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**Differentiated Social Capital Mobilization in the Migration Decision\***

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## **Abstract**

### **Differentiated Social Capital Mobilization in the Migration Decision**

*The consensus within the migration literature is that social capital embedded within overseas networks lowers the costs of migration and increases the likelihood of cumulative migration. This consensus relies on a flawed assumption that overseas contacts willingly provide assistance to prospective migrants in the home country whenever possible. Interviews with 95 migrant domestic workers from the Philippines reveal, however, that while prospective migrants see social capital as a benefit, prior migrants often see the social capital resources they possess as a liability. Migrant social capital mobilization is both a contingent and differentiated process, influenced by a variety of factors at the individual, dyad, network, job, and market levels. The findings also demonstrate that structural rather than cultural factors more directly influence individuals' helping decisions, but that they interpret and justify their decisions to help (or not) through a cultural lens.*

## **Differentiated Social Capital Mobilization in the Migration Decision**

A core concern of the migration literature is the question of why some people migrate and others do not. One popular explanation put forward deals with the role of social networks in encouraging migration. The theory is that migrant social capital embedded within networks of relatives, friends, or even merely co-nationals in the destination reduces the costs and risks of migration, and thereby increases 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). Research into the role of migrant social capital has also highlighted the various forms of migration assistance that can be requested and received. Some prospective migrants—particularly temporary labor migrants—tap their overseas network of friends or family for a match with a willing local employer or for monetary assistance to cover the cost of applying for a legal entry visa (Garip 2008; Ratha and Shaw 2007; Spaan 1994; Eelens and Speckmann 1990; Boyd 1989). Other prospective migrants depend on their relatives residing overseas to sponsor family reunification visas for them (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 experienced relatives accompanying the novice migrant on their first journey across the border or sharing useful border-crossing strategies (Singer and Massey 1998). As the late Charles Tilly put it, it is “not people who migrate, but networks” (1990:65 in Faist 2000:53).

The underlying assumption of most of the migrant social capital research cited above is that overseas contacts willingly provide assistance—as much as possible, whenever possible—to prospective migrants in the home country. Recent research has highlighted how cumulative migration patterns can be gendered, with male and female migrant networks operating in

different ways (Curran, Garip, Chung, and Tangchonlatip 2005; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), however there has been limited research into other variables that might influence the mobilization of migrant social capital. Most quantitative studies, meanwhile, (e.g. Garip 2008; Curran, Garip, Chung, and Tangchonlatip 2005; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Singer and Massey 1998) do not include any direct measures of migration assistance (received or rendered) as variables of interest. Instead, indirect measures of access to and volume of social capital are used: the count of trips between the origin and destination by the prior migrant, the presence of a parent or sibling in the destination, and the proportion of community members who had previously travelled to the destination, to name a few. Key assumptions in most of these studies are that household members have *full* access to the social capital resources of prior migrants from the same household, or that within a village, the only factor affecting the accessibility of social capital is the proportion of village members who had migrated in the past. Such strong assumptions over-simplify the mobilization of migrant social capital by prospective migrants. When successfully activated, migrant social capital certainly can encourage migration, but the activation of migrant social capital is a more contingent process than is generally recognized in the migration literature. The prior migrant—the possessor of the resources in question and the one who has to decide whether or not to extend migration assistance to the prospective migrant—might not always agree to provide help when asked, and even when they do, they might not provide as much help as they are capable of providing.

I propose that a process of *differentiated migrant social capital mobilization* occurs among prior migrants when they are asked by their contacts in the home country for migration assistance. Drawing on data from in-depth interviews with 95 former, current, and prospective

Filipino migrant domestic workers in Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, I demonstrate that while prospective migrants see their social capital as an asset, prior migrants can often see the social capital resources they possess as a burden because of the frequent requests for migration assistance they receive from contacts in the home country, and the financial and social risks involved in helping these contacts. A third of the study participants had refused to help *any* of their contacts migrate overseas. The remainder had offered assistance to at least one of their contacts in the origin country, but this relatively high figure masks other requests for migration assistance that these migrants had turned down or the varied types of assistance they had provided, offering more help to some contacts than to others.

Applying findings from existing research on the mobilization of social capital in the job search (Smith 2007, 2005; Newman 2006, 1999; Royster 2003; Menjívar 2000), I propose a multi-level conceptual framework of factors at the individual, dyad, network, job, and market levels that influence prior migrants' helping decisions. These factors include prior migrants' earlier experiences helping other contacts, their personal assessment of the commitment and adaptability of their contact, the strength of their ties with the contact and with the potential employer, the number of their ties to local contacts in the host country (such as prospective employers and maid placement agencies), the degree of social closure in the network connecting the prior migrant with the prospective migrant, and the structural characteristics of the job sector and local labor market in which the prior migrant works. These factors also influence the *degree* to which their migrant social capital is activated, from simply recommending a trustworthy recruitment agency to use in the Philippines (which involves minimal risk or cost to the prior migrant), to personally matching the prospective migrant with an overseas employer willing to hire them and loaning the prospective migrant money to cover the costs of migration (both of

which carry greater risk).

These findings reveal how social capital activation is highly contingent on the structural position of the possessor of these resources. The more vulnerable their position, the more likely they are to perceive helping others as risky behavior and offer assistance only on a differential basis. I argue that the decision to help (or not) has less to do with cultural norms—whether these norms are the American ideal of individualism and self-help, or the Asian collectivist notion of helping the extended family—than with structural vulnerability. However, cultural values do play an important role *post facto* in justifying the non-activation of social capital among the domestic workers in this study. The prior migrants in this study, embedded in the Philippine culture of collectivism, justified their unwillingness to help by telling their contacts in the Philippines that they were actually helping *more* by not helping, that the life overseas was too dangerous and risky for these contacts, and that they would be better off staying in the Philippines.

With these findings, I contribute to both the migration literature and the social capital literature. First, by investigating the decision-making process when prospective migrants seek migration assistance from prior migrants, I show that the activation of migrant social capital is a contingent and differentiated process, and much more complex than existing studies have assumed. To my knowledge, this is the first in-depth investigation of the factors that influence the mobilization of migrant social capital. Second, by studying the helping decisions of migrants from the Philippines, I provide data from a non-U.S. population that can be used to compare against findings from existing studies of differentiated social capital activation that have relied heavily on U.S.-based respondents. This comparison allows for the possibility of validating Smith's (2007) claims that it is the culture of American individualism and the mythology of the

American Dream that prevents the young African American men and women in her study from more actively offering and seeking job-matching assistance. What I find instead is that structural, rather than cultural factors, are the primary factors behind helping decisions.

In the following sections, I describe the varied literature on social capital activation in immigrant communities, in the job search, and in the migration decision, highlighting what is currently known about the conditions under which social capital is successfully mobilized. After describing the methods used in this study, I provide some statistics collected from the interviews, which reveal how much and what kind of migration assistance participants received when they were first trying to leave the Philippines and how much assistance they provided to others after their own migration. This is followed by a discussion of the various factors at the individual, dyad, network, job, and market levels that influenced participants' helping decisions. I conclude with the implications of my findings for both the migration and social capital literatures.

## **SOCIAL CAPITAL ACTIVATION**

The concept of social capital—defined by Portes as “the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures” (1998:6)—has received a great deal of scholarly attention in recent decades (Smith 2005, 2007; Royster 2003; Putnam 2000; Menjívar 2000; Portes 1998; Coleman 1990, 1988; Boyd 1989; Bourdieu 1986). One variant of this concept is “migrant social capital” which can be defined as the ability of prospective migrants to secure information or assistance from prior migrants to reduce the costs and risks of migration (Garip 2008). Following the rubric established by Portes (1998) and tailored to fit the migration context by Garip (2008), I distinguish between three different dimensions of migrant social capital:

- (1) the resources (information, money and other forms of assistance that can ease the migration process for prospective migrants),
- (2) the sources (prior migrants who have already left their home country and can help others leave too), and
- (3) the recipients of social capital (prospective migrants who are seeking to leave their home country as well).

Distinguishing between the different dimensions of migrant social capital is critical because of the possibility of negative effects stemming from its activation. Writing about social capital in general, Portes and Sensenbrenner warn that individuals can suffer from excessive community demands, especially 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 environments, relatives and friends can immediately beset anyone who does well, asking for handouts. This scenario can also occur with prior migrants who have left their home country but are still in touch with relatives and friends back home who may be bombarding them with requests for help to leave the country as well.

Unfortunately, most of the literature on the role of social capital in the migration decision overlooks this possibility and instead employs the perspective of the prospective migrant who sees migrant social capital as only having instrumental benefits (see Garip 2008, Singer and Massey 1998, Massey and Espinosa 1997, for examples). It is only when we consider migrant social capital from the perspective of *prior* migrants that it becomes clear that such capital resources can also be a liability, putting at risk the new connections the prior migrant has built in

their host country and potentially depleting their financial savings.<sup>1</sup> Given these risks and costs to the prior migrant, we cannot take for granted that they will fully mobilize their migrant social capital resources whenever they are asked.

### *SOCIAL CAPITAL IN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES*

Most studies of immigrant communities emphasize the abundance of interlinked ties and “bounded solidarity” (see Waters 1999; Waldinger 1996, Portes and Zhou 1992, for examples). There have been only a select few ethnographies that highlight the underlying tensions that can also exist within immigrant groups, preventing the easy exchange of help (e.g. Parreñas 2001; Menjívar 2000). These studies focus on immigrant networks in the host country, investigating the provision of assistance between landed immigrants. The present study, in contrast, looks at transnational migrant networks that span both host and home countries, and focuses on the provision of help to prospective migrants. Despite these differences, some of the conclusions of the above studies have a bearing on the present project.

Studying Salvadoran immigrants in San Francisco, Menjívar (2000) for instance finds that job information was passed along relatively freely among friends, neighbors, and relatives, but that job recommendations were more circumspectly provided. The fear of having the person they recommended perform poorly on the job and thus taint their own standing with the employer, resulted in job-holders only helping close relations whom they felt obliged to assist. Social distance heavily influences the provision of job-related assistance among Menjívar’s study population, with respondents expecting relatives to help more than friends. However, Boyd notes that in cultures that have an “expanded notion of the familial unit” (1989:648), one could

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<sup>1</sup> More generalized social capital can be a burden for prior 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 (e.g. Allen 2009). However, for the purposes of this article, only *migrant* social capital is considered.

expect to see significant sharing of assistance beyond the immediate nuclear family, incorporating extended family members and even fictive kin. Most major immigrant-sending countries also happen to be low-income developing countries that possess such collectivist cultures where societal norms encouraging altruistic helping behaviors are ingrained in the population (Hofstede 2001). The Philippines—where all the participants of the present study originate—scores 32 out of 100 on Hofstede’s index of individualism, placing it squarely on the collectivist side of the spectrum.<sup>2</sup> In collectivist cultures, the social distance between individuals shrinks considerably, so it is possible that among the Filipino domestic workers in this study, help would be offered between even seemingly weak ties.

Menjívar also finds that the local economy and government can directly influence the “viability of immigrant social networks” (2000:116). In favorable situations where there is an abundant supply of job openings or where government policies are generally pro-immigrant, social networks between immigrants 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. Menjívar arrives at this conclusion by analyzing her participants’ helping decisions over time and how changes in the economy affected their helping behavior. In the present study, Filipino migrants in two overseas market locations—Hong Kong and Singapore—were interviewed about any migration assistance they had provided their contacts in the Philippines. The inclusion of two separate market locations—each with differing regulations regarding domestic workers and different market conditions—thus allows for a comparison study to test the influence of different market structures on the mobilization of migrant social capital.

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<sup>2</sup> For purposes of comparison, the United States scored 91—making it the most individualistic country in Hofstede’s survey of 50 countries—while India scored 48, Mexico 30, and Indonesia 14.

### *SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE JOB SEARCH*

Recent research in the urban poverty literature has also highlighted the distinction between access to and mobilization of social capital (Smith 2007, 2005; Newman 2006, 1999; Royster 2003). Between 1999 and 2002, Smith (2007; 2005) conducted 105 in-depth interviews with low-income, young, African American men and women living in Michigan. Roughly half were employed at the time of their interview. Through her interviews, Smith also finds that many low-income African American jobholders are reluctant to extend help (in the form of job referrals or job information) to their friends and family for fear that their help will be wasted and that, as a result, their reputations with employers may be tarnished. All in all, six out of every ten jobholders in Smith's study said that they usually did not provide any job-matching assistance when asked or limited the amount of help they provided (58). At the same time, however, 87 percent of jobholders reported that they had provided job-finding assistance to at least one other person in the past, and most said that they would most likely do so again in the future. In describing the various factors that influence respondents' decision to extend job-matching assistance, Smith (2007; 2005) proposes a multi-level conceptual framework that includes:

- (1) Individual-level factors such as the reputations of both the jobseeker and the jobholder, and the degree of stability enjoyed by the jobholder,
- (2) Dyadic properties such as the strength of the tie between the jobseeker and jobholder, and the tie between the jobholder and the potential employer, and finally
- (3) Community-level properties such as the degree of economic disadvantage in the neighborhood in which the jobholder lives.

This framework can also serve as a starting point for an analysis of the thought process prior migrants undertake in deciding whether or not to help their contacts in the home country migrate. Smith also hypothesized that the degree of social closure in the networks connecting the jobholder and jobseeker should have some influence in their willingness to help, but she did not find any evidence to support this thesis. She also proposed that local labor market conditions should influence the likelihood of jobholders agreeing to help, with a buoyant local economy meaning more job openings resulting in jobholders being more willing to trust their contacts and take chances with recommendations. But again, there was insufficient data in her sample to test this theory.

In her 2007 book *Lone Pursuit*, Smith emphasizes that the relationships between young, poor African American jobholders and jobseekers are “characterized by pervasive distrust that deterred cooperation” (3). She theorizes that this “pervasive distrust” stems from the mythology of the American Dream to which most young black men and women subscribe—that hard work will always be rewarded with success (Young 2004; Hochschild 1995). The unfortunate corollary to this belief is, of course, that those who are unsuccessful—such as the chronically unemployed—have not worked hard enough at finding a job and therefore are unworthy of any assistance. Smith writes that this is the meaning that jobholders—and the rest of American society—scribe onto young, African American jobseekers, resulting in their unwillingness to extend help. Smith thus reinserts a cultural explanation into more traditional structuralist accounts (e.g. Wilson 1996, 1987; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991) of black unemployment. However, this begs the question whether this is a strictly American phenomenon, or if culture can explain helping decisions in other countries and contexts as well. This present study is an attempt to test the role of culture—specifically the collectivist culture of Philippine society—in

how prior migrants decide whether or not to mobilize their migrant social capital to provide migration assistance to their contacts in the home country.

### ***SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE MIGRATION DECISION***

Network connections between origin and destination points can and do have positive spillover effects on the migration decisions of migrants' family members and friends in the sending country (Curran, Garip, Chung, and Tangchonlatip 2005; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Singer and Massey 1998; Massey and Espinosa 1997). In a recent study on internal rural-to-urban migration in Thailand, Garip (2008) finds that the greater the amount of migrant social capital resources available to a prospective migrant, the higher their propensity to migrate to an urban area. In a study of migration from Mexico to the United States, Massey and Espinosa (1997) find that having migrant parents and many siblings in the U.S., as well as living in an area in Mexico where many residents had earlier moved to the U.S., plays a highly significant role in increasing the odds of undocumented travel north. However, in both these and other quantitative studies (e.g. Curran, Garip, Chung, and Tangchonlatip 2005; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Singer and Massey 1998) that analyze the role of migrant social capital in the migration decision, only indirect measures of the volume of and access to social capital resources are used, such as the count of trips between the origin and destination by the prior migrant, the presence of a parent or sibling in the U.S., and the proportion of community members who had travelled to the U.S. A key assumption in most of these studies is that individuals have *full* access to the social capital resources of prior migrants from the same household without any consideration that a prior migrant might not agree to help these relatives

migrate, and even if they did, might not necessarily provide the same *level* of migration assistance to each relative.

To fully understand the mobilization of migrant social capital, it is critical to consider it from the perspective of *prior* migrants—the ones possessing the social capital resources in demand—who are called upon to provide migration assistance to their network contacts in the home country, and who might turn down such requests for help or offer only graduated help. Most studies of migrant social capital have ignored the point of view of prior migrants, focusing on *prospective* migrants, who may be receiving migration assistance from some of their overseas contacts, but not all, and may not be receiving as much help as their contacts could actually give them. Employing the perspective of the prior migrant makes it possible to unpack the process of mobilizing migrant social capital, and gain a better understanding of the factors that influence its successful and complete activation.

A review of the migration literature revealed few mentions of the possibility of non-activation of migrant social capital and they involved a gender-based activation of migrant social capital. Kanaiaupuni (1995, cited in Kanaiaupuni 2000) notes some reluctance on the part of established Mexican migrants in the United States to sponsor female friends and relatives, out of a sense that bringing female contacts overseas would call for more responsibility and obligation on the part of the sponsor. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) also discusses how gender “organizes” migration through exclusively male networks that encourage additional migration only by other men. She writes that Mexican women were able to migrate to the United States only when they circumvented these male networks and “appeal[ed] to the assistance of immigrant women already established in the United States” (1994:188). While the gendered mobilization of capital

is critical, I argue in this paper that the activation of social capital is fractured along multiple dimensions, not only gender.

### ***THE HELPING DECISION***

In analyzing the role played by prior migrants in encouraging cumulative migration, it is important to distinguish between the altruistic and egoistic motivations behind their helping behavior as this can help us understand why there may also be times when they do not offer migration assistance. On the side of altruism, research has shown that cultural values can play a part in “framing” the act of helping as a responsibility not to be shirked (Perlow and Weeks 2002; Dovidio 1984). As mentioned earlier, the Philippines scored 32 out of 100 in Hofstede’s (2001) index of individualism, indicating its collectivist society. This would imply a high level of helping behavior among prior migrants from the Philippines who have been socialized into seeing helping others as normative.

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* 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 prior 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.

Offsetting the benefits of helping contacts in the home country migrate are the costs and potential risks. Prior 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 applying for visas and work permits. If illegal immigration is involved, there could also be the possibility of arrest, fines, or deportation. Finally, prior 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 contact performs poorly, it will be the prior migrant's reputation that will suffer. Their social capital in the home country may also be put at risk if the contact they assist ends up being abused or mistreated while overseas and shifts responsibility onto them. For all of these reasons, prior migrants may experience an internal tug-of-war when asked for migration assistance, and not automatically accede to these requests.

## **MIGRATION OUT OF THE PHILIPPINES**

In the following sections, I discuss the various factors that influenced the helping decisions of study participants. But first, I present some background information about Philippine migration to justify its selection as a case study of cumulative migration through migrant social capital activation.

As of December 2007, the stock of overseas Filipinos was estimated to be over 8.7 million individuals compared to a total national population of 88.6 million (Philippine Overseas

Employment Agency 2008). These overseas Filipinos represent a deep well of migrant social capital resources that can—if successfully mobilized—engender a process of cumulative migration out of the Philippines. It is for this reason that the Philippines makes for an ideal case study to look at the role of migrant social capital in the migration decision of prospective migrants.

Out-migration from the Philippines consists of two distinct and uneven strands. Permanent emigration involves fewer than 100,000 Filipinos each year (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2008). Most of these individuals move to developed countries in the West, primarily the United States. In contrast, over 1 million Filipinos leave each year on temporary labor contracts, mostly to high-income developing countries in the Middle East and Asia (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2008). Both permanent and temporary migration streams rely on activated social capital. Permanent emigrants from the Philippines depend on overseas family members to sponsor their immigrant visas (DeJong, Root, and Abad 1986; Keely 1973). Temporary Filipino labor migrants look to overseas connections to help in other ways: from sponsoring a tourist visa, to providing financial assistance to cover the costs of migration, to directly matching them with a willing employer so as to avoid paying a placement fee to a recruitment agency (Keely 1973).

For-profit recruitment agencies abound throughout the Philippines, seeking to help prospective migrants leave the country on temporary contracts (Martin, Martin, and Weil 2006). As of March 2009, the government body charged with regulating labor migration out of the Philippines—the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA)—listed over 1,000 accredited recruitment agencies that place temporary land-based workers overseas. There are many more agencies that work without a government license (Asis 2005). Recruitment agencies

in the Philippines pair up with overseas placement agencies where prospective employers go to hire suitable foreign workers. The POEA authorizes recruitment agencies to charge migrant workers the equivalent of one month's salary as a fee for placing them overseas and handling all the necessary paperwork. However, violations of this rule are routine, with agencies charging considerably more (Asis 2005). Migrants are expected to pay for a range of services provided by the recruitment agencies—a placement fee for matching the prospective migrant with an overseas employer, job-training costs, medical examination fees, administrative fees, and transportation and housing charges—with fees varying depending on the popularity of the destination (Asis 2005). A job as a live-in caregiver in a top destination country such as Canada can cost as much as 16,000 US dollars in pre-departure fees of which the placement fee can constitute more than two-thirds of the total charges.<sup>3</sup> Prospective migrants often have to take out high-interest loans from private lending companies or pawn or sell property or jewelry to cover these costs (Asis 2005). One way for a prospective migrant to reduce the fees charged by their recruitment agency is to ask their overseas contacts to find an employer to hire the prospective migrant directly. Participants called this process “direct hiring.” The migrant still has to pay the recruitment agency some money to cover various processing costs but no placement fee is charged which reduces the overall cost of migration substantially.

Domestic work is the most popular job category for Filipino migrants because the market for such labor spans the globe, from developed countries in the West to high-income developing countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore (Lan 2006; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Parreñas 2001; Anthias and Lazaridis 2000; Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Constable 1997). Domestic service is also something a prospective migrant without any technical skills can aspire

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<sup>3</sup> Based on field interviews conducted by the author between May and June 2008. All costs are in US dollars unless otherwise stated.

to. A prospective migrant's financial capital is often the primary limiting factor preventing them from working overseas as a domestic worker, or stopping them from gaining entry into their preferred destination (Author 2009). It is here that migrant social capital can be most useful if successfully mobilized—to directly cover some of the costs of migration and/or reduce these costs by circumventing the Philippines-based recruitment agency and finding a willing overseas employer through connections with prior migrants.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Between May and June 2008, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 95 Filipinos about their decision to work overseas as temporary domestic workers. I interviewed 27 women in the Philippines, 26 women and two men<sup>4</sup> in Hong Kong, and 40 women in Singapore.

Participants were recruited using multiple methods. In all three countries, I approached local groups that work to improve the welfare of migrant workers and asked for their assistance in finding potential interviewees. I also visited some of the popular gathering spots in Singapore and Hong Kong for Filipino migrant workers during their rest days and randomly approached any Filipinos I saw. In the Philippines and Singapore, I interviewed the clients of several recruitment and maid placement agencies respectively. Through a process of snowball sampling, interviewees referred me to other Filipinos they knew who they thought might also be willing to be interviewed.

During the recruitment process, I introduced myself as a researcher from the United States conducting a study on the migration and destination decisions of Filipinos who had chosen to work as domestic helpers overseas. Participation in the study was restricted to Filipinos, 18-

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<sup>4</sup> Paid domestic work is a female-dominated sector of the migrant labor market. Some men do become domestic workers though primarily as drivers, cooks, gardeners, or live-in caregivers for elderly men who prefer to be tended to by another man (Hansen 1990; Rollins 1985).

years-old and above, who were former, current, or prospective domestic workers overseas. Participants were offered a token payment: 10 Singapore dollars, 100 Philippine pesos, and 10 Hong Kong dollars in each respective country where the interviews were conducted. This payment amounted to less than 10 US dollars in all three cases, though it was certainly not trivial in any of the three countries. Several overseas participants spoke of using the money to purchase a pre-paid phone card so that they could call their families in the Philippines.

The interviews lasted 45 minutes on average and were audio-recorded with participants' permission. At the end of each interview, participants completed a two-page paper-and-pencil survey in English about their demographic information, their overseas network of family and friends, the frequency and channel of their communications with network contacts in other countries, and their earnings and remittance profile. All interviews were conducted in English (which many Filipinos have a working knowledge of). Only two participants had difficulty understanding my questions and in these two cases, one of their acquaintances was asked to help translate as needed. The interview tapes were transcribed and then the transcripts were coded using the HyperResearch software package, version 2.8. All personal names were changed to keep the identity of participants anonymous.

Of the 95 participants, 46 were currently working as domestic workers and 15 were former domestic workers who had been retired for several years. Another 17 in Hong Kong and Singapore had cut short their contracts because of abuse, insufficient pay, homesickness, or serious illness. (These women were interviewed in shelters run by local non-governmental organizations.) There were also five first-time migrants in the Philippines who had yet to start work overseas and 12 that were between contracts, waiting to start a new job, sometimes in a

new country. Table 1 provides some descriptive data about the interviewees, organized by the country where the interviews took place.

The lion's share of the interview time was spent discussing the mechanics of participants' migration and destination decision-making process. Almost all participants spoke of leaving behind husbands, children and/or parents to work overseas, sometimes over the objections of relatives and friends who did not approve of their working as domestic helpers or living by themselves in a foreign country. Insufficient household funds and the desire to support their children's education were the primary reasons given for deciding to seek employment overseas. Participants were asked if they had received any help or encouragement from overseas friends or relatives in their migration and destination decision-making process. Did a participant decide to migrate to Singapore, for instance, because she was encouraged to do so by a cousin who was already working in Singapore as a domestic helper? Did she use money borrowed from friends living overseas to pay her recruitment agency fees? Did her overseas contacts find her an employer to hire her directly so that participants only had to pay a reduced fee to her recruitment agency? I did not hypothesize in advance that overseas contacts might possibly refuse to assist participants in their quest to emigrate from the Philippines. Like most migration scholars, I was working on the assumption that prior migrants are generally eager to help their network contacts migrate as well. I was focused on understanding the nature of the help provided. Instead, what emerged during the interviews was a recurring pattern of hesitancy and reluctance on the part of some prior migrants to assist their relatives or friends leave the Philippines.

Several participants mentioned how they themselves had turned down requests for migration assistance from friends or relatives in the past. I subsequently revised my interview protocol to ensure that I probed prior migrants' reasons for refusing to extend migration

assistance to some of their contacts and for extending only certain types of assistance to other contacts. After all the interviews were transcribed, I coded the transcripts for any mention of migration assistance—its provision or non-provision—and the different types of help provided.

Smith (2005) categorizes the different types of job-finding assistance she observed in her study as either more or less proactive. For my study, I categorized the different types of migration assistance described by participants in terms of both their value to the recipient of this assistance and their risk/cost to the provider. In general, these two variables are positively correlated: the more value some assistance provides a prospective migrant, the more costly it usually is to the provider. According to participants, there are four main types of assistance provided by overseas migrants to ease the migration process of prospective migrants. Providing financial assistance, either as a loan or gift, and directly matching the prospective migrant with an overseas employer, are two high-risk forms of help for the prior migrant because of the possibility of their losing either some financial or social capital resources if things go awry. At the same time, both forms of assistance are of great benefit to the prospective migrant, reducing their own financial outlay and potentially matching them with an employer who has been vetted and found trustworthy. The third form of assistance—submitting a contact's personal information to an overseas maid agency, thus bypassing the Philippines-based agencies and saving participants some money—poses less risk to the prior migrant and is of considerable value to the prospective migrant, though they would still have to pay a substantial fee to the overseas agency to secure their work permit in the host country and for placing them with a local employer. The fourth and final type of migration help is recommending a trustworthy recruitment agency to use in the Philippines. This is the lowest-risk form of assistance, not requiring any tangible sacrifice or effort on the part of the prior migrant, with little chance of

jeopardizing their social and financial position in the host country. At the same time, however, it can minimize the possibility of the prospective migrant being cheated out of their savings by an unscrupulous recruitment agency that overcharges them, or worse, takes their money and then fails to secure them an overseas employer. So it is still of some limited benefit to the prospective migrant despite not reducing their financial outlay in any way. As such, it is of minimal (though not zero) value.

One of the challenges of conducting interviews with migrant Filipino domestic workers was bridging the social and cultural distance between the interviewees and myself. As a doctoral student, of Indian citizenship but living in the United States, I was removed by several degrees from the lives of the women I was interviewing. I was not Filipino, did not speak Tagalog, and had never been employed as a domestic worker. At the same time, however, the fact that I was a woman, a migrant, also Asian like them but not Chinese<sup>5</sup>, and almost six months' pregnant at the time of the interviews, probably helped overcome some of the initial hesitation my interviewees may have had. Many interviewees were patently curious as to why I was studying their population and appreciative of my attention, reflecting the marginalized position migrant domestic workers occupy around the world and their desire for some recognition. I explained to them how I had lived in Singapore for many years before moving to the United States and how I had been interested in the status of foreign domestic workers since that time. Interviewees also seemed to be disarmed by my pregnancy—with so many of my interviewees mothers themselves, a relatively quick connection was formed between us on the basis of our shared

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<sup>5</sup> While some participants worked for expatriate employers who were White or Japanese, most participants' employers were local Singaporeans or Hong Kong residents who were Chinese by race. By virtue of being neither White nor Chinese, 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.

status. Lastly, the fact that I lived in the U.S.—a preferred destination for the vast majority of participants—stoked their curiosity and may have even led some of them to agree to my request for an interview in order to learn more about life in America. A handful of participants even asked me—only half-jokingly—if I could help them find employment in the U.S. I usually downplayed their ideas about my status, explaining that as a student and as a foreigner in the U.S., I did not know anyone who was looking to hire a domestic worker nor could I hire anyone myself.

Another challenge during the interviews was assessing the veracity of participants' accounts about the migration assistance they had received or provided. I had no way of confirming if participants were telling me the truth about their mobilization of migrant social capital. At the same time, however, there was little incentive for participants to lie that they had refused requests from their contacts for migration assistance. It is much more likely that people would want to paint themselves as being more generous than they actually were. I argue therefore that participants' accounts about refusing to help their contacts emigrate should be fully believed.

## **MIGRANT SOCIAL CAPITAL ACTIVATION STATISTICS**

All 95 participants in the study population were asked to explain the mechanics of their migration, including if they had requested and/or received assistance when trying to leave the Philippines. Of these 95 migrants, 81 had relatives or friends living overseas before they themselves left the Philippines. (See Table 2 for more details.) Of these 81 participants, 50 received help from at least one of their overseas contacts in their quest to emigrate.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Many Filipino labor migrants, who have already left the Philippines, often rely on their social networks to help them find better-paying jobs in more attractive destinations (Author 2009). Anecdotal evidence from this study –

All participants—except the five prospective migrants and 10 migrants who had left the Philippines the same year as when the interview was conducted—were also asked if they, in turn, had been approached to help one of their contacts in the Philippines emigrate and the nature of the assistance they had provided, if any. Out of these 80 participants, ten had been abused or underpaid while working abroad and so their responses are not included in the statistics listed below, in case their negative experiences prejudiced them against helping any of their contacts in the Philippines go abroad as well. How participants themselves had fared overseas did in fact influence whether or not they were willing to extend help to other contacts in the Philippines, with almost all participants who had recently endured negative working experiences emphasizing that they did not want to help bring their contacts find work overseas. Chrissie, a 39-year-old domestic worker in Hong Kong who had been mistreated by her former employers and was in the middle of a legal dispute with them when I interviewed her, had warned her cousins in the Philippines against migration: “Some [of my cousins] asked me for help...But I told my cousins that to become a domestic helper is very difficult. ‘You must bring your tears,’ I said to them. ‘If you have a job in the Philippines, you better work there...If you would ask me, I don’t want you to experience what I have experienced.’” The personal work experience of prior migrants is one of the factors included in the multi-level framework presented later. However, to show that the refusal to extend migration assistance is not limited to migrants who endured hardship or abuse while overseas, the statistics presented here do not include these particular participants.

To summarize, the analysis of migrants as *receivers* of social capital resources looks at the 81 study participants who had contacts living overseas prior to their emigration. Meanwhile, the analysis of migrants as *providers* of social capital resources focuses on a subset of 70

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and other research (Singer and Massey 1998) suggests that migrants’ access to migration-specific social capital increases with subsequent trips they take overseas. For the purposes of this study, however, only assistance provided to leave the Philippines for the very *first* time is included in the analysis.

participants. This twin analysis of participants as receivers and providers of migrant social capital resources offers us a virtual second population against which to verify any findings concerning the differentiated mobilization of migrant social capital.

### *PARTICIPANTS AS RECEIVERS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL RESOURCES*

Of the 81 participants who did have connections living overseas prior to their own emigration, 50 of them (or 62 percent) received migration assistance from these contacts. While the majority of participants received migration assistance, the *type* of assistance received varied greatly. The most common form of assistance—received by 17 participants—was the recommendation of a trustworthy recruitment agency in the Philippines to use. (See Table 3 for more details.)

Receiving such assistance was most common probably because this is the easiest type of help to dispense. Participants were evenly distributed between the other three types of migration aid they had received: 14 participants had received financial assistance from their overseas contacts to help pay their recruitment agency fees, 13 had been directly offered a job with an overseas employer that their contacts had found for them, and 12 participants' overseas connections had submitted their personal information to an overseas recruitment agency.

Several participants also spoke of being turned down by some of their contacts when they approached them for help. Hazel, a 34-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, had been refused help by her sister—who was already employed overseas as a domestic worker—when Hazel first voiced her desire to leave the Philippines.

Hazel: She does not want me to work here as a D[omestic] H[elper]! [laughs] But I have no choice!

*What did she tell you?*

Hazel: She just told me that it is so hard. Well, not hard, but it is not easy to work like this. Especially like these jobs as a DH. So that's why she don't want me to go here to work. [laughs] Especially because she knows me. She knows how I work... Even though we are poor in the Philippines, I am not working like this before. Working without vacation, like that. So that's why.

However, Hazel was determined to emigrate and eventually managed to receive help from an aunt who was also working overseas. Hazel's aunt submitted her personal information to a maid placement agency in Singapore and Hazel was matched with a local employer soon enough.

Like Hazel, study participants had received help primarily from relatives, whether close (defined here as either a parent, spouse, child, or sibling) or extended (such as cousins, aunts, and in-laws). Overall, 41 out of the 50 participants who received help received it from a relative: 16 from a close family member and 25 from extended family members. In contrast, only 15 participants received help from friends. (Six participants received help from both friends and family members.) Weak ties—in the form of acquaintances such as former neighbors or colleagues who had migrated earlier—had not provided any assistance.

The type of assistance received also varied greatly depending upon the relationship between the participant and their overseas contact. Relatives—both close and extended family members—were most likely to provide financial assistance. Relatives (in particular, extended family members) were also most likely to offer direct placement into a job overseas. Friends were least likely to provide financial aid but most likely to suggest the name of a trustworthy recruitment agency in the Philippines, the form of assistance that provided the least value and carried the least risk.

### ***PARTICIPANTS AS PROVIDERS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL RESOURCES***

Of the 70 participants interviewed about their experiences providing migration assistance, only four said they had never been approached by a contact in the Philippines. Among the remaining 66 participants, 42 (or 64 percent) said that they had helped at least one contact in the Philippines. The most common type of aid—provided by 18 participants—was to submit their

Philippine contact's personal information to an overseas agency they knew and trusted. (See Table 4 for more details.) One of the potential reasons why this practice was so popular could be because many agencies (primarily in Singapore) now offer a commission for successful referrals. (Table 5 shows how this type of aid was much more popular in Singapore than in Hong Kong.) During the field interviews, participants indicated that these commissions could sometimes reach as high as \$150. The chance to earn extra revenue, with little associated risk, could also be the reason why two participants in Singapore even provided their neighbor's personal information to a Singapore-based maid agency.

The least common form of assistance provided by study participants was the recommendation of a trustworthy agency in the Philippines. Only six participants had done so for their contacts. One possible explanation for this reversal in numbers is that, having undergone the process of migration themselves, most participants recognized that such recommendations did not necessarily ease the migration process and so did not count it as aid when questioned. However, this discrepancy between participants as receivers and as providers is puzzling and bears further investigation in follow-up studies.

Participants provided varying levels of migration assistance to their contacts in the Philippines depending on the nature of their relationship. Participants were most likely to assist family members: 23 participants spoke of helping relatives such as cousins and nieces, and 16 participants helped close family members (in particular sisters, but also children and spouses). The aid offered relatives was usually of substantial value, either connecting the relative with an overseas employer or providing financial assistance to cover the relative's migration-related expenses. Participants were more likely to help friends by simply submitting their personal information to an overseas maid agency rather than finding them an employer.

## **DIFFERENTIATED MIGRANT SOCIAL CAPITAL MOBILIZATION**

The interviews revealed that a variety of factors at various levels influenced the degree of migration-related assistance participants provided their contacts in the Philippines. Together, these factors fit into a multi-level conceptual framework that builds upon and extends earlier work by Smith (2007, 2005) and Menjívar (2000). Several of the factors identified by both authors—namely some of the individual-, dyadic-, and market-level factors—were found to influence the provision of assistance among this study’s participants as well. However, while Smith did not find any evidence of network-level factors influencing the degree of migrant social capital mobilization, the interview data from this study suggests that there are in fact two overlapping networks that affect how much migration assistance is provided. There is the transnational network connecting the prior and prospective migrants, and then there is also the network in the host country linking the prior migrant with potential employers and agents. Likewise, neither Smith nor Menjívar discuss how the structure of the market in which the jobholder works, or the job that they possess, can also play a role. But evidence from this study indicates that both of these factors play a critical role in influencing the mobilization of migrant social capital.

After analyzing all the data from the interviews, I put forward the following multi-level framework of factors that influence migrant social capital activation:

- (1) Individual-level factors such as the past experiences of the prior migrant and the perceived commitment level of the prospective migrant,
- (2) Dyadic properties such as the strength of the tie between the prior migrant and prospective migrant, and between the prior migrant and the potential employer,

- (3) Network-level properties such as the range and diversity of local ties the prior migrant enjoys with other migrants, potential employers, and recruitment agencies in the host country, and the degree of social closure within the transnational network connecting the prior migrant with the prospective migrant,
- (4) Job-level properties such as the degree of vulnerability to which the prior migrant is exposed through their job in the host society, and the gendered nature of their job, and finally,
- (5) Market-level properties such as the structural characteristics of the particular sector in which the prior migrant works, and the general availability of jobs.

Country-level factors—in particular, the culture of individualism/collectivism in which the prior migrant was raised and socialized—are absent from this framework because no evidence was found to support its influence on the level of migration assistance provided. Future studies that compare the helping behaviors of migrant domestic workers from different countries and cultures are needed to more accurately assess the role of culture in the mobilization of migrant social capital.

### ***INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL FACTORS***

Past Experiences of the Prior Migrant: Decisions to extend help are often predicated on the outcomes of earlier helping decisions (Dovidio 1984; Moss and Page 1972). Negative helping experiences in the past stunt an individual's subsequent desire to offer assistance through a process of negative reinforcement (March 1994). That was what had happened to Wanda, a 42-year-old domestic worker in Hong Kong, who no longer wanted to offer migration assistance to most of her Philippine contacts when I interviewed her. Some years earlier, a local doctor—for whom Wanda had worked part-time illegally for seven years—had asked her to recommend

someone who could work full-time for him. Wanda had recommended her niece in the Philippines and helped arrange her niece's travel to Hong Kong. But after three months, the niece decided she was too homesick and ended the contract without giving one-month notice. From that point onwards, Wanda said she refused to help anyone else because she was "so ashamed" of having failed her former employer.

While negative helping experiences stunted prior migrants' willingness to help others, positive experiences encouraged further helping. Another worker, Marnie, had a Filipino friend who had married a Singaporean and then opened a maid agency in Singapore. Through this trusted connection, Marnie had helped more than eight contacts in the Philippines find employment in Singapore. She was very proud of the fact that all her contacts had had good work experiences overseas. "They are lucky also. Everybody I bringing in Singapore gets very good employer...they worked eight years, five years, six years with one employer, like that," she boasted to me during her interview. These positive experiences, and the pride she felt in having helped these women improve their life-situations, encouraged Marnie to continue helping other contacts in the Philippines who approached her for migration assistance.

Perceived Commitment Level of the Prospective Migrant: In an attempt to reduce the uncertainty in their decision-making, individuals assume that past behavior (encapsulated in people's reputations) is indicative of future behavior (March 1994; Spence 1974). Smith (2007, 2005) finds that jobholders weigh the reputation of the person asking them for help, using the jobseeker's reputation as a "signal" of future behavior on the job. Unfortunately, the present study's participants did not have the luxury of relying on the reputation of their contacts to assess whether or not the contact could handle the duties of a domestic worker, as few of their contacts worked in the domestic service or similar sectors in the Philippines. This lack of experience also

led participants to worry that their contacts would not be able to accept the menial aspects of paid domestic service: the hard work, long hours, and lowered status. Many participants had had to make a difficult mental adjustment themselves when they first began the job of a domestic worker and they worried that their contacts might not be able to do the same. This was the reason Renasha, a 46-year-old domestic worker, had refused to help her relatives find a job in Hong Kong.

My niece asked me to help. But I said, “Maybe you cannot take it because your parents have jobs to work [in the Philippines]. And you are not that strong as me. Besides you have kids. It is lonely here. You might say, ‘Aunty, I want to go home because I miss my husband, my kids.’ So waste of money because now the processing is so expensive. It’s more or less one hundred thousand [Philippine] peso.” So I discouraged them always.

Participants such as Renasha worried that after investing time and effort in helping their contacts find jobs overseas, their contacts might change their minds at the last minute or not do a proper job once they signed their contracts. They therefore looked for clues in how their contacts approached the migration process and the search for an overseas employer, to assess their commitment level. Rachel, a 34-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, interpreted signs of wavering on the part of her friend as a lack of determination and an early warning signal that her friend would not survive a stint overseas.

One of my friends in the Philippines, until now is asking me to bring 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 first. Because, maybe if I bring her here, and she changes her mind, it will make trouble.

Such indecisive behavior signaled to participants that their assistance could be put to better use helping contacts who were more serious about migrating and more willing to accept the indignities of paid domestic labor. Some participants only offered low-risk assistance (such as just recommending an agency in the Philippines) to contacts who did not seem committed enough. Other participants only offered conditional assistance—in effect telling their contacts to first *prove* their commitment before providing any real help themselves. This was what happened

to Andrea, a former domestic worker who had wanted to migrate to the United Kingdom (U.K.) after having worked in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan for more than 12 years.

I have my friend in U.K. and I asked my friend, “Oh, help me. Find me an employer so that I can reach the U.K.” “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 flight ticket to the U.K., her friend never bothered to find her an employer or arrange a visa to the U.K. Eventually, Andrea had to return to the Philippines and was running a tailor shop from her house in Manila when I interviewed her.

### ***DYADIC PROPERTIES***

The Tie between Prior and Prospective Migrants: Both Smith (2007, 2005) and Menjívar (2000) find that jobholders are more likely to extend job-finding assistance to close contacts rather than more distant connections. Likewise, in the present study, the evidence indicates that the closer the connection between the prior migrant and the prospective migrant, the greater the likelihood that the prior migrant will offer at least some migration assistance. 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—a child, spouse, or sibling—participants were almost always willing to put aside their concerns and offer assistance. One participant, Diane—a 38-year-old Filipina employed as a domestic worker in Singapore for the last 13 years—had been approached by various extended family members, friends, and even neighbors, asking for migration assistance. She turned down all these requests but she did assist her two sisters.

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 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. To your family, I am responsible. Then how? I cannot! I don’t want. I can help but I don’t want to.

Diane highlighted a host of reasons why offering migration assistance is a risky venture for prior migrants like herself, but none of these concerns prevented her from helping her two sisters emigrate. Participants still raised the dangers of working overseas with close relatives, but they almost always provided whatever aid they could to help these contacts leave the Philippines. Even migrants who had gone through negative helping experiences in the past still offered assistance to immediate family members who wished to migrate. Wanda, the domestic worker mentioned earlier whose niece had ended her contract early, was nevertheless setting aside money to help her oldest son secure a job as a nurse in Saudi Arabia and her other son a job in a hotel in Macau.

In helping their close relatives, participants also often tried to reduce the risks of working overseas for their contacts. One popular approach was to try and directly match these relatives with an employer that participants trusted. Such an effort required more work on the part of the prior migrant and resulted in their taking on additional risk, but they seemed willing to do this for close contacts. When more distant relatives or friends asked for migration assistance, participants were generally less likely to automatically accede to their requests. In such situations, participants were more likely to follow a “logic of consequences” (March 1994), resulting in their weighing the risks and costs of their actions more carefully before deciding whether or not to help. This can explain why close family members were almost always the first to receive migration-related assistance from participants. Only after these contacts had been helped were extended family members and friends offered help. Mandy, a 46-year-old former domestic

worker who had previously worked in Abu Dhabi and Qatar, explained how she was waiting for her cousins in Italy to help her find a job but that she understood she wasn't their first priority.

Yes, they want to help me. They want to help me but the problem is they want to first help their sister, then their brother, before me. So I couldn't go [yet]. Like that.

The Tie between Prior Migrants and Potential Employers: Participants' ability and willingness to help place their contacts with local employers was also dependent on the warmth of their relations with these employers. However, the direction of this association—whether positive or negative—was not consistent. In some cases, the stronger the relationship between the potential employer and the prior migrant, the more likely it was that they would be able to recommend someone to the employer. For instance, Andrew, a male domestic worker in Hong Kong, had been approached by his younger brother who wanted to leave the Philippines as well and find work overseas. Andrew, who had been working overseas for less than two years at the time of his interview, told his brother that “right now, it is very difficult to find an employer looking for a male [domestic worker]” and asked for his brother's patience while Andrew tried to mine his employer's friends and colleagues to find a suitable employer for his brother. He didn't want to go through a recruitment agency that would assign his brother to a random employer who might mistreat him. For the same reason, Andrew did not want to simply give his brother money to cover his agency fees. Instead, Andrew wanted to find a suitable employer for his brother himself, but that approach required time as he built and expanded his network of local contacts until he found an employer that he thought was trustworthy.

Other participants took the opposite tack and did not want to refer anyone to local employers they were friendly with, in case the person they recommended performed poorly on the job. Cindy, a 45-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, was one such participant. “If [I] recommend a bad one to the good boss, I feel so bad,” she explained to me. In general, however,

most participants attempted to exploit their good relations with potential employers by recommending close relatives to them for employment. In some cases, it was even the prospective employer who approached the prior migrant, asking if they knew anyone trustworthy who could work for them. That was how Laura, a 53-year-old domestic worker, secured her first job in Hong Kong over 32 years earlier.

I had a cousin here before in Hong Kong. She first came here...She offered a job to me because one of her part-time [jobs] is with a doctor. He asked her if she had a relative who wanted to come over and work as a domestic [helper]. So she called me [in the Philippines]. Then I was working...in the agriculture department. But she said to me, "Are you interested to come here to Hong Kong?" "As a domestic helper?" I asked. "Yes," [she said.] You see, we are from the same family and they know where we come from, they know how we are hardworking. I think no one will blame me if I take a job. So the job was offered and I decided to come over.

### ***NETWORK-LEVEL FACTORS***

Degree of Social Closure within the Migrant Network: In trying to explain why social capital seems to be easily activated in so many immigrant communities, Portes (1998) argues that one underlying mechanism is "enforceable trust." In situations where there is a concentration of immigrants living or working together, the immigrant neighborhood or community can and often does police the recipient of capital to ensure repayment to the donor and the honoring of obligations. In such settings, there is a greater chance of social capital being mobilized. But in situations where such closure is not possible, potential donors of social capital resources may be less willing to help their network contacts (Burt 2000; Coleman 1990, 1988). Migrant domestic work—the focus of this study—has been identified as a particularly isolated and alienated occupation. Due to the housebound and unstructured nature of the work (Human Rights Watch 2006; Yeoh and Huang 1998; Rollins 1985), 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 (Constable 2003, Zarembka 2003; Parreñas 2001; Milkman, Reese, and Roth 1998; Romero 1992). In such situations, social closure becomes almost impossible and the provision of

migration assistance to help a contact land a job overseas becomes more of a gamble. This could be one reason why so many participants expressed hesitation about helping their contacts find work overseas.

This is also another potential explanation for why family connections were usually given primacy in the mobilization of migrant social capital. There could be a sense that with relatives, there would be less blame placed on the prior migrant if things did not go well with the overseas job—that somehow family would be more understanding. This was certainly the case with Agatha, a 33-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, who had paid a portion of the agency fees to help her brother's wife and the wife's sister find jobs on the island as well. She explained that it was easier to help family—even such relatively distant relatives—rather than friends because “if you help friends, you don't know [their] future here in Singapore. And I don't want to be blamed for that.” Agatha's explanation also suggests that there was a greater possibility of controlling or at least overseeing family members' behavior, and that through this oversight mechanism, there would be fewer chances of things going awry. In cases where the contact asked for a loan, for instance, there would be more avenues with relatives to ensure repayment. Thus, stronger ties might encourage prior migrants to provide high-risk (and high-value) migration assistance through the possibility of greater social closure.

Network Connections in the Host Country: While prior migrants were usually embedded in transnational networks connecting them with relatives and friends in the Philippines, they were also rooted in local networks in their host country. These local networks comprised other migrant workers but they sometimes also included natives from the host country—the migrant's employer, the employer's family, neighbors, the migrant's agent, and others. Migrants who were well-connected to locals in the host country, and had friends and acquaintances in circles not

limited to other domestic workers, were more likely to hear of job availabilities for which they could recommend their contacts in the Philippines. This finding supports Granovetter's (1973) classic study of the role of weak ties in channeling information about promising vacancies to jobseekers. Eartha, a gregarious 47-year-old college graduate, for instance, had cultivated many friendships with her employer's neighbors during her 16 years of service with the same family in Singapore. These local connections would ask her for recommendations when they needed to employ someone to fill a vacancy.

I have some friends [in Singapore] that are Chinese. They are very good. So I talk to them and then they say, "Oh, you have friend like this? Oh, you have someone like this? If yes, can you tell her to email her resume? Then we'll try."

Another domestic worker in Hong Kong—54-year-old Vanessa—had made friends with a Hong Kong mother who used to take her child to the same playground where Vanessa took her ward. Vanessa suggested to the Hong Kong woman that she hire a domestic worker to help her in her housework, and when the woman agreed, Vanessa recommended her sister in the Philippines for the job. Vanessa also found a job for one of her sisters-in-law with the brother of her employer, and for another sister-in-law, she found a job with a local Hong Kong woman that Vanessa worked with on a part-time basis. Participants without these local connections found themselves constrained in the range of assistance measures they could employ. This is what eventually happened to Vanessa. Prior to 1997, she had managed to bring over four of her relatives by matching each of them to a Hong Kong employer she personally knew. Vanessa did not trust recruitment agencies to find suitable employers for her Philippine contacts, so after she had exhausted all of her local network connections, she had to turn down all other requests for migration assistance.

So then, there were four of them [that I brought here]. And the other [relatives], they still want to come but there were no more employers! Because I didn't want to go through the agency anymore... So that was it. There were no more employers here that I could find. And by that time, ...getting an employer was only through the agents. Very, very seldom can you get a

recommendation directly.

Vanessa could have still offered other types of migration assistance—providing monetary assistance, recommending a recruitment agency in the Philippines—to her contacts. She had the *ability* to offer such forms of aid, but she chose not to extend such help because she deemed all those forms of migration assistance too risky for her or for her contact.

### ***JOB-LEVEL FACTORS***

The Gendered Nature of the Job: Research on helping behavior has uncovered different patterns of helping between the genders, with women more likely to provide help than men (Eagly and Crowley 1986). At the same time, research has shown that female networks are primarily comprised of family members and friends—all centered around the home—while those of males include more work-based acquaintances and colleagues (Parks 2005; Sassen 1995) and that the helping patterns of male and female migrant networks are also different (Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Within the current study, participants (who were overwhelmingly female) primarily provided migration assistance to other women, with aunts helping nieces or one sister helping another. Likewise, participants had received migration assistance mainly from female relatives and friends who were also working in the domestic service sector overseas. In contrast to earlier research, I posit that such a helping pattern was most likely because of the gendered nature of the work participants performed and the female-dominated job sector they were in. Participants' migration-related human and social capital (either in terms of information they possessed about job vacancies for domestic workers, or connections they had fostered with particular overseas placement agencies that specialized in providing maids and caregivers to local families) was inextricably linked with their work in a female-dominated occupation. It was for this reason, I argue, that they were much more likely to

help their female rather than their male contacts in the Philippines. Participants' contacts also most likely self-selected by gender when it came to asking overseas migrants for migration assistance, with female prospective migrants more likely to approach female prior migrants.

However, this did not mean that participants did not help male contacts at all. Two women had helped their husbands secure jobs overseas—one as a driver and the other as a domestic worker—so that they could work in the same country. And participants who possessed sufficient financial capital—the most fungible of resources—were more than willing to use it to help immediate male relatives (primarily sons) leave the Philippines as well. But most of their migrant social capital resources were entrenched in the domestic service sector and therefore this capital was being deployed to help mainly female relatives and friends who also wanted to migrate.

The Vulnerable Nature of the Job: In providing migration assistance to their contacts in the Philippines, participants were taking on certain risks. Their contact might not be able to handle the life overseas and decide to return home before the end of their contract, the employer might not be satisfied with their contact's performance and decide to terminate the contract, or the contact might not repay the money the participant had loaned them. To some extent, these are standard risks that any prior migrant might be concerned about when considering whether or not to extend migration assistance. But among migrant domestic workers, there exists another level of risk that is specific to the paid domestic labor market: the potential for incidences of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. These are all risks faced by the prospective migrant but any of these scenarios could potentially jeopardize the prior migrant's relationships with the prospective migrant and that individual's family in the Philippines. This was the reason why 54-year-old

Lilith, a domestic worker in Singapore, gave for refusing to help any of her contacts in the Philippines emigrate.

They asked me, but I told them, “I cannot direct you. You have to go through the agent... And some of [my relatives], I am scared for them. I ask them, “Are you ready for the job? Because the lifestyle in Singapore and lifestyle here in the Philippines are very poles apart! But if you are ready to work hard, you go and apply. But I don’t want to be a middleman. Because if I take your papers, I still have to talk to the agent, so that is why you better go to the agent [yourself].” And, some more, 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.

The fear of being “blamed” for a possible negative outcome was a concern raised repeatedly during the interviews. As Rena, a 30-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, who had refused to help her contacts find work in Singapore, explained: “If I am the one to introduce them, and then after that, they get into trouble, then maybe after that, they blame me.” Participants’ thinking was that it was better to let contacts find their own way overseas so that, if anything did go wrong, participants wouldn’t be seen as culpable in any way. This was how Gina, a 26-year-old domestic worker in Singapore, explained her reasoning for not offering any migration assistance to any of her contacts:

They [can] apply to agency, lah! Because I cannot guarantee them...Because maybe I bring them from Philippines, they come and suffer. So, of course, my fault. So it is better they go through the agent.

What made participants so fearful of helping? Within development economics, there is a growing body of literature that highlights how being more financially vulnerable makes the poor extremely risk-averse in their decision-making (Duflo 2006; Duflo and Udry 2004; Banerjee 2001). But vulnerability can manifest itself in various forms, not just poverty. Migrant domestic workers experience structural vulnerability through the heavily marginalized lives they lead in their host country. Part of this stems from the solitary, housebound, and unstructured 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 social connections only to their employer’s family and other migrant domestic workers (Momsen 1999; Yeoh and Huang 1998). I hypothesize that this compounded vulnerability was the primary reason some participants weighed so heavily the risks and costs of providing migration assistance to their network contacts in the home country, resulting in refusals to help or the provision of only limited help.

This hypothesis is partially borne out by the fact that participants who were in more secure jobs, working for employers they trusted and liked, seemed more willing to help their contacts in the Philippines emigrate. The ten participants who had been recently mistreated by their employers were in general adamant that they did not want to assist any of their Philippine contacts emigrate. However, one interviewee—Annie, a 26-year-old runaway in Singapore—provided a more nuanced answer, explaining that she would be willing to help her contacts in the Philippines but only after she had found a better employer for herself. It was not that she was refusing to help any of her friends at all but that she was holding off until she felt more secure in her own job. That is what she told her friends as well: “I say [to my friend 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.”

### ***MARKET-LEVEL FACTORS***

The Structure of the Market: In addition to the gender distribution of the prior migrant’s job sector, other structural characteristics of the labor market can influence the migrant’s willingness to offer aid. These market characteristics vary by country. The Hong Kong market for domestic workers for instance requires migrants to pay their placement fees upfront prior to their

departure, while Singapore-bound migrants pay most of their fees through a process of salary deductions that can last up to the first 10 months on the job. In Hong Kong, a newly-hired domestic worker who is terminated by her employer is given only 14 days to find a new employer (with little help from her agency) before she is required to leave the country, forfeiting all of the fees she had already paid in full. 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. They were not willing to go through an agency out of concern that the employer the agency found would fire their contact, leaving the contact without a job and no money. This was the case with Renasha, the 46-year-old domestic worker in Hong Kong, who had repeatedly refused to help her niece find work in Hong Kong. Renasha said she would not bring her niece to Hong Kong, “unless I can find an employer who will accept salary deduction and will not terminate.”

Participants in Singapore were more willing to use local maid agencies to help their contacts in the Philippines. Given that Singapore-based agencies accepted payment of placement fees through monthly salary deductions, the agency had a greater incentive to keep workers in their jobs or find them another job if they were fired. In fact, of the 23 participants in Singapore who had provided migration-related assistance to contacts in the Philippines, the most common form of help provided was to submit their contacts’ personal information to a maid agency in Singapore (see Table 5). In contrast, only two participants in Hong Kong had helped in this manner.

Job Availability: Both Smith (2007) and Menjívar (2000) discuss the role of the local economy in influencing jobholders’ willingness to assist jobseekers they knew. In general, they argue that a flourishing economy leads to more job openings which encourages jobholders to be less risk-

averse when recommending their contacts for jobs. This is most likely the case with migrant social capital activation as well, however, job availability is influenced by other factors in addition to the local economy. In the heavily racialized paid domestic labor market, an increase in demand for domestic workers of a particular nationality or race results in a simultaneous decline in demand for workers from other groups. 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). In 1995, there were an estimated 150,000 domestic workers in Hong Kong, of which more than 130,000 were from the Philippines (Constable 1997). By early 2003, the number of Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong had shot up to 75,000 while the number of Filipino workers had stayed roughly constant (Sim 2003). A migrant rights activist in Hong Kong estimated that there are now more Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong than Filipino workers: 150,000 Indonesians to 125,000 Filipinos.<sup>7</sup> Several participants expressed their belief that employers were now less willing to hire Filipino workers because they preferred Indonesians who enjoyed a reputation of being more docile, less likely to complain about poor working conditions, and most importantly, willing to be paid less. Delia, a 38-year-old Filipino domestic worker, explained to me the difficulty she was having finding any suitable employers for her contacts in the Philippines:

Delia: Actually, it is hard, much more now. It is very difficult to find an employer.

*Why is it more difficult now?*

Delia: One reason is that, some of the employers are looking for other nationality. Not because they—[these nationalities]—are better or they are best, but because of the issue of the wages.

Another worker—53-year-old Carrie—believed that the popularity of Indonesian workers was also due to the fact that they were trained to speak Cantonese before coming to Hong Kong:

[There has been an] influx of the Indonesians...because they are accepting 1000 HKD, 2000 HKD below the minimum [wage], even though they sign the contract, yeah. And the advantage also—

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<sup>7</sup> Interview conducted in Hong Kong on June 2, 2008 with a member of Migrante International, an international alliance of Filipino migrant organizations.

they know how to speak Cantonese. Because they will study—according to them, they study for six months in Indonesia. They cannot come to Hong Kong without Cantonese. Because they don't speak English, so how can they communicate? There is no other choice! So they are good in Cantonese when they come here. So most Chinese... they prefer to take this Cantonese-speaking people, especially if they have to take care of the old-age people.

This general sense that employers now preferred to hire Indonesian domestic workers may have also stopped some participants from actively trying to find a job for their contacts in the Philippines. No participant mentioned soliciting a prospective employer who told them that they preferred to hire an Indonesian. Instead, their beliefs about employers' preferences may have prevented them from even trying to approach local employers.

### **CULTURE AND STRUCTURE IN SOCIAL CAPITAL ACTIVATION**

Do individuals from a collectivist culture have a greater predilection for helping their network contacts than individuals from a more individualistic society? Surprisingly, the findings of this study reveal that cultural differences are less important in determining the degree of mobilization of social capital than structural factors such as the vulnerability of the prior migrant's status in the host society, the characteristics of the local labor market, or the degree of social closure in their networks. Participants in both Smith's study in Southeast Michigan and this study of Filipino migrant domestic workers expressed their greater willingness to help individuals they were close to, or had long-standing relationships with, such as relatives or close friends. But in both study populations, there were also participants who denied help to their closest relatives because of non-cultural reasons such as their contact's reputation for poor work performance (Smith 2007:77-78) or because they thought the job as a domestic worker was unsuitable for their contact. For the above reason, I argue that cultural background is not that critical in determining if social capital is activated or not. However, it does influence how individuals *justify* their helping decisions.

In *Lone Pursuit*, Smith discusses how the low-income African American jobholders she interviewed upheld the ideas espoused in the American Dream that “any jobseeker with motivation and drive could find one” (2007:167). The American culture of individualism encouraged jobholders to see those without employment as deficient in character or drive, and therefore unworthy of receiving any assistance. Smith’s interviewees felt justified in turning down requests for job-finding assistance if they deemed the jobseeker to be insufficiently driven or unreliable. All in all, reluctant helpers were the majority in Smith’s sample, with almost six out of every ten jobholders unwilling or resistant to assist jobseekers they knew. Smith writes that “to justify their unwillingness, these job-holders literally ranted about the importance of self-reliance, espousing the importance of bringing individualistic values to the job-finding process” (2007:168). In contrast, the Filipino domestic workers in the present study rarely spoke of the unworthiness of their contacts. Instead, participants claimed that by *not* helping, they were actually helping their contacts *more* – that it would be better in the long run for these contacts to remain in the Philippines. Vanessa, the 54-year-old domestic worker in Hong Kong, explained how she tried 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].

Christina, a 39-year-old domestic worker in Hong Kong, had repeatedly refused to help her friends who wanted to find work in Hong Kong as well, but couched her refusal as if she was only thinking of her friends’ best interests.

My friends, sometimes they are asking me to bring them here, but I said, “Oh, you have a small business there [in the Philippines] now. I think it’s much better to stay in the Philippines. Because in Hong Kong, I cannot say that you will make much money. If you left your business in the Philippines and you come to Hong Kong, and then your employer is not so good, I don’t know if

you're strong enough to do the job if your employer is not so good to you.”

Such justifications reflect the difficult tightrope the prior migrants in this study 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). Smith's study participants never expressed such sentiments. Instead “a subtext of distrust and noncooperation” (2007:34) ran throughout the accounts provided by both the jobholders and jobseekers Smith interviews.

I argue that the collectivist culture of the Philippines led the Filipino migrant domestic workers in this study to justify their refusal to help in a fundamentally different way from the poor African American participants in Smith's study, despite the fact that underlying both groups' helping decisions were similar structural constraints against helping. Both sets of participants were hesitant to expose themselves to risk—financial or social—through helping. But their differing cultural backgrounds resulted in vastly divergent meaning-making exercises to retroactively justify their decisions not to help.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The literature on transnational migrant networks has overwhelmingly emphasized how the presence of family and friends abroad accelerates emigration through the financial and informational assistance these prior migrants provide to prospective migrants (Garip 2008; Curran, Garip, Chung, and Tangchonlatip 2005; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Singer and Massey 1998; Massey and Espinosa 1997). The aim of this article is not to dispute the critical role migrant social capital can and often does play in the migration decision. Rather, it is to highlight that the activation of migrant social capital is a more complex process

than has been generally characterized in the literature. To date, there has been limited interrogation of the possibility that migrant social capital is not always successfully mobilized, and even when it is mobilized, not always to its full potential. To my knowledge, this study offers the first in-depth look at the conditions under which migrant social capital is activated. It does so by switching perspectives and considering the mobilization of migrant social capital through the eyes of prior migrants—the possessors of the resources in question and the ones who eventually make the decision whether or not to extend migration-related assistance.

Building on past work by Smith (2007, 2005) and Menjívar (2000), I argue that prior migrants are influenced by a variety of factors at the individual, dyad, network, job, and market levels in their decision whether or not to extend migration assistance. These factors not only influence whether or not migrant social capital is mobilized but also the degree to which it is activated. Rather than a binary variable, migrant social capital is mobilized by degrees. It is important to take into account the contingent and differentiated nature of migrant social capital activation when constructing migration models based on cumulative causation. It should no longer be considered sufficient to make the methodologically expedient assumption that the existence of friends and family overseas means guaranteed social capital mobilization; instead, it is necessary to distinguish between access to capital and its actual mobilization in our models of cumulative migration. In addition, it is important to distinguish between the different types of migration-related assistance that can be offered. Less than half of the study participants who provided aid offered substantive assistance—providing money or finding an employer for a prospective migrant. When lower-value assistance—such as submitting a contact’s information to an overseas agency or simply recommending a Philippines-based agency—or only conditional assistance is offered, not all prospective migrants will be able to accumulate the additional

resources required to make the journey overseas. Thus it is possible for migrant social capital to be mobilized and yet not result in migration.

While this study highlights the differentiated mobilization of migrant social capital among Filipino domestic workers, there are still many questions that remain unanswered. Since only low-skilled migrant workers were interviewed for this study, it is not certain that the findings presented here are applicable to all classes of migrants. I have argued that it was the vulnerable structural position of the study participants that made many of them reluctant to offer more substantive aid to their relatives and friends in the home country. Migrants who occupy a less precarious position in their host country—either because they hold permanent immigrant status or work in a white-collar profession—should therefore display greater willingness to aid their contacts in their origin country. Further research is planned to study a population of high-skilled (but still temporary) migrants to assess their patterns of providing migration assistance.

This study was consciously restricted to studying the role of social capital in the migration decisions of *temporary* labor migrants. Temporary migration constitutes a growing and increasingly significant proportion of total global migration flows (United Nations 2004). In the Philippines, the vast majority of the migration out of the country is of a temporary nature (Philippines Overseas Employment Agency 2008). The mechanisms through which migrant social capital is mobilized for temporary migration are also more varied. However, there is a need to understand how social capital is mobilized in the context of permanent migration to determine if there are any significant differences between the two processes. While it makes intuitive sense that citizens and permanent residents would want to sponsor their spouses and children for immigration, it is less certain if all newly naturalized citizens would willingly

sponsor their siblings and parents even if they were able to do so under the family reunification laws of their newly adopted country.

The fact that the vast majority of participants in this study were female might also limit the generalizability of the findings. It is still unclear how male domestic workers deploy their migrant social capital resources within their networks of friends and relatives. Of the two male participants interviewed, one had helped his wife find work as a domestic worker in Hong Kong so that they could be in the same country, and the other had not yet helped any of his contacts, though he had assured his brother that he would help him emigrate soon. With only two male subjects in this sample, it is not clear whether it was the gender of the participants and their networks, or the gendered nature of their work, that was more influential in deciding who they helped migrate. As stated earlier, my hypothesis is that it was the female-centric nature of their work that constrained these two male domestic workers' efforts to help other men migrate out of the Philippines. Research in an industry that is more gender-neutral in its composition is required to uncover if a gendered activation of migrant social capital occurs even in such circumstances.

Finally, because a non-random sample was used, I cannot guarantee that my findings are representative of the migrant domestic worker population at large. Several measures were taken to make the findings as generalizable as possible. Recruiting participants in three countries, with experience working in many more, was one approach adopted to ensure as much diversity in the study sample as possible. Comparisons with migrant domestic workers of other nationalities were outside the scope of this study but this would be a worthwhile area for future research.

Despite the above limitations, the findings in this study contribute to several literatures. Within the migration literature, this study provides empirical evidence that migrant social capital mobilization is in fact a differentiated, contingent process, and opens up new avenues for

research on the role of social networks in cumulative migration. Rather than ignoring the tensions that can exist in transnational networks, this study uses the novel approach of investigating the circumstances when prior migrants do *not* extend migration-related assistance to family and friends in the home country, or offer less assistance than they are actually capable of. It is by studying these cases of differential mobilization of migrant social capital among Filipino domestic workers that we are able gain a better sense of the factors that influence the helping decision. The “reconstructed theory” (Burawoy 1998) on migrant social capital mobilization stemming from this research provides a robust framework that comprehensively explains the decision-making process among prior migrants who are deliberating whether or not to provide migration assistance to prospective migrants in the home country.

This study also has implications for the literature on social capital activation. The findings here reveal the interplay between structural and cultural forces in the helping decision. While structural factors directly influence individuals’ willingness to provide assistance, these individuals interpret and justify their decisions through a cultural lens. The cultural values in which these individuals were raised—whether these values are individualism and self-help, or collectivism and notions of fictive kinship—are the tools they use to make sense of their actions to themselves and to others. I did not find any evidence of culture directly influencing the helping decision itself. It is possible that the willingness to offer migration assistance to extended family members such as cousins and sisters-in-law is a direct result of the culture of collectivism prevalent in the Philippines. Yet, participants were also willing to deny these contacts help when they were not confident that their contact could handle the life overseas, or if it would jeopardize their own status in the host or home country. For this reason, I argue that the decision to help (or

not) has less to do with cultural norms than with the structural vulnerability experienced by the provider of this help.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of Study Population

	Total Study Population (N = 95)	Hong Kong (n = 28)	Singapore (n = 41)	Philippines (n = 26)
Migrant Characteristics	Proportion of Participants			
Age (in years):				
18 – 25	.08	.00	.05	.23
26 – 35	.35	.43	.41	.15
36 – 45	.36	.36	.34	.38
46 and above	.21	.21	.20	.23
Gender:				
Male	.02	.07	.00	.00
Female	.98	.93	1.00	1.00
Marital Status:				
Never married	.38	.50	.32	.35
Married	.46	.46	.54	.35
Separated	.09	.04	.10	.15
Widowed	.06	.00	.05	.15
Education:				
Less than High School	.07	.11	.05	.08
High School	.28	.18	.29	.38
Some College	.38	.36	.41	.35
College and above	.26	.36	.24	.19
Children:				
With Children	.62	.46	.66	.73
No Children	.38	.54	.34	.27
Decade of Departure from Philippines:				
1970s	.02	.07	.00	.00
1980s	.17	.14	.17	.19
1990s	.35	.36	.41	.23
2000s	.46	.43	.41	.58

**Table 2.** Participants' Pre-Migration Overseas Networks

Network Contacts	Proportion of Participants (N = 95)
Contacts Overseas:	
Close Family	.27
Extended Family	.43
Friends	.39
None	.14
Contacts in Migrants' First Overseas Destination:	
Close Family	.15
Extended Family	.25
Friends	.20
None	.41

**Table 3.** Number of Participants Receiving Assistance and the Source

Type of Assistance Received	Source of Overseas Assistance			Total
	Close Family	Extended Family	Friends	
Direct Placement with an Overseas Employer	3	9	1	13
Financial Assistance	8	5	1	14
Submission of Personal Information to Overseas Agency	4	3	5	12
Recommending an Agency in the Philippines	1	8	8	17
Total	16	25	15	

*Note: N=95*

**Table 4.** Number of Participants Providing Assistance and the Recipients

Type of Assistance Provided	Recipients of Help <sup>a</sup>				Total
	Close Family	Extended Family	Friends	Neighbors	
Direct Placement with an Overseas Employer	5	9	3	0	17
Financial Assistance	3	7	2	0	12
Submission of Personal Information to Overseas Agency	6	6	4	2	18
Recommending an Agency in the Philippines	2	1	3	0	6
Total	16	23	12	2	

<sup>a</sup> At times, participants helped more than one contact within the same category e.g. their sister-in-law and their cousin (both counted as extended family members). In such cases, the help was only counted once since the focus is on how many participants helped their contacts and not how many contacts were receiving help. If participants helped two or more contacts who belonged to different categories (e.g. a sister and a friend), then this help was counted once under each category.

*Note: N=70*

**Table 5.** Number of Participants Providing Assistance, by Country of Interview

Type of Assistance Provided	Country of Interview	
	Singapore (n = 37 <sup>a</sup> )	Hong Kong (n = 22 <sup>a</sup> )
Direct Placement with an Overseas Employer	6	6
Financial Assistance	8	2
Submission of Personal Information to Overseas Agency	11	2
Recommending an Agency in the Philippines	3	2
Refused to Help	10	8

<sup>a</sup> These numbers do not include participants who had been abused or maltreated, and those who had started their contracts in 2008, the year in which the interviews were conducted.

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