Good Help is Hard to Find: The Differentiated Mobilisation of Migrant Social Capital among Filipino Domestic Workers

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Abstract:

Migrant social capital can reduce the costs and risks of migration and thereby increase the likelihood of cumulative migration among network members. However, several ethnographic studies of transnational migrant networks have highlighted repeated and regular instances of current migrants refusing to provide migration assistance to network contacts in the home country. Extending this nascent body of research, this article proposes a multi-factor framework at the individual, dyad, network, job, market, and country levels that influences current migrants' helping decisions, particularly when it comes to labor migration assistance. This framework is constructed using interview data from 95 Filipino migrant domestic workers in the Philippines, Singapore and Hong Kong. These interviews showcase the dynamic and differentiated nature of migrant social capital mobilisation in terms of the volume, type, and conditionality of migration assistance provided.

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Introduction

There is a truism within the migration literature regarding the positive role social networks play in fostering migration. The theory goes 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 among network members. As the late Charles Tilly put it, it is 'not people who migrate, but networks' (1990: 65 in Faist 2000: 53).

However, several ethnographic studies of migrant networks have highlighted repeated and regular instances of current migrants refusing to provide migration assistance to home country contacts (Bashi 2007; Böcker 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kanaiaupuni 2000). These studies have identified several factors that might increase current migrants' resistance to providing migration help. However, no attempt has been made to develop a comprehensive list of factors that influence the (non-)mobilisation of migrant social capital. In an attempt to fill this gap in the literature, I draw on data from in-depth interviews with 95 former, current, and prospective Filipino migrant domestic workers in Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, to construct a multi-factor conceptual framework at the individual, dyad, network, job, market, and country levels. The factors in this framework moderate current migrants' helping decisions, especially when it comes to labour migration assistance. These factors influence not only whether migration help is provided but also the volume, type and conditionality of this aid . In other words, this article demonstrates how the mobilisation of migrant social capital is a contingent, dynamic and, most importantly, a *differentiated* process and significantly more

complex than is often represented in the literature.

Social Capital Mobilisation

The concept of social capital has received significant scholarly attention in recent decades (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1990, 1988; Portes 1998; Putnam 2000). Portes defines it as 'the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures' (1998: 6)—One variant of this concept is 'migrant social capital,' the ability of prospective migrants to secure information or other forms of assistance from current migrants to reduce the costs and risks of migration (Garip 2008; Palloni et al. 2001).

However, migrant social capital is not an unalloyed 'good' and there can be possible negative effects stemming from its activation (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Current migrants can be overwhelmed by requests for migration assistance, causing them to deny some of these requests. Vilna Bashi observes veteran West Indian migrants in New York and London 'hoard[ing] overseas opportunities' (2007: 6) and only helping those home country contacts they believe will either improve their lifestyle or enhance their reputation. Kanaiaupuni (1995, cited in Kanaiaupuni 2000) meanwhile notes some reluctance on the part of established Mexican migrants in the US to sponsor female contacts from Mexico, out of a belief that bringing women overseas is more onerous. And Böcker finds that Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands evolved from being 'bridgeheads' to 'gatekeepers,' limiting the chain migration of their relatives from Turkey to Europe when Dutch authorities began to clamp down on irregular migration (1994: 103).

Within the broader literature on general social capital, there are also several studies whose findings are relevant to the decision-making process of current migrants asked to provide

migration assistance. Studying job-matching assistance among Salvadoran immigrants in San Francisco, Cecilia Menjívar (2000) finds that job *information* was passed along relatively freely among friends, neighbors, and relatives, but that job *referrals* were more circumspectly provided. The fear of having the person they recommended perform poorly on the job and taint their standing with an employer resulted in jobholders only providing job referrals to close relatives whom they felt obliged to assist. Sandra Smith (2007, 2005) meanwhile finds that many low-income African American jobholders are reluctant to provide either job referrals or information even to relatives out of similar fears. These studies are of particular relevance when it comes to understanding how labour migrants utilise social capital to secure overseas work permits to leave their home country.

These researchers have also highlighted specific micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors that may influence helping decisions. From her interviews, Smith (2007, 2005) finds that individual-level factors (such as the work reputations of both the jobseeker and the jobholder) and dyad-level factors (such as the strength of the tie between the jobseeker and jobholder, and the tie between the jobholder and potential employer) influence the helping decision. At the network level, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) highlight how 'enforceable trust' can engender social capital through an internal policing capacity built into tightly knit communities with a high degree of social closure and the resources to ensure the honoring of obligations. Therefore, we should see greater provision of migration assistance in transnational networks marked by high social closure and the ability to monitor prospective migrants once they are overseas. Also, less migration assistance should be observable in networks marked by low social closure.

Finally, Menjívar finds that the local economy and government can directly influence the 'viability of immigrant social networks' (2000: 116). In situations where there is an abundant

supply of job openings or where government policies are generally pro-immigrant, social ties are positively affected and network members are more likely to help one another. In less favorable situations, the potential for assistance-sharing between network members diminishes.

Migration out of the Philippines

The Philippines is a useful case study to investigate the mobilisation of migrant social capital, because a 'culture of migration' exists in the country, with a significant proportion of the adult population seeking to emigrate and join the 1 million Filipinos already living overseas (Asis 2006; Rodriguez 2010). These aspiring migrants rely heavily on their activated migrant social capital. Permanent Filipino emigrants frequently depend on overseas family members to sponsor their immigrant visas (Ezquerra 2007; Parreñas 2001). Temporary labour migrants meanwhile look to overseas connections to sponsor a tourist visa, provide financial assistance, or match them with a willing overseas employer, or provide migration advice (Paul 2011a).

Domestic work is the most common occupational category among land-based labour migrants from the Philippines (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency, POEA 2010) and Filipino domestic workers are fixtures around the globe (Anthias and Lazaridis 2000; Constable 1997; Lan 2006; Parreñas 2001). A prospective migrant domestic worker's lack of personal financial capital is often the limiting factor preventing them from working overseas in their preferred destination due to their inability to pay the exorbitant fees demanded by recruitment agencies (Paul 2011a) and it is here that their migrant social capital can be most useful if successfully mobilised.

Data and Methodology

In 2008, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 95 Filipinos about their decision to work overseas as temporary domestic workers. Hong Kong and Singapore were selected as research sites because both are common destinations for Filipino domestic workers (POEA 2011).[1] Both countries offer two-year, renewable work permits to foreign domestic workers hired by local residents. These permits are tied to a particular employer and require workers to live in their employer's residence. Most employers contract local maid placement agencies to match them with suitable workers, though some rely on referrals from other domestic workers they trust. This latter route allows employers to use an agency only to process the necessary paperwork to secure a work permit for their new employee, and frees the new hire from having to pay a hefty placement fee to the agency.

Study participants were recruited using multiple methods. In Singapore and Hong Kong, I visited popular weekend gathering spots for Filipino migrant workers and randomly approached any Filipino I saw. In the Philippines and Singapore, I interviewed the clients of several maid recruitment and placement agencies respectively in their public waiting areas. In all three countries, local migrant domestic worker organisations also assisted me in publicising the study among their membership. I also relied on snowball sampling.

During recruitment, I introduced myself as a researcher from the United States conducting a study on the migration and destination decisions of Filipino migrant domestic workers. Participation was restricted to Filipinos, 18-years-old and above, who were former, current, or prospective overseas domestic workers. Participants were offered a token payment— 10 Singapore dollars, 100 Philippine pesos, and 10 Hong Kong dollars in each respective country, less than US$10 in all three cases. The interviews lasted 45 minutes on average and were audio-recorded with participants' permission. All interviews were conducted in English,

with only two participants requiring an acquaintance to serve as interpreter. All names were changed to keep the identity of participants anonymous.

---TABLE 1 about here---

Table 1 provides descriptive data about the interviewees. Of the 95 participants, 46 were working overseas as domestic workers at the time of their interview and 15 were former domestic workers who had retired. Another 17 in Hong Kong and Singapore had recently ended their contracts because of abuse, insufficient pay, homesickness, or serious illness. (These women were interviewed in shelters run by local migrant rights organisations.) There were also five first-time migrants in the Philippines who had yet to start work overseas and 12 who were between contracts.

When discussing the mechanics of their migration and destination decisions, participants were asked if they had received any help from overseas contacts.[2] All participants (except the five prospective migrants and 10 migrants who had left the Philippines in the previous six months) were also asked if they themselves, after emigrating, had been approached by any of their Philippine contacts to provide migration assistance. A significant number of participants reported having turned down such requests or having been turned down themselves when they were first trying to leave the Philippines. What emerged was a recurring pattern of resistance on the part of many current migrants when it came to assisting their contacts leave the Philippines.

Differentiated Migrant Social Capital Mobilisation

Only four interviewees said they had never been approached by a contact in the Philippines for migration assistance while 24—approximately a third of participants—indicated that they had turned down all requests for help to date. The remaining 42 participants (or 64 per cent) said that

they had attempted to help at least one contact in the Philippines. However, the type of labour migration assistance they had provided varied greatly (see Table 2), falling into four distinct categories:

(1) Providing financial assistance;

(2) Directly matching the prospective migrant with an overseas employer;

(3) Submitting a contact's personal information directly to an overseas placement agency, so as to bypass Philippines-based recruitment agencies; and

(4) Recommending a trustworthy maid agency in the Philippines or overseas.

<center>---TABLE 2 about here---</center>

The first two types of help pose the highest risk for the current migrant: There may be no repayment of their loan or, if their contact performs poorly on the job, the migrant's standing with the employer might suffer. Their social standing in the home country may also be jeopardised if their contact is mistreated while overseas and then blames them. However, both forms of assistance are of great benefit to prospective migrants: reducing their financial outlay and potentially matching them with a pre-screened employer who will treat them well. The third type of assistance involves some time and effort but poses no real risks for the current migrant while still being of value to the prospective migrant. Though the latter would still have to pay a substantial fee to the overseas maid agency, it would be significantly less than what a Philippines-based recruitment agency charges. The fourth type of help—simply recommending an agency—entails the lowest risk and effort on the part of the current migrant, and would hardly jeopardise their social position. However, it is still of some value to the prospective migrant, reducing the likelihood of their being cheated by an agency that absconds with their money.

Migrant social capital was differentially mobilised along two other dimensions: The volume and conditionality of the aid provided. The interviews revealed that a variety of factors influence this multi-dimensional variation in migration assistance.

---TABLE 3 about here---

Since a single factor can affect all three dimensions of aid simultaneously, Table 3 summarizes the conditions associated with the high and low mobilisation of migrant social capital in general. High mobilisation is characterised by the provision of high volume, high value and/or unconditional migration assistance, while low mobilisation entails offering low/zero volume, low value and/or conditional assistance to network contacts seeking to leave the home country.

Individual-Level Factors

<u>Past Experiences of the Current Migrant</u>: Decisions to extend help are often predicated on the outcomes of earlier helping decisions (Dovidio 1984; Moss and Page 1972). Prior negative helping experiences stunt an individual's subsequent desire to offer assistance through negative reinforcement (March 1994). A similar effect was observed among participants such as Wanda, a domestic worker in Hong Kong. Some years earlier, a local doctor—for whom Wanda had worked part-time for seven years—had asked her to recommend someone who could work full-time for him. Wanda had recommended her niece in the Philippines and helped arrange her niece's travel to Hong Kong. But after three months the niece grew so homesick, she ended her contract without giving notice. Mortified, Wanda refused to help anyone else because she was 'so ashamed' of having failed her former employer.

Negative helping experiences also influenced the amount and type of assistance migrants offered future contacts. Rather than refusing to provide any future assistance, some migrants

switched to offering help that entailed the least amount of risk/cost for themselves. This was the case with Cindy who had previously loaned money to her friends while working in Singapore but had never been paid back. As a result, now when she was asked for migration assistance, she stalled. 'I just say that if I can find work for you, then I will try to introduce you. But if I don't have, […] maybe they should try somebody else. I suggest them to go and find the agency. Then they can choose that way.' Cindy did not give an outright rejection in case that damaged her relationship with her contact; but she now effectively limited her exposure to further harm by providing the least amount of migration assistance possible.

While negative helping experiences inhibited current migrants' willingness to help, positive experiences encouraged further helping. Another worker, Marnie, had a Filipino friend who had married a Singaporean and opened a maid agency in Singapore. Through this trusted connection, Marnie had helped more than eight contacts find employment in Singapore. 'They are lucky also. Everybody I bringing in Singapore gets very good employer,' she boasted. These positive experiences and the pride she felt after each successful referral encouraged Marnie to continue helping other Philippine contacts emigrate.

Perceived Commitment Level of the Prospective Migrant: Smith (2007, 2005) finds that jobholders weigh the work reputation of the person asking them for job-matching assistance, using the jobseeker's reputation as a 'signal' of future behavior on the job. The present study's participants did not have the luxury of relying on their contact's work reputation to guide their helping decision as few of their contacts had previously worked in the domestic service sector in the Philippines. This lack of experience led participants to worry that their contacts would not be able to endure the menial aspects of overseas domestic service. Participants such as Rachel, a

domestic worker in Singapore, therefore looked for clues in how their contacts approached the

migration process to assess their commitment level:

> 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.

Prospective migrants' indecision sometimes led to wasted efforts on the part of those

current migrants who had initially been eager to help. Annie, a worker in Singapore, shared

about why she no longer tried to help her friends in the Philippines emigrate:

> Yeah, I have so many friends who asked me to help them. But after I do all this, they look not so interested. So what can I do for them? I told them I really tried my best to help them but they don't cooperate. So after that, I keep quiet.
> *Int.: When you say 'they don't cooperate,' what do you mean?*
> I ask them to spend their passport's Xerox copy because the agency needs it. Or send some passport pictures. But until now, they don't send. I spend [money on] calling cards [to talk] with them, but they look not interested now. So, okay, if you are not interested, I also stop.

Indecision signaled to current migrants that their energies could be put to better use

helping contacts who were serious about migrating and willing to accept the indignities of paid

domestic labour. For contacts who did not seem committed enough, migrants often offered only

low-risk assistance (such as suggesting an agency to use in the Philippines) or conditional

assistance (for instance, offering to pay for a plane ticket if the prospective migrant could secure

a visa by themselves), in effect telling their contacts to first *prove* their commitment.

Dyad-Level Factors

The Tie between Current and Prospective Migrants: Individuals are more likely to extend high-

value assistance to close contacts compared to more distant connections (Böcker 1994; Menjívar

2000; Smith 2007, 2005). In the present study too, participants were most likely to provide their

relatives—both close and extended family members—with financial assistance or direct

placement into an overseas job, the two most high-value and high-risk forms of migration

assistance (see Table 2).[3]

While many participants repeatedly expressed the fear that their help was going to be wasted, when the need arose to help a close family member—particularly a child or a spouse—participants were almost always willing to put aside their concerns and offer unconditional assistance. Diane—a domestic worker in Singapore—had turned down several requests for migration assistance during her 13 years abroad but had still helped her two sisters find work in Singapore:

> I only help bring my two sisters [here]. I do not bring anyone else. Because one thing—I cannot guarantee whatever will happen to people here. If I recruit people to come here and work, the agency gives us 200 [Singapore dollars] as an incentive for recruiting these people. But it's not worth it. It is fast money to earn but the responsibility is too great. I don't want.
> *Int.: Have you had a lot of people asking you for help?*
> Yes! Even my neighbors [in the Philippines]! 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.

None of these concerns however prevented Diane from recommending both her sisters to local employers she knew in Singapore and covering their migration-related expenses.

Participants still raised the dangers of working overseas with close relatives, but they almost always provided whatever aid they could to help them emigrate. Even migrants who had gone through negative helping experiences in the past were still usually willing to extend substantive assistance to close family members. Wanda—the worker whose niece had ended her contract early—was nevertheless saving money to help her oldest son secure a nursing job in Saudi Arabia and her other son a hotel job in Macau.

Thus the strength of the tie also influenced the volume of assistance provided and whether or not it was offered unconditionally. In general, there was a clear pattern of family exceptionalism to the mobilisation of migrant social capital. However, it should be noted that the Philippine definition of 'family' extends beyond the Western nuclear family model (Peterson 1993). Compounded by the more collectivist culture of the Philippines (Hofstede 2001),

participants also often felt an obligation to assist extended family members such as nieces, cousins, and in-laws. This is reflected in Table 2 which shows that more participants provided high-value migration assistance to extended family members than to closer relatives.

<u>The Tie between Current Migrants and Potential Employers</u>: The warmth of the relationship between current migrants and potential local employers in the host country also had a direct bearing on the provision of one particular form of migration assistance: the job referral. In most cases, the stronger this relationship, the more likely it was that the current migrant would try to recommend someone to the employer (either of their own volition or after being approached by the employer for a recommendation). Due to the possibility of the person they recommended not performing well on the job—as was the case with Wanda's niece—current migrants tended to wait until they had amassed sufficient social capital reserves with individual employers before they asked these employers to trust their recommendation. This process took time and effort, which is why the strength of the tie between employer and current migrant was also tied to the length of time these migrants had worked abroad. The longer they had been overseas, the more likely it was that these migrants would have had the opportunity to build sufficiently trusting relationships with prospective employers.

This was the case with Andrew, a domestic worker who had been working in Hong Kong for less than two years, who was being pressured by his younger brother to find an overseas job for him. Andrew said he wanted to help but indicated that 'right now, it is very difficult to find an employer looking for a male [domestic worker].' He had asked for his brother's patience while Andrew solidified his network of local contacts to the point where he was comfortable enough with a potential employer that he could broach the topic of hiring his brother.

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). Gendered helping patterns have also been observed within Mexican migrant networks (Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kanaiaupuni 2000). Within the current study, participants (who were overwhelmingly female) also primarily provided migration assistance to other women. Likewise, female participants had received migration assistance mainly from female relatives and friends working in the domestic service sector overseas.

Several explanations have been put forward for this gendered provision of migration assistance. Curran et al. propose that it is because men and women 'face different barriers to moving, maintain different relationships with households and villages of origin, and experience completely different opportunities in places of destination' (2005: 250). Building on these authors' point concerning the gendered nature of most migrants' work, I argue that the female-dominated job sector in which this study's participants were concentrated and their reliance on labor migration as their exit strategy from the Philippines were the primary drivers for the gendered patterns of migration assistance I observed. 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 to overseas employers—was inextricably linked to their work in a female-dominated occupation. It was for this reason that they were much more likely to help their female rather than male contacts in the Philippines.

Female study participants did help their male contacts on occasion. Two women had helped their husbands secure jobs overseas—one as a private chauffeur and the other as a domestic worker—so that they could work in the same country. And participants who possessed sufficient financial capital were more than willing to use it to help immediate male relatives (primarily sons) leave the Philippines as well. But most participants' migrant social capital resources were entrenched in the domestic service sector and, as a result, this capital was more often than not deployed to help female contacts find work overseas as domestic workers as well.

The Vulnerable Nature of the Job: All temporary labour migrants are taking on certain risks when accepting work overseas. But among migrant domestic workers, there exists a level of risk that few other occupations possess: the potential for physical, emotional, *and* sexual abuse. Participants were fully aware of the dangers of their job and it frequently made them think twice before placing any of their contacts in a similarly vulnerable position. This was why Lilith, a domestic worker in Singapore, refused to help any of her contacts:

> They asked me but I told them, "I cannot direct you. You have to go through the agent." […] I don't want to be blamed in the end if they get a bad employer. That is why I don't encourage them [or] help them to come here.

The fear of being 'blamed' for a possible negative work experience was a concern raised repeatedly during the interviews. As Rena, a domestic worker in Singapore, who also had refused to help her contacts, explained: 'If I am the one to introduce them and then, after that, they get into trouble, then maybe after that, they blame me.' These participants' thinking was that it was better to let contacts make their own way overseas so that participants would not be seen as culpable if something untoward occurred.

What made participants so fearful of helping? I posit that it was the structural vulnerability they experienced in their host country. Part of this stemmed from the solitary, housebound and under-regulated nature of paid domestic service which makes these workers

more prone to abuse (Constable 1997; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003). But migrant domestic workers also lead marginalised lives outside of work, often categorised as racialized and sexualized 'others' existing on the outskirts of mainstream society in their host country, with local social connections only to their employer's family and other migrant domestic workers (if such mingling among workers was allowed) (Momsen 1999; Yeoh and Huang 1998). This compounded vulnerability made participants weigh the risks and costs of providing migration assistance more heavily, often resulting in refusals to help or the provision of only limited help.

Participants who were in more secure jobs, working for employers they trusted, were more willing to help their contacts emigrate. Several long-serving participants—like Marnie who had worked happily for the same Singapore family for 19 years—had assisted multiple contacts find jobs overseas and were perfectly willing to help more. In contrast, the ten participants who had been mistreated recently by their employers were adamant that they did not want to assist any of their contacts. One such worker—Annie, a runaway in Singapore—however, provided a more nuanced answer: 'I say [to my friend in the Philippines that] I cannot decide to help. Because, you see, until now, I have not got a good job here. But if I have already a good employer here, then I can send my friend's bio[graphical] data to the agency.'

Network-Level Factors

Degree of Social Closure connecting Current and Prospective Migrants: In situations where there is a concentration of immigrants living or working together, the immigrant community frequently has the capacity to police the recipients of favors to ensure repayment and the honoring of obligations. As a result of this 'enforceable trust,' these immigrant communities are

often characterised by a high degree of social capital mobilisation (Portes 1998; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993).

Bashi's (2007) account of veteran migrants closely monitoring the individuals they helped leave the West Indies, insisting on these individuals' co-residence with them, is a prime example of social closure at work. But in communities where such closure is not possible, potential donors of social capital resources may be less willing to help their contacts. Due to the housebound nature of paid domestic work, contact with other workers is often restricted to a weekly or monthly day-off (where that has been granted) or fleeting encounters while running errands outside the employer's home (Constable 2003; Milkman, Reese, and Roth 1998; Parreñas 2001; Yeoh and Huang 1998; Zarembka 2003). In such situations, high social closure becomes difficult to achieve and the provision of high-value migration assistance more of a gamble. This helps explain why so many participants expressed hesitation about assisting contacts find work overseas, or limited themselves to helping only close relatives with whom they shared a tightly-knit connection in the Philippines and therefore could follow up with more easily through home-country intermediaries.

It also explains why participants were always willing to provide migration assistance when their employer was looking to hire a second domestic worker. As Bashi shows, social closure can be especially strong when migrants live and work under the same roof. It is also in migrants' best interests to find a co-worker they can get along with, someone who can be regularly reminded of their debt to the migrant.

Market-Level Factors

Job Availability: A flourishing economy leads to more job openings, which in turn encourages jobholders to be less risk-averse when approached for job-matching assistance (Menjívar 2000; Smith 2007). This is the case with migrant social capital activation as well, especially when it comes to making personal recommendations to potential employers. But job availability is influenced by many factors in addition to the state of the local economy, and beliefs about the volume of job openings available for network contacts can influence whether or not current migrants even make the effort to provide migration assistance.

Most countries' domestic labor markets are heavily racialized and hierarchical (Paul 2011b). An increase in demand for domestic workers of a particular nationality can result in a simultaneous decline in demand for workers from other countries, all else being constant. This is what has happened to Filipino workers in Hong Kong as Indonesian migrants have begun to make inroads in the 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 Filipinos with hardly any Indonesians (Sim 2003; Constable 1997). Now, there are reported to be more Indonesians than Filipinos working in Hong Kong's 300,000-strong domestic service industry. Local employers and agencies reportedly prefer Indonesian workers because they enjoy a reputation for being more docile, less demanding and, most importantly, cheaper (Constable 1997). Carrie, a worker in Hong Kong, meanwhile claimed that the popularity of Indonesian workers was due to the fact that Indonesians received training in Cantonese (the primary dialect used by Hong Kong Chinese) before coming to Hong Kong (Wee and Sim 2004): 'They know how to speak Cantonese. According to them, they study for six months in Indonesia. […] So they are good in Cantonese when they come here. So most Chinese […] they prefer to take these Cantonese-speaking people.'

However, no Hong Kong-based participant could recall being turned down by a prospective employer who preferred to hire an Indonesian rather than their Filipino contact. Instead, participants' assumptions about employers' shifting nationality preferences may have prevented them from even *attempting* to approach local employers with referrals. In this manner, both real and presumed job availability levels can influence the mobilisation of migrant social capital.

Domestic Worker Regulatory Environment: Böcker (1994) writes that when the Dutch government began imposing stricter requirements on short-term entry visas, creating a more hostile environment for transnational migrant networks, migrants became much more particular in terms of who they helped come to the Netherlands. A similar change occurred among the Filipino domestic workers who had started working in Hong Kong prior to the 1987 introduction of several "New Conditions of Stay" (NCS). The earlier rules governing migrant domestic workers had allowed them to remain in Hong Kong to search for a new employer if their previous contract had ended prematurely. In contrast, the NCS gave out-of-work migrants only two weeks to find new employers before requiring their departure from Hong Kong (Constable 1997). In addition, a migrant who had successfully found a new employer within the two-week grace period still had to return to their home country to apply for a new work visa before returning to start their new contract.[4] This last requirement places a significant financial burden on migrants who are usually expected to pay their Hong Kong agency a hefty fee for finding them a new employer. This and other changes in the regulatory environment governing migrant domestic workers have had a cumulatively strong dampening effect on study participants in Hong Kong, lessening their desire to help their contacts find work in Hong Kong in recent years.

In Singapore, meanwhile, local maid placement agencies are much more amenable to helping migrant domestic workers switch employers. The Singapore government also does not require these workers to exit the country while their new work permit is being processed. These practices significantly reduce the risks for current migrants in Singapore when it comes to helping their Philippine-based contacts find employment there. As a result, while Singapore-based participants spoke of having found employment for some of their Philippine contacts as recently as the previous year, several Hong Kong-based participants spoke of how, in recent years, they had not directly placed their contacts with employers. Overall, a significantly higher proportion of participants in Hong Kong had also refused to provide any migration assistance to their network contacts (see Table 4). The explanation participants like Cissie, a domestic worker in Hong Kong, provided was that the Hong Kong market had become more inhospitable in recent years:

> Before it's not like what you can see in here now. Because before, if you are terminated, you can find another employer easily. […] Before you can find an employer in here directly and no need to come back to Philippines to apply for the visa again. You can continue your work if you have an employer already. No problem… But now, […] so many things has changed. Now the salary is become lower. And if you were just terminated and you can find an employer, you still have to go back to Philippines and wait for your visa there. And you need to have an agency too to work for the processing of the documents.

---TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE---

Contract Termination Rates: The Hong Kong market has a reputation for being a place where the early termination of workers' contracts is the norm (Constable 1997). This had the effect of making study participants in Hong Kong somewhat wary about helping to bring their contacts to Hong Kong—particularly through an agency—in case their contacts ended up being terminated prematurely and forced to forfeit all their agency fees.

Such a possibility is frightening for migrant workers seeking jobs in Hong Kong given that they are required to pay exorbitant recruitment agency fees, which in 2008, ranged from

80,000 to 100,000 Philippine pesos (roughly 40-50% of the average *annual* income of a family

in the Philippines. Prospective migrants are usually expected to pay these fees *prior* to their

departure, constituting a significant financial burden.

Meanwhile, Singapore-bound migrants pay on average 50,000-60,000 Philippine pesos

(or between 25 to 30% of their average annual family income in the Philippines) for a job in

Singapore. In addition, Singapore agencies accept part-payment of these fees through a process

of salary deductions that can last up to the first 10 months *after* the worker has started her job.

These divergent payment structures are what create differing incentives for Hong Kong- and

Singapore-based agencies when it comes to contract turnover: While Singapore agencies were

motivated to keep migrants employed so as to be able to collect their placement fees in full,

Hong Kong agencies felt no such compunction.

Constable concludes that in Hong Kong, 'the more rapid the turnover [of domestic

workers], the more profitable an agency's business' (1997: 62). She finds Hong Kong agencies

encouraging employers to run through several domestic workers before settling on a final choice.

They did so by offering employers a half refund of any fees paid or unlimited replacements of

workers within the first forty days of a contract. Likewise, the present study's participants spoke

of "Buy One, Get Five" offers made by Hong Kong agencies to prospective employers, allowing

them to cycle through five domestic workers for the price of one. There is limited downside for

employers when accepting such offers; meanwhile, for agencies, each new domestic worker

placed with an employer represented significant new revenue, all of it coming from the worker

and not the employer.

These market conditions have led to a situation in Hong Kong where contracts are

frequently terminated prematurely by employers (Constable 1997). A terminated domestic

worker forfeits all agency fees she paid, even if she was only on the job for a few days or weeks.

As a result, several Hong Kong participants explained that they had turned down requests for

migration assistance when they could not find an employer to directly hire their contact in the

Philippines. These migrants were not willing to go through an agency out of concern that the

employer the agency found would fire their contact, leaving that individual without a job and,

most likely, with an exorbitant loan that they would be unable to pay back. This was why

Renasha, a domestic worker in Hong Kong, had repeatedly refused to help her niece find work in

Hong Kong, insisting that 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 rely on local agencies. Of the 23

participants in Singapore who had provided migration-related assistance, the most common form

of help provided was the submission of their contacts' personal information to a local maid

agency (see Table 4). In contrast, only two participants in Hong Kong had helped in this manner.

Country-Level Factors

<u>Migrant Worker Freedoms:</u> Cultural norms and labor regulations that restrict the freedom of

movement of female migrant domestic workers can also influence the types of migration

assistance they provide. Participants who had previously worked as domestic workers in

conservative Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia spoke of how they had not been given a

weekly day-off and had not been allowed to freely mingle with other domestic workers or go to

public places like shopping centers unsupervised. These restrictions on their movement meant

that they were less able to build relationships with other migrant workers or with locals to keep

themselves apprised of new job openings à la Granovetter (1973). These restrictions also made it

difficult for these migrants to submit their contacts' information to a local maid agency. Beatrice had worked for several years as a migrant domestic worker in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and her account of her employers' restrictions on her movements is typical of most foreign domestic workers in the Middle East:

> *Int.: When you were working, either in Abu Dhabi or in Dubai, did anyone ask you for help to bring them overseas as well?*
> Yes, but I couldn't. […] Because I didn't have the day off. I didn't have it. I can go with [my employers] to another country when they go [overseas]. I can go with them, but I don't have the day off. They are very strict. Even when, sometimes we go to the park, they don't want me to talk to another Filipina [maid]. They are very strict.

Thus, while workers in the Middle East could provide money to help fund a contact's departure from the Philippines or recommend a recruitment agency in the Philippines, they were less likely to directly place their Philippine contact in a job unless they heard about a vacancy through their employer. In this manner, the migrant labour rules and norms that constrain the freedom of movement of domestic workers and their freedom to communicate with others can have a direct impact on the type of migration assistance they provide.

Conclusion

This article showcases how the mobilisation of migrant social capital is a selective and dynamic process, with migrants moving from being very helpful to not helpful and back over time, depending on their current context, their relationships with each contact, and their past helping experiences. More than sixty per cent of participants had offered migration assistance to at least one of their contacts in the Philippines. However, less than half of these participants had provided substantive assistance—providing money or finding an employer to directly hire their contact. These findings point to the need for more data on the actual forms of assistance being provided by overseas migrants. It is insufficient to ask whether or not overseas migrants assist their network contacts' we need to ask: 'How *much* help do they provide?'

When the migration assistance that is given is of low value, limited in nature, or conditional, not all prospective migrants will be able to accumulate the additional resources required to make the journey overseas or reach their preferred destination. Thus, it is possible for migrant social capital to be mobilised and yet not result in migration. Another likely outcome is that migration trajectories are altered in significant ways, shifting away from countries with higher entry barriers and towards countries that offer easier access, encouraging multistage migration as a way to circumvent an initial lack of migrant capital (Paul 2011a). The low/partial mobilisation of migrant social capital and its impact on migration strategies and destination trajectories is a promising area for future research.

This article's comparison of migrant domestic worker helping patterns across different countries also makes clear that migrant social capital mobilisation is not simply a function of micro-level factors but is heavily contingent on structural factors at the market and country levels. Laws that help mitigate some of the vulnerabilities of domestic work encourage current migrant domestic workers to take on the risk of finding jobs for their home country contacts. These findings are in line with Böcker's (1994) research on Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands who became less willing to extend migration assistance as Dutch immigration laws became more restrictive. But equally important is the structure of the job market in which these migrant labor. Overall, the existence of a pro-migrant and pro-worker regulatory environment is critical for migrant domestic workers who already experience so much structural vulnerability in their working lives.

In addition to the role played by policies on the books, policy *praxis* also influences the degree of network mobilisation. The actual workings of the migrant domestic worker market, in particular the role played by market intermediaries such as maid agencies, can impact how

comfortable current migrants feel extending help to network contacts, and also the type of help that they offer. These agencies—which often exist in a regulatory gray area—regularly function as migration gatekeepers, illegally charging prospective migrants exorbitant fees that prevent low-capital individuals from leaving their home countries. But, as this study shows, these agencies' recruitment and placement practices also have an effect on migrants who are already overseas, moderating their willingness to extend certain types of assistance to their network contacts.

All in all, this article reaffirms the outsize role migrant social capital can play in the migration decision of prospective migrants. But it highlights how migration help—especially 'good' help that can make all the difference between migrating to one's preferred destination, migrating somewhere else, or not migrating at all—can often be hard to find and is moderated by a range of factors outside the control of individual migrants. Most of the empirical research on migrant networks does not provide any direct measures of the type and quantity of migration assistance provided, simply assuming that assistance was either provided fully or not at all (Garip 2008). What this article has hopefully highlighted however is the need to look more critically at the activation of migrant social capital, recognizing its dynamic and differentiated nature and the effect this has in shaping migration flows.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] Between 2005 and 2009, on average, 20,491 newly-hired Filipino domestic workers left for Hong Kong each year, while 1,962 left for Singapore, according to official statistics released by the Philippine government. However, the Singapore statistics are heavily underestimated as most Filipino domestic workers arrive in Singapore on family- or friend-sponsored tourist visas and only apply for a work permit after their arrival (Yeoh, Huang and Gonzalez 1999). As a result, while they have legal work permits from the Singapore government, they are 'invisible' to the Philippine government which makes it difficult to trust the Philippine government's data on the volume of the Filipino migration flow to Singapore.

[2] For the purposes of this study, only assistance provided to leave the Philippines for the very *first* time is analysed.

[3] Likewise, participants were more likely to have *received* high-value migration assistance from relatives (both close and extended).

[4] See http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehtml/ID%28E%29969.htm#8 for the rules regarding any change of employers.

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Table 1. Characteristics of sample population

	Total sample population (N = 95)	Hong Kong (n = 28)	Singapore (n = 41)	Philippines (n = 26)
	Per cent of participants			
Gender				
Female	98%	93%	100%	100%
Male	2%	7%	-	-
Age (in years)				
18 – 25	8%	-	5%	23%
26 – 35	35%	43%	41%	15%
36 – 45	36%	36%	34%	38%
46 and above	21%	21%	20%	23%
Education				
Less than high school	7%	11%	5%	8%
High school	28%	18%	29%	38%
Some college	38%	36%	41%	35%
College and above	26%	36%	24%	19%
Decade of departure from the Philippines				
1970s	2%	7%	-	-
1980s	17%	14%	17%	19%
1990s	35%	36%	41%	23%
2000s	46%	43%	41%	58%

Table 2. Helping patterns among participants providing migration assistance

Type of assistance provided	Number of participants providing help to:[a]			
	Close family[b]	Extended family[b]	Friends/ Neighbors	Total
Direct placement with an employer	5	9	3	17
Financial assistance	3	7	2	12
Submit personal data to an overseas agency	6	6	6	18
Recommend an agency	2	1	3	6
Total	16	23	14	

[a] 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, their help was only counted once. 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.

[b] Spouses, children, siblings, and parents count as close family members. All other relatives (e.g. cousins, nieces, aunts, in-laws) are counted as extended family members.

Note: n=42. This number does not include 10 participants who had been abused or maltreated, five who had yet to leave the Philippines, and 10 who had started their contracts in 2008, the year in which the interviews were conducted. It also does not include the four participants who said they had never been asked to provide migration assistance and the 24 participants who said they had turned down all requests for help to date.

Table 3. Multi-level conceptual framework of factors influencing the mobilisation of migrant social capital

Level	Factor	Conditions associated with migrant social capital mobilisation:	
		High mobilisation	Low mobilisation
Individual	Current migrant's past helping experiences	Positive past experiences	Negative past experiences
	Prospective migrant's perceived commitment level	High commitment	Low commitment
Dyad	Tie between current and prospective migrants	Strong ties	Weak ties
	Tie between current migrants and potential employers	Strong ties	Weak ties
Job	Gendered nature of the job	Weakly gendered[a]	Strongly gendered[a]
	Degree of vulnerability in the job	Low vulnerability	High vulnerability
Network	Degree of social closure	High social closure	Low social closure
Market	Job availability (real and perceived)	High availability	Low availability
	Domestic worker regulatory environment	Pro-worker regulations	Anti-worker regulations
	Contract termination rates	High termination rates	Low termination rates
Country	Migrant worker freedoms	Freedom of movement	No freedom of movement

[a] In a weakly gendered occupational sector, job incumbents are able to pass along job information and referrals to both male and female network contacts who are interested. In a strongly gendered occupation, however, job incumbents are restricted to helping only half their network contacts, assuming that their network is evenly divided between men and women.

Table 4. Helping patterns by country of interview

Type of assistance provided	Per cent of participants providing help in:	
	Singapore (n = 37)[a]	Hong Kong (n = 22)[a]
Direct placement with an employer	16%[b]	27%[b]
Financial assistance	22%	9%
Submit personal data to an overseas agency	30%	9%
Recommend an agency	8%	9%
Denied all requests for help	27%	36%

[a] 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.

[b] Even though a higher proportion of Hong Kong participants provided direct placement assistance to their network contacts than Singapore participants overall, most of this assistance was provided many years earlier. In more recent years, Hong Kong participants had not provided as much of this type of assistance as their Singapore counterparts.