Migration-decision making and social status: Cambodian female migrant workers in Malaysia

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By

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List of abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CDIR	Cambodia Development Resource Institute
CLC	Cambodian Labor Confederation
CPK	Communist Party of Kampuchea
DCCAM	Documentation Center of Cambodia
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
DoEM	Department of Employment and Manpower
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KUFNS	Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MoLVT	Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training
NACC	National Union Alliance Chamber of Cambodia
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
PRK	People’s Republic of Kampuchea
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia

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Chapter One

Introduction

Sokha is 30 years old, married, and comes from Kampong Cham Province. She is currently working as a domestic helper in Malaysia (Interview #01). Prior to working in Malaysia, she had worked as a domestic helper in Phnom Penh for several years, but was able to earn only 50,000 riels ($12.50 USD) per month. Her family was very poor and had a lot of debt. Her mother was not even able to buy ingredients for cooking and people in the village would not lend her any money. One day a broker came to her home and mentioned to her mother that domestic workers in Malaysia could earn $150 USD per month. Sokha's mother called her and asked if she would be willing to leave the country and work in Malaysia. Initially, Sokha was concerned about the prospect of working overseas because she is illiterate and had never traveled abroad. She was also afraid because she had heard stories about the excessive mistreatment of domestic helpers in Malaysia by their landlords.

Because of the dire financial situation of her family, Sokha finally decided to leave Cambodia and work in Malaysia. She felt if she committed herself to work hard, she could convince the landlord to like her and would not be at risk of abuse. While in Malaysia, she lived with her landlord's family and was assigned long working hours. She was not allowed to use her personal phone, severely limiting access to her family back home in Cambodia. After working for a while, she was able to send money home to help her family pay their debt and expand their

farmland. The living conditions of her family have been improving. Sokha said she felt proud of herself for being able to support the family and has received more respect from her family members as a result. After working in Malaysia for two years, she returned home and was greeted with a friendly reception from relatives and neighbors who visited, although she had never been greeted by them before.

This is just one among many other stories of female Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia, but what can we learn from her experience? This thesis provides an empirical understanding of both the migrant decision-making process at the household level and the social status of Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia. I decided to conduct this research study for several related reasons. The foremost reason is that there is relatively limited literature which explicitly addresses Cambodian female migration. Most of the existing studies which address Cambodian migration focus on the internal aspect, for example, workers in the garment and sex industries (Nishigaya, 2002; Derks, 2008; Hoefinger, 2011). In addition, studies of overseas Cambodian migrants tend to analyze non-gender-based issues, such as irregular recruitment and exploitation (Holliday, 2012), social adaptation of migrant workers (Chaisuparakul, 2015) and working conditions in Thailand (Walsh and Ty, 2011), psychological impacts on returnees (Meyer et al. 2014), and economic drivers (Suphal and Suvaṇṇāriddhi, 1999). The limited studies on Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia do not consider the role of women as decision makers or the effect of migration on their social status (Lee, 2007). Finally, but importantly, Cambodian women working in Malaysia have suffered abuse and exploitation, which prompted the Cambodian government to place a temporary ban on the migration of domestic workers to Malaysia from 2011 to 2016 (ILO, 2013b).

This introductory chapter begins with the research questions and significance of this study. Following the introduction is an explanation of migration motivation factors and decision-making. Although this thesis focuses on Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia, I think it is also important to understand the general cause of migration. In closing, I present the outline of my thesis.

Rationale, research questions, and significance of the study

To supplement the existing literature, I seek to provide an empirical understanding of the process involved in making the decision to migrate and the effect upon the social status (at the household level) of Cambodian female migrants who chose to work in Malaysia. My research aims to answer the three following related questions:

1) What are the contexts within which women negotiate the decision to obtain foreign employment?
2) How are decisions rendered within the household?
3) How does foreign employment affect the social and economic status of the female migrant upon her return?

The study is significant based on three major contributions. Firstly, this is a study of a nascent migrant-worker program. Other governments, including the Philippines, have been engaged in foreign employment programs for over four decades. Cambodia's migrant-worker program is relatively new compared to Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and especially, the Philippines. Consequently, Cambodians are in a position to better understand the context of migration within an employment program as it undergoes development. Secondly, because the migrant-worker program is so new,

both formal social networks and support systems for departing and returning migrant workers are only in their infancy. This study provides an opportunity to understand the specific problems migrant women are encountering, as well as possible solutions. Thirdly, this study addresses and documents potential transformations of gender relations. As research has shown in other contexts, employment abroad (especially for women) has a tremendous transformative effect on household relations. This study reveals insights into these transformations within the context of the developing migration program.

Motivating factors and decision-making

Many factors contribute to the decision for a worker to migrate. As cited in various studies, Chi and Voss (2005) note that factors include personal characteristics (age, education, income, family ties, social network, and residential preference), life-cycle status (marriage, divorce, childbearing, and retirement), and amenities (climate, crime rates, and natural beauty). Low education and a lack of employment opportunities in remote areas of Cambodia result in a surplus of unskilled workers who are not able to earn an adequate income to support their families (Henrich Boll Stiftung, 2015). As stated in the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (2003-2005), Cambodia is lacking a domestic employment market and thus Cambodian migrants seek jobs overseas to earn enough income to support themselves and their families. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MOLVT) strategic plan (2006-2010) considered the promotion of foreign employment policy and protection of migrant workers' rights as priorities (ILO, 2013). As a result, the number of Cambodian migrant workers steadily increased, while Indonesia temporarily postponed its migrant worker program in 2009 due to severe abuse against Indonesian migrant workers (Holiday 2012 cited from MOLVT, 2011).

While it is obvious that high income potential in the destination country plays a significant role (Wickramasekera, 2002; Baláž et al. 2016), Boyd (1989) suggests that the existence of a personal network and social relations has a major impact on migration decision-making. The study reveals that a social network helps connect people across space and can be a source of assistance. Friends and relatives who are already working in the destination country provide valuable information and serve as an anchor for the newcomer (Wickramasekera, 2002; Haug, 2008). In particular, this network helps reduce the cost and risk of migration, such as financing the travel, searching for a job and accommodation (Haug, 2008). These issues can be addressed within communities of migrants, former migrants or non-migrants at the origin and destination. The study argues that neither micro-level economic migration, which focuses on individual and structural conditions, nor a macroeconomic approach adequately explain migration motives. In the case of Indonesia, Elmhirst (2002, cited in Hoang, 2011) finds young single women migrate easily to work in export factories due to strong social networks within the village and the destination. In Thailand, Curran and Saguy (2001, cited in Hoang 2011) also note that relatives heavily influence the decision of the migrant's parents to permit their daughter to leave their home and work outside of the country.

In addition, in the context of migration decision-making, many different theories have been studied. Neo-classical economic theory suggests that migration decision-making is an individual choice, in which the migrants themselves are motivated to move due to their own personal gain in terms of financial and human capital (Todaro, 1976, cited in Gubhaju and De Jong, 2009). Other migration theories, such as the household strategy, suggest that other social and economic relationships outside of the individual migrant influence the journey and the household is the fundamental structure that embodies such relationships (Caces et al., 1985).

Mincer (1978, cited in Chi and Voss 2005) suggest that migration decision-making should be conducted at the household level rather than the individual level, since it is affects net family gain, not just gain for the individual. While it is believed that people act collectively within the family unit to maximize the expected income while minimizing the risk for their family member, Oishi (2002) points out that this is only an assumption due to the lack of fieldwork data from migrants to define the motivation for their decision to migrate. The following section will discuss why migration is indeed gender-based.

Outline of the thesis

In addition to Sokha's story, research questions and significance of the study, and general motivation factors of migration, as described above, Chapter Two provides an overview of existing literature on women's migration and decision-making, background information about Cambodia, gender and social status of Cambodian women, historical development of Cambodian migration, contemporary internal and external Cambodian migration, and migration to Malaysia. The literature reviews are based upon three main themes: women, migration and decision-making in general; Cambodian migration literature; and gender in a Cambodian context. Chapter Three focuses on methodology. It describes the site study, data collection and data analysis, and my positionality. Chapter Four outlines the results and discussion from the findings of this research study. More specifically, it discusses contexts of Cambodian migration to Malaysia, the decision-making process, and the social status of migrant workers. To conclude, Chapter Five summarizes the main findings, the limitations, and the future direction of Cambodian migration studies and literature.

Chapter Two

Migration: General, Cambodian context, and Cambodian migration to Malaysia

This chapter consists of six sections. First, it reviews existing studies on women's migration and decision-making in general. Second, it provides background information on Cambodia—its geography, history, and economics. Third, it explains gender and social status with regard to Cambodian women. Fourth, it provides an understanding of migration in a Cambodian context, which involves the history of war in the country. Five, it explores Cambodian migration, primarily through internal and external migration studies. More specifically, it focuses on Cambodian female migrant workers, recruitment and remedies, and related policies and actors. Last, it ends with a focus on Cambodian migration to Malaysia.

Overview of female migration, gender, and decision-making

In this section, I provide information on existing studies as general figures, as motivating factors in the decision-making process, and with regard to gender and migration.

General figures

Migration is a global phenomenon. Since 1960, the number of female migrant workers has increased to the same extent as their counterparts, steadily climbing to 48 percent by 1990 and 49 percent by 2000 (Piper, 2013). In Southeast and East Asia, the number of female migrants

has sharply increased since the late 1970s. The Philippines, for instance, has become the world's largest labor exporting country while Mexico is the second largest labor source (Piper, 2013).

In 2013, among an estimated 150.3 million migrant workers worldwide, about 8.5 million were women serving as domestic workers; 2 million (24 percent) were concentrated in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (ILO, 2015b). In Southeast Asia, there are 9.9 million international migrant workers and 6.9 million (half of whom are women) move across the countries within the region (UN Women, 2017). By 2017, there were about 164 million migrant workers of working age (15 years or older) worldwide (ILO, 2018). Male migrant workers represent 58.4 percent (95.7 million), whereas female migrant workers represent 41.6 percent (68.1 million). The World Bank (2019) estimates that official annual remittances sent to low and middle-income countries contributed $483 billion USD to their economies in 2017 and $529 billion USD in 2018 (a 9.6 percent increase year-over-year). At the regional level, growth in remittances for the same period reached almost 7 percent in East Asia and the Pacific and 12 percent in South Asia.

Gender and migration

Gender is a major component of migration and involves different aspects. First, to continue the discussion above, Oishi (2002) makes an argument based on her research on gender and migration that on one hand, young or unmarried women in the Philippines and Sri Lanka migrate partly to earn money to support the family but also for their own future. On the other hand, her study finds that married women in the Philippines and Sri Lanka are motivated to migrate in order to support the future of their children and manage the financial security of the family (Oishi, 2002).

The majority of migrant women (both single and married) make their own decision, at least in the context of the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Married women in the Philippines and Sri Lanka have the autonomy to migrate for the future of their family. However, some married women cannot exercise their own will and instead must follow the decision of their husband, due to the fact that they are bound together as a couple and want to avoid conflict.

Second, sexual vulnerability is a major gender issue associated with migration (Hoang, 2011). In evaluating migration cases in northern Vietnam, Hoang (2011) finds that migrant networks are not gender neutral. Men tend to be associated with a more extended network, whereas women are limited to family networks, which provide them with information, practical support, social protection and security, all of which eases many concerns for both the women and their family members. In a case study of migrant workers from northern Thailand, Sobieszczyk (2000) identifies the factors included among gendered labor demand of overseas employers as including safe working and living environments for young women, financial resources available to potential male and female migrants, and differences in social networks and previous overseas migration experience.

Third, in terms of its relation to social status (especially for female migrant workers), many studies on labor migration consider the impact on the economic side of migrant workers—their household and the societies of the receiving and sending countries. However, there are few studies on how economics really affects the social status of the migrant worker while working overseas. Existing studies focus primarily on the social impact upon the worker's return.

Remittances obviously represent the immediate impact of labor migration in many sending countries. In some countries of origin, remittances even constitute the largest source of revenue (Sijapati, 2015). Migrant women send a higher proportion of their income in a more

frequent manner compared to men (Sijapati, 2015:05 cited in FIDH, 2007; IOM and UN-INSTRAW, 2010). Migrant workers in Southeast Asia usually remit money for household expenses, purchase of consumer products, and financing children's education (Harkins et al., 2017). Aside from the economic considerations, the migrant worker may also remit skills, attitudes, and knowledge, all of which contribute to the home country's socio-economic development and transform gender inequality practices to some extent (Sijapati, 2015).

As a result of their economic contribution to their family and to society-at-large, the study on returning overseas Filipino workers found that the women had become more confident and independent compared to before their overseas employment (Yu, 2015). Migrant women gained more control and involvement in family decision-making (Harkins et al., 2017). In a study of labor migration in Southeast Asia, Harkins et al. (2017) reveals that employment abroad results in more control over household decision-making and greater agency for both male and female migrants upon their return. Female returning migrants felt more confident, were treated with more respect and gained influence over important decision-making (Harkins et al., 2017). Aside from the positive impact on the social status of migrant women, the study also confirms the existing stigma and gossip aimed at returning migrants within their communities in at least in four different countries: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Cambodian has a higher level of such discrimination, the study points out.

A brief history of Cambodia

Cambodia is a small nation situated in Southeast Asia and shares a border with Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand (see map 1). Due to the mighty Mekong River, Tonle Sap Lake, monsoon weather and flat topography, Cambodian has enjoyed a long agricultural tradition. During the

Angkorian period (802–1431), major, complex irrigation systems facilitated the practice of agriculture (Fletcher et al. 2008; Evan and Fletcher, 2015). Rice was able to be harvested three or four times per year (Daguan, 2007). While trading is known to have existed prior to the *Angkorian era*, Cambodians have primarily been subsistence farmers (Chandler, 2008). Trade, marketing, and commercial farming have been carried out by Chinese descendants. Significant Cambodian commodities include gold, silver, precious stones, silk, cotton, ivory, pepper, and rice, among others.

Map 1: A map of Cambodia (source: United Nations)

As the result of aggressions and invasions by its neighboring countries of Siam (Thailand) and Vietnam, Cambodia gradually declined until King Ang Duang requested status as

a French protectorate in 1853. During the French colonization (1863-1953), the population of Cambodia was an estimated 4.5 million. The majority of Cambodians were sustenance farmers, whereas Chinese-Cambodians controlled trade and commercial activities (Slocomb, 2003). Maize, paddy rice, fish, and rubber were major export items. After achieving its independence in 1953, Cambodia enjoyed a peaceful and prosperous period known as the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* regime (1955-1970), led by King Sihanouk. With a population of about 4.6 million at that time, Cambodia exported rice and rubber and received economic aid from the United States, China, France and other countries.

Due to the destabilization of Southeast Asia brought about by the Vietnam War, Cambodia endured a bloody civil war (1970-1975) between the Khmer Republic regime of Lon Nol (1970-1975), which was backed by the United States, and communist groups (later officially known as the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) and commonly referred to as the Khmer Rouge. As a result of the conflict, rice, maize, and rubber production declined, and the country became dependent on foreign aid from the United States, primarily in the sectors of agriculture, military and energy (gas) (Slocomb, 2003). On April 17, 1975, the CPK achieved victory over the Lon Nol regime and initiated the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) (1975-1979). The CPK military victory led to unprecedented mass internal migration, whereby millions of residents of the capital city Phnom Penh were forcibly evacuated from their homes and relocated to various remote areas of the country. During the DK period, at least 1.7 million people perished as a result of execution, starvation, forced labor, and untreated diseases. At the same time, intensive agricultural policies and practices were implemented to increase rice production for export (Tyner, 2017).

In 1979, in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge years, women represented two-thirds of the surviving population (Gough, 1986). Suffering from famine and in a state of humanitarian crisis, the regime of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK: 1979-1989) prioritized the restoration and increase in rice production to feed the starving population (Mason and Brown, 1983; Slocomb, 2003). Economic aid was received primarily from the Soviet Union and neighboring Vietnam. The prolonged conflict and instability finally came to an end through the intervention of a two-billion-dollar mission of the United Nations, with a charter to restore peace and democracy through the Paris Peace Agreement. This resulted in elections, the disbanding of the Khmer Rouge organization, and a governmental coup d'état in 1997 which set the stage for the current government which remains in power today (Chandler, 2008).

In the past decade, Cambodia has maintained a high economic growth rate of 7.8 percent (ADB and ILO, 2015). The Cambodian population has risen to 14.68 million, with 2.5 million households in rural areas and 0.66 million households in urban locations (ADB, 2014). The poverty rate fell sharply, from 47.8 percent in 2007 to 22.9 percent in 2009, 19.8 percent in 2011, and 18.9 percent in 2012 (ADB, 2014). The economy relies on four main sectors—garment manufacturing, tourism, construction, and agriculture (ADB and ILO, 2015). Garment manufacture and footwear have remained the backbone of the Cambodian economy, accounting for 10.2 percent of the nation's GDP and 80 percent of its total exports (ILO, 2015). By mid-2015, this sector employed over 600,000 Cambodian workers, 86 percent of whom were female (ILO, 2015). Its export value reached $3 billion USD in the first half of 2015.

Gender and Women's Social Status in a Cambodian Context

Cambodia is an Asian nation dominated by men and tolerates male superiority in its culture. There are strong attitudes of support toward dominant mail gender roles, due to the struggle against gender inequality and male privilege (Eng et al. 2010). Gender is a factor affecting violence against women in Cambodia (Surtees; 2003, Hill and Ly, 2004; Eng et al. 2010).

Cambodian women are traditionally bound by "*Chbab Srey*," the women's code of conduct, which defines appropriate and inappropriate social behavior for women. There are many rules imposed upon Cambodian women with regard to culturally-appropriate behavior within the household and in public situations. Some of these include, for example, instructions to respect her parents and husband, establish a peaceful and safe environment in the home, behave frugally, be soft and sweet in forgiving her husband, never reveal marital tensions to neighbors, move quietly around the house, be polite, avoid vulgarity, and be careful to preserve her dignity and the feelings of her husband (Kent, 2010; Brikell, 2011).

Traditional representations of women in Khmer proverbs include ‘‘men are gold; women are silver’’ and ‘‘men are gold; women are cloth,’’ both of which imply the vulnerability and inferiority of women (Hill and Ly, 2004). However, various measures have been introduced and implemented to promote gender equality and to empower women at various levels in Cambodia. For example, the Cambodian Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) has introduced a national women's program, *Neary Ratanak*, ("women are precious gems"), which presents women as diamonds which men should admire and respect (Hill and Ly, 2004). This has been part of the

national strategic policy, developed by the MoWA in partnership with relevant ministries and institutions for implemention nationwide.[1]

In 2007, *Chbab Srey* was removed from the school curriculum.[2] Although the process of change is not widespread yet, Cambodian society is transforming, especially among urban young women (Brikell, 2011). Migration has, in fact, made a significant contribution to this process. Many studies have pointed this out. Brikell (2011) notes that women's mobility and education are two emerging themes which have impacted the pattern of social life in Cambodia. As mentioned earlier, women decide to migrate in order to improve the family's standard of living (Sandy, 2006). Contemporary young Cambodian women from rural areas have the ability to utilize their networks and move though geographical space (rural to urban) to earn income for their families and adjust to modern life (Derks, 2008). Although *Chrab Srey* has been part of Cambodian culture since the 19th century, it is important to realize in Ledgerwood's (1994, cited in Nishigaya, 2002) that Cambodian women are known to have always been economically active and considered to enjoy more autonomy than their contemporary Asian counterparts. Women in a migration context in existing studies and in my study are surely making this more obvious to society.

Historical development of migration in a Cambodian context

Cambodian migration has both internal and external components. Historically, little has been mentioned regarding internal migration in Cambodia prior to independence in 1953. However, internal migration certainly occurred whenever leaders moved the capital city for

[1] More information of the strategies can be found within this following link http://www.kh.undp.org/content/cambodia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/cambodian-gender-strategic-plan---neary-rattanak-4.html

[2] Kounila, K. (2013, March 08). A final note: on trying to be the perfect woman. *The Phnom Penh Post.* Retrieved from https://www.phnompenhpost.com/7days/final-note-trying-be-perfect-woman

military defense reasons, for instance, from Angkor to Lovek to Oudong and finally to Phnom Penh. During French colonization, no internal migration was ever mentioned, but the French did bring Vietnamese into the country to work on Cambodian rubber plantations (Gottesman, 2004). During the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* regime, the Khmerization policy of King Sihanouk integrated highland tribal minorities into lowland areas in an effort to integrate them with the Cambodian Khmer majority (Uk, 2016). Some rural peasants moved to the capital to seek employment, like Chum Mey, for example (Chum, 2012).

The United States' aerial bombardment of Cambodia during the Vietnam War (1969-1973) and during the civil war between the Lon Nol government and Khmer Rouge (1970-1975) caused major internal migration in Cambodia. Three million civilians, half of whom were peasants, moved to Phnom Penh seeking food and shelter until they were forced to evacuate the city by the Khmer Rouge upon their victory on April 17, 1975. The residents were relocated and assigned to work-camps and cooperatives in provincial areas (Tyner et al. 2004). During their reign, the Khmer Rouge mobilized people throughout the country at various times and to various degrees. One such example was the mass evacuation by railcar to the Northwest Zone (DCCAM, 2014). The Khmer Rouge military leaders and cadres moved into Phnom Penh and ran the country after having forced the city's residents to relocate to the countryside (Tyner et al. 2014). In the rural locations, the population was treated as slave labor and often repeatedly relocated to work on building projects such as irrigation systems and other arduous tasks.

In 1979, when the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS) defeated the Khmer Rouge regime with the support of Vietnamese troops, the Khmer Rouge fled, forcing thousands of Cambodians to escape with them to the Cambodian-Thai border (Slocomb, 2003; Gottesman, 2004). Consequently, many Cambodians ended up in refugee camps in Thailand.

However, some people chose not to follow the Khmer Rouge and instead returned to their native village or to Phnom Penh to begin to rebuild the country. From the 1990s onward, internal migration has increased significantly, with the highest degree of concentration around the capital city of Phnom Penh and areas around Sihanouk Ville (ILO, 2007).

Migration from rural to urban areas, particularly to the capital Phnom Penh, increased by 70 percent (from 1 million to 1.7 million) between 1998 and 2013 (ADB, 2014). The driving forces behind the internal migration include chronic poverty, lack of employment, landlessness, indebtedness and natural disasters (ILO, 2013a). Many women relocated to Phnom Penh to seek work in the garment sector after the industry emerged as an economic opportunity in 1994 (Derks, 2008).

In terms of external migration, many Cambodians fled the dangers of the ongoing civil war and settled as refugees in Thailand during the 1980s and 1990s (Phalla et al. 2011). They lived in refugee camps along the Thai border before making their way overseas to various countries, including the United States, Australia, and many others. Furthermore, since the 1990s, many Cambodians have used informal channels to support themselves as undocumented workers in Thailand (Maltoni, 2007). As a neighbor of Cambodia, Thailand can easily be accessed through the provinces of Battambang and Banteay Meanchey (ILO, 2007); only 10 percent of the workers use official channels to seek employment there (ILO, 2013b).

After a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Thailand and Cambodia, the number of Cambodian migrant workers to Thailand using official channels increased 173 percent (from 4,116 in 2006 to 11,224 in 2010 and 16,837 in 2011) (ILO, 2013b). In Thailand, Cambodian workers are employed in the construction sector (55 percent), farming (16 percent) and factory work (15 percent) (ILO, 2016). Women tend to be employed as domestic workers, or

in grocery stores or the entertainment industry (ILO, 2013a). In 2008, it was estimated that Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand returned about $45 million USD to Cambodia in financial remittances (ILO, 2010).

In addition to Thailand, Cambodians have migrated to various other countries in search of work. For example, in 2011, there were 4,957 Cambodian migrant workers in the Republic of (South) Korea, of which 89 percent were male (ILO, 2013b, citing from MoLVT). From 2007 to mid-2012, 166 Cambodian men and 86 Cambodian women migrated to work in Japan (ILO, 2013b, citing from MoLVT). A recent report by Cambodia's Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MoLVT), which oversees internal and external migrations, states that in 2017, nearly 100,000 Cambodians migrated overseas for work, an increase of 12.6 percent compared to about 85,000 in 2016.[3] The destinations included Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Japan, Singapore, China's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and South Korea.

In 2013, it was estimated that Cambodian external migrant workers reached about 1.12 million (7.3 percent of the entire population) (ADB 2013 cited in ADB and ILO, 2015). In addition, external Cambodian migrant workers remit an estimated USD 300 million per year back to Cambodia (approximately 4 percent of the country's GDP in 2007) (ILO, 2009). However, complete and reliable statistical data regarding external migration remains unavailable due to the large numbers of unregistered migrant workers and the absence of data about their jobs and skill profiles overseas (ILO, 2012; 2013; ADB and ILO, 2015).

Illiteracy is a major problem for Cambodian migrant workers. It affects their ability to understand contracts, the nature of pre-departure training, methods of education for migrant

[3] Kunthear, M., (2018, March 13). Spike in migrant worker numbers. *The Khmer Times.* Retrieved from https://www.khmertimeskh.com/113661/spike-in-migrant-worker-numbers/

workers, as well as safety and labor rights (ILO, 2013b). The majority of external migrants from Cambodia are unskilled and thus unprepared for the jobs at their destination, unaware of their rights, and ill-informed of any associated risks, namely trafficking, exploitation, and abuse (ILO, 2007)

Contemporary Cambodian migration

Cambodian migration literature is limited with regard to female migrant workers. This section is divided into internal and external migration in a Cambodian context as described below.

Internal migration

Migration from Cambodia's rural to urban area (particularly the capital of Phnom Penh) increased from just 1 million to 1.7 million (70 percent) between 1998 and 2013 (ADB, 2014). This internal migration is highly driven by chronic poverty, lack of employment, landlessness, indebtedness and natural disasters (ILO, 2013a). However, this phenomenon is vital for maintaining the Cambodian labor supply (and therefore the underlying economy) and is characterized by four main aspects (ADB and ILO, 2015). First, internal and external migration has affected both young and old Cambodians. Second, internal migration follows a net rural-urban pattern. Third, economic migration has gained in importance. Finally, internal and external migration appears to be clustered in low-skilled workers.

According to ILO (2013b), migration in a Cambodian context tends to originate in families with surplus labor or in households with little or no land for farming. These groups of people represent a surplus at the household level, but not at the aggregate level. In addition, with regard to decision-making (whether economic, social, or political), migrant workers from rural

areas rarely break a common rule, which is to return and safeguard their subsistence farming whenever needed. The decision to send family members outside of the home village for employment is basically a temporary household strategy to deal with cash shortages during a slack period, which usually extends from January to April (ILO, 2013b). When considering whether to send family members outside of the area for work, villagers plan in advance to arrange for replacement labor needed in the fields, even if they have to hire workers. In most cases, it is known that,

> "Most migrant workers will return because of the deep cultural importance of family obligations and reciprocity. They may continue to work in the modern sector during off-peak seasons, but will return home to help on the farm when necessary." (ILO, 2013b:21)

In addition, there are some studies which specifically address female internal migration in Cambodia. Nishigaya (2002) focuses on migration, sex work, and HIV with regard to Cambodian women working in Phnom Penh. The study finds that many women migrating from rural areas to work in the garment (or other) sectors in Phnom Penh ultimately end up (directly or indirectly) in commercial sex work due to the deepening poverty of their families in rural areas and insufficient wages in the garment factories. Hoefinger (2011) studies Cambodia's 'professional girls,' young women engaged in multiple sexual or non-sexual transactional relations with western boyfriends in order to gain material benefits to support themselves and their families. The author's study provides that Cambodian women, who migrated from rural Cambodia, consider the role of bar girls as a subculture and a place to resist stereotypes. In this

way they can play with multiple identities to develop solidarity and secure material resources. Their complex lives, styles and rituals have been 'glocalized,' while their identities and sexualities have been hybridized.

In her study of sex workers in Sihanouk Ville, Cambodia, Sandy (2006) views prostitution as a form of labor, being produced and reproduced by a variety of gendered economic and social power relationships. She finds that the decisions of women to work in the sex industry were calculated and resolute. Their desire is to look after themselves, their children, husbands or lovers, their brothers and sisters, parents, and especially their mothers, for whom they feel a great debt of gratitude. Derks (2008) studies women working in the garment industry, prostitution and street trading and finds that women have the ability to expand beyond the village context and influence the change process to accommodate both their own modern life and the obligations and cultural ideals for family.

External migration

In addition to the information provided in the external Cambodian migration section in Chapter One, I address and categorize existing studies into four parts. First, a considerable number of studies focus on Cambodian migration in Thailand. An early work by Sophal and Sovannarith (1999) on Cambodians from fourteen villages in Battambang Province who migrated to Thailand indicates that regardless of their illegal status, migration to Thailand provided employment to a large number of poor Cambodians, especially those in areas bordering Thailand. The study reveals that workers risk various forms of harassment and arrest by Thai police. According to this study, some reports even indicate that women were raped by Cambodian men in Thailand and Thai border police or drugged to work longer hours.

Hing et al. (2011) finds that irregular Cambodian migration arises from chronic poverty, lack of employment and economic hardship in communities of origin, restrictive immigration policies in labor-receiving countries, and lengthy, complex and expensive legal recruitment. The study proposes three measures, namely, addressing the causes, strengthening protection and enhancing international cooperation. Many Cambodians take advantage of irregular channels; as CDIR (2009) notes, the legal channel costs $ 700 USD, whereas the illegal one costs only $100 USD. The study further suggests that there should be a defined migration policy with specific laws as well as a separate department of the MoLVT to deal with migration, considering that the country has approximately 200,000 undocumented migrant workers. With regard to the fishing industry in Thailand, Cambodian migrant workers are found to have consulted among household members, including wives, siblings, and parents (IOM, 2014). Particularly, men or young men who want to work in the fishing industry seek approval from their family members first, whereas in other cases they just approach recruitment agencies directly.

According to Walsh and Ty (2011) workers in Thailand face discrimination, payment issues and lack of legal protection due to their illegal status. On average, these workers send fifty percent of their salary back home due to the economic stress of their families. Chaisuparakul (2015) finds that prolong periods of unemployment in Cambodia lead to an increase in Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand. The integration of Cambodian migrant workers into Thai society is impeded by the language barrier, but this is usually a very short-term challenge. Other challenges arise from Cambodians' sensitivity to criticism based on their nationality, and the fact that Thai employers' prioritize production quotas over consideration for the culture and sensitivities of their migrant workers. Aside from their research on issues involving migrant workers in Thailand, Meyer et al. (2014) have studied mental health issues of Cambodian

migrant workers returning from Thailand. The studies find that communities seriously impacted by irregular migration experience a range of many poverty-related conditions—socio-economic deprivation, domestic violence, alcoholism, and lack of access to basic services—which have an impact at both the individual and community level.

Second, there are three studies which have addressed Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia. Holliday (2012) notes that the outdated and weak regulatory framework of the Cambodian government has enabled recruitment agencies in the private sector to exploit recruited workers. Thus far, there have been reports of underage recruitment through identity theft and the entry of incorrect ages in family books (Malaysia's required age is 21). There have also been problems with worker rights associated with contract language and training in practical skills, language, lessons on health and safety, cultural differences, legal status of migrant workers, confiscation of passports by employers in Malaysia, and repatriation by limited Cambodian embassy staff. The study identified three main issues: agreement on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Malaysia, strengthening of the regulatory framework (including standardizing contracts) and improving the quality of pre-departure training.

Sok (2017) finds that Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia work in three distinct capacities—as self-employed businesspeople, domestic helpers, and general workers. Their rights are not well-protected since the labor laws established to guarantee appropriate working and living conditions are not sufficiently enforced. Unregistered workers are at increased risk of complications associated with legal repercussions and working conditions. In addition, expensive working permits and irresponsible recruiting agencies play major roles in creating social vulnerabilities for Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia.

Having studied the impact on the children of migrant workers in Malaysia, Hong et al. (2016) finds that Cambodian women seek jobs in Malaysia because economic conditions in Cambodia do not allow them to earn a sufficient living to their raise family and better alternatives exist in Malaysia. While both documented and undocumented workers moved to Malaysia due to their embedded network (spouse, relatives, and friends), undocumented workers faced many more challenges than documented ones. As the minimum wage is 900 Malaysia ringgit ($215 USD), women tend to be able to save money and send home remittances based upon the extent of their overtime shifts. The money earned by the Cambodian women in Malaysia has an impact on the well-being of their children who remain behind in Cambodia.

Third, in terms of recruitment, from 2008 to 2010, the licensed recruitment agencies increased from 18 to 31 (ILO, 2013b). Currently there are 39 agencies, 25 of which are members of the Association of Cambodian Recruitment Agencies. Those working in the Thai fishing industry are usually recruited through informal channels by brokers who travel directly to the villages to recruit them (Derks, 2010; IOM, 2014). Recruiters are mostly former fishermen who understand the work requirements of that industry, and there are no formal contractual bonds. However, Cambodian workers have been known to face extremely exhausting and hazardous conditions working on Thai fishing boats, such as resting only three or four hours per day and having their freedom restricted upon arriving offshore.

Fourth, according to the MoLVT strategic plan for 2006-2010, that organization is responsible for the promotion of foreign employment through public and private employment services. As such, they need to ensure that the following specific tasks are accomplished: improving the management of foreign employment, expanding the protection of migrant workers, developing a stronger inter-ministerial coordination, and establishing close international

cooperation (ILO, 2013b). In particular, the Department of Employment and Manpower (DoEM) of the MoLVT is responsible for governing labor migration.

Since 2011, the MoLVT has worked to increase protections for migrant workers prior to their departure by ensuring that private recruitment agencies follow the minimum requirements to obtain a license. The MoLVT monitors the operation of the agencies and suspends their license if they do not comply (RGC, 2014). Basically, the RGC monitors the recruitment process of the private agencies, provides pre-departure training, regulates the migration cost, provides assistance to migrants of every status, facilitates the complaint mechanism, etc. (RGC, 2014). Many sub-decrees have been issued and adopted. For example, in August 2011 Sub-Decree No. 190 on *Management of Sending Cambodian Workers Abroad t*hrough private recruitment agencies was adopted, ensuring the safety and protection of migrant workers overseas. In September 2012, the MoLVT established a working group whose mission is the suppression of human trafficking, smuggling, labor and sexual exploitation of women and children (ILO, 2013b). In addition to collaboration and cooperation with related NGOs in Cambodia and Malaysia, the Cambodian government has established the Cambodian Labor Confederation (CLC), the National Union Alliance Chamber of Cambodia (NACC), and the Cambodia Confederation of Trade Unions (CCTU) to promote a rights-based migration policy, network, and education.

Cambodian migration to Malaysia

According to Sok (2017), there have been two waves of Cambodian workers to Malaysia. The first group were Cambodian Muslims (commonly known as Khmer Islam or *Cham*) who began migrating between 1979 and 1993. They left Cambodia to escape political upheaval,

received refugee status and then subsequently brought their family members. The second group consisted primarily of domestic and factory workers who migrated from 1998 to 2016.

In 1997, Cambodia established a bilateral agreement with Malaysia to send migrant workers to the country through two recruitment agencies beginning in 1999 (Hatsukano, 2015, cited from the Asia Foundation, 2011; Chan, 2009; Hing et al., 2011). In 2006, the number of migrant workers in Malaysia who were processed through official channels was 1,690 (ILO, 2007), half of whom were women (Sophal, 2007). As indicated above, the number of individuals serving as migrant domestic workers has increased significantly. Holiday (2012, cited in MoLVT, 2011) notes that such numbers increased from 5,873 in 2009 to 27,995 in 2010, with 85 percent female. ILO (2013b) data indicates that the number increased from 10,165 in 2008 to 30,197 in 2010 and 33,707 in 2011. In 2009 and 2010, female domestic workers represented 84 and 73 percent, respectively, of the entire number of Cambodian migrants working in Malaysia (ILO, 2013b).

However, in October 2011, the Cambodian government imposed a temporary ban on the migration of domestic workers from Cambodia to Malaysia due to various reports of abuse and exploitation (ILO, 2013b). This ban prompted Malaysian employers to seek extensions of the contracts of female Cambodian domestic workers in Malaysia. In December 2015, a new Memorandum of Understanding on labor cooperation was agreed upon between Cambodia and Malaysia.[4] The following table, kindly provided by the MoLVT official, provides detailed information of number of official Cambodian migrant workers to Malaysia.

Table 1 below shows the numbers of Cambodian workers who migrated to Malaysia from 1998 to 2018 to serve in the country's domestic and industrial sectors. In the first two years

[4] Australian Aids: Triangle in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_580139.pdf

(1998 and 1999), all female migrants worked in domestic service in Malaysia. Their numbers have always exceeded those for men. A sharp increase in the number of women migrating for domestic work in Malaysia took place from 2005 (1,776) to 2010 (16,394). In 2011, 3,510 Cambodian women migrated as Malaysian domestic workers. The government announced a ban on such migration to Malaysia on October 14, 2011. Since that time, no women have left Cambodia for domestic work in Malaysia, only for industrial employment.

Table 1: Statistic of Cambodian migrant workers to Malaysia (source: MoLVT)

Year	**Domestic worker**			**Industrial/Company**			**Total**		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
1998	120		120				120		120
1999	86		86				86		86
2000	82		82	113	307	420	195	307	502
2001	393		393	111	342	453	504	342	846
2002	437		437	366	246	612	803	246	1049
2003	842		842		73	73	842	73	915
2004	582		582	122	105	227	704	105	809
2005	1008		1008	301	467	768	1309	467	1776
2006	1141		1141	318	231	549	1459	231	1690
2007	2114		2114	931	174	1105	3045	174	3219
2008	3360		3360	19	53	72	3379	53	3432
2009	8114		8114	692	876	1568	8806	876	9682
2010	11918		11918	1954	2522	4476	13872	2522	16394
2011	3510		3510	384	457	841	3894	457	4351
2012				70	110	180	70	110	180
2013				28	62	90	28	62	90
2014				290	180	470	290	180	470
2015				585	222	807	585	222	807
2016				93	30	123	93	30	123
2017				7	20	27	7	20	27
2018				3	6	9	3	6	9
Total	**33707**	**0**	**33707**	**6387**	**6483**	**12870**	**40094**	**6483**	**46577**

Chapter Three

Research Methodology, Narrative Analysis, and Positionality

This chapter consists of three sections, research methodology, data analysis and my positionality. Firstly, it discusses the methods applied to this study, which include site study, data collection, archival research, site observation, and in-depth interviews. Secondly, it describes the narrative approach used for analyzing collected interviews. Lastly, it concludes with how I position and relate myself within this study.

Research Methodology

This research applies qualitative methodology to understand the experiences of female Cambodian migrant laborers in the context of migration decision-making at the household level and the effect upon the social status of the migrant worker upon their return from employment in Malaysia. My field study took place in two countries—Cambodia and Malaysia. Research methods employed in this study include archival research, site observation and in-depth interviews as described below.

Site study

As indicated above, this research was conducted in Malaysia and Cambodia. I chose Malaysia as my study location for three related reasons. Firstly, Malaysia is one of the primary destinations for labor migration to developing nations (Testaverde et al. 2017), ranking as one of the top five destinations for migrant workers in Asia (Sok, 2017). Secondly, Malaysia is among

the worst countries for labor migration due to poor working conditions, high stress, and lack of medical care for migrant workers (Sok, 2017). At the same time, Cambodian migrant workers are among the most vulnerable groups under such circumstances because most of them are unskilled workers. Thirdly, the majority of Cambodian migrant workers to Malaysia are women working in the industrial sector (as general workers) and domestic work (as domestic workers/ helpers/maids) (MoLVT, 2018). The domestic work has been performed by women from 1998 through 2018, despite the fact that there have been many reports of mistreatment and exploitation of the migrants. Domestic workers were determined to be the most vulnerable group (Lee, 2006).

Map 2: A map of Malaysia showing Penang northwest and Johor southern part near

Singapore (source: http://www.malaysia-maps.com)

Specifically, this research was conducted in the Malaysian states of Penang and Johor, where Cambodian women work as shop assistants and garment factory workers. I was provided with contact information for groups of women working in these two locations by representatives of local NGOs in Cambodia. I then made contact with one of the migrant workers in Malaysia to gain an understanding of their schedule and working hours before determining the feasibility of doing field work in Malaysia.

In Cambodia, I selected two provinces—Prey Veng and Kampong Cham—because Kampong Cham is a large province with a significant population and borders Prey Veng, which is relatively small and less populated. Coincidentally, many Cambodian female migrant workers I contacted and interviewed were natives of these two provinces. In addition, the addresses provided for the family members of the migrants in these provinces were accessible and suitable for my timeframe and research budget.

Data collection

My data collection consists of archival research, site observation, and in-depth interviews. The primary data include archival research, observation, and in-depth interviews; and the secondary data are primarily existing studies (published journals and books) and reports from various institutions. Specifically, the Malaysian research is conducted in Penang State (northwest peninsula) and Johor State (southern peninsula), where women are employed primarily as domestic workers and garment factory workers. I made two field trips to Cambodia during the summers of 2017 and 2018 to conduct archival research at various NGOs and the MoLVT, as well as to interview the key informant groups. During the summer of 2017, I made a two-week

visit to the states of Penang and Johor in Malaysia to observe and establish a relationship with the female migrant workers before requesting and conducting the interviews. Detailed information on the three related methods is described below:

Archival research

Archival research plays a vital role at this stage of the study. It provides insight into my first research question—determining the social, cultural, political, and economic criteria that influence women's decisions to migrate abroad for employment (Ogborn, 2010). In addition to literature on migration (and Cambodian migration in particular) available in libraries and online, archival research was carried out in Cambodia in order to access official documents such as state policies, the statistical migration flow and relevant reports from the MoLVT. Specifically, I was able to review the most recent statistical data regarding Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia and the MoU between the Cambodian and Malaysian governments—documents which are not available online. In addition, I was able to conduct archival research at NGOs affiliated with migration issues to gather valuable information, including contact information for migrant workers in Malaysia as well as some returnees.

Many studies have used archival research to study migration topics. Cantú et al. (2009) conducted archival research on organizations that work with gays and lesbians to better understand the context of gay migration and examine how sexuality has impacted the migration process. Koh (2017) conducted research on the legacy of British colonialism and the culture of migration, using archival research to analyze interview data and gain insight into the colonial history of Malaysia and Singapore at the National Archives in London, the library of the National University of Singapore, as well as the migration archives of the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office. Garcés-Mascareñas (2012) also used archival research to collect primary data. Specifically, the author was seeking statistical data for outcomes of migration policy and the number of migrants each year through news articles that contained statements by politicians, representatives of trade unions and migration organizations. Thompson (2009) used archival research to collect primary data on the role of former Kyrgyzstan-United States labor migration and gain insight into the understanding of migration laws and procedures of the two countries.

Following the methods of these previous studies, I am confident that archival research will contribute to the process of acquiring primary data and examining the circumstances of women in the context of Malaysian and Cambodian migration policies. Specifically, I contacted local NGOs in Cambodia and requested the opportunity to conduct archival work in their organizations. I received welcoming assistance from representatives of the MoLVT and various NGOs which resulted in useful and updated data for this study.

Site observation

Site observation enabled me to better understand the daily life, activities and behavior of the female migrant workers and their family members back home (during the absence of their daughter or wife) (Ritchie et al., 2013). Observation was conducted at the residences of female migrant workers in the states of Penang and Johor in Malaysia, and in the provinces of Prey Veng and Kampong Cham in Cambodia (where family members of the migrants reside). This approach enabled me to become familiar with the geographical location of the female migrant workers in Penang and Johor states and furthermore, to observe their living conditions and behavior. Specifically, I was able to ascertain the ways in which the workers build relationships with each other and with their families, and how they perceive their status as

the breadwinner of the family. Likewise, my site observation in Prey Veng and Kampong Cham allowed me to learn about the living conditions and daily life of migrants' family members back home, as well as the family's attitude toward their daughter or niece. Moreover, the site observation assisted me in making connections and ensuring availability of research participants.

Figure 1: Living condition of migrant in Johor State (source: author)

During my two-week field work in Malaysia, I remained at the migrants' residences until around 11:00 p.m., because most of them work overtime and do not usually return home until 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. Thus, I would converse with the workers who returned earlier while waiting for the others. I helped them cook and shared dinner with them. In doing so, I was able to

establish a better rapport than if I had just begun my interviews immediately. I could sense the trust developing between us, considering that we had never known each other previously. Through this camaraderie, they developed a willingness to share their stories, even beyond what I needed to know.

Figure 2: Living condition of migrant workers in Penang State (source: author)

Previous studies on migration have used site observation, among other methods, to build a relationship with research participants. For instance, research on the process of migration in Kyrgyzstan in International Migration, Sagynbekova (2016) points out that site observation provides the advantage of observing the family members of households from which workers have migrated to Moscow. The author faced the challenge of obtaining contact information for

the workers. By visiting the household residents in Kyrgyzstan and explaining the nature of the research several times, the author was able to learn how the household communicated with their family members via phone. The effort was worthwhile and the author eventually was able to obtain contact information for the workers and interview them in Moscow.

In-depth interview

The interview is the most common method used in qualitative research to acquire detailed information and clarification (Ritchie et al., 2013). It is an effective approach for filling the knowledge gap of interviewees as well as empowering them to speak up (Dunn, 2005). As this study seeks to understand the first-hand experiences of female migrant workers and their household members in decision-making, the in-depth interview method allowed me to record their responses in great detail.

Prior to the field trip, I anticipated conducting interviews with at least 33 people, represented by Cambodian female migrant workers in Malaysia, their family members in Cambodia (especially mothers), returnees, and representatives of the MoLVT and associated NGOs and recruitment agencies. As a result of two field trips to Cambodia and one to Malaysia, I was able to interview ten female migrant workers in Malaysia and eight family members in Cambodia. I was not able to enlarge the interview pool because of family relationship considerations of the female migrant workers. Some workers specifically requested that I not interview their family members, and I fully understood and respected their decision.

In addition, the snowball sampling method worked well with Cambodian female migrant workers, but not with the returnees. As a result, I was able to interview only one returnee. I obtained contacts for some returnees from their peers and from NGOs, but two main issues arose

to preclude the chance of conducting interviews with them. Firstly, some had changed their address and/or phone number, which made it difficult for me to contact them. Secondly, many had family and personal commitments which conflicted with my work schedule. Thirdly, a few of them had migrated to Korea, where migrants can earn a higher salary than in Malaysia. As for the third group of members of associated organizations, I was able to interview one representative of an NGO, two staff members of the recruitment agencies, and four officials.

The first component includes interviewing women who are currently working in Malaysia. These interviews addressed research questions one and two, as described above. The second component involves tracing the migrant women's family networks and the returnees. I was able to interview members of their households in Cambodia as well as a returnee to understand their perceptions and roles within the household, as described in research question three. The in-depth interviews lasted from thirty-minutes to one hour, using a semi-structured approach. This approach is vital for this topic because I refrained from using any guiding questions and allowed the subjects to describe their own personal experiences. In every case, I tried to be flexible with their responses to ensure that all research questions were answered (Bernard and Ryan, 2009).

Many studies on labor migration use interview as a main method of research. Lever and Milbourne (2015) use a semi-structured format to interview government officials, trade union representatives, members of voluntary organizations, health officials, and migrant workers. In a study on Malaysian labor migration policy, Benjamin (2016) conducted interviews with Malaysian authorities, industry representatives and migrant workers. In a study on labor organization of South China migrant workers, Chan and Ngai (2019) interviewed workers in two factories which experienced a strike. In a study about free time of migrant workers in Korea, Lee

et al. (2016) interviewed migrant workers about their participation in leisure activities and some of the challenges they encountered. Hoang (2009) conducted interviews with workers who are considering migrating overseas for work to ascertain the feelings of household members on the decision-making process and thus shed light on gender and migration decision-making.

In addition, many studies on Cambodian migration also use the interview method. They include the study on social adaptation of migrant workers in Thailand (Chaisuparakul, 2015), environmental distress and motivation for migrating to Thailand (Bylander, 2015). Hong et al. (2016) interviewed female migrant workers in Malaysia whose children live with them, as well as female migrants who left their children behind in Cambodia, to better understand the impact of Malaysian labor migration on the women and children involved.

The interview data is collected through two purposeful samplings, such as key informant and snowball sampling. The key informant method was employed with an official of MoLVT, a representative of a recruitment agency and an NGO director. These people have considerable expertise and their experiences yielded a good deal of insight regarding the issue of migration. For the NGO staff member, I used the snowball-sampling strategy (Patton, 1990), requesting their assistance to identify women from the Cambodian provinces of Prey Veng and Kampong Cham who are working in the Malaysian states of Penang and Johor. Since this thesis seeks to understand the dynamics of power in decision-making within the household, I added a follow-up question about the decision-making process of migrant workers and their family members to ensure accuracy of the analysis.

After the interviews, I transferred data (photos and recorded MP3 files) into my encrypted hard drives and transcribed them. Original names of the interviewees were renamed, and their family members were named after their daughter, for instance, Saory's mother. A

codebook was developed to identify themes, for example, family background, recruitment processes, and various experiences while working in Malaysia as women. Validity was verified based on the consistent patterns provided by the participants.

Data Analysis and Narrative in Migration Study

According to Tyner (2002), migration is a contextualized understanding process rather than just a moving one. My aim in this research is to reveal and understand the life experiences of female migrant workers. Therefore, I see significant benefits in the narrative approach. Narrative is broadly defined as "the telling of a story to make known or convey information" (Berger 1997, cited in Wiles et al. 2005). The study indicates that most researchers accept that narrative presents a consequence of the connected events with structural coherence (Wiles et al. 2005 cited in Labov 1972). In addition, researchers make the argument that narrative is defined as the involvement between an event and the consequence or relation between events (Wiles et al. 2005).

The narrative approach has been employed for years in various disciplines, including anthropology, education, and cultural studies (Eastmond 2007; Wiles et al. 2005). For instance, narrative is popular in the study of living history to enhance understanding of the diverse aspects of human life in the context of historical processes, psychological development, and culture (Eastmond, 2007). Likewise, population geographers have also employed the use of narrative in research, particularly in migration studies (Tyner 2002, cited in Halfacree and Boyle, 1993; Miles and Crush, 1993; Vandsemb, 1995; Boyle et al., 1998; Watkins, 1999). As Wiles et al., (2005) explain, narrative is created to challenge the interpretation of the interview and conversation form in order to understand the situation of the speaker or the interviewee.

The narrative approach is a means for the individual to relate his or her experiences in a way that he or she understands through personal experience (Moen, 2006). Likewise, in the study of migration experience, Vandsemb (1995:411) explains, "in migration research, the narrative or the story approach has the potential of capturing the verity and the indeterminacy of migration's experiences and the complexity of the decision to migrate, aspects that the quantitative approach cannot reveal to the same degree." The author continues by stating that narrative is the telling of a story in words and events chronologically, thus it is a beneficial method for use in migration studies and development geography. Vandsemb (1995 cited in Miles and Crush, 1993) points out that narrative is a technique for revealing hidden stories and giving the marginalized a voice to be heard, because in migration studies the stories of the people are vital. Therefore, the narrative method plays a credible role in understanding an individual's personal situation and how it may ultimately lead to the decision to migrate (Vandsemb, 1995).

Though the narrative approach is a useful method to employ in migration studies, its benefit is still limited. As Wiles et al., (2005) point out, using the narrative approach might lead the researcher to discard the distinction of a participant's presentation of themselves and their experience because the researcher might decide to emphasize a part of the story less meaningful to the participant. In another direction, Tyner (2012 cited in Vandsemb, 1995) suggests that the narrative could represent the story over its reality. Narrative in qualitative research is usually criticized over its generalizability because the data alone cannot give an explicit conclusion of the research Watkins (1999, cited in Tyner, 2002). Therefore, it is argued that the presentation of narrative only provides insight into experience and its interpretation (Tyner, 2002)

Thus, in this research I use narrative to reveal the stories of Cambodian female migrant workers in Malaysia in order to understand the decision-making process at the household level

and the impact of their decision to migrate on their social status and gender role. I do not intend to interpret the decision-making process of women who migrate to Malaysia in general. My aim is to ascertain what is really happening at the familial level during the migration decision-making process and to better understand the changes in social status within Cambodian society for those women who choose to migrate overseas for employment.

Positionality

Positionality has been addressed as one of the components in geography research. According to Chacko (2004:52), positionality refers to "aspects of identity in term of race, class, gender, caste, sexuality and other attributes that are markers of relational position in society, rather than intrinsic qualities." Reflecting on the positionality reflects the identity of the researcher and enables the research process to proceed smoothly and in a meaningful way (England, 2006; Sultana; 2007).

In my case, I see myself as someone who is well-positioned to conduct the study by talking with and collecting data from the subjects in order to share their voices and experiences with a general audience. Firstly, gender does have an impact on research interest as well as the research process itself, as pointed out by Kusek and Smiley (2014) in their research on gender and positionality in cultural geography research. In their study, the authors, as women, could easily contact and gain access to information from the female subjects. My case study represents a similar situation. In addition to being a native Cambodian woman, I was born and raised in a poor family in a remote area of Cambodia. I understand the feelings associated with being a woman living far away from one's family. Although I moved to the capital of Phnom Penh in pursuit of university degree rather than for employment, I understand perfectly how it feels to

rent a small room and live with several other women. I worked and studied at the same time and experienced financial hardship. As a result, my interaction and conversation with the Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia and their family members in Cambodia, especially the mothers, went so well that I was able to glean a good deal of personal information about their lives prior to, during, and after working in Malaysia.

Furthermore, I have had extensive personal and professional experience communicating and working with women, including survivors of traumatic experiences during the Cambodian genocide and individuals who have experienced contemporary human rights and violence-related issues in Cambodia. This personal experience resulted from my affiliation with two renowned non-governmental institutions in my country—the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) and the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR). In addition, I have known and communicated with external Cambodian migrant workers, as many of them are my neighbors and friends, prior to conducting this research. In short, my experiences and identity as a Cambodian woman makes me comfortable and suitable for carrying out this research on Cambodian female migrants in Malaysia and their families in Cambodia.

Chapter Four

Result and Discussion

Table 2 below lists the Cambodian female migrant workers interviewed for this research study. There are ten migrant workers in Malaysia (five single and five married) and one returned migrant (married), all of whom worked in Malaysia between 2005 and 2015. Specifically, two women arrived in Malaysia in 2015; five women arrived in 2014; one woman arrived in 2013; one woman arrived in 2010; one woman arrived in 2007; and one woman arrived in 2005.

Table 2: Cambodian female migrant workers in Malaysia and returned migrant (source: author)

No	Name	Occupation	Age	Marital Status	Arrived in Malaysia
1	Sokha	Domestic worker	28	S	2007
2	Nary	Factory worker	29	M	2013
3	Kunthea	Factory worker	21	S	2014
4	Lida	Factory worker	32	M	2015
5	Seyha	Factory worker	21	M	2015
6	Sokcheng	Factory worker	28	M	2014
7	Rana	Factory worker	27	S	2014
8	Saory	Factory worker	20	S	2014
9	Kanha	Factory worker	37	M	2005
10	Leaphy	Factory worker	20	S	2014
11	Chantha	Factory worker	34	M	2010

As this thesis seeks to understand the decision-making process and social status of Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia, the findings reveal that migrants choose to migrate and obtain employment overseas due to poverty, better job opportunities in Malaysia, and migration and network and risk evaluation. The decision-making process itself is found to be different

between married and single migrants. Based on the experiences of the migrant workers, the findings show the changed relationship between their economic contribution and their social status as women within the community.

This chapter consists of three sections. First, it discusses the contexts within which Cambodian women are enabled and motivated to migrate to Malaysia. It details three main points, namely poverty, improved job opportunities, and migration network and risk evaluation. Second, it examines the decision-making process at the household level and explains how decisions are made differently between single and married women. Finally, it ends with a discussion regarding how the social status of the women working in Malaysia is impacted by their sacrifice and hard work abroad upon their return to Cambodia.

Contexts of migration to Malaysia

As mentioned above, this study identifies three main contexts—poverty, improved job opportunities, and the migration network and risk evaluation—as the primary contributing factors considered by Cambodian women when making the decision to serve as a migrant worker in Malaysia. Each of those factors is described below.

Poverty

As pointed out by Multoni (2007), migrant workers decide to leave their home country and seek work elsewhere due to poverty, landlessness, unemployment, debt, and natural disaster. The collected narratives confirm that poverty is a highly motivating factor in the decision to migrate. In this study, poverty was the primary catalyst which pushed the Cambodian women to leave their families and jobs in Phnom Penh (and throughout Cambodia) to work in Malaysia.

The types of poverty and financial hardship and the related experiences of the migrants are similar in some ways, but different in others. For example, nine of the women worked in Phnom Penh (eight as garment workers and one as a domestic worker) except Linda. Linda, aged 32, had formerly worked in Thailand with her husband, but they were cheated by their employer there, having been denied their salary due to their unregistered status. She said,

> *Before coming to Malaysia, my husband and I worked in Thailand for several months, picking fruit and working in a construction unit. However, we were cheated by the manager and not given any salary because we were unregistered workers and had no passport. We were broke and started contacting my sister-in-law and her husband, who are working in Malaysia, to get some money so that we could return home to Cambodia. (Interview #04).*

Three of the workers were in such serious debt that their parents' income, combined with the salary from their job in Phnom Penh, was not sufficient to pay the interest and principal on loans from businessmen in their hometown. For example, Sokha is 30 years old, married, and comes from Kampong Cham Province. She is currently working as a domestic helper in Malaysia. She said,

> *My family lives in a very small house and owns a small amount of land, just big enough to build a house. We are the poorest family in the village and my mother was not even able to buy or borrow cooking ingredients from her neighbors. Furthermore, people do not want to lend any money*

> *to my mother because they don't believe she will be able to pay it back. I worked as a domestic worker in Phnom Penh since I was 17 years old, and all I ever earned was 50,000 riel ($12.50 USD) per month. (Interview #01)*

Sokh Cheng, aged 28, is from Kang Meas District, Kampong Cham Province, and has worked in the government sector since 2014. She said,

> *My family used to have a grocery store, but the business was not going well. Farming was not productive and the rice fields were not yielding an abundant harvest. One thing led to another and they borrowed money from the local bank or microfinance company. When I earned my first salary in Malaysia, a large sum of money was sent to Cambodia to pay the interest and loan debt. (Interview #06)*

Better job opportunity in Malaysia

The women in this study, especially those working in the garment sector in Phnom Penh, did not believe that they could save sufficient money from their income to improve the living conditions of their family or support their own future in either the short or long term. Most of the garment workers in this study left for Malaysia in 2014, when the monthly minimum wage there was around 900 Malaysian ringgit ($295 USD) (Tunon and Rim, 2013). In Cambodia, the monthly minimum wage for garment workers was increased from $45 USD in 2000 to $80 USD in 2013, and then gradually from $100 USD in 2014 to $128 USD in 2015 and to $140 USD in

2016.[5] In October 2018, the minimum wage was raised to 182 USD per month.[6] Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia has speculated that the minimum wage for garment workers could reach up to $250 USD per month within the next five years.

Nary, aged 29, is married and has one son. She is from Prey Veng Province. She said,

> *I have been working in a factory in Malaysia for nearly four years. Prior to working here, I spent three years working in a factory in Phnom Penh. But I have still not earned enough money to support my family, my mother and my mother-in-law. Job opportunities are no better in Cambodia because my husband is not able to make enough money to support our family either. He is a motor-taxi driver. We were in a desperate condition, so I decided to come here and work in Malaysia to make more money. (Interview #02)*

Rana, aged 27, is from Kampong Cham Province. She said,

> *I have been working in Malaysia for almost four years. For many years, I worked in a factory in Phnom Penh, but I could not earn or save enough money to support my family in Cambodia. After working here and sending money home, I am happy that I am able to*

[5] ILO, (2016). Cambodian garment and footwear sector bulletin. International Labour Organization. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_463849.pdf
[6] Prak, C., T. (2018, October 5). Cambodia hikes textile workers' minimum wage, falls short of union demands. *Reuters.* Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-garment/cambodia-hikes-textile-workers-minimum-wage-falls-short-of-union-demands-idUSKCN1MF18B

help my siblings. In Cambodia, I was able to help them, but not to the same extent. (Interview #07)

Rana's mother in Cambodia confirmed her daughter's comments by saying,

She helped me a lot and our living conditions have improved. She sent money for me to build a house. Whenever I have any difficulty, I always get help from her. I have no one to help me but her. My husband has left me. We got divorced. I pity her [Rana] that I cannot make much money for the [family], but she [Rana] earns more than me to help her siblings and me. (Interview #17)

Migration network and risk evaluation

The migration network has played a major role in encouraging women to work in Malaysia, despite revelations that migrant workers (specifically those employed as domestic workers), have endured unpleasant treatment there. All of the Cambodian women interviewed in this study confirmed that they were aware of mistreatment and abuses inflicted upon many Cambodian domestic workers in Malaysia. As a previous study on migrant workers to Malaysia has shown (Hong et al. 2016), undocumented and documented workers move to Malaysia following their spouses, relatives, and friends. In this study, all the women interviewed (with the exception of Sokha and Kanha) stated that they had a network in Malaysia prior to deciding to apply and depart for the country.

Sokha learned about working in Malaysia from a broker who approached her mother in her hometown. At the time, Sokha was working as a domestic worker in Phnom Penh (Interview

#01). Kanha is aged 34, married and comes from Prey Veng Province (Interview #09). She has traveled to Malaysia twice for job opportunities. She heard about the possibility of working in Malaysia from her employer in Cambodia, who said that his factory had another brand in Malaysia. She had no network in Malaysia.

Figure 3: Residence of migrants in Johor State (source: author)

Seven out of ten of the migrants interviewed have had relatives working in Malaysia. For example, two women had sisters-in-law, three women had cousins, one woman had an aunt, and another woman had an older brother working in Malaysia prior to their arrival. One woman said she had friends working in Malaysia. Family members and friends communicate with one another. In Cambodia, it is a traditional way of life to ask after one another and discuss

possibilities for increasing income and rising out of poverty. The women and their family members in Cambodia were aware of job opportunities in Malaysia. They learned more detailed information about personal experiences and working conditions from their friends, cousins, aunts, and siblings, which finally prompted them to decide to go to Malaysia.

In terms of risk and evaluation, existing studies point out some relevant issues, such as the legal status of migrant workers (Hagiu, 2017), type of work (for example, domestic workers) (Piper, 2004 cited in Lawasia, 1998), and the written contracts provided to migrant workers (Harkins et al., 2017). This study finds that the Cambodian women and their family members evaluate two main factors: the legality of their migration and types of jobs available in Malaysia. The Malaysian and Cambodian governments have crafted agreements on the recruitment and employment of domestic workers and general workers to ensure the implementation of legal requirements and the protection of Cambodian workers (Harkins, 2016). All women in this study were aware of the importance of the legal ramifications and consequently they all used official channels through recruitment agencies in Cambodia. Lida, who experienced the negative consequence of illegal status while working in Thailand with her husband, said,

> *Some people migrate to work in Malaysia through companies which are not registered or professional and they experience many problems. By using a proper company, if something goes wrong, the company will take action to help us. Therefore, at that time I knew what I needed to do. (Interview #04)*

After becoming aware of the job opportunities and reaching consensus among household members regarding the decision to migrate to Malaysia, the women (in most cases accompanied by their family members) approached recruitment agencies, filled out an application form, completed training (especially for domestic workers), waited for confirmation, and then finally departed for Malaysia. Women who were working in garment factories in Phnom Penh were not required to do additional training if they could demonstrate their skill to the agencies, whereas Sokha, who applied as a domestic worker, received six months of training prior to her departure. This training requirement was confirmed with representatives of the travel agency, who stated that Cambodian garment workers did not require training and usually traveled to Malaysia in groups, whereas domestic workers required training in Phnom Penh before they left (Interviews #01 and #23).

In coordination with the recruitment agencies, the MoLVT recently monitored training programs and established standard fees for agencies to charge migrant workers (Interview #19). The recruitment agencies must cover paperwork fees, airfare, and other related items prior to departure and upon arrival of the migrant workers in Malaysia. Since none of the women in this study had enough money to make either full or partial advanced payment to their agency, some percentage of their income in Malaysia was deducted monthly to repay the debt. As a result, all of them said that they were only able to send a small sum of money (or almost none) home during the early months of their work in Malaysia. Usually they would send money home through a third party or with a migrant worker who decided to travel home during special Cambodian holidays or festivals.

As mentioned earlier, reports on the abuse and exploitation of Cambodian domestic workers were widespread among Cambodians, including within the recruitment agencies. All of

the women had concerns about these issues and therefore wanted to serve only in the garment sector. They did not wish to work and live in someone's home, since they felt the possibility of ill-treatment could be high. Many of them were concerned that their two-year contract would be reassigned from a garment factory to domestic work. However, that did not happen to any of them.

Kanha is aged 34, married with two sons, and is from Prey Veng Province.

> *I had no concerns about working in a factory. My objective is just to make more money. People working in factories have regulations to follow. Many of my colleagues had applied for work in Malaysia. By that time, I had become aware of the mistreatment and poor working conditions of housemaids. However, that wasn't an issue for workers in the factories. (Interview#09)*

Nary is aged 29, married with one son, and from Prey Veng. She said,

> *After I signed the document with the company, I was so concerned. I was afraid of several things. I could not speak the language and I was afraid the fee was too expensive. I did not know what would happen. However, I calmed myself and remembered that if I had any problems, I could get help from my older brother and his wife. I also wanted to be brave and take the risk for my family. Otherwise, we would not have any future. (Interview #02)*

Sokha was the only exception. She had been a domestic worker in Cambodia for several years prior to deciding to work as a maid in Malaysia. She was the only woman in the study who intended to be a domestic worker in Malaysia. She was aware of what had happened to some Cambodian domestic workers in Malaysia prior to applying for domestic work with the recruitment agency. In addition, she was informed of the abuse of domestic workers in Malaysia during her training in Cambodia. She said,

> *I learned about working in Malaysia through my mother, after a broker visited my home. I was scared because I do not know the language any better than a cow does, but then I set aside the risk and decided that I could work hard and convince the landlord to like me. There are no opportunities in Cambodia because the salaries are inadequate. I do not want to work in a factory. When I came here, I was interested in working as a maid from house to house. I never told my relatives or neighbors about the difficulties working here, because I felt that if I told them negative things, they would not be willing to send their daughters to work in Malaysia. Every boss is different. My boss is nice; but others might mistreat their maid, so I do not want to say anything. (Interview #01)*

Decision-making at the household level

The study finds that decision-making at the household level is distinguished between single and married women as follows:

Single migrant workers

The single migrant workers interviewed in this research confirmed that they discussed their migration decision with their parents, family members and other relatives. The discussed topics were as mentioned above: salary, job, and safety. The decisions were circulated among all family members, but their narratives confirmed that single women tended to have a stronger bond with their mothers. Stressful living conditions, poverty, and especially the lack of a better option for improving their lives in the short-and-long term overcame any immediate objections from family members in most cases. They took time for a serious discussion with family members, and each case seemed to vary as described below.

Rana said her discussion took place not only within her immediate family, but also with other relatives. Her mother and relatives first resisted her plan because, being a woman, they felt she should work in Thailand instead since it is closer to Cambodia. She said,

> *I did not follow their advice because our family was so poor that I felt I should go and work in Malaysia. After I had been working there for a while, my mother called and asked me to return home several times. But I continued to fulfill my work contracts.* (Interview #07)

Upon meeting her mother, I learned the following.

> *I was very concerned about her because I was afraid that she would end up working as a domestic worker. I was afraid that people would abuse her because she is a woman. However, since I have a sister [Rana's aunt] working in Malaysia, I am a little less concerned, because if something happens to her [Rana] I can follow up with my sister.* (Interview#17)

Leaphy confirmed that she wanted to work in Malaysia because she had many relatives already working there. She asked her parents to allow her to migrate to Malaysia, however, they did not want her to go. Ultimately, they could not stop her and finally she made her own decision to leave. Leaphy's mother said her daughter wanted to go and earn money because they are poor. She provided an illustration in an interactive dialogue:

> *It took us almost a year to decide because we were afraid she would be cheated, but finally she made her own decision. She wanted to try and paid the fee for the application without telling me*. (Interview #14)

Saory stated that she wanted to go and work in Malaysia because she had many relatives working there and she would be able to save more money. She told her mother that she really wanted to work in Malaysia, just like her other relatives. However, at that time her mother

resisted and tried to prevent her from leaving. That was not a big challenge for Saory, because she disagreed with her mother and in the end, she made her own decision. After she had worked in Malaysia for a while, her mother tried to convince her to return because she wanted her to rejoin the family, but again Saory kept working at her job because she really wanted to earn some money in Malaysia for few years and then return home. Saory's mother confirmed that she did not want her daughter to migrate and she rationalized her concern in these words:

> *I was afraid she would be cheated. If someone trafficked her, I would not know where to find her, even though she has relatives working there. We spent months making this decision. If she worked in Phnom Penh, it would be closer, but she wanted to try and she made the decision herself. She even asked her father if she could quit school and go to work in Malaysia because many women in the village did so*. (Interview #13)

Another single migrant, Kunthea, said her family was in a very difficult situation because her parents were in debt. Her mother wanted her to go and work in Malaysia because she had relatives working there and she could earn a lot of money. Her mother asked if she would volunteer to go. At that time Kunthea had no understanding about working abroad because she had never been away from her family. Even though she used to work in Phnom Penh, she had continued living with her parents during that time and they did the cooking for her daily. After she heard about the abuse of domestic workers in Malaysia, she was very afraid of leaving her

parents. However, after thinking about her family's poor living conditions, Kunthea decided to take the risk and hope for the best. She stated:

> *My father did not want me to leave, but I thought if I stayed in Cambodia, we would gain nothing. If I came here, the situation would improve. If I had refused while we were contemplating the move, my mother would not have objected, because she was worried that I would be abused or get sick. Following our traditional practice, my mother gave me a piece of earth from our farm for me to boil in water and drink whenever I became ill, particularly if contracted malaria while in Malaysia*.
> (Interview #3)

Sokha had a similar experience before she migrated to Malaysia. She said she had to take the risk and made a commitment to work very hard in order to help her family. Sokha stated:

> *My mother did not force me to leave. She would not have objected if I disagreed; she just said that if I went to work in Malaysia, our living conditions would improve. In addition, I am the oldest child and my siblings are very young. Therefore, I decided to leave*.
> (Interview #01)

Regarding the decision-making process, Sohka's mother confirmed that she did ask Sokha to go and work in Malaysia because during that time, her family's situation was very difficult. However, she intended to respect Sokha's decision. She described the following:

> *I wanted her to go, but to do so voluntarily. I did not force her at all. After she left, I was so concerned that she would be mistreated. I lost contact with her for a while because whenever I called, I reached her boss first because she was not allowed to use her phone. If the boss did not tell her (I called) or did not allow her to use the phone, we were not able to talk; therefore, I was very worried*. (Interview #15)

Married migrant workers

Not all of the married women interviewed in this research discussed their decision to migrate with their parents, aunts or uncles. Two women did not discuss the decision with any family members only with their spouses, while three other women did have discussions with their family members and in-laws.

Seyha is 21 years old and comes from Kampong Cham Province. Together with her husband, she went to work in a factory in Malaysia. Prior to working there, she was employed at a factory in Phnom Penh. Seyha and her husband discussed the possibility of migrating to Malaysia only with each other. Seyha said she could not discuss the matter with her parents because they are elderly and also divorced. Moreover, after she got married, she lived separately from her parents; therefore, she relied only on her husband for advice about working abroad.

Initially, Seyha was worried about migrating because she was afraid the working conditions would be difficult and she would not be reunited with her husband. However, her husband's brother told them that everything would be fine there. Seyha confirmed that during the decision-making process, she was reluctant to go to Malaysia and decided to make the move only to follow her husband. She illustrated her experiences in these terms:

> *When I told my husband that I didn't want to go to Malaysia, he asked me whether I wanted to be rich. Then I thought that if we stayed in Cambodia, we would remain poor. I was afraid that my husband would blame me, so I decided to follow him, even though I was upset with myself. It was not good that I wasn't able to decide for myself. Since I had just gotten married, I told myself that I would follow my husband this time. (Interview #05)*

Lida had a similar experience during the process of deciding whether to work in Malaysia. Lida said she did not discuss the plan with her aunt because she did not live with her aunt. Previously, she had worked in Thailand; later she lived and worked in Phnom Penh. She only discussed the issue with her spouse. After she and her husband agreed to migrate, she called her aunt to inform her that they were leaving to work in Malaysia. Her aunt tried to stop her because she was afraid something bad would happen to her there. Furthermore, Lida has a daughter who lives with her aunt. However, nothing could change her mind. Initially, Lida did not want to work in Malaysia and tried to persuade her husband to return to Thailand instead, but

her husband wanted to follow his brother who was trying to convince them to go to Malaysia. She stated,

> *If I had refused to come here with him, it would have led to arguments and problems between us because he was determined to migrate to Malaysia. His brother said we could make money here. If I had not followed him, there would have been consequences. I did not want to cause any problems. If one of us decided to leave and the other did not, there would be problems. If the decision only involved me, I would not have come here because working conditions are not different. But the point is that I did not want to come to Malaysia*. (Interview #04)

Upon meeting her aunt, I learned the following.

> *They made the decision. First, I was afraid she went illegally and would face mistreatment. Later on, I had less concern because I found out that she had gone with her husband. (Interview #18)*

Other married migrants like Sokcheng and Kanha experienced different situations during their decision-making process (Interviews #06 and #09). Sokcheng said that she and her husband were living with her parents-in-law while in Cambodia. When Sokcheang and her husband were considering working in Malaysia, they told their parents that they wanted to migrate. However, their parents did not want them to move because they were afraid that Sokcheng and her husband

would be cheated. There were many cases of migrant workers being cheated by having their contract changed from working in a factory to domestic work. If that happened, they would be at risk of physical, sexual, and mental abuse. However, Sokcheng and her husband were not deterred by those possibilities at all. Sokcheng said,

> "*First, they did not want us to leave. However, we ourselves really wanted to leave when we heard that people could make more money here. In addition, we were poor and we needed money to pay our debts. We owed a microfinance loan.*" (Interview #6)

Sokcheng's mother-in-law echoed her concern that she did not want the couple to go to Malaysia because their child was so small. She was also afraid they would be cheated and Sokcheng would have to work as a maid. A sister of her son-in-law used to work there and she returned with serious mental problems. She stated,

> *They did not discuss the matter with me at all. They just decided between themselves and told me that they were leaving. The documents and passports were already prepared. If I had known in advance, I would not have allowed them to go.* (Interview #16)

Kanha went to Malaysia the first time after she got married. She returned home for a while, during which time she had two children. Then she decided to return to Malaysia because

she could not make enough money working at a factory in Cambodia. She said that the first time she went to Malaysia, she discussed the matter with her husband and asked permission from her mother-in-law. At that time, her husband and her mother-in-law did not object and she made her own decision. Later on her husband regretted allowing her to leave, because they had just been married and had to live apart. After working abroad for a while, her health declined and she became sick very often. Kanha wasn't able to earn as much money as she wanted and so she decided to return home. She returned to Malaysia for a second time in 2014, together with her husband. She was the one who wanted to work in Malaysia, so she asked her husband to join her. Initially, her husband did not want to leave and suggested that they start a business in Cambodia instead. However, because she had worked in Malaysia previously, she tried to convince her husband that if they remained in Cambodia, nothing would change. She told her husband, "*We have to leave; we have to struggle through the hardship to survive.*" She added,

> *I only discussed the matter with my husband, not with my mother-in-law, even though my kids live with her. She did not try to discourage us because [she knew] I had worked there before. (Interview #09)*

In my interview with Kanha's mother-in-law, she said Kanha and her husband made the decision. She did not want them to go to Malaysia because she was afraid they would encounter difficulties. However, she did not object or try to stop them. She said:

> *I did not want them to go to Malaysia because I was concerned that both of them would face difficult conditions working there. My daughter-in-law initially went alone; then later her husband went with her. Both of them made the decision together. I was aware of their plans, but had no right to stop them.* (Interview #12)

In Nary's decision-making experience, she consulted with her brother (who was working in Malaysia), her mother, and her husband. Nary's mother did not comment, but she wanted her to work in Malaysia for just a few years and then start a business upon her return. Nary said that during the decision-making process, her husband did not resist her plan, and he and his family even urged her to go. Surprisingly, after she left he had an affair and took another wife. Nary rationalized her situation in these terms:

> *I did not know what was on his mind at that time. His family also encouraged me to leave and I didn't know their intention, either. After I had been here for three years, [I learned] he had another wife. I have tried to stay calm and not focus too much on that because I am alone here, and if I get sick, no one is available to take care of me. Therefore, I endure the [emotional] pain and think about other things to lighten my mood. Even if they did not want me to leave, I felt that I had no choice because there was no future if I stayed and worked in Cambodia. That was my rationale. I*

didn't know what I would do if my child got sick because my husband wasn't making much money. (Interview #02)

In my interview with Nary's mother, she said she did not want Nary to work in Malaysia. Nary only discussed the move with her husband and he wanted her to work there. Nary's mother was concerned about the couple living separately, because they had just been married and had a son. Her husband could take another wife if she left. Moreover, she was concerned about working conditions in Malaysia *"I could not say anything because they are married, so both of them decided,"* she added. (Interview #11)

Social status of migrant workers

Caces et al. (1985:08) views the term 'household' as "all persons committed to a set of residentially-centered interpersonal relationships." Some researchers refer to household as a co-residential group, which may include or exclude blood relatives (Wallerstein, 1984, cited in Wolf, 1990). However, many migration literature describes household as a family square (Gubhaju and De Jong, 2009; De Brauw and Rozelle, 2008; Mberu, 2006; Semyonov and Gorodzeisky, 2005). In this research, I view household as family and household members as family members. To better understand the gender role in migration decision-making in this research, I divide the discussion into two sections based on the marital status of migrant workers. By doing so, I seek to understand how marital status influences decision-making and how the household reacts to those decisions.

In this section, I discuss how employment abroad contributes to a changed social status for the female migrant worker, during their time working in Malaysia and upon their return to

Cambodia. More narrowly, social status in this context examines how the household members of migrant workers perceive them and also how their neighbors view them, based upon conservative traditional attitudes toward women in Cambodia. However, there is a correlation with the economic factor of how much the migrant can earn, which means the income from migrant work does have an effect on the social status of the worker.

Migrant workers in Malaysia

According to the narratives of the migrant workers' experiences in this research, working overseas has had an impact on their social status. At the personal level, migrant workers feel pleased and proud of themselves for being able to support their family. At the household level, eight out of ten migrant workers felt a sense of pride and value on the part of their parents and relatives after working abroad for a while. Implicitly, in terms of financial decision-making or even other issues within the family, the migrant's parents or family members always discuss matters with them and wait for their decision. This is because the migrant is providing money to help support the livelihood of their family. Aside from the support for general family expenses, married women are able to remit money to support their children's education.

In her experience, Kunthea noticed that after she had worked in Malaysia for a while and had sent remittances home, the dynamics within her family changed. Even though her family's living conditions had not improved as much as she wished, she could sense that her parents valued her more. Before she left to work in Malaysia, her parents often complained about the daily expenses to support the children; in particular they complained about Kunthea. Sometimes her parents even asked the neighbor for food to feed the children. She stated,

> *They called and asked if I wanted to come home. They value my opinion and always consult with me when they have a problem. They asked me not to send them more money because they worry that I don't save enough for myself. (#Interview 03)*

Saory shared a similar story about how her parents are pleased that she is working in Malaysia is able to send money home to help them, especially to build a house. She is very happy as well and all of her relatives praise her for her financial contribution to the family.

Saory added,

> *I think I have more of a voice in the family. If they have a decision to make, they wait and consult with me because I am earning money for the family. If I disagree, they dare not do anything. (Interview #08)*

Sokha said she is proud that she made the right decision to migrate and can now help her family improve their living conditions. Moreover, her mother is able to pay their debt and buy land to expand the farm (Interview #01). Sokha explained that in the past, when she was working in Cambodia, she was not able to help the family very much. However, now she is able to help them and her mother always praises her and makes her feel proud. Her mother usually asks about her working conditions and tells her to return home if it is too hard for her.

Figure 4: A new house built with Saory's remittance (source: author)

Sokcheng and Kanha, both married, have had similar experiences. They explained that after working in Malaysia for a while and earning a better income, they feel happy and have more self-esteem. They did not mention receiving satisfaction from their parents or family members (Interviews #06 and #09). They are proud that, as women, they have been able to help their families to some extent.

In contrast, at the societal level, the traditional and conservative ideal that is imposed on women still exists. Some people assume that women who are living far away from home will have a relationship with men or do something inappropriate. At least four out of ten migrants confirmed that their neighbors would view their migration in a negative way if they were not sending home a lot of income.

Nary explained that relatives and neighbors generally view migrant workers negatively, since they feel that women should stay home and care for their family and elderly parents. In her case, her mother is aging and her son is living with her mother. Therefore, she believes people probably say negative things about her behind her back. She stated,

> *They might think I only hang out and have fun with men. They think I have lovers and do not care about my family, my children, and my parents. I used to hear such comments. However, their words don't matter. The truth is that I am not as bad as they think. If I return home with more money, they will be nice to me. If I have no money, they will criticize me*. (Interview #02)

Kunthea commented that she has never directly heard what people think about her since she has never returned home, but she believes if she returned home without money, her neighbors would gossip about her. She illustrated her comment with these words:

> *If I go home without more money, they will have negative things to say. This is normal because I am a daughter. People always have such views.* (Interview #03)

Saory shared a similar opinion about her social status—that the neighbors would judge her in a negative light if she did not earn more money. She said, "*They would think that I am a*

prostitute if I am not making more money, because people usually view women working in Malaysia in such a way." (Interview #08)

Sokha visited her home after working in Malaysia for two years and she experienced how her relatives and neighbors viewed her, based upon her [changed] financial status. Sokha rationalized in these words:

> *When I was in Cambodia, my relatives and neighbors never treated me as their niece. After I worked here for two years and then returned home, they were so nice to me. I was so surprised and proud of myself. I just thought that when I had no money, I really had no relatives. So I totally understand the change.* (Interview #01)

Sokcheng has never visited home since working in Malaysia, but her husband returned because he became ill and needed treatment (Interview #06). She has never heard of any comments from the neighbors about her, but Sokcheng explains that people would not judge her in a negative way because she came to Malaysia with her husband. Another married woman, Kanha, has never heard of any bad comments from her relatives or neighbors while she has been working in Malaysia. However, she confirms that after she had worked in Malaysia for two or three years, she was able to remit money home to build a new house in her village. Her neighbors praise her a lot and some of them want their daughters to go to Malaysia too.

Figure 5: A new house built with Kanha's remittance (source: author)

Returned migrant workers

I initially intended to interview ten returned migrants for my research. Unfortunately, there is only one returnee who was able to participate in the study. First, migrants who return to Cambodia usually change their address and contact number. Second, most returned migrants prefer to find further overseas employment rather than work in Cambodia, due to better income opportunities.

Chantha, the returned migrant worker, confirmed that after working in Malaysia for a while, she understood life in a foreign country and the societal differences between cultures. In addition, she was able to learn a foreign language to improve her communication skills (Interview #20). In terms of the impact at a personal level, the foreign employment enhanced her

self-esteem so that she has more confidence in many aspects of her life, including decision-making.

Chantha felt a sense of pride and respect from her family members, as well as from her neighbors, because she was able to improve the living conditions of her family. In addition to the change in her social status, the returned migrant worker learned to value her children's education. She now realizes that if her children attain a higher education, they will have a better future than her. She mentioned that before she left to work in Malaysia, she never considered being able to support her children's education because of the added expense. She had only been able to earn enough to support basic living expenses. She said,

> *In the past I sold clams [to make a living] and I always thought about the future of my children. That's why I wanted to work in Malaysia and earn more money. When I returned [from Malaysia], I wasn't able to make enough money working in a factory near my home. At the same time, my kids told me that they want to continue to study and they asked whether I could support them. Therefore, I decided that I will soon go and work in Japan.* (Interview 20)

Chapter V

Conclusion

This chapter consists of three main parts. First, it describes the significance of the study. Second, it summarizes the main findings of the study. Third, it discusses the limitations of the study and suggests future directions of migration studies, especially with regard to female migration.

Summaries of main findings

Prior to discussing the main findings on the decision-making and social status issues of Cambodian female migrant workers in Malaysia, it is important to mention several keys factors and actors which make migration to Malaysia possible. First, it was through the efforts of the Cambodian government, which established agreements with Malaysia in 1997 and 2015, that the flow of migrant workers to Malaysia was initiated and coordinated. Later, procedures, regulations, and laws established by the MoLVT enabled the establishment of recruitment agencies. In an improvement over the early stages of Cambodian migration to Malaysia, the MoLVT now monitors the training process of each recruitment agency before workers are permitted to depart for Malaysia.

The MoLVT, with the assistance and collaboration of the ILO and other institutions, has enacted reforms to cope with internal and external issues such as irregularities, abuses, conflict resolutions, and repatriation. Most international migrant workers have encountered various types

of exploitation, abuse, and other challenges. Cambodian migrant workers to Malaysia are no exception. As indicated in Chapter One, many reports on the abuse and exploitation of Cambodian migrant workers prompted the Cambodian government to place a temporary ban on the migration of domestic workers to Malaysia.

During the course of this study and as mentioned by staff members of NGOs and MoLVT officials, the situation for Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia is gradually improving. They are informed of their rights and what actions to take in case any irregularities take place unexpectedly. They can retain their passports and are even provided with a copy of their contract. The MoLVT, NGOs and Cambodian Embassy in Malaysia have collaborated extensively on providing assistance to Cambodian migrant workers who have experienced abuse, required assistance in claiming wages, been rescued and repatriated, and required psychological support after their return.

In relation to the main findings, the first question addresses the contexts within which women negotiate the decision to obtain foreign employment. Like many other studies, this study finds that the primary factor motivating Cambodian women to accept foreign employment in Malaysia is poverty. Many of them come from families who are in debt, and they believe that the meager income from their Cambodian jobs is not sufficient to cover the principal and interest on that debt or improve their economic situation in the short or long term. Therefore, they apply to work in Malaysia. Once they begin work overseas (especially during the first year), payments are deducted from their wages for paperwork, airfare, accommodation and other associated expenses which were paid upfront by the recruitment agencies. For the first year or so, most workers are unable to send remittances to their families in Cambodia (which is usually accomplished through third parties or through peers who return home for a visit). Only after the recruitment agencies

are reimbursed for their expenses do the families of the workers benefit from the overseas work arrangement.

Second, better job opportunity is another main context for migration to Malaysia. As many of the workers pointed out, they could not save enough money to improve the standard of living for their family or ensure a sound economic future for themselves or their children. The higher wages in Malaysia ($295 USD per month), augmented by overtime shifts, enable them to save for themselves and also send money home to their family, which they were unable to do when previously working at the lower minimum wage in Cambodia. Third, the migration network and risk evaluation helped finalize the decision-making process. With the exception of two women, all of the Cambodian workers in this study confirmed that they decided to migrate to Malaysia as a result of their network of relatives and friends who had experience working in the country. Sokha was in desperate financial need and decided that it was worth the risk to migrate. So far she has been fortunate not to have suffered any abuse or exploitation. Kanha learned from her employer and later made friends with other Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia. She, too, has fortunately remained safe.

As for the second question regarding decision making, both single and married women consulted with their household, but the level of consultation varied. One common concern is the awareness of exploitation and abuse of Cambodian domestic workers in Malaysia. More specifically, women considering migrating were concerned about the possibility of having their contracts altered to domestic worker status. Single women tend to consult with more family members, and in some cases they receive objections regardless of the state of poverty of the family or degree of financial gain in Malaysia. However, the study finds that ultimately the single women had autonomy over their decision to move to Malaysia. Married women did not

discuss their decision to move to Malaysia with family members. Married couples tended to decide between themselves only. More specifically, two women did not discuss their decision with the household, but three others discussed their decision with their family members and in-laws. Two of them did not want to leave, but had to accompany their husbands.

Last but not least is the third question regarding change in social status of the migrant worker. Based on the experiences of both single and married migrant workers in Malaysia (as well as one return migrant), the findings show that their economic contribution does have an impact on their social status as women. At the personal level, both single and married migrant workers confirm that they feel happy, confident, and proud of themselves for having the ability to help support their families. At least one return migrant confirms that she could envision a better future for herself, especially for her children's higher education. The issue of funding children's education remains a source of strength and inspiration in the decision to migrate to another country.

At the family level, migrant workers feel more empowered and respected by parents and family members. Family members value their opinion in decision-making. Obviously, this is a result of their financial support which has raised the family's standard of living, helped to repay outstanding debt and supported the education of their siblings or children. At the societal level (which refers to the neighborhood), however, their social status is very much linked to their economic success. The most important point is that Cambodian society as a whole needs to acknowledge the contribution and sacrifice of the female migrants, including their achievement in overcoming social and cultural barriers to support their family financially, rather than focusing on negative speculation such as prostitution.

Limitations

This research is the first study ever to provide insightful understanding of Cambodian female migration overseas. More specifically, it aims to generate discussion regarding decision-making at the household level and changes in social status of women during and upon their return from Malaysia. In doing so, it uses archival research, site observation, and in-depth interviews to explore and answer the three main proposed questions. However, there are several limitations due to the timeframe of my research study as a graduate student and financial assistance.

First, my timeframe and financial budget did not permit me to interview similar numbers of female migrant workers in Malaysia in terms of both types of work (domestic workers and garment workers) and their status (married or single). As pointed out in Chapter Four, the decision-making process is very different for single and married women. Domestic workers usually stay and work with the families they are serving. The one Cambodian migrant woman who served as a domestic worker in Penang State in Malaysia and was pleased to be interviewed by me lived with other domestic workers. Her employer did not require her to live with the family.

Second, not all targeted family members (especially mothers of the interviewed migrants who work in Johor State) were interviewed. One migrant worker personally requested me not to approach or interview her mother. There were many issues within her family, one of which was the fact that her parents were divorced. Another mother of a migrant worker was not able to be interviewed either, because she had relocated from her hometown to Phnom Penh for work purposes and her daily schedule was so tight that she did not have time to meet me.

Third, I was not able to make contact with many returnees from Malaysia. I tried to obtain their contact information from related NGOs as well as current and former Cambodian migrant workers who used to work in Malaysia. However, many of the returnees have relocated within the country or overseas. The one returnee I interviewed in Kampong Cham Province was in fact about to leave for Japan in a week. She kindly granted me the time to meet her during the busy harvest season before her departure to Japan. While one returnee did feel comfortable sharing her personal experiences with me, the rest of the returnees had moved or were busy with their families and life's daily routines.

Finally, it is difficult to measure the power of the decision-making of each individual. Each case involves input from many family members and is influenced by a variety of factors. Discussions have been processed with this consideration in mind.

Despite the several challenges as mentioned above, which affected data collection and analysis, this study does give a voice to Cambodian migrant workers overseas and shed light on the motivating factors, decision-making process, and impact on their social status during and upon their return. These issues of Cambodian external migration have never been analyzed or discussed previously.

Future direction

Drawing from this study, I think further studies should focus on the following areas and topics. First, there should be an in-depth comparative study between single and married Cambodian migrant workers in either the domestic work sector or the industry sector. Second, it is common that married couples who migrate to work in foreign countries leave their children in the care of their parents or in-laws. There should be comparative studies on married women who

migrate with or without their husband, since the families (especially the children) experience different psychological and socio-economic impacts. Third, more focus should be placed on the returnees, particularly on the impact of their overseas work on their social status, standard of living, and psychological wellbeing after their return. Fourth, the economics and pattern of transformation of the household which results from the financial support of Cambodian migrant women should be evaluated through time and space. Last but not least, Cambodia is relatively new to the migration experience, especially in the external sense. However, it appears that the government (and the MoLVT in particular) has made significant improvement in providing information, training, and measures to assist migrant workers in overcoming irregularities and challenges upon working in Malaysia. This work has been accomplished in coordination with related NGOs in Cambodia and Malaysia, as well as with the Cambodian Embassy in Malaysia. However, as stressed in several studies, it is imperative to continue strengthening the regulations and implementation of related laws, sub-decrees, and contents of the MoU with Malaysia in order to ensure a positive experience for those Cambodians who break cultural barriers and social norms in order to earn a better living and improve the standard of living for their family and for Cambodia as a whole.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of interviews the author conducted for the research study

01. Author's interview #01; Sokha, 28, from Batheay District, Kampong Cham Province; former domestic worker in Phnom Penh and current domestic worker in Penang, Malaysia, conducted in Penang and dated on June 16, 2017.
02. Author's interview #02; Nary, 29, from Kampong Trabek District, Prey Veng Province; former garment worker in Phnom Penh and current garment worker in Penang, Malaysia, conducted in Penang and dated on June 18, 2017.
03. Author's interview #03, Kunthea, 21, from Kampong Trabek District, Prey Veng Province; former garment worker in Phnom Penh and current garment worker in Johor, Malaysia, conducted in Johor and dated on June 20, 2017.
04. Author's interview #04, Lida, 32, from Batheay District, Kampong Cham Province; former garment worker in Phnom Penh and current garment worker in Johor, Malaysia, conducted in Johor State, Malaysia, dated on June 20, 2017.
05. Author's interview #05, Seyha, 21, from Kampong Siem District, Kampong Cham Province; former garment worker in Phnom Penh and current garment worker in Johor, Malaysia, conducted in Johor and dated on June 20, 2017.
06. Author's interview #06, Sokcheng, 28, from Kang Meas District, Kampong Cham Province; former garment worker in Phnom Penh and current garment worker in Johor, Malaysia, conducted in Johor and dated on June 20, 2017.
07. Author's interview #07, Rana, 27, from Prey Chhor District, Kampong Cham Province; former garment worker in Phnom Penh and current garment worker in Johor, Malaysia, conducted in Johor and dated on June 21, 2017.

08. Author's interview #08, Saory, 20, from Kampong Trabek District, Prey Veng Province; former garment worker in Phnom Penh and current garment worker in Johor, Malaysia, conducted in Johor and dated on June 21, 2017.
09. Author's interview #09, Kanha, 37, from Kampong Trabek District, Prey Veng Province; former garment worker in Phnom Penh and current garment worker in Johor, Malaysia, conducted in Johor and dated on June 21, 2017.
10. Author's interview #10, Leaphy, 20, from Kampong Trabek District, Prey Veng Province; former garment worker in Phnom Penh and current garment worker in Johor, Malaysia, conducted in Johor and dated on June 21, 2017.
11. Author's interview #11, mother of Nary in Kampong Trabek District, Prey Veng Province, Cambodia and dated on July 08, 2017.
12. Author's interview #12, mother-in-law of Kanha in Kampong Trabek, District, Prey Veng Province, Cambodia and dated on July 08, 2017.
13. Author's interview #13, mother of Saory in Kampong Trabek District, Prey Veng Province, Cambodia and dated on July 08, 2017.
14. Author's interview #14, mother of Leaphy in Kampong Trabek District, Prey Veng Province, Cambodia and dated on July 08, 2017.
15. Author's interview #15, parents of Sokha in Batheay District, Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia dated on July 16, 2017.
16. Author's interview #16, mother-in-law of Sokcheng in Kang Meas District, Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia and dated on July 16, 2017.
17. Author's interview #17, mother of Rana in Prey Chhor District, Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia and dated on July 16, 2017.

18. Author's interview #18, aunt of Lida in Batheay District, Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia and dated on July 16, 2017.
19. Author's interview #19, MoLVT official at Ministry of Labor in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and dated on July 24, 2017.
20. Author's interview #20, Chantha, aged 34, returnee in Cheung Prey District, Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia dated on August 08, 2017.
21. Author's interview #21, a NGO Director (Legal Support for Children and Women) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia date on August 10, 2017.
22. Author's interview #22, a labor recruitment company representative (Human Resource Development) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia dated on August 10, 2017.
23. Author's interview #23, a labor recruitment company representative (Success Manpower Service) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia dated on August 11, 2017.

Appendix 2: IRB's approval

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

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Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Migration decision-making and social status: The Case study of Cambodian women in Malaysia

Principle Investigator: James A. Tyner
Co-Investigator: Chhunly Chhay

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will inform you about information on the research study, what you will do, and the associated risks and benefits of the study and your participation. Your participation is indeed voluntary, and you can stop participating at any time you wish. Please kindly read this consent form carefully. If you cannot read or comprehend it, I will read and explain to you one by one with very simple terms. You can ask your neighbors to read and explain this form to you, if doing so make you feel more comfortable. However, when you agree for the interview, no one else besides you and me will be present during the interview. It is important that you ask any questions relating to this study and fully understand them before making an informed decision. You will be given a copy of this form to take with you.

Purpose: This study seeks to understand factors, which influence Cambodian women to be migrant workers in Malaysia and most importantly the decision-making at the household level, women's self-conception and roles in the family upon working and returning from Malaysia. More broadly, this study will provide comprehensive understanding of women role, family, and social attitude toward them.

Procedures: The interview will ask you to provide information about what influence you to be migrant workers in Malaysia, how final decision-making is reached upon the household level and views of women's self-conception and role in the family during and after returning from Malaysia. If you do not understand any question, please never hesitant to ask for clarification. At the end of our conversation, I will play the recorded audio so that you can hear or making any changes if you wish to.

Benefit: This study may not have any direct benefit for you; however, your participant will help provide comprehensive understanding of women roles in the family and their sacrifice to help improve family living condition in our Cambodian society.

Risk and Discomfort: Some of the questions relating to family might make you feel homesick. If you become emotional, for example expressing feeling of homesickness, I will stop the interview and provide comfort, such as offering tissues, water and verbal comfort. After the interview, if you express any discomfort, I will refer you to local NGOs that offer services to oversee migrant workers, given that they are well-trained to deal with mental health issue.

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(330) 672-3739 • http://www2.kent.edu/cas/geography/

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Privacy and Confidentiality: Your given information will remain confidential within the limited of the laws and only the researchers of this study will have access to the information you provide. The interview will be converted with codenames and stored in secured location and electronic devices locked with secure passwords.

Voluntarily Participation: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are absolutely free to decline to participate, end the interview, or refuse to answer any specific question without penalty.

Contact information: If you have any question about this study, please feel free to contact the Principle Investor, Prof. James A. Tyner at (330)-672-3739 or especially the Co-Investigator, Chhunly Chhay at (330)-593-1593/ (855) 17 528 021. The Kent State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this p. If you have any further questions about your rights as a research participant or complain about the research, you might contact the IRB at (330) 672-2704.

Consent Statement and Signature: I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my most satisfaction. Therefore, I voluntarily agree to participant in this study. I understand that a copy of this form will be given to me for future reference.

_____
Printed name

_____
Signature

_____
Date

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Author's note: this is the renewable version in addition the one issued in 2017, as it is normally valid for one year only.

Appendix 3: Questionnaires

Questionnaires for migrant workers in Malaysia

1. Why you choose to work in Malaysia?
2. How do you learn about migrant worker' job in Malaysia?
3. How do you approach your family about the news or vice versa?
4. What factors are discussed in term of evaluating the decisions to go to Malaysia?
5. Did you learn the abuses and other difficulties from those who returned from Malaysia?
6. Who you need to discuss with about leaving for Malaysia?
7. What is your role in term of making decision?
8. How the final decision is reached?
9. What is your role in the family while working in Malaysia?
10. How your family view you or how you see yourself?
11. How people in your villages view you? In what way?

Additional question for returnees:

12. What is your role in the family in the family after returning from Malaysia?
13. What are the women's roles and social status in the household upon and after returning from Malaysia?