



***Makibaa*: The Living Out Experiences among the *Imiligan* of Upper Bauko, Mountain Province**

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to document the living out (*makibaa*) practice in Bauko, Mountain Province. While migration generally happens purposely for economic and political reasons, the youth from this indigenous people's village migrated because of their desire for educational advancement albeit the temporary period. The study was about the *iMiligan* youth leaving their biological families to live with non-relatives in the lowlands. The research included the problems that the *baa* (foster children) encountered and how they managed such problems. Using descriptive method and purposive sampling technique, responses were gathered through in-depth interviews involving 26 key informants. Findings revealed that the participants moved to various destinations in the lowlands due to push and pull factors. The push factors are economic, geographical, social, political, and education. The pull factors are availability and proximity of schools, educational opportunities, values and skills' development, and high demand from the *among* (foster parents). Participants described their stay in the lowlands as memorable, rewarding, and gratifying although some encountered negative experiences. Participants employed varied strategies in response to the negative encounters. The choice of destinations and prospective foster families followed some schemes and strategies such as referrals from former or current *baa*; by invitation from prospective foster parents or referrals of foster parents; and through request of biological parents for foster families.

KEYWORDS

Makibaa /mΛ-ki-bΛΛ/
Baa /bΛ-Λ/
iMiligan /i-mi-li-gΛn/
Igorots
Living out
Foster child
Foster parent

INTRODUCTION

Miligan is a village in the municipality of Bauko, Mountain Province consisting of the three barangays

namely: Sadsadan; Mabaay; and Leseb. This village is blessed with beautiful landscape, temperate climate, and fertile soil. Since the 1970s, these are the few barangays in Bauko, Mountain Province that became

known because of the quality production of temperate vegetables and staple foods such as sweet potatoes, cabbages, beans, carrots, potatoes, bell pepper, Chinese pechay, sweet peas, rice, among others. As commercial agriculture started to flourish in the 1970s, Quipas, P. (personal communication, April 15, 2015) recalled that some residents including minors became actively engaged. Consequently, education in this scenario had taken the back seat as pupils had to stop schooling. This is one of the reasons why before the 1980s, very few residents from the said village completed high school and college since their parents opted for them to work in the farm than sending them to school.

This predicament of not finishing a particular level of education became worse because schools were located far from the villages. These problems prompted some youths to leave their biological families to stay with non-acquaintances and non-relatives in the lowlands. This is how the concept of *makibaa* /mΛ-ki-bΛ-Λ/ existed. In some instances, parents were the ones who prodded their children to continue their studies in the lowlands.

This research topic appears to be interesting because children of tender age (10-18 years old) managed to leave their biological parents just to continue their studies as a *baa*. *Makibaa* /mΛ-ki-bΛ-Λ/ as used in this study pertains to the *iMiligan's* /i-mi-li-gΛn/ practice where a child leaves his/her biological family to stay with foster families in the lowlands in order to continue his/her education. This developed into a practice among some residents of Miligan in Bauko, Mountain Province until it increased during the 1970s-1990s.

Among the Kankanaey tribe of Mountain Province and Benguet, Philippines, if letter "I" is prefixed to a name of a place, it means "dwellers of" or "dwellers in" that place. It then identifies the people who come from that place. Hence, the residents of Miligan are called *iMiligan* /i-mi-li-gΛn/; the residents of Bauko are called *iBauko* (i-bΛ-u-ku); and the inhabitants of Baguio are called *iBaguio* /i-bΛg-yu/.

While several studies revealed that many youth leave their biological families due to employment and other economic purposes, the *baa* from Miligan left their biological families due to their overwhelming desire for better education as the said opportunity is not available in their place of origin. This phenomenon motivated the researcher to find out why some

youth in the three barangays of Upper Bauko become *baa* in the lowlands. Lowlands as used in this study pertains to the provinces of Ilocos Region such as Ilocos Sur, La Union, and Pangasinan, and Nueva Ecija in Region 3. These were identified as the place of destinations among the *baa*.

The choice on the place of destination and the foster families were the factors that were looked into in this study. While the need is there, one problem that the *baa* have to face is whether there are willing foster parents to accept them in their homes. AIFS-CFCA (2007) noted 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. LeMoyné (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 or vice versa to look for a place where they feel comfortable with, or a place which will define their future.

Living out 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.

One after-effect of living in a foreign territory is social isolation. Grohol (2013) defines social isolation as a complete or near-complete lack of contact with people and society for members of a social species. Indeed, living with strangers in a strange territory and environment is certainly not going to be that smooth and easy. Problems may occur due to cultural differences, language barrier, climate adaptation, and the like. Weir (2012) claimed that social rejection could influence emotion, cognition, and even physical health. Hence, Leary (2011) as cited by Zentgraf and Chinchillaa (2012), remarked that total rejection can sometimes be a clue that one behaved badly and should change his/her ways. However, Williams (2012) as cited by Zentgraf and Chinchillaa (2012) argued that



if one's sense of belonging and self-esteem have been thwarted, he/she tries to reconnect. Excluded people actually become more sensitive to personal signs of connection and they tailor their behavior accordingly.

Finally, this study endeavored to look at how the *baa* also known as foster children, "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.

This study looked into the living out experiences among the *baa* (foster children) from Upper Bauko, Mountain Province. Specifically, it aimed to: determine the factors that pushed and pulled the respondents to become *baa*; identify the significant experiences encountered by the *baa* while living in the lowlands; identify the responses to the experiences that they have encountered; and determine the schemes and strategies that helped the *baa* choose their place of destinations and their prospective foster families.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study utilized the descriptive-exploratory method guided by the Theory of Migration and Social Exchange Theory. Zanker (2008) defines migration as the temporary or permanent move of individuals or groups of people from one geographic location to another for various reasons ranging from better employment possibilities to persecution. Reyes (2008) added that 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.

Perpetuation of migration may likewise contribute in understanding the story about the foster children. As argued by Massey et al. (1998), 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. I consider the definitions above as the best guide to expound the case of *makibaa* among the indigenous peoples of Bauko, Mountain Province. When the youth from Miligan flocked in the lowlands to stay with foster families purposely to pursue their education, I find this to be one mode of migration even if the stint of some of them was cut short due to some factors. The primordial reasons why the youth migrate to the lowlands are to acquire new skills and to continue their education. It is then tantamount to what Reyes (2008) considered as part of the 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 which is the purpose why people migrate.

Social exchange theory, on the other hand, posits that in interdependent relationships, transactions between parties beget a norm of reciprocity and possibly, quid pro quo reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Blau (1964) defined social exchange theory (SET) as a social, psychological, and sociological perspective that explains social change and stability as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties. Mutual bonds emerge in social interaction as persons who incur obligations reciprocate, but the imbalance resulting from unilateral benefits engenders superior status. Homans (1961) defined social exchange as the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons. Finally, Emerson (1981) defined social exchange as involving two persons, each of whom provides benefits to the other and contingent upon benefits from the other.

Looking at the above concepts, the authors are one in referring to the idea that in social exchange, reciprocal obligations exist between two persons or groups of people. The study on *makibaa* is guided by the social exchange theory particularly on the concept of reciprocity. In every partnership or relationship, trust, respect, and confidence between the parties are the factors that sustain such partnership or relationship. Absence such make the relationship to wither or in jeopardy. In the case of the *makibaa*, people might be amused why some of the *baa* become so attached and loyal to their foster



families and vice versa while others appear to find their stay in the lowlands as not worth remembering. This means that for the relationship between the foster children and foster families to succeed and to last long, it is imperative that the two parties would develop a symbiotic relationship.

Finally, there must be meeting of minds between the foster children and with foster families, a “give and take rapport” in order to sustain their relationship. Such that whoever reneges from this oral agreement does not expect a good working relationship. This concept guided the researcher in explaining why some *baa* transferred from one foster home to another. Mahon (1998) citing Gouldner (1960) pointed out that reciprocity is a universal norm in a relationship. Violation of this norm of reciprocity harms the continuation of the relationship.

This theory likewise becomes a framework on the problem on referrals and place of destinations. The social exchange theory was adapted to explain why some *baa* preferred to transfer to other foster families after they would find out that the foster families would default in their agreements.

This study was composed of 26 key informants (Table 1). Key informants included only those who had been a *baa* for at least four years. Triangulation and validation techniques were used to cross check

and establish the validity of the data taken from the key informants by interviewing the parents, relatives, and neighbors of the *baa*. As insider in the place of study and having experienced being a *baa* albeit for a short stint, I personally know all of the respondents being my neighbors and relatives. Hence, purposive sampling in selecting the participants was employed. Likewise, permissions to video tape, take photos of them, and publish their life stories were granted by the participants. The research covered three barangays of Upper Bauko, Mountain Province namely: Sadsadan; Mabaay; and Leseb. Categorization and thematic analysis was used to assess, examine, and record the themes that describe the phenomena of *makibaa*.

The study zeroed in on the factors (push and pull factors) that influenced the participants to go to the lowlands despite their tender age; the problems they encountered while living with their foster families; the treatments by their classmates, teachers, and neighbors; their responses to such treatments or problems; and finally, the strategy that they employed in choosing their foster parents and place of destinations.

A glimpse of the respondents’ profile shows that as to job experience, six participants are either retired government employees or still working in the government; four were overseas contract workers,

Table 1. Names of key informants and their profile

Names of Key Informants	Past or Present Job	Place/s of destination	Duration of stay in the lowlands	Educational Attainment
Pablo Quipas	Former Government employee and Catechist	Tagudin, Ilocos Sur	8 years (Grade 5-2 nd Year Vocational)	Two-year Secretarial Course
Melecia Cads	Retired Catechist	San Esteban, Ilocos Sur	1 st Year High School to 1st Year College (6 yrs.)	1 st Year College Level
Basilio Mucat	2-term Barangay Councilman	Tagudin, Ilocos Sur	4 years (High School)	High School Graduate
George Wacnag	Former Barangay Councilman	Tagudin, Ilocos Sur	4 years (High School)	High School Graduate
Victor Cads	Former Barangay Councilman	Binmaley, Pangasinan	4 years (High School)	High School Graduate
Fr. Manuel Samonte	Parish Priest/ Former Treasurer, Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe	Binmaley, Pangasinan and Tagudin, Ilocos Sur	5 years (Grade 6-4 th Year High School)	AB Philo, Theology
Navey Catawe	Teacher II, DepEd. Mountain Province	Binmaley, Pangasinan	10 years (1 st Year High School-College)	Bachelor of Elementary Education



Table 1. *Continued...*

Names of Key Informants	Past or Present Job	Place/s of destination	Duration of stay in the lowlands	Educational Attainment
Miguela Badian	Teacher III, DepEd-Baguio	Binmaley, Pangasinan	8 years (1 st Year High School-College)	Bachelor of Elementary Education, MA Education
Judy Gaiwen	Teacher III, DepEd Mountain Province	Pozorrubio, Pangasinan	4 years (High School)	Bachelor of Elementary Education
Jane B. Immotna	Business Woman	San Esteban, Ilocos Sur and Cabanatuan City	9 years (High School/ College)	Bachelor of Elementary Education
Noria A. Ancheta	Farmer	Binmaley, Pangasinan	5 years (Grade 6-High School)	High School Graduate
Norman Pampanico	Miner/Gardener	San Esteban, Ilocos Sur	4 years (Grade 5-High School)	2 nd Year High School
Josefa S. Busay	Farmer, BENEKO Bill Collector	San Esteban, Ilocos Sur, and Sta. Mesa, Manila	11 years (Grades 5-6; High School; College)	Bachelor of Arts in Commerce
Maria S. David	Medical Quality Control staff, Canada	San Esteban, Ilocos Sur and Sta. Mesa, Manila	12 years (Grades 5- 4 th Year High School; 5 Years in College)	Bachelor of Elementary Education
Susana Sanoan	College Librarian, Saint Louis College	San Esteban, Ilocos Sur	6 years (Grade 5-4 th Year High School)	Bachelor of Secondary in Education (Library Science)
Betty Agatlaos	Midwife/ Farmer	San Esteban, Ilocos Sur	6 years (Grades 5-6, High School)	Midwifery
Sr. Adeline Labutan	Mother Superior, Camillian Missionary	San Esteban, and Santiago, Ilocos Sur	5 years (Grade 6-4 th Year High School)	Bachelor of Secondary Education (Religious Education)
Sr. Grace S. Bagne	Registered Guidance Counselor and Religious Missionary (University of Cebu)	Pozorrubio, Pangasinan	4 years (High School)	Bachelor of Secondary Education (Filipino), Bachelor of S in Guidance and Counseling, Master in Guidance and Counseling
Janette Canonigo	Former OFW, Businesswoman	Pozorrubio, Pangasinan	5 years (Grade 6-High School)	Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics
Marilou S. Bagne	OFW, Canada	Pozorrubio, Pangasinan	4 years (High School)	Bachelor of Science in Home Economics
Felicidad Gubat	Business Woman	San Esteban, Ilocos Sur	5 years (Grade 6-High School)	Bachelor of Arts in Commerce
Espirita Quipas	Former Factory worker, English Teacher in Thailand	Luna, La Union and Cabanatuan City	9 years (High School-College)	Bachelor of Secondary Education
Arturo Sabala	Government Employee, DPWH	Pozorrubio, Pangasinan	4 years (High School)	High School Graduate
Florence P. Hipol	Former OFW	Binmaley, Pangasinan	5 years (Grade 6-4 th Year High School)	High School Graduate



Table 1. Continued...

Victoria Sanoan	Former government Employee (Department of Agriculture-Bontoc)	San Esteban, Ilocos Sur	9 years (Grade 6-College)	Bachelor of Science in Agriculture
Agueda A. Pal-iwen	Teachers DepEd-Baguio City	Luna, La Union	6 years (1 st -4 th Year High School and 1 st -2 nd Year College)	Bachelor of Elementary Education, MA Education

and three each were former elected barangay officials and religious missionaries, respectively. As to place of destinations, 12 participants stayed in the province of Ilocos Sur and 11 in Pangasinan province. As to duration of stay in the lowlands, eight participants only stayed for four years while the longest was 12 years. Finally, only five participants completed their college degrees as a *baa* while seven completed their college degrees outside of the foster care.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Push and Pull Factors of Living Out

Every movement of people from one place to another always comes with a reason. The *baa* (foster children) believe that their movement to the various destinations in the lowlands to live with foster families have developed into the culture or practice due to some push and pull factors. The practice of *baa* among the *iMiligan* of Upper Bauko, Mountain Province appears to be unique and distinct. It is quite unusual and alarming when kids (10-18 years old) leave their biological families to stay 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, there might be possible adverse effects.

Factors that Pushed the *iMiligan* to the Lowlands

Push factors are those associated or results of the society's changes in the countries of origin

(Dumaraog et al, 2012; Lee, 1966; Stanojoska & Blagojce, 2012). In the case of the *baa*, the push factors come in different ways such as economic, social, and political issues as revealed by the participants.

Economic factors. The Municipality of Bauko has been classified as a 4th class municipality and Mountain Province is likewise classified as 4th class province (NSO Census, 2010). On the other hand, the place of destinations of the *baa* in the lowlands such as Pangasinan, Ilocos Sur, La Union, and Nueva Ecija are all classified as 1st class provinces as to income classification (NSO Census, 2010). This explains the disparity in as far as schools and other infrastructure projects are concerned.

Prior to 1980, some residents of Bauko particularly Miligan engaged mainly on traditional farming. They depended largely on organic 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 enough amount of money for the needed school expenses of their kids. They could only think and plan of savings when they sell their native poultry products and large cattle or when they save their wages from other sources such as stone-walling, plowing of fields, and other manual jobs.

Starting the 1980s, however, a number of residents started to engage in cash crop production albeit with small quantity. And since 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.

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 10 and 12. Accordingly, their parents were only 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* key informants 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.

Geographical factor. One push factor was the inaccessibility of schools and if there was one, it was so remote. Consequently, some participants recalled that some of their schoolmates had to stop in the middle of the school year due to the discomfort of hiking for 1-2 hours every day in order to reach their schools.

Quipas (2015), the oldest participant at age 80, narrated that he had to go down to Tagudin, Ilocos Sur in the 1950s to continue his schooling. He further narrated that no matter how persevered he was to finish elementary grades in his home of origin, he could not endure the agony and sacrifice of traversing many rivers and a huge mountain everyday just to reach the elementary school in the adjacent barangay. He further recounted that oftentimes, he reached school with his clothes wet as he had to pass by pathways covered with thick grasses and bushes.

Education factor. One predicament that pushed the *baa* to the lowlands was the incomplete grade levels. According to Mariano Bagne, a parent-participant, if the number of enrollees in a particular grade level dropped to ten, the principal has the reason to order for the closure of that grade level. The decrease in the number of enrollees was either associated to small number of enrollees, drop-outs, or the flocking of pupils to the lowlands. This scenario resulted in an incomplete grade level in schools.

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.

Social factor. One factor that deserves consideration in understanding the *baa* is to look at how they are affected by the people around them. The people around us sometimes are either our motivators or destroyers. The following are the social factors associated to the *baa*.

Bullying. One factor that dissuaded participants from pursuing their dreams was attributed to the people around them. In the distant past where insufficient laws and statutes that protect children and women were not in place, bullying had been an ordinary experience of children going to school. Consequently, Basilio Mucat, a barangay council member revealed that some students were forced to drop out because their classmates and out-of-school youths bullied them, and some school girls were sexually harassed on their way home. Afraid that the acts happen to them again, some participants decided to go to the lowlands.

Escape from farming. Witnessing children quit school in the middle of the school year due to the demand of working in the farm after dismissal and during weekends makes one understand why the children from Miligan preferred to go to the lowlands. Samonte narrated that after his three long years in Binmaley, Pangasinan from Grade 6 to second year high school as *baa*, he went home to the province to do farming but he was unsuccessful. Disappointed and realizing that he had no bright future in farming, he decided to go back to Tagudin, Ilocos Sur where he completed his secondary education.

Teenage pregnancy. High incidence of teenage pregnancy and early marriage among students in one secondary school 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 principal of the school warned the parents about the increasing number of students getting pregnant. Alarmed with the warning, he sent his daughter to the lowland to become *baa*.

Political factor. Paramount among the factors is the seeming disinterest of the government line agencies to provide the basic needs of the people in the country side such as classrooms, school facilities, items for teachers, and roads. Infrastructure projects prior to 1990s were concentrated in the Poblacion and other populated areas thereby neglecting the



basic necessities in the remote areas according to Roy Busay, a retired school principal.

Factors that Pulled the *Baa* to the Lowlands

The pull factors are antipode (a positive one) of the push factors (Stanojoska & Blagojce, 2012). The following articulate the factors that convinced the *iMiligan* into leaving their biological families and lived with foster families in the lowlands:

Availability and proximity of schools. The favorite destinations of the *baa* are the provinces of Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, and Nueva Ecija. The participants believed that these are relatively better places as compared to theirs considering that the schools were very accessible in most lowland municipalities where they stayed. This perception attracted some kids to become *baa* so that geographical distance and incomplete grade levels were not anymore their issues. Cousins Pasyan and Samonte recalled that during their elementary years in their place of origin, pupils were asked to repeat the grade level as no teacher was assigned to handle the next grade level or there were very few pupils enrolled. As per NSO Census in 2010, Bauko, Mountain Province is still a 4th class municipality compared to Pozorrubio and Binmaley in Pangasinan province which are 1st class municipalities while San Esteban and Tagudin, Ilocos Sur are 2nd class and 1st class municipalities, respectively.

Desire for better education. The study on *Makibaa* revealed that the participants got motivated by the prospect that migrating to the lowlands would not only lead to one's social development and better education but to a better future as well. Prior to the 1980s, only a handful of professionals from Upper Bauko, Mountain Province were identified. Of these professionals, a quite number of them were from Miligan, particularly the residents of Sadsadan, Bauko, Mountain Province. George Wacnag (2015), a *baa* during the 1960s recounted that had it not been on the practice of *Makibaa*, the pioneering professionals from Barangay Sadsadan could not have completed their college degrees or have reached college level.

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. Participants were unanimous in saying that they were so attracted to see their older neighbors come home during summer with clean clothes, fine skin, and knowledgeable in Filipino and lowland languages.

Development of values and skills. 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* (sister), *manong* (brother), uncle, auntie or any polite manner of addressing people sounded good. As personally observed, Igorots or natives in the Cordillera, generally seldom call their elders with these words of salutations or endearments as what lowlanders do. However, even if the folks from Miligan do not frequently utter those words of respect or endearment, it does not follow that they disrespect their elders.

Developed values and skills were the factors that attracted other *iMiligan* kids to go to the lowlands. Participants recalled that when they were in the lowlands, they woke up as early as 4 a.m. to scrub the floor of the house, clean the premises, and wash manually the clothes of their foster families. These became their routines which they still follow until today. Cooking and food preparation are likewise the skills that the *baa* are proud of. Most *iMiligan* are not familiar with lowland dishes or menu so that there are only few people that the villagers have in mind to prepare the food if there are big celebrations in the community. These were the former *baa*.

Demands from foster families. 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 (in terms of expenses) but have everything to gain. The reason is that they benefit more from the outputs of the foster children but spend less for the foods, allowance, and board of the foster child.



Positive and Negative Experiences Encountered by the *Baa*

Every encounter or experience of a person comes in different forms. They are categorized into positive and negative experiences.

Positive experience. Most of the participants proudly and enthusiastically described their stay in the lowlands as memorable, rewarding, fulfilling, and gratifying. It was evidenced by the fact that some *baa* extended their stay 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. These accounts are manifestations that the relationship between the foster families and the foster children has reached a higher level. It has become very personal and intimate. These were how the *baa* described their encounters and experiences in the lowlands:

Reciprocal acceptance by foster family and the *baa*. 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. As a word of endearment, the *baa* called the members of their foster family *uncle*, *tita* (aunt), *kuya* (elder brother) and *ate* (older sister). In return, members of their foster family called them *anak* (child), *kuya* or *ate* as the case may be. David, one participant, revealed that her foster parents treated her as if she were their real child. She recounted:

My 1st foster family was so good to me. Even when I was with another foster family in Manila during my tertiary education and when I worked abroad, our communication line was still open. In fact, they were the ones who sponsored me to Canada. Now that we are all living in Canada, they sometimes come and stay in our house for a week and we also visit them in their house. Our closeness has developed.

Samonte 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 in Binmaley, Pangasinan and Tagudin, Ilocos Sur. When he was ordained priest in 1989 and during his silver anniversary

celebration, his former foster families came to attend.

Other *baa* 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 of his job, he got his daily allowances. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) asserted that the central construct is reciprocity; that is, social interaction will continue only if mutually rewarding. Blau (1964) corroborated by positing that social exchange is limited to actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others and that cease when these expected reactions are not forthcoming.

As gleaned from the testimonies of the *baa* participants, the relationship that was manifested between them and their foster families was not that of a domestic helper and a boss relationship; not between a child laborer and an employer; and not impersonal and civil but personal. Their relationship definitely was more of a parent-child one, subjective not objective. As aptly put by Schofield and Beek (2005), "To other children, what came across was the way feeling at 'home' rather than in 'a placement', 'belonging' with the carers mattered to them."

Fair and humane treatment by lowland classmates. One memorable experience that the *baa* had was the fair and humane treatments they received from their lowland classmates. Despite the disparity in culture, economic status, and the knowledge that they were *baa*, some lowland classmates did not discriminate them. In fact, the lowland classmates invited them to their homes during breaks and were proud to commend them for being industrious, determined, and diligent. Participants recalled that their classmates were their defenders whenever some of their classmates bullied or discriminated them on account of their being Igorots. Excellence in the classroom puts one in the pedestal so to speak. The praises they received attracted the attention of students and their 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 (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.

Fair and civil treatment from their teachers.

Teachers in the lowlands were civil and fair when dealing with their students. During practical arts classes, male *baa* were assigned by their teachers to do some physical jobs like gardening or carpentry in recognition of their industry, capabilities, skills, and their being responsible. Their teachers likewise became their defenders whenever the said the *baa* were bullied by their classmates. 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 when they come back. 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.

Concerned and sympathetic neighbors. Houses in the lowlands were quite congested. Consequently, the work ethics, attitudes, and character 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. That is, despite the hardship that some *baa* encountered while with their foster families, such cheering and reassuring neighbors inspired them to stay put and be of help to their foster families.

Negative experiences of the baa. Every community, no matter how civilized and educated its inhabitants, has its own weaknesses and flaws. Indeed, some people around us are 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. It could not be denied; however, that there are also some causes which were personal to the *baa* themselves.

Feeling of loneliness and homesickness.

Physical separation from the biological family has been the common undesirable feeling that the *baa* experienced. Chipungu and Bent-Goodley (2004) affirmed 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 youth from Miligan did not stay long in the lowland 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 territory aggravated their feeling of loneliness and homesickness. Other participants withstood their feeling of homesickness because they were pacified by some *baa* but when they went home during the summer vacation, they decided not to go back to the lowlands anymore.

Undesirable experiences with foster family.

Participants narrated their undesirable experiences with their foster families with mixed emotions. Reminiscing their past, some respondents laughed at their experiences and called them their "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.

These were some accounts from former *baa* as regards their personal encounters and experiences with foster families:

Inadequate basic necessities and financial allowance. Food is a basic necessity that must never be neglected. In the accounts of some *baa*, they revealed that their foster parents required them to serve foods first to their foster families before they ate their meals. In fact, some *baa* revealed that the foods for the members of their foster family are different from what were served to them. These experiences were seen as discriminating treatments towards *baa*. To them, to be reprimanded for mischievous attitude is tolerable but to deprive them of foods is inhuman and being inconsiderate.

As to financial assistance, most *baa* recalled that they were given transportation allowance except for snacks. It was because of this reason that the biological parents of the *baa* have to come in by sending allowance to their children. Few *baa* had to walk everyday for 2 kilometers to reach school because they were not given transportation allowance. Hence, some *baa* used resourceful



survival approach by picking some fruits from their backyards to cope with the situation.

Irregular sleep schedule and separate shelter. Majority of the participants recounted waking up as early as 4 a.m. everyday to wash clothes, scrub the floors, and cook foods. While this is construed as a good training for them, such schedule was too much for growing kids. To the *baa*, waking up this early was too much to handle for children like them but they had no choice. This negative experience forced some *baa* to transfer to other foster families after a year while other *baa* did not go back anymore to the lowlands. While foster parents might want to inculcate in them the rudiments of life, the kids must not be deprived of quality sleep as this has adverse implications to their health and mental development. Crabtree and Witcher (2008) found out that chronic partial sleep restriction and acute sleep restriction, paradigms suggest that reduction of total sleep time significantly affects cognition and learning in children and adolescents. Dahl (1999) likewise revealed that sleep loss is associated with brief mental lapses in attention during simple tasks. Finally, Gaultney (2010) concluded that many college students are at risk for sleep disorders, and those at risk may also be at risk for academic failure.

A number of participants admitted that there was discrimination from their foster families as they were sheltered in a quarter separate from their foster families. While their quarters were decent and habitable, the notion of separating them from the foster family members seems discriminatory. Sister Grace, one of the *baa*, argued that anyway, that was a better set up because we had privacy and that we could do things without being disturbed.

Verbally abused. Some respondents disclosed that some members of their foster families uttered invectives and offensive words. Indeed, humiliating and demeaning words kill one's self-esteem especially if the utterances were full of malice and bad intentions. It likewise becomes more humiliating if the invectives and offensive words were uttered in the presence of people. Reyes (2008) revealed that the vulnerability of children to abuse and violence is one of the worrying aspects of parental absence. The study shows that among the common form of abuse are verbal, intimidation, and physically hurting the children.

Unwanted experiences with lowland

classmates. Bullying among youth inside or outside the school is a universal phenomenon. This is the challenge that children face while living in an unfamiliar territory. The *baa* from Miligan were not exempted because they also had a taste of these negative treatments from their classmates especially when their classmates learned that they were *baa*. 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 as challenges. 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 physical differences.

Adaptation Strategies and Responses to the Negative Treatments

For every treatment that an individual has encountered, be it positive or negative, it has corresponding adaptation strategies and responses either through a feeling of satisfaction, fulfillment and encouragement or reaction that would address the negative encounter. Some people when confronted with undesirable and inappropriate deeds would respond positively albeit in different ways.

Hostile, antagonistic, and unfriendly behaviors are frequently observed in some places, be it a workplace, a home, or a school environment. For one to live in such kind of environment or to survive such behaviors, one has to adapt strategies or develop appropriate responses.

Positive attitude towards foster family's adverse attitude. When treated fairly and humanely, the *baa* would compensate them by showing positive attitudes. Participants gratefully narrated the humane and fair treatment they received from their foster families which pushed them to be more patient, obedient, responsible, and caring to the members of the foster family. As they say, "Respect begets respect; love begets love". When treated like real members of their respective foster families, the feeling of attachment exists. Otherwise, the *baa* could have transferred to other foster families if they were not treated well. Having stayed in their foster family homes from high school to



college is an indication that they felt very much at home in their second home. Sanoan proudly narrated that her foster parents entrusted her with kitchen finances making her decide what foods to buy and viand to prepare. In response to this positive treatment, she had to be honest in reporting the real expenditure and would return whatever excesses or unspent amount. The social exchange provides that the reciprocity norm (Gouldner, 1960) specifies that favorable treatment received by one party obligates him/her to provide favorable treatment in return. That is, when one party provides a benefit, the receiving party is obligated to respond in kind. This corroborates Lin's (2004) and Pruitt (1968) idea which states that an individual feels indebted when helped and that the donor expects future reciprocity implies that human beings are rational and remember how much they have helped others as well as how much others helped them.

Favorable experience with lowland classmates and teachers. Living in a foreign territory and with strangers can be favorable. To other people, they find these places and people more comfortable. The participants-*baa* shared similar experiences.

Fair treatment from classmates and teachers. There is no denying that being immersed in unfamiliar environment, one feels uncomfortable. However, the *baa* gladly narrated that these feelings eventually faded away. They admitted that during their first few months in school, some of their classmates were so repugnant, aloft, discriminating, ethnocentric, repulsive, and difficult to socialize with. But when the *baa* befriended them and showed them that they were no different, their schoolmates treated them as their friends. This ended the name-calling and other forms of discrimination. As to their teachers, they were so generous to the *baa* by giving them items when they go home to the province during long vacation. And as a gesture of gratitude to the generosity of their teachers, the *baa* gave them highland vegetables and returned the favor by being polite, helpful, and by performing well in their subjects. According to Greenberg and Frisch (1972), subjects felt more obligated and indebted to the other when they received the deliberate help.

Excellent academic performance. One of the primordial reasons why the *baa* left their biological families was their burning desire for higher level of learning and their desire to uplift their families'

social and economic status. Having experienced the difficulty of farming, the *baa* felt obligated to give their best in school. Reyes (2008) reiterated that unlike the perceived notions, children of migrants performed well especially during grade school compared to non-migrant children. The *baa* recalled reading their notes while cooking, scrubbing the floors, and while washing the clothes. Consequently, due to their excellent academic performance, their lowland classmates respected and befriended them.

Encouraging and reassuring neighbors.

The neighbors' encouraging and helpful attitude to some struggling *baa* became motivations for the latter to reach for their dreams. That is, despite the hardship that some *baa* had encountered while they were with their foster families, the cheering and reassuring neighbors inspired them to stay put. As Sanoan (2015) gladly recalled, "My neighbor always encouraged me to persevere in my studies in order to reach my goal of becoming a professional". Other *baa* shared similar encounters with their neighbors.

Every community, no matter how civilized and educated its inhabitants, has weaknesses and downfalls. The *iMiligan* definitely had a taste of these undesirable treatments and experiences from people in their place of destinations during their stint in the lowlands. On the other hand, some of these negative experiences were self-made and personal to the *baa*. And whenever a problem arose, it was the obligation of the senior *baa* to be the overseers and assumed as big brothers or big sisters to the neophyte *baa*.

Coping with homesickness. When one is physically detached from his/her loved ones, he/she experiences the feeling of longing and yearning. This usually happens when the environment and activities are so strange and the coping mechanisms are difficult to execute. In order for the *baa* to dispel and lessen their homesickness, they employed various ways such as crying; sending letters to their family members; visiting their fellow *baa* during their vacant time or making themselves busy.

Managing unwanted experiences with foster family members. The terrible experiences that some *baa* had with foster families such as verbal abuse, social discrimination, and inhuman treatment were not enough to dissuade them from clinging to their second home. They managed the negative treatments and considered them as merely ordinary challenges and motivations to achieving their



dreams. Indeed, the *baa* countered these negative attitudes and treatments of some foster family members with good deeds. The following negative experiences and the *baa*'s responses were:

Resourcefulness towards inadequate foods, medicines and other basic needs. Paramount to one's existence and survival is the satisfaction of his basic needs. When the *baa* experienced deprivation of basic needs like foods, they resorted to some mischievous remedies albeit ridiculous. They became resourceful by setting aside foods without their foster parents' knowledge, climbing fruit trees in the backyard and eating its fruits. Other foster parents were very accommodating so that when they learned of the predicaments of some *baa* from their wards, they would invite them in their houses during their free time. They would offer them with whatever food that is available and other necessities like medicines.

Some foster parents are not necessarily wealthy as some were just rank and file government employees. Hence, Hipol recalled that she was given transportation allowance everyday but not for snacks. Consequently, instead of riding a tricycle when she goes home, she had to walk from school to the house. She would then use her transportation allowance for her snacks.

Positive habit towards irregular working hours and separate shelter. The daily routine of participants of waking up as early as 4 a.m., gave them the opportunity to study their lessons while cooking food for the early breakfast. At first, they considered this schedule too early but they eventually became used to it and they felt comfortable. Indeed, their experiences could be a good foundation and an advantage especially when one enters the tertiary level.

Shelter is a necessity. For as long as their foster families would provide their wards a safe room, even if they were in a separate quarter, then there is no issue about it. In fact, the *baa* felt more comfortable and free if sheltered in a quarter where they have privacy as they could do their things. However, being sheltered on a different area creates the feeling of being discriminated.

Positivity despite the use of foul and demeaning words. The *baa* admitted that the discriminating words and other invectives hurled against them by members of their foster family somehow affected

them emotionally. With the negative treatments, they had no choice but to keep quiet, meek, and humble, and asked for forgiveness. As other people would say, you cannot stop fire with another fire. Reyes (2008) revealed that the vulnerability of children to abuse and violence is one of the worrying aspects of parental absence. Her study showed that among the common forms of abuse are verbal, emotional, and physical abuse of children.

Schemes of Referral, Choice of Destinations, and Choice of Foster Families

The dynamics employed by the *baa* on the prospective places of destination and foster families play a vital role in sustaining the practice or culture 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 and moral standing of the foster families are not doubtful. Financial capability of foster parents is likewise a criterion. Hence, familiarity on these factors has to be put in mind by people who recommend; otherwise, the lives and future of the prospective *baa* would be put in jeopardy. This scheme has perpetuated hence, from just a couple of *baa* during the 1950s, it increased gradually until it reached its peak during the 1990s when in a year, there were 30 *baa* in different destinations. It only decreased during the late 1990s when schools in nearby barangays in the place of origin were established and when commercial vegetable farming in the communities started to flourish.

Lee (1966) emphasized that migration is selective. This simply states that migrants are not a random sample of the population at origin. The reason why migration is selective is that persons respond differently to the sets of plus and minus factors at origin and at destination.

The schemes became effective when the following strategies were adapted:

Request and invitation by prospective foster parents. The practice of *baa* among the *iMiligan* started in the early 1950s. Quipas, one of the pioneering *baa*, proudly narrated how he was able to go to Tagudin, Ilocos Sur. Accordingly, he went to the lowland through the recommendation of Engr. Tuazon, a native of Tagudin, Ilocos Sur who indicated



to Quipas' parents his desire of bringing him to his relatives in Tagudin, Ilocos Sur. To the participant, this was an opportune time if he were to change the direction of his life and to avoid the miserable experiences of walking for two or more hours every day in order to reach the school in an adjacent barangay.

This manner of referral was one of the reasons why a number of *baa* from Miligan increased tremendously in a particular locality or destination. This likewise was the reason why foster parents of the *iMiligan* were neighbors and it became advantageous to the *baa* as their feeling of homesickness became lighter or mitigated.

Referrals of former *baa*. One year after Pablo stayed in the lowlands, he went home during a summer vacation to his home town with a mission: an opportunity to convince some kids in his community to come with him to the lowlands. After telling them his good experiences and his transformations, some kids were convinced to come with him. This type of referral; thus, became a practice 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 a 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 by former *baa*. This means that the kids from Miligan 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 times and in various places of destinations.

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 1950s, 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 Miligan who had positive experience in the lowlands as *baa*, motivating 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.

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 youth from Miligan did not hesitate to leave their biological parents even at a tender age for a noble purpose which is education.

The positive experiences of the *baa* include among others, their memorable and enriching encounters with foster families, classmates, teachers and neighbors. These were the experiences which 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. Likewise, the *baa* were eclectic and positivistic in their approaches and responses to the challenges that they encountered even as they used varied strategies in order to cope with the challenges.

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.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The practice of *baa* could be eliminated if some push factors such as accessible schools, roads and transportations, dormitories or boarding houses would have been 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, basic educational equipment, and other student needs.

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. 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.

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 people in need, must be given commendation. 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.

This DSWD and other NGOs dealing with foster children and foster parents may consider the findings of this research in improving their programs. An in-depth study on the phenomenon of *baa* as well as the contributions of foster parents to the life of the *baa* are recommended.

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