

ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH APPLIED TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS. THE CASE STUDY OF FEMALE DOMESTIC WORKERS IN ETHIOPIA AND TANZANIA

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Abstract

In this paper, I present an ongoing anthropological research applied to sustainable development projects for the promotion of domestic workers' rights in Ethiopia and Tanzania. This research addresses internal gender migration dynamics, with a specific focus on domestic work, using a comparative approach. Domestic workers are active agents in complex social contexts. Giving space to their voices, this work examines the complexity of motives that bring girls to move to perform domestic work, as well as their expectations and ambitions. The aim is to bring a valuable overview of domestic workers experiences, while acknowledging both the gendered context-specific and the structural constraints that they face. The ultimate goal is to identify solutions that might benefit domestic workers in the first place.

Keywords

Domestic work; gender; applied anthropology; development cooperation

Introduction

In this paper, I present an ongoing anthropological research that I have carried out in Ethiopia and Tanzania under the umbrella of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Comunità Volontari per il Mondo (CVM), in partnership with the Italian University of Urbino Carlo Bo, as part of my PhD programme. CVM, based in Italy, is working on a three-year project for the “Creation of Support Networks for Domestic Workers in Africa” (2017-2020) in Ethiopia and Tanzania.

Within this qualitative anthropological research I undertake a comparative analysis of domestic work in Ethiopia and Tanzania, with the aim of identifying recommendations for development policy and interventions that might benefit domestic workers. Significantly, the choice of a two-country study has involved comparing different sets of labour legislation, which in the case of Ethiopia excludes domestic workers from its remit – as in the majority of other countries – while in Tanzania it includes them in the umbrella legislation for all workers but falls short of accounting for many of their needs.

In my study, domestic workers are young women and girls who migrate internally, primarily from rural to urban areas, to work within the households of their employers. While listening to girls and women's narratives, I analyse the complexity and diversity of their life and working experiences. I mainly explore the reasons behind their movements, their trajectories, ambitions and expectations,

the decisions that they take and the strategies employed to face challenges, as well as how they experience their mobility. The intent is to facilitate an inclusive and participatory environment where domestic workers play a key role, and different viewpoints are acknowledged, shared and discussed. This exchange between research and cooperation activities has the potential to increase the impact and efficiency of development projects, shedding light on some critical issues and proposing potential solutions through a collaborative process of co-creation of knowledge. In this regard, applied research should always be employed in consultancy activities to promote a culturally sustainable type of international cooperation (Declich, 2012).

Clearly, the objective of my research has also been to assess the experience of the so called beneficiaries of CVM projects, and in particular domestic workers, when taking part in educational trainings organized by the NGO, their ideas and perceptions, as well as the impact of these activities on their lives. However, regarding research findings, in this specific paper I only address the complex set of motives behind the girls' need to migrate. Indeed, interventions that wish to improve domestic workers' lives cannot be promoted without systematically understanding why it is that girls work and migrate, as well as how they experience their mobility and working conditions, and which alternatives could be applied to meet their needs differently (Howard, 2017).

The structure of this paper is organized as follows: in the first section, I briefly present the NGO and its projects involving domestic workers. In the second section I discuss the terminology that I use and reflect on domestic workers as active agents. The third section briefly presents my methodology, which privileges a life-story approach. In the fourth section, I show some figures and facts on domestic work in Ethiopia and Tanzania. In the fifth section, I illustrate partial research results, specifically in relation to the girls' motives behind migration, expectations and hopes. Lastly, I present my conclusions.

The NGO and its projects involving domestic workers

Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, the NGO supports the creation of domestic workers' Associations, whose members meet regularly. The involvement, empowerment and capacity building of Associations have the objective to facilitate and strengthen support networks for domestic workers and build local organizations, which aim to enhance and promote domestic workers rights. During their meetings, members of the Associations share their life and work experiences, and develop mutual support strategies, as well as ways to engage with new potential members and strengthen the associations. Members have been enrolled in combined trainings in labour laws, reproductive health, AIDS/HIV risks/prevention, time management in the workplace and work ethics,

communication and professional skills, among others. Specific trainings on domestic workers' rights have also involved employers. The Associations also run Micro-insurance and Income Generating Activities (IGAs) - for example in the handcraft sector - allowing them to sustain their activities. All these activities have been facilitated by the NGO in strong partnership with local leaders and representatives of the community in both countries.

More broadly, CVM projects promote and facilitate coordination between institutions and trade unions with respect to the implementation of actions and policies that protect domestic workers and recognize them as a professional category. In particular, the NGO facilitates the organization of meetings, workshops and social exchange tables involving various representatives of institutions at National, Regional and Local level, Trade Unions and Domestic Workers Associations in Ethiopia and Tanzania. Supported by the involvement of international actors such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) - which is the only global trade union led by women - the NGO also contributes to the International Campaign for the ratification of the ILO Convention No. 189 "Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers" (C189) in both countries. Future projects concern the promotion of women's rights and equal opportunities beyond specific country case studies, aiming at the acknowledgement of domestic workers' contribution at global level. However, the language surrounding this occupation has varied greatly according to cultural and geographical context over time. Thus, some theoretical considerations on the terminology are needed.

Theoretical considerations

The term domestic worker is a broad term, there is no common definition across countries for what constitutes domestic work and opinions about the use of this term diverge also in the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) and in recent discussion about this occupational group at the ILO (Hoerder et al., 2015). When discussing domestic work, there is a range of related terms – such as 'foster child', 'employer', 'employee', and others - whose use and meaning differ in space and time, and should therefore be carefully employed. Here, I mainly address domestic work as part of the migration process from rural and semi-urban areas to the major towns and cities. Specifically, Ethiopian domestic workers working in Ethiopia and Tanzanian domestic workers working in Tanzania.¹ Their main working activities vary from cleaning the house, washing clothes, cooking,

¹ Research material in the last two decades has mainly focused on migration from Africa towards developed countries, while only a few studies have looked at the African continent itself (Declich & Rodet, 2018). Close linkages exist between internal migration within the same country, as well as cross-border mobility within the African continent, and international migration processes (King & Skeldon, 2010). In my study,

to taking care of children and looking after elderly or sick people. They are primarily, though not exclusively, live-in domestic workers, as they reside in their employers' households. The notion of household is equally complicated. In order to grasp its meaning, one must examine the context-specific definitions of this concept while providing detailed social and historical analysis (Declich, 2015). In this paper, I use the term household in a broad sense: as the group of people who are related to the owner of the dwelling and for whom the labourer works, as well as the place where this group resides.

The use of the term “domestic worker” is particularly significant for the ILO - responsible for improving the conditions of *all* workers – as a way to update terms such as “servant” and “maid” (Adelle 2011). The ILO defines ‘employment relationship’ as a relationship between an employer and an employee in which the latter performs work in return for remuneration, and under certain conditions. Studies in East Africa highlight that in the domestic work sector, in order to understand the meaning and implications of employment relationship it is important to explore the recruitment process of a domestic worker. For instance, girls may be recruited “through kinship networks, commonly referred to as *Undugu* in Swahili” (Kiaga & Kanyoka, 2011, p. 13). Thus the relationship employer-employee may become blurred and sometimes be confused with a sort of kinship, or distant kinship. Similarly, several studies point out that in given contexts of the so called Global South, the ILO definition of ‘children in employment’ and ‘child domestic work’ risks to exclude work undertaken in the child’s own household, turning unpaid care and domestic work invisible (Imoh, Bourdillon, & Boyden, 2019). Further studies problematize the formalization and professionalization of paid domestic work in given contexts, while arguing that this institution ends up reproducing the structures of social and cultural inequalities in society (Uhde, 2016).

Although in this article it is not possible to properly reflect on each term that is used, as well as to define and disentangle terms that interact and overlap in complex ways, such considerations have to be kept in mind. In this regard, accurate analysis of the significance and use of specific terms in different contexts, and over time, are vital to challenge the ethnocentrism of dominant policies.

One must also consider that domestic workers are not a homogeneous group, but active agents in complex social contexts responding in various ways to different situations.

some of the women interviewed were on the process of migrating– or had the ambition to do so- to the Middle East, while others already had had a working experience abroad. However, I do not address this issue here

Domestic workers as active agents

Domestic work often hides abuse and makes it possible. Several studies show that domestic workers often experience discrimination and marginalization with regard to pay, working conditions and legal rights, as well as verbal, physical and sexual abuse (Chuang, 2010; ILO & Ramirez-Machado, 2003; Mulugeta, 2012). In my study, many women and girls tend to describe their lives as very isolated, and their freedom of movement as constrained by the will of the people for whom they work. Scholars, however, have highlighted that describing domestic workers only as victims neglects their role as agents (de Regt, 2010; Lan, 2003), namely, girls' resilience and capacities to negotiate their own position. As active agents, domestic workers employ various strategies to improve their situation while dealing with the hardships and challenges inherent to their lives (Grabska, de Regt, & Del Franco, 2019). A complex variety of reasons, desires and expectations are at the origin of their movements and individual responses to different situations. Therefore, it is vital to investigate the particular circumstances these girls face in their own communities that motivate them to start domestic work, such as the forms of social and gender pressures from which they may try to escape, as well as the risks and opportunities they are exposed to (Bujra, 2000; Gankam Tambo, 2014). This might help to problematize the dominant poverty concept underlying migration, while shedding light on the gendered context-specific and the structural constraints in which women's lives are embedded. In both countries the domestic workers who were interviewed emphasize strong gender norms and gender-based inequalities that had affected their lives since childhood. Their gender had an impact on their responsibilities, the type of work they had to do in or outside their home, their relationships with relatives, friends and other members of the community, their opportunities to access education, as well as their ambitions and future plans (Creighton and Omari, 2018). Thus, my study seeks to explore how domestic workers continue to practice agency, to take everyday and strategic decisions despite structural constraints (see Briones 2009).

Before illustrating my methodology and research results, I shall discuss figures on domestic work in Ethiopia and Tanzania and the legal instruments that are relevant in both countries.

Domestic work in Ethiopia and Tanzania: some figures and facts

According to the ILO, Africa is the third largest employer of domestic workers, after Asia and Latin America. "Approximately 5.2 million domestic workers are employed throughout the region, of whom 3.8 million are women and 1.4 million men"(ILO, 2013, p. 33). However, this figure is

widely seen as an underestimate, as in many African Countries the number of domestic workers in official statistics is very limited and they may not be recognized as workers in labour force surveys. In Ethiopia, according to a remote national estimation retrieved from the ILO's Department of Statistics, in 2005 at least 248,600 people were employed as domestic workers in private households, and 91% of them were women. These statistics only refer to domestic workers in cities (Schwenken & Heimeshoff, 2011). In 2015–16, the Population Council undertook a study of migrant, out-of-school girls in six Ethiopian regions. Overall, 4,540 out-of-school female migrants were interviewed. While 1,094 were in domestic work at the time of the survey, 67 percent among migrant girls entered domestic work as their first working experience (Erulkar et al., 2017).

In Ethiopia, domestic workers are excluded from the application of the Labour Proclamation No.1156/2019 (the 2019 labour law). Indeed, they do not have a trade union upholding their rights, they are not allowed to join/form a trade union and they are not considered in official statistics (Gebremedhin, 2016).

Domestic workers under Tanzanian laws are considered jointly with other employees, and although their rights are provided for under the Employment and Labour Relations Act, 2004 and Regulation of Wages and Terms of Employment Order, 2010, no specific provision strictly applies to domestic workers alone. The trade union called Conservation, Hotel, Domestic and Allied Workers Union (CHODAWU) represents, amongst others, domestic workers (ILO, 2016).

A situational analysis of domestic workers conducted by the ILO suggests that at least 883,779 domestic workers in mainland Tanzania, and 203,622 in Zanzibar, are party to an employment relationship by declaring themselves as domestic workers. However, the report states that, if we consider people performing domestic tasks, who are involved in very informal arrangements without necessarily being recognized as workers, this number increases to at least 1,728,228 (seventy-five percent are women). Further surveys suggest that about 53 per cent (5,009,076) of all households in Tanzania employed a domestic worker (weighted results using 2012 Census) (ILO, 2016).

Overall, both in Ethiopia and Tanzania reliable data on domestic work are unavailable. Fundamental research is also lacking, with a few exceptions (Bujra, 2000). The treatment of domestic workers is usually addressed in the context of child protection projects related to child labor, child migration and trafficking, as well as HIV/AIDS girls' education programmes, and rarely the issue is addressed as part of the migration process from rural and semi-urban areas to major towns and cities (Austrian Red Cross, 2016).

Methodology

This ongoing research has been mainly conducted in two towns where CVM has its premises: Debre Markos (Ethiopia) and Morogoro (Tanzania). The main data collection methods have consisted in structured and semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews and life stories, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), daily conversations, participation and observation. Overall, I carried out seven months of fieldwork research in Ethiopia, and five months in Tanzania, split in two phases: between June and December 2018, and between August and December 2019.

Domestic workers are not easy to reach, they hardly have time off and a relationship of confidence with them was not easy to build. They usually start their work very early in the morning (around 5:30 a.m.) and end late in the evening (around 9:00 p.m.) after the last meal. Overall, their freedom of movement is restricted, as it often depends on the will of other household members who determine the extent to which they can leave the house when they are not performing working activities outdoors (such as when they shop at the marketplace).

This research would not have been possible without the support of CVM staff, who played a great role in facilitating my contacts. Many interviewees were accessed through CVM domestic workers Associations, yet a snowballing technique was employed to reach also domestic workers who did not know the NGO. Good collaboration with CVM staff, and in particular with translators, has been vital in developing this research and building trust in the community.

My analysis of women's narratives mainly draws on 30 life-stories gathered in Ethiopia and 25 in Tanzania, since this is the basic approach I chose to adopt. All women were interviewed individually with a female interpreter. Tape-recorded life stories were subsequently transcribed from Amharic (Ethiopia) or Swahili (Tanzania) into English. I changed their names in order not to disclose their identities. Whenever in this article I quote domestic workers' words, I specifically draw on tape-recorded life stories which were subsequently transcribed by local translators. Further contextual information on women's lives was gathered while working with the NGO staff, especially during meetings of the Domestic Workers Associations established by the NGO, through FGDs, structured and semi-structured interviews with a total of 83 young women in Ethiopia and 103 in Tanzania.

Most of the Ethiopian women came from villages in the Amhara region, usually less than 100 kilometres away from Debre Markos. In contrast, some of the Tanzanian domestic workers I interviewed in Morogoro originated from different regions of the country, such as Dodoma, Kigoma and Tanga.

At the time of my fieldwork, the majority of the girls who were interviewed (aged between 14 and 30) were working as live-in domestic workers in Debre Markos and Morogoro. Yet their narratives also refer to previous experiences of work in households other than the current one, as well as in other towns or cities. The majority of them were adolescents (between 12 and 17 years of age) when they first started working as domestic workers.

Points of view of employers, intermediaries for recruitment process, relatives and friends, CVM staff, as well as other social actors, were gathered. Observation and participation in the daily life of the community, markets, community gatherings and ceremonies, as well as visits of girls at the workplace (the household) were highly valuable opportunities. Further information has been collected from representatives of various organizations, institutions, local and international NGOs working on issues related to internal migration and workers' rights.

I am aware of the unavoidable intersectional power dynamics between researcher and research participants. As I mentioned in the introduction, it is the responsibility of researchers to facilitate the creation of an inclusive and collaborative environment of co-creation of knowledge, where mutual dialogue and collaboration between researcher, research participants and various stakeholders is valued as a useful tool to refine research questions and identify solutions (GAATW-IDWF, 2019). This might help to minimize, as far as possible, the complex set of power hierarchies that inevitably persist.

Motives behind migration

The great majority of domestic workers interviewed come from families economically depending on agricultural activities in the rural area. They generally move to middle-class and upper-middle-class households in the urban area. Most studies mention poverty as the main driving factor that pushes girls to migrate (Atnafu et al., 2014). In my study poverty, together with the need to support family back home, have been often reported as a major factor, especially during structured interviews. However, through in-depth interviews and life stories, a complex set of reasons come to the fore. Girls may move to escape oppressive gender regimes at home, to pursue their education, to improve their standard of living, to fulfil family needs, to explore new areas and experience a new lifestyle, among other reasons. Focusing on women's life trajectories reveals that the prospect of upward social mobility might take centre stage (see Thorsen 2006). One of the main aspirations to social mobility for a domestic worker might be a relationship with a wealthy person in the urban area who could provide a sort of protection that she is lacking back home. Many domestic workers also hope to find a better job and start a new life in the foreseeable future. The chance to work in

cities might be valued as a road that offers new spaces for action – even if under specific constraints - which would not have been available in their villages of origin.

Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, societies are markedly hierarchical and have strong gender norms and gender-based inequalities (Boyden et al., 2012; Stark, 2018). In domestic workers' accounts, individual aspirations are often combined with a great sense of responsibility and sacrifice. As some scholars underline (Grabska et al., 2019), migrating for one's own benefit is considered less acceptable in a society where girls are supposed to make sacrifices in the best interest of their families back home. Thus the motivations expressed are often imbued with statements on responsibility they feel towards their families. The ability to support family members who stay behind is almost always part of the women's migratory projects. In other words, domestic workers continuously juggle family demands and individual aspirations.

Moreover, personal decisions are always inspired by others and never taken individually and unilaterally (Grabska, 2016; Huijsmans, 2012).

There were other people in my home village, they said to me “it is better in Morogoro, go and find a job as domestic worker” (...) you will not pay a house rent, you will not have food expenses.” So I talked with my friend and we decided: “let's go together.” (Ratifa, 20 years old, 13/08/19, Tanzania)

Overall, the girls decide to migrate as a result of a dialectic between agency, opportunities and structural constraints, where various factors intersect: the struggle to survive and the pursuit of desires and aspirations.

Family circumstances

Difficult family circumstances can prompt women and girls to become domestic workers in the urban area. Quite a number of girls left their villages for the first time after having lost one or both parents, after family issues such as their parents' divorce, as well as experiences of abuse back home. Below, this girl recounts how her life got worst when her mother married a man who used to abuse her.

As soon as he moved into my house I quit my education. I had to do all household chores and fetch water and work the land. I had heavy workload and I was scared. He used to beat me every time I made a mistake. (Leonia, 18 years old, 16/08/19, Tanzania)

In some cases, both orphans and children born out of wedlock experience marginalization from the community. Some scholars point out that in given contexts, for example in Ethiopia, pregnancies out of wedlock are socially condemned and orphans may be considered as an economic burden on

the community (Grabska, 2016). In the case below, the girl lost both parents. She states that after the death of her father she had no alternatives other than leaving her village.

My father was sick, we went to Addis to heal him with holy water but he died. When I returned to my village people were angry with me. They said that I hadn't had enough faith and this was why my father died. (Mulu, 23 years old, 16/07/18, Ethiopia)

In other words, cultural traditions and ideologies may work at expelling vulnerable young women from rural communities.

Avoiding marriage agreements

Scholars also reveal that young women may decide to break away from their home area to escape from practices such as early marriage, abduction and rape, which are the result of a complex interplay of sociocultural and economic variables like marriage rules, moral values and the land holding system (Shiferaw et al., 2018). In the following life story, a young woman describes her preparation for early marriage when she was a child, as well as how she was engaged in household chores both at her parents' house and at her future husband's household.

I think I was 8 years old... Even the day of my wedding ceremony I had no idea that I was going to be married [...] They came and took me at night. Then my marriage was over and I remained at home with my parents [...] They used to say "let her go back and forth between her husband's family and her parents' house, until she is mature enough to live with her husband." They made me run errands to bring water and do household chores back and forth, so I did what I was told to do. (Yamrot, 26 years old, 17/12/18, Ethiopia)

Yamrot moved to the city at the age of 12 to avoid her marriage agreement, and found a job as a live-in domestic worker, then was a daily labourer at construction sites, finally she moved back to live-in domestic work. In this case, the decision to break away from the home area can be considered as a subversive act against specific patriarchal structures. This does not mean that her migration led to a rupture in family relationships. Rather, her meagre salary contributed to partly covering the school costs of her younger brothers. Yet, in her account, working in the city – albeit under exploitative circumstances - gave her the opportunity to also invest in other personal ambitions. She was able to attend at least two years of secondary education, but she dropped out of school after having failed the final National exam. When I met her, she hoped to find a more stable job and be hired at the Debre Markos University as a cook in the canteen.

Restrictions of movements and isolation

Domestic workers often spoke about their restricted mobility in their place of origin. They were not allowed to leave the house freely because their parents, and other influential adults, were afraid they would start premarital relationships. In talking about their life in the rural area, several women stressed the fact that daily activities were confined to specific tasks such as fetching water, livestock and agricultural tasks, while boys were given more freedom to take rest, socialize with peers and go anywhere during their free time. In a few cases, I found that girls migrated because they got pregnant after having had premarital relations. They left the newborn to their community back home and then moved to an urban area in order to escape stigmatization and marginalization from their community, as well as to find means to support their child. The majority of domestic workers that were interviewed, however, did not have children, and were not married. They claimed that marriage was an important aspect of their future projects, but they tended to give prominence to other personal ambitions, such as the desire to pursue their education and find a more qualified job before marriage.

The restricted mobility that women had experienced in their villages of origin and from which they had tried to escape recurred in different forms in the urban context. In their narratives, girls tend to describe their lives as very isolated and their freedom of movement as confined to the employers, who determine the extent in which they can go out and meet other people.

In Dar es salaam I was in someone's house so I wasn't free...I had to stay inside until she (the employer) came back or decided to take me out, but I wasn't totally free, no freedom of movement if I wanted to visit someone... The movement was just around the shop and it wasn't everyday because she (the employer) was always angry and everything took place inside the house. (Edina, 23 years old, 17/09/19, Tanzania)

The term 'freedom' is another complex concept with various facets revealing different meanings in domestic workers' accounts. As I have already mentioned, the aspirations of girls who move from rural to urban areas may include the will to improve their standard of living by entering a house with a higher life standard, while somehow searching for a sort of protection that they cannot receive back home.

Educational opportunities

The lack of educational opportunities in the rural area is another push factor women mentioned as reason to migrate to the urban area. According to domestic workers' accounts, on the one hand the double workload of livestock activities and household chores in their villages of origin made it

difficult for them to attend school. On the other hand, they were taken out of school by their parents who wanted to prevent the risk of them starting sexual relationships. However, in other cases, the migration of girls was supported and the decision taken by their parents who asserted that they wanted them to start or continue their education. Clearly, this could be a way to convince the girls to go.

My father told me: ‘Education is important. Move to the city, but I will kill you if something happens there.’ I have an uncle in Addis. I went to Addis to help my aunt while she was pregnant, and then I moved to another house. (Alemeit, 22 years old, 15/11/18, Ethiopia)

As I will illustrate, in many cases promises made to girls were broken, domestic workers seem to have been cheated by influential adults who convinced them to go work in town to pursue their education, while they could not fulfil many of their ambitions and ended up working in very exploitative circumstances. There are also cases where the decision to leave the village was taken by adults regardless of whether it was also the girls’ will. Yet most of the time, girls report that even in this case, they had high expectations about their life in the town. They had hoped to become financially independent, to improve their own lives and those of their relatives back home, to continue their education and then to move from domestic work to another job. However, at the time of my fieldwork, almost all domestic workers were disappointed by the ways in which their lives had turned out after migration. Their aspirations and hopes for a fast and easy change were regularly frustrated by harsh working conditions, and promises about school were very often broken.

My parents took me to my cousins’ house, they said “you will go to school”, but instead they only made me work, I just performed household chores for three years... Three years without any sign that I might be sent to school (Magret, 22/08/19, Tanzania)

Unclear relations

In most cases, girls started working for someone who offered them accommodation and education in exchange for household chores, hence the first working experience of girls in the urban area was often without any salary. Girls who were recruited through kinship networks were sometimes exploited, because the relationship between them and their employers was not clear. In the following narrative, a young woman (Ketema) moved to Addis Abeba when her ‘distant’ paternal relative connected her to a household in the city. Differently from what she expected, she ended up working as a domestic worker and she was never paid.

My relative said to me "you will find a job in your field of studies", but when I went there I was made to work as a house servant... When I asked the employer "what about my salary", she (employer) said to me "your relative will give it to you" [...] When I said to her "now you will give me my salary", she replied "what salary are you taking about, have you been working in my house?" (Ketema, 28 years old, 19/12/18, Ethiopia)

In this case, it was not easy to understand which kind of blood connection linked Ketema with the man that she – as well as her mother and sister - called ‘distant relative’: “we have a distant blood relation with him”, “You know, my father has a lot of relatives...”. However, Ketema also reported that he was somehow connected to her paternal uncle’s family. In my study, many women mentioned uncles and cousins as those who recruited them or provided accommodation upon arrival in the city. Despite the use of kinship terminology, in several situations these people were not related by blood. Anyway Ketema, her mother and sister, they all claimed that they had been cheated by him. Ketema argued that her parents were not aware of the exploitative working conditions she endured in Addis Abeba, she explained that she was not given the chance to communicate with them. In turn, Ketema’s mother and sister argued that they were given wrong information about Ketema’s conditions, and so they thought that she was fine. I wanted to encounter other people, for example Ketema's father, but he never showed up. I could not verify whether anyone made an agreement with the man who sent Ketema to Addis or knew his plans. Relations between the parties involved were not clear. But one must consider that studies - in revealing different approaches for girls’ placement - demonstrate that within extended family ties, girls may be offloaded on a third party, even pawning them to settle a debt. In some cases an extended family member may obtain pecuniary gain as an agent, transferring the girl from her natal rural home to a well-off urban household (Bryceson 2019).

Satisfaction, regrets and hopes

What emerges from the domestic workers’ accounts in relation to their lives in the city is a combination of mixed feelings and emotions, which is a part of their self-representation that allows us to learn how alternative selfhoods are negotiated (Gardner, 2002). In the following quotation, a young woman regrets having left her home village, while at the same time stating that moving to the urban area was the best decision she had ever taken.

But now I sometimes feel bad for the fact that I didn't get married and built a family there....and other times I say to myself "it is good that my sister got me out of the rural area". If I had lived in the rural environment until now, I would have known nothing"...I would have spent my life digging like my mother...but still other times I say "I wish I stayed in the rural home and never came to Debre Markos". At the same

time I comfort myself saying "it is good that I came". It is when I am able to pay for the recharge of my mobile card and so on that I tell myself "it was good that I came to Debre Markos". (Yamrot, 26 years old, 17/12/18, Ethiopia)

In order to underline her point, she showed me a mobile phone that she had bought a few months before our meeting. Girls' agency comes to the fore when they talk about ambitions, regrets, setbacks, achievements, and the strategies they continuously mobilize to negotiate their own position, face challenges and improve their lives. Domestic workers often felt trapped in a present they did not want to inhabit, they felt the uncertainty and the unpredictability of their future, while waiting for an alternative future which was hardly possible. Yet their daily time continued to flow, shaped by survival strategies and hopes for the future. As Cathrine Brun (2015) puts it: "People use hope to cope with an uncertain future; they take on hopeful waiting in the positive anticipation that it will help them to stay afloat" (Brun, 2015, p. 33). During their life course, domestic workers changed their hopes, expectations and plans. They built alternative strategies to reach alternative futures.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have shown that the situations of domestic workers largely differ and are not easily depicted in only one dominant portrayal. Poverty is not the only factor that pushes girls to leave their place of origin. Girls may move voluntarily to escape restrictive gender norms at home, to access education, to explore urban areas, and so on. Sometimes the girls seem to have been cheated by their relatives, who convinced them to move in order to work in other people's houses hinging upon their wish to study while they sent them to work in conditions of exploitation, so that the girls did not fulfil the ambitions which in the first place motivated them to comply with the requests of their relatives. For some girls the arrangements in the town/city are made by controlling adults, with or without their acceptance. For others, taking up domestic work is a strategy to obtain support and protection that is lacking back home, with the possibility of either acquiring benefits or being exploited once they reached the place of destination. However, decisions are made within situations of severe constraints. In most cases, girls' expectations about life in urban areas turn quickly into disappointments, colliding with the reality of harsh working conditions, low pay (if any) and various forms of abuse. Despite of this, girls still value the urban area as an opportunity to change their lives and continuously mobilize strategies to face challenges. Ultimately, domestic work itself can offer risks as well as benefits and hopes to girls in deprived circumstances.

As this is the trend, girls most likely will continue entering this kind of job opportunities because they are considered an alternative to their lives, which do not appear sufficiently interesting. However, they can be made aware about ways to opt out from abusive conditions and given information on the danger of being involved in enslaving jobs, as well as on the role of various types of agents transferring girls to urban households. It would be important to investigate the (unclear) relations between the parties involved in the recruitment process of domestic workers - both within extended family ties, based on networking of rural and urban branches of the extended family, and non- familial relations.

To achieve this objective, it is necessary to involve various researchers interviewing not only domestic workers and their employers, but also several members of their families, living in cities as well as in the rural areas of origin. This would allow to better grasp the complexity of different approaches to domestic workers' placement, the role played by other household members, and the risks to which many women and girls are exposed.

Anthropological research has the potential and the responsibility to shed light on critical issues, as well as to contribute to the identification of solutions which might increase the effectiveness of sustainable development projects on domestic work. In this regard, accurate analysis of the significance and use of specific terms in space and time are vital to challenge the ethnocentricity of dominant policies. An effective collaboration between researcher, research participants and various stakeholders is vital to create an inclusive environment of knowledge co-creation, to identify solutions, as well as to minimize some of the power hierarchies inherent to both the NGO projects and the research process. Lastly, interventions that wish to improve domestic workers' lives cannot be promoted without systematically addressing the complex set of motivations behind girls' need to work and migrate, as well as how they experience their mobility and work conditions, and what alternatives they may enact to satisfy their needs.

Having said that, researchers should do their best to share the results of their work with the broader public, beyond academia. That is, they should explain complex concepts and arguments by making their language more accessible to everyone. In this way, they might have a key role in disseminating new ideas that shape and enrich public debates.

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