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# Working Papers

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## Actors and Networks:

Unravelling Foreign Domestic Labour  
Migration

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## Abstract

This paper is based on survey and interview data collected with 147 and 15 migrant domestic workers, respectively, at the Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI), in Singapore. ACMI is a church-based organisation that provides educational and skills training classes for foreign domestic workers and is also engaged in advising and lobbying the Singaporean government regarding foreign worker issues.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the degree to which foreign domestic workers in Singapore actively look for self-development opportunities during their migratory journey. Here self-development is conceived of as the process of acquiring new skills that can be used to improve their welfare. As a result, this paper is also interested in the ways in which self-development can impact upon migrant welfare. Moreover, this paper situates its investigation of self-development

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A third of Singapore's 5.4 million population is non-resident (MOM, 2015a). Here, 222,500 foreign domestic workers undertake the social reproductive roles that have been so central to the city-state's development in the last three decades. Impeccably managed, domestic workers are drawn from regional labour exporters such as the Philippines and Indonesia as well as the emerging markets of Myanmar (MOM, 2015b). Restrictive immigration and employment policies ensure transience and precariousness. Two-year rolling contracts, gender and age limitations, kafalalike visa sponsorship systems, state-sanctioned deportation mechanisms, industry-specific employment restrictions serve to create an architecture of docile labour on a use-and-dispose basis (Yeoh, 2006; O'Connell Davidson, 2013).

The results of these policies have led to well-documented incidences of abuse and exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous employers and recruitment agencies that has since garnered international attention (Human Rights Watch, 2005). Though Singapore has taken steps to improve domestic worker welfare, progress has been slow; it was not until 2011 that Singapore had ratified the International Labour Organisation's Convention 189 (ILO, 2013), securing basic employment rights for domestic workers and it wasn't until 2013 that domestic workers were granted weekly offs (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Nonetheless, as welfare, in general, seems to have improved and cases of serious abuse subdued, so too has research into foreign labour migration diversified. From investigations of abuse and exploitation towards studies recognising the minute coping strategies domestic workers adopt to negotiate unbalanced power relations, domestic labour migration scholarship of late seem preoccupied with 'agency' and 'empowerment' en vogue.

Though such developments are welcome, it seems that the analytical referent often remains stubbornly attached to her disadvantage; agency is recognised only insofar as it is remedial to her immediate position of subservience. We are thus ill equipped to understand how migrant agency develops over time (Griffiths et al., 2012). In other words, the developmental capacity of the migrant has been overlooked owing to theoretical conservatism and temporal shortsightedness.

workers to achieve better welfare across what I term the 'migrant lifecourse'. First, 'development' is understood as the accumulation of ways that migrants acquire new skills to negotiate their welfare over time; this owes a clear theoretical debt to Sen's (2004) theory of capabilities that understands empowerment not in terms of predefined ends, but the creation of the necessary preconditions and opportunities for the individual to achieve welfare on her own terms. Self-development is thus taken as on-going migrant subjectivities rather than static end goals. Second, the migrant lifecourse is primarily concerned with the phases and transitions that are specific to domestic workers in Singapore. Though conventional lifecourse categories, such as adolescence, marriage and childbearing, are useful temporal indicators, this paper wants to hone in on migrant-specific experiences across time.

To this end, this paper bases its research with domestic workers who attend educational classes at Singapore's Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI). Established in 1998 by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Singapore, ACMI is a church-based organisation that offers migrant workers educational training classes amongst other services such as legal aid and public outreach. Held every Sunday, classes include English, baking, hairdressing, dressmaking, computer literacy, wellness and beauty, and business management. By engaging domestic workers who have proactively sought out educational classes in Singapore, we may begin to investigate the degree to which some migrants actively seek out non-economic resources, such as education, when migrating and how this contributes towards their wellbeing over time. This paper will use self-development and non-economic resource accumulation interchangeably.

This focus is important for a very significant reason. Domestic workers are often conceived of as altruistic economic migrants (Brickell and Chant, 2010). Although agency is recognised within the capitalist process of wage accumulation and remittance, little research has been conducted regarding how the accumulation of non-economic resources translates into welfare impacts over time. Skills training and education is just one example of an economic resource; though this paper's research is exclusively based on ACMI students, it also recognises the diversity of activities and sources of 'development' for migrants and so does not preclude self-development only within the realms of ACMI classes.

Moreover, this paper's conception of 'capitals' is premised upon Bourdieu's (1986) theory of economic, social, and cultural capital. Though this paper is concerned with non-economic capitals, it is clear that the trio of resources can never really exist in isolation of one another; in fact as the

migrant can accumulate social capital (personal networks, relationships, group membership) and cultural capital (knowledge, education, skills), so too are these 'convertible' to economic capital (ibid). The title of this report draws on the Latourian concept of an actor-network and, where migrant wellbeing is concerned, seeks to trace through time the associations and processes that enable or inhibit migrant welfare and self-development (Latour, 2005). To do this, this report will investigate three interrelated research questions:

- 1) To what extent do domestic workers in Singapore actively seek self-development opportunities during their migratory journey?
- 2) What are the barriers or catalysts for foreign domestic workers to pursue self-development?
- 3) To what degree does self-development lead to an increase in migrant welfare?

The report is structured as follows. Section two offers a concise review of the existing literature pertaining to domestic worker migration, issues around agency, non-economic capital, and temporality. Section three discusses the methods used in this study as well as processes of data analysis, and offers reflections on some of the project's methodological limitations. Section 4 looks at the relevant findings and discusses them within a migrant temporality framework

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The literature on foreign domestic labour migration enjoys rich, interdisciplinary inputs. Thinking in terms of domestic labour migrants and their pursuance of self-development over time, this section reviews some of the prevailing literature on issues regarding agency and temporality, and draws heavily on concepts from anthropology, sociology, and development studies.

Early domestic labour migration research often cited the financial motivation underpinning internal and, to a greater extent, international domestic labour migration. In the context of Southeast Asia, rich ethnographic data revealing the altruistic notions of mobility as compelled by family poverty and hardship constraint have, by now, become familiar (Yeoh and Huang, 1999; Momsen, 1999; Parre-as, 2001, Rahman et al., 2005). At every step of the migratory journey, from the dire straits of household poverty to the flows of remittances that underwrite the lived realities of domestic workers and their dependants, migrant agency and economic capital accumulation were concepts used interchangeably (Constable, 2007). This is not to invalidate such a focus; though two decades have elapsed since foreign domestic labour migration was brought in vogue, financial support remains the



dominant motivation for domestic labour migration; migrant households are often highly dependent on remittances to sustain basic household expenditures, educational expenses for children, as well as durable investments and assets (Kho et al., 2014).

To this end, contributions from development sociology invites us to understand migration as a household strategy. Here, Douglass (2012), describes the concept of 'householding' as the 'the ways in which the processes of forming and maintaining households through time are globalizing in all key dimensions of the life of households: marriage/partnership, bearing, raising and educating children, managing daily life, earning income and caring for elders and nonworking members' (pp. 4). Migration, for Douglass, is the reflexive/altruistic means of sustaining household reproduction where the household has undergone fundamental shifts vis-à-vis structural adjustment, state support retrenchments, and social policy reform (see Wolfson & Likić-Brborić, 2008). Moreover, the concept of 'householding' resonates strongly with early migration/development literature that understood mobilities as compelled by the need to diversify household 'incomes portfolio' (Stark & Levhari, 1982: pp. 192). For development economists, household risk in the form of poverty is mitigated through the meditated diversification of income over geographical distance to reduce wage differential co-linearity with local wages (Zimmer et al., 2008).

Although the notion of agency seems to be implied within the migration and development literature, it is recognised insofar as it chimes with the concept of the rational economic migrant. Even where skills training, education and vocational training is concerned, migrant agency is extracted only in economic terms as surplus value transferred to employers (Barber & Bryan, 2012). Outside the realm of household and development economics, research on migrant agency and capitals accumulation left much to be desired. In Bourdieusian terms, the unrelenting focus on economic capital accumulation obscures the potential for migrant cultural and social capital development. In a field preoccupied with material indicators and objectified states of capitals as income, assets, and investments, the embodied state of disposition, of knowledge, of habitus of capitals that enables agency has been swept under the rug (Bourdieu, 1986)

This was particularly true of early South-North domestic labour migration research; on one extreme of emb r

the migrant domestic worker was upheld as a folk hero whose remittances are the cornerstones of

empowerment (Mosedale, 2005). Though studies of what one might term 'self-interested migration' especially those relating to skills training, education, and domestic work is scant, it is in the interface between agency and self-interest that this paper might find a fitting theoretical basis for our understanding of self-development.

Early examples might include Elmhirst's (1999) study of rural Indonesian women who migrate for domestic work in Java. Here, Elmhirst explains how domestic work is deeply rooted in Indonesian patron-client customs that enables a social hierarchy that is at once demeaning, but also symbolic of modernism in one's quest towards the urban metropolis. Such notions are corroborated elsewhere, especially within the Asian context (see Breman, 2010). McKay (2003), for example, notes the prevalence of Filipino domestic workers who leverage their employment status to secure relationships, marriage, and citizenship internationally, which is also compelled by 'a particular form of Americanised modernity and imaginary of romantic love' (pp. 30). Paul (2011) also reveals a hierarchy of destination desirability for migrants; at the bottom of the hierarchy are regions of known precariousness in terms of worker rights and freedoms, such as the Middle East, but at the top are countries perceived to offer superior benefits and salaries; North America is a frequent example. Furthermore, McKay's (2007) study of migrant remittances 'a stronghold of altruism within the migration literature' shows how remittances may also be deployed to 'selfish' ends, such as the strategic maintenance of group memberships. Vanwey (2004) thus explains how altruistic behaviour, such as remitting wages, is also intersectional on factors such as household income, rather than a *pr*given; in her study of migrant remittances, women and migrants from poorer households tend to remit on more altruistic bases those from better-off backgrounds. All of these studies highlight the importance of non-economic resources in migrant welfare. As if the black matter within the domestic labour actor-network, it is slowly being discovered.

In this vein, we may also dispel, if uncomfortably, the myth that (female) migrants are truly the altruistic pillars of the household, who may in fact harbour self-interests or aspirations of their own (Brickell and Chant, 2010). Only by recognising the capacity for migrants to act with self-interest might we begin to understand how pursuing self-development goals 'through the accumulation of social and cultural capital' enables greater degrees of welfare on the migrant's own terms. To this end, this paper also owes a clear theoretical debt to Sen's (1999) *Development as Freedom*, and borrows from it ideas around freedoms of opportunity, association, and economic wellbeing. Following Sen, self-development is not only concerned with tangible measures or indicators such as wages, important

though they may be but a more comprehensive improvement in the wellbeing of the individual in terms of self-esteem, confidence, and agency that has benefits beyond the economic or material. Moreover, Sen (2004) deploys this in practical terms of being able to increase individual capabilities. This necessarily requires us to foreground agency of the individual; where increased capabilities allows migrants to achieve higher levels of welfare, they must first be able willing to do so. In this vein, Gong et al. (2011) finds a positive correlation between migrant agency in aspects self-determination and mental health.

Finally, a second theoretical handicap of domestic labour research that this paper hopes to address is the apparent lack of resolution afforded on migration and its temporalities. Griffith et al. (2012) notes that, despite progress in problematizing the migratory journey, migrant temporalities are still poorly understood especially where future-oriented imaginaries are concerned.

To this end, Adam (2010) laments how social science's logic of inquiry encompasses completed processes that have ossified into empirically accessible phenomena which can be located in a temporal frame of clock and calendar time (pp. 362). Indeed, the epistemological draw to the present or completed negates a meaningful understanding of how non-economic capitals accumulations impact welfare, both real and imaginary. In a migrant demographic where the future-oriented 'do it for the family' narrative is so prevalent (Parreñas, 2001), mere interrogation of the present without due analysis of the future is inadequate. Here, Sheller and Urry (2006) reminds us 'time spent traveling is not dead time that people always seek to minimise' (pp. 213). For the migrant domestic worker, her time in Singapore, however limited, is not reducible merely to the monthly remittances that she generates. We should thus conceive of the labour migrant not a rationalised unit of labour power, but the product between the abstract power of agency and the opportunities for capitals accumulation, in





Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were processed using Atlas.ti and were subject to open and in vivo coding to lump quotes by common expressions; coding was done line-by-line to maximise the resolution of data and to reduce the possibility of biased researcher inputs (Saldaña, 2013). Codes were then collated into Atlas.ti's network view in order to

actively used for productive purposes as the 'self-improvement' or 'upgrading oneself' narrative seems so strong amongst the domestic worker population that responses may be subject to a social desirability bias. Finally, interviews are used as a proxy to gain, through testimony and conversation, a



ÔAlreadyÕ time, on the other hand, describes the established, experienced migrant and seems to carry with it a certain sense of accomplishment, relief, or optimism.

On filial care responsibilities: Ô

Though two workers reveal that they had returned home 'permanently' for the purpose of marriage, the birth children quickly necessitated a return to Singapore to generate household income. Interviewees often express their migratory calculus in terms of wage differentials. On her decision to stay or leave Indonesia, Eliza, 47, describes her ultimatum for working in Singapore: 'I must choose. If I work in Indonesia also the salary is not enough... cannot make money... then I decided myself I must go' (Interview #001-Eliza).

Put more bluntly, Maria, 31, explains her motivation for working as a domestic worker, initially in Brunei: 'Because of poverty. I got three sisters, my father is only a farmer, and my mother is only a housewife' (Interview #011-Maria)

Although there is an age range of over two decades between the interviewees, the vast majority are united under a common narrative: that of economic compulsion. This is particularly true for those from an agricultural background as well as those with financial dependants. Another theme uniting migrants 'last time' is the experience of the employment agency. Save for three workers who travelled to Singapore on tourist visas and exploited legal loopholes to secure employment, everyone was 'processed' through the sprawling monopoly of the transnational employment agency industry.

“I searching which is better, who is better. Then I asking like that until I meet an agency, that 4 months only deduction, some is 7 months like that. And then I telling this one, 4 months, choose this one” I compare also the other agency because free lodging, but I buy my own food, the other one not free lodging but free food, like that”

(Interview #015-Melody)

Fig. 1. Internet Employment Search

Though domestic workers enjoy relative benefits to their migration in that their cost of travel and visa processing is initially borne of the agency, this entails several months of salary deductions once the migrant has arrived and secured employment in order to recoup the employment agency’s cost plus profit. Where new migrants often command a lower initial salary, their deductions often reduce their monthly income to a minimal “allowance” level of just tens of dollars (see TWC2, 2006). It is during this period that migrants are usually most economically vulnerable and least free to pursue capital accumulation and self-development. In a period where even minor practical considerations, such as the cost of public transport, becomes an insurmountable ordeal, this precludes a large part of basic migrant freedoms. This narrative of entrance into Singapore, securing employment, and salary deduction is universal across interviewed workers.

Nonetheless, through comparing agencies online, Melody managed to secure what is, by domestic labour migration standards, a very agreeable agency fee. To put Melody’s advantage into perspective, the modal salary deduction period in the interview sample is six months, the upper range eight months, and “allowances” ranged between \$50SGD a month (£5.25). With current salaries within the \$500-600SGD range, even a two-month reduction in fees represents a massive saving. In a household strategy where dependants are disproportionately reliant on migrant remittances, this has profound welfare impacts for both the migrant and her dependants (Platt et al., 2013). Time, literally, is money.

Temporally, the urgency of migration also secures Singapore as an anomaly in domestic worker destination. Where studies have looked at domestic workers’ geographical “migration” towards Europe and North America, which is seen as more desirable in terms of employment conditions, remuneration and potential citizenship rights (Paul, 2011), ACMI survey results show a remarkable population of domestic workers who have actually returned from other destinations, predominantly from the Middle East and Asia. Indeed, when prompted, interviewees express being drawn to Hong Kong and Taiwan, the latter is believed to offer the highest wages regionally. When asked why

Singapore was chosen instead migratory choice behaviours are expressed temporally: Because Singapore is easy to find new job for the helper, because in Taiwan you have to wait also for 6 months because they do some medical. So it's really... strict, Singapore you just come (Interview #006-Joan)

Whilst there doesn't appear to be concrete evidence to suggest Taiwan is more difficult to enter, the general consensus is that Singapore is more accessible and therefore saves on migration time, training, and opportunity costs of foregone remittances. The active minimisation of migration time in order to maximise earnings is reminiscent of what Creswell (2006), terms 'principle of least net effort' the basic assumption that things (including people) don't move if they can help it (pp. 29).

In this vein, we might understand migrant agency as temporally contingent along her journey; 'last time', she is free to sell her labour power on the global market with the capacity to shop around for potential destinations. Postmigration, her agency is transferred into state labour control policies in the form of deportation mechanisms, employment laws (or lack thereof), and employer bonds and levies that ensure a devolved surveillance of the 'other'. In this respect, Singapore excels par excellence and the newly-arrived migrant sees her freedoms severely curtailed.

Unsurprisingly, it is owing to these structures of what we might term 'direct precarity' that they directly engineer the conditions that give rise to precarious migrant times, that there is a demonstrable decline in migrant agency upon arrival. In building a proxy lifecourse by assembling migrants by age and experience, it is difficult to assess in retrospect the degree to which migrants seek self-development, but it is fair to assume that the accessibility of self-development resources is heavily impeded. For Massey (1994), this is evident of the profoundly unequal 'power geometries' that underwrite mobilities; of the migrant's relation to the flows of exchange, 'some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it' (pp. 149). Needless to say, migrants 'last time' exhibit more of the characteristics of the latter.

A lack of cultural capital in the form of local knowledge, experience in conducting domestic chores, or information regarding employment rights and social capital for emotional support and release further compounds migrant agency suppression. Moreover, the lack of social capital further increases isolation during a period when homesickness takes a high emotional toll. This translates to an

inability, or unwillingness, to negotiate on basic rights: Ô

deductions. In a similar story, Mila, a college-educated worker with a strong employment background in administrative jobs found herself hopping to and fro contracts during her initial period in Singapore. Luckily, her employers gave her the "release papers" that are necessary for her to legally transfer to another employer, but the experience was tumultuous nonetheless. She had three employers, 1st June 15 2011 - mid July 2011. The locals not good for trusting. Very difficult for me, then adjustment is not so good" (Interview #009Mila)

Amalgamated within an elaborate architecture of labour control, direct precarity ensures that early "last time" migrant agency is, for the most part, suppressed. Indeed, systems of employment agency debt repayment exhibit remarkably similar traits to debt-bonded unfree labour in the grey economy (Bales, 1999). Predictably, migrants expressed mild interest in self-development at best. Far from the wishful thinking of learning or skills training, migrants are too distracted by the notion of rapid







Whether Irene and Josie's enthusiasm is shared amongst the rest of the domestic worker community is beyond the scope of this project. However, there seems to be a high cultural significance assigned to learning and education both in terms of perceived benefits as well as in abstract terms. Moreover, an underlying narrative of adventure and new experiences as the primary motivator for working in Singapore is also disproportionately attributable to migrants in her 'already' phase. Within survey data, 'new experiences/adventure' is expressed by a third of respondents. Lacking a longitudinal methodology, it would be interesting to investigate how much of those responses were due to social desirability bias, a retroactive claim on economic migration, or an earnest desire for 'adventure'. Understood within the migrant lifecourse, adventure and new experiences might be the luxuries afforded to those who have achieved sufficient migratory stability to allow her to pursue comfortably more self-interested endeavours. Nonetheless, for the 'already' migrants, the importance of self-development is usually expressed in terms of future income security or 'opening one's mind' as a



Of all interviewees, Rita is likely the most driven. Keen to make use of her ti

economic resources such as wages or savings (Bourdieu, 1986). However, in practice, it is difficult to fully separate the accumulation of cultural and social capital in migrant self-development much less express such accumulation in absolute economic terms; they are at once mutually constitutive and mediated through one another. This manifests in the word-of-mouth marketing and recruitment of ACMI students as well as the brokerage of favours and exchanges that result from migrant learning; it is not uncommon for students to offer to do someone's makeup in return for getting a haircut, for example. In this vein, self-development is not understood nor expressed exclusively in economic terms; welfare thus extends beyond the material.

Cecile, for example, recalls how her initial time in Singapore was marked by timidity and low self esteem. Here, self-development can yield real impacts on one's psychological welfare of belonging and selfhood: 'Yeah, learning is confident to myself, it's like I know how to stand on my own' (Interview #013

In both Marina and Shirley's testimonies, skills training at ACMI seems to be an attempt not only to "upgrade" oneself, but also to make up for lost time. The desire to "grow up" is referential to the sacrifice of their own development for the sake of their dependants before, during, and probably long after their migratory journeys. This is not to pander to the altruism rhetoric; in fact, there is an active undertone that they are deserving of an education, especially when so much of their own development is diverted temporally and economically for the development of others; it's high time they had a share of what it means to "grow up". Ricoeur's (1992) theory of narrative identity is relevant here. For Ricoeur, identity is managed through the calculated assemblage of discordant experiences, stories, actions and counterfactuals that express one's selfhood across a given temporality. Applied here, both Marina and Shirley's time

until how many years so you don't want to moveÉ my boss pay me is \$450.. for second employer, she started \$450, then after 1 year increase me \$25 every one year, become like \$550.. then \$550 I increase myself (Interview #001-Eliza)

In ÔalreadyÕ time, the structures that once stifled migrant agency and welfare are more pliable, able to be manipulated to produce spaces of negotiation and empowerment. Just as Rita chanced upon her employer who has proven to be a source of inspiration for her, so the productive risk of the migrant actor-network constellations can be mobilised for gain. By all measures, Eliza is a veteran domestic worker. Having been in Singapore for 15 years, Eliza has changed employers three times, predominantly on the basis of getting higher pay. In this vein Eliza is the perfect example of BourdieuÕs (1986) ÔembodiedÕ cultural capital: those internalised and lasting dispositions that manifest in confidence and will, in agency and II, in agency and

As long as they [employers] are good, they don't scold me, they don't ask me what I do, nagging me, I don't care about the money as long as.. for me as long as I can give money for my mother, okay fineÉ (Interview #010Marina).

This is understandable, within the stabilised 'already' time, there appears to be strong relationships between the workers and their employers: The Canadians [employers] are very good to me, actually I'll love themÉ They treat me like I'm family, I eat with them, especially the dinner. They don't like to eat it if I didn't eat with them. We sit on the table, the chair, like the family you knowÉ (Interview #007 Agatha).

In the same way one might be reluctant to talk money with close friends or family, so too are domestic workers, for the most part, unwilling to profit maximise on their cultural capitals for fear of harming the relationship with their employers. Indeed, the love and intimacy that some workers share with their employers in the case of the Juliet overrides her compulsion to return to her own family in the Philippines: 'don't want to leave Singapore, I don't want to leave mam [employer] because she's the only one home, so I will take careah!É (Interview #014Juliet)

Here, migrant welfare extends beyond the accumulation of skills and knowledge but, rather by accident, workers develop close bonds with their employers such that it overrides the profit motive, at least in the realms of employment. To this end, it must also be understood that sustained and stable relationships might produce higher overall net welfare for the migrant and so there is an inherent interest to stay put. Maria, for example, gets paid \$480SGD a month, but knows this to be below





mindful of the lived past and projectively oriented towards the "not yet" (pp. 362). In fear of returning to conditions of "last time", the appeal to the economic rhetoric is symbolic of migrants' desire for "progress" and reluctance to return to precarity. This often entails long-term economic strategies such as saving to prepare for the future, [if] I have no money and I don't want to come back here and work as a maid forever (Interview #02Rita).

Though one may progress beyond "last time", its threat is omnipresent within the migrant imaginary; we might therefore consider "last time" to be simply the time of maximum precarity. Moreover, for the migrant, her return to the economic is an appeal for progress beyond her "temporal domain" (ibid: pp. 362): "I want to be rich because I grow up, and my children struggle like me, I don't want that to happen to my children" (Interview #002Rita). Here, the threat of "last time" extends beyond the immediate temporality of the

Here, both workers have pursued self-development activities in Singapore and both do regularly save money, albeit in different amounts. For Melody, her 'imagined' time of purchasing a house is grounded in her conventional lifecourse of providing for her daughters and to have a durable asset; she plans to leave Singapore within five years. For Marina, her 'imagined' time of accruing savings in order to study for a teaching qualification fits with the 'return to the economic' narrative as compelled by the need for the generation of future incomes; she plans to leave Singapore in two years. Here, social desirability may play a part in crafting narratives that do not seem wholly sustainable, at least in Marina's case where negligible levels of savings negates any meaningful engagement with her own aspiration. This seemed to be a common theme within interviews; when asked about aspirations, savings, and the planned duration of their stay in Singapore, there appears to be a brutal mismatch between expectations, or aspirations and their economic reality.

Thus far, self-development has been upheld as a means of improving migrant welfare; self-development does not entail welfare as an inevitable end, but also self-development can also be a good in and of itself in the forms of embodied cultural capital. Throughout the paper, evidence for the welfare impact of self-development has been presented. However, if, for the sake of 'imagined' times, we return to the economic model, then it also entails a return to the matter of agency, with 'last time'. The great variations in migrant agency in pursuing their aspirations, superficially uniform as they may seem, precludes any concrete causality between migrant self-development and agency. Here, we return to Sen's (2004) notion of capabilities. For Sen, capabilities represent the attainable opportunities available to a person; if we consider cultural capital accumulation to be a way of 'opening doors', then self-development might produce greater opportunities for the migrant. However, that there are more doors does not make the migrant any more likely to walk through them. Whilst there are examples of success stories in the making within the interview sample, predictably Rita is one of them, as well as Maria; these stories seem to be anomalies rather than the norm. For both Rita and Maria, their success is premised on continued diligence and commitment to their migratory cause that cannot simply be reduced to agency alone. Rather, their 'success' is the temporal manifestation of agency, capitals, the social milieu, and luck. Throughout the proposed migrant lifecourse framework 'last time', 'already' time, and 'imagined' time there appears to be a slow divergence in migrant capabilities. From the unifying experience of structural constraints on agency during 'last time', to the differential exercise of sociocultural capitals gained from 'already' times, and finally the aspiration, yet to be affirmed 'imagined' time, the propensity for welfare slowly departs from one of assuredness to one that is increasingly contingent and uncertain.

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Findings revealed a very strong temporal dimension to both migrant pursuance of self-development and welfare; early migrants were primarily occupied with the accumulation of economic capital (or more accurately, the minimisation of economic expenditure). This proved counterintuitive; data shows that there is considerable scope for capitals conversion between the cultural and economic. Where migrants are concerned with economic utility, one would expect more interest in self-development, though this must also be understood within the stifling structures of agency inhibition during early stages of migration. Moreover, as migrants progress from periods of uncertainty and precariousness to ones of stability, migrants seem less concerned with economic utility. As results show, some migrants actively choose not to profit maximise through the negotiation of wages even if their capitals allow them to do, instead opting for 'safer' options such as staying with employers who pay sub-average wages; this is a testament to the comfort of safety.

In a way, this project's findings are an amalgam of existing literature on foreign domestic workers who are at once structurally disempowered (Anderson, 2000), but also capable of accruing welfare and capitals to better their position, whether socially or economically (Constable, 2007). Nonetheless, where existing literature tends to conceptualise the migrant as either/or, in terms of agency, this project has illustra

development, or indeed the suggested policies, guarantees welfare, but rather it allows for the maximisation of migrant capabilities to achieve welfare on their own terms.

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FDW interview schedule

Tell me about your family background

- ¥ Where do you live?
- ¥ What does your family do?
- ¥ How did you come to Singapore? Why did you come?
- ¥ Do you support anyone back home?
- ¥ Do you have siblings?
- ¥ How is the responsibility shared between you?
- ¥ What is your current relationship status?

What was your previous employment and educational history?

How important is ACMI to you?

- ¥ Who pays for you to attend?
- ¥ How did you hear about ACMI?
- ¥ What classes do you take at ACMI?
- ¥ How do you use your skills that you have learnt at ACMI?
- ¥ Has that had an impact on your time in Singapore?

Extra notes:

How important is it to workers that their migration has value-added components such as