

Conference Paper

Makibaa: The Living out Experience Among the iMiligan of Upper Bauko, Mountain Province

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Abstract

This study was conducted to find out why iMiligan youth leave their biological families and live with non-relatives in other provinces in the lowlands (Makibaa). It also studied the problems they encountered and how they managed such problems. Using descriptive-qualitative-exploratory method, responses had been identified through key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Findings revealed that the participants moved to various destinations in the lowlands due to push and pull factors. The push factors were economic, geographical, social, political and education. The pull factors were availability and proximity of schools, educational opportunities, values and skills' development and higher demand from foster parents. Participants described their stay in the lowlands as memorable, rewarding, and gratifying although some encountered negative experiences. Varied strategies were employed by the foster children in response to the negative encounters. The choice of destinations and prospective foster families followed some dynamics such as referrals from former or current baa; by invitation from prospective foster parents or referrals of foster parents; and through request by biological parents for foster families.

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1. Introduction

Living out from home has been a common scenario throughout the world. Reyes, (2008) claimed that migration is not a new phenomenon, not a failure of development, nor a substitute for development. Individuals move out as part of their effort to improve their lives and the lives of their families, to learn new skills, to gain new experiences, to find a job or to flee insecurity, disaster or famine. Migration, the temporary or permanent movement of individuals or people to one area is an economic, social and political process that affects those who move, those who stay behind, and the places where they go (Reyes, 2008).

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The choice on the place of destination and the foster families were looked into in this study. While the need is there, one problem that the *baa* faced is if there are foster parents who are willing to accept them. AIFS-CFCA (2007) revealed that while the need for carers to provide quality out-of-home care for children is rising, the availability of such carer appears to be decreasing. Several factors pushed people to move out of their homes. LeMoynes (2005) revealed that even in advanced countries, people move out from their homes and migrate to other places due to employment and poverty. Plameras (1977) added that people move from the province to the city to look for a place where they feel comfortable with, or a place which will define their future.

Living away from home is caused mostly by the push and pull factors. Lee (1966) categorized these into: a) factors associated with the area of origin (Push factors); b) factors associated with the area of the destination (Pull factors); c) intervening obstacles; and d) personal factors. Dumaraog *et al.* (2012) likewise found that the negative characteristics pushed the migrants out of the area of origin while the positive aspects of the destination area pull the migrants towards the direction. Economic condition plays a vital role to a family's decision-making. Stanojoska and Blagojce (2012) revealed that poor families employed their children in the fields because either they do not see the benefits of education or the opportunity cost of sending a child to school is too high. However, in an article in London Borough of Bexley (2013), the author asserted that while many of our children do have problems, the children living in care have the capacity to blossom like any other but they need support to realize their ambition. Unlike the negative perceived notions, children of migrants performed well especially during grade school compared to non-migrant children.

While several literatures state that a lot of people left their families for employment, the *baa* (Foster children) from *Miligán* left their biological families for further education. This phenomenon motivated this researcher to find out why some youth in the three barangays of Upper Bauko, Mountain Province also wanted to become *baa* in the lowlands. Lowlands as used in this study pertain to the provinces of Ilocos region such as Ilocos Sur, La Union and Pangasinan, and Cabanatuan City in Region 3. Finally, this study endeavored to look at how the *baa*; "self-supporting" individuals; wards; or stay-ins existed. As Ricouer (1992) explained: to understand the subject is to narrate his life story. The story constitutes the story of the life lived.

1.1. Objectives

This research looked into the living out experiences among the *baa* from Upper Bauko, Mountain Province. Specifically, it aimed to determine the factors that pushed and pulled the respondents to become *baa*; identify the positive and negative experiences encountered by the *baa* while living in the lowlands; and determine the dynamics that helped them in the choice of their place of destinations and their choice of prospective foster families.

2. Framework of the Study

2.1. Theory of migration

According to Reyes (2008), people have been on the move since human life began. Individuals move as part of their effort to improve their lives and the lives of their families, to learn new skills, to gain new experiences, to find a job or to flee insecurity, disaster or famine. Zanker (2008) citing Lee (1966) pointed that the positive and negative factors at the origin and destination push and pull migrants towards (non) migration, hindered by intervening factors.

2.2. Perpetuation of migration

One theory that explains the occurrence of migration is the perpetuation of migration. As argued by Massey (1990), the factors that influence migration to start could be very different from the conditions that make migration continue, i.e. perpetuate. After an initial phase of pioneer migration, migration becomes more common in the community, with more and more people imitating current migrants and being helped by them until migration becomes self-sustaining. And as networks expand, migration becomes part of local culture and makes migration more and more accessible to all levels of the population.

2.3. Attachment theory

Under the Attachment Theory, Barth (2005) articulated the potential risks of experiencing multiple caregivers and emphasized the importance of the close social relationship to development. Attachment theory offers concerned parents what they believe to be

the scientific explanation about their lack of satisfying parent-child relationship they desire. Bourdieu (1979) argued that people inherit their cultural attitudes, the accepted “definitions that their elders offer them.”

An understanding of the unique experiences of people serves as basis for any legislations and programs that would address the basic problems of the youth and the Indigenous Peoples (IPs). That is, having a good grasp of the predicaments of the people may guide local legislators and officials in formulating policies, programs or any kind of intervention. The results of this study hope to serve as a wake-up call on the part of the government agencies to prioritize and expedite the construction of school buildings in far-flung barangays and allocating funds for the hiring of regular teachers. Finally, this study would serve as a form of commendation and recognition to the foster parents for becoming second parents (*In Loco Parentis*) to the *baa*.

3. Methodology

This study utilized the descriptive-qualitative-exploratory method of research involving 26 Key Informants and 2 groups consisting of parents, relatives, and neighbors using an open-ended interview guide. The research covered three barangays of Upper Bauko, Mountain Province namely: Sadsadan, Mabaay and Leseb.

Emphasis was given to the factors that influenced the respondents to go to the lowlands despite their tender age (Push and pull factors); the problems they encountered while living with their foster families; and finally, the dynamics that the *baa* employed in choosing their foster parents and place of destinations.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Push and pull factors

Every movement of people from one place to another always comes with a reason. The *baa* believed that their movement to the various destinations in the lowlands to live with foster families have developed into a practice due to some push and pull factors. The practice of *baa* among the *iMiligan* appeared to be unique and distinct. However, it is quite unusual and alarming as 10-18 years old children leave their biological families to live with non-relatives in the lowlands. It is unusual because kids like them are supposed to be clinging to their biological families at home but it was not. It is likewise

alarming because being away from their biological parents, their life and future might be in jeopardy and adversely affected.

4.2. Push factors

Stanojoska (2012) defined push factors as a result of the society's changes in the countries of origin. They are economic, social, political, cultural factors as well as factors connected with militarization and war conflicts. In the case of the *baa*, the push factors come in different ways such as economic, social, and political issues. The following are the push factors as revealed by the participants:

1. **Economic Factors.** The Municipality of Bauko has been classified as a 4th class municipality (NSA Census, 2010). Prior to 1980, residents of Bauko particularly *Miligan* engaged mainly on traditional organic farming on crops such as beans, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, rice; wild edible plants; fruits; and aquatic products such as shells, eels and loach for their daily subsistence. Considering this situation, there was no way for them to save a relatively huge amount of money for the expenses of their kids. They could only save when they sell their native poultry products or when they save a part of their wages. During the 1980's however, a number of residents started to engage in cash crop production albeit with small quantity. As commercial farming entails huge capital, the *iMiligan* started growing vegetables that required small expenditures such as beans, sweet peas, bell peppers and tomatoes. Besides, these crops are the easiest to be transported from the farm to the market as roads were not accessible.

Escape from poverty was one of the reasons why most *baa* went to the lowlands. They admitted that lack of finances from their parents was their main reason to move to the lowlands at an early age of 11 and 12. Their parents were on a hand-to-mouth existence hence, becoming a *baa* was their only way out. This was aggravated by the fact that elementary schools and high schools were far from their homes which entails expenses on transportation, board and lodging. The *baa* unanimously revealed that life in their respective places of origin prior to 1980 was extremely difficult. Consequently, only a few residents finished high school as most kids just got contented finishing elementary level. This corroborated the reports from UNESCO (2006) where the participants in literacy programs just wanted to learn how to read, write and manage their finances because they wish to become autonomous, gain control over everyday situations and "avoid being cheated". Relative to the fading interest of children to go to school, Thengal

(2013), revealed that poor families often give more importance on earning than to education due to the opportunity cost of the latter. The pressing need to work, in order to supplement their families' economic needs, is the chief cause of school dropout among young people.

2. **Social Factor.** One factor that dissuaded respondents from pursuing their dreams was the people surrounding them. In the distant past where there were insufficient laws and statutes for the protection of children, bullying and other forms of harassment had been the common experience of pupils and students. Consequently, some students were forced to stop because they were bullied by classmates and out-of-school youths; their packed lunch was stolen; and the women were sexually harassed on their way home. Afraid that these acts might happen to their children, they decided to send their children to the lowlands. Furthermore, the high incidence of teenage pregnancy and early marriage among students in the secondary schools in the locality prompted some parents to send their children to the lowlands. One parent recalled that during one of their Parents-Teachers Association's (PTA) meetings, the school principal warned the parents about the increasing number of students getting pregnant. Consequently, one parent said: "That warning alone by the principal alarmed me, hence, before the start of the next school year, I sent my daughter to the lowland".
3. **Political Factor.** Paramount among the factors is the seeming disinterest of the government line agencies and local politicians to provide the basic needs such as classrooms, school facilities, creating items for teachers and roads. It is something where Local Government Officials in cooperation with government agencies such as Dep-Ed, DPWH, and DSWD would have to look into for the welfare of the residents. In fact, the earliest secondary school existing in 1970 was the catholic school put up by the Belgian missionaries in the Poblacion. Consequently, the remoteness of schools forced pupils and students to stop in the middle of the school year due to the discomfort of hiking for 1-2 hours every day coupled with the fact that the pupils would reach school with their clothes wet as they had to pass by pathways covered with thick grasses and bushes.

4.3. Factors that pulled the *baa* to the lowlands

The pull factors are antipode (a positive one) of the push factors (Stanojoska and Blagojce, 2012). The pull factor then pertains to any reason, situation and circumstance that attract individuals to come nearer. The favorite destinations of the *baa* are the

provinces of Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan and Nueva Ecija which they believed to be relatively better places considering that the schools were very accessible as compared to their place of origin. This perception attracted some kids to become *baa* so that distance and incomplete grade levels were not anymore their issues. Education is assumed to make lives better (Dumaraog, 2012). This study on *Makibaa* revealed that the *baa* got motivated by the prospect that migrating to the lowlands would not only lead to one's social development and better education but also to a better future as well. Prior to the 1980's, only a handful of professionals from Upper Bauko, Mountain Province have been identified. Of these professionals, a quite number were from *Miligán* particularly the residents of Sadsadan, Bauko, Mt. Province. People from the place affirmed that the *baa* became successful because of their determination and patience to stay with foster families.

Every time a group of *baa* returned to their places of origin, they would enthusiastically narrate their positive experiences although a few recounted their ordeals. Such positive narration of experiences caught the interest of other young kids. The *baa*'s positive transformations were already a come-on to the kids. Respondents were unanimous in saying that they were so attracted to see their older neighbors come home during summer with clean clothes and knowledgeable in Filipino and lowland languages. Respect for elders and use of polite words were some of the values that called the people's attention from the *baa*. Addressing elders with words of respect, endearment or salutations such as: *manang*, *manong*, *uncle*, *auntie* or any polite manner of addressing people sounded good. While the folks in *Miligán* do not frequently utter those words of respect, it does not however follow that they disrespect their elders.

Positive values and skills were likewise the factors that attracted other *iMiligán* kids to go to the lowlands. Respondents recalled that when they were in the lowlands, they woke up as early as 4 o'clock in the morning to scrub the floor of the house, clean the premises, and wash manually the clothes of their foster families. They said those became their routines which they still follow until today. Cooking and food preparation are likewise the skills that the *baa* are proud of. And since most *iMiligán* are not familiar with lowland dishes or menu, there were only a few names that the villagers have in mind to prepare the food if there are big celebrations in the community. These were the former *baa*. Finally, the demands from foster families to have foster children have attracted more *baa* to the lowlands. Due to some good observations about the *baa*, neighbors and acquaintances of foster parents would request from the *baa* to recommend somebody to them. Foster families in the lowlands

are into this arrangement because they themselves are the beneficiaries, i.e. they are in the advantage side. That means that foster parents have little to lose and everything to gain. The reason is that they benefit more from the outputs and help from the foster children but spend less for the foods, allowance and board.

4.4. Positive and negative experiences encountered by the *baa*

Every encounter or experience of a person comes in different forms which may be categorized into positive experiences and negative experiences.

4.4.1. Positive experience

Most of the participants proudly and enthusiastically described their stay in the lowlands as memorable, rewarding, fulfilling and gratifying. This was shown by the extended stay of *baa* in the lowlands. In fact, other *baa* were so loyal and grateful to their foster families so that despite finishing their college degrees, having families of their own and eventually assigned in their respective workplaces, they still find time to visit their foster families.

The following were how the *baa* described their encounters and experiences: a) with their foster families. Some foster children narrated that their foster parents taught them skills like doing electrical wiring and welding. One *baa* was taught on how to drive a truck and to operate the rice mill and from the proceeds, he got his daily allowances. Maria confessed that she was treated by her foster parents as if she were their real child. She recounted: "Even when I was with another foster family during my tertiary education, and when I worked abroad, our communication line was still open". Fr. Manny likewise revealed that when he was at the seminary until the time when he was ordained a priest, he saw to it to connect himself with his foster families. When he was ordained priest and during his silver anniversary celebration, his former foster families came to attend. Schofield and Beek (2005) said: Foster parents need to create a humane environment for their foster children to feel accepted as members of the family; b) the *baa* claimed that despite the disparity in their culture, most lowland classmates did not discriminate them. In fact, some invited them to their houses during breaks and were proud to commend them for being industrious, determined and diligent. Respondents recalled that their classmates were their defenders whenever some of their classmates bullied them on account of their being *Igorots*. Likewise, excellence in the classroom puts one in the pedestal. This status attracted the attention

of students and teachers which eventually led the *baa* to their being treated fairly by their lowland classmates.

The above findings contradicted the study of Battistella and Conaco's (1996) as cited by Reyes (2008), when they found that parental absence is experienced particularly as a sense of loneliness and abandonment and that children who were away from their parents generally lagged behind in their academics as compared to their classmates with both parents present; c) Teachers in the lowlands were so civil and fair when dealing with their students. During practical arts classes, male *baa* were assigned by their teachers to do the physical job like gardening or carpentry in recognition of their industry, capabilities, skills and on account of their physical abilities. In some instances, some teachers manifested their generosity to their *Igorot* students by giving them clothes and fruits especially when the *baa* would go home during long vacation. And as a gesture of gratitude to their teachers' kindness and generosity, the *baa* would in turn give them highland vegetables as tokens. This contradicts the findings of Parreñas (2006) that teacher-counselors are often biased on the performance of students with migrant parents by labeling them, hard-headed, lazy, and not intelligent; and d) finally, houses in the lowlands were quite congested. Consequently, the work ethic, attitude and everything that the *baa* had been going through were witnessed by their neighbors. When the neighbors observed that the *baa* looked sad and depressed, said neighbors were there to motivate and boost their spirits. Such cheering and reassuring neighbors inspired them to stay put and be of help to their foster families.

4.4.2. Negative experiences

Every community, no matter how civilized and educated its inhabitants, has its own weaknesses and flaws. Indeed, some people around us are sometimes our stressors, gossipers and oppressors. The *baa* were not exempted as they had a taste of these undesirable treatments and attitude from different groups of people during their stint in the lowlands. Thus, Jean Paul Sartre declared: "Hell is other people" (Thune, 2009). It could not be denied however that there are also some causes which were personal to the *baa* themselves. Their negative experiences such as: a) feeling of homesickness due to their physical separation from their biological families has been the common undesirable feeling that the *baa* experienced. Chipungu and Bent-Goodley (2004) divulged that "Children entering foster care may experience grief at the separation from or loss of relationship with their natural parents. Within three months of placement, many children exhibit signs of depression, aggression, or withdrawal".

The reason why many youths from *Miligan* did not stay long in the lowlands was their feeling of longing from their biological parents and siblings. Their sudden separation from their families coupled with their being immersed in a new family in foreign territories aggravated their feeling of homesickness; b) the participants narrated their undesirable experiences with their foster families with mixed emotions. Reminiscing their past, some respondents laughed at their negative experiences and called them "lessons in life". Others on the other hand, shed tears because they believed they did not deserve such treatments. Accordingly, since they were just there as *baa*, other family members treated them as just house helpers thereby treating them coldly and subjecting them to verbal abuse. According to Reyes (2008), children have a different level of acceptance or tolerance of the situation depending on their "cognitive development". For young children, they only see migration as a form of abandonment of their parents; while adolescents may either be receptive or resentful; and c) bullying among youths inside or outside the school is a universal phenomenon. This is the challenge that children face while living in an unfamiliar territory. The *baa* were not exempted. In the classroom, they were subjected to ridicule especially when discussions were focused on indigenous people, poverty and education. Nevertheless, the *baa* took these reactions and comments in stride and a sort of a challenge. As described by Reyes (2008), children's mobility can have an effect to children's performance in school as well as finishing and meeting school requirements. And while in school, children migrants experience bullying from other children. They have difficulty in socializing due to language barriers, cultural differences, and their physical differences.

4.5. Dynamics on referrals, choice of destinations and foster parents

The dynamics employed by the *baa* on the prospective places of destination and foster families played a vital role in sustaining the practice of *baa*. The place of destinations could not just be anywhere and the choice of prospective foster families could not just be any family. Similarly, people who refer the *baa* have the obligations to ascertain that the behavior, family background and moral standing of the foster families are beyond reproach. Financial capability of foster parents is likewise a criterion. Hence, the familiarity on these factors has to be considered by those who recommend. Otherwise, the lives and future of the prospective *baa* would be put in peril. This dynamics perpetuated when from just a couple of *baa* during the 1950's, it increased gradually until it reached its peak during the 1990's where in a year, there were thirty (30) *baa* in

different destinations. It only decreased during the late 1990's when schools in nearby barangays in the place of origin were constructed and commercial vegetable farming in the communities started to flourish.

The choices then are facilitated and made possible through some underlying forces and dynamics as follows: a) by invitation of lowland families. This manner of referral was one of the reasons why a number of *baa* from *Miligán* increased gradually in a particular locality or destination. This was likewise the reason why foster parents of the *iMiligan* were neighbors which makes it an advantage to the *baa* as their feeling of homesickness was alleviated; b) through referrals from former *baa*. One year after a pioneering foster child (Pablo Quipas) stayed in the lowlands, he went home to his home town during summer vacation with a mission: To convince some kids in his community to come with him to the lowlands. After telling them his good experiences, some kids were persuaded to come with him. This type of referral thus became a tradition so that every time a *baa* goes home to his village during summer vacation, he is expected by other younger kids in their community to take them to the lowlands. Indeed, such act was considered their bounden duty and legacy to their neighbors.

The increasing number of *baa* in various places in the lowlands such as Tagudin, Ilocos Sur (1950-1980); San Juan and San Fernando City, La Union (1980-2000), San Esteban and Santiago, Ilocos Sur (1965-1990); Binmaley, Pangasinan (1970-1990); Pozorrubio, Pangasinan (1970-2010); and San Nicolas and San Rafael, Pangasinan (1980-2000) among other places, were due to the referrals and recommendations of former *baa*. This means that the kids from *Miligán* flocked to places where their siblings, relatives or neighbors have stayed. This means further that the practice of *baa* runs in the family or community although on different years and in various places of destinations; c) through parents' motivation. Wishing that their children would follow the footsteps of a number of successful *baa*, some parents would request their *baa* neighbors to scout for possible foster parents. As the practice of *baa* existed since the 1950's, most parents who noticed the positive transformations that happened to their *baa* neighbors became desirous that someday, their children would be like them. Consequently, said parents were the ones who pushed their children to live in the lowlands. It may seem ridiculous and irresponsible for parents or other close relatives to push their minor children to live with other families in a territory not so familiar but it happened. For parents from *Miligán* who had positive experience as *baa*, "pushing" their children to follow their footsteps was noble. This was supported by Reyes, (2008) when she revealed that the strength of family relationship particularly the children's closeness to their parents, is reflected in the children's choice of their parents as role models.

Migration then has somehow influenced the children's choice of career and future plans.

5. Conclusions

There are relatively equal push and pull factors that contributed to the decisions of the youth from *Miligan* to live in the lowlands. These factors played a vital role in the decisions of the *baa*. In their desire to uplift their family's lives and future, some youths from *Miligan* did not hesitate to leave their biological parents even at a tender age for a noble purpose which is either a high school or college diploma.

The positive experiences of the *baa* include, among others, their encounters with foster families, classmates, teachers and neighbors. These were the factors that helped them shape their personality. On the other hand, the negative experiences were not only caused by foster families, classmates, neighbors and external factors but are personal to the *baa*-participants as well. The *iMiligan* have adapted various dynamics of referrals in the choice of foster parents and place of destinations. The choice of desirable foster families are ascertained when the people who refer potential *baa* have been acquainted to or have personal knowledge on the attitude and financial capabilities of prospective foster parents.

6. Recommendations

The practice of *baa* can be eliminated if some push factors such as accessible schools, roads and transportations, dormitories or boarding houses will be addressed. The LGU officials and heads of government line agencies may include in their agenda some legislative measures that could give priority and attention to indigent communities not only on financial aspect but also on prioritizing infrastructure projects and basic educational equipment and other student needs. Parents must make it a point to keep in touch with their children to make them feel that they are not neglected and abandoned. Overt acts of showing love, care and concern will cure the pain and feeling of abandonment.

Foster families in the lowlands who acted as second parents to the *baa* and who offered their homes as haven to other children in need, must be given commendations by the government. On the other hand, foster families need to undergo orientations and guidance on handling foster children. This includes updating them on existing laws involving rights of children. The local government units and other concerned

agencies must strategize safety net programs that could help indigent and struggling families with the needed assistance such as low and affordable health care services, scholarships to children of low income families and skills training to non-schooled children. The DSWD and other NGO's dealing with foster children and foster parents may consider the findings of this research in improving their programs.

A further study on the contributions of foster parents to the life of the *baa* is recommended.

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