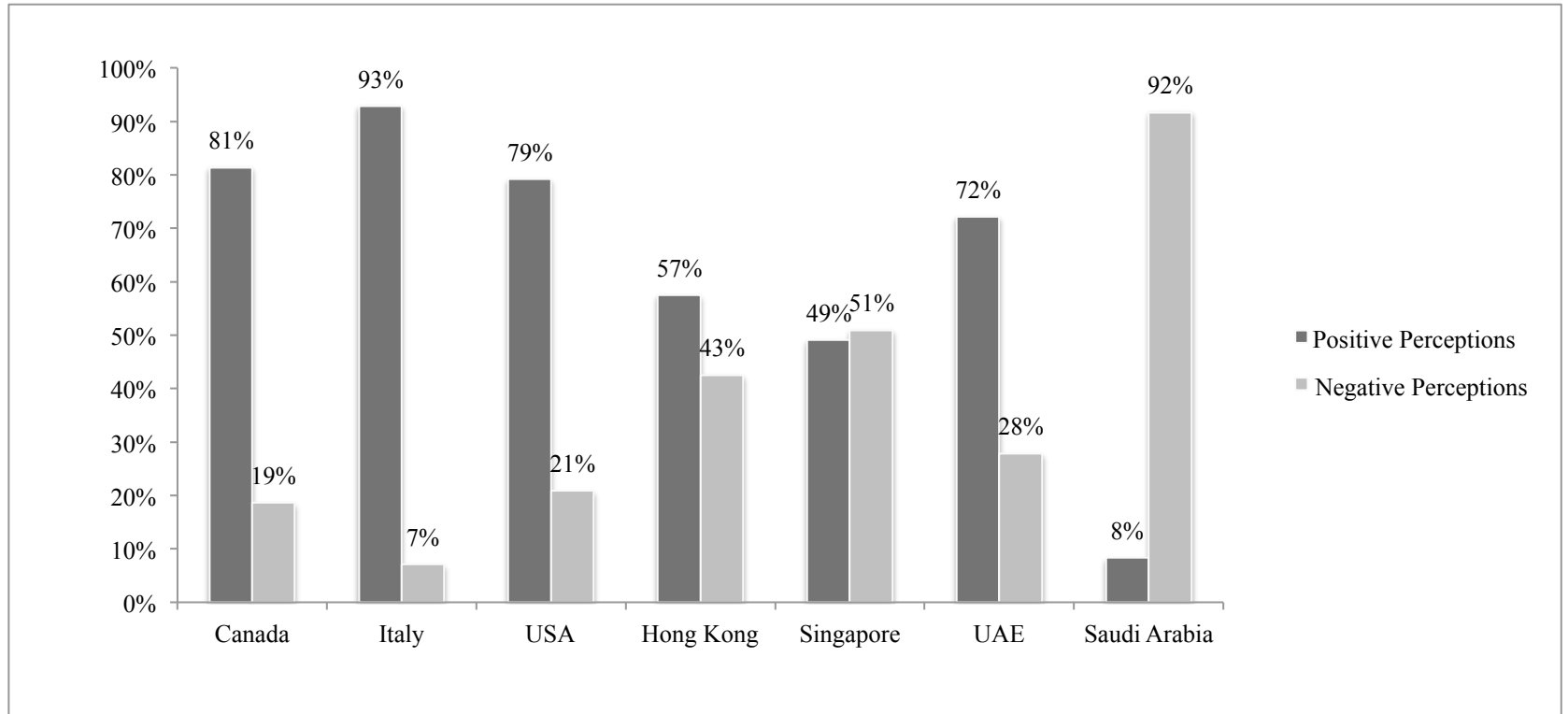
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<sup>3</sup> The average age of Canadian-based participants when they first arrived in Canada was 33 years. This is significantly higher than the average age of all study participants when they first left the Philippines to work abroad (28 years) given that the vast majority of Canadian participants had worked for several years in intermediate destinations before finding employment in Canada.

I heard from my friends in Canada that life is difficult there too. Because although salary there is higher compared to Hong Kong, they are paying taxes there. And they are paying for their personal needs also. And then the price for their personal needs are also high there. So my friends told me, “Why do you need to go to Canada? Maybe, if you want to go to Canada and get a green card, then you can go there. But if you just want money, then better to stay in Hong Kong.” That’s what they say. I don’t know.

Other concerns participants expressed included the bitter winters—three participants raised this issue—and the long distance from the Philippines—another three raised this point. But while these factors gave a handful of participants pause, they did not deter most. In general, participants shared overwhelmingly positive stories about Canada with little discussion of any potential difficulties. Figure 6.1 shows how there were four times as many positive statements about Canada as there were negative. In many respects, what participants described was the Canadian version of the American Dream: A chance at a comfortable life, a social safety net, family reunification and upward mobility.

Figure 6.1  
Percentage of Positive vs. Negative Perceptions about Destination Countries



Notes: Statements about the ease/difficulty of entry into a country were not counted as either positive or negative. Instead Figure 6.1 focuses on the reasons behind the relative standing of various destination countries, irrespective of how high their entry barriers were. I am assuming that the question of entry barriers was considered by prospective migrants only after they had already determined that a particular destination country is worth entering in the first place.

When it came to ways to achieving this “Canadian Dream,” a quarter of participants also raised the point that it was easier to travel to Canada through a stepwise migration trajectory, rather than directly from the Philippines. Several reasons were given for this approach: First, that recruitment agencies in Hong Kong or Singapore charged less than agencies in the Philippines for applicants seeking jobs in Canada, and second, that the visa processing time in those intermediate countries was considerably shorter than in the Philippines, taking only weeks or months instead of years. Marcie, a 39-year-old caregiver in Toronto, was one participant who had heard that traveling stepwise to Canada was easier and who had then acted on this advice. As a young woman in the Philippines, she had heard an advertisement on the radio singing the praises of Canada and telling listeners that the easiest way to Canada was via an interim job as a domestic worker in Singapore.

Actually, my father, my parents are against my going abroad. But I was young and I wanted to expand my horizons. I got the idea of going abroad because of the radio station. [*Marcie laughs.*] One time I was cleaning the house and then suddenly the announcer said, “Oh, it’s nice to work abroad. You go first in this country [Singapore] and then, after two years, you can cross country to Canada.” So I started thinking. Before that, I really don’t have plans because I really want to work in the Philippines. But when I was young, I was very impulsive and very ambitious to work abroad.

Marcie convinced her parents to let her work in Singapore as a domestic helper by sharing with them her dream of settling in Canada. She was eventually able to realize this dream. However, instead of taking two years to get to Canada, it took 14 years—four years in Singapore and then another ten years in Hong Kong—before she was finally able to secure a live-in caregiver job in Canada. She had been working in Canada for 17 months when I interviewed her in 2010 and she was starting to think about the paperwork required to apply for permanent residency. She estimated that there would be a 12-month waiting period, after she finished her 24 months’ employment requirement, before she

would eventually receive permanent resident status and even longer if she decided to sponsor her parents in the Philippines. All in all, Marcie's dream of getting to Canada was considerably more arduous and drawn-out than she had ever imagined it would be back when she was still in the Philippines but she had still not changed the top ranking she had given Canada in her destination hierarchy.

### *Italy*

Now, in Italy, I will be a tutor. And, at the same time, a nanny. At the same time, a domestic helper. All in one. But, anyways, it's Italy! [...] You know the difference really is the place. [...] In the Philippines, even if you are a domestic helper [in Italy], it's no problem because it's there! It's Europe!

The above quote comes from Winola, a 49-year-old Filipina who had worked as a private, live-in tutor for four years for a local Saudi family in Saudi Arabia, before returning to the Philippines. Back home, Winola had enrolled in a six-month caregiving course with the plan of finding a position as a live-in caregiver in Canada but she had been cheated out of her deposit of PHP250,000 (almost US\$6,000) by her recruitment agency. Then, out of the blue, another agency had offered her a job as a live-in caregiver for a Saudi family in Rome, Italy and she had jumped at this opportunity. In justifying her decision to accept the Italian job offer, Winola spoke in broad generalities about Italy, conflating the country with the rest of Europe. A similar approach was adopted by most participants who saw that part of the Western world as an undifferentiated, but alluring, whole. "Europe? It's a big country," was how one interviewee vaguely described the region when asked what she thought of working there. Participants glossed over differences in immigration policies, working and living conditions, prospects for citizenship and anti-immigrant fervor among the 27 countries within the European Union.

In fact, alongside Italy, participants only mentioned a handful of European countries (the UK, Spain, Italy and Cyprus), a function of where most of the migrant domestic worker traffic to Europe was directed.<sup>4</sup> Other large European economies, such as France and Germany, were almost never mentioned.

But even in the case of the four European countries that were regularly brought up during the interviews, participants displayed a distinct lack of specific knowledge about them—and Europe in general. This was reflected in the level of detail participants used to describe these destinations. While participants used 38 unique descriptors for Canada, only 23 were used for Italy. Likewise, while 58% of participants named Canada their “dream country,” no one talked about Italy in those terms. Forty percent of participants called it a “nice” or “very nice” country but it was clear that Canada still trumped Italy when it came to participants’ destination preferences.

The most common statement made by participants about Italy dealt with the high salaries available there. Altogether, 53% of participants made such a statement, eagerly pointing out that the opportunity to earn in euros made Italy (and other countries in the Euro zone) very attractive. Several participants also mentioned that Italy offered comfortable working conditions in the form of limited work hours and nice employers. A 28-year-old Filipina named Ariel, interviewed in Singapore, was one of the interviewees who had heard good reports about working in Italy:

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<sup>4</sup> Of the 3,317 Filipinos who traveled to Europe in 2010 as newly hired domestic workers, Cyprus (47%), Italy (37%), Romania (4%), Spain (3%) and Norway (3%) accounted for 95% of the flow, according to official statistics from the Philippine government. Another 15 European destination countries each had less than 50 Filipino migrant domestic workers enter their borders in 2010. (Data collated from Philippine Overseas Employment Administration website at <http://www.poea.gov.ph/stats/2010%20Deployment%20by%20Occupation,%20Destination%20and%20Sex%202010%20-%20New%20hires.pdf> on February 9, 2012). But, as has been pointed out earlier, these figures disregard the undocumented migration of migrant domestic workers to Europe and those migrant domestic workers who travelled to Europe through an intermediate destination such as Israel.

My friend in Hong Kong, she have an auntie, a relative in Italy. And she told me that Italy is very nice, like that. [...] She told me that the people there are very nice also. And then you can rest. [...] You can work and then stay out in the weekend, like that. And then you have rest there. That's what they told me. And then also, you can earn how much money there, like that.

There was some talk of occupational mobility for migrants in Italy. One participant had in-laws in Italy who were long-time residents who now held minimum-wage jobs in garment factories. Another participant, Marnie, had a sister who had lived in Italy for over 20 years and now worked in a restaurant. "The last time, it was as a domestic helper," Marnie explained. "But, after five years, they got their green card. They find the [new] work there. Now, they work in a restaurant. Like waiter, like that." But no participant made any mention of their Italian contacts moving up the occupational ladder into white-collar professions. Instead, the occupational mobility that long-term residents in Italy secured had more to do with gaining the freedom to set their own work schedule as a part-time rather than full-time domestic worker, or to work in a less isolating but still low-status and low-wage job. In other words, it was understood that horizontal rather than vertical occupational mobility was available to long-term migrants in Italy, while Canada appeared to offer more opportunities for vertical mobility.

Like Canada, Italy was recognized by participants as having high entry barriers for prospective migrants seeking to enter its borders. Altogether, 47% of participants talked about the exorbitant placement fees required to secure a job in Italy. At the same time, however, there was a general impression that Italy imposed less stringent job qualification requirements compared to Canada. While the cost of securing a job in Italy was on par with the cost of a job in Canada, participants repeatedly said that prospective migrants to Italy (and other European countries like Spain and Cyprus) required less *human capital* in the form of educational qualifications and relevant work experience.



According to these interviewees, applicants did not need to be college graduates to get a job as a domestic worker in European countries like Italy; a high school diploma would suffice. Several participants also talked about how their advanced age had precluded them from applying to Canada for a live-in caregiver job, but that their age was not an obstacle when applying to Italy or Spain. This distinction between the difficulty of *entering* the country (which was related to financial capital barriers) versus the relative ease of securing a domestic worker job once in Italy (which was more related to human capital barriers) was not present in participants' images of Canada. This reflects the difference between the thriving underground market for migrant domestic workers in Italy and the more regulated market in Canada.<sup>5</sup>

As a consequence of this underground market and the rather byzantine immigration rules and quotas imposed by the Italian government, participants were less familiar with the process of applying for a work visa to Italy. Instead, several participants, like 47-year-old Winnie in Toronto, had heard that “mostly in Italy, it’s a TNT<sup>6</sup>. [...] They go there as a tourist or with no proper processing of [visa] papers.” Winnie was referring to the large volume of undocumented Filipinos living and working in Italy, with many of them working in the waged domestic service industry. Winnie had Filipina friends who had first worked as domestic workers in Israel and then paid over US\$7,000 to be clandestinely transported to Italy and then matched with a willing employer. Another participant, 35-year-old Ginifer, had used her entire life savings (PHP200,000, or roughly US\$5,000) from nine years of factory work in Taiwan to pay an

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<sup>5</sup> It is also a function of Canada’s unique geographical location: Separated from most other Western nations and only sharing a land border with the United States which was just as strict when it came to entry restrictions. As a result, entry into Canada was largely through legal means and, particularly, the LCP.

<sup>6</sup> TNT refers to “*tago nang tago*”, a Tagalog phrase which loosely translates into “hiding and hiding”. TNT is a colloquial expression popular among Filipino migrants to refer to an undocumented migrant.

illegal “travel agency” to get her a tourist visa to Sweden and then take her overland into Italy where her friends had promised to help her find a job as a domestic worker. Other participants, like 29-year-old Jasmine who had worked in Hong Kong and now Canada, had heard from friends in Italy that “it’s, like, really hard to go there if you don’t have any family to sponsor you.” These stories reflect most prospective Filipino migrants’ understanding that they would need large amounts of social and/or financial capital to gain access to Italy, effectively limiting the number of Filipinos who could aspire to immediate, direct entry into Italy.

### *United States*

Of course, US is a big country and a nice country and I think American people are good also. They are kind, friendly. And then, of course, about the earnings!

*- Rayann, 35 years old, Hong Kong*

You know, it’s more harder to go to the US than Canada. Yeah. I think some people can just go there in the US because they have somebody there. They have relatives there to sponsor them. But you cannot just apply. Because here [in Canada], we apply as live-in caregivers. But I think you cannot apply there [to the US] as live-in caregivers.

*- Jasmine, 29 years old, Canada*

The United States held a unique position in study participants’ destination hierarchies. Like Canada, it was a “dream destination” for many interviewees (43%) but an almost similar number of participants (37%) talked about the extremely high barriers to entry imposed by the US government, particularly the need for high educational qualifications or family sponsorship, that were almost impossible to overcome. While participants highlighted the difficulties involved in securing entry into Canada, most still recognized that the live-in caregiver program gave prospective low-capital migrants a chance at the Canadian Dream. In the case of the American Dream, however, there was no such opening. In talking about the United States, 15% of participants specifically

mentioned that they had not heard of a parallel live-in caregiver program in the US, ruling it out as a viable destination option.

Prospective migrants without specific educational or employment-based qualifications, or access to sufficient financial capital, could only rely on relatives to sponsor them for a family reunification visa or a tourist visa. But even with relatives willing to do so, the wait for a family reunification visa could take decades while many applications for US tourist visas from the Philippines are routinely denied. There was a general sense that the US embassy in the Philippines was very strict when it came to issuing visas of any kind to Filipinos for travel to the US. Participants like Rani talked about some of these difficulties:

US is so hard [to enter]. Because my grandma is there and then they want to get me but it's so hard to go. [...] Like, the American embassy, they have a lot of things they want you to find [like] all the papers. It's not like other countries that you can [visit], anytime you can go. But, in Philippines, it's so hard to get in US.

One participant, Beatrice who had previously worked both as a live-in domestic worker and a teacher in a daycare center in the US, had been a university professor and government employee in the Philippines. But even she had been apprehensive when applying for a tourist visa to the US and had worried that her application would not be approved.

Several interviewees had devised multistate migration plans to gain access to the United States. Rachel, a 28-year-old domestic worker who had already worked in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore by the time I interviewed her, had set her sights on finding a job in Canada because she planned on using Canada as a stepping stone to the US:

In the US is my auntie. My mother's sister is in USA.  
*Has she told you anything about the US?*  
"US is nice but hard to bring the maid there." She wanted to bring me there but it's hard.  
If I can go [to] Canada, my auntie said [that it is] easy to bring me there [to the US].

Other participants seemed to have settled on Canada as their final destination because they had decided that securing entry into the US was too difficult. For these participants, Canada was something of a “consolation destination” rather than a dream destination. Renasha, for instance, had initially claimed that Canada was her dream destination but then qualified her answer:

If I have the chance to go to US, I will go to US.

*So the US would be your final destination?*

Yeah, US is my dream country.

*Why?*

Because they said US is a heaven.

*Who said the US is a heaven?*

People used to say that a long time ago. But now, whenever you talk about the US, they say the [immigration] law is very strict, so I don't like to go anymore.

In general, those participants with extensive and close family connections in the US appeared more likely to retain the US as their top destination preference, while those interviewees with limited family ties to the US were willing to reorder their destination preferences. This speaks to the role of overseas networks in weighting prospective migrants' destination perceptions and preferences.

Why did the US hold such a prominent position in so many participants' destination hierarchies? In trying to explain why the US was their dream destination, most Asia-based interviewees spouted the same, slightly vague dreams of upward mobility, comfortable living and high wages that they spoke of when describing life in Canada. “It's very nice there and a lot of money earned and then you just only have five days to work if you want to. And then, the other days, then you do your own business or whatever because it's the weekend there,” was how 36-year-old Rani talked about life in the US.

But many Canada-based participants' perceptions of the US (and their destination hierarchies more broadly) changed considerably after they arrived in Canada. Having

experienced life in a Western country—and one that shared a land border with the US—Canada-based participants had acquired much more information about the merits and demerits of life in the US vis-à-vis Canada. According to Vanessa, a 47-year-old domestic worker in Toronto, the US and particularly California—the state with the highest concentration of Filipino immigrants—offered milder weather and lower taxes, when compared to Canada:

I think, my first choice is US. Because the taxes there is low. And the second [choice] is Canada because the taxes here are so steep. You need to pay two taxes: the federal and provincial. That's why most of the nurses here move to New York.  
*Because of the taxes? So they can earn more money in the US?*  
Yes. So that's why until now they, [the US, is] still—out of all the countries in the world—they are the only country still open for immigrants. [...] Canada will be great as the United States if they only welcome more immigrants, professionals.

But Vanessa was in the minority in this regard. There were also newly-discovered disadvantages to life in the US that discouraged several Canada-based participants from attempting to re-migrate there. In addition, many of them had developed a positive affect towards Canada that influenced their opinions about the US and tended to make them defend Canada more vigorously than they might have before their arrival in Canada. Several of these participants talked about their preference for Canada's welfare programs, its national healthcare service and its public transportation system, favorably comparing these government services over America's more free market system. The healthcare debate that had raged in the US between 2009 and 2010 had also clearly affected Canadian-based participants' views about both countries' merits. During their interviews, these women regularly touted the “free” healthcare and other welfare benefits they received in Canada as advantages over the United States' more capitalistic approach.

Overall, participants in Canada appeared to be much more educated about the pros and cons of life in Canada vis-à-vis the United States, compared to their counterparts

in Asia and even those in the US. Few US-based participants knew much about working conditions in Canada. Nor did they express much interest in moving to Canada, not even those participants who were currently working illegally in the US.

### *Hong Kong*

They said that, if you come from Riyadh, Riyadh is hell and Hong Kong is heaven!  
That's what they told me. So I just wanted to try that.

*Who said that?*

A lot of people said that. Because Hong Kong is Asia. And you have the day off. And it's a small country but all the stuff is good.

*Did you know people who were already working in Hong Kong at that time?*

Oh yeah, people from my hometown. There were a lot of them.

– *Jeannie, 49 years old, Canada*

Hong Kong was a popular destination among participants both as a terminal destination and a stepping stone to greener pastures in the West. When compared with other Asian markets, Hong Kong had a reputation as a place where a migrant domestic worker could earn relatively high wages and enjoy some workplace protections. In fact, Hong Kong's high wage rate was its most commonly mentioned characteristic with 48% of participants raising this trait and 34% saying that Hong Kong was a nice destination to work in. Rebecca, a 32-year-old single mother, explained how her friends had touted both those aspects of Hong Kong when she first started thinking of going abroad:

Before I decided to go here [in Hong Kong], I think [it over] a million times. [*Rebecca laughs.*] I think a million times before I leave. And then I consult my friends, my family. "Oh, what should I do now? My salary is too low. I cannot answer the needs of my family, especially those of my daughter. So, where should I go?" My friends advised me, "You can go to Hong Kong, because Hong Kong is a nice place, and then Hong Kong has a higher salary than the rest of the Asian countries."

The legal protections afforded migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong made it particularly attractive, especially in comparison with other countries in Asia and the Middle East that did not regulate their waged domestic service industry. This was the other reason Rebecca had chosen to work in Hong Kong: "I choose Hong Kong because I

believed that the laws here are fair. And then I am safe here. And then the salary is quite bigger than the rest of the countries, like Asian countries, like Singapore, Malaysia or Saudi Arabia. So that is why I choose here.” Likewise, Andrew, a 28-year-old domestic worker who had been working in Hong Kong for less than two years when I interviewed him, had heard from his friends that Hong Kong provided better protections for migrant workers compared to other Asian countries:

What I have heard, when you are in Singapore, you are not free to join any association or organization. You cannot express yourself as a migrant. If you are maltreated, you need to go to the agency. You can't go to the immigration to report the employer. Or in Taiwan, they are only accepting women [domestic workers]. [...] So, that is why I chose Hong Kong. Because you are free to express yourself [here]. You can do whatever you want on your rest day. They are respecting your day off. So, you have 24 hours day-off and then, the most important is, you are allowed to join the [workers'] association.

Another advantage that Hong Kong enjoyed over other destinations was its proximity to the Philippines. Sixteen percent of participants spoke of how a flight from Manila to Hong Kong takes only two hours and how this had raised Hong Kong's appeal to them. As 42-year-old Vivian explained: “I like Hong Kong. Because, you know, it's very near to the Philippines. Only one hour. Whatever happens here, I can go home quickly. But, if I am in other countries, it is very hard.” In fact, Hong Kong's proximity to the Philippines was so important to a few Hong Kong-based participants that they had turned down opportunities to work in the West so they could remain close to the Philippines. This was the case with 53-year-old Laura in Hong Kong, who had turned down a job offer from her cousin in Canada:

You know what? When my cousin went to Canada, she told me the following year I am coming there. But I am considering my mom because she is getting older. I am very close to my mom because I am still single. So I said, “What's going to happen to my mom? I cannot go home anytime from Canada. Whereas from here [in Hong Kong], which is an hour and thirty minutes to fly, I can go to my home and see my mom and see my family [anytime].”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> There was no discernible pattern, at least on the basis of marital status, distinguishing those study participants who voluntarily chose to remain in Asia rather than move on to Canada. Married participants,

But against these advantages, several widely known disadvantages were also associated with Hong Kong. The first and most critical of these was the high risk of the early termination of workers' contracts by their employers. Thirty-five percent of participants raised this "termination" issue—wherein employers prematurely end their domestic worker's contract after only a short stint on the job—and talked about its prevalence in Hong Kong. Under Hong Kong law, once their contract is terminated, workers have only two weeks to find a new employer before they are required to leave the country.<sup>8</sup> For workers who had used up all their savings and taken out loans to secure a job in Hong Kong, being forced to leave without recouping their investment and while still saddled with massive debts, was a terrifying possibility. When they were first trying to leave the Philippines for Hong Kong, some interviewees (like 33-year-old Ginny below) had encountered difficulties when trying to borrow money from friends and family simply because of Hong Kong's reputation for early termination:

[My cousin] doesn't want me to borrow their money because he said Hong Kong is a—because they also heard that Hong Kong is not good because there is so many termination. There is a termination policy there. Because there are other workers who are there only a few days in Hong Kong and then [they are] coming back to the Philippines already. And then, it is very, it's worse because they have to pay all their loans. And then their family farm, they have to sell to others to pay back their loans, things like that. And so my cousin doesn't want me to borrow their money because of what they heard.

Coupled with the risk of early termination was the large amount of financial capital required to secure a job in Hong Kong. Altogether, 29% of participants cited high agency

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or participants with children were frequently just as eager as single/younger participants to go to Canada, because of the possibility of eventually sponsoring their families to join them in Canada. The distinguishing characteristics of multistate migrants will be discussed in further depth in Chapter Seven.

<sup>8</sup> By law, Hong Kong employers are required to provide one month's notice or one month's wages in lieu of notice upon termination of the employment contract. Workers have two weeks to find another employer before they are required to leave the country. And even if they find a replacement employer, workers are still required to leave Hong Kong and return to their country of origin before entering Hong Kong again with their new contract (See <http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehhtml/ID%28E%29969.htm#8>). This requirement places an additional financial burden on migrant workers in Hong Kong who are usually expected to pay their recruitment agency another set of fees for finding them a new employer.



fees as one of the reasons why they were unable to go to Hong Kong directly from the Philippines, or had initially opted for cheaper destinations. Marnie, a 43-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, told me that she had chosen not to seek jobs in Hong Kong because she would have had to pay over PHP100,000 (or US\$2,300) in placement fees. Another worker, 29-year-old Lena, explained why she had initially worked in the UAE for two years before moving to Hong Kong in 2006:

Before I go to the UAE, I thought of applying to Hong Kong before. But because of too much agency fee to pay and then so many expenses to shoulder before coming to Hong Kong, I was very—Because I am afraid to borrow money if, later, I will be shouldering so many debts. Like that. So, I stopped applying [to Hong Kong] before.

Prospective migrants had to weigh the risk of termination and the high cost of agency fees against the probability of earning relatively high wages and enjoying important workplace freedoms (a weekly rest day and the ability to attend church and be part of a vibrant community of Filipino migrant domestic workers) when deciding if Hong Kong was a worthwhile destination. Participants who opted to not work in Hong Kong because of the risk of termination were simply trying to reduce the likelihood of their regretting their decision in the future. The avoidance of “decision regret” (Bell 1982) because of future uncertainty was an understandable move on the part of these prospective migrants given the high stakes involved.

Added to this mix of concerns was the likelihood of working for local Chinese employers who were stereotyped as being fussy, not trusting, strict and tightfisted. One in five participants had heard that Chinese employers in Hong Kong were overly demanding, adding to their fears of early termination. Ramona, a 28-year-old first-time migrant who was about to leave for the UAE, explained why she had been fearful of working for a Chinese employer in Hong Kong:

You know, in Hong Kong, some of the Chinese people is very—what is this—they don't give food, like that. They underpay and [give] physical abuse, like that. And always shout and shout like this if ever you [make] a mistake. In Hong Kong, the money that [domestic workers] earn there is big; the only problem there is the employer. Sometimes, they don't want black color in the [domestic workers'] t-shirts; they only like red. And they don't want to see their employees crying or sad. They want their employees to be happy persons, not homesick.

Participants going to Hong Kong often hoped to find work with white expatriates employed by Western multinational corporations because these employers had a reputation for being lax, generous and more understanding (Paul 2011). However, even if workers were able to find employers who treated them well, they understood that they were still only temporary workers and that they would never gain permanent resident status in Hong Kong no matter how long they were employed. “Because, in Hong Kong, you will be there forever as a domestic helper,” was how one study participant put it. Workers understood that their likely future involved either returning to the Philippines when they retired or moving on to a Western country (particularly Canada) that did offer a path to permanent residence and family reunification. There was a general recognition that, outside of the West, Hong Kong was one of the best countries to work in, as long as one could secure steady employment.

Stories about Hong Kong being an especially good stepping stone to Canada also enjoyed wide circulation and influenced participants' decisions to look for work there. “It is because I have heard Hong Kong is a very easy [place] to apply in Canada. That's why [I came here],” Catherine, a 30-year-old Filipina, said to justify her decision to seek work in Hong Kong. “If I am going to apply [to Canada] in the Philippines, it takes so many years. When here [in Hong Kong], I heard that after two-to-six months, you can go.” In this manner, Hong Kong represented not only an attractive destination in its own right (if

one could find a good employer who would not terminate one's contract) but also a convenient stepping stone to countries even higher up migrants' destination hierarchies.<sup>9</sup>

### *Singapore*

I have a cousin here in Singapore. When she hears that I was going to Hong Kong, she called me up and said, "Why don't you come here in Singapore?"

I say, "What is Singapore? Where is it?" I don't know about Singapore at that time. So I said, "Where is it?"

"It's a neighboring country. You don't know Singapore?" [she asked.]

I said, "No, I don't know. I don't read about Singapore." Actually, my history is not good. I don't know anything about Singapore.

So she say, "Oh, this is a very quite good place to work. But here, you have to work hard and you have to be honest." And she says, "[...] Here people also have freedom, as long as you don't break the law here. There's not much difficulty to work and you don't get in trouble."

So I then come here. [...] I don't really know about Singapore. I just read in this booklet in the Philippines. I hear a big thing about Singapore: Number one, the law. They are following the law, like that. I hear the law here is very important. And that's why it's great to come here. And my cousin assured me that, "Oh, here, the employer can't touch you. Because you just call the police. [...] It's not like the Philippine police that just say, 'Oh, forget it.'" So I was brave enough to come here.

– Aisha, 44 years old, Singapore

I heard that in Singapore the employer is very fierce.

*Who told you that?*

Some other people who come from Singapore already. And then they say the salary is very low. And then, if you work, you work so hard! It's not only eight hours [that you work each day]. It is not like with Canada where it is only eight hours [a day]. Here [in Singapore], it is 24 hours [a day]. More than that! Like that. So, yes, I am scared.

– Eartha, 47 years old, Singapore

Participants were divided into two distinct camps when it came to their pre-arrival perceptions of Singapore. On the one hand, many participants had heard stories of Singapore being a "nice" (41%), "clean" (17%) and "safe" (15%) country with low placement fees and the option of paying one's agency fees through salary deductions (26%). On the other hand, there were a significant number of participants who said they

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that different countries served as stepping stones to different terminal destinations. While migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong primarily focused on moving to Canada, I heard several anecdotes about workers in Cyprus focusing their efforts on gaining access to Italy because of its geographical proximity.

had heard that it was a “scary” country (31%) that they were discouraged from working in. These latter participants typically cited the famous case of Flor Contemplacion—the Filipina domestic worker who was found guilty of the murder of another Filipina worker and her young charge, and later hanged by the Singapore government in 1995.

Many Filipinos still believe that Contemplacion had been framed by the Singaporean employer of the murdered worker and that the Singapore government had railroaded a confession out of Contemplacion while ignoring evidence that would have exonerated her. The case is widely regarded as the moment that galvanized Filipino migrant workers around the world to demand greater protections from the Philippine government (Rodriguez 2010; Solomon 2009; Tyner 2004). Despite the fact that almost 20 years had passed since the case was front-page news in both Singapore and the Philippines, it was still one of the first things that participants spoke about when they were asked for their impression of Singapore as a place to work.

Most participants who brought up the Contemplacion case saw it as an indictment of Singapore’s cavalier treatment of foreign domestic workers. “Since I heard the case of Flor Contemplacion, I never dreamed of [going to] Singapore. I never dared to go there,” declared 46-year-old Mandy in the Philippines. But there were a handful of participants who raised the Contemplacion case in order to explain that it had *not* deterred them from choosing to work in Singapore. In some instances, such as with 38-year-old Diane in Singapore, interviewees explained that they did not believe that Contemplacion’s fate was representative of most migrants’ experiences in Singapore:

During that time, when I decided to come to Singapore—I don’t know if you heard the news about that Filipino, Flor Contemplacion, who was hanged? I come here 1996. And that time, it was only two years since that happened. It’s really very hard news. And very popular news all around the world. But it never hampered me to decide [to come here].  
*Why not?*

Because I say, “Different persons, different future.” I analyzed the situation and I think that those are self-inflicted situations. It is up to us to behave. [...] If you don’t behave, then you can anticipate those bad things going to happen to you. So, for me, as long as I behave, that’s it. So I am very blessed, I am very appreciative. So, seems like, I came to love Singapore.

In general, participants who spoke about Singapore in negative terms only knew of the country through news media reports, while those who spoke about it in positive terms had personal connections with earlier migrants who had worked in Singapore. The personal stories these participants heard had convinced them to discount the negative reputation that continued to plague Singapore. Thus, the heterogeneity in opinions about Singapore largely stemmed from a clash between the stickiness of the Singapore mythology as a harsh country with draconian laws, and the personal (and largely positive) stories about Singapore that some study participants had access to. This is reflected in the quote from Aisha at the beginning of this section. Aisha talked about Singapore’s laws not as harsh or punitive, but as safeguards: Protecting workers, rather than constraining them.

The other reputation that Singapore had among migrant domestic workers was that of offering low wages, particularly when compared with Hong Kong. A third of participants had heard complaints about Singapore’s low wages but most of them weighed this disadvantage against the fact that recruitment agencies charged significantly lower placement fees for jobs in Singapore compared to Hong Kong. In addition, Singapore-based agencies’ willingness to accept payment of their fees through monthly salary deductions, rather than a one-time upfront cash payment, was considered a significant selling point. These two factors were important considerations for participants as they weighed the pros and cons of working in Singapore versus Hong Kong. Juno, a

30-year-old Filipina in Singapore, shared with me how these cost comparisons had pushed her into choosing Singapore:

In Hong Kong, sister, there is a placement fee. We have no money to pay the 30,000 [Philippine pesos] like that. Since Singapore is salary deduction, I have money to pay. Just salary deduction. I pay only my medical [examination fees]. Just only 1,700 [Philippine pesos]. So it is easy for me to go in Singapore. Because in Hong Kong, placement fee is 30,000 [pesos] and we have no money to pay that placement [fee]. So, I choose Singapore, lah!

Likewise, 54-year-old Lilith recalled that, prior to choosing to work in Singapore, her overseas friends had shared with her only two things about the island nation and both had involved comparisons with Hong Kong: “Only they tell me that pay there [in Hong Kong] is higher than in Singapore. But the placement [fee] is higher also, much higher than in Singapore.”

Singapore-based employers, the majority of whom were Chinese by race, also had a reputation for being demanding (similar to Hong Kong employers). But while 35% of participants voiced fears about early termination in Hong Kong, 13% specifically stated that there was *no* such widespread practice of contract termination in Singapore. Agatha, a 33-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, described the comparative merits of Singapore and Hong Kong in terms of this issue:

In Hong Kong, they say that the pay is more higher. But the termination is very high. [...] They say that if the employer don't like you, or even if first day, they don't like you, they send you back home. They don't give you a chance to find another employer. [But in Singapore,] if you don't want your employer, or you see that the employer is no good, then you can just call the agent to settle for you.

In this manner, the stories circulating about Singapore reflected both its attractions and drawbacks as a destination, with an almost equal measure of positive and negative accounts (49% positive versus 51% negative).<sup>10</sup> In addition, many of the

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<sup>10</sup> The large number of study participants, based in Singapore, who tended to have primarily positive views of the island nation, biases this ratio. Among non-Singapore-based participants, impressions of Singapore tended to skew more negative.

descriptions applied to Singapore were relative, comparing it either positively or negatively with Hong Kong, in the same way that Canada was constantly compared with the United States. With Singapore and Hong Kong, these contrasting accounts of working life in these two countries highlight the mid-level ranking of these and other Asian countries in most participants' destination hierarchies. These countries represented worthwhile destinations for labor migrants who were willing to accept holding only temporary resident status in their host countries. They also offered significantly better living and working conditions than the Middle East. But for migrants who wanted more—better jobs, higher wages, permanent resident status and all that came with it—these Asian countries still fell far short of what the West had to offer.

#### *United Arab Emirates*

Participants' perceptions about the United Arab Emirates (and the emirate of Dubai in particular) were symptomatic of the heavy marketing of Dubai as a shopper's paradise and liberal oasis in the culturally conservative Middle East (Henderson 2006; Elsheshtawy 2004). While 98% of the descriptions applied to the Middle East were negative<sup>11</sup>, 72% of the descriptions of the UAE were positive (see Figure 6.1). Altogether, 54% of participants described the UAE as a "nice" country and 29% also used the term "open country" to contrast the UAE with other Middle Eastern countries, particularly Saudi Arabia which was universally described as a "closed country."

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<sup>11</sup> All in all, 29 unique themes were used by participants to describe life in the Middle East, of which only one was positive. Three participants said that the Middle East was a "nice" place to work. Almost 60% of participants described the Middle East as a "scary" place to work with 29% having heard that employers in the Middle East were abusive.

The term “open country” implies a place where the local culture is more liberal and the social mores regarding dress codes, the treatment of women and religious freedoms are more permissive. Because of the UAE’s reputation as an open country, participants such as 38-year-old Abbie were willing to set aside their fears of working in the Middle East to consider working in the UAE:

I don’t want to go the Middle East. I hate the Middle East.

*But Dubai is also in the Middle East.*

Yes, but [it is an] open country. According to the stories of my niece, my nephew, and also my husband [...], it is okay. I think it is like the Philippines. [...] Girls can wear shorts. Not like in Jeddah [in Saudi Arabia].

Abbie’s husband worked in the construction industry in Saudi Arabia, while her niece and nephew both had white-collar jobs in the UAE. Their work experiences and general impressions of the UAE informed Abbie’s ideas about the UAE, even though none of these relatives knew anything about the life of a migrant domestic worker in the UAE.

Other positive aspects of UAE life that participants had heard about included the additional freedoms that migrant workers in the UAE were granted. The freedom to move outside their employers’ houses (14%) and the freedom to attend Sunday church service (7%) were raised by study participants. Participants like 44-year-old Melissa made specific comparisons with other Middle Eastern countries (and Saudi Arabia in particular) to show how much more liberal society was in the UAE:

All my friends will apply in Dubai. All I hear [is] Dubai is good. Because, in Riyadh, you can’t shop, you can’t go outside. Dubai is good. What[ever] you want to buy, you can go outside [to buy]. But, in Riyadh, if you want to buy the shampoo, you give the driver the money. Madam says, “No go out. You give the money to the driver and the driver will buy the shampoo.”

Sarina was another participant who sang the praises of Dubai. Her sister worked in Dubai as a domestic worker and 40-year-old Sarina was preparing to join her in the UAE shortly. “[My sister], she told me nice, good here in Dubai. She can go outside. But



in Riyadh, you cannot go outside. All *haram* [that is, forbidden]. Not like in UAE. UAE is open city. That is nice.”

A scattering of participants had heard negative reports about the UAE—about foreign domestic workers being raped or murdered by their employers—but such participants were few and far between. And, similar to Singapore, some of those participants who had heard negative stories about the UAE indicated that these stories did not affect their overall positive opinion of the country. This was especially the case if participants had friends or relatives working in the UAE who had had positive experiences. Jinnifer, a 29-year-old first-time prospective migrant, was one such participant who thought of the UAE as an attractive destination despite having heard news media accounts of rape and abuse occurring there:

I just hear the news about Filipinas who was raped and punched by [the] employer in Dubai. And then the passport was being held by the employer. That’s all. I just heard about those things.

*Does that scare you?*

No.

*Why not?*

Because I know that my brother is there and my niece is there.

Jinnifer’s niece was a domestic worker in Dubai and it had been her niece’s employer’s mother who had sponsored Jinnifer’s work permit for the UAE. Jinnifer was confident that since her niece was enjoying her time in the UAE, she would too.

The regular glowing media accounts of Dubai as a tourist destination also affected how participants viewed the UAE as a whole. 38-year-old Abbie (mentioned earlier) who had previously worked in Singapore but was considering a job in the UAE, shared her first introduction to Dubai:

It is beautiful, Dubai. [...] I see the movie [about Dubai]. It is a very lovely place. It is memorable. So when I am watching, I want to go to that place. I want to—I want to see [it] in person. I want to touch the place in person.

The fact that Abbie was willing to move from Singapore to Dubai, moving *down* the typical destination hierarchy of most Filipino migrant domestic workers, is indicative of how popular the UAE was as a destination among migrant workers.

There were other Middle Eastern countries—Kuwait and Bahrain—that a small number of participants mentioned as offering a similar “open” culture to migrant domestic workers. One participant, 21-year-old Saida, had a cousin working in Kuwait who was encouraging her to find work there as well. “They told me that Kuwait is [an] open city,” she said. “They can go without *hijab*. And they can drive!” she told me, laughing in wonder at the freedom that would offer. “Because it is an open city, not like Saudi.” But other participants still remembered the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and talked about it being a dangerous place to work in light of that conflict. Other participants were fearful of working in Lebanon because of the 2006 invasion of that country by Israel. The UAE was the only Middle Eastern nation that received consistently positive remarks from participants. In fact, the UAE received almost as many positive comments (72%) as Canada (81%) despite the radically different living and working conditions in these two countries. Some possible reasons behind this exaggerated positive view of the UAE are discussed in detail later.

### *Saudi Arabia*

In contrast to the United Arab Emirates, study participants saw Saudi Arabia in almost uniformly negative terms. Ninety-two percent of the statements made about Saudi Arabia were negative, compared to only 28% for the UAE. Participants described Saudi as a “scary” (36%) and “unsafe” (27%) country, with “abusive” (24%) and “strict” (24%)

employers. Time and again, participants recounted how they had heard news stories of domestic workers being raped or murdered by their employers in Saudi Arabia. Rebecca recalled how she had heard accounts of Saudi Arabia that had convinced her to stay away:

I know that in Saudi Arabia, domestic helpers don't get a holiday. They were not entitled to go out, to go to church during Sunday. [...] In Saudi Arabia, most of the Filipinos were abused. They are raped by their employers, abused physically, and then, some of them, the employers did not provide for them food. They did not give them enough salary. So that is why most of the Filipinos, they run away from their employers and go to the Philippine embassy for help.

Another participant, Elaine, confessed that she too was scared of working in Saudi Arabia. "Because, what I heard in the newscast, there it is like a dangerous country! That is what they say. So I am scared. So that's why I don't go there. For safety."

Some participants knew of friends or relatives who had personally suffered at the hands of their Saudi employers and these contacts' personal accounts of mistreatment and abuse further convinced participants that Saudi Arabia was a dangerous place to work.<sup>12</sup> Marnie had a sister-in-law who had been sexually abused by her second employer in Saudi Arabia: "She said she break the contract because the Arabo [*sic*], if they like you, they rape you. So Saudi is not safe for the domestic helpers. [...] That's why she decides to go back [to the Philippines]."

Another participant, Betty, shared her own story of abuse at the hands of her Saudi employer. During the first year of her two-year contract, when her female employer had not been in the house, her male employer had called her into his bedroom.

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<sup>12</sup> There was a clear difference between how participants talked about employers in Asia as compared to employers in the Middle East. Both sets of employers were viewed negatively but, in the case of Asia, employers had a reputation for being strict, while Middle Eastern employers were believed to be not only strict but also abusive. This was an important distinction for female prospective migrants who were entering an industry where they knew they would be in a vulnerable position working inside someone else's home.

She walked in to find him naked and lying on the bed. He had left money and gold on the bed in a blatant attempt to buy her sexual favors:

I run out and then I go to my room and lock my room. And then I didn't go out. I let him know that it's not good for me, I am very angry and then I lock my door. He said, "I'm sorry, sorry! And just testing you." But I am still not opening the door until his wife arrived. When the wife arrived, he is still feeling sorry but he did not tell the wife. And me also, I am not telling the wife because I am thinking that I don't know if the wife will believe me. So I just keep on in my room.

Betty never told her female employer about the incident because she was well aware of how vulnerable her position in the household was and how easily her male employer could deny everything she said. She also recognized that she had been "fortunate" that her male employer had not forced himself on her because it would have been hard for her to resist in such a scenario. Amazingly enough, Betty continued working for her employers for another year after the incident because she could not afford to return to the Philippines empty-handed. It was only after she finished her two-year contract that she chose to find another employer, but still in Saudi Arabia.

Participants also talked about Saudi being a "closed" country (21%) where female domestic workers were not granted the freedom to leave their employers' houses without a chaperone (18%). And even when domestic workers were able to venture outside, they were required to cover themselves in an *abayah* and cover their heads with a *hijab*.

Saida, the only self-identified Muslim in the study sample, was one of only a handful of participants who had positive things to say about Saudi Arabia. Saida had specifically sought a job in Saudi because, while other participants sometimes spoke of Saudi being a "Muslim country" as a drawback, Saida saw it as a plus.<sup>13</sup> "I really like

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<sup>13</sup> Other participants emphasized that it was not Saudi being a Muslim country that deterred them, but the fact that it was an *Arab* country. One of these women, Aisha, had previously worked in the Southeast Asian kingdom of Brunei which is also a majority Muslim country. She saw a fundamental difference between the Asian Muslim culture of Brunei and the Arab Muslim culture of Saudi Arabia. "Middle East for me is very

Saudi,” she told me. “Because Saudi is [...] a Muslim place. And then I can go in Mecca to take *hajj*.”<sup>14</sup>

Among study participants, Saudi Arabia’s biggest draw was the purported ease of securing a job there. Participants were well aware of the fact that recruitment agencies charged low (or no) placement fees for a job in Saudi Arabia and were willing to accept payment of almost all fees through salary deductions. In addition, most domestic workers were able to pay off their placement fees within three months of starting their jobs, as compared to the six to ten months it typically took a domestic worker in Singapore. In speaking about the Middle East in general, and Saudi Arabia in particular, several participants spoke about how the lack of a placement fee was hard to resist, despite the hesitation they felt about working in that part of the world. Sarina explained how, at the end of her first contract in Saudi, she had been forced to accept another job in Saudi Arabia because of the financial constraints she was under:

When I come back [home] again from Saudi, I want another place but I cannot because I have no money to pay the placement fee. I want Hong Kong, I want other place, but in Saudi, there is no placement fee, just my two months’ salary [deduction]. And I have to finance myself. That is the problem. So always Riyadh, Riyadh.

The other draw of Saudi Arabia, and the Middle East in general, were the almost nonexistent human capital pre-requisites to land a domestic work job there. Participants spoke of prospective migrants they knew who were either too young or too old to seek jobs in Asian countries like Singapore and Hong Kong, but who were still able to get jobs

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dangerous,” she told me. “Number one is the culture. [In Brunei,] they are Asian people, while the Middle East, it’s different. They are Arabs and they treat women as really second-class. [...] You know, Arabs, the guys, they are more [...] macho. You don’t have a say inside the house. You just [have to] follow them. So much more so if you are a maid. [Then] you can’t say anything! You just follow. So I don’t think I’ll go over there.”

<sup>14</sup> Anecdotal evidence from conversations with officials from recruitment agencies and non-governmental organizations in the Philippines indicates that there is a growing trend to hire Muslim Filipinas from Mindanao, in the southern, Muslim-dominated part of the Philippines, to work as migrant domestic workers in the Middle East under the assumption that being Muslim would make these women more inclined to work in Saudi Arabia.

in Saudi Arabia because it imposed no minimum or maximum age restrictions. One participant explained that she had applied for a job in Saudi because Hong Kong agencies only accept first-time applicants younger than 38 years of age. Another participant said that Saudi Arabian agencies accepted applicants even as old as 50 years. At the opposite end of the spectrum, one participant shared how her 20-year-old niece, who was unable to secure a job in Hong Kong because the minimum age for a job there was 23 years, had opted for a job in Saudi Arabia instead. Likewise, there were no minimum educational qualifications for a domestic worker job in Saudi Arabia; even high school dropouts could find work in Saudi.

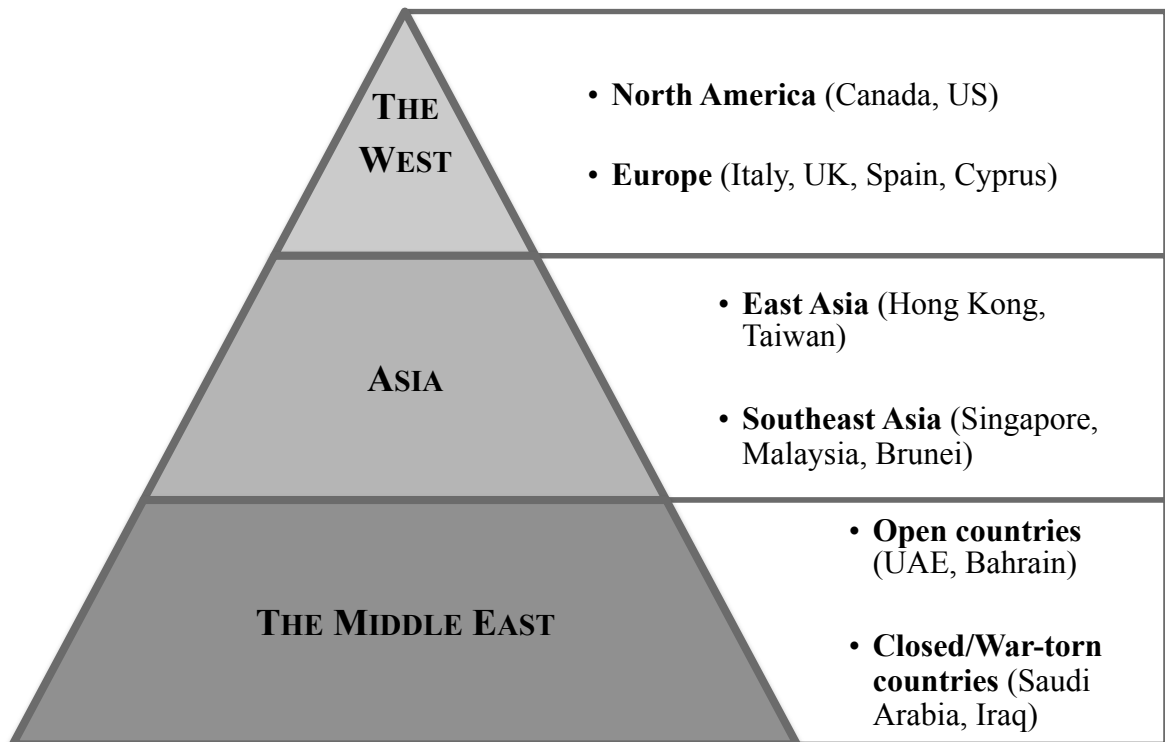
Thus, for low-capital prospective migrants desperate to leave the Philippines, the lack of entry barriers and the low cost of entry tended to outweigh Saudi Arabia's many disadvantages. By not requiring significant human or financial capital resources, Saudi Arabia and the Middle East continue to attract a significant proportion of first-time domestic workers leaving the Philippines each year. In 2010, the Middle East as a whole accounted for 58% of all newly-hired domestic workers leaving the Philippines.

### **Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers' Destination Hierarchies**

The above discussion of participants' perceptions about these seven destination countries offers several insights. The first is that study participants hold remarkably consistent destination preferences that can be organized into a common "destination hierarchy" that, I would argue, is applicable to all non-Muslim Filipino migrant domestic workers. This discovery is in line with Gould and White's finding that there is often a "shared national perspective" (1986:52) on both popular and unpopular destinations. It

stands to reason that this shared perspective would be even more similar among individuals who share not only the same citizenship but also the same gender, occupation, religion and, to a lesser extent, the same class. Study participants' shared destination hierarchy was a personally and socially constructed, tiered ranking of those regions and countries of the world that are popular markets for migrant domestic workers. Figure 6.2 is a stylized representation of this destination hierarchy, with Western countries positioned at the very top, followed by Asian countries in the middle, and Middle Eastern countries at the very bottom.

Figure 6.2  
A Typical Destination Hierarchy for Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers



Within each tier of this destination hierarchy, the interviews revealed that there are further sub-divisions. Among Western nations, for instance, North American countries (specifically, Canada and the United States) enjoy a higher ranking than European countries. Within Asia, East Asian countries like Hong Kong are ranked higher than Southeast Asian countries like Singapore and Malaysia. Likewise, among Middle Eastern countries, the UAE takes top billing compared to Saudi Arabia. It is within these tiers and sub-tiers that most interpersonal variation in destination preferences was observed. While most participants ranked Hong Kong over Singapore, a vocal minority did talk about preferring Singapore over Hong Kong because they enjoyed the tropical weather and multi-ethnic cuisine in Singapore, or they had more friends and relatives in Singapore. Likewise, some study participants placed the US at the top of their destination hierarchies, while others positioned Canada at the top because they found comfort and security in Canada's national health service and better-funded public transportation system. But the broader destination hierarchy—starting with the West, followed by Asia, and lastly, the Middle East—remained consistent across almost all participants.

### *The Construction of Destination Hierarchies*

The interviews also highlighted where participants' destination hierarchies originate. After sharing their pre-arrival perceptions of a particular country, participants were asked where they had acquired their destination information. Altogether, seven different information sources were mentioned by interviewees, ranked here according to their frequency of mention:

1. Friends,

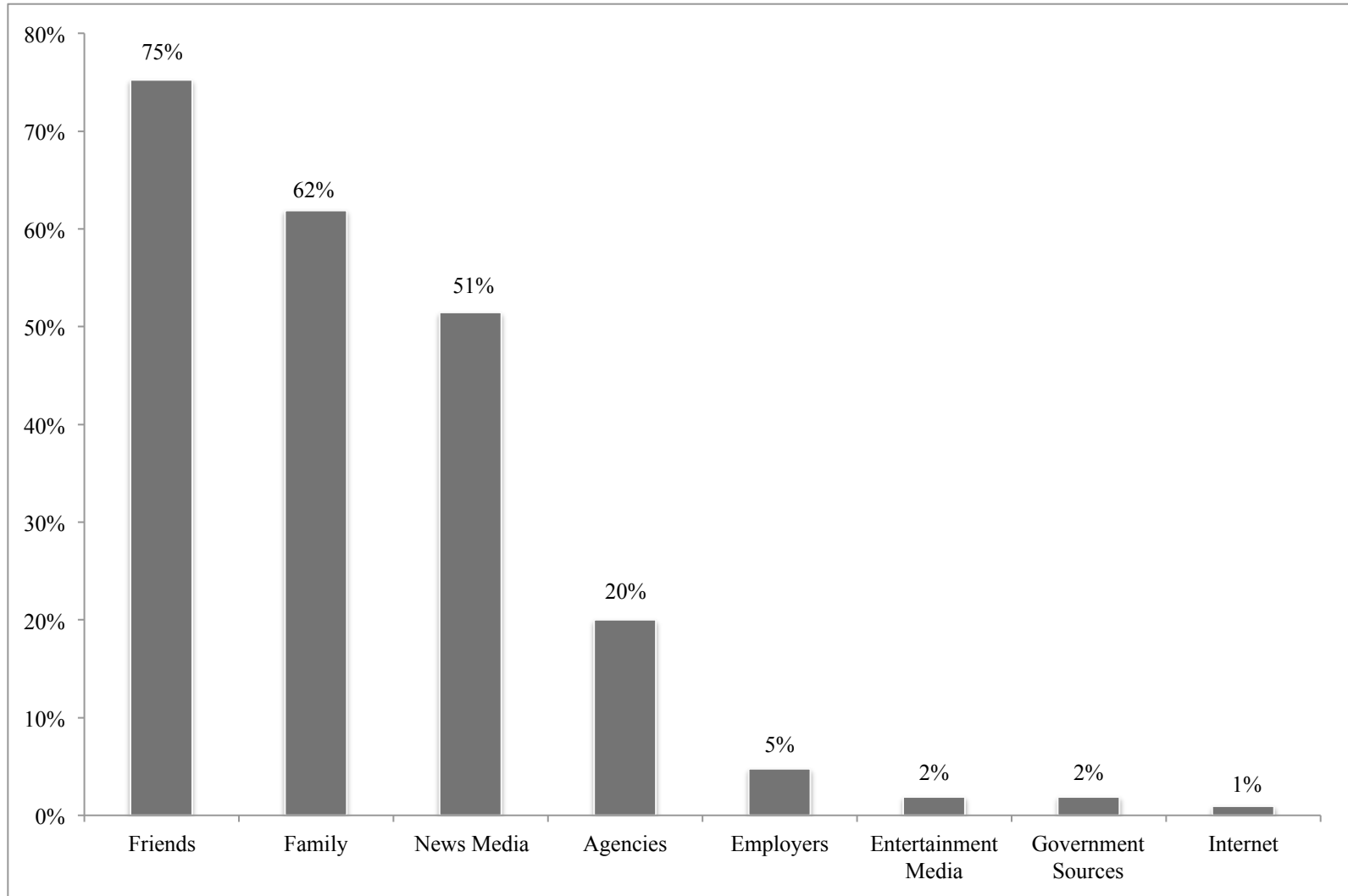


2. Relatives,
3. The news media (television, newspapers and radio),
4. Recruitment agencies,
5. Employers (both overseas and in the Philippines who shared their opinions about different destination countries),
6. The entertainment media (such as movies and television shows set in destination countries),
7. Government sources (such as information booklets and awareness-raising sessions about different destinations produced/organized by either the Philippine government or host country governments), and
8. The Internet.

Participants were allowed to indicate if they had acquired their destination information through multiple sources. Their responses were tallied and are presented in Figure 6.3.

This chart demonstrates how close network contacts—both friends and family—were participants’ primary window to the rest of the world, shaping the worldviews of 75% and 62% of participants respectively. This communication was sometimes conducted face-to-face and, at other times, over the phone, Skype, email or through social networking services like Facebook and Yahoo Messenger. The power of these informal channels of communication is most evident in the cases of Singapore and the UAE, where personal, positive stories shared by participants who had friends and relatives in those two countries were given more weight than negative news stories.

Figure 6.3  
Sources of Study Participants' Destination Perceptions



This is not to discount the importance of the news media in shaping prospective migrants' views about different destination options, especially when they had no other source of information. Half of participants indicated that they had heard stories about the working conditions of migrant domestic workers in various destination options (and particularly the Middle East) through the news media in the Philippines. Participants recalled watching news stories about sensational cases of maid abuse in the Middle East, or following the Flor Contemplacion case in Singapore through regular updates in their local newspaper long before they themselves even considered becoming migrant domestic workers themselves. In Singapore and Hong Kong, there are several free/low-cost publications (e.g. *Pinoy Star* in Singapore and *Hong Kong News* in Hong Kong) that specifically target the Filipino migrant worker population and are widely read. These newspapers and magazines regularly publish stories about working conditions and newsworthy events in top destination countries for Filipino migrant domestic workers, and also include advertisements placed by recruitment agencies touting the advantages of working in other destinations.

These accounts echo studies of tourists' destination decision-making that show that much destination information is acquired "incidentally and passively" (Decrop 2005:125; Woodside and Lyonski 1989), rather than through an active search. Participants were unconsciously building a mental map of the world of destination options as they conversed with relatives and friends who were overseas or returned migrants, read newspaper stories about the life of migrant domestic workers overseas, and watched movies set in countries that were common markets for Filipino migrant domestic workers. When they eventually made the decision to leave the Philippines or

move to a new destination, there was typically a final, more intentional and more critical push to learn about the particular overseas market that they were leaning towards. But more general destination information about multiple countries was being gathered and stored away in prospective migrants' minds a long time before their actual migration and destination decisions were made.

### *The Evolution of Destination Hierarchies*

In addition to revealing where and how participants' destination information originated, the interviews also revealed that participants' cognitive maps of the world can evolve over time, sometimes resulting in the reordering of preferences or the addition of new tiers and sub-tiers in individuals' personal destination hierarchies. Few participants started their migration journeys with a comprehensive understanding of the world of destination options available to them. Initially, their mental maps were sparsely sketched out and contained large blanks. It was over time that their cognitive maps gained additional detail and definition. Some of these changes in preferences stemmed from participants' direct, personal experiences in various countries. Time and again, participants would talk about how they had held one image of what their host country would be like, only to have it change after they started working there.

In other cases, world events—particularly wars—reshaped the relative standing of different countries in participants' minds. Lebanon and Iraq were frequently mentioned as unsafe places to work because of the recent wars in those Middle Eastern countries. Participants' mental maps also evolved as a result of interactions with their fellow overseas migrants who shared stories with them about new potential destination countries

they had not yet considered. As Aisha had mentioned earlier, she first heard of Singapore through her cousin who worked there. Until that point, she had had no knowledge of that island nation. Migrant domestic workers in the Philippines who had initially thought of the West as an amorphous whole, began to learn more about differences between the United States and Canada, or Canada and Italy, as they started working overseas and interacting with other migrants who had more foreign work experience. Likewise, participants' notions about the Middle East and the relative merits of different Middle Eastern countries often became more nuanced the longer they worked abroad and especially if they had built friendships with people who had previously worked in that region. With each additional year spent overseas, and each additional country they worked in, migrants' awareness of the relative merits and demerits of different destination options continued to grow and change, and regions of the world that had once been a blank slate to them began to gain definition in their minds, demonstrating the significance of both personal experience and active membership in a wide-ranging migrant network.

But these evolving destination hierarchies and the greater awareness of alternative destinations also set the stage for the *re-migration* of migrants after having worked overseas for a few years. As Chapter Seven will explore in more detail, when migrants learned about alternative (and purportedly better) destinations available to them, they began to consider moving to these locations rather than staying put in their current host country or returning to the Philippines at the end of their contracts. Their onward migration was thus heavily dependent on these migrants' expanding network of overseas

contacts who educated them on new destination options and practical migration strategies to gain access to these markets.

### **Destination Biases**

When comparing participants' destination hierarchies with Chapter Five's more systematic analysis of different countries' migrant domestic worker programs (compare Figure 6.2 in this chapter with Figure 5.1 in Chapter Five), it becomes clear that even without access to detailed policy information, participants' subjective rankings of different world regions share the same order as a more objective assessment of these regions' policies and work environments for migrant domestic workers. However, there are several important differences between participants' destination perceptions and Chapter Five's more objective policy analysis, and these reveal how prospective migrants do not always approach their initial and subsequent destination decisions in a completely rational and objective manner. Rather, there are cognitive biases inherent in how they view the world and construct their destination preferences, independent of the sources of their destination information. Three of these biases, and the particular country perceptions they affected, are highlighted below:

#### *Anchoring Effects and the United Arab Emirates*

Most interviewees in Asia spoke in glowing terms about the UAE, and Dubai in particular, as reflected in the 72% of statements about the UAE that were positive in nature. Participants presented a heavily skewed picture of this country that was at odds with ILO reports about the frequent abuses that domestic workers in the UAE suffer. I

argue that this disproportionately positive view of the country stems from what is known in social psychology as an “anchoring effect” (Mussweiler and Track 1999; Tversky and Kahneman 1974). This effect is observed when an individual attempts to judge an object by comparing it with an “anchor” object that acts as a standard of reference, directly influencing the eventual judgment. The classic example of anchoring effects deals with individuals who were given an ostensibly random number (the anchor) and then asked if they thought the percentage of African nations in the United Nations was higher or lower than the random number they had been given. They were then asked to provide their *own* estimate of the percentage of African nations in the UN. Depending on whether they had initially been given a high or low supposedly “random” number, participants provided answers that were either high or low respectively (Tversky and Kahneman 1974).

Similar anchoring effects have been found in a wide range of contexts, from how judges in Germany decide the appropriate sentence length for a convicted criminal, to how real estate properties are valued (Mussweiler and Track 1999; Northcraft and Neale 1987). In the present study, the interview excerpts make clear that migrants also evaluated different destinations through a process of anchored comparison. The UAE, as a Middle Eastern country, was most frequently set against Saudi Arabia, the prototypical Middle Eastern nation in participants’ minds. This is evidenced by the high number of participants who, when asked about the UAE, would (of their own volition) provide statements comparing it positively with Saudi Arabia.<sup>15</sup> Given that working conditions in Saudi are universally accepted as being horrific, I posit that this made life in the UAE seem idyllic in comparison, leading to the overwhelmingly positive remarks participants

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<sup>15</sup> Even though Kuwait has been the largest Middle Eastern market for newly hired Filipino migrant domestic workers in the last few years.

made about the UAE. However, if participants had been asked to directly compare the UAE with Hong Kong or Canada, I hypothesize that their comments would have been much less effusive. But because their natural instinct was to compare countries within the same region, and because Saudi Arabia was seen as the prototypical Middle Eastern country, the UAE came across as a liberal oasis.

In a similar manner, participants' comments about Canada frequently referenced the United States, and comments about Hong Kong used Singapore as a reference point (and vice versa). Prospective migrants were consciously and unconsciously comparing different destinations when making their destination decisions, and depending on the country they used as their standard of reference, their eventual perception of the destination under consideration could vary drastically.

### *Cognitive Conservatism and Singapore*

Singapore's reputation among a sizeable number of study participants—as a scary country with draconian laws—is illustrative of how a mythology can develop around particular destinations. Such a “destination mythology” weaves together both fact and fiction, and enjoys considerable lasting power. The negative mythology surrounding Singapore initially came to be after a series of events in the early 1990s, one of which was the Flor Contemplacion arrest and subsequent hanging, but all of which cemented Singapore's reputation as a country of strict laws and unbending rigidity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Another event involved the conviction and eventual caning of an American teenager, Michael Fay, in Singapore for theft and vandalism. Fay was sentenced to six strokes of the cane. Bill Clinton who was the US President at the time personally pleaded (unsuccessfully) with then-Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok for clemency. Other issues that fueled Singapore's reputation were its system of hefty fines for such as acts as public spitting, littering and its import ban on chewing gum (which was partially lifted in 2004).



Even though almost 20 years have passed since that time, this reputation continues to stick in the minds of many prospective Filipino migrant domestic workers. I posit that the stickiness of this place reputation derives from the psychological principle of “cognitive conservatism,” the notion that people find it difficult to change their opinions once formed and have a hard time incorporating new information that might run counter to their existing belief system (Greenwald 1980). Similar behavior has been observed among scientists, stock market investors and even psychologists themselves, at the individual and at the group level, so it stands to reason that migrants would not be immune to this cognitive bias (Schulz-Hardt, Frey, Lüthgens and Moscovici 2000; Kuhn 1996; Shiller 2000; Greenwald 1980).

Only participants who had friends or relatives with direct, personal experience of Singapore, who could give them a more positive account of life in Singapore, were able to shift their point of view. Participants who lacked this personal connection to counter the negative mythology surrounding this island nation were more likely to continue clinging to their decades-old beliefs about Singapore.

A similar effect may have been influencing participants’ views of the United States. The mythology of the American Dream played a heavy role in that country’s position at the top of many participants’ destination hierarchies. Setting aside participants in Canada who were more nuanced in their opinions about the US, most other interviewees only spoke in glowing terms about their former colonial master. This is in line with the entrenched history of Philippine migration to the US (as outlined in Chapter Three) and the continued valorization of the US as a place where the potential for upward mobility is very strong. As one participant, Baila, who lived in the US explained:

The common concept of those Filipinos who have not come here, who have not gone to America—I tell you, even me! When I did not, when I had not had the chance of coming here yet, I was thinking that everything in America is good. Everything in America is convenient. Everything in America is perfect. There is no beggar, there are no homeless people. But when I came here—well, I see, specifically in New York—New York is dirty. And there are so many vagrants. There are so many homeless people digging the garbage bins to find some food. And when you come here, even though you are professional [...] until now, they are cleaning houses in Manhattan and they are taking care of old people or babysitting.

Participants in the US talked about trying to dissuade their contacts in the Philippines from attempting to come to the US, telling them about how difficult life was in the US, but they knew that this was to no avail. The positive mythology surrounding the US continued to prevail. Why did positive personal stories about Singapore manage to overcome negative stereotypes about this island nation, when negative personal stories about the US failed to change people's positive beliefs about life in the US? The answer may lie in a third bias prevalent among humans: Our optimism bias.

#### *The Optimism Bias and Canada*

The third and final cognitive bias that was widely observed in participants' accounts of their pre-migration destination perceptions was the tendency to imagine a happy, trouble-free future for themselves in their chosen destinations and especially in the countries at the top of their destination preferences, discounting the many difficulties they might encounter there instead. The higher up their destination hierarchy they went with their country descriptions, the more optimistic they became about what the future in these countries had in store for them. When speaking about Canada, many participants were completely confident that within two years of working in Canada, they would be able to apply for permanent residency, then sponsor their families to join them, and soon after,

shift careers to a more white-collar profession. There was no recognition of the various hurdles that they might need to overcome before this imagined future could come true.

This “optimism bias” is a fundamentally human trait, something that most individuals manifest in our expectations of what the future will bring (Sharot 2011; Irwin 1953; Marks 1951; Shiller 2000). It is also the reason why so many migrants voluntarily choose to leave their homes and relocate elsewhere in the first place: They are working on the assumption that their new life will be better than their old one. This is not to suggest that prospective migrants do not weigh the costs and benefits of the various destination options they are considering. Rather, the concept of an “optimism bias” teaches us that when engaged in a cost-benefit analysis, prospective migrants may unconsciously overestimate the benefits of life in their preferred destination country and the ease of accruing these benefits, while undercounting the costs and risks involved in getting to that country and their life thereafter. I posit that this may have also contributed to why some participants were willing to change their negative beliefs about Singapore but not their positive ones about the US.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to give a sense of how Filipino migrant domestic workers understand the world outside the Philippines, with a special focus on their perceptions of seven major destination countries. What this analysis reveals is that Filipino migrant domestic workers who already share a national origin, industry, gender and religion also share a largely similar view of the world. These migrants view the different countries that are major markets for domestic workers hierarchically and

comparatively, with Western countries sitting at the very top of their shared destination hierarchy, followed by Asian countries and, finally, Middle Eastern countries at the very bottom. This ranking of different destinations can evolve over time as migrants' direct and indirect knowledge of the world increases and their own personal situation changes. This ranking is also shaped by cognitive biases that result in the overvaluing of some destinations and the undervaluing of others.

This country hierarchy in turn shapes prospective migrants' initial destination preferences and current migrants' subsequent destination preferences. It also shapes the market-driven cost of entry into each respective country. Recruitment agencies are well aware of migrants' country preferences and price their services accordingly. The better the expected living and working conditions available within a country's borders, the higher its position in the shared destination hierarchy and, at the same time, the harder it is to *enter* the country. Agency placement fees are inversely proportional to market demand and rise exponentially with a destination's popularity. Overall, the lower a country's ranking, the cheaper and faster it is to gain entry.

And so, even though low-tiered countries may not be preferred destinations for migrant domestic workers, the low barriers to entry into these countries sway more capital-constrained migrants into choosing to work there. This is reflected in the relative volume of migration traffic to the different regions in migrant domestic workers' destination hierarchy. In 2010, more than half of all newly-hired migrant domestic worker traffic was directed towards the Middle East, the least preferred region in Filipino migrant domestic workers' shared destination hierarchy. Another 37% of total migrant volume went to Asia which occupies a middle-tier rank in the common destination

hierarchy. Only 5% of newly-hired Filipino migrant domestic workers traveled to jobs in the West. The progressively smaller number of migrant domestic workers who enter countries higher up the destination hierarchy as first-time migrants thus reflects the filtering process that restricts entry into higher-tiered countries to those individuals who are already in possession of sufficient levels of migrant capital.

But the country hierarchy discussed in this chapter has an impact not only on the destination decisions of migrants leaving the Philippines for the very first time, but also all their subsequent destinations. It does so by embodying these migrant workers' dreams about what their life overseas could be like. All those migrant domestic workers who earn little money, toil under difficult circumstances for demanding employers and live apart from their loved ones, are fully aware that there are other countries out there where they could enjoy a better life. Multistate migration journeys are intentional acts, motivated by the same aspirations that first propelled study participants to leave the Philippines and shaped by participants' expanding knowledge of the world of destination options available to them. Some participants moved within the same tier; others moved across tiers, such as from Hong Kong to Canada. In both cases, the destination hierarchy presented in this chapter helps illustrate how these specific multistate migration trajectories emerged, shaped by migrants' subjective understanding of what the relative offerings of different destination countries.

The concept of a destination hierarchy also helps visualize the importance of "stepping stone" countries to multistate migrants attempting to climb to the very top of their destination hierarchy. The properties of a good stepping stone country include shorter processing times for a visa to destinations higher up the hierarchy, and the

opportunity to save money or accumulate additional work experience so as to qualify for jobs in a preferred destination. Countries like Hong Kong and Singapore that enjoy a reputation for being good stepping stones thus attract migrants not just because of their intrinsic benefits as terminal destinations, but also because of their purported ability to ease subsequent migrations up these migrants' destination hierarchy.

In the next chapter, I present the multistate migration patterns among the study sample, paying particular attention to the migration trajectories adopted by migrants in Canada. I also show how Hong Kong has developed a reputation within Filipino migrant domestic worker circles as the ideal stepping stone to Canada and the West, fulfilling its global reputation as Asia's "gateway to the world" in an unexpected way.

## CHAPTER SEVEN<sup>1</sup>

### Onward and Upward<sup>2</sup>: Multistate Migration among the Capital-Constrained

The first published study of a migration journey involving multiple stages was observed, not among international migrants, but among internal migrants within the British Isles in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ravenstein 1885). Ravenstein coined the term “stepwise migration” to describe the incremental progression of internal migrants within the British Isles, from their native village to a spatially proximate urban center and then beyond. Stepwise migration was viewed as “a process of human spatial behavior in which individuals or families embark on a migration path of acculturation which gradually takes them, by way of intermediate steps, from a traditional-rural environment to the modern-urban environment” (Conway 1980:10). From this definition, it is clear that the term was primarily used to cover *internal* migrations (see Korinek, Entwisle, and Jampaklay 2005; Conway 1980; Riddell and Harvey 1972). When the concept was extended to include international migration, the common assumption was that village residents first move within their own country to an urban setting where the odds of their emigrating overseas increase substantially, with only the final “step” in their migration life-path being to go abroad (Konadu-Agyemang 1999; Malmberg 1997). Only much more recently have there

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter were previously published in 2011 in the *American Journal of Sociology* (volume 116, issue 6, pp. 1842-1886) in the article, “Stepwise International Migration: A Multi-Stage Migration Pattern for the Aspiring Migrant.”

<sup>2</sup> The title of this chapter is taken from C. S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia* series.

been studies documenting the process of multiple *international* migrations undertaken by the same migrant.

But this subfield of international migration studies remains disorganized. This is evidenced by the proliferation of terms—secondary migration, tertiary migration, onward migration, stepwise migration, serial migration, multiple migration, multistage migration, triangular migration and re-migration. (See Paul 2011a; Aydemir and Robinson 2008; King and Newbold 2007; Siu 2005; Ossman 2003; DeVoretz and Ma 2002; Lam 1996, 1994)—that all refer to effectively the same process of migrants undertaking legal stops of substantive duration in multiple destination countries.

The present chapter attempts to bring some clarity to this corner of migration studies by putting forward an umbrella term, “multistate migration,” to embrace all types of migration that involve migrants spending significant amounts of time in a hierarchical progression through multiple destination countries. I particularly focus on how capital-constrained migrants are able to undertake multistate migration to reach countries at the top of their destination hierarchy. Most existing studies of multistate migration focus on high-capital migrants, individuals possessing high levels of human, financial and/or social capital who move from country to country when their fancy takes them or without significant effort (see Aydemir and Robinson 2008; King and Newbold 2007; Siu 2005; Ossman 2003). Instead, I attempt to shine a light on the thought process that less well-endowed migrant domestic workers go through as they attempt to undertake multistate migration and the actual mechanics of their migrations across multiple countries. Using the Filipino migrant domestic workers I interviewed as my lens, I focus on four key questions in this chapter: How did participants come up with the idea of multistate



migration? How did they choose each of the intermediate countries they traveled to? What kinds of capital did they use to support their journeys across multiple countries? And finally, who becomes a multistate migrant domestic worker?

In answering these questions, it is important to keep in mind the proportion of multistate migrants within the sample subset in each study site. Just over 82% of Canadian participants were multistate migrants, having worked in one or more intermediate destinations for at least a year before entering Canada.<sup>3</sup> Among Hong Kong-based participants, 50% were multistate migrants, after setting aside six participants who had only left the Philippines for the first time less than two years earlier. Likewise, if we disregard the eight interviewees in Singapore who were still on their first overseas contract, 42% of Singapore participants were multistate migrants. In contrast, among US-based participants, only 22% were multistate migrants, with most participants having directly entered the US from the Philippines after having been sponsored by their immediate family members under family reunification or tourist visas.<sup>4</sup>

The US finding is in keeping with the absence of an accessible market for foreign domestic workers in the US and the limited availability of work visas for migrant domestic workers seeking to enter the US. In contrast, the high proportion of multistate migrants among Filipino live-in caregivers in Canada speaks to the relatively high human

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<sup>3</sup> This statistic parallels the data mismatch presented in Chapter Five between the departure statistics of Filipino caregivers leaving the Philippines directly for Canada that was collected by the Philippine government and arrival statistics on the number of Filipino caregivers arriving in Canada that was collected by the Canadian government.

<sup>4</sup> This statistic is in line with national-level data on the percentage of multistate Filipino migrants in the US. Data from the 2000 US Census indicates that roughly 20% of Filipino migrants who arrived in the US at least 5 years earlier had lived in a country other than the Philippines in 1995 before entering the US. The most popular intermediate countries were Japan, Guam, China (Hong Kong), Canada, and Germany in declining order. This statistic is based on a 5% sample of the 2000 US Census and analyzed online at the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-USA) website at <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/index.shtml>. This data is not yet available for the 2010 Census.

and financial capital requirements needed to secure entry into Canada through its LCP. In subsequent sections, I argue that multistate migration was the only way for these migrants to acquire the necessary capital needed to qualify and pay for a job in Canada. I also interpret the exponentially increasing proportion of multistate migrants amongst the sample of study participants from Singapore, Hong Kong and Canada respectively, to indicate that multistate migration is an increasingly necessary strategy for capital-constrained but aspiring migrants as the entry barriers to different country markets grow with the popularity of the destination. Using study participants' stories as a guide, I present a theoretical framework to explain the emergence and growing popularity of this migration pattern among capital-constrained migrants such as migrant domestic workers.

### **The Multistate Migration Decision-Making Process**

Participants' accounts of their migration journeys made clear that there were two models of multistate migration decision-making that existed within the study population. Some participants were what I call "stepwise migrants," proactively adopting multistate migration at the outset of their journeys as a strategy of incremental and upward progression in order to reach their preferred destination country. Other participants were closer to being what I call "onward migrants," only deciding to re-migrate after spending a significant amount of time in one overseas country and after learning about new destination options and new ways to get to those countries.

### *Onward Migration*

Kirstie, a married college graduate who had worked for an NGO in the Philippines, is an example of this latter approach to multistate migration decision-making. When she first decided to leave the Philippines, she initially planned to work overseas for only a few years. She hoped to earn enough money to build a house in the Philippines for her family and save for her daughter's education, before returning home for good. Kirstie's first overseas destination was Hong Kong and, initially, she had had no plan to move on from there to a new destination. But after having made friends with other Filipino migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, she learned about the possibility of migrating onward to Canada:

When I was already in Hong Kong, [my friends] informed me about this cross-country going to Canada. So, since I can meet the requirements for going to Canada so I tried also the luck of the applying. And here I am in Canada right now. [...] Because I really don't have—I really don't have the plan of going to Canada. [...] Then, when I was in Hong Kong, then because a lot of people were going here in Canada to work, I said I would also try my luck in going to Canada.

Kirstie worked in Hong Kong for two years while attempting to accumulate sufficient funds to pay for her second migration journey. Around the two-year mark, a friend who was working in Canada on a part-time basis contacted Kirstie to say that her Canadian employer was looking for a full-time live-in caregiver and the position could be Kirstie's if she was interested. Kirstie jumped at this opportunity to circumvent the use of an expensive recruitment agency and, when I interviewed her in 2010, she had already been working in Canada for almost two years.

The migration story of another participant, Wilma, highlights how critical a role macro-structural issues, such as the ongoing economic problems of the Philippines, can also play in encouraging Filipinos to become onward migrants. The continuing economic blight in the Philippines helps transform Filipino migrants from temporary labor migrants

into longer-term onward migrants seeking a permanent home for themselves and their families outside the Philippines. Wilma had worked for ten years as a community organizer in the Philippines before leaving to work in Hong Kong. She and her husband had five boys and, after her husband lost his mining job, it became hard to make ends meet. Wilma had relatives already working in Hong Kong as migrant domestic workers and she asked them if they could help her secure a job in the Chinese territory. Those relatives willingly agreed to connect her with a Hong Kong-based agent who matched her with a local employer. One of her cousins also loaned her the PHP60,000 (or US\$1,400) needed to pay the agency's placement fee:

That time, the Hong Kong migration is, you know, in demand. That's what I know. Because my cousins in Hong Kong were saying, "You better come here! You better come here! There's a lot of work here!" So I said, "Okay. As long as you pay for all the processing and then I'll pay you later." That's the deal. Because I really got no money for applying and spending abroad.

Wilma's original plan had been to work in Hong Kong for ten years before returning to the Philippines for good. But after experiencing work-life in Hong Kong, she became deeply unhappy with life in the Philippines:

Every time I went back, it's getting worse and worse. You can see the difference now, if you are in the Philippines and if you are overseas. You are like, Oh my gosh! If you spend a few days [back home], you might kill all the people around you! [*Wilma laughs.*] You know what I mean? You go out to a shopping mall, you see all the people, you are like, Oh my gosh!

I don't know who is to blame. You have already gone out of the country and the difference is too much, you know? Yeah, in abroad, you can see people working but you get something [from your work]. But here in the Philippines, even if you have work, you can work and work and work, there's nothing. Nothing changed, you know? Nothing changed! Oh my gosh, I thought, what will I do here? It's just, you know, so hard.

On her husband's urging, Wilma started to consider re-migrating to Canada. "My husband said, 'Why are you not planning to go to Canada? Because there we can reunite.'" She checked with various maid agencies in Hong Kong but the fees they were demanding were too high, ranging from US\$3,500-US\$5,000. Wilma could not afford to

spend that much money when she was remitting most of her earnings back to the Philippines to support her family. But then, unexpectedly, a friend of hers who was already in Canada told her that she could find her an employer for only US\$2,500. Given the prevailing agency rates, Wilma jumped at this lower-cost opportunity and, when I interviewed her, she had been working in Canada for three years.

Each stage of Wilma's multistate migration journey had materialized because of the kindness and generosity of her relatives and friends. None of the individual stages in her seven-year journey to Canada had been meticulously planned out beforehand. Instead Wilma chose to take advantage of the opportunity for onward migration offered her because she came to believe that there was no way she could support herself and her family if she returned to the Philippines. The continuing economic malaise suffered by working- and middle-class Filipino families was what propelled overseas migrants, like Wilma, to make the momentous decision to look for a permanent home outside the Philippines. In the case of migrant domestic workers, this decision typically entailed attempting to re-migrate to a country that could offer them permanent residence.

### *Stepwise Migration*

Participants who adopted a more planned approach to multistate migration were, in general, well-connected to earlier migrants who had already engaged in multistate migration to themselves and had instructed participants on the merits of an incremental journey to their preferred destination country. These interviewees spoke of stepwise migration as a logical strategy they had adopted to gain additional work experience, save extra money and/or apply from an overseas location that allowed for easier (and cheaper)

visa processing. This was the case with Marnie, a 43-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, whose relatives had advised her to use Singapore as a training ground so that she could gain the necessary work experience to secure a job in the West:

They say to come here first [...] and, afterwards, some of them have got experience here already and they go to Canada, UK, like that. Many Filipinos, they work here four years. After that, they go to Canada or US. It is like they only come here to train.

A similar situation occurred with Catherine, a 30-year-old single Filipina in Hong Kong, who had a long-held dream to emigrate to Canada where her sister-in-law lived. On the advice of her sister-in-law and, in order to foot the bill of migrating to Canada and gain the experience required for a Canadian caregiver visa, Catherine had first worked as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia for two years and then returned to the Philippines thinking she had saved enough money to fund her re-migration to Canada. But she came up short:

[Saudi Arabia] is only my stepping stone. But I need more money. [...] I earned my monthly salary of around US\$200 in Saudi Arabia. That is nothing. When I came home to the Philippines, I have not enough money because I have saved only 120,000 [Philippine] pesos. That is not enough for Canada [...] I think you need probably 800,000 pesos for Canada. So I came here [to Hong Kong].

Catherine had to work another two years in Hong Kong before she had saved enough money to pay the agency fees for a caregiver job in Canada. When I interviewed her in Hong Kong, she was waiting to receive her final visa papers before leaving for Canada. All in all, it took Catherine four years and stints in two intermediate countries to accumulate enough human and financial capital to make her dream of moving to Canada a reality, much longer than her initial planned two-year trajectory of Saudi Arabia-Canada. Catherine still fit the ideal type of a stepwise migrant; it just took her longer than expected to realize her plans, which speaks to the fluidity inherent even in stepwise migration trajectories.

These unexpected stops in new and additional destinations were all part and parcel of even the most organized stepwise migrant's migration trajectory. Almost all stepwise migrants' stories emphasized the high degree of fluidity in their migration trajectories. In particular, participants frequently spoke of how they were caught by surprise at the high monetary cost of entry into their preferred destinations and how these cost issues had resulted in delays in their re-migration efforts and/or the addition of new intermediate destinations to their trajectories. This is also demonstrated by Eva's story.

Eva was a college graduate who had worked as an elementary schoolteacher in the Philippines for a year before leaving the country to work in Taiwan. Eva had never wanted to be a schoolteacher but her parents had coerced her down that particular career path. Given that she was not making much money in that line of work, Eva was more than happy to switch careers and try migrant domestic work instead. Eva worked in Taiwan for one year and then returned to the Philippines, hoping that she could now applying for a live-in caregiver position in Canada:

I'm trying to apply to Canada. But they were asking for money that is more than the amount I have. So I said, Maybe I go to the other country. Maybe I save some more in the other country. I don't think it's time for [Canada.] I tried to save more so I don't owe anybody or anyone, and I didn't bother my parents.

*So was your idea then that you would just try to save more money and then try again for Canada later?*

Yeah, that's what I really want. If I go in Canada now, I owe some money to somebody. And then, if I'm unsuccessful [in Canada], I don't want. You know, if [...] it happen that I'm not successful, it's hard to pay [back] the money. You know, if you borrow some money from some companies, there's a lot of interest. And, if you cannot pay, the more the interest, then double the money amount [you owe]. So, yeah, it's like that. So I choose to—I make my mind to take time. Maybe it is not the time, I said. So I take it slowly, slowly and not too rushed. So, it's not my time to go there.

So I stay in the other country where I can save more and then I don't need to bother anybody until the time is for me. So later, when I applied here in Canada, I don't owe anybody. I used my own money.

Eva's plan entailed working in Malaysia, one of the few Asian countries where recruitment agencies accepted fee payment through salary deductions rather than a one-

time upfront payment prior to migration. (Singapore had been another option but she chose not to work there because the Flor Contemplacion hanging had happened only a couple of years earlier. As Eva said: “We hear that news so we’re scared to go in Singapore. We hear that Singapore is a very strict country for the workers, like that. So I ended up in Malaysia.”)

After Malaysia, Eva had planned to go directly to Canada but, once again, her plans were derailed because of cost issues. Recruitment agencies in the Philippines were asking for PHP600,000 (or roughly US\$14,000) excluding airfare, and Eva had only managed to save half that amount during her time in Malaysia. As a result, she was forced to consider alternative locations again. In addition to Canada, her recruitment agency also offered overseas positions in Cyprus, Israel and Kuwait. To Eva, Cyprus seemed the best option given that it was in Europe.

In Cyprus, Eva was employed by an elderly couple with whom she built a very strong working relationship. She worked for them for four years and would have stayed longer if not for the fact that the Cypriot government only allows a single nine-month extension after a foreign domestic worker’s four-year contract expires. Unable to stay any longer in Cyprus, Eva brushed off her dream of working in Canada and applied through a maid placement agency in Toronto, paying only US\$3,000 this time round. All in all, instead of the straightforward Taiwan-Canada trajectory she had expected, Eva had to work in two additional intermediate destinations (Malaysia and Cyprus) over the course of 11 years on her quest to gain access to Canada.

Eva’s journey through four countries is an example of the fluidity inherent even in the most planned stepwise trajectory. Eva’s case, however, is also an example of how



many study participants' migration trajectories—both in terms of the number of stages involved and the actual destinations traveled to—strike a delicate balance between agentic action and structural determinism. Eva's decision to go to Cyprus was a function of the high cost of entry into Canada but also the set of destination options her particular recruitment agency had to offer. Eva herself mentioned that if she had gone to a different agency, she might have ended up in Italy or Switzerland instead. But given the limited destination options she was presented with, Cyprus had seemed like the best choice. Eva was forced to make choices under difficult constraints but the very choices she made gave her the ability to alter (and eventually nullify) these same constraints in the long run.

#### *The Overlap between Stepwise and Onward Migration*

As the participant accounts above already show, there is broad overlap between the two ideal types of stepwise and onward migration, with migrants' destination decision-making oscillating between these two ends of the intentionality spectrum. This overlap is important because it highlights the incredible degree of agency and ingenuity that both types of multistate migrants manifest as they seek to realize their dreams. At the same time, it demonstrates the structural constraints on their agentic action that are not always easy to overcome. Marcie, the live-in caregiver in Canada who had previously worked in Singapore and Hong Kong, is a perfect example of the duality that exists among almost all the multistate migrants in this study: Their at-times strategic and, at other times, reactive decision-making under tight constraints.

Marcie's story was previously outlined in Chapter Six but, to recap briefly, when Marcie was a young woman in the Philippines, she heard a radio advertisement—paid for

by a recruitment agency—touting the benefits of Singapore as a stepping stone to Canada. Inspired, she convinced her reluctant parents to support her decision to engage in stepwise migration through Singapore to Canada. However, when she had almost finished her two years in Singapore, Marcie found that she was in fact ineligible for live-in caregiver positions in Canada:

Before I finish two years, I tried to write to the Canadian embassy there [in Singapore] about how to cross-country to Canada. And they give me all the requirements for the Live-in Caregiver program. But that time, [...] the only possible people who can work as a caregiver must be, should be a graduate of nursing, a teacher or midwife. And I am not qualified because I am a commerce graduate. So, after two years in Singapore, I renewed my contract. And then after, before I finished four years, the requirement [for Canada] was still the same. So that was the time that I decided to work in Hong Kong. Because I told you before the salary in Singapore is low.

*How did you choose Hong Kong?*

Because I had friends in Singapore and most of my friends there, they applied to Hong Kong. And then, when they arrived there [in Hong Kong], they said it's better to work there [than Singapore]. Because the salary is double.

Marcie's decision to move from Singapore to Hong Kong was motivated by the scuttling of her plan to secure a job in Canada. Four years into her migration journey, she decided to shelve that dream of hers and settle for the next-best destination: Hong Kong.

But after ten years of working in Hong Kong, Marcie had a change of heart:

After 10 years, I was thinking that although I owned two pieces of land in the Philippines, I keep on working as a [migrant] domestic worker. I was thinking of my [past] ambitions and I was thinking of upgrading myself. Trying something different. I saw a lot of cases in Hong Kong where they start working as domestic workers when they were young and still nothing happened. So they get older and their children, they weren't able to finish their studies. And even as they get older in Hong Kong, they didn't have enough savings. It seems that there was no good future or opportunity [in Hong Kong].

So, I decided to—and that was in 2008—that time, from 2005 to 2008, there were lots of people in Hong Kong applying to Canada. So that's it. So I decided to apply [as well].

Marcie applied for a caregiver position in Canada in 2008. By this time, the Canadian government had amended its LCP policies such that prior work experience as a paid caregiver could qualify an individual for the program. Marcie's application was accepted

and, within a week, she had been matched with an employer in Canada and, within three months, she had received her Canadian work permit and had left Hong Kong for good.

Marcie's migration story shows how her migration decision-making went from being strategic to reactive, and back again. Her account also reveals the important role played by different receiving countries' immigration and labor policies in shaping multistate migrants' migration trajectories, forcing them to dynamically shift course and change plans as they hit unexpected roadblocks.

Participants also alternated between planned and unplanned destination decisions because of the financial burdens involved in adopting a more direct and immediate route to their preferred destination. These cost considerations sometimes altered migrants' entire migration strategy—down to their occupational choice—as was the case with Cherina, a registered nurse in the Philippines, whose first attempt at migration—applying for a nurse position at an eldercare facility in the UK) had been unsuccessful:

Because that time, I'm working in the hospital [in the Philippines] for less than a year. And also, for me, the placement fee was too high. It was really very expensive. I heard that it was between 250,000 pesos to 300,000 pesos [i.e. between US\$6,000 to US\$7,000]. So, that time, I am not really sure. Because I don't know where to get that kind of money. So, I am not really sure whether or not to pursue this. I went for an interview [for a job in the UK] and actually I passed the interview, but they are also looking for more than three years' experience at that time. And I have less than a year. And the other reason is the placement fee is very expensive. And I heard also that we have to pay for our own plane ticket. Yeah, plane ticket and also the medical. You have to pay for it.

*So you decided just to drop it?*

Yeah. Because we don't have that kind of money.

Cherina's initial plan was to continue working in the Philippines and slowly start saving money. But many of her friends from college were fellow nurses who were already working overseas. One of them, in Saudi Arabia, suggested that Cherina apply for a position there as well given that the Saudi government did not require additional work experience for registered nurses and there was no placement fee that needed to be paid.

Cherina applied for a nursing position in an outpatient clinic in Saudi thinking that she could use her time abroad to earn more money and also study for the NCLEX<sup>5</sup>, the licensing examination that all registered and practical nurses must pass before being granted a license to practice in the US. But five years into her time in Saudi Arabia, Cherina had yet to sit for the NCLEX, mainly because she was working long hours and could never find the time to study. At that point, she had pretty much given up on her stepwise migration strategy to find work in the West as a registered nurse.

But then a different opportunity presented itself. Three of Cherina's nursing friends in Saudi Arabia had recently moved to Canada to work as live-in caregivers (LICs). A fourth friend, who was in the midst of processing her LIC work permit, talked to Cherina about the advantages of this migration strategy:

She showed me her contract and how she talked to her employers. And she said, "Why not try to apply to Canada?" But I have second thoughts because, you know, it's a live-in caregiver program. You have to live in their home. You have to stay with the employer and do the housework and stuff. So I told her, "I'm not sure if I can do it." Because, I heard also that caregivers living in Hong Kong, in Saudi Arabia, working in homes, they have a very hard life. They have to work so many hours a day. They are getting maltreatment from their employers.

So what I'm thinking before is that, if I work in Canada, that will happen to me also? So that was my misconception before. So that's why I told my friend, "I have to think about it. I'm not sure if I could work there as a live-in caregiver."

But then, when I talked to one of my friends [in Canada], she said, "Oh no, it's different here in Canada. It's not the same as Hong Kong at all." [...] She said it's different here. This is not Hong Kong; this is not Saudi.

Persuaded by her friend, Cherina applied for an LIC position in Canada. She applied from Saudi Arabia, sending her application materials and résumé to a maid placement agency in Canada. Her nurse's training made her a strong candidate and even though the agency fees were US\$4,500, her agency allowed her to pay the entire amount

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<sup>5</sup> The National Council of State Boards of Nursing in the US requires any nursing candidate (whether a Registered Nurse or a Practical Nurse) to pass the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). Further information is available at <https://www.ncsbn.org/nclex.htm>.

in incremental payments over the course of six months after her arrival in Canada. While working in Canada as a caregiver, Cherina studied for and passed the Canadian nursing licensing examinations and the required English language proficiency test. After two years, she applied for permanent residence and, at the time of her interview, she was waiting for the official paperwork recognizing her change in immigration status. She fully expected to find a job as a registered nurse once she became a permanent resident. When asked, she voiced no regrets about the detour into domestic work that she had taken, or the years she had spent working in Saudi Arabia, especially now that she was back on track towards fulfilling her dream of settling down and working as a nurse in the West.

But the various twists and turns in Cherina's migration story—her multiple transformations from nurse to domestic worker to nurse; her failed attempts at direct migration to the UK and stepwise migration through Saudi Arabia to the US; her onward migration from Saudi to Canada—highlight how structural factors outside the control of individual migrants (from host countries' immigration and labor policies to recruitment agencies' fee structures) can combine with migrants' own capital constraints to introduce a great deal of dynamic change into their migration journeys.

### **Multistate Migration Trajectories**

Having discussed how participants' multistate migration decisions came about, I now turn to analyzing how their *specific* multistate migration trajectories came to be, paying particular attention to Hong Kong's unique position as a springboard for Canada.

How did these migrants learn about the possibility of moving on to Canada from Hong Kong?

*The Role of Networks in Information Transfer*

As already discussed in Chapter Six, interviewees' friends and family were overwhelmingly the most important source of destination information. The same scenario applied when it came to information about multistate migration. Migrant networks were crucial in disseminating information about the pros and cons of different countries as stepping stones or end-destinations. Sometimes this information was shared with study participants when they were already overseas; other times, it was when they were still in the process of making their initial migration and destination decisions in the Philippines. That was how Jasmine, a college graduate who had worked as a part-time clerical assistant in the Philippines and then a domestic worker in Hong Kong, first learned about the possibilities of onward migration to Canada:

When I left the Philippines the first time, I didn't have any plans of coming here to Canada. But like for the first year that I am in Hong Kong, I hear a lot of people saying Canada is very good and like this, like that. And then, there's a friend of Auntie Carrie's, [my aunt in Hong Kong,] and she has a sister in Quebec and they own an agency in Quebec. And Auntie Carrie asked me, "Do you want to go to Canada for your future? [If yes,] then you can go apply through this person. I know her. She's my friend. She's got a sister in Quebec and she owns an agency." So I said, Okay, I'll try. So I'm so excited that time.

These transnational interpersonal connections between Hong Kong and Canada were remarkably strong and active, fostered by the large and vibrant community of Filipino migrant domestic workers in both countries and the steady outflow of migrants from Hong Kong to Canada over the last two decades. A culture of re-migration thrived among study participants in Hong Kong, even more so than in Singapore. Almost all study participants in Hong Kong talked about friends, relatives and even mere

acquaintances who were making concrete efforts to find work in Canada, or they talked about contacts who were already in Canada and the stories they had shared about life in the West.

These connections were also facilitated by the heavy use of social networking technologies like Facebook, Yahoo Messenger, Skype, and even simply email, by these migrants. These communication technologies allowed participants to maintain regular contact with friends on either side of the Pacific Ocean. In Canada, many participants spoke of having purchased a laptop or personal computer in order to communicate with family and friends in the Philippines and elsewhere. Their freedom to use their computers in the privacy of their rooms also enabled their heavy usage of such communication technology.<sup>6</sup> Hong Kong, meanwhile, is one of the most “wired countries” in the world.<sup>7</sup> Even though few migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong had their own room from which to talk to their families and friends, Hong Kong-based workers were guaranteed a weekly day-off. Many participants used their free time to frequent Internet cafés and public libraries where they could go online and chat with friends and family spread across the world. Many of Hong Kong’s mass rapid transit stations also have public computer booths with free Internet access and these were very popular among migrant domestic workers. All Hong Kong and Singapore-based participants who were employed at the time of their interview also had at least one, if not two cell phones, that they used to text friends and family in the Philippines and other countries.

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<sup>6</sup> In contrast, some participants in Hong Kong and Singapore spoke of hiding their laptops and cellphones from their employers in case they were accused of wasting their time talking with friends and family when they were supposed to be working.

<sup>7</sup> According to the World Economic Forum’s 2010-2011 Global Information Technology Report, Hong Kong ranks 12<sup>th</sup> among high-income countries when it comes to its “networked readiness.” Report available at [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GITR\\_Report\\_2011.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GITR_Report_2011.pdf).

### *Stepping Stone Countries*

Among Canada-based participants who were multistate migrants, 60% had worked in Hong Kong before their arrival in Canada. Why was Hong Kong so popular as a stepping stone country? Much of its reputation had to do with the fact that applying to Canada from Hong Kong was both cheaper and speedier than doing so from the Philippines or anywhere else for that matter. For instance, Arielle, a live-in caregiver in Toronto, who had worked first in Taiwan and then in Israel before finding her current job in Canada, was now thinking of bringing her sister to join her in Canada. But she explained during her interview that “I want her to go to Hong Kong first because the processing is easier than in the Philippines.” Even though she herself had worked in Taiwan and Israel before moving to Canada, Arielle was of the opinion that Hong Kong was a better springboard for Canada.

Through advice like Arielle’s, Hong Kong has now gained the reputation for being the ideal gateway to Canada: Offering speedy processing of visas, costing relatively less money for agency fees, and finally, giving Filipino domestic workers based there the reputation of being experienced and well-qualified caregivers.

But Hong Kong was not the only stepping stone to Canada. Altogether, 20% of the Canada-based multistate migrants I interviewed had worked in various Western nations before moving to Canada. These countries included Cyprus, Israel and Germany. None of these three countries have policies allowing migrant domestic workers to apply for permanent residence. In the case of Cyprus, as mentioned earlier, the Cypriot government has a strict policy of enforcing a four-year maximum stay for migrant



domestic workers. Thus, while foreign domestic workers in these high-income countries can earn significantly high wages, they are unable to build a legal future for themselves and their families in these countries. The limited residency options available to these workers was the reason that participants who had worked in these countries decided to keep on migrating, even though they were technically already working in a Tier 1 destination. Thus, while a country can become a stepping stone to greener pastures because of intrinsic qualities it possesses that can facilitate subsequent climbs up migrants' personal destination hierarchy, it can also become a stepping stone because of internal factors that simply make it inhospitable to long-term migrants.

This was the case with Israel. Arielle, mentioned earlier, explained that she had chosen to leave Israel and re-migrate to Canada because of the political controversy over whether or not to grant Israeli citizenship to the Israeli-born children of Filipino migrant domestic workers. She and her husband had been working in Israel—Arielle in Tel Aviv and her husband in Jerusalem—when their son was born. When their son turned three, they decided that Arielle should apply for a caregiving job in Canada:

I almost don't want to go to Canada and not to have this job here. But I'm thinking of him [my son], of his future. Because though there is a chance that we can migrate to Israel, but not a 100% [chance]. Others said you have to wait for the child to become six years old and then you can apply for him to become a citizen. But there's no assurance. So I decided to go here [to Canada]. And after 24 months, we can reunite. But it's really hard.

*I didn't know there was that option in Israel.*

Yes, there is an option [in Israel]. But, you know, the laws always change. Last time when I was still there [in Israel], there were some Filipino [children] in Israel, they were granted citizenship. I think, more than a thousand that they granted citizenship in Israel. Those [Israeli-born children who were] 10 years old and above, when I was still there, they offered them citizenship. But, after that, when they changed the prime minister, [they decided that children] six years old and below, they should go back to the Philippines already.

Given the political uncertainties surrounding the issue of Israeli citizenship, Arielle decided that a safer bet was applying for Canadian citizenship through Canada's LCP and then sponsoring her husband and son to join her in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

While Hong Kong appears to be the primary feeder country for Canada—partly because Hong Kong itself draws the largest proportion of newly-hired migrant domestic workers leaving the Philippines each year—it should be noted that other countries may act as stepping stones to other end-destinations. Several participants mentioned in passing that Filipino migrant domestic workers in Cyprus often sought out work in Italy when their Cyprus-based contracts were about to expire. A similar link between Israel and Italy was also mentioned by several participants. There is a distinct possibility that multistate migration among labor migrants is path-dependent: That each destination choice they make directly influences their subsequent destination choice because of how transnational migrant networks are structured and the geographical proximity between particular pairs of destinations. However, further cross-national data between some of these country-pairs needs to be collected to confirm this hypothesis.

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<sup>8</sup> Arielle was referring to the schizophrenic actions of the Israeli state towards non-Jewish (and non-Palestinian) foreign workers within its borders. A large undocumented Filipino migrant domestic worker population exists in Israel and, in the early 2000s, there were repeated crackdowns against this population in the form of police raids of homes and public places with the stated goal of arresting undocumented workers and deporting them (Liebelt 2008). However, there was widespread denunciation of these actions and, particularly, their effect on the thousands of undocumented Israeli-born children of these workers. This was followed by the 2005 decision by the Israeli government to grant permanent residency and later citizenship to all Israeli-born children of migrant workers who were ten years and older, could speak Hebrew and were attending or had completed school within Israel's education system. These children could later sponsor their parents for permanent residency (Kemp 2007). However, in 2010, the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that it was about to deport up to 2,000 children of migrant workers who were less than five years old, did not speak fluent Hebrew and were not yet enrolled in school (Esveld and Chen 2010). These fears of deportation and family separation were what pushed Arielle to relocate to Canada while her husband took their son back to the Philippines.

## **The Mechanics of Multistate Migration**

Migrants possess a certain amount of capital—financial, human, social and cultural capital—prior to leaving their home country but some of this capital is exhausted by the very act of migration. Certain forms of capital, such as human, cultural and social capital, may remain at their pre-migration levels. But, in order to support a new migration to a new destination, aspiring multistate migrants have to accumulate sufficient *new* migrant capital in their current host country to overcome the high entry barriers imposed by their new destination's immigration and labor policies or by the recruitment agencies that function as gatekeepers to that country's domestic labor market.

### *Migrant Human Capital*

Migrant human capital refers to both information about the process of emigration to a desired destination (possible visa categories to apply under, the paperwork required, the cost of securing a visa) and the job experience, language skills, educational qualifications, family status, and even age, that can facilitate securing a job in the desired country. In the case of human capital, the act of migration does not necessarily deplete migrants' existing store of these resources. If a migrant held a bachelor's degree from the Philippines, she remained a college graduate even after finding work overseas. However, if migrants worked overseas in an occupation that was different from their home country occupation and college training, their time abroad often cancelled out any of their prior work experience and qualifications. In fact, migrant domestic work has been associated with significant deskilling of migrants who were white-collar professionals before their departure from the Philippines (Parreñas 2001).

To counter this atrophying of their human capital, many participants tried to upgrade their skills while overseas so as to qualify for more desirable destinations and to make themselves more attractive to new prospective employers. Part-time courses in caregiving, culinary skills and computer science were popular among many of the Filipinos I interviewed in Singapore and Hong Kong precisely for this reason.<sup>9</sup> Some of these courses had questionable value. For instance, one participant explained that she had enrolled in an aromatherapy course “because they say that if you get this certificate [...] it is easy to go [to Canada].” But the underlying sentiment behind these course enrollments was participants’ desire to acquire new skills and make themselves more appealing to prospective employers in other countries.

However, even without such specialized courses, there was a general understanding that prior work experience as a migrant domestic worker was an asset when applying for live-in caregiver positions in Canada. This message was reinforced by maid agencies in Canada that specifically looked for applicants with prior work experience in Hong Kong or Singapore, using this experience as a “signal” of suitability. Roxie, a 28-year-old domestic worker in Hong Kong, claimed that agencies in Canada would not hire someone unless they had prior overseas work experience:

You cannot go there in Canada if you have no experience. [...] If you have experience, it’s easy to go to Canada. Because some of the Filipinos here, they live in Hong Kong [and then] they go there to Canada. It’s easy. So I try my best to work here as an experience. Because I need to earn my certificate to go to Canada. In four years or like that.

A similar statement was made by Fiona, a 40-year former domestic worker, who had first worked in Singapore before moving to Hong Kong. She concluded that it had taken her very little time to secure a job in Hong Kong because of her prior experience in

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<sup>9</sup> Many participants in Canada meanwhile were enrolled in English language classes as they began to prepare themselves for the upcoming change in their residency status and labor market permissions.

Singapore. “Since I have experience from Singapore, they [my agent] said it will go quicker to Hong Kong,” she recalled. “They said ex-abroad have more advantage to find employer than the first-timer.” Fiona’s term “ex-abroad” was a common label applied to Filipinas who had previously worked overseas. It was understood that “ex-abroads” prior work experience in the same field—as long as they had not been fired from their previous job—made them more attractive to new employers in the same country or elsewhere. The Canadian government has even codified this viewpoint by waiving the requirement for expensive formal training in a caregiver course for those applicants with at least one year’s worth of relevant caregiving experience. In this manner, both overseas recruitment agencies and the Canadian government inadvertently encourage an incremental, multistate migration to Canada to facilitate the accumulation of occupation-specific migrant human capital for migrant domestic workers.

### *Migrant Financial Capital*

Migrant financial capital refers to the funds needed to pay the necessary agency fees, visa application fees, and other ancillary costs that are incurred when attempting travel to a desired destination. The ability to access enough funds to cover these costs influences how high up their destination hierarchy a migrant can start, and it also has an impact on the number and duration of stops multistate migrants have to make on their journeys to their preferred destination.

Participants’ financial capital resources were the hardest hit by their initial act of migration. Given the exorbitant cost of agency placement fees, participants typically started their overseas stints with severely depleted bank accounts. Many of them had

taken on large, high-interest loans that needed to be paid off. And for those participants who were paying their agency fees through salary deductions instead, they were effectively earning no salary at all during their first year overseas. In order to fund further migrations, participants had to work hard to set aside some of their overseas earnings to pay the agency fees for their next migration. But they had to do this while also remitting a significant portion of their earnings back to their families in the Philippines. This drain on their savings could be so significant that some participants had given up on their dreams of multistate migration having accepted that they would never be able to save enough money.

This is what happened with Rebecca, a single mother who was the sole breadwinner for her daughter, parents and younger siblings. She explained why she had given up on her dreams of emigration to the West:

Why I decided to apply to Hong Kong is because Hong Kong is a stepping stone to go to Canada. [...] Because many of my friends that were here, they come to Hong Kong first and then they gained experience, and then have time, and then apply to Canada. So when I come here, I think, Oh, I will just finish my one contract here and then I will go to Canada. But then that plan—[*Rebecca laughs*—has been vanished! Because I don't have enough money to go to Canada! [*Rebecca laughs again.*] Because my Canada visa takes a lot of money. And we are not talking about pesos, we are talking about dollars! Because the application costs another 30,000 Hong Kong dollars [or US\$3,850]. So I don't have enough money. I still need to send money to my family every month. And then, my money is spent for my holiday, for my personal needs.

Another participant who ran into similar problems was Isabel, a married mother of three boys, who worked for a Japanese expatriate in Singapore. She earned SG\$500 (or just under US\$400) a month which was an above-average salary for migrant domestic workers in Singapore but she wanted to find better-paying work in Spain. However, she was unsure if she could save enough money from her current wages to cover the agency fees for a job in Spain:

I want to go somewhere like Spain because that now is the big salary. But I don't know yet if I can because I need to save money also. Three thousand [Singapore dollars] and

then you can apply. [...] But then, for me, I say, Oh, maybe I cannot do that. Because I need to send my salary every month for the school. My three kids are going to school. I need to pay the tuition. And then their everyday pocket money and then for their lunch and something like that.

All in all, participants' success at accumulating sufficient migrant financial capital directly determined their success at multistate migration.

Participants without dependents in the Philippines relying on their earnings were better positioned to save enough money to fund further migrations. Participants who had overseas relatives or close friends they could turn to for short-term loans to cover the costs of their subsequent migrations were also much more successful at multistate migration. This was the case with Jasmine, the domestic worker from Hong Kong who asked her aunt (who also worked in Hong Kong as a domestic servant) to loan her money to pay the agency fees for a job in Canada. In Jasmine's case, it also helped that she did not have any dependent children in the Philippines who required most of her foreign earnings. She still sent remittances to her parents in the Philippines but, with fewer dependents, she was able to set aside more of her wages for herself and her future migration plans. Another participant who had first worked in Hong Kong, asked her US-based boyfriend for a loan of US\$2,700 to cover part of the agency fees for a job in Canada. As one onward migrant who had also worked in Hong Kong before re-migrating to Canada put it: "It's easy if they have a money. [...] Because if you really don't have money, you cannot go."

### *Migrant Social Capital*

The third form of migrant capital needed to support both initial migrations and re-migrations is social capital and it refers to the information or more tangible forms of

assistance that can be provided by network connections to reduce the costs and risks of migration (Garip 2008; Portes 1998). Contacts in the preferred destination country are particularly important possessors of migrant social capital and were actively cultivated by study participants seeking to migrate to those countries.

Many participants found their access to this type of migrant social capital increasing after they had left the Philippines. They made friends with other migrants who could provide useful information and tips about how to secure visas to their preferred destinations. Some of these contacts did more, recommending a trustworthy recruitment agency to use, matching participants with employers in their desired country to hire them directly, even introducing participants to new potential destinations and thus reordering their country hierarchies. This was of critical importance to migrants who were not already embedded within a family network of overseas migrant domestic workers. Diane, a 38-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, for example, spoke of a close Filipino friend of hers whom she had met in Singapore who managed to emigrate to Canada. That friend was now trying to arrange a Canadian work permit for Diane as well. She had already found an employer in Canada for Diane and offered to handle all the flight arrangements as well, if only Diane would submit the paperwork for a visa application to the Canadian High Commission in Singapore.

Migrant social capital embedded within the Filipino diaspora was also influential in encouraging participants to consider multistate migration in the first place. Such aspirations were forged through interactions with migrants who had engaged in similar multistate trajectories in the past. Almost all the participants who spoke of traveling stepwise towards their preferred destination also spoke of friends or relatives who had



made a similar multi-stage journey in the past and served as role models whose migration *strategies* and *trajectories* were to be emulated. Many interviewees in Hong Kong (and, to a lesser extent, Singapore) knew of friends or relatives who had earlier used these two countries as launch pads for eventual journeys to the West and encouraged them to follow a similar trajectory. Consider Juno, a 30-year-old domestic worker, who had first sought employment in Singapore on the advice of her aunt and cousin in Canada:

My auntie says to me that, “If you want to go here [to Canada], you stay first in Singapore. Even one year only, like that. It is easy to go first to Singapore and then from Singapore, exit to Canada.” [...] My cousin who graduated physical therapy, she worked as a domestic helper here two years and then cross country to Canada. So I want to be like her also.

The role of migrant networks in facilitating multistate migration will be discussed in much more depth in Chapter Eight but for now, I will conclude by saying that, when successfully mobilized, migrant social capital can be critical in facilitating participants’ re-migrations to countries higher up their destination hierarchy.

### *Migrant Cultural Capital*

Cultural capital refers to the forms of knowledge, skills, education and other advantages embodied within an individual that provide them with a higher status in society (Bourdieu 1986). This cultural capital can be acquired unconsciously by accident of birth (e.g. for people born into a higher socioeconomic class or in a high-status country) or through a more concerted cultivation process (Waters 2006; Wacquant 1996; Bourdieu 1986). Filipino migrant domestic workers benefit automatically from their nationality and the presumed cultural capital they possess by virtue of being Filipinos. Starting in the 1970s, the Philippine government framed Filipino women migrants as intrinsically more loving, nurturing and better qualified than other nationality groups at

traditionally feminine jobs like domestic work and nursing (Tyner 2009). These efforts have been very successful. Within the heavily racialized and hierarchical market for migrant domestic workers, Filipinos often enjoy top billing vis-à-vis other nationalities (Paul 2011b; Lan 2006; Calavita 2005; Constable 1997). In such overseas markets, employers can accrue higher status simply by hiring Filipino domestic workers. This makes it easier for Filipinos to market themselves to prospective employers in new destination countries.

In addition to the cultural capital that Filipino migrant domestic workers possess by simple virtue of their nationality, there is also *new* cultural capital that they may acquire after working overseas for a period of time, especially if they work in countries that themselves have higher standing in the world order. Ossman (2004) refers to this idea obliquely when she describes the “cosmopolitanism” that the serial migrants she interviews had acquired. Ossman cautions that this veneer of sophistication may be authentic or simply be a show. Whatever the case, this air of sophistication can help these migrants successfully navigate societies that prize well-traveled individuals and cultural omnivores. Applying this insight to the case of migrant domestic workers, I find that countries like Hong Kong and Singapore were seen as excellent recruiting grounds and credentialing sites by maid agencies in Canada. Interviewees reported that migrants with prior work experience in these Asian countries were viewed as being more competent than migrants from other intermediate destinations such as the Middle East. The assumption was that these Asian countries shared more cultural similarities with Canadian society and a domestic worker who had been successfully employed in Hong Kong or Singapore was equipped with the necessary skill set (especially English

language skills) to do well in Canada as well. In this manner, Filipino migrants' new cultural capital (acquired because of their earlier decision to first work in countries like Singapore and Hong Kong) can support their multistate migrations up their destination hierarchy.

### **The Profile of a Multinational Maid**

The previous section has already hinted at some of the factors that distinguish multistate migrants from single-state/single-stage migrants. This section delves into this topic in more depth. It should first be pointed out that in this study sample, multistate migrants sit in the middle ground between “direct migrants” who were able to reach their *preferred* destination with a single migration journey and “single-stage migrants” who also only undertook one migration journey but did so to a country lower down their destination hierarchy and had gone no further at the time of their interview.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the multistate migrants in this study were not so capital-rich that they could afford to travel directly to their preferred destination but neither were they so capital-poor that they could not undertake multiple migrations over the course of their lifetime. I describe them instead as being “capital-constrained”: Limited in their initial destination options when they first considered leaving the Philippines, but with the capacity to break free of these constraints through their accumulation of additional migrant capital.

Within the current study sample, multistate migrants were, on average, more educated than single-stage migrants, with 82% of them possessing at least some college

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<sup>10</sup> Single-stage migrants are difficult to identify both within this study sample and in general because it is very possible that they may undertake further migrations in the future. In fact, many of my study participants whom I have classified as single-stage migrants spoke of doing just that. As a result, my generalizations about the characteristics of single-stage migrants must be read with caution.

education compared to only 56% of single-stage migrants. More than double the number of multistate migrants were degree-holders compared to single-stage migrants (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1  
Educational Level of Study Participants, by Migrant Type

<b>Education</b>	<b>Direct</b>	<b>Multistate</b>	<b>Single-Stage</b>
College and Above	66%	48%	23%
Some College	25%	35%	33%
High School	6%	11%	35%
Some High School	3%	6%	9%

This difference speaks to the greater education requirements for jobs in countries higher up participants' destination hierarchies. Given that multistate migrants are able to move up their destination hierarchy to countries that often have higher human capital requirements, it stands to reason that they would possess greater educational qualifications than single-stage migrants who were unable to qualify for higher-tier destinations. Direct migrants meanwhile were even more educated with 91% having some college education.

However, multistate migrants were considerably younger than the direct migrants in the study sample when they first left the Philippines (see Table 7.2). Almost 50% of multistate migrants were 25 years or under when they first left the Philippines to work overseas. In contrast, only 12% of direct migrants were that young. In fact, the average age of direct migrants when they first left the Philippines was 37, compared to 27 years

for multistate migrants. (There was no difference in the average age of multistate migrants and single-stage migrants.)

Table 7.2  
Age at First Departure of Study Participants, by Migrant Type

Age	Direct	Multistate	Single-Stage
16-25	12%	49%	44%
26-35	27%	35%	46%
36-45	36%	12%	11%
46+	24%	3%	0%

The most likely explanation for this large discrepancy in age at first departure between direct and multistate migrants has to do with the primary mode of entry into the US/Canada employed by my sample of direct migrants. Most of these migrants entered as permanent residents, having been sponsored by immediate relatives already residing in these countries. Given that the visa sponsorship process is incredibly long (taking decades in the case of the US), it stands to reason that these migrants were significantly older when they finally secured their official visa papers and were able to leave the Philippines. Multistate migrants, on the other hand, typically could not afford to wait for overseas relatives (if they had any) to sponsor them for visas to their preferred destination and so left the Philippines at a much earlier age (though to a different easier-to-enter country) in order to start earning money for their families.

This last point is tied to the differences between the network connections of these three migrant types. Multistate migrants were significantly less well-connected than direct migrants who often had siblings or parents who were US/Canadian citizens and

could sponsor them through family reunification visas or help cover the hefty agency fees required for direct migration to the West. This is not to say that multistate migrants were not well-connected. Most of them were also deeply embedded within transnational migrant networks, however these networks were qualitatively different from those of direct migrants. While direct migrants had more relatives overseas who were citizens or permanent residents of other countries, multistate migrants' relatives were instead working overseas as temporary migrant laborers—as domestic workers and factory workers (among female relatives) and seafarers and construction workers (among male family members) with almost no migrant rights. As a result, multistate migrants' network contacts could not sponsor them for family reunification or even tourist visas, but they could (if they were willing) still provide advice and other forms of assistance. The various ways in which multistate migrants' network contacts facilitated their multiple migrations are covered in Chapter Eight.

Finally, there were differences in the financial capital that multistate migrants could bring to bear on their migration decisions. Multistate migrants (85%) were more likely to have been employed prior to their migration from the Philippines than both direct migrants (76%) and single-stage migrants (72%). However, a greater proportion of direct migrants (52%) had been employed in so-called middle-income jobs compared to multistate migrants (34%). The occupations that the direct migrants in this study possessed prior to their departure from the Philippines included that of university professor, lawyer, business owner, accountant and bank officer. In contrast, multistate migrants were more likely to have been in lower-income jobs in the Philippines such as office worker, factory worker, telephone operator and salesperson. This speaks to the

greater financial wherewithal direct migrants most likely possessed to assist in their direct migration to their preferred destination country.

Table 7.3  
Pre-Migration Income Level of Study Participants, by Migrant Type

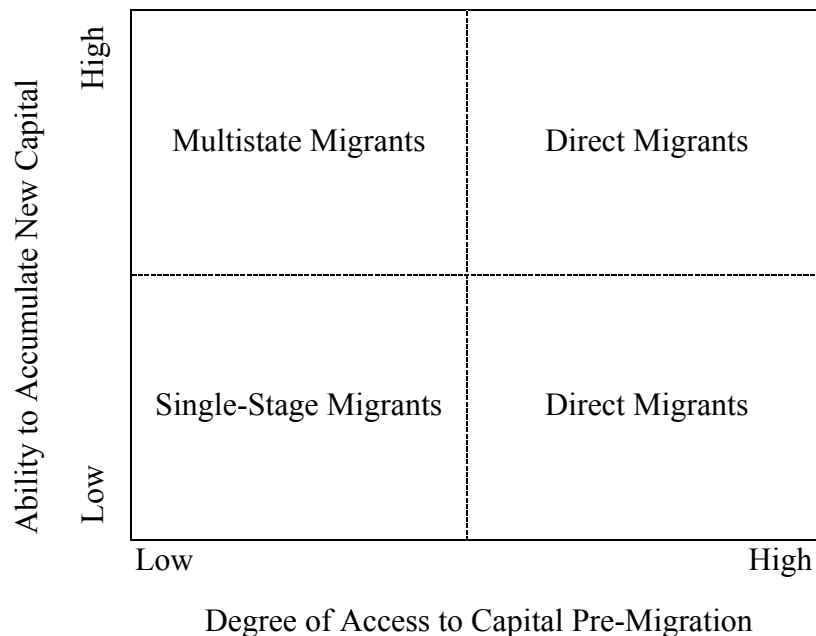
<b>Income Level</b>	<b>Direct</b>	<b>Multistate</b>	<b>Single-Stage</b>
Middle Income	43%	32%	20%
Low Income	33%	52%	52%
Housewife	10%	6%	13%
Unemployed	14%	10%	16%

With this rudimentary analysis, we now have a rough sketch of what a multistate migrant domestic worker looks like. Such a migrant is endowed with a fair amount of human capital (especially in terms of their educational qualifications) and some social capital (in the form of overseas network connections who are also migrant workers). But they personally possess fewer financial capital resources and this, combined with their lack of sufficient social capital resources in their desired destination, is what makes it impossible for them to undertake direct migration to their preferred end-destination.

However, as mentioned earlier, the ability to accumulate capital while overseas is one of the most critical aspects of multistate migrants, setting them apart from single-stage migrants. The ability to accumulate capital (and especially financial capital) is directly tied to the number of dependents migrants in the Philippines expecting regular remittances from migrants' overseas wages. The greater the number of dependents and the more needy they are, the less likely it is that migrants will be able to set aside enough

money to fund another migration. Various other factors—such as whether or not their husband (if they were married) was earning an income of his own, and whether or not their children (or siblings’ children) were college-age—all play a part in migrants’ ability to acquire and *hold onto* financial capital, and through this, their ability to engage in multistate migration. These differences between multistate migrants, direct and single-stage migrants are represented below.

Figure 7.1  
The Differences between Multistate, Direct and Single-Stage Migrants



### A Model of Multistate Migration

This chapter has provided evidence of how individual migrants’ agency and various social forces interact to encourage the adoption of multistate migration. I now incorporate all these findings into a model of multistate migration. I base my model on Everett Lee’s (1966) push-pull model of migration. Lee attempted to build a comprehensive migration theory to explain why migration occurs between two countries.



Since that time, his push-pull model has been mischaracterized—and, I would argue, unfairly—criticized for presenting a view of the world where there are only push factors in the origin country that encourage potential migrants to emigrate and only pull factors in the destination country that draw these same migrants towards its shores.<sup>11</sup> According to this version of Lee’s model, all citizens of the origin country would want to emigrate as long as there were higher wages to be had elsewhere and the only factors stopping them are the financial and personal costs of migration.

This is far from the argument that Lee made. Figure 7.2 presents the original diagram from Lee’s 1966 paper where he first outlined his push-pull model of migration. As Lee conceptualized it, the decision to migrate is a function of a set of factors (positive, negative and neutral) at both origin and destination countries, a series of intervening obstacles and various personal factors. To further elaborate, there are some factors (represented by ‘+’s) in the origin country (such as the presence of immediate and extended family members or a comfortable, well-paying job) that may encourage residents to remain there. There are other factors (represented by ‘-’s) in the origin country that repel natives, pushing them to leave. These negative factors could include the lack of employment opportunities or an ongoing civil war in the home country. There are also other factors that have no bearing on an individual’s migration decision, and Lee represented those with ‘0’ signs. Likewise, in the destination country, there are some forces of attraction and some of repulsion for aspiring migrants in the origin country.

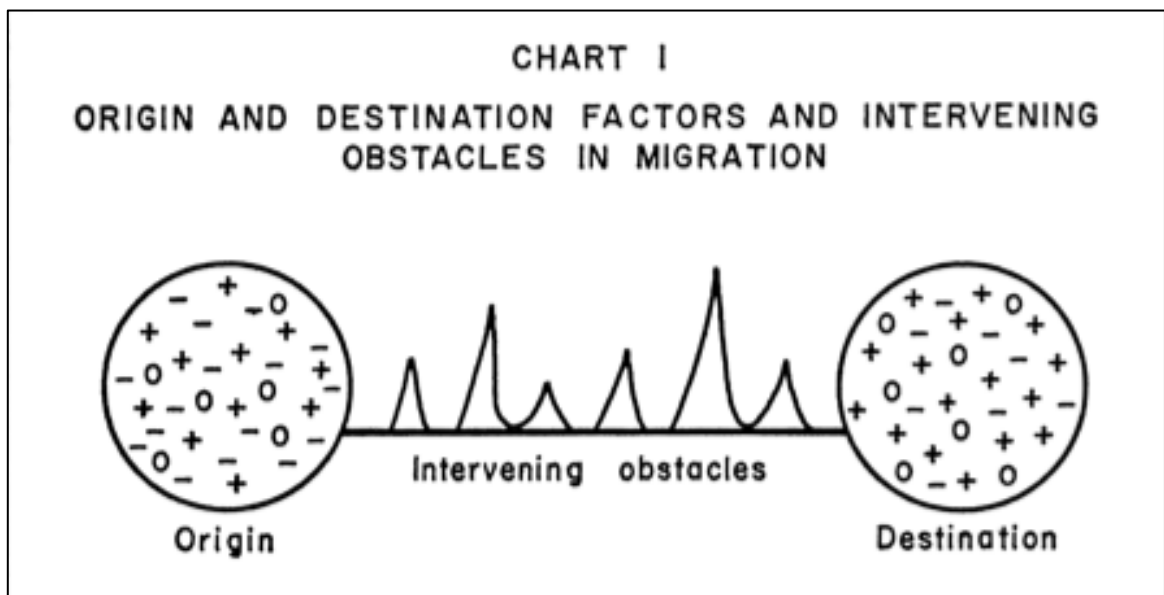
But even if a prospective migrant desires to leave (net of these push and pull factors in both origin and destination), there are also what Lee called “intervening

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<sup>11</sup> These critics typically lump Lee’s model with neoclassical economic theories of migration that assume that wage differentials between origin and sending countries are the only driver of migration.

obstacles” that can prevent an individual who wants to emigrate from being able to leave their origin country. These obstacles could include the high monetary cost of migration or policies that limit the granting of visas according to very restrictive criteria or familial resistance to an individual’s migration decision.

Figure 7.2  
Everett Lee’s Pictorial Representation of His Push-Pull Model of Migration



Source: Lee, Everett. 1966. "A Theory of Migration." *Demography* 3(1):47-57.

Finally, there are personal factors that can influence the migration decision both directly and indirectly. Lee writes about how a potential migrant’s stage in their life cycle can determine if they overestimate the benefits of remaining in their home country (if they have already lived there for several decades) or underestimate the difficulties of starting a new life in a new country (if they are young, unmarried and/or seeking adventure) (1966:51).

Lee's model is both broad enough and simple enough that it can incorporate many of the factors highlighted in earlier chapters to explain the out-migration of migrant domestic workers from the Philippines. At the same time, the model recognizes that there is a migration "decision" that has to be made and that potential migrants do engage in some kind of a cost-benefit analysis (however rudimentary or skewed) when deciding whether or not to leave their home country. Lee specifically warns that migrants are *not* rational economic actors, solely motivated by financial gain. But, in making the decision to leave their home country and work elsewhere, they still attempt to weigh the pros and cons of leaving versus staying, which is to say that migrants are not irrational either, even if they may sometimes make decisions that appear irrational to others.

However, there are still limitations to Lee's model. The first is the fact that Lee only talks about the migration decision, and not the *destination decision*, of potential migrants. His model, as it currently stands, assumes a world of only one origin and one destination country. Secondly, and this is related to the first limitation, Lee does not attempt to explain multistate migration. Given that there is only destination option, the notion of migrants moving from one host country to the next does not figure in Lee's model. In fact, Lee specifically writes that "excluded [from this model] are the continual movements of nomads and migratory workers" (1966:49).

In writing that there may be "intervening obstacles" that prevent the migration decision, Lee also does not highlight how there may also be *intervening opportunities* that might facilitate the migration decision for potential migrants. These intervening opportunities are destination-specific, easing migration to particular countries and not others. For instance, as outlined in Chapters Five and Six, a destination country with

specific labor importing programs targeting certain types of migrant workers, might be easier to enter for aspiring migrants who possess the needed qualifications to enter.

Despite these limitations, it is relatively easy to amend Lee's model to correct for these shortcomings and fully explain the emergence of multistate migration. This is exactly what I attempt to do in the following section.

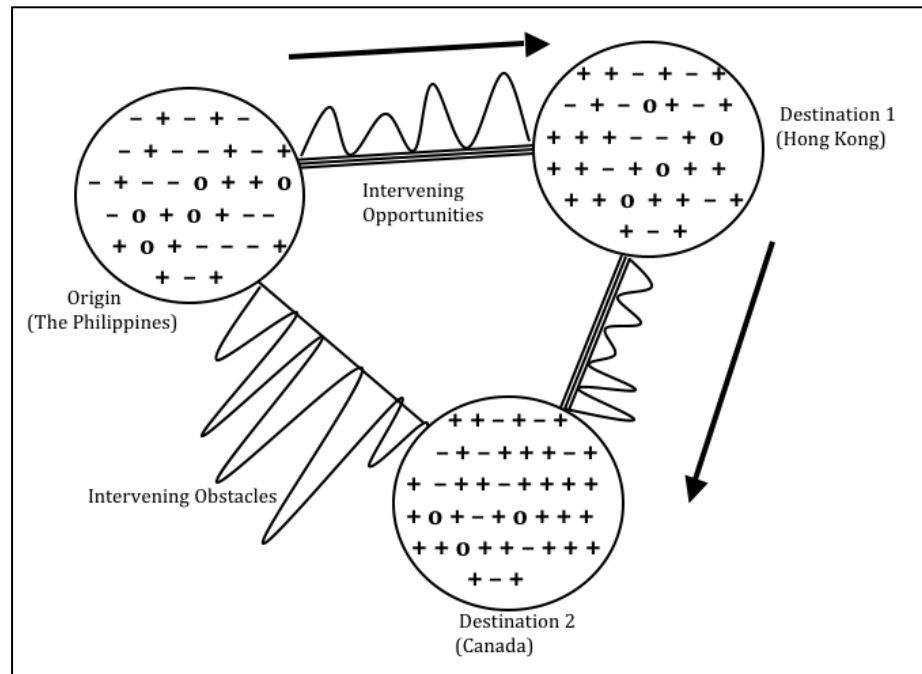
*A Push-Pull Model of Multistate Migration for the Capital-Constrained*

The first needed modification to Lee's model is the addition of one more destination option, though the model could easily be scaled up to incorporate even more countries. In this revised model, represented by Figure 7.3, a prospective migrant in the Origin country must choose between two destinations, with one option (Destination 2) more attractive to the migrant than the other (Destination 1). This is represented by the greater number of '+'s and smaller number of '-'s in Destination 2 relative to both Destination 1 and the Origin. If applied to the case of migrant domestic workers from the Philippines, Destination 1 could be Hong Kong while Destination 2 could be Canada.

But even though Destination 2 (Canada) is more attractive to potential migrants, there are significantly greater migratory hurdles, or intervening obstacles, between the Origin and this destination, as represented by the much "bumpier" line connecting the two. The bumpier the line and the higher the bumps connecting origin and destination, the greater the number of obstacles the potential migrant must overcome in order to reach the destination. Given the capital-constrained nature of these potential migrants, these bumps could constitute significant impediments to their migration and destination preferences. For migrant domestic workers, these obstacles could include the impossibly

high placement fees charged by recruitment agencies placing Philippines-based migrant domestic workers directly in Canada or the incredibly long wait times for visa applications to Canada submitted in the Philippines.

Figure 7.3  
A Push-Pull Model of Multistate Migration for Capital-Constrained Migrants



At the same time, however, there are intervening opportunities easing the migration process between the Origin and Destination 1 (Hong Kong). These opportunities are represented by the multiple straight lines in Figure 7.3 that connect these two countries. The greater the number of connecting straight lines, the more the opportunities for migration to a particular destination. For migrant domestic workers, this could refer to the lower human capital requirements for Hong Kong-based jobs. This could also refer to the considerably faster processing times for Hong Kong visas when applying from the Philippines. All of these factors combine to make it more likely that

prospective labor migrants—particularly those who are capital- and time-constrained—would choose their initial journey to be to Destination 1 (Hong Kong) rather than Destination 2 (Canada).

However, as Figure 7.3 demonstrates, a migrant having arrived in Hong Kong could still feel a pull towards Canada as long as their life stage or long-term aspirations have not changed. As the earlier excerpts from study participants show, this was very much the case. Most Hong Kong-based migrant domestic workers continued to be attracted to Canada's higher wages, better working conditions and its promise of permanent residence and family reunification. In addition, the intervening obstacles obstructing migration to Destination 2 may now be less formidable, when viewed from Destination 1 rather than the Origin Country. For instance, recruitment agencies in Hong Kong charge Filipino migrant domestic workers significantly lower fees for a job in Canada compared to their counterparts in the Philippines. Also, as mentioned earlier, applying for a Canadian work permit out of Hong Kong takes only a matter of weeks while it can take more than a year when applying from the Philippines. There might even be specific opportunity structures that facilitate such a re-migration decision from Destination 1 (Hong Kong) to Destination 2 (Canada) such as the preference Canadian agencies have to hire existing migrant domestic workers from Hong Kong. For these and other reasons, migrants in Destination 1 who have managed to accumulate additional capital to cover the costs of and other requirements for a second migration to the harder-to-enter Destination 2 may be drawn into considering multistate migration.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated how multistate migration is not just the province of high-capital individuals who can move around the world at will, settling down wherever they choose without any restrictions placed on their mobility. Capital-constrained migrants such as foreign domestic workers can also undertake multistate migration. In some cases, the decision to re-migrate is motivated by the simple desire for better working and living conditions. But, in other cases, multistate labor migrants are motivated by the desire for a new home for themselves and their families, and a chance at upward mobility in another country. As the participant accounts in this chapter revealed, this decision can be made as either part of a long-term strategy or more organically, but the multistate migration journeys that these migrants undertake are almost always marked by a great deal of fluidity.

The Filipino migrant domestic workers in this study adopted multistate migration in direct response to various emergent social forces. The first of these factors is the global labor market that has developed for migrant domestic workers, creating a unique opportunity structure that allows these capital-constrained migrants to secure entry to countries that might otherwise have been out of reach. At the same time, this global market is also transnational, allowing migrants to transfer their prior work experience, training and qualifications as domestic workers in one receiving country to another and be rewarded for the occupation-specific human capital they have acquired along the way.

The second and third factors involve the restrictive immigration requirements and policies instituted by the countries that rank at the top of most migrants' destination hierarchies and the exorbitant agency fees charged for access to these countries. These

immigration/labor restrictions and price controls prevent many migrants from gaining direct access to their preferred destination countries, pushing them to consider alternative destinations that are easier to enter and can also serve as stepping stones to their preferred destinations. Without these entry barriers, multistate migration among the capital-constrained would be largely unnecessary.

The fourth factor that encourages the adoption of multistate migration among Filipino migrant domestic workers is the presence of a global diaspora of successful multistate migrants from the Philippines who serve to inspire others to follow in their footsteps. Much has been written about the role of migrant social networks in encouraging cumulative migration (Curran et al. 2005; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Singer and Massey 1998; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Boyd 1989). This chapter shows that prior migrants play an equally important role in the adoption of particular migration *strategies*, such as multistate migration, and particular migration *trajectories*, with certain countries such as Hong Kong gaining a reputation among these migrants as an ideal stepping stone to the West. Success breeds success, and the greater the stock of multistate migrants in a preferred destination, the more likely it is that newer generations of migrants will choose a similar migration strategy to gain access to that country and choose similar stepping stones in order to do so.

At the individual level, multistate migration is made possible by the fact that labor migration allows for the acquisition of new capital (human, social and financial) while overseas. This capital, if accumulated and mobilized wisely, can support further migrations to new (and better) destinations. And the growing popularity of multistate migration among Filipino migrant domestic workers in places like Hong Kong and



Singapore reflects their ability to undertake agentic and strategic action in the face of significant structural constraints.

However, it should be emphasized that not all migrants who aspire to engage in multistate migration are able to do so, largely because of their inability to accumulate sufficient capital. The most critical form of migrant capital required for multistate migration is financial capital. Given that the majority of the women who become migrant domestic workers face significant demands on their foreign earnings from their families in the Philippines, it is understandable that many of them are unable to set aside enough of the wages to fund another journey up their destination hierarchy.

When comparing the annual inflow of Filipino migrant domestic workers to Canada and Hong Kong respectively, one gets a sense of the difficulty involved in a climb to the top of these migrants' destination hierarchy. In 2008, the last year for which a full year's worth of inflow data is available for both countries, 18,286 newly-hired migrant domestic workers left the Philippines for jobs in Hong Kong (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2011).<sup>12</sup> In 2008, 4,246 Filipino caregivers were granted visas to work in Canada.<sup>13</sup> If we assume that Hong Kong was the only source country to send Filipino migrant domestic workers to Canada, that would imply that less than one out of five migrant domestic workers who find jobs in Hong Kong are able to secure jobs in Canada at some later point. In actuality, the odds are even slimmer given the other stepping stone countries sending migrants to Canada and the direct migrants who travel straight from the Philippines to Canada. In other words, only a fortunate few

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<sup>12</sup> The number of new hires traveling to Hong Kong fluctuates each year but the five-year average between 2004-2008 was 18,776 new hires.

<sup>13</sup> I am using Canada's immigration statistics rather than the Philippine government's published departure statistics because of the data mismatch problem highlighted in Chapter Five.

are able to fulfill their dreams and gain access to the very top of their destination hierarchy.

But even migrants who do not make it all the way to their dream destination are still often able to improve their living conditions by consciously working up their destination ladder, to earn more money or enjoy better working conditions. In this manner, this chapter reveals the capacity of capital-constrained migrants to surmount the barriers that stand in the way of their dreams through a process of multistate migration, allowing them to climb their destination hierarchy and gain entry into their preferred destinations. If migrant domestic workers—a class of low-capital labor migrant that is uniformly seen as being heavily constrained in their migration options—are able to engage in multistate migration, other migrants with access to more capital should be even better-equipped to do so. There are few studies (outside of those looking at transit migration) that focus on migration spanning multiple national borders and even fewer databases that track the multinational movements of migrants. Only in the last two decades has there been a growing recognition of the growing mobility of migrants in our interconnected world. This chapter thus highlights the importance of taking a migration life-course approach, following international migrants' over the course of their lifetimes and not just for their initial journey out of their homeland.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **Good Help is Hard to Find: The Differentiated Access to and Mobilization of Migrant Social Capital<sup>1</sup>**

In 2008, Diane, a 38-year-old Filipina, had been employed as a domestic worker in Singapore for 13 years, working happily for the same Singaporean Chinese employer all those years. She was very aware of her relative good fortune. As a way of assisting her less fortunate countrymen and women, Diane had established a charitable foundation in the Philippines to channel medical care to Filipino children in rural parts of the country. She was also one of the leaders of a Singapore-based group of Filipino domestic workers that organized regular outreach and fundraising events. When it came to migration assistance, Diane had helped her two sisters find jobs as domestic workers in Singapore, successfully matching them with willing employers. She had also been approached by many other relatives, friends and even neighbors, asking for assistance finding them jobs overseas as well. However, she had turned down all these requests:

I only help bring my two sisters [here to Singapore]. I do not bring anyone else. Because one thing: I cannot guarantee whatever will happen to them here. If I recruit people to come here and work, the agency gives us 200 [Singapore] dollars as an incentive for recruiting these people. But it's not worth it. It is fast money to earn but the responsibility is too great. I don't want.

*Have you had a lot of people asking you for help?*

Yes! Even my neighbors [in the Philippines]! Even they approach me too. But I always say, "There are a lot of accredited agencies. So rather you go there." Because I cannot guarantee. Even though the situation with my employer is very good, I cannot guarantee that you will be [lucky] like me when you reach here. So I said, "You go through the agency. I can't be responsible for you. Because if I do help, then to you, I am responsible."

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this chapter have been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* in Spring 2013 under the article title "Good Help is Hard to Find: The Differentiated Mobilization of Migrant Social Capital among Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers."

To your family, I am responsible. Then how? I cannot! I don't want. I can help but I don't want to.

Diane's account highlights the hesitancy with which many migrant domestic workers greet requests from their home country contacts for migration assistance. It also illustrates the mental arithmetic existing migrants undertake when deciding whether or not to expend their social capital resources in the service of prospective migrants from the home country. But this notion of a selective and contingent mobilization of migrant social capital is not often discussed within the migration literature.

Instead, only the role of networks in *encouraging* both international and internal migration is well-documented. It is widely accepted that migrant social capital embedded within networks of relatives, friends, or even merely co-nationals in the destination can reduce the costs and risks of migration, and thereby increase the likelihood of cumulative migration (Garip 2008; Curran, Garip, Chung, and Tangchonlatip 2005; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Singer and Massey 1998; Massey and Espinosa 1997). But several recent ethnographic studies of migrant networks have highlighted regular instances of current migrants displaying resistance or reluctance to providing migration assistance to network contacts in the home country (Bashi 2007; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Böcker 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994a). These studies demonstrate that the mobilization of migrant social capital should not be taken for granted and that it is in fact a *contingent* and *selective* process. Not all migrants choose to help their network contacts and, like Diane, even when they do, they do not assist everyone they know.

In this chapter, I argue that the mobilization of migrant networks is also a *differentiated* process, with existing migrants sometimes providing significant amounts of migration assistance and, at other times, only cursory help. This differentiated provision

of migration assistance is critical because the volume, type and conditionality of help provided has a direct bearing on the migration strategies and destination decisions of prospective migrants given the differing barriers to entry for different destination countries. In earlier chapters, I have focused on how overseas migrant network contacts can encourage aspiring migrants to undertake multistate migration through the migration advice and destination information they share. In this chapter, I show how *both* the mobilization and non-/partial mobilization of migrant social capital can encourage the adoption of multistate migration trajectories.

### **Migrant Social Capital**

The concept of social capital has received a great deal of scholarly attention in recent decades (Smith 2007, 2005; Royster 2003; Putnam 2000; Menjívar 2000; Portes 1998; Coleman 1990, 1988; Boyd 1989; Bourdieu 1986). There are two prevailing schools of thought about the nature of social capital. (See Adler and Kwon (2002) for a detailed discussion of the differences between these two schools.) Some scholars view it as an internal characteristic of a social structure and that it “facilitate[s] certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (Coleman 1988:S98). Using this definition, some communities can be classified as having a high degree of social capital and others not. Communities with high social capital are understood to be more likely to enjoy more intra-group transactions based on trust and fewer free-rider problems.

Bourdieu (1986), on the other hand, sees social capital as a resource or a set of obligations that can be converted on demand into other forms of capital, primarily economic ones. Together with Loïc Wacquant, he defines it as “the sum of the resources,

actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119). In this chapter, I lean more towards this latter understanding of social capital as an external asset that is sourced from particular types of network relations between individuals and within social groups. This view of social capital is useful because it allows for the recognition that social capital resources, even though accessible, may not always be mobilized (Smith 2005; Lin 2001). This is critical when it comes to understanding situations where close network contacts may choose to withhold help from each other.

One variant of the social capital concept is “migrant social capital,” which is defined as the sum of resources, whether information or assistance, that potential migrants can access through their social networks in order to reduce the costs and risks of migration (Garip 2008; Palloni et al. 2001; Portes 1998). Existing migrants are a critical component of these social networks because they are often in possession of greater financial capital and migration-related information than network contacts in the home country. In fact, network connections between origin and destination points have been found to have positive spillover effects on the migration decisions of migrants’ family members and friends in the sending country (Curran et al. 2005; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Singer and Massey 1998; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Boyd 1989).

Overseas migrants can facilitate such cumulative migration patterns in various ways. Earlier chapters have already highlighted how overseas connections are vital in shaping potential migrants’ destination preferences and their eventual destination

decisions through the information they share about the world at large. And within the migration literature, there are plentiful studies that highlight the way in which overseas migrant networks facilitate cumulative migration. Migrants can match their home country contacts with a willing overseas employer or provide them with monetary assistance to cover the cost of applying for an entry visa (Garip 2008; Ratha and Shaw 2007; Spaan 1994; Eelens and Speckmann 1990; Boyd 1989). Migrants legally residing overseas may sponsor family reunification visas or tourist visas for their relatives and friends (Ezquerro 2007; Choldin 1973; Keely 1973). Even undocumented entries into a country, or legal entries on non-immigrant visas with the intent to overstay, can be facilitated by the activation of migrant social capital, with veteran migrants accompanying the novice migrant on their first journey across the border or sharing useful border-crossing strategies (Muanamoha, Maharaj and Preston-Whyte 2010; Singer and Massey 1998).

### *Why Do Migrants Help?*

Overall, the network theory of migration has been shown to explain a significant amount of the cumulative migration observed around the world (Massey et al. 1998). But why do current migrants help their network contacts? In analyzing the role played by current migrants in encouraging cumulative migration, it is important to distinguish between the altruistic and egoistic motivations behind their helping behavior.

On the side of altruism, research has shown that cultural values can play a large part in framing the act of helping as a responsibility not to be shirked (Perlow and Weeks 2002; Dovidio 1984). This is of vital importance in the Philippines where there is a strong

culture of reciprocal giving (Trager 1988; Tacoli 1999; Medina 2001) and a strong sense of collectivism (Hofstede 2001; Asis 1994).

From an egoistic perspective, providing migration assistance to help family and friends relocate to the host country allows a prior migrant to transplant their social networks overseas. Much has been written about the sense of alienation and loss experienced by immigrants—particularly those experiencing status-discrepancy—upon their arrival in their host country (Parreñas 2001; Pratt 1999; Small 1997). Kelly and Lusic (2006) write insightfully about how migrants *lose* some social capital in the process of separating themselves from their families, friends and former colleagues in their homeland. It is for this reason, these authors argue, that migrants invest so much in maintaining their transnational ties: To benefit from the emotional and psychological comfort such relationships provide. Granting requests for migration assistance can therefore be of instrumental benefit to veteran migrants, giving them a sense of power and continued relevance in the lives of family and friends in the home country while simultaneously enhancing their networks in the host country (Bashi 2007).

But even among overseas migrants who are willing to assist their home country contacts, the amount and type of assistance provided can vary drastically. The differentiated nature of migration assistance is partly a function of the varying capacity of different migrants to provide help. Migrants who are naturalized citizens of a top-tier destination country, with access to abundant financial resources, have the ability to sponsor their immediate relatives for a family reunification or a tourist visa. In contrast, migrants who are working as foreign laborers on temporary work visas are typically not granted the legal authority to sponsor their relatives for any kind of visas. They also may



not earn enough to cover the agency fees to secure an overseas job for their relatives. In other words, even among overseas migrants who are willing to assist their home country contacts emigrate, their own degree of access to capital directly influences how much they can help others. In the case of Filipinos seeking to leave the Philippines, those aspiring migrants who are closely related to citizens of preferred destination countries may be in a better position to leave the Philippines permanently. Filipinos whose close ties are to temporary migrant workers instead may only be able to ask for and receive more limited forms of migration assistance.

### **The Non-Mobilization of Migrant Social Capital**

Offsetting the benefits of helping contacts in the home country emigrate are the costs and potential risks. Existing migrants may be asked to part with some of their savings to cover their contacts' migration costs, with the possibility of no repayment. They may have to invest considerable time and energy handling the paperwork involved with applications for visas and work permits. If illegal immigration is involved, there could also be the possibility of their own arrest, fines and/or deportation. Finally, existing migrants may have to put their own limited social capital in the host country on the line, asking potential employers they are acquainted with to trust their recommendation to fill a job vacancy, all the while knowing that if their home country contact performs poorly, it will be their own reputation that will suffer. Their social capital back home may also be put at risk if the contact they assist ends up being abused or mistreated while overseas and shifts the ultimate responsibility onto them. For all the above reasons, existing

migrants may experience an internal tug-of-war when asked for migration assistance and not automatically accede to these requests (Bashi 2007).<sup>2</sup>

Even if each request for migration assistance is relatively minor, overseas migrants may be bombarded by so many requests that, taken together, they amount to a significant burden. Portes and Sensenbrenner write that this outcome is especially likely in an environment where “claims [are] buttressed by strong norms enjoining mutual assistance within the extended family and among community members in general” (1993:1338). In such collectivist cultures—and Philippine society would be a prime example of such a society (Asis 1994; Hofstede 2001)—relatives and friends may immediately beset anyone who does well for themselves, asking them for handouts. Among migrants who have left their home country, a similar scenario can still occur. Thanks to the wonders of modern communication technology, relatives and friends back home may bombard overseas migrants with requests for help to leave the country as well (Bashi 2007). For these migrants, their network connections in the home country can thus become a liability.<sup>3</sup> Given these varied risks and costs to the migrant, it cannot be taken for granted that they will fully mobilize their resources—however much they have—whenever they are asked to assist a prospective migrant they know.

Within the last 15 years, there have been several studies highlighting regular and repeated instances of the non-activation of migrant social capital within migrant networks. Some of these studies highlight the strongly gendered mobilization of migrant

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<sup>2</sup> Similar considerations also apply to network members in the origin country who may be asked to provide migration assistance. However, this chapter focuses primarily on the assistance provided by overseas migrant contacts.

<sup>3</sup> More generalized social capital can also be a burden for existing migrants who have relatives or friends in either the host or home country requesting regular remittance payments or other favors, even without asking for migration-related assistance (see Allen 2009). However, for the purposes of this chapter, only *migrant* social capital is considered.

social capital. Kanaiaupuni (1995, cited in Kanaiaupuni 2000) notes some reluctance on the part of established Mexican migrants in the United States to assist female relatives cross the border, out of a sense that bringing female contacts to the US would entail more work and more responsibility. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994a) also discusses how gender “organizes” migration through exclusively male networks that encourage additional migration only by other men. Curran and Rivero (2003) find that the migration of women from Mexican households to the US positively affects the migration of other women from the same household, but not men. Curran et al. (2005) find similar gendered patterns of migration assistance among rural-urban migrants in Thailand. They hypothesize that this is due to the different ways in which gender structures the job opportunities for rural migrants in Bangkok and how it shapes migrants’ ties to their families and friends in the origin village. In other words, it is not so much that men see their female relatives as burdensome, but that migrants are often embedded in heavily gendered occupations and so are able to provide job-related migration assistance mainly to their own gender (Pfeiffer et al. 2008).

Other studies have highlighted additional factors that influence the differential and selective mobilization of migrant social capital. Vilna Bashi observes veteran West Indian migrants in New York and London “hoard[ing] overseas opportunities” (2007:6) and only helping those home country contacts whom they believe will either improve their lifestyle or enhance their reputation. Anita Böcker finds that Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands evolved from being “bridgeheads” to “gatekeepers,” limiting the chain migration of their relatives from Turkey to Europe when Dutch authorities began to clamp down on irregular migration (1994:103). These researchers’ findings imply that

prospective migrant domestic workers from the Philippines might not always be able to rely on their overseas contacts to assist them in their attempts to leave the country and find work abroad. Immigration policies, the gendered nature of the overseas job market, the gender of their overseas contact, their own gender, the reciprocal “gift” they can offer their contact in return—all these factors can influence the helping decision.

Within the urban communities literature on social capital, there are also several studies on the promise of job-matching assistance whose findings mirror the differentiated mobilization of migrant social capital. These studies add to our understanding of the conditions under which migrant social capital can be mobilized. Studying job-matching assistance among Salvadoran immigrants in San Francisco, Cecilia Menjívar (2000) finds that job information was passed along relatively freely among friends, neighbors and relatives, but that job *referrals* were more circumspectly provided. The fear of having the person they recommended perform poorly on the job and thus taint their own standing with an employer resulted in jobholders only providing referrals to close relatives whom they felt obliged to assist. Menjívar thus highlights how different forms of assistance can be provided, and that multiple sub-decisions need to be made with each helping decision: Whether or not to help, and just as important, how much to help.

Sandra Smith (2007, 2005) meanwhile finds that many low-income African American jobholders are reluctant to provide either job referrals or job information even to family members for fear that their help may be wasted and their reputations with employers tarnished. From her interviews, Smith finds that individual-level factors (such as the work reputations of both the jobseeker and the jobholder) and dyad-level properties

(such as the strength of the tie between the jobseeker and jobholder, and the tie between the jobholder and the potential employer) influence the helping decision. These individual- and dyad-level factors are intuitive enough that they should be universally applicable to any helping decision, including the decision to help a prospective migrant domestic worker leave the country.

At the network level, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) highlight how “enforceable trust” within a community or neighborhood can engender social capital through an internal policing capacity built into tightly-knit groups with a high degree of social closure and the resources to ensure the honoring of obligations. Following this line of argument, we should expect to see a greater provision of migration assistance in transnational networks marked by high social closure and the ability to monitor prospective migrants once they are overseas. The corollary of this theory is that less migration assistance should be observable in networks marked by low social closure.

Finally, at the market level, Menjívar finds that the local economy and government can directly influence the “viability of immigrant social networks” (2000:116). Smith also reports that the degree of economic disadvantage in the community where a jobholder lives can influence the amount of job-matching assistance the jobholder provides. In situations where there is an abundant supply of job openings or where government policies are generally pro-immigrant, social ties are positively affected and network members are more likely to help one another. In less favorable situations, the potential for assistance-sharing between network members diminishes. I posit that the same should apply between prospective and current migrants.

All of the above factors operate at different levels to influence the degree to which social capital is mobilized. At the national level, the existence of a *culture* of helping may also play a part. The prevalence of such a culture and general patterns of assistance-giving in the Philippines is discussed next.

### **Assistance Patterns among Filipino Families**

The typical household structure within the Philippines is that of the nuclear family with parents and children living under the same roof. Within each Filipino family, there are strong filial ties between Filipino parents and their unmarried children, and between siblings (Medina 2001; King and Domingo 1986; Trager 1988). But Filipino families also have an extended kinship structure with strong ties of loyalty conjoining more distant relatives such as cousins, aunts, nephews and nieces who may not all live under the same roof (Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Medina 2001; Trager 1988). Castillo characterizes the Philippine system of family relations as “residentially nuclear but functionally extended” (1977:Vol. II, 394). There is also a strong fictive kinship culture within the Philippines, with the widespread practices of godparentage and fosterage encouraging strong ties of respect and loyalty connecting children with adults who are not their blood relatives but still actively involved in their care and upbringing (Trager 1988:76; Yu and Liu 1980; Peterson 1993).

Within extended Filipino families and Philippine society as a whole, there are also deep-seated norms of reciprocal gift-giving (Medina 2001; Trager 1988). The moral principle underlying these relationships of mutual obligation is called *utang na loob* which, translated, means “debt of prime obligation” (Trager 1988:77) or “debt of

gratitude” (Tacoli 1999:663). These norms are strongest when it comes to the parent-child relationship. It is accepted that parents, in giving life to their children, have given them the greatest gift of all and that their children will be forever in their parents’ debt. It is for this reason that Filipinos fully expect to care for and support their parents even in old age. The majority of Filipino migrants who send remittances back to the Philippines send money to their parents (Asian Development Bank 2006). But a similar sense of obligation also often exists between siblings. Unmarried daughters in particular are expected to function as benefactresses to not only their parents but also their younger siblings and their siblings’ children (Medina 2001; Tacoli 1996; Chant and McIlwaine 1995).

For Filipino migrants, there are strong expectations that they will continue to support their families in the Philippines (in one way or another) even though they are physically separated from them by large distances (Lauby and Stark 1988; Trager 1984, 1988; Medina 2001; Tacoli 1999). This assistance can take different forms though most migrants are expected to send money (Lauby and Stark 1988; Semyonov and Gorodzeisky 2005). In 2009, 27.4% of Philippine households reported receiving financial assistance from overseas family members.<sup>4</sup>

Migrants’ family obligations may also extend to helping their relatives leave the Philippines. Many prospective migrants choose the same destination as their overseas relatives primarily because of the sense of security they feel knowing that they have a family member in the same country they can call upon in times of need and because of the destination-specific assistance they can rely on (Medina 2001; Medina and Natividad

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<sup>4</sup> This statistic was calculated using data sourced from the 2009 Family Income and Expenditure Survey conducted by the Philippine government’s National Statistics Office. Accessed from <http://www.census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/2009/ie20092add.pdf> on May 31, 2012.

1985; Asis 1994). Certainly, most permanent migration from the Philippines to the United States and other high-income countries in the West is through family reunification visas sponsored by Filipino immigrants who have become citizens and permanent residents of those countries. In the case of women migrants, the presence of supportive female relatives overseas can also lend greater social acceptability to the idea of women leaving the Philippines to live and work abroad (Tacoli 1999; Boyd 1989; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992).

Trager (1988:79) writes that many migrants complain about the generous remittances they are expected to send back to their families, but that most still send the money anyway. In general, it is hard for Filipinos to turn down requests for help as it goes against the normative Philippine culture of reciprocal giving. Refusing to help an individual to whom one is already indebted is seen as particularly reprehensible and such a person is described as *walang hiya*, meaning “having no shame” (Trager 1988:77; de Leon 1987). Such behavior could also jeopardize an individual’s relations with the person requesting help and that person’s family.

Having provided an overview of helping patterns among Filipinos in general, I turn now to the present study to discuss patterns of migration assistance among interviewees.

### **Giving and Receiving Help among Study Participants**

When talking with interviewees about the process they went through to first leave the Philippines (and for each subsequent migration), I also asked them if they had requested and/or received migration assistance from anyone they knew. The vast majority



of study participants had received some degree of assistance from at least one network contact when they were first trying to leave the Philippines, demonstrating the culture of giving that is prevalent in the Philippines. As Table 8.1 shows, most participants received help from family members, whether an immediate family member (such as a spouse, parent, sibling or child) or more extended family members (such as aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces or nephews), highlighting the extended kinship structure of Philippine society where aunts and cousins can oftentimes feel as close as siblings and parents.

Table 8.1  
Sources of First Migration Assistance Received, by Country of Interview

Sources of Migration Assistance	Percentage of Participants who Received Help in				
	Philippines	Singapore	Hong Kong	Canada	US
Close Family	23%	24%	40%	78%	60%
Extended Family	27%	37%	50%	43%	32%
Friends	42%	32%	40%	43%	14%
Acquaintances	8%	15%	7%	0	0
Employers	0	2%	4%	0	0
Agents	0	0	0	4%	0
Total	73%	93%	96%	100%	100%

But there are clear differences in the sources of migration assistance received by participants across the different interview countries, indicating the contrasting migrant networks within which participants were embedded. Interviewees in the US and Canada were more likely to have received help from immediate family members, participants in the Asian countries of Hong Kong and Singapore more often received help from

extended family members, while participants in the Philippines had relied primarily on friends. (The appropriate cells in Table 8.1 have been shaded gray.)

There was also a great deal of diversity in the types of migration assistance participants received, revealing the differentiated nature of migrant social capital mobilization. In general, five types of migration assistance were received by study participants. These were:

- (1) Financial assistance, either as a loan or gift,
- (2) Direct placement with an overseas employer,
- (3) Submission of their personal information to an overseas maid agency, allowing participants to bypass Philippines-based agencies and shave off a significant amount of money from their overall cost of migration,
- (4) Recommending a trustworthy recruitment agency to use either in the Philippines or overseas, and
- (5) Migration-related advice and information (such as the best strategy to adopt for leaving the Philippines or reaching a particular desired country).

The higher the value of the assistance to the prospective migrant, the greater the risk or cost it involved for the existing migrant providing the help. The first two types of help (financial and job-placement assistance) carried with them the highest risk because of the possibility of existing migrants' losing some of their personal financial or social capital resources if things went awry. There might be no repayment of their loan or, if their contact performs poorly on the job, the referrer's standing with the overseas employer might suffer. Their social capital within their home country network might also be jeopardized if their contact ends up being abused or mistreated while overseas and

shifts responsibility onto them. At the same time, both these forms of assistance are of the greatest benefit to prospective migrants, significantly reducing their own financial outlay and potentially matching them with an employer who will treat them well.

The third type of assistance—submitting a contact’s information to an overseas agency—poses less risk to existing migrants but is still of considerable value to the prospective migrant, even though the latter would still have to pay a substantial placement fee to their overseas agency. This form of migration assistance did call for some time commitment and effort on the part of the existing migrant, who would have to collect and collate their contact’s personal information and secure copies of their contact’s passport, educational certificates and work-related documents to submit to the overseas agency. This effort was not substantial but it did mean that the overseas migrant was inserting themselves personally into their contact’s efforts to leave the Philippines and therefore exposing themselves to blame if things did not turn out well.

The fourth and fifth types of migration help—simply recommending an agency and providing migration advice/information—were the lowest-risk forms of assistance, not requiring any tangible sacrifice on the part of the overseas migrant (with little danger of jeopardizing their social and financial position in their host country) and no deep personal involvement. At the same time, such referrals had the potential to reduce the possibility of the prospective migrant being cheated out of their savings by an unscrupulous agency. And even though there is the saying that “advice is cheap,” migration advice can be useful. This is especially the case when the advice provided helps the prospective migrant save time, effort and/or money. Thus, these last two

categories of migration assistance could still be of value to prospective migrants even while they involved little to no risk or cost to existing migrants.

Table 8.2 reveals how these different forms of migration assistance were distributed across the different interview locations. (The most common form of assistance for each interview country is shaded gray.) Participants in the US were much more likely to have had immediate relatives sponsor them for a visa to leave the Philippines (and travel directly to the US). Participants in Canada and Hong Kong were more likely to have received financial assistance from their relatives (both close and extended family members) when they were attempting to leave the Philippines. In contrast, participants in Singapore received less valuable assistance from their network contacts, with most interviewees only receiving agency referrals through their contacts.

Table 8.2  
Types of First Migration Assistance Received, by Country of Interview

Type of Assistance Received	Percentage of Participants Receiving Assistance <sup>\$</sup>				
	Philippines	Singapore	Hong Kong	Canada	US
Visa sponsorship <sup>@</sup>	0	3%	7%	13%	65%
Direct placement	16%	18%	26%	39%	35%
Financial assistance	21%	37%	56%	74%	25%
Agency submission	11%	34%	7%	13%	0
Agency referral	74%	42%	37%	26%	5%
Migration advice	26%	26%	22%	17%	5%

Notes:

<sup>\$</sup> - Percentages for each country are calculated using the count of participants from that country who received help as the denominator.

<sup>@</sup> - Network contacts could assist study participants leave the Philippines by sponsoring their visas to foreign countries. These visas fell into three categories: work permits (where the network contact served as the participant's employer), tourist visas and petitions for family reunification.

### **The Denial of Help among Study Participants**

The above pattern of differentiated provision of migration assistance could be traced back to either differentiated *access* to migrant social capital or the differentiated *mobilization* of such capital. An example of the former would be if US-based participants were more likely to receive visa sponsorships to leave the Philippines because they were deeply embedded in overseas networks of American citizens, while Canada-based participants lacked those kinds of connections. But if the latter explanation were true then it is possible that Canada-based participants were also connected to Filipino American citizens but that these US citizens had opted not to sponsor them for visas (for whatever reason).

A better way to highlight the differentiated *mobilization* of migrant social capital is by looking at participants' accounts of being turned down by some of their overseas network contacts when they asked them for migration assistance. Many participants, especially those in Asia, repeatedly talked about having asked relatives or friends for help with their migration efforts and having had their requests denied (see Table 8.3). At the same time, participants in all countries shared their own stories of having turned down family and friends in the Philippines or various host countries who asked them for migration assistance. For instance, half of Canadian participants talked about having had to turn down a network contact asking for migration assistance. But a third of them still spoke of wanting to sponsor a relative for a visa to Canada or matching a contact with an employer overseas. In other words, even though they come from a culture of reciprocal giving, overseas migrants selectively decide when to provide help and when not to.

Table 8.3  
Denial of Requests for Migration Assistance, by Country of Interview<sup>@</sup>

	Percentage of Participants		
	Singapore	Hong Kong	Canada
Having requests denied	15%	7%	17%
Denying others' requests	27%	36%	52%

<sup>@</sup> The US is excluded from this table because the high number of undocumented migrants in its sample population which negatively skews their willingness to provide migration assistance. The Philippines is excluded because of the wide array of migrant types interviewed there: Returned migrants, prospective migrants who had yet to leave the country, migrants between contracts who might or might not decide to leave the Philippines again, etc.

But even Table 8.3 does not present the full picture. Rather than denying aid entirely, overseas migrants may instead offer conditional aid, promising to help if the prospective migrant performs a specific task first. This does not technically count as a denial of a request for migration assistance though it might have the same effect. In other cases, the volume of aid offered may be severely limited, cramping prospective migrants' capacity for migration or constraining their destination options.

Looking at the types of migration assistance that study participants provided when they *did* choose to extend help provides a clear pattern of selective and differentiated assistance (see Table 8.4). In this table, I focus only on participants in Singapore, Hong Kong and Canada because they shared a similar migrant status in each of their host countries, allowing for valid comparisons of helping patterns across these three countries and yet they displayed very different patterns of migration assistance.

Table 8.4  
Types of Migration Assistance Provided, by Country of Interview

Type of assistance provided	Percentage of participants providing help in:		
	Singapore	Hong Kong	Canada
Visa sponsorship	0	0	29%
Direct placement	16% <sup>B</sup>	27% <sup>B</sup>	29%
Financial assistance	22%	9%	10%
Agency submission	30%	9%	14%
Agency referral	8%	9%	0

<sup>B</sup> Even though a higher proportion of Hong Kong participants provided direct placement assistance to their network contacts than Singapore participants, most of this assistance was provided in the early 1990s or even earlier. In more recent years, Hong Kong participants had not provided as much of this type of assistance as their Singapore counterparts.

Setting aside the visa sponsorship plans of Canada-based participants,<sup>5</sup> roughly a third of these participants had matched one of their network contacts with an overseas employer. A similar number of Hong Kong-based participants had done so, but a significantly smaller number in Singapore had provided this form of migration assistance to their network contacts. In contrast, submitting a network contact's personal information to a Singapore-based maid agency was the most popular form of assistance provided by Singapore-based participants. Likewise, participants in Singapore were more likely to have provided monetary assistance to relatives and friends seeking to leave the Philippines, even though they were paid the lowest wages across the three countries under consideration. As I will discuss in the following section, such differences in the

<sup>5</sup> Participants' decisions to sponsor visas for the immediate relatives to join them in Canada were to a large extent still in the planning phase. However, if participants who expressed their clear intent and willingness to sponsor a relative to join them in Canada, they were counted as having already provided this type of migration assistance.

degree of mobilization of migrant social capital are directly tied to variations in these countries' migrant domestic worker markets, among other factors.

### **The Differentiated Mobilization of Migrant Social Capital**

Having identified a pattern of differentiated migration assistance, this section now combines the data presented in the above tables with insights gained from the interviews and the earlier literature review section to present a multi-level framework identifying various factors at the individual, dyad, network, job and market/country levels that, independently and through their interactions with each other, influence the differentiated mobilization of migrant social capital among overseas migrants (see Table 8.5).

#### *Individual-Level Factors*

##### The Provider's Past Helping Experiences

Decisions to extend help are often predicated on the outcomes of earlier helping decisions (Dovidio 1984; Moss and Page 1972). Prior negative helping experiences have been found to stunt an individual's subsequent desire to offer assistance through negative reinforcement (March 1994) and a similar effect was observed among participants.

Wanda, a 42-year-old domestic worker in Hong Kong, no longer wanted to offer migration assistance to most of her Philippine contacts for such a reason. Some years earlier, a local doctor—for whom Wanda had worked part-time for seven years—had asked her to recommend someone who could work full-time for him.



Table 8.5  
A Conceptual Framework of Factors influencing the Mobilization of Migrant Social Capital

Levels	Conditions Associated with Migrant Social Capital Mobilization		
	Factors	High Mobilization <sup>#</sup>	Low Mobilization <sup>#</sup>
Individual	Provider's past experiences giving assistance	Positive past experiences	Negative past experiences
	Perceived competence of the prospective migrant	Committed/Competent	Uncommitted/Incompetent
	Immigration status of current migrant	Documented	Undocumented
Dyad	Tie between current and prospective migrants	Strong ties	Weak ties
	Tie between current migrants and potential employers	Strong ties	Weak ties
Job	Gendered nature of the job	Weakly gendered <sup>@</sup>	Strongly gendered <sup>@</sup>
	Degree of vulnerability in the job	Low vulnerability	High vulnerability
Network	Degree of social closure	High social closure	Low social closure
Market/ Country	Job availability (real and perceived)	High availability	Low availability
	Market turnover	High termination rates	Low termination rates
	Domestic worker regulatory environment	Pro-worker regulations	Anti-worker regulations

<sup>#</sup> In order to aid comprehension, differences in mobilization rates have been clustered into either "high" or "low" categories. High mobilization is characterized by the provision of high volume, high value and/or unconditional migration assistance, while low mobilization entails offering low/zero volume, low value and/or conditional assistance to network contacts seeking to leave the home country.

<sup>a</sup> In a weakly gendered occupational sector, job incumbents are able to pass along job information and referrals to both male and female network contacts who are interested. In a strongly gendered occupation, however, job incumbents are restricted to helping only half their network contacts, assuming that their home country network is evenly divided between men and women.

Wanda had recommended her niece in the Philippines and helped arrange her niece's travel to Hong Kong. But, after three months, the niece grew so homesick that she ended her contract without giving notice. Mortified, Wanda said she now refused to help any of her other relatives because she was "so ashamed" of having failed her former employer.

Negative helping experiences also influenced the amount and type of migration assistance participants were willing to offer. Rather than refusing to provide any future assistance, some participants switched to offering migration help that entailed the least amount of risk/cost for themselves. This was the case with Cindy in Canada who had previously loaned money to her friends while working in Singapore but had never been paid back. As a result, she had switched to a strict policy of having "friends here but no money attached." Now when she was asked for migration assistance, she stalled:

I just say that if I can find work for you, then I will try to introduce you. But if I don't have, [...] maybe they should try somebody else. I suggest them to go and find the agency. Then they can choose that way.

In this manner, Cindy was now effectively limiting her exposure to further harm by trying to steer her contacts to other sources of help.

While negative helping experiences inhibited current migrants' willingness to help others, positive experiences encouraged further helping. Another participant, Marnie, had a Filipino friend who had married a Singaporean and opened a maid agency in Singapore. Through this trusted connection, Marnie had helped more than eight Philippine contacts find employment in Singapore. "They are lucky also. Everybody I bringing in Singapore gets very good employer," she boasted during her interview. These positive experiences and the pride she felt after each successful referral encouraged

Marnie to continue helping other Philippine contacts who approached her for migration assistance.

### Perceived Competence of the Prospective Migrant

Research on the role of networks in the labor market has found that social networks help disseminate information about job vacancies (Granovetter 1973; Munshi 2003) but do not always ensure that better-qualified individuals secure those positions (Calvo-Armengol and Jackson 2004; Mortensen and Vishwanath 1994). For instance, jobholders may simply recommend their relatives and friends for a position without regard to the ability of these individuals to perform on the job. However, under certain conditions, jobholders tend to weigh more heavily the reputation and ability of the person asking them for job-matching assistance, using these character traits as a signal of future behavior on the job (Smith 2007, 2005; Beaman and Magruder 2010).

When their own job security or pay is riding on the good performance of the jobseeker, jobholders are more careful to refer network contacts whom they are confident will be high-performers on the job. In the present study, providers of migration assistance—who clearly had a lot at stake when helping a contact emigrate—did not have the luxury of relying on their contacts’ work reputations to guide their helping decision, as few of their contacts had previously worked in the domestic service sector in the Philippines. Their contacts’ lack of experience led participants to worry that their contacts would not be able to endure the menial aspects of overseas domestic service. Participants looked for clues in how their contacts approached the migration process to

assess their commitment level. Rachel, a domestic worker in Singapore, interpreted her contacts' wavering as an early warning that they would not adjust well to overseas life:

One of my friends in the Philippines, until now is asking me to bring her here. But sometimes she feels like she don't want [to come] and sometimes she feels like she wants. So I think better that she stay there [in the Philippines] first. Because, maybe if I bring her here, and she changes her mind, it will make trouble.

Prospective migrants' indecision often led to wasted efforts on the part of those current migrants who had initially been eager to help their contacts. Annie, a domestic worker in Singapore, shared how she had previously tried to help friends in the Philippines emigrate but no longer did so:

Yeah, I have so many friends who asked me to help them. But after I do all this, they look not so interested. So what can I do for them? I told them I really tried my best to help them but they don't cooperate. So, after that, I keep quiet.

*When you say "they don't cooperate," what do you mean?*

I ask them to send their passport's Xerox copy because the agency needs it. Or send some passport pictures. But until now, they don't send. I spend [money] on calling cards [to talk] with them, but they look not interested now. So, okay, if you are not interested, I also stop.

Indecision signaled to current migrants that their energies could be put to better use helping contacts who were serious about emigrating and willing to accept the indignities of paid domestic labor. To avoid any wasted efforts on their part, many migrants offered only low-risk assistance (such as simply recommending an agency in the Philippines) or conditional assistance—in effect telling their contacts to first *prove* their commitment. This was what happened to Andrea, a former domestic worker who had previously worked in Hong Kong and had wanted to emigrate from there to the UK:

I have my friend in the UK and I asked my friend, "Oh, help me. Find me an employer so that I can reach the UK."

"Okay," she said. "First you get the ticket and then I will tell you how to come here." But I do not have money. I do not have money now.

With Andrea unable to save enough money to purchase a plane ticket to the UK, her friend never bothered to expend her own social capital to find Andrea a British employer.

Lacking the financial capital to self-fund a move up her destination hierarchy to the UK, Andrea eventually had to return to the Philippines.

### Immigration Status of the Current Migrant

The legal status of the overseas migrant also had a direct bearing on the degree to which they were willing and able to assist their contacts in the Philippines find work overseas. In general, migrants who lacked legal immigration status—either because they were undocumented or because they had run away from their employer—were somewhat constrained in terms of the types of assistance they could provide their contacts. But even though sponsoring a contact's visa was out of the question, providing monetary assistance (as long as the current migrant was employed and earning an income, albeit illegally) was still an option as were other lower-value types of migration assistance. However, their illegal status and marginal existence within their host country's society added various emotional and psychic stresses to their lives (Menjívar 2000), and this seemed to stunt many undocumented workers' desire to help any of their network contacts.

Cala, a babysitter in New York City, who had worked without documentation after running away from her diplomat-employer, had only been able to provide financial aid to her relatives in the Philippines, before she married an American and was able to secure permanent resident status. After gaining legal alien resident status in the US, she had helped pay for her niece's nursing degree with the understanding that her niece would eventually seek a job as a nurse overseas. In another case, she had paid the placement fees for her sister-in-law who had secured legal employment as a domestic

worker in Singapore. But for other relatives and friends in the Philippines seeking to come to the US (to work illegally), she had turned them down as gently as possible, trying to explain that life overseas was not all it was made out to be:

Some family members and some friends are asking for some help to come to the US. But I'm trying to discourage them. I'm telling them that if they can find a job in the Philippines, it's better if they just stay there. I try to tell them that it's not as good as they think here.

Another participant in New York City, Lucia, who had been working illegally as a babysitter in the US since 1998 after running away from her employer's house, had been asked by her daughters to help bring them over to the US so that they could be reunited as a family. Even though Lucia would have liked nothing better than to be with her children whom she had not seen in over 10 years, she did not like the idea of her daughters being undocumented migrants alongside her, and so she had told them no. The general pattern among participants who were undocumented migrant domestic workers seemed to be an unwillingness to help other network contacts become undocumented as well.

### *Dyad-Level Factors*

#### The Tie between Current and Prospective Migrants

Jobholders have been found to be more likely to extend high-value job-finding assistance to close contacts compared to more distant connections (Smith 2007, 2005; Menjívar 2000). Böcker (1994) also finds that the closer the connection between current and prospective migrants, the greater the likelihood that the current migrant will offer some migration assistance, usually of greater value. In the present study too, participants were most likely to have received from their relatives—both close and extended family members—financial assistance or direct placement into an overseas job, the two most

high-value and high-risk forms of migration assistance (see Table 8.1). They were also most likely to have provided such high-value assistance to their relatives.

While many participants repeatedly expressed the fear that their help was going to be wasted, when the need arose to help a close family member—particularly a child, spouse or sibling—participants were frequently willing to put aside their concerns and offer unconditional assistance. Participants still raised the dangers of working overseas with close relatives, but they often provided significant amounts of aid to help those desirous of leaving the Philippines. Even migrants who had gone through negative helping experiences in the past were still usually willing to extend substantive assistance to close family members wishing to migrate. Wanda—the Hong Kong-based worker mentioned earlier whose niece had ended her contract early—was nevertheless saving money to help her oldest son secure a nursing job in Saudi Arabia and her other son a hotel job in Macau.

It should be noted though that the decision to help a close network contact was still influenced by the current migrant's assessment of the relative's ability to be self-sufficient overseas. Participants were very wary of helping those individuals—even relatives—if they felt that they were going to be too much of a burden for the participant overseas. In this vein, Zulay, a 71-year-old grandmother, who had been petitioned by her sister, a US citizen, in 1982 and whose petition for permanent residency was approved 25 years later in 2007, spoke of her two grandsons who had pleaded with her to bring them to the US. Zulay had refused to do so because she knew that she would have to take on full responsibility for caring for them once they arrived in the US:

I know they cannot live here. They don't even know how to wash dishes. They don't even know how to wash their socks. They depend so much on the maids [in the Philippines]. Oh my goodness!

In the same way that some Mexican men might express reservations about helping Mexican women join them in the US because they saw these women as too much of a burden (Kaniaupuni 1995 cited in Kaniaupuni 2000), several of the Filipinas I interviewed spoke of their husbands in the same manner. They expressed worries about what their husbands would do if they joined their wives in the West: How they would handle their inevitable loss of status, possible unemployment and, in some cases, their limited ability to communicate in English. An extreme example of this way of thinking comes from Nannette, a former secondary school teacher, who had decided not to sponsor her husband to join her in Canada once she secured her permanent residence. She explained her reasons as such:

I think it's not a mistake that I made. Because it's also for the good of the family. Because, if he comes here, I will be the one who suffers because I will be one to go to work and he will only stay home. And then it's not easy supporting a person here in Canada, because he spends dollars everyday. But if he stayed in the Philippines, he could only spend like \$100 in a month, so it's equivalent to 4,400 [Philippine pesos], or I could send like 5,000 pesos and it's enough for him to survive in one month.

#### The Tie between Current Migrants and Potential Employers

The warmth of the relationship between current migrants and potential local employers in the host country also had a direct bearing on the provision of one particular form of migration assistance: The matching of a prospective migrant with a willing overseas employer. In most cases, the stronger this relationship, the more likely it was that the current migrant would try to recommend someone to the employer (either of their own volition or after being approached by the employer for a recommendation). Due to the possibility of the person they recommended not performing well on the job—as was the case with Wanda's niece—current migrants needed to have amassed sufficient social capital reserves with individual employers before they could ask these employers to trust



their recommendation. Likewise, potential employers usually only ask current migrant workers for a recommendation if they feel they can trust these workers' judgment (Mattingly 1999).

Achieving that degree of trust took time and effort, which is why the strength of the tie between employer and current migrant was often tied to the length of time these migrants had worked abroad. The longer they had been overseas, the more likely it was that these migrants would have had the opportunity to build sufficiently strong relationships with prospective employers. This is related to Granovetter's (1973) finding regarding the importance of weak ties to learn about new job opportunities that individuals' core network of interconnected strong ties would not know about. Local employers in the host country fall into this category of "weak ties" but these weak ties still needed to be strong enough for employers to be willing to accept a foreign domestic worker's recommendation for a potential new hire. In addition, these weak ties belong not to the prospective hire, but instead to the referee, highlighting how a combination of weak and strong ties are required for prospective migrant domestic workers to find jobs overseas.

This was the situation facing Andrew, a domestic worker who had been working in Hong Kong for less than two years, who was being pressured by his younger brother (a strong tie) to find an overseas job for him. Andrew said he wanted to help but indicated that "right now, it is very difficult to find an employer looking for a male [domestic worker]." He had asked for his brother's patience while Andrew solidified his network of local contacts to the point where he was comfortable enough with a potential employer (a weak tie) that he could broach the topic of hiring his brother.

## *Job-Level Factors*

### The Gendered Nature of the Job

Research on helping behavior has also uncovered different patterns of helping between the genders, with women more likely to provide help than men (Eagly and Crowley 1986). Male and female migrant networks have also been found to function along gendered lines (Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Within the current study, participants (who were overwhelmingly female) also overwhelmingly provided migration assistance to other women. Likewise, female participants had received migration assistance mainly from female relatives and friends working in the domestic service sector overseas.

Curran et al. propose that the underlying reason for such behavior is the fact that men and women “face different barriers to moving, maintain different relationships with households and villages of origin, and experience completely different opportunities in places of destination” (2005:250). In other words, because men and women’s pre- and post-migration experiences are so different, their migration assistance patterns also differ significantly. Building on these authors’ point about the gendered nature of most migrants’ work, I posit that the female-dominated job sector in which the present study’s participants were concentrated and their reliance on labor migration as an exit strategy from the Philippines were the primary drivers for the heavily gendered patterns of migration assistance I observed. Participants’ migration-related human and social capital—either in terms of the information they possessed about job vacancies for domestic workers, or the connections they had fostered with particular overseas

placement agencies that specialized in providing maids and caregivers to overseas employers—was inextricably linked to their work in a female-dominated occupation (both in terms of the proportion of women working in this field and how domestic service has been socially constructed as being a “natural fit” for women). I propose that it was for this reason that they were much more likely to help their female rather than male contacts in the Philippines.

Women participants did help their male contacts emigrate on occasion. A handful of women had helped their husbands secure jobs overseas—as private chauffeurs, domestic workers and home healthcare aides—so that they could work in the same country. All these jobs were still within the domestic sphere and, as a result, participants possessed the necessary connections with employers and specific knowledge about these vacancies that they were able to refer their husbands for the job.<sup>6</sup> And participants who possessed sufficient financial capital were more than willing to use it to help immediate male relatives (primarily sons) leave the Philippines as well. They used their savings to pay the agency placement fees or to cover the cost of specialized training in fields that were tailored for overseas work and more open to men, such as hospitality management and even nursing. Likewise, several female participants had received destination advice and financial loans from brothers who were working overseas as commercial seafarers or engineers. But most participants’ migrant capital resources were entrenched in the domestic service sector and, as a result, this capital was more often than not deployed to help female contacts find employment overseas as domestic workers.

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<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Mattingly (1999) notes that many female immigrant household workers in San Diego found their jobs through their husbands who were working as gardeners in private homes and who were able to recommend their wives as suitable hires to their current employers.

### The Vulnerable Nature of the Job

All temporary labor migrants are taking on certain risks when accepting work overseas. But among migrant domestic workers, there exists a level of risk that few other occupational sectors possess: The potential for physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Participants were fully aware of the dangers of their job and it frequently made them think twice before placing any of their contacts in a similarly vulnerable position. Participants who themselves had been abused in the past seemed more willing to help if their network contacts were taking up less vulnerable jobs overseas.

One such participant was Lainey who had been a community organizer in the Philippines before being sponsored by her brother to become a permanent resident in the US. Lainey now worked part-time as a babysitter in New York but when she first arrived in the US, she had worked under horrendous conditions as a housekeeper and babysitter for various employers. Her personal experience as a domestic worker in the US made her reluctant to help her relatives in the Philippines take up migrant domestic work:

Every time you go there [to the Philippines], and they know that I'm from here, they always ask you for help. [...] They ask for jobs [and] if I know somebody that is willing to sponsor them. And the close relatives, they ask for financial support. I have two nieces. One already left for Saudi Arabia. And another one who's planning to leave, yeah. They're nurses. So, with those, I am very willing. I am perfectly willing to help out. But for those that I know are just going to harm's way, I don't help them. I really discourage them.

Lainey was clearly willing to help her relatives find work overseas but it was the nature of the work that decided whether or not she would extend any assistance. She was perfectly happy to help her relatives find more protected forms of overseas employment, but she drew the line at domestic work.

Lilith, a 54-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, refused to help any of her contacts leave the Philippines because she too was worried about the possibility of these

contacts being abused by a bad employer. She confessed that one of her primary concerns was that if such an event did occur, she would be blamed:

They asked me, but I told them, “I cannot direct you. You have to go through the agent.” [...] I don’t want to be blamed in the end if they get a bad employer. That is why I don’t encourage them [or] help them to come here.

This fear of being “blamed” for a possible negative work experience was a concern raised repeatedly during the interviews. As Rena, a 30-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, who had also refused to help her contacts, explained: “If I am the one to introduce them and then, after that, they get into trouble, then maybe after that, they blame me.” Many participants’ thinking was that it was better to let contacts make their own way overseas so that participants would not be seen as culpable if something untoward occurred.<sup>7</sup>

What made participants so fearful of helping? I posit that it was because of the structural vulnerability that migrant domestic workers experience through the heavily marginalized lives they lead in their host country. Part of this stems from the solitary, housebound and under-regulated nature of paid domestic service which makes these workers more prone to abuse (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Constable 1997). But migrant domestic workers also lead marginalized lives outside of work, often categorized as racialized and sexualized “others” existing on the outskirts of mainstream society in their host country, with local social connections only to their employer’s family and other migrant domestic workers (if such mingling among workers was even allowed) (Momsen 1999; Yeoh and Huang 1998). This compounded vulnerability, combined with the fear of being blamed for any future migration-related problems, made participants weigh the

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<sup>7</sup> Blaming others who were only tangentially responsible for one’s current position is a somewhat understandable reaction in the Philippines, given its collectivist culture of suppressed autonomy and complete family dependency (Hofstede 2001; Schumacher 2002). Migrants who encounter abuse while overseas, may convince themselves that the only reason they went abroad in the first place was because they were pushed to do so by their network contacts whom they then blame for their abusive situation.

risks and costs of providing migration assistance more heavily, often resulting in refusals to help or the provision of only limited help.

Participants who were in more secure jobs, working for employers they trusted, appeared more willing to help their Philippine contacts emigrate. Several long-serving participants—like Marnie who had worked happily for the same Singaporean family for 19 years—had assisted multiple contacts find jobs overseas and were perfectly willing to help more. In contrast, the ten participants who had been mistreated recently by their employers were adamant that they did not want to assist any of their contacts. One such worker—Annie, a 26-year-old runaway in Singapore—provided a more nuanced answer, however, explaining that she would be willing to help her contacts once her own employment situation had improved: “I say [to my friend in the Philippines that] I cannot decide to help. Because, you see, until now, I have not got a good job here. But if I have already a good employer here, then I can send my friend’s bio[graphical] data to the agency.”

### *Network-Level Factors*

#### Degree of Social Closure connecting Current and Prospective Migrants

In situations where there is a concentration of immigrants living or working together, the immigrant community frequently has the capacity to police the recipients of their favors to ensure repayment and the honoring of obligations. As a result of this “enforceable trust,” immigrant communities are often characterized by a high degree of social capital mobilization (Portes 1998; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993).

Bashi's (2007) account of veteran migrants (or "hubs" as she called them) insisting that the newly-arrived migrants they helped leave the West Indies reside under the same roof with them, is a prime example of social closure in action. These veteran migrants did so in order to keep a close eye on their new co-residents and ensure that these newly-arrived migrants did not squander the opportunities they had been provided. But in migrant communities where such mechanisms supporting social closure do not exist, potential donors of social capital resources may be less willing to help their network contacts.

Migrant domestic work, the focus of the present study, is a particularly isolated occupation. Due to the housebound nature of this work, contact with other workers is often restricted to a weekly or monthly day-off (where that has been granted) or fleeting encounters while running errands outside the employer's home (Constable 2003; Zarembka 2003; Parreñas 2001; Milkman, Reese, and Roth 1998; Yeoh and Huang 1998). In certain countries, employers do not even allow their workers to own mobile phones which might have enabled these workers to maintain regular contact with relatives and friends. In such situations, high social closure becomes difficult to achieve and the provision of high-value migration assistance more of a gamble.

This can explain why so many participants expressed hesitation about assisting contacts find work overseas, or limited themselves to helping only close relatives with whom they shared a tightly-knit connection in the Philippines and therefore could follow up with more easily through home-country intermediaries. Eva, a 37-year-old Filipina, who had worked in a total of four countries (Taiwan, Malaysia, Cyprus and Canada),

highlighted exactly these concerns when explaining why she turned down a request for monetary assistance from one of her network contacts:

Before, when I am in Cyprus, someone asked for financial help but I'm not [giving]. Because she's in the Philippines. She was working in Cyprus before and we meet there and then it just happens that her employer sends her home. So because she finished her contract in Cyprus, she cannot stay in Cyprus anymore. And so she don't have enough financially. She wants to apply to another country but she doesn't have enough financially. So, because we are friends, she called me and asked if I have enough savings. But I was thinking to myself, If I lend some money to this person—because I don't know her—we just know each other in Cyprus. I don't know where she is in the Philippines. The Philippines is a little bit big. I don't know where her family is.

And so when she asked money, I was thinking I can lend her some money. Just a little amount to go to other country. But the problem is: You don't know the mind of the other people, right? We are just lending money without signing any agreement from the lawyer. So if anything happens, if it happens that she doesn't pay [me back], that she just keeps hiding herself, so it's hard for me to look for her and to ask for the payment for the money that she borrowed.

And I don't like also to ask people. If you borrow money from me, just pay me without my having to ask you to pay me back the amount you borrowed. Things like that. So if you borrowed money from me, just pay back that amount and pay me whenever you have the money. Don't wait for me to ask you. I don't like that. So instead of being in that situation, I don't loan that money. Maybe I say I don't have so I don't lend her any of my money. So that there is no problem afterwards.

In contrast, participants were always willing to provide migration assistance when their own employer was looking to hire a second domestic worker. Social closure can be especially strong when migrant domestic workers live and work under the same roof. And it was, after all, in these participants' best interests to find a co-worker they could get along with and who could be reminded of their debt to the participant on a daily basis. Other researchers have found similar helping behavior among Mexican domestic workers in the US who “sub-contract” some of their existing work to newly-arrived network contacts from Mexico as a way to help these contacts get on their feet while also keeping close watch over them (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Mattingly 1999).



## *Market-Level Factors*

### Job Availability

Both Smith (2007) and Menjívar (2000) argue that a flourishing economy leads to more job openings, which in turn encourages jobholders to be less risk-averse when approached for job-matching assistance. This is most likely the case with migrant social capital activation as well, especially when it comes to making personal recommendations to potential employers. But job availability is influenced by many factors in addition to the state of the local economy. And *beliefs* about the volume of job openings available for network contacts can influence whether or not current migrants even make the effort to provide migration assistance.

Most countries' domestic labor markets are heavily racialized and hierarchical (Paul 2011b; Constable 1997). As a result, an increase in demand for domestic workers of a particular nationality can result in a simultaneous decline in demand for workers from other countries, all else being constant. This is what has happened to Filipino workers in Hong Kong as Indonesian migrants have begun to make inroads in the Filipino share of the domestic worker market (Anggraeni 2006; Constable 1997). In 1995, there were an estimated 150,000 domestic workers in Hong Kong, of which more than 130,000 were from the Philippines and hardly any from Indonesia (Sim 2003; Constable 1997). Now, there are reported to be more Indonesians than Filipinos working in Hong Kong's 300,000-strong domestic service industry. Several participants expressed the belief that employers are now less willing to hire Filipino workers because Indonesians enjoy a reputation for being more docile, less demanding and, most importantly, cheaper.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed about Thai workers in Hong Kong during the early 1990s (Constable 1997:36-7).

Constable (1997) also heard similar statements about the relative merits of Indonesian domestic workers during her field research in Hong Kong. Carrie, a 53-year-old worker in Hong Kong, believed that the popularity of Indonesian workers was due to the fact that Indonesians receive language training in Cantonese—the primary dialect used by Hong Kong Chinese—prior to their arrival (Wee and Sim 2004): “They know how to speak Cantonese. According to them, they study for six months in Indonesia. So they are good in Cantonese when they come here. So most Chinese [...] they prefer to take these Cantonese-speaking people.”

The increasing popularity of one nationality group meant a reduction in the availability of jobs for other nationalities, whether this was Indonesians vis-à-vis Filipinos or Thais versus Filipinos. However, no Hong Kong-based participant could remember an actual incident where they had been turned down by a prospective employer who preferred to hire a different nationality rather than a Filipino. Instead, I posit that participants’ assumptions about employers’ changing nationality preferences may have prevented them from even *attempting* to approach prospective local employers with the names of potential Filipino hires. In this manner, both real and presumed job availability levels can influence the mobilization of migrant social capital.

### Market Turnover

The Hong Kong market has gained a reputation as a place where the early termination of workers’ contracts is the norm and where there is a great deal more volatility in job tenure (Constable 1997). This has had the effect of making many study participants in Hong Kong somewhat wary about helping to bring their contacts to Hong

Kong—particularly through an agency—in case their contacts ended up being terminated from their contract early and forced to forfeit all their placement fees.

Such a possibility is frightening for many migrant workers seeking jobs in Hong Kong given that they are required to pay exorbitant recruitment agency fees, which in 2008, ranged from PHP80,000 to PHP100,000 (roughly 40-50% of the average annual income of a family in the Philippines. This is despite Hong Kong's standard contract stating that employers are responsible for covering these expenses for their domestic worker.<sup>9</sup> Prospective migrants are usually expected to pay all these fees *prior* to their departure, constituting a significant financial burden.

Meanwhile, Singapore-bound migrants pay on average PHP50,000-60,000 (or between 25-30% of their average annual family income). In addition, Singapore agencies accept part-payment of these fees through a process of salary deductions that can last up to the first 10 months but only *after* the worker has started her job. These divergent payment structures are what create differing incentives for Hong Kong- and Singapore-based agencies when it comes to contract turnover: While Singapore agencies are motivated to keep migrants employed so as to be able to collect their placement fees in full, Hong Kong agencies feel no such compunction.<sup>10</sup>

Constable adds that in Hong Kong, “the more rapid the turnover [of domestic workers], the more profitable an agency's business” (1997:62). She found Hong Kong

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<sup>9</sup> Hong Kong's standard employment contract for domestic workers is available at <http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehhtml/id407form.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> The high turnover in the Hong Kong market and its stricter fee levels and payment structures could also explain why fewer Hong Kong-based participants provided financial assistance to their network contacts compared to Singapore-based participants. Singapore-based current migrants had to cover a smaller proportion of the lower placement fees charged to prospective migrants heading to Singapore, and so were in a better position to be generous. In contrast, Hong Kong-based migrants were asked to cover a much large sum. When combined with the knowledge that their network contact might be fired prematurely and thereby lose any chance of paying them back, Hong Kong migrants were understandably hesitant to loan their contacts any money.

agencies actively gearing employers to run through several domestic workers before settling on a final choice. They did so by offering employers a half refund or unlimited replacements of workers within the first forty days of a contract. Likewise, my Hong Kong interviewees told me of “Buy One, Get Five” offers made by agencies to prospective employers that allowed them to cycle through five domestic workers for the price of one. There is limited downside for employers when accepting such offers; meanwhile, for agencies, each new domestic worker placed with an employer represents significant new revenue, all of it coming from the worker and not the employer.

These market conditions have led to a situation in Hong Kong where contracts are often terminated prematurely (Constable 1997). A domestic worker who is terminated by her employer forfeits all the placement fees she paid, even if she was only on the job for a few days or a few weeks.<sup>11</sup> As a result, several Hong Kong participants explained that they had turned down requests for migration-related assistance when they could not find an employer to directly hire their contact in the Philippines. These migrants were not willing to go through an agency out of concern that the employer the agency found would fire their contact, leaving that individual without a job and, most likely, with an exorbitant loan that they would be unable to pay back. This was the case with Renasha, a 46-year-old domestic worker in Hong Kong, who had repeatedly refused to help her niece find work in Hong Kong. Renasha insisted she would not bring her niece to Hong Kong, “unless I can find an employer who will accept salary deduction and will not terminate.”

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<sup>11</sup> Hong Kong law stipulates that employers who terminate their domestic worker’s contract prematurely must pay their employee one month’s wages in lieu of notice or give them at least one month’s notice in writing. (See [http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehtml/faq\\_fdh.htm#9](http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehtml/faq_fdh.htm#9), Q43.) However, there is nothing mentioned about agency placement fees because technically these workers are not supposed to be paying these fees in the first place.

Participants in Singapore, on the other hand, were more willing to use local agencies to help their contacts. Of the 23 participants in Singapore who had provided migration-related assistance, the most common form of help provided was the submission of their contacts' personal information to a local maid agency (see Table 8.4). In contrast, only two participants in Hong Kong had helped in this manner.

### Regulatory Environment

Böcker (1994) writes that when the Dutch government began imposing stricter requirements on short-term entry visas, creating a more hostile environment for migrant networks connecting Turkey and the Netherlands, Turkish immigrants became much more particular in terms of whom they helped come to the Netherlands. Böcker was referring to permanent immigrants to a country, but a similar situation applies to the case of temporary labor migrants and the specific labor and immigration policies that govern their stay in a host country. Increasing restrictions on domestic workers' living and working conditions has a dampening effect on their desire to help their network contacts find jobs in the same market.

This is what occurred among the Filipino domestic workers who had started working in Hong Kong prior to the 1987 introduction of several "New Conditions of Stay" (NCS). The previous rules governing migrant domestic workers had been much more equitable, allowing them to remain in Hong Kong to search for a new employer if their previous contract had ended prematurely. In contrast, the NCS rules gave an out-of-work migrant only two weeks to find a new employer before requiring their departure from Hong Kong (Constable 1997). In addition, migrants who had successfully found a

new employer within the two-week grace period still had to return to their home countries to apply for a new work visa to Hong Kong before returning to start their new contracts.<sup>12</sup> This last requirement placed a significant financial burden on migrant workers in Hong Kong who were usually expected to pay their Hong Kong agency a hefty fee for finding them a new employer. This and other changes in the regulatory environment governing migrant domestic workers cumulatively had a strong dampening effect on study participants in Hong Kong, lessening their desire to help their contacts find work in Hong Kong in recent years.

In Singapore, meanwhile, local maid placement agencies are much more amenable to helping migrant domestic workers switch employers and the Singapore government does not require these workers to exit the country while their new work permit is being processed. These practices significantly reduce the risks for current migrants in Singapore when it comes to helping their Philippine-based contacts find employment there. As a result, while Singapore-based participants spoke of having found employment for some of their Philippine contacts as recently as the previous year, several Hong Kong-based participants spoke of how, in recent years, they had not directly placed their contacts with employers. Overall, a significantly higher proportion of participants in Hong Kong had turned down requests for migration assistance from their network contacts, 36% compared to 27% in Singapore (see Table 8.3). One of the explanations Hong Kong-based participants provided for their recent non-helping behaviors was that the market for migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong had become more inhospitable in recent years. This was how one Hong Kong worker, Cissie, put it:

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehtml/ID\(E\)989.htm](http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehtml/ID(E)989.htm). Retrieved on October 6, 2011.

Before it's not like what you can see in here now. Because before, if you are terminated, you can find another employer easily. Since it is under the British before, you can find an employer in here directly and no need to come back to Philippines to apply for the visa again. You can continue your work if you have an employer already. No problem. [...] But now, since Hong Kong is under the China now, so many things has changed. [...] Now the salary is become lower. And if you were just terminated and you can find an employer, you still have to go back to Philippines and wait for your visa there. And you need to have an agency too to work for the processing of the documents. Actually during that time Hong Kong is under the British, [it is] really good. Because they have a good consideration of the helper. [...] But now when it is into China, everything they changed. In our salary, our working conditions, so many things happened really.

Even though the NCS were in fact implemented when Hong Kong was still under British rule, the overall sentiment of participants—that the regulatory regime in Hong Kong had become less hospitable over time—was still valid and was another reason behind their growing reluctance to provide migration assistance.

### **The Filipino Art of Withholding Help**

The above section has delved into the many factors that influence current migrants' decision to extend or withhold help, providing an insight into the self-justifications used by these migrants. But, when turning down their network contacts' requests for migration assistance, study participants often couched their reasons for withholding help in very different ways.

In *Lone Pursuit*, Sandra Smith's (2007) interviewees turned down requests for job-finding assistance if they did not deem the jobseeker sufficiently driven or hardworking. Smith writes that the low-income jobholders she interviewed upheld the ideas espoused in the American Dream that "any jobseeker with motivation and drive could find one" (2007:167) and as such saw those without employment as deficient in character and drive, and therefore less worthy of receiving any assistance. But during their face-to-face interactions with jobseekers, jobholders would often lie and say they

had not heard of job vacancies (Smith 2005:23, 25, 28) and, only sometimes, directly confront the jobseeker with his/her own incompetence and unreliability (Smith 2005:22).

Participants in the present study also turned down requests for help if they felt that the prospective migrant was not committed enough to working overseas as a domestic worker. And, the Philippines' collectivist culture of reciprocal giving meant that they too could rarely couch their refusals in direct terms. The cultural norm of helping in which Filipinos are socialized creates strong pressures to provide assistance to friends and family from the home country. But clearly, study participants were not "cultural dupes"; they were fully aware of the risks and costs associated with helping and often turned away network contacts who asked them for migration assistance.

But culture did play an important part in how participants framed their decisions to turn down requests for help. Many participants told their network contacts that by *not* helping them leave the Philippines, they were actually doing these contacts a favor, that life overseas was so risky that it would be better in the long run for these individuals to remain in the Philippines. Vanessa, a domestic worker in Hong Kong, used this tactic to dissuade her contacts in the Philippines from asking her for migration assistance:

Whenever I go home, there are still those who want to come. I discourage them. I always discourage people from coming to Hong Kong. [...] I always give them the scenario that working abroad is not a guarantee that your life will get better. And I tell them about cases after cases that we witness here: those who are abused, those who are with so much loans. So instead of improving their life, they would become much worse [by coming here].

Other participants emphasized the difficulties involved with the process of international migration to dissuade their network contacts from embarking upon such an adventure entirely. They also highlighted how cash-strapped they were, to justify their refusal to loan any money to their network contacts. This is what Janelle in Canada said to fend off her relatives:



My niece, my sister-in-law. Also, my niece and nephews. My cousins, they say, “Could you get us there? Could you bring us there?” And I say, “Well, it’s not easy. You need to apply for an agency, right? Sponsor [a work permit] is not easy too because, in the Philippines, when you get somebody to work here in Canada as the live-in caregiver directly from the Philippines, the processing is too long. And you need to, I think, give up two years. And, you know, there’s no employer who could wait that long. The pressure, they need them right away, they need the service. They need somebody to look after their kids or who will do housekeeping.”

And I was sharing with them [my relatives] about the expenses, right? They need to think about how costly it is. “Well, you know, I’m not saying, I’m not saying it to discourage you because I don’t want you to come. But you need to check. And if you think that I will help you financially, no, I can’t. It isn’t [that] I don’t want you to come or [that] I don’t want to help you, but I’m saying [that] I can’t afford it. [...] You think that [because] I am here in Canada that I have lots of money. [But actually] I’m still in difficulty. I’m still buried with loans.”

Such apologia reflect the difficult tightrope study participants had to walk: Trying to prevent their social capital from becoming a burden to them (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993) while ensuring that their refusal to help did not jeopardize their social networks in the homeland, in which they were still tightly embedded and on which they relied for emotional and psychological support (Kelly and Lusia 2006; Parreñas 2001). Because of the cultural norms surrounding the values of *utang na loob* and *hiya*, participants feared that an outright rejection to a network contact might damage their personal relationship with them. As Nanette in Canada, put it:

If I could not find a way [to help], it’s hard to say no to [people]. I don’t know how to explain it. Because they get upset. Because, you know, Filipinos, if you don’t help them, they will say something about you. I don’t want them to do that, [to say] that I don’t help them.

And so, participants repeatedly talked about trying to let their contacts down gently. Some migrants went so far as to never say no, instead giving vague promises to help but at some unspecified point in the distant future that would never actually come.

### **The Substitution Effect of Withholding Help**

Previous chapters have emphasized how multistate migration can come about because of an aspiring migrant’s initial lack of capital which prevents them from gaining

access to their preferred destination country. This lack of capital can result in a *substitution effect* among these aspiring migrants because of their constrained options. This substitution effect can be temporal, with these migrants opting for a delayed gratification of their desire to enter their preferred destination country. It can also be spatial—with migrants opting for less-preferred destinations in the near term. Together, these substitution effects (whatever their cause, be it the lack of financial, human or social capital) set the stage for their adoption of multistate migration in the long run.

So far, when speaking of migrant social capital, I have referred primarily to how the lack of *access* to this capital can foster such substitution effects. For instance, aspiring migrants without immediate relatives in the US are forced to consider alternative destinations and so on. But the partial- or non-mobilization of migrant social capital (as described in previous sections) can have a similar substitution effect.

This is what happened to Winnie, a 47-year-old Filipina mother of five boys, who had first worked in Hong Kong before coming to Canada. Winnie had several relatives in Canada whom she approached for help finding an employer to hire her so that she could avoid paying a hefty agency placement fee. However, Winnie's Canadian relatives told her they were unable to find an employer for her and squashed her dreams of migrating directly to Canada:

I asked my relatives and they said they can help me with my ticket, but directly no. I asked them before and they said, "No, we can't find any [employers]." [...] They just said, "Oh, we'll help you buy your ticket but you have to loan it from us. But finding an employer, no."

Winnie eventually found other relatives of hers in Hong Kong who were willing to find her a job as a domestic worker in Hong Kong. She worked in Hong Kong for seven years

before she was able to secure enough funds to pay the agency fees for a caregiver job in Canada and enter the country on her own steam.

Winnie's story demonstrates the immediate and long-term effects of the non-mobilization of migrant social capital. Unable to successfully mobilize her network connections in Canada, Winnie had to seek work in Hong Kong instead. She was still able to reach Canada in the end but it had taken her many more years and a lengthy stopover in Hong Kong to realize that dream.

Another case is Macy, a certified medical technologist, who was still living in the Philippines when she asked her aunts and uncles in the US to help sponsor a visa for her. But they told her that they could only help by arranging a "green card marriage" for her.

Actually, [going to the US] was my desire. You know, being with my relatives in the US. But they just told us that it's really hard to apply. [...] They don't want us to go there. That's my thinking: That they really don't want us to go there. They said that it's hard but I don't know how hard that will be. My aunt—the eldest sister of mommy—told me that they can arrange marriage [for me]. Something like that. That is the only way they presented to me. Aside from that, nothing more. So, you know, I was a bit dismayed, you know? I don't know if they are really willing to help me, you know?

Unwilling to be part of an arranged marriage, Macy had no other means of securing a visa to the US and had to consider alternative destinations and alternative migration strategies. Macy ended up applying for the live-in caregiver program in Canada and I interviewed her when she had been working in Toronto for almost three years. Her initial plan had been to use Canada as a stepping stone to the US: Once she secured her Canadian citizenship and returned to her former profession as a medical technologist, she had expected to move on to the US. This plan had changed somewhat since her arrival in Canada but she freely admitted that this form of "triangular migration" through Canada had been her backup plan after her hope for a direct migration to the US blocked by her relatives.

Altogether, 17% of interviewees in Canada spoke of having had their initial requests for migration assistance turned down (see Table 8.3). All of these migrants still managed to cobble together enough resources (of their own or from other network contacts) to leave the Philippines and travel to a less-preferred country. As a result of their initial inability to mobilize all their social capital resources, their eventual migration trajectory was significantly longer in duration and also involved more stops in intermediate countries.

### **Conclusion**

Migrant networks influence migration system dynamics by affecting the aspirations, capabilities and opportunity structures of prospective migrants.<sup>13</sup> In Chapter Six, the role of networks in shaping the destination preferences and aspirations of prospective migrants was discussed. In this present chapter, the role of networks in both enhancing and restricting the capabilities of migrants was elaborated upon. The examples provided here highlight how the process by which this occurs is significantly more complex than what the current network theory of cumulative migration describes.

This chapter showcases how the mobilization of migrant social capital is a selective, contingent and dynamic process, with migrants moving from being very helpful to not helpful and back over time, depending on their current context, their relationships with each network contact, and their past helping experiences. Most study participants had received migration assistance when they were first seeking to leave the Philippines. Likewise, most of them had offered some amount of migration assistance to at least one

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<sup>13</sup> I am using de Haas' definition of migration as a "function of [a prospective migrant's] aspirations and capabilities within a given set of opportunity structures" (2011:21).

of their contacts in the Philippines. However, only half the time had these participants provided *substantive* assistance—giving money or finding an employer to directly hire their contact. These findings point to the need for more data on the actual forms of assistance being provided by overseas migrants. It is insufficient to ask whether or not overseas migrants assist their network contacts, we need to also ask: “How *much* help do they provide?”

This chapter’s comparative analysis of migrant domestic worker helping patterns across different countries also makes clear that migrant social capital mobilization is not simply a function of micro-level factors at the individual and dyad levels, but is heavily contingent on more macro-structural factors. For instance, laws that help mitigate some of the vulnerabilities of domestic work and migrant labor encourage current migrant domestic workers to take on the risk of finding jobs for their home country contacts. These findings are in line with Böcker’s (1994) research on Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands who became less willing to extend migration assistance as Dutch immigration laws became more restrictive. But equally important is the structure of the job market in which these migrant labor. Overall, the existence of a pro-migrant and pro-worker regulatory environment is critical for migrant domestic workers who already experience so much structural vulnerability in their working lives.

In addition to the role played by policies on the books, policy *praxis* also influences the degree of network mobilization. The actual workings of the migrant domestic worker market, in particular the role played by market intermediaries such as maid agencies, can impact how comfortable current migrants feel extending help to network contacts, and also the type of help that they offer. These agencies—which often

exist in a regulatory gray area—regularly function as migration gatekeepers, illegally charging prospective migrants exorbitant fees that prevent low-capital individuals from leaving their home countries. But, as this study shows, these agencies’ recruitment and placement practices also have an effect on migrants who are already overseas, moderating their willingness to extend certain types of assistance to their network contacts, and transforming them into migration gatekeepers as well.

When the migration assistance that is given is of low value, limited in nature, or conditional, not all prospective migrants will be able to accumulate the additional resources required to make a journey overseas or reach their preferred destination. Thus, it is possible for migrant social capital to be mobilized and yet not result in migration. Another likely outcome is that migration trajectories are altered in significant ways, shifting away from countries with higher entry barriers and towards countries that offer easier access, encouraging multistage/multistate migration as a way to circumvent an initial lack of migrant capital. The spatial and temporal substitution effects of the low/partial mobilization of migrant social capital are what set the stage for multistate migration.

To end, this chapter reaffirms the outsize role migrant social capital can play in the migration decisions of prospective migrants. But it highlights how migration help—especially “good” help that can make all the difference between migrating to one’s preferred destination, migrating somewhere else, or not migrating at all—can often be hard to find and is moderated by a range of factors outside the control of individual migrants. Most of the empirical research on migrant networks does not provide any direct measures of the type and quantity of migration assistance provided, simply assuming that

assistance was either provided fully or not at all (Garip 2008). What I have tried to highlight in this chapter is the need to look more critically at the activation of migrant social capital, recognizing its dynamic and differentiated nature and the effect this has in shaping multistate migration flows.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **Conclusion**

For this dissertation, I investigated the phenomenon of multistate migration, an emergent migration strategy and trajectory among aspiring Filipino migrant domestic workers. In the preceding chapters, I outlined the multiplicity of factors at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels that led to the emergence of this migration pattern. In Chapter Three, I described the conditions in the Philippines that have facilitated the adoption of multistate migration by aspiring migrants. The continuing economic doldrums of the Philippines have set the stage for just over 100,000 Filipinas to leave the country each year as newly-hired migrant domestic workers. When their overseas contracts expire, however, these women have few reasons for wanting to return to the Philippines for good. Their economic worries have not lessened in any permanent way and their choice of migrant domestic work does not translate into improved chances for their employment in the Philippines. So, many of these women may choose to remain overseas but not always in the same overseas destination.

Migrant domestic workers are able to consider alternative destinations because the overseas labor market for these workers is both global and transnational. It is global in that there are many high-income countries around the world—countries as disparate as Canada, Italy, Switzerland, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Cyprus, the United



Arab Emirates and Taiwan—that have instituted labor programs to grant temporary work permits to migrant domestic workers. At the same time, this market is transnational in that it allows for the skills, experience and reputation accrued by foreign domestic workers while working in one of these overseas markets to be transferred to and rewarded in another country. These country markets are not isolated silos with no links connecting each other. Rather, thanks in large part to the enterprising actions of overseas maid agencies and the growing stock of Filipino migrant domestic workers in these destinations, there are now well-established flows of migrant domestic workers flowing from one overseas market to another, such as from Hong Kong to Canada.

Migrant domestic workers themselves are aware of the relative merits of these different overseas markets. Migrants carry around in their heads a socially constructed destination hierarchy that guides each of their destination decisions. Aspiring, optimistic migrants—and people who choose to leave their home country for a new one are, almost by definition, both aspiring and optimistic—seek better-paying jobs, better working conditions and/or the possibility of securing permanent residency in their new country. They may not always be able to gain direct access to their preferred destination due to high barriers to entry and so may be forced to settle for a less-preferred host country instead. But, in their subsequent migrations, they may attempt to climb their destination hierarchy and eventually gain access to their preferred host country or, at the very least, a country that is higher up their hierarchy. Sometimes, this multistate migration trajectory is planned out from the start as an intentional strategy. In other cases, it is more organic, with each step in the migration journey occurring independently of any others (even though there is an element of path-dependency involved in much multistate migration).

But whatever the case, the process of multistate migration is frequently marked by dynamic change as new migration opportunities and new destination information can alter migrants' preferences and plans in unexpected ways.

At the same time, the ability to engage in multistate migration up their destination hierarchy is a function, not only of migrants' initial degree of access to capital, but also, their ability to accumulate new capital while overseas. Migrants who are better educated and unencumbered by dependents needing most of their foreign earnings are more likely to engage in multistate migration. There are also significant differences between multistate migrants and those direct migrants who are able to travel directly to their preferred destination country in a single step. One of the most critical of these is the type of overseas network that the migrant is embedded in. While direct migrants are often closely connected to overseas migrants who have already secured citizenship or permanent residence in a preferred destination country and can sponsor visas for them, multistate migrants have often only other temporary contract laborers to assist them in their migration attempts. These differing networks highlight the capital-constrained origins of multistate migrants: It is not that they lack any access to capital, but rather that they do not have enough of it to support a direct migration to their preferred destination country. If and when they are able to accumulate new capital (human, social, financial *and* cultural) while working overseas, these migrants can position themselves to engage in further migrations up their destination hierarchy.

## **Contributions**

Through my findings, this dissertation contributes to various literatures. It adds to the migration literature by proposing a conceptual model of multistate migration as undertaken by capital-constrained migrants. This is of great use given that this emergent pattern of migration is currently both ill-defined and under-studied. My findings also shed light on the more subjective side of destination decision-making and how various cognitive biases may result in the over- and under-valuing of particular countries as destinations.

Within globalization studies, it expands our understanding of how the processes of globalization are transforming certain industries and occupational fields and, in the case of this study, creating a transnational labor market for migrant domestic workers. Such a global labor market enables these workers, who are often represented as low-capital migrants, to take their newly-acquired skills and experience acquired while working in one overseas market and successfully transfer it to a new country where their human capital can be recognized and rewarded.

This dissertation also speaks to labor studies, highlighting the oft-unrecognized agency of individual migrant domestic workers. Between 40-50% of study participants in Hong Kong and Singapore and 82% of participants in Canada were multistate migrants. Despite working in a low-status, low-paid occupation that heavily marginalized them, these migrants were able to accumulate sufficient capital while overseas to support at least one additional journey up their destination hierarchy, upending the notion that these migrant domestic workers are always the “victims” or “servants” of globalization. Instead, the findings point to how migrants’ capacity for agentic action can increase while

they are overseas, enabling them to take advantage of globalizing market forces and climb their destination hierarchies.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to gender studies with its exploration of how women's independent labor migration can still occur within a patriarchal hegemony. It does so by presenting a "negotiated migration" model of migration decision-making that clarifies how women migrants may successfully navigate the gendered and generational hierarchies within which they live in their home country. In this manner, it provides a gendered corrective to the new economics of labor migration.

However, despite these insights, there are still questions that this study has not answered: How does multistate migration impact the migrant domestic workers who undertake such journeys? What are other likely occupations where multistate migration might emerge? In this concluding chapter, I take a stab at answering some of these questions and lay out a research agenda for future studies I hope to initiate.

### **Multistate Migration among Other Migrant Populations**

Considering that I interviewed a narrow section of the labor migrant population—only one nationality, one gender and one occupational category—my findings on multistate migration may not be generalizable outside this population. However, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, there have been several case studies of other migrant populations that highlight international migration patterns that could also be classified as multistate migration (see Biao 2007; Gold 2007; Konadu-Agyemang 1999; DeVoretz and Ma 2002). Biao's (2007) work focuses on Indian IT workers (most of whom are men) and his study highlights the same forces in the global political

economy—tightening immigration restrictions in the West, a pent-up demand for cheap foreign labor in developed and high-income developing countries and the emergence of a migration industry to support and steer the aspirations of prospective migrants in the developing world—that set the stage for the emergence of multistate migration among the Filipino migrant domestic workers in this study. DeVoretz and his fellow researchers focus more on Hong Kong immigrants to Canada who move on to the US. Their work highlights the ability of migrants to accumulate new capital while overseas to fund further migrations to new, harder-to-enter destinations. These two research examples alone suggest that the practice of undertaking multistate migration to climb one's destination hierarchy is not exclusive to Filipinos, domestic workers or women.

In addition, my preliminary interviews with Filipino nurses in the US<sup>1</sup> reveals that this migration pattern might be becoming more common amongst this population as well, now that the US—the traditional dream destination for Filipino nurses (Choy 2003)—no longer offers as many long-term visas to foreign-trained nurses. In earlier decades, there was a steady stream of Filipino nursing graduates to the US, first through the Exchange Visitor Program (EVP) (established in 1948), then as a result of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that lifted nationality-based quotas for permanent immigrants intending to settle down in the US, and most recently, through specialized employer-sponsored visa categories (H1-A and H1-C) that were eligible only for foreign-trained nursing graduates.

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<sup>1</sup> I interviewed only one Filipino nurse in Canada and she had been retired for several years at the time of her interview. In contrast, the nursing professionals in the US that I interviewed were all still working as nurses and were active in the Filipino nursing community in their respective locations. I should note however that my Canadian interviewee had first worked in the US under the auspices of the EVP. But, at the end of a two-year stint in Texas, when she was supposed to return to the Philippines, she instead found work in a hospital in Toronto. She eventually settled down in Canada, marrying and raising two daughters there. So she was a multistate migrant herself.

The above specialized visa categories were created in response to severe nursing shortages across the country and later in rural parts of the US. But, in recent years, the US has become increasingly restrictive when it comes to granting long-term or permanent access to foreign-trained nurses. The EVP is still in operation but it no longer lists foreign nurses as one of its accepted occupational categories.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the H1-A and H1-C visa categories have been discontinued.<sup>3</sup> Even employer-sponsored permanent residency is no longer an easy option for foreign nurses. Potential employers are able to sponsor foreign nurses only if they are seeking to fill highly specialized nursing positions or positions that include both nursing and managerial responsibilities, where they can argue that they cannot find such skilled individuals among US nurses.

These recent restrictions on the entry of foreign nurses into the US has not been lost on Filipino immigrants in the US. During my conversations with Filipino nurses in the US, several interviewees told me about how they were now advising their relatives in the Philippines who were newly-graduated nurses, to seek employment in other countries that accepted foreign nurses, at least until the US loosened its immigration and labor policies. Such advice reflects the ongoing trend for Filipino nurses to seek work in non-US locations. While the US was the earliest and used to be the largest importer of Filipino nurses, several other countries have become more important destinations for Filipino nurses in recent decades. Between 1993 and 2003, nearly 100,000 nurses left the Philippines, with 46,000 going to Saudi Arabia, 16,000 going to the UK and Ireland, and only 11,000 to the US (Ball 2008). Since 2003, the US has dropped even further down the list: The top ten markets for newly-hired Filipino nurses in the seven years till 2010

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/87379.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types\\_1275.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1275.html)

have been countries in the Middle East, Asia and Europe, and not the US (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2011).

Most of my Filipino nurse interviewees had come to the US directly from the Philippines in 1990 or even earlier when entry into the US was significantly easier. But my most recently-arrived interviewee, Jane, had entered the US in 2001 after waiting for four years for her application to be processed and approved. Prior to securing her US visa, Jane had worked in the UK for three years. She had adopted this multistate migration trajectory on the advice of her brother (a nurse in the US) and her aunt (a nurse in the UK) who told her to find an RN job in the UK while waiting for her employer-sponsored US permanent residency application (submitted in 1997) to be approved.

The advice Jane's relatives gave her is a reflection of trends occurring within the nursing industry that parallel the trends I observed in the domestic worker industry in several countries: Labor shortages in many high-income countries that have forced them to increase their reliance on foreign-trained nurses; a similar hierarchy of overseas markets for nurses (with Western countries at the top, followed by Asian countries, and lastly the Middle East); the emergence of a transnational labor market for foreign-trained nursing graduates (especially for those who had passed internationally-accepted credentialing examinations like the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools, an international authority on the evaluation of foreign nursing professionals); increasing restrictions that limit the entry of foreign nurses into the US; a culture of migration among the major suppliers of nurses for the global market (e.g. the Philippines, India and Sri Lanka); and finally, the expansion of the for-profit migration industry that

supports the placement of foreign nurses overseas but using a sliding scale fee structure that makes jobs in the West initially out of reach for many migrants.

### **Working-Class Cosmopolitans**

What does the experience of working and living for long periods of times in various overseas destinations do to individual migrants? I have coined the term “working-class cosmopolitans” to describe migrants such as those of my study participants who were multistate migrants employed in low-status occupations such as paid domestic work. Unlike the picture of cosmopolitanism that is popular in the media—that of jet-setting, globe-trotting, consumption-driven, elitist Westerners moving from country to country at will (Calhoun 2002; Robbins 1998; Vertovec and Cohen 2002)—, the working-class cosmopolitans I interviewed originated from Asia, had acquired their multifaceted knowledge of the world through their low-paid and menial labor in various countries, and received little societal recognition in their host countries for their hard-earned knowledge and experience. As James Clifford has noted about cosmopolitanism among the Victorian era bourgeoisie:

A host of servants, helpers, companions, guides, bearers, etc. have been discursively excluded from the role of proper travelers because of their race and class, and because theirs seemed to be a dependent status in relation to the supposed independence of the individualistic bourgeois voyager (1992:106).

But cosmopolitanism represents not only the condition of having lived in multiple locations during one’s lifetime (Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988). It is also a form of skill—a muscle, if you will—that select well-traveled individuals can exercise in different national contexts. Ulf Hannerz describes it as “a personal ability to make one’s way into other cultures, through listening, looking,



intuiting and reflecting” (1990:239). Few individuals have to perform this process of immersion into a new culture as much as migrant domestic workers who have to live in the homes of their foreign employers, learn to cook a different cuisine, sometimes speak a different language and navigate the different systems of meaning that exist in their host country. A migrant domestic worker who was born and raised in the Philippines and then worked in, say, Hong Kong, Cyprus and eventually Canada, has become expert at adapting to multiple cultures.

Even though they are cosmopolitan through their experiences and abilities, they are rarely treated as such in their host countries.<sup>4</sup> Their low status as domestic workers still trumps their wide-ranging experience and adaptive capabilities. In addition, because of the many years these capital-constrained migrants had invested into their multistate journeys as domestic workers, they often remain trapped in low-status occupations. The significant deskilling they experienced while domestic workers means that it is difficult for them to find work in more reputable sectors of the economy.

In the case of Canada, the live-in caregivers I interviewed were almost all still in the process of applying for permanent residency (PR) and had not yet started other types of work. But my background interviews with immigrant activists and grassroots workers indicate that the post-PR life for these workers is not a bed of roses. Their Philippine degrees and pre-migration professional qualifications are rarely recognized, making it difficult for them to find a new occupation that is commensurate with their educational qualifications. Sponsoring their families to join them in Canada takes a great deal of

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<sup>4</sup> The situation is very different in their home countries where the stories they tell of their experiences in various foreign countries and the diverse consumer goods they send back home from different corners of the globe, secure them a high status among their relatives and friends. At home, they are more likely to be recognized as modern cosmopolitans despite their low-status occupation.

money as well: CA\$450 for their own application, CA\$550 each for their spouse and parents, and CA\$150 for each dependent child under 22 years of age, and a host of other application fees. There is also a minimum annual income requirement that varies depending on how many family members are being sponsored.<sup>5</sup> When they considered all the added expenses of housing, food and transportation required to support an entire family, some participants thought twice about their initial plans to sponsor their families to join them in Canada. A few participants told me that they had decided not to sponsor their husbands because they feared their husbands would not be able to handle the downward mobility and cultural shock that would inevitably occur. One participant had even decided not to bring her children to Canada but have them continue their education in the Philippines instead.

Still, Canadian-based interviewees remained excited about the possibility of upward mobility for themselves. Former nurses and other health professionals were taking Canadian licensing examinations or signing up for online courses that would facilitate their return to their earlier professions. Others spoke about their dreams of working in the hospitality industry or in early childhood education, both areas where their work experience as live-in caregivers in Canada and elsewhere might be recognized and rewarded to some extent.

Migrants in Singapore and Hong Kong, who were unable (or unwilling) to climb any higher up their destination hierarchy, had resigned themselves to a very different future. They had shifted their focus to building a comfortable (albeit less than full) life for themselves as migrant domestic workers in their host country. They looked for an

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/applications/guides/5196ETOC.asp#5196E9>. Retrieved on July 2, 2012.

employer who was flexible, generous and supportive, and once they had built a strong relationship with such an employer, they tried to make their employment last as long as possible in order to give themselves a sense of financial and emotional security even as a temporary migrant worker.

Domestic workers in the United States who had entered on tourist visas or short-term work contracts were in an even worse situation. Not only did they have very little likelihood of becoming permanent residents of the US in the future, but they also were working illegally in the present. These factors kept them in the shadows of American society, fearful of jeopardizing their situation in any way. Some of the participants I talked to in New York, spoke of having never visited their relatives on the West Coast because they did not want to risk taking a plane in case their passport was checked and their visa was found to have expired. Some had been in the US for several years at a time without ever having returned to the Philippines to see their family because they knew that once they left, they could not come back. Undocumented domestic workers in the US also focused their efforts on finding good employers who would not ask questions about their immigration status or who might even be willing to sponsor them for a visa. Their efforts highlight the continuing power of immigration and labor policy to constrain migrants' lives despite all the talk of globalization flattening the world.

These stories demonstrate how multistate migration in and of itself is not a panacea to all the difficulties of life as a migrant domestic worker. Only a tiny proportion of all migrant domestic workers leaving the Philippines each year are able to eventually gain access to countries like Canada where they have a shot at securing permanent resident status and a chance at upward mobility. Other multistate migrants are still

frequently able to improve their circumstances, finding better-paying jobs in countries that provide more protections for domestic workers and migrants, and building a supportive community of friends for themselves. And few interviewees expressed any regrets over the migration and destination decisions they had made. But the lives of all these women in Canada and elsewhere remain marked by vulnerability. All it would take is an abusive or overly strict employer, an unethical, mercenary recruitment agency, or a major illness that makes them unable to perform their job, to remind these women of just how tenuous their situation in their host country truly is. It is for this reason that despite the multistate migration success stories I witnessed that highlight the agency and ingenuity of individual migrant domestic workers, my main takeaway from the interviews is the continuing need for greater reforms in all host countries, so as to guarantee sufficient workplace protections, better living conditions and greater respect in general for all migrant domestic workers, whether they are multinational maids or not.

### **Future Research**

As already mentioned, I did not interview many live-in caregivers in Canada who had completed their 24-month full-time employment requirement and become permanent residents of Canada. As such, I do not have sufficient data to discuss the long-term prospects for upward mobility for these migrant domestic workers. This is a project that I hope to initiate upon graduation.

A second research area that I plan to pursue is the role of recruitment agencies in fostering multistate migration flows. Despite being critical traffic wardens and gatekeepers of international migration flows over the last 50 years, for-profit migrant

agencies are an understudied aspect of global migration patterns. This is most likely because these agencies—many of whom work illegally, over-charging their clients—shy away from explaining their business practices to researchers. Given the expected difficulty recruiting study participants, I hope to be able to conduct a small-*n* ethnographic study of these agencies and their role in fostering multistate migration not only among migrant domestic workers but also migrant laborers from other industries.

It is also my hope that other migration scholars will take the model of multistate migration I have proposed in this dissertation and apply it in their own research on multiple international migrations. If my dissertation serves to delineate and define this sub-field of migration studies that looks at multistate migration, I will consider it work well done.

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### Asian Interview Protocol: Questions for Existing/Former/Prospective Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers in Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines

#### MIGRATION DECISION

1. What made you look for work overseas?
  - What kind of work were you doing in the Philippines before you left?
  - What kind of work did you think you would probably end up doing?
  - What did you think would be the benefits of working overseas?
  - What did you think would be the disadvantages?
  - Before you migrated, did you know anyone who had worked overseas?
  - Had they told you anything about working overseas?
2. Do you ever regret deciding to migrate?

#### DESTINATION DECISION

3. How did you end up working in Hong Kong/Singapore/Country X?
  - Was this the first overseas destination where you've worked?
  - Where else have you worked?
  - Was this your first choice?
  - Did you think about other countries before or after coming here?
  - What do you think of Hong Kong/Singapore/Country X compared to when you first arrived?
  - What do you think of Hong Kong/Singapore/Country X compared to before you arrived?
  - Do you ever regret coming to this country?
  - How would you describe your life here?

*[Instructions: Repeat Q3 for as many countries as the migrant worked in.]*

4. If you could choose your preferred country, where would you like to work most?  
Why?
  - Do you know of anyone who has worked in any of these countries?
  - What do your friends and family say about these countries?
  - What have you heard or read about any of these countries in general?
  - What have you heard or read about Filipinos working in any of these countries?
  - (If not working in Hong Kong) Have you heard or read anything about working in Hong Kong compared to Singapore?

- (If not working in Singapore) Have you heard or read anything about working in Singapore compared to Hong Kong?
- Have you heard anything about the Middle East?
- Are there any countries where you absolutely refuse to work? Why?
- Are there any countries where you would love to work but don't think you can? Why?

#### **SECURING EMPLOYMENT**

4. When you decided to work overseas, how did you go about securing an overseas job?
  - Did you go through friends or family? Why or why not?
  - Did you go through a recruiting agency? Why or why not?
  - Did you look in the newspaper for job ads? Why or why not?
5. What kind of information about the country or the job do you wish you had before you signed the contract to work overseas?

#### **HOUSEHOLD MIGRATION PATTERNS**

6. When you decided to work overseas, did you go on your own or with other people?
7. When you decided to work overseas, did you need to seek permission from someone else? Who?
8. Did you consult with or seek advice from other people? Who?
  - Did you have any family members who were already overseas or had been in the past?
  - Did you communicate with any of these family members?
  - How often did you communicate with them? What did you talk about?
  - Did anyone tell you not to go overseas? Why didn't you follow their advice?
9. Did anyone help you leave the Philippines? If yes, how?
10. Has anyone asked you for help to leave the Philippines?

#### **FINANCES**

11. How much did it cost you to get a job overseas?
  - How much did you think it would cost you?
  - Where did you get the money to pay for these expenses?
12. How much have you earned from working overseas?
  - How much did you think you would earn?
  - How much have you saved from working overseas? How long did it take you?
  - How much did you think you would save?
  - What do you do with your savings?



## APPENDIX B

### North American Interview Protocol: Questions for Existing/Former/Prospective Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers in the United States and Canada

#### MIGRATION DECISION

1. Tell me about your life in the Philippines before you left. What kind of work were you doing in the Philippines?
  - ⇒ *Did you go to college? What did you study?*
  - ⇒ *Was life comfortable growing up? Would you say that your family was middle-class?*
  
2. What made you decide to leave the Philippines and work overseas?
  - ⇒ *How did you first get the idea? Did someone suggest it to you?*
  - ⇒ *What did you think would be the benefits of working overseas?*
  - ⇒ *Did you think there would be any disadvantages?*
  - ⇒ *Were there any particular factors you weighed in making your decision?*
  - ⇒ *Where did you get your information about overseas life?*
  - ⇒ *Did you need to seek permission from someone? Who?*
  
3. What was your migration plan?
  - ⇒ *How long were you planning on staying overseas?*
  - ⇒ *What kind of work did you think you would end up doing overseas?*
  - ⇒ *Did you have a particular country you wanted to emigrate to?*
  - ⇒ *Did you think you would work in one or more countries?*
  - ⇒ *How did you think you were going to get into those countries?*
  
4. Did you ever consider working overseas for a few years and then returning to the Philippines, instead of leaving for good?
  
5. Please walk me through the process you went through to leave the Philippines the first time?
  - ⇒ *Did you go through an agency? If yes, how did you go about selecting the agency?*
  - ⇒ *Did you go through friends or family?*
  - ⇒ *Was there any paperwork or tests you had to complete?*
  - ⇒ *Did you have to pay any money? Where did you get the money?*

- ⇒ *Were there any difficulties that came up while you were trying to leave the Philippines?*
6. Have you lived in any other country besides the US/Canada after leaving the Philippines?
- ⇒ *If yes, what countries and what jobs and for how long?*
- ⇒ *How did you secure each job?*
- ⇒ *Did you have to make any payments?*
- ⇒ *What was your experience like working and living in each country?*
- ⇒ *Was your experience different from what you had expected?*
- ⇒ *Why did you decide to leave each country?*
- ⇒ *How do the communities of migrants in these two (or more) countries compare?*
- ⇒ *Is it better or worse where you are now? In what way?*

### **THE ROLE OF CAPITAL**

7. Did you ask any of your friends or family for any kind of help migrating?
- ⇒ *Did any of them say yes? If yes, who were they and what kind of help did they provide?*
- ⇒ *Did any of them say no? Who said no and what reasons did they give for not helping?*
8. Did you have any special skills/training that made it easier or harder for you to leave the Philippines?
9. Do you think there were any particular personal characteristics you had that made it easier or harder for you to leave the Philippines?
10. Did you have to pay any money to leave the Philippines?
- ⇒ *If yes, how much?*
- ⇒ *How did you find the money?*
- ⇒ *Was it hard to secure the money?*
11. Do you think it's easier for people from the Philippines to come to the US/Canada than migrants from other countries?
- ⇒ *If yes, which countries are you thinking about?*
- ⇒ *Why do you think so?*
12. Think back to the people who lived on your street, or the people you went to school with. What percentage of them would you say are living overseas now? What percentage would you say are in the US/Canada?
13. Compared to some of your neighbors/friends back in the Philippines, how unique is your migration story?
- ⇒ *Do you consider yourself to be luckier than them?*
- ⇒ *If yes, in what way? If no, why not?*

- ⇒ *What do you think makes you different from them? What do you have (or don't have) that they didn't have (or do have)?*
14. What would your life be like now if you had never left the Philippines? Would you be comfortable? Would you be happier?
15. Do you ever regret deciding to migrate to any of these countries? Were there other mistakes that you made?
16. What role did chance/luck (good or bad) play in any of your migration and destination decisions?

### **NETWORK MIGRATION PATTERNS**

17. Before you left the Philippines, did you have any close friends or relatives who lived/worked overseas?
- ⇒ *If yes, in which countries/cities?*
- ⇒ *What kind of work did they do?*
- ⇒ *What did they tell you about those countries? About their jobs? About the overseas life?*
- ⇒ *Were they supportive of your decision to migrate?*
11. Did you consult with or seek advice from any of these people before migrating?
- ⇒ *If yes, who?*
- ⇒ *How often did you communicate with them? What did you talk about?*
- ⇒ *Did anyone tell you not to go overseas? Why didn't you follow their advice?*
12. Do you know anyone else who has worked/lived in multiple countries?
- ⇒ *Were they stepwise or onward migrants?*
- ⇒ *Do you think stepwise migration is a popular strategy among Filipinos? Why or why not?*
- ⇒ *Do you think onward migration is common among Filipinos? Why or why not?*
- ⇒ *Do you know why they chose that particular migration trajectory?*

### **DESTINATION HIERARCHIES**

13. Before you first left the Philippines, what was your “dream destination” where you most wanted to work? Why?
- ⇒ *Did you know of anyone who had worked in that country?*
- ⇒ *What did your friends and family say about that country?*
- ⇒ *What had you heard or read about that country from the media?*
- ⇒ *Did you think it was possible to ever work in that country? Why or why not?*
- ⇒ *If yes, how did you plan on getting to that country?*
14. Were there any countries where you absolutely refused to work? If yes, which countries and why?

15. If you could choose your dream destination now, where would you like to work most and why?
- ⇒ *Do you know of anyone who has worked in that country? What do they say about it?*
  - ⇒ *What had you heard or read about that country from the media?*
  - ⇒ *Do you think it is possible to ever work in that country? Why or why not?*
  - ⇒ *If yes, how do you plan on getting to that country?*
16. Now I am going to mention some other common destinations for Filipino migrants. Please tell me what you think of each of them and where you got your information:
- ⇒ *Hong Kong, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Italy*
17. Why did you want to live in the U.S./Canada?
- ⇒ *Was that the plan all along?*
  - ⇒ *Did you try coming here earlier? What happened?*
  - ⇒ *When you were a child growing up in the Philippines, what was your impression of these two countries? Where did you get these ideas?*
18. How did you end up working in Canada/U.S.?
- ⇒ *Were there any difficulties gaining entry? If yes, how did you overcome them?*
  - ⇒ *Was this country your first choice? Why or why not?*
  - ⇒ *Did you think about other countries?*
19. How does the US compare with Canada?
20. Have you ever thought of moving to any other countries after coming here?
- ⇒ *If yes, which countries and why? What have you heard about those countries?*
  - ⇒ *What disappointed you about your life now?*
21. Have you ever thought of returning to the Philippines after coming here? Why or why not?

### **MULTI-STATE MIGRATION**

22. Do you know anyone who travelled stepwise to the US/Canada?
23. Do you have any idea how popular that approach to getting to the US is?
24. [If a multistate migrant] How did you first get the idea of traveling this way to the US/Canada?
- ⇒ *Do you know anyone else who lived in an intermediate country before getting to the US/Canada?*
  - ⇒ *Do you think that's very common among immigrants here?*

### **POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCE**

3. Did you know anyone in Canada/U.S. before arriving here?

- ⇒ *Did they help you when you first arrived? With housing? Finding a job? Food? Getting around?*
4. What were the initial days and months of your first job here like?
    - ⇒ *Were they difficult in any way? Were you homesick? Did you experience culture shock?*
  5. How have you adjusted to life in Canada/U.S.?
    - ⇒ *How do you spend your off-days?*
    - ⇒ *What is your daily work routine like?*
    - ⇒ *How do you deal with loneliness or being homesick?*
  6. What do you think now of Canada/U.S. as a place to work and live?
    - ⇒ *Was your opinion different before you got here? Has your opinion changed since?*
    - ⇒ *Do you ever regret coming to this country?*
    - ⇒ *How would you describe your life here?*
    - ⇒ *What kind of information about Canada/U.S. do you wish you had before coming here?*
    - ⇒ *If working in US, what do you think of Canada as a destination? Is it better or worse than the US? Did you ever think of migrating there?*
    - ⇒ *If working in Canada, what do you think of the US as a destination? Is it better or worse than Canada? Did you ever think of migrating there?*
    - ⇒ *If they mentioned healthcare as a reason for staying in Canada, why is healthcare so important to you?*

## **FUTURE PLANS**

7. Do you want to change your occupation in the future? How easy do you think it will be to do that?
8. [For interviewees on temporary visas or undocumented] What do you think life after gaining your permanent residency (or citizenship or legal status) will be like? What is (or will be) the difference between life before and after?
9. Do you think you'll change in any way after you get your PR/citizenship/legal status?
10. Do you plan on sponsoring any of your family members to join you here? Why or why not?
11. [If going to be reunited with family members] How easy do you think it will be for your family to adjust to life overseas?
12. Do you ever wish you had a better, higher-status job? How would you go about getting it?
13. Do you ever think of moving onto another country?

### **PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO OTHERS**

14. Has anyone asked you to help them to emigrate to Canada/U.S. or somewhere else since you left the Philippines?
- ⇒ *If yes, who asked, how many and what kind of help have they asked for?*
  - ⇒ *Did you help them? Why or why not? What kind of help have you provided?*
  - ⇒ *Do you enjoy providing this kind of assistance?*
  - ⇒ *If no, why not? What did you tell them?*
  - ⇒ *Is it hard to help people emigrate? Why or why not?*

### **ROLE OF POLICY**

38. Do you think the US/Canada should be more or less strict in letting people enter and work in the country?
39. Do you think Filipinos should get priority when it comes to entering the US/Canada?
40. Do you think there are a lot of Filipino migrants living and working here illegally?
41. Do you think the US/Canadian government should legalize the status of undocumented workers?
42. How do you think the immigration policies of the US/Canada affected your journey to this country?
43. Do you think these policies have changed over the years? If yes, how do you think this has affected the chances of other Filipinos who want to emigrate here?
44. What kind of immigration policies would you like to see in place?

### **STATUS OF FILIPINO AMERICANS/CANADIANS**

45. What do you think the status of Filipinos in the US/Canada is?
46. How do you think other Americans/Canadians think of Filipinos?
47. Why do you think there are so many Filipinos working/living in the US/Canada?
48. Why do you think there are so many Filipinos working in your field/industry?

## APPENDIX C

### Online Recruitment Survey of Filipino Migrants (used in the US)

#### Instructions

*Hello. My name is Anju Mary Paul and I am a doctoral student at the University of Michigan conducting research on the migration paths of Filipino immigrants in the U.S./Canada. To qualify for this survey, you must:*

- 1. Be over 18 years old,*
- 2. Have been born in the Philippines,*
- 3. Now live in the US/Canada, and*
- 4. Have worked in the past or are working now as a nursing professional, caregiver, babysitter or domestic worker.*

*Please fill in this survey to the best of your ability. It should only take a couple of minutes. All your responses will remain confidential.*

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. What is your gender? (Please circle)
  - Male
  - Female
2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ (in years)
3. Of which country are you a citizen? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Are you a permanent resident of any country? If yes, which country? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Where were you born in the Philippines? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Where did you live in the Philippines before leaving? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is your highest education level? (Please circle)
  - Bachelor's Degree and above
  - Some College (did not complete Bachelor's)
  - High School Diploma
  - Some High School (did not complete High School)
8. What is your marital status? (Please circle)
  - Single
  - Married
  - Separated/Divorced
  - Widowed
9. What is your current job? \_\_\_\_\_

**MIGRATION INFORMATION**

- 10. In what year did you first leave the Philippines? \_\_\_\_\_
- 11. What was your last job in the Philippines? \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. Why did you decide to leave the Philippines?

- 13. Since what year have you been living in the US? \_\_\_\_\_
- 14. Please list all the countries (not including the Philippines) in which you have worked/lived, the years you worked there, and the jobs you held.  
e.g. Hong Kong, 1993-1998, Domestic Helper

<b>Country</b>	<b>Years</b>	<b>Job</b>

Would you be willing to talk more about your migration experience? All interviewees are paid \$10 for their time. Interviews are completely confidential and can be conducted over the phone or face-to-face. If you are interested, you can email me at [anjupaul@umich.edu](mailto:anjupaul@umich.edu) or call at 646-266-4665.



## APPENDIX D

### Post-Interview Demographic Survey of Study Participants (Asia)

*Please fill in this survey to the best of your ability. If you do not know the exact answer, please write down your best estimate.*

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. How old are you (today)? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where were you born?  
City/Municipality \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where did/do you live in the Philippines?  
City/Municipality \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your highest education level? (Please circle)
  - Bachelor's Degree and above
  - Some College (did not complete Bachelor's)
  - High School Diploma
  - Some High School
5. What is your marital status? (Please circle)
  - Single
  - Married
  - Separated/Divorced
  - Widowed
6. What was your last job in the Philippines before you left? \_\_\_\_\_
7. In what year did you first leave the Philippines? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Since what year have you been living in the U.S./Canada? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What is your current job? \_\_\_\_\_

**HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION**

11. How big is your household in the Philippines?  
 # Adults (including self) \_\_\_\_\_ # Children \_\_\_\_\_

12. How old are your children? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Please indicate how many of your relatives/close friends live in the Philippines and overseas.

	Relationship to you	Number in the Philippines	Number in _____	Number in _____	Number in _____	Number in _____	Number in _____
a.	Parents						
b.	Brothers						
c.	Sisters						
d.	Children						
e.	Uncles						
f.	Aunts						
g.	Male cousins						
h.	Female cousins						
j.	Close friends						

**FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

14. How much do you earn a month currently? \_\_\_\_\_ (Currency \_\_\_\_\_)

15. What is your monthly household income in the Philippines (from all sources except remittances from abroad)? \_\_\_\_\_ pesos

16. Does your household in the Philippines receive any foreign remittances? (Please circle)  
 Yes      No

17. If yes, how much each month? \_\_\_\_\_  
 From which country? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Do you currently send remittances to any country? (Please circle)  
 Yes      No

19. If yes, how much do you typically send, how often, and to whom?  
 Amount \_\_\_\_\_ Frequency \_\_\_\_\_  
 Recipient \_\_\_\_\_ Recipient's country \_\_\_\_\_

## COMMUNICATION WITH PEOPLE IN OTHER COUNTRIES

20. How often in the last 12 months have you used the following to talk to, see, or correspond with people overseas?

	<i>Everyday</i>	<i>Several times a week</i>	<i>Once a week</i>	<i>Once a fortnight</i>	<i>Once a month</i>	<i>Several times a year</i>	<i>Once</i>	<i>Never</i>	In which countries were these people living?
Letter	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Landline or Cellphone	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Internet based telephone (e.g. Skype)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
SMS/Text Message	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Email	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Instant Message	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Webcam	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	

## APPENDIX E

### Post-Interview Demographic Survey of Study Participants (North America)

*Please fill in this survey to the best of your ability. If you do not know the exact answer, please write down your best estimate.*

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. How old are you (today)? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where were you born?  
City/Municipality \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where did/do you live in the Philippines?  
City/Municipality \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your highest education level? (Please circle)
  - Bachelor's Degree and above
  - Some College (did not complete Bachelor's)
  - High School Diploma
  - Some High School
5. What is your marital status? (Please circle)
  - Single
  - Married
  - Separated/Divorced
  - Widowed
6. What was your last job in the Philippines before you left? \_\_\_\_\_
7. In what year did you first leave the Philippines? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Since what year have you been living in the U.S./Canada? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What is your current job? \_\_\_\_\_

**HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION**

11. How big is your household in the Philippines?  
 # Adults (including self) \_\_\_\_\_ # Children \_\_\_\_\_

12. How old are your children? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Please indicate how many of your relatives/close friends live in the Philippines and overseas.

	Relationship to you	Number in the Philippines	Number in _____	Number in _____	Number in _____	Number in _____	Number in _____
a.	Parents						
b.	Brothers						
c.	Sisters						
d.	Children						
e.	Uncles						
f.	Aunts						
g.	Male cousins						
h.	Female cousins						
j.	Close friends						

**FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

14. How much do you earn a month currently? \_\_\_\_\_ (Currency \_\_\_\_\_)

15. What is your monthly household income in the Philippines (from all sources except remittances from abroad)? \_\_\_\_\_ pesos

16. Does your household in the Philippines receive any foreign remittances? (Please circle)  
 Yes      No

17. If yes, how much each month? \_\_\_\_\_  
 From which country? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Do you currently send remittances to any country? (Please circle)  
 Yes      No

19. If yes, how much do you typically send, how often, and to whom?  
 Amount \_\_\_\_\_ Frequency \_\_\_\_\_  
 Recipient \_\_\_\_\_ Recipient's country \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F

### A Timeline of Philippine History and Migration

- 900s Chinese mercantile traders visit the Philippine islands to trade with the native population.
- 1200s Islam is brought to some of the Philippine islands in the south by Muslim Malay and Arab traders who encouraged a peaceful religious conversion by the native population.
- 1521 Ferdinand Magellan arrives in the Philippine islands, giving them the name the “Archipelago of Saint Lazarus” (Barrows 1925) and peacefully converting several hundred natives to Christianity. A Spanish trading post was established on the island of Cebu.
- 1542 Another Spanish expedition under Lopez de Villalobos sets out for the Philippines. It is Villalobos who names one of the islands “Felipina” in honor of Philip the Second, the heir apparent to the Spanish throne. This name for the archipelago—Las Filipinas—grows in popularity over time.
- 1565 A third expedition from Spain, under Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, arrives in the Philippines and begins the permanent occupation of the Philippines by Spain (Barrows 1925).
- 1570 The Spanish King appoints Legazpi governor of the Philippines and grants his soldiers *encomiendas*, dividing up land and villages into administrative units that were required to pay regular tributes in cash and kind to their Spanish overlords. This begins the restructuring of the Philippine economy to support Spain’s colonial ambitions. The most onerous of these tributes is the *repartimento* system which requires all Filipino men between the ages of 16 and 60 to provide labor the state for 40 days each year. Filipinos are put to work building and repairing roads, and building ships for the galleon trade (Tyner 2009).
- 1571 Legazpi captures the fortress city of “Maynilad” and renames it Manila. The King grants Manila the royal title of city.

- 1574 Chinese pirates attempt to violently take control of Manila but are defeated by Spanish troops.
- 1581 The first Spanish missionaries arrive (Abinales and Amoroso 2005).
- 1760s The Spanish galleon trade plies between Manila and Acapulco, bringing silver from Mexico to Manila where it is traded for Chinese silks and porcelain, and ivory and spices from India and other parts of Southeast Asia. Some Filipino crew on these boats settle in Mexico and eventually some find their way to Louisiana where they create the “oldest continuous Asian American communities in North America” (Okihiro 1994:38 citing Espina 1988:1).
- 1762 Following the conclusion of the Seven Year War, Britain occupies Manila.
- 1764 A negotiated withdrawal has the British returning the Philippines to Spanish rule. (Abinales and Amoroso 2005)
- 1778 The dwindling galleon trade compels Spain to reorient the Philippines’ colonial economy towards export agriculture. Large-scale production of export-driven cash crops such as sugar, cacao, coconut, tobacco, fruits and spice is initiated (Abinales and Amoroso 2005).
- 1800s The internal displacements that resulted from the establishment of a plantation-based, export-oriented economy result in mass migrations of landless, indebted peasants from rural parts of the Philippines to Manila (Abinales and Amoroso 2005:80).
- 1896 José Rizal, considered the “First Filipino”, for his anti-colonial writings and his founding of a Philippine nationalist group, is executed. The first open rebellion by anti-colonial groups is launched in Manila but is quickly stamped out by Spanish forces. However clashes between nationalist groups and the military continue in other parts of the country.
- 1898 The United States declares war on Spain in April after the sinking of the American ship *Maine* in Havana, Cuba. In December, the Treaty of Paris is signed ending the war with Spain. Cuba’s independence is recognized, and America takes possession of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. The Philippines is included in the deal after the payment of US\$20 million by the US to Spain.
- 1898-1902 The United States fights a guerrilla war with Filipino nationalists which the US eventually wins.
- 1900s Free elementary and secondary school education in English is mandated for all Filipinos.

- 1903 Under the Pensionado Act, the United States begins sending students from the Philippines to the US for training.
- 1906 Recruitment of Filipino labor for Hawaii's sugar plantations begins.
- 1934 The Tydings-McDuffie Act passes which sets up a 10-year waiting period before Philippine independence can be granted. It also limits Filipino immigration into the US, setting the annual quota at only 50 individuals. Until this point, Filipinos were considered American nationals and "their movement into the US was relatively free" (Palumbo-Liu 1999:40).
- 1935 Congress passes the Filipino Repatriation Act providing free transportation for any indigent Filipino who wants to return to the Philippines.
- 1942 Japanese forces occupy Manila.
- 1943 Japan declares the Philippines' independence and establishes a puppet regime called the "Second Republic."
- 1944 US forces return to the Philippines and successfully expel Japanese troops.
- 1946 The US grants independence to the Philippines but imposes several unequal trade and military agreements on the Filipinos. US businesses are given the right to export goods to the Philippines duty-free for eight years, after which tariffs will be incrementally increased over a 25-year period. Philippine exports to the US however have strict quotas they are not allowed to exceed. The Philippine peso is pegged to the dollar and can not be devalued to increase exports. And US businesses are given "parity rights" to invest in Philippine natural resources and public utilities. Meanwhile, the US military is given the right to set up military bases on 99-year leases.
- 1958 The Import Control Act introduces an import substitution industrialization program in the Philippines to build the country's manufacturing base and move its economy away from export-oriented cash crops. However, this program is unable to absorb the rapidly growing labor force or the continuing subsidies enjoyed by US firms in the Philippines.
- 1965 US immigration and Nationality Act is passed.
- 1960s Under advice from the World Bank and the IMF, President Marcos introduces an export-oriented industrialization program that provided generous tax credits to producers to establish factories in the Philippines for export-oriented manufacturing. The country's national debt and unemployment problems continue to worsen.



- 1972 President Marcos declares martial law and rules by decree from that point onward. All economic planning comes directly under the control of his office.
- 1970s Various presidential decrees are passed to weaken the negotiating ability of organized labor within the country, and establish “export processing zones” where private manufacturers can set up factories.
- 1974 The new Labor Code mandates the Philippine government to actively support the employment of Filipino workers overseas. This initiates the development of the Philippines’ migration bureaucracy, comprising three main entities: the Overseas Employment Development Board (OEDB), the National Seaman Board (NSB) and the Bureau of Employment Services (BES). In addition, the Labor Code requires all overseas Filipino workers to remit a part of their earnings (ranging from 50% to 80%) to their families in the Philippines.
- 1978 The Marcos government is forced to give up its state monopoly over the placement of overseas Filipino workers, and allow private recruitment agencies to participate. The government migration apparatus begins to shift its focus more towards regulating the emerging migration industry.
- 1982 The OEDB, NSB and BES are merged to form the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) tasked with the promotion and regulation of all overseas employment for Filipino workers. A secondary goal is the diversification of overseas employment streams to encompass more destination countries and more occupations (particularly higher skilled professions).
- 1986 A popular uprising—the People’s Power revolution—results in the ouster of President Marcos. Opposition leader, Corazon Aquino, becomes the next President.
- 1987 Despite the change in government, overseas employment continues to be a central economic strategy for the Philippines’ national development. The Aquino government attempts to reframe overseas workers as “heroes and heroines” rather than the “victims” portrayed by domestic critics of the labor exportation program.
- 1991-1995 A Filipina domestic worker in Singapore, Flor Contemplacion, is charged with the murder of another Filipina domestic worker and a four-year-old Singaporean boy. She pleads guilty to both charges—some say under duress—and is sentenced to death. The Philippine government requests a stay of execution which is denied and, in 1995, Contemplacion is executed. Filipino migrant communities worldwide protest the handling of the case,

criticizing the Philippine government's inability to protect its citizens abroad.

1995 Another Filipina domestic worker in the United Arab Emirates, Sarah Balabagan, kills her 85-year-old employer after he allegedly attacked and raped her. She is found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. Under appeal, she is first resentenced to death, and later, to 100 cane lashes and a 12-month imprisonment. The Balabagan case, following on the heels of the Contemplacion case, ignites worldwide protests against the Philippine government's migration bureaucracy.

In response, President Fidel V. Ramos signs into law Republic Act 8042, the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act of 1995, which explicitly states that the government "would not promote overseas employment as a means to sustain economic growth and achieve national development".

1990s The Philippine government adopts a neoliberal stance toward the overseas employment of Filipino workers, framing labor migration as a personal choice adopted by autonomous individuals seeking self-fulfillment. The government argues that while it does not explicitly promote out-migration, it would not infringe upon the natural desires of Filipino citizens to work abroad, thus implicitly transferring responsibility for any subsequent abuses and exploitation to the individual migrants.

2000s Under the presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, an annual goal of a million Filipino workers deployed overseas is set. The Philippine government moves to increase the efficiency and transparency of the overseas placement process, with the express goal of reducing any bureaucratic hurdles private recruitment agencies might face when placing migrant workers overseas.

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